I Fear Not!

Exploring Accessibility Options in Horror Games

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Abstract:

This paper explores the possibilities of accessibilities within horror games, and identifies current methods used in modern day games, and games of the past. Using personal experience, online research, and also other forms of horror themed media, these methods will be examined based on their significance within the game, how well they served their purpose, and their effect on the horror theme of the game. Finally, possible solutions will be theorized on creating more accessible mechanics and atmospheres within future games in the horror genre.

EX. Creative Assembly (2014) *Alien Isolation*

Table Of Contents

Introduction

Accessibility in horror games is a strange topic indeed. When one is designing for a scary experience, they generally like to explore ways to maximize the amount of fear that everything can offer. Remove all the lights! Add the atmospheric fog! Play that strange audio cue! However, accessibility is never thought about too much when designing them. What even is accessibility in horror games? This paper explores just that, but more specifically, how to create adaptable experiences in horror games so that more players are able to play them.

What even is accessibility in Horror?

Accessibility is the process of designing something to be usable to as many people as possible. In the case of games, it is used to allow as many players as possible the ability to play your game. Accessibility in games can be designed for in many different ways, whether they be designing your UI for color blind players, or something as simple as allowing a slider for your subtitle text's size (or even having subtitles at all). In essence, it allows players to play a game freely, without the feeling of being excluded for reasons you cannot control or change.

With this in mind, one might come to the conclusion that accessibility in horror games is just making the game less scary and although this could be the case in some scenarios, this goes against the idea of creating a scary game. Additionally, this process could alienate players who really enjoy horror games, as they feel the game is catering to the general mass, rather than creating a "real horror" experience. In this scenario, just making the game less scary is the least ideal solution.

The types of accessibility that this paper explores is allowing players to alter their experience in the way that they wish. A simple example could be a difficulty slider that changes the overall difficulty of the game, however this solution is a common one that is already implemented in many games. I wish to explore uncommon ways, or unorthodox ways that designers can help players cater their experience in the way they like, so that they can feel fulfilled when playing the game.

Purpose

It's no surprise that horror games are stressful. The whole premise of a horror game is to put you under stress, using fear and suspense, and this idea has created very great games. The more horrific a game is, the more niche of a market it has. As some players don't enjoy stressful situations as much as others, these players may opt out of some really great games because they are too stressful. As someone who hasn't completed many great games because I found them too scary, I want to explore ways to help people introduce themselves into horror games, without affecting the vetern horror fans with a “washed out” horror game and create horror games more accessible so that more people can enjoy them.

Relevance

With games becoming a more common form of media entertainment, horror games will as an extension have a larger base of players to work with. As having scarier games may result in a more niche fanbase, these experiences would not be viable in the growing market, and might just be passed over. As a result, I think that horror games may start becoming less scary overall, as more people try to design less scary experiences, to draw in more people.

Defining Horror

What makes a game scary?

Overall, there are many different factors that play into what makes a game “scary”. They can be stress inducing, have jump scares, have a creepy environment, and many more. As everyone has their own definition of fear, these factors will differ among players, and some may find one game scary while other players just stroll through the experience unfazed. As a result, one cannot define what makes a game scary, as what “scary” is may differ among everyone. However, there are types of fears that can contribute to making something scary for someone, and those we are able to look at.

Different types of fear

Phobias

Phobias are defined as “extreme and persistent fears of certain objects, situations, or activities, or persons” (Garcia R. (2017)) [1]. As games can feature a variety of different scenarios, they have the possibility of inducing fear through phobias. Although phobias can be developed through previous experiences that invoked a strong distressing response, this isn't necessarily the only way of developing them “Genetic, familial, environmental, or developmental factors play an important role in the development of this type of specific phobia” (Garcia R. (2017)) [1]. Many people have a type of phobia, or even multiple phobia, and the fear that is induced by them varies in each individual.

One area of focus is the evolutionary factors that can cause phobia. The **nonassociative model** is used to understand these types of phobia, and is formed on the belief that some phobias do not need a specific interaction, if they have had a type of **evolutionary** relevance to our survival (Coelho et al. (2009)) [1]. This is the idea that some

of our **phobias are innate** in us when we are born, as they were instrumental to our ancestor's survival. These phobias are often the fear of darkness and the fear of falling, but can also be seen as arachnophobia (the fear of spiders), ophidiophobia (the fear of snakes), or related phobia.

At the other end, there are phobia that are **conditioned** into the individual, which are studied under the **preparedness framework** (Coelho et al. (2009)) [2]. These types of phobia are developed through the **individual's experiences**, and can often result from a strong negative experience. An example could be the intense fear of driving after the individual experienced a crash.

Environment & Atmosphere

One of the major components that makes a game scary is the environment of the game. The environment builds up an atmosphere for the level, which in turn can be used to create tension. Without the tension, the fear may not be induced correctly, and as a result it may feel out of place.

Reducing Vision

Lack of vision is a key element in creating a scary environment. Thats why so many horror games take place in dark places, and give the player very few light sources to navigate with; it limits the player's vision. Through limiting their vision, people have little info to work with, as they dont have the whole picture. They can be ambushed at any moment from almost anywhere. As a result, players will be on high alert, making sure that they will be able to react quickly if something should attack them.

EX.Frictional Games (2015) Soma - The poorly lit deep underwater trenches, with a silhouette appearing at the left.

Another form of reducing vision is by introducing atmospheric fog. Again, this approach is used to limit the information available to the player. However, this type of approach can cause eerie feeling environments during the daytime as well. With well paired lighting, fog can be used to create shadows that could add to the feeling of unease in the player. What is that shadow in the fog? Is it dangerous? Is it coming closer? These tactics put the player on edge.

Additionally, by adding a light source that is pointed at, or follows, the player, while in an area with poor visibility, this creates a “deer in the headlights” type of scenario. Here, the players cant see what is pointing the light at them, but the source is able to see them. Once more, this lack of information can create fear, as the player will have to quickly assess the threat, and negotiate what to do (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen et al. (2019)) [4].

EX.Playdead (2010) *Inside* - Headlights pointed at the player in a foggy area.

Infection & Diseases

Another type of atmosphere that can invoke a type of fear is infection and diseases. This builds upon the theory of some fears being a nonassociative instinct, with the idea that humans avoid places filled with plagues and infections in order to avoid being infected themselves. This could cause unease when being present in an infected area, as infection could lead to death.

EX. Microsoft (2007) *Halo 3* - The level *Cortana* features an infected ship, filled with many assets that are used to represent disease

EX. Creative Assembly (2014) *Alien Isolation* - The *Hive* features infected corridors full of aliens, face huggers, and previous hosts of the Xenomorphs

Fear of Lost Progress

One type of stressor that can occur within games is the fear of losing progress, which could be analyzed as a point of fear within a horror game (Garner et al (2011)) [8]. Unlike horror movies, games have a failure state that the player can occur. As a result, they will likely fail at least once within a game, and revert back to a previous save. As no player enjoys losing their progress like that, it is a very common fear among players, and already stressful situations can become that more stressful if the player has not saved recently.

This fear arises from the idea that when people are met with a fearful situation, they aren't necessarily scared of the situation itself, but what could be the consequence of the situation. As Garner puts it, "the true source of our fear is not necessarily the psychotic killer advancing, or the act of a vicious attack, but the permanent damage or death that their assault signifies" (Garner et al (2011)) [8]. With this idea in mind, it would make sense that as players go longer without saving, they become more afraid in a situation where they could lose all their recent progress, as the progress could be difficult to repeat.

Accessibility with Horror

Once more, accessibility is the idea allowing as many players as possible the ability to play the game, without external factors having an effect. Having accessible horror games is the same idea but with horror games. However, as “just making the game less scary” isn’t a great solution, I want to explore other possible ways to allow many people to play them.

Stress Inducers

As explored in the previous section, there are many types of fears, and things that can induce fear. However, many of these fears have a commonality in that they all invoke some sort of stress. Although fear itself can invoke many different reasons for stress occurring, within games, stress is mainly accumulated through the fear of losing your progress.

Most gamers have had the experience of getting very far within a game, dying all of a sudden, and realizing they haven't saved for hours. On the rare occasion, some gamers have experienced their save file corrupting, and as a result losing all of progress in the game. Regardless of the situation, both situations would likely result in a type of despair over the lost progress, and a feeling of failure. This is a feeling that all gamers try to avoid, as most players come to games for an enjoyable experience. However, with situations like these, they lose that sense of accomplishment, and are met with the exact opposite. In severe cases, perhaps the player lost thousands of hours within the game, the player could be dissuaded from playing the game again.

Now, pair these memories and emotions with a situation in which the player is unsure whether they will reach a fail state in the game, and is unsure when the last time they saved was. Suddenly, they will experience much stress, as they realize that the feeling of despair is

a likely scenario to the current situation. Of course, should they overcome the situation, their feeling of accomplishment seems much more enjoyable, as their emotions jump from one end of the spectrum, to the opposite end. However, this would only occur if they actually overcame the situation.

Knowing that the fear of lost progress is a major contributor, designers can start measuring how stressful a situation can be. Is the player able to quick save? When was the last accessible saving station? How much progress has the player progressed? These types of questions could be discussed when thinking about how stressful a situation is, and how stressful it should reliably be.

Additionally, exploring these types of systems could help create more accessible situations. As the idea is to lessen the stress, without losing the horror, developers could utilize these ideas in creative ways. Perhaps the player can quicksave, but with every quicksave, you lose a few points in your final score. This tactic can award hardcore players, who dont want to quicksave, but also award players who do. Although this can be seen as a disability for players with low stress tolerance, there exists the idea of reducing fear by exposure, which will be discussed in the next section.

Exposure Therapy

One common technique to help reduce fear towards something is exposure therapy. With multiple interactions of the threat, the individual will likely start feeling less fear, until they feel they can manage interacting with the fear, or no longer have the fear (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen (2019)) [4].

When considering exposure therapy, one believe that this type of theory could be applied to video games. For example, as players play more violent games, they grow used to the violence they experience while playing, and start to become desensitized to violence. This can be applied to horror games as well, in that the more scary experiences one has with a game, the less scary it can become for them.

What are some current examples?

Arachnophobia Filter

As arachnophobia is a more common phobia among people of the general mass, a few games have taken this phobia into consideration and applied some special mechanics and systems to combat this.

Satisfactory

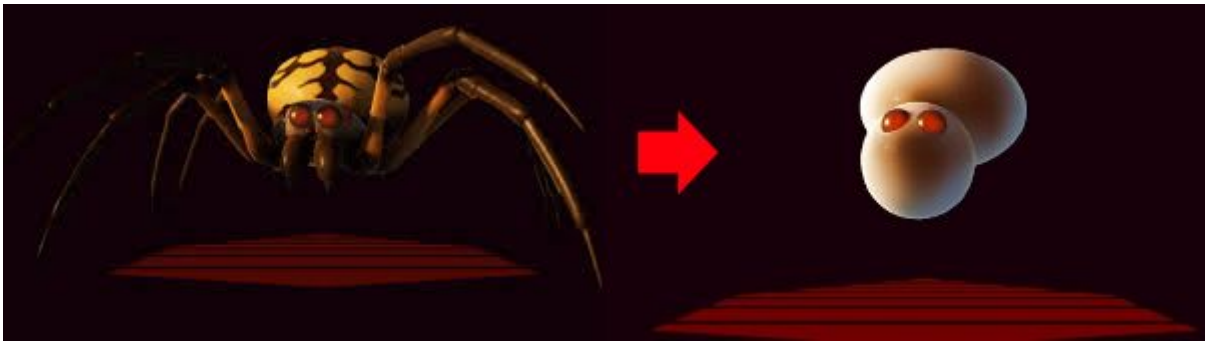
A unique way that the developers of *Satisfactory* combatted arachnophobia was by replacing all the spider models with 2d images of cats.

EX. Coffee Stain Studios (2019) *Satisfactory* - A cat image replacing a spider NPC's model

The reason for the filter being added was “there are spiders in Satisfactory, and although they're relatively small, they move in a flurry of knobbly-jointed legs, eerily like the real thing. This was causing a problem for people working on the game so an Arachnophobia Mode was added - and remains in the game still!” (Purchese, 2019) [10]. Starting off originally as a tool for the developers, the filter made its way into the final, and was appraised by many for the accessible option.

Grounded

In similar fashion to *Satisfactory*, Obsidian Entertainment’s *Grounded* has a similar mechanic, in that it was included to combat arachnophobia for players. In *Grounded*, however, instead of replacing the model with a cat image, the game had a slider for changing how much the model resembled a spider, with the furthest point simply being a couple of spheres.



EX. Obsidian Entertainment (2020) *Grounded* - On the left, the initial spider model, on the right, the “safest” spider model

According to reviewer, Elise Favis, this change, although drastic, still felt somewhat threatening. As a player who has arachnophobia, she was unable to play games that contained spider enemies. With this game however, she says“I chose the most extreme restrictions: The spiders in my game were transformed into disembodied floating blobs with

glowing-red eyes. They don't look like insects at all; yet there's still something off-putting that kept me tense. With arachnophobia safe mode turned on, spiders are still scary, especially in their quick, jerky movements and immense strength that can kill your character in seconds. But this is a welcome and manageable intensity, swapping phobias for a sense of exhilaration." (Purchese, 2019) [10].

"Safe" mode

In Frictional Games' *Soma*, a mechanic they dubbed "Safe Mode" was included as a toggle for the players. As removing the enemies would impact the story, and atmosphere, of the game, Frictional Games went a different route. In this mode, the enemies that would otherwise chase and kill the player, are no longer a threat as they cannot perform harm on the player.

This mode created a more accessible environment, as players who were otherwise turned off by the originally stressful encounters, no longer had to fear these situations any longer. However, as the enemies were still present, and the environment was the same, they could still experience the original atmosphere of the game, albeit less stressful.

The mode originated in a PC mod for the game, where a modder, who played the original game, found that he could not recommend the game to anyone, as the game was too frightening and stressful. Thus, Thomas Grip, the mod creator, created a mode where the monsters were pacified. This mod received many downloads with positive praise, as players who were otherwise to stressed out by*SOMA* were able to play the game. (Lindbergh, 2017) [11].

Exploring Existing Games

This section explores some of the horror games that I have played and experienced. I give a short summary of the game, and analyze the strategies they used to create a fearful experience.

Doki Doki Literature Club (2017)

Team Salvato (2017) Doki Doki Literature Club

Doki Doki Literature Club is a game well known for its fourth wall break, and misleading theme. It initially starts as a typical dating VN, where the player attempts to build a good enough relationship with one of the four characters to start dating them. Using common tropes, the game seems to be a normal dating VN with nothing special to it.

However, mid-way through the game, the game switches gears, and turns into a horror-like experience, and 3 of the main characters are killed by the fourth character, in a horrific manner. The artstyle aims for a more cutesy anime art style, with many bright and

vibrant colors. However, in the later half of the game, the colors start to dim to a more life-less color, and the art style, although relatively stays the same, has more violent graphics applied to it, along with more graphic themes. For example, one of the main characters has an animation where she stabs herself to death, and blood splatters onto the screen. In addition to this change of artstyle, some real-life images are put into the game, to create a disconnect and make the game seem like it's glitching. IE. One of the character's mouths turns into a gif of a real mouth speaking.

This change of artstyle really startles the player. Initially, they associate the game with a more common dating VN, which typically is a calm, and cute type of atmosphere, and when the horror shift occurs, this shatters that thought drastically, as the characters that the player has grown attached to are killed in violent manners. By creating this drastic shift, players are caught off-guard, and are kept wondering "it cant get any worse, right," which as a result keeps them in a tense state.

Although Doki Doki Literature Club is not the first game I think of when I think "horror game", I believe that it still deserves some praise for its abilities. Though it's horror may not be bone chilling, or may not even be scary to some players, the ways it utilized it's genre's tropes and twisted them into more horrific situations was a great example of going against the norm. Additionally, the game itself is not too stress inducing. Yes, there may be some scary or frightful moments in the game, however, due to the nature of the game, the player is able to progress at their own pace, lessening their stress. Thus, I think this is one of the more accessible horror games I have played.

SOMA (2015)

Frictional Games (2015) Soma

Soma is a game that many players praise for its existential dread invoking atmosphere and story. Although there are segments within the game that can indeed startle the player, much of the tension is built through the uneasy atmosphere, and environmental storytelling.

In *Soma* players play Simon Jarrett, a young Torontonian who goes to get his brain scanned. Immediately after his brain scan, he is transported into the far future, and awakens in a claustrophobia-inducing laboratory that is based in the far depths of the Atlantic ocean. In this future, Earth has been hit by a comet, which has eradicated the surface population of earth, with the remaining life being stationed within the ocean laboratories. However, due to complications, the station's AI has gone rogue, and essentially ends up mutating the remaining humans into horrific, zombie-like, beings. The twist in Soma is that these new beings actually contain the brain scans of their hosts, and the new bodies they were implanted to are being kept alive by the rogue AI, in order to maintain the "preservation" of humanity.

In the early beginning of the game, Simon meets with Catherine Chun, a previous scientist of the station, who has had their brain scan integrated into one of the station's robotic engineers. Catherine serves as Simon's guide throughout the station, and as Simon's sole companion throughout the game. As the only other sane "human" in the station, their relationship quickly builds, as they work together towards the goal. Near the end of the game, however, after achieving their goal, the facility starts to go offline, and Catherine's console explodes, destroying her functionality. Simon, realizing he is now the last sane person on the planet, mutters "please dont leave me alone".

As mentioned earlier, the horror in *SOMA* is based upon the idea of being the last sane and sociable human on earth, while being stranded in an inescapable prison. This game builds upon a combination of claustrophobia, and thalassophobia, and it does it very well. In other horror games, where the fear is stemming from our natural desire to stay alive, *Soma'*s story reverses the theme, and provides a monkey's paw type of situation, where Simon does indeed stay alive, although he can no longer die, and is stuck on the bottom of the atlantic ocean, filled with horrific monsters that barely resemble their past selves. As we humans are naturally sociable creatures, activities are made very worse if we have to deal with them alone, and this is a topic that *Soma* finishes off with very well.

SOMA is one of my favourite horror games, as it can be scary through the gameplay, but the story it conveys is the real horror inducing source. With that in mind, I believe *SOMA* to be one of the less stressful horror games to play, which I think makes it a great accessible game in the horror genre.

Alien: Isolation (2014)

Creative Assembly (2014) *Alien: Isolation*

Alien: Isolation is a game that is very well acclaimed by many fans of the horror game genre. With it's fear-inducing atmosphere, sound design, and an AI that feels like an actual predator, *Alien: Isolation* has become one of the most well known horror games.

Alien: Isolation has the player play as Amanda Ripley, the daughter of Ellen Ripley from the 1979 film *Alien*, who explores the Sevastopol space station. Upon initial entry, the station is seemingly deserted, with much of the interior suffering damages in the major systems and lights. The player is then met with a group of inhabitants of the station, however they are hostile towards them, firing their weapons. Ripley then meets with a man named Axel, who informs her that there is a "monster" roaming around the station killing people, thus causing hostility among the inhabitants. After working with Axel, with the promise that he would be given a free ride off the station, they reach a poorly lit area, and Axel is promptly

killed by the Alien. After this initial encounter with the alien, the alien now becomes a prominent threat to the player, will start to appear, and will actively hunt the player.

The atmosphere in *Alien: Isolation* is utilized very well here. Using our natural phobias of being more aware in the dark, paired with the feeling of being alone and hunted throughout the station builds up an immense amount of fear in players. This can be seen in the initial encounters, before the Alien even appears, with the bandits. Although the player will be aware that the monster is a Xenomorph alien and will know it's capabilities, as that is most likely the reason they bought the game, the environment really conveys that idea that the monster is very powerful, and you should fear it as it is the creature that brought the station the state that it is in.

Although the environment is a major point in what makes the game scary, the largest contributor to the fear is, of course, the Xenomorph alien. The Xenomorph's behaviour in the game has gained notoriety among many players as one of the most creative solutions to an AI. This claim has risen from the design of the AI, and how it was designed to feel like it was **always a pressing threat** with **unpredictable** behaviour, in order to match the original feeling of the Alien in the original movie. As described by Al Hope, the creative lead of *Alien: Isolation*, ""We understood early on that if we were going to re-establish the alien as this ultimate killer, something that really commanded your respect, that you felt was lethal, terrifying, and gave you the sense of being hunted, we had to take a different approach; that the alien couldn't run under any prescribed path or pattern"" (Graft, 2014) [13]. The idea was that a **predictable AI wouldn't be as fear-inducing** after the player learned their behaviour patterns, and would just be a nuisance in the late game and subsequent playthroughs. Additionally, the alien was built using two systems, the director AI, and the alien AI. The director AI will feed hints to the Alien as to where the player is, but the alien AI has to actually find the player (Thompson, 2017) [14]. This idea was implemented to assist in the

unpredictability of the alien, but also allow some lee-way if the director detected that the player was too afraid to progress in the current situation.

Alien: Isolation is a game that I am highly fond of for what it accomplished. It's AI system is very well made, along with a very engaging story and environment. With this in mind, I do not think that it is too accessible as a horror game. Although the director ai will detect if the player is too afraid or stressed, and will call off the AI, these stressful moments are very common throughout the game, which they should be as it is a horror game. However, players who have a smaller stress threshold may not be able to cope as well, and could, as a result, quit the game, which I believe to be a disservice to a fantastic game.

Practice

After exploring some of the elements that make up a horror game, researching some existing accessible options in horror games, and analyzing some previously played horror games, I would like to adjust some of the design of *Alien: Isolation* to create a more accessible mode for players who are too frightened or stressed out by playing the game. The reasoning for choosing *Alien: Isolation* is due to my previous experience with the game, as I was unable to justify continuing playing the game with the amount of stress I developed while playing.

Alien: Isolation Adjustments

Overall, the gameplay of *Alien: Isolation (A:I)* was a unique experience for me, and, although I found the game too stressful to continue, the environment and game mechanics were very immersive for me. With that in mind, I would like to avoid changing too many aspects of the game, in order to maintain as much of the original design, mechanics and systems that the developers intended. While looking at some options that could allow the game to be more accessible, I can identify three main aspects:

- Saving
- AI Aggravation & Death
- Fear Threshold

Saving

EX. Creative Assembly (2014) *Alien: Isolation* - The saving station animation

One of my major stressors with *A:I* is the saving system. Saving stations are located in various locations throughout the station, and allow the player to save their progress. However, there is a lengthy animation preceding the saving functionality, in which the player is vulnerable. As the Xenomorph can sometimes be in the vicinity of the save stations, this means that the player is able to be killed by the Xenomorph during this animation.

The design implications for this was to make the player always think twice before going out into the open when trying to save, and making sure they are aware of their surroundings. In the interview with Al Hope, he states “"It felt like the right thing to do, because even the simple act of saving became part of the horror experience, and supported what we were trying to do," he says” (Graft, K., 2014) [7]. At a personal level, and as a developer myself, I am really intrigued with this design decision, and I think it was a good call on them for creating this mechanic. This small little mechanic creates a bunch of tension,

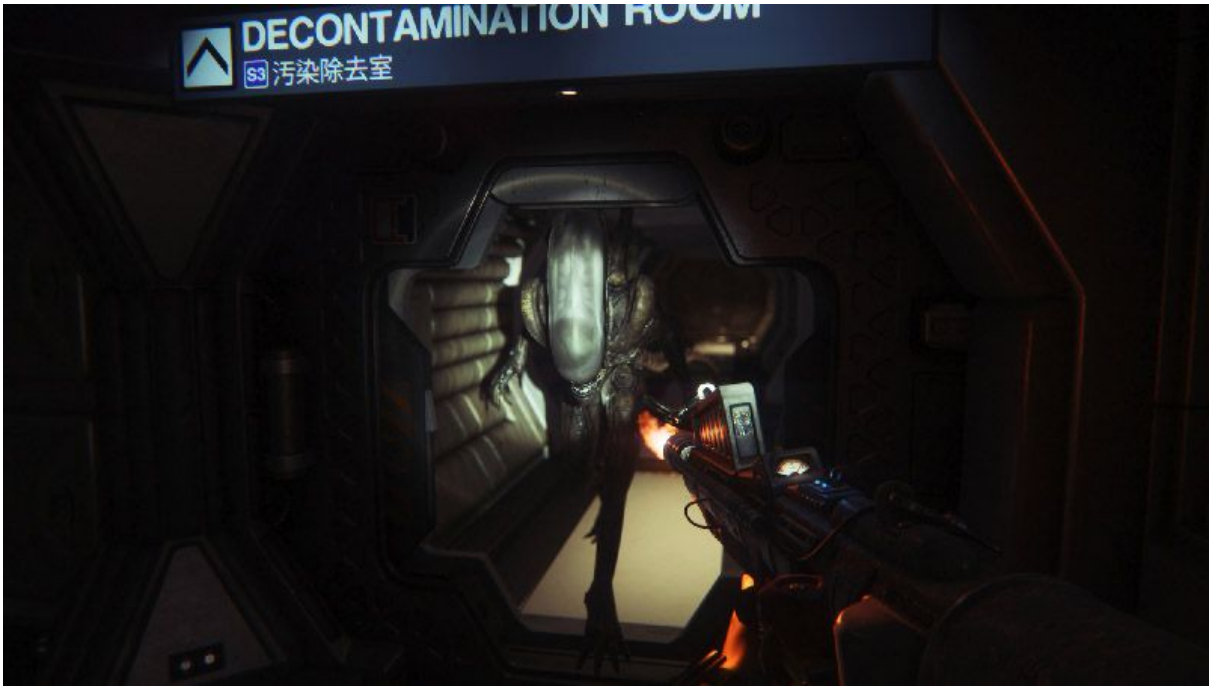
and makes the player double check to be sure they are safe. It combats the idea that being near a save spot means you are safe, which has been conditioned into players from many different games, and actually results in the feeling that the player is never safe. This feeling definitely adds to the atmosphere they were trying to build to match the original game, in that the Xenomorph is unpredictable, and you can be killed at any time.

As a person with a low stress threshold however, this mechanic creates much more stress that I would have originally thought. As much of the stress in this particular situation is essentially “I cannot afford to die here, as I am very close to saving”, should I inevitably die by the Xenomorph here, while in the middle of the saving animation, the amount of defeat is much more prominent, as I know I will likely have to go through the same stressful situation again, after being so close to having completed it.

The change for this little mechanic is very simple for the accessible toggle. Simply disable the animation wait time, and allow the player to save immediately. Doing this would eliminate the fear of save points, as they will once again be that little safe-haven that players have developed for save stations. Of course, this would only be disabled if the player decides to disable it, and as a result would not affect a player who wants the original experience.

AI Aggravation & Death

As explored in a previous section, the major selling point of the game is of course the Xenomorph and it's exceptional AI behaviour and ability to cause distress to the player. Without the Alien, the game wouldn't be too much of a horror game, as the other AI (the engineers and the other hostile humans) are not that much of a threat, and are easily killable by the player. The Alien is the main threat, with its superior searching skills, and its ability to kill the player instantly. This isn't to say that the player can't do anything if they are spotted, even if this is the case for the early game. When the player finds the flamethrower, they are able to thwart the alien off for a time, though this defensive capability will dwarf over time as the alien adapts and no longer fears the flamethrower. The player also has noise makers they can throw to distract the ai, though, as with the flamethrower, the alien will stop following the noise, and will actually search in the area it was thrown from. At the end of the day, the Alien is a very adaptive foe, and is a difficult one at that, which isn't too accessible for players of lower fear tolerances.



EX. Creative Assembly (2014) *Alien: Isolation* - A player with a flamethrower aimed at the Xenomorph

Overall, the AI and it's behaviours are amazing, and have been praised as such by many. The developers at *Creative Assembly* have absolutely created a creature that matches the original *Alien* movie, and as a result, the AI behaviours should not be touched too much, else the design for the game be changed as well. Additionally, should the AI be changed too much, many fans of the original game will likely be angered by the alteration, and players who play the mode may feel left out.

When exploring ways to adjust the AI for the Alien, I can currently think of two possible ways. Go the *SOMA* route, and pacify all the enemies, or change how the alien attacks. Both ways have their merits, and faults, and I'll explore both.

Pacification

EX. Creative Assembly (2014) *Alien: Isolation* - A close up view of the alien while not in the aggressive state; likely how passive mode would feel like

By pacifying the enemies of the game, the alien would be able to still appear, but would not go into its aggression state. This would remove death fear for the player, as they wouldn't be attacked. As a result, they could leisurely play the game without fear of lost progress at the hands of the Xenomorph or other hostile AI. Altogether, this mode would be more of a movie viewing, where the player could still witness the alien killing other civilians, or experience scripted events where they have to perform actions to survive. This playthrough would be ideal for players who want to experience the story and environment of the game, but may not necessarily enjoy the horror aspect of it. This mod, however, would completely eliminate any difficulty that the game has, and would essentially render it a walking simulator. Although *SOMA* had experienced much praise with this route, this strategy may not work too well, as the main point of the game is to express how dangerous the Alien actually is. However, for players who don't care too much about the difficulty, this game mode may be what they actually desire, and those players would likely really enjoy this mode.

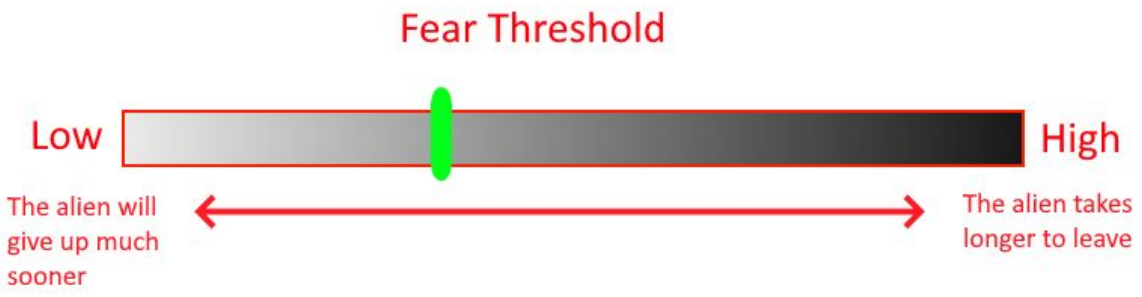
Attack Modification

This modification is based on the idea of changing what happens when the Alien detects the player. Instead of remove the aggression state towards the player, the Alien's attack behaviour would just change, and the player would still have to avoid it. This can be done in a few ways, such as making the Alien walk, instead of running, to the player when they are spotted, very similar to how zombies attack. Or maybe the alien still runs and attacks the player, but the attack doesn't kill the player. Perhaps the player just loses some items, and the Xenomorph is actually a thief. What it would want with flashlight batteries, who knows? Maybe its afraid of the dark. But this method would remove the fear of lost progress, but still incentivizes the player to sneak around, and actively hide from the alien. However, this could prove to make the Alien less scary, as it's attack doesn't really do anything negative other than take easily found items, and could work against the theme that Creative Assembly is trying to invoke.

Between the two methods, they both have their merits. I personally would prefer the attack modification, as it still keeps the loop of the game, if the player does not want to lose items, but I can see myself playing the pacification mode if I wanted to just explore the station. Overall, I can't decide between the two, and this would likely boil down to playtesting both methods. Who knows? Perhaps both mods could be implemented as separate modes.

Fear Threshold

As mentioned earlier, the AI of the Xenomorph is controlled via two different systems that work together. The **Director** and the **Behaviour** AI. The behaviour AI is what controls the behaviour of the alien, and tells it what to do, or what it senses. The director AI will let the behaviour AI know the general location of the player, to keep the alien close, and will let the behaviour AI know when it's time to back off, as the player is too stressed, which will allow the player to continue playing the game. The point of this modification would be to allow the player adjust the fear threshold that would need to be passed for the alien to back off.



Ex. A mockup of what the fear threshold would look like, and function

I think that this method would create interesting results, as it allows players to have very adaptive control over the game, and let them play how they like. Additionally, this could

be used in both scenarios where the player might want to reduce the threshold to make it less stressful, or increase it to make it more stressful. As a result this could potentially be a benefit for advanced players who want the game to be as tough as it can be.

As a programmer, this seems easy enough to create as well. Since there's already a variable for the fear threshold, simply allow the player to adjust it via a slider. Although, from an encounter designer and level designer point of view, this could potentially be a massive hurdle to go through, as you would have to design for varying types of difficulties for both the more passive alien to the more aggressive alien. Since you have to make sure the player can pass, you can't make a level too difficult, but making it too easy would make the more passive enemy a walk in the park. As a result, much more playtesting would need to occur in order to test this.

Practice Conclusion

There are likely many other factors of *Alien: Isolation* that could be adjusted to create a more accessible game, and these are most likely just the tip of the iceberg. These mods don't change too much of the game loop, which is what I was looking at, but perhaps other mods would be more beneficial, at the expense of the game loop. Whether players would accept this, however, is a different question.

Conclusion

Overall, my exploration of creating accessible horror games has definitely increased my awareness of the topic. I think, should I design a horror game, that I would likely be taking these findings into consideration, and perhaps that will lead to a more accessible horror game. Whether leads and stakeholders will care too much about this area is a question I do not know specifically, but I believe that it is a worthwhile topic to go into further, as it could increase overall exposure of the game, and as a result; more sales. In conclusion, I think this paper has expanded my design skills, and was a worthy topic to explore.

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Script

[Slide 1]

Hello everyone, welcome to my talk about accessibility in horror games.

[Slide 2]

So Accessibility, Horror Games, what exactly are they? Well, accessibility is the notion of designing for an inclusive environment. Think wheelchair ramps, braille text, etc. Essentially, it allows people to utilize the product, despite what impairments they may have.

Horror Games is kinda self explanatory. They are games that contain horror, are scary, and generally create unease in it's players. Now, how would we pair these topics together?

[Slide 3]

Well, what if we just combine the terms?
"Designing Horror Games to be playable by everyone"

But who is everyone?
Generally, accessibility in games will target people who have a physical disability, such as poor eyesight, color blindness, or physical impairment.
But, this topic mostly explores the emotional or mental parts that could affect how people play games, ie stress tolerance, gameplay preference.

[Slide 4]

Now, why would we want more accessible horror games?
Well, if we go back to our target demographic, these are people who want to enjoy the game, but are generally too stressed out while playing which could deter away from the

experience they want.

With accessible options, players would be able to play the game how they want, allowing them to change how stressful the gameplay is to them. These options also have the chance of creating a wider audience, which would result in more revenue.

[Slide 5]

Okay, but how exactly would we achieve this?

Like many things, there's all kinds of solutions to this. The proper solution will depend on the game, however, there are commonalities.

Take, for example, the fear of lost progress. Almost all games will have this fear written into them, as long as there's a way for the player to fail.

As Garry Napper explains, the atmosphere is very tense when the player has gone a long while without saving, while being challenged by a failure state.

But how exactly could we remedy this, or at least make it less stressful for the player?

Some possibilities could be Fail state options, where the player can decide what occurs on a fail state, or SOMA’s Passive Mode, where enemies don’t reach their aggression state.

[Slide 6]

Now you might be thinking, wouldn't that just ruin the horror aspect? Not exactly

Horror is made up of a bunch of different components, such as Audio, Visuals, and

atmosphere. Although stress is an aspect of horror, horror isn't built upon that alone.

Since the idea is to allow the player options that control the stress caused by the experience, players could play the game at their own rate. Yes, they could play with the least stressful settings, but at the end of the day that's the experience that they want to play with.

Now, what about horror veterans? Well, as these are just options, the base experience would still be accessible, with the accessible options disabled.

[Slide 7]

Now, in summary,

There are a bunch of different solutions for accessibility in horror games, but the correct one will depend on the game

In general though, these solutions shouldn't make the game too easy, and should allow the player to find the right balance between stress and difficulty.

Lastly, the intended horror experience shouldn't be tarnished by these accessible options.

[Slide 8]

But, other than that, that's the end of my talk! Here's my info if you wanna chat, and thanks for listening!

Interview Questions

Q: Why don't designers just make the game not less scary, instead of going to all this work?

A: The purpose of this deep dive was to explore ways to allow horror games to be adjustable for all players. If you take the horror aspect out of the game, it may still indeed be a good game, however, it may not be the experience that players desire. By allowing players accessible controls and toggles, they can experience the horror experience in a way that they enjoy.

Q: Wouldn't this idea steer players who want a terrifying horror experience away from the game?

A: The idea presented here was to give the players options to use the accessibility. With these systems in mind, designers would still be able to make terrifying experiences in their games, and the accessible options should allow the player to play how they want. In fact, these options may change the game to be even more frightening if the player chooses, which could draw in those horror veterans.

Q: Why attempt to fix *Alien: Isolation* after it has already received many praise and awards for being so terrifying as it is?

A: I do agree that *Alien: Isolation* is a great game as it currently is, and is very great at promoting fear. This can stand as a double-edged sword, however, as it can draw away more casual players who may not be able to handle the amount of fear or stress the game promotes. These accessible options would ideally allow those casual players a more casual game experience, while not affecting the experience for everyone else.

Q: Why would you try to design for players who may not be your target audience? Isnt this a waste of resources?

A: I can see how this could be considered a waste of resources, as in the end people outside your target demographic may not even play the game. In the instance of popular IPs, such as *Alien*, its more likely to bring in more people, as the IP is established enough to be that enticing. In these instances, more casual players and players outside the original target demographic will likely be drawn in to the game concept, but may have low stress tolerance, in which case they may decide against playing the game. This is the scenario that these accessible options are trying to address.

Q: Why should designers, who create horror games, listen to you, someone outside of their target demographic?

A: Although it is true that I'm outside of their target demographic, I think that the idea of drawing in those outsiders is a good idea to consider while designing. As game designers, we aim to create the best experience possible. If a player fails to finish a game, we have failed at our goal, as they did not have a good experience. Additionally, accessibility options are not new to gaming. We have accessible options for all types of things, and I think that stress tolerance should be one to be considered in future games.

Catch All: Although this topic is a little opinionated and can be seen as somewhat biased, I do think that something can still be learned from this topic, and possibly thought about while designing games. Accessibility has only ever had the goal of expanding the usability of a game, and increasing its audience, which should be the primary goal of most designers, so more people can experience the game. With this in mind, if the accessibility options make the game less accessible, or impair the overall experience, perhaps those options aren't the correct solution and other considerations should be discussed.