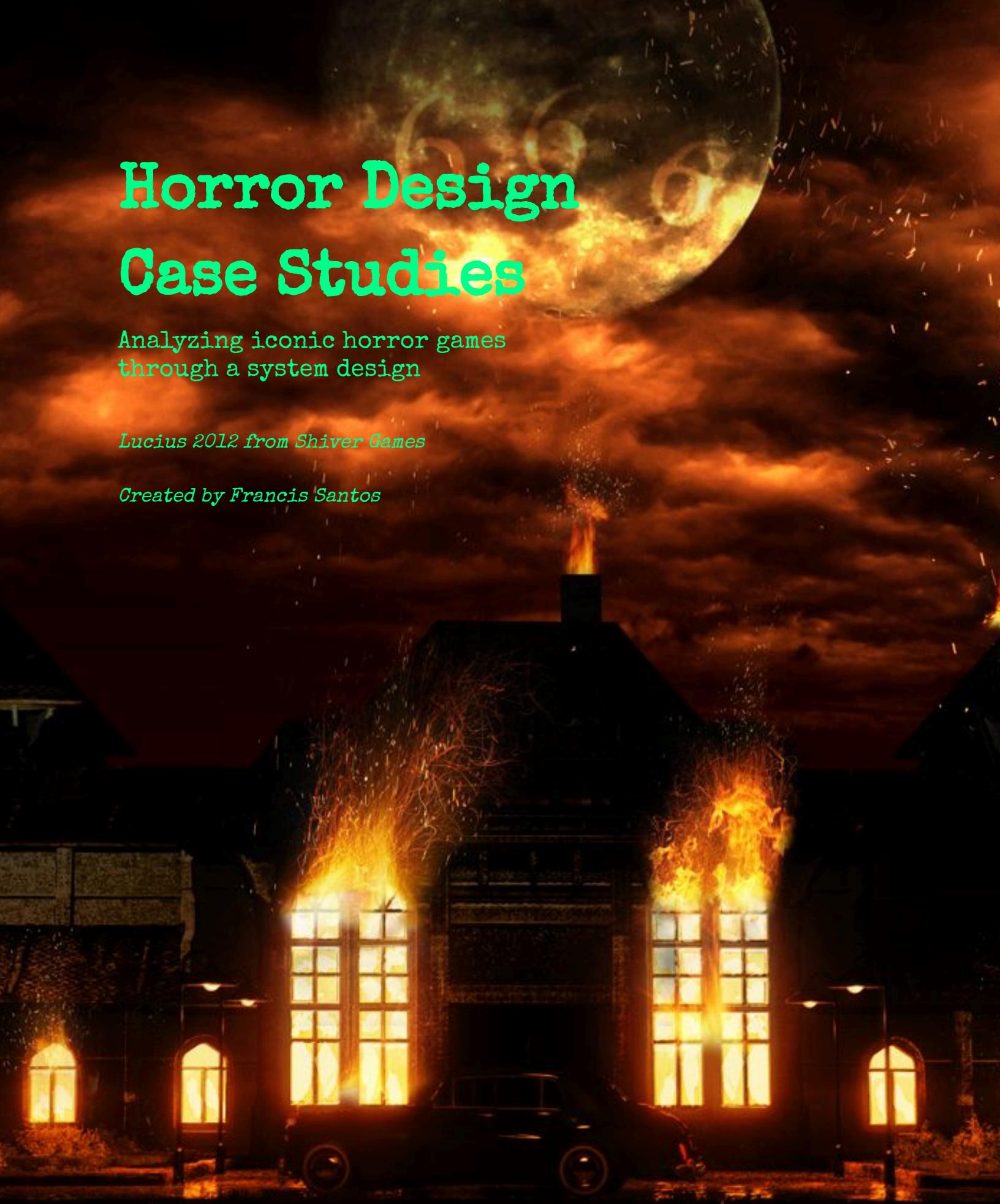


Horror Design Case Studies

Analyzing iconic horror games
through a system design

Lucius 2012 from Shiver Games

Created by Francis Santos



Lucius 2012 from Shiver Games Breakdown

PLAYER CONTROL WINDOW

In Lucius, the player controls a young boy navigating Dante Manor to stage “accidental” murders.

The player must explore the house, gather tools, manipulate objects, and plan deaths while avoiding getting caught. The house layout, locked rooms, and NPC schedules act as soft rails, guiding the player's access and pacing the narrative.

Forced Camera Moments

The camera stays fixed behind Lucius in a third-person over-the-shoulder perspective. Lucius becomes the pivot point, which naturally draws attention to whatever he faces. This means the designers can guide suspicion and focus simply by placing key objects or NPCs within the camera’s line of sight.



Certain moments shift the camera for dramatic emphasis:

- Conversations with key NPCs zoom in at a cinematic angle to hint they are the next target.
- After the player assembles all pieces of a murder, the camera fades into a cinematic sequence where the investigator examines the body and tries to rationalize the “accident.”
- When using telekinesis, the camera briefly shifts to a tight view to improve perception and precision.

Example:

In Gene's death scene, the camera highlights the stove and the handyman's nearby tools, priming the player to understand how the "accident" will be explained later.

Movement Control

Lucius's movement is intentionally limited and structured. The slow walk speed and tight hallways create a controlled traversal pace. This prevents players from rushing kills and forces them to observe NPC routines and environmental details.

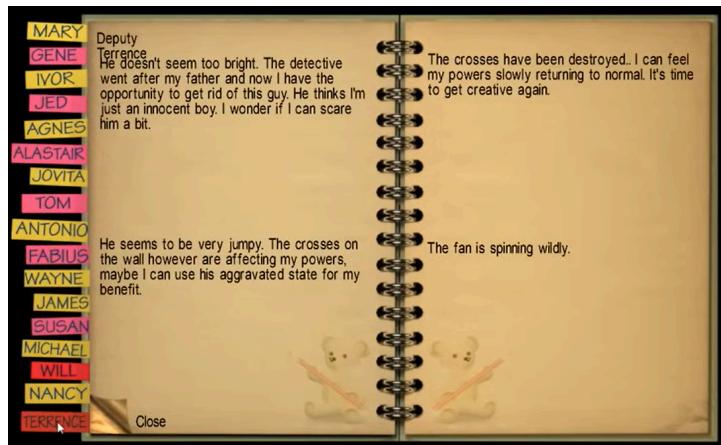
Movement restrictions include:

- **Locked doors** to prevent entering story areas too early
- **NPC patrol routes** that block some paths
- **Rooms with crosses** that drain Lucius's power, limiting where he can safely stand
- **Stealth considerations** where running or standing in open doorways increases suspicion

By keeping Lucius vulnerable and small in large spaces, the designers reinforce the theme of a child secretly controlling the house without ever being in direct power.

Interaction Control

Interaction plays a major role in Lucius's systems. The game relies heavily on finding items, using tools, manipulating objects, and tracking tasks through Lucius's journal.



Key interaction systems:

- **Lucius's Journal:** updates with clues, victim weaknesses, and steps needed to stage the death. This acts as a mission guide.
- **Environmental interaction:** light switches, matches, tools, poison, batteries, keys, and appliances.
- **Power-based actions:** telekinesis, mind control, and fire-starting abilities that unlock over time.
- **NPC interaction:** basic dialogue, but mostly used to observe schedules or lure them into traps.



Interactions are simple but intentional. Their purpose is to gradually teach the player how to assemble murders while never overwhelming them with complex puzzles. Each interaction is a breadcrumb toward the next victim.



TENSION RELEASE POINTS

The primary source of tension in Lucius is the constant fear of being caught. The player must carefully assemble traps while monitoring:

- **The suspicion meter**
- **Lucius's power bar**
- **Cross-proximity drain**
- **NPC routes**



Setting up a murder is stressful, requiring planning and timing.

Release points happen after each death:

- The detective arrives, questioning the family and reviewing the scene.
- Lucius returns to daily routines with his mother, Nancy (cleaning, chores, etc.)
- Music softens, tension drops, and exploration becomes safe again.



These downtime segments act as pacing resets before the next escalation of powers and murders.

PUNISHMENT & REWARD (Psychological System)

Lucius uses a psychological loop instead of traditional punishment.

Punishment

Punishment comes in several forms:

- **Suspicion spikes:** NPCs becoming aware, requiring the player to reset positioning.
- **Power drain:** crosses reduce abilities, forcing caution.
- **Mission failure:** if caught, the player may need to restart certain sequences.
- **Narrative guilt pressure:** the detective gets closer to the truth, adding ambient tension.

Punishment is not physical; it is social and stealth-based.



Reward

Rewards are tied to progression:

- **New demonic powers** are unlocked after each successful kill.
- **Access to new wings of the manor** as suspicion resets.
- **Story advancement** through investigator cutscenes.
- **Empowerment fantasy:** the player feels more capable and creative with each victim.

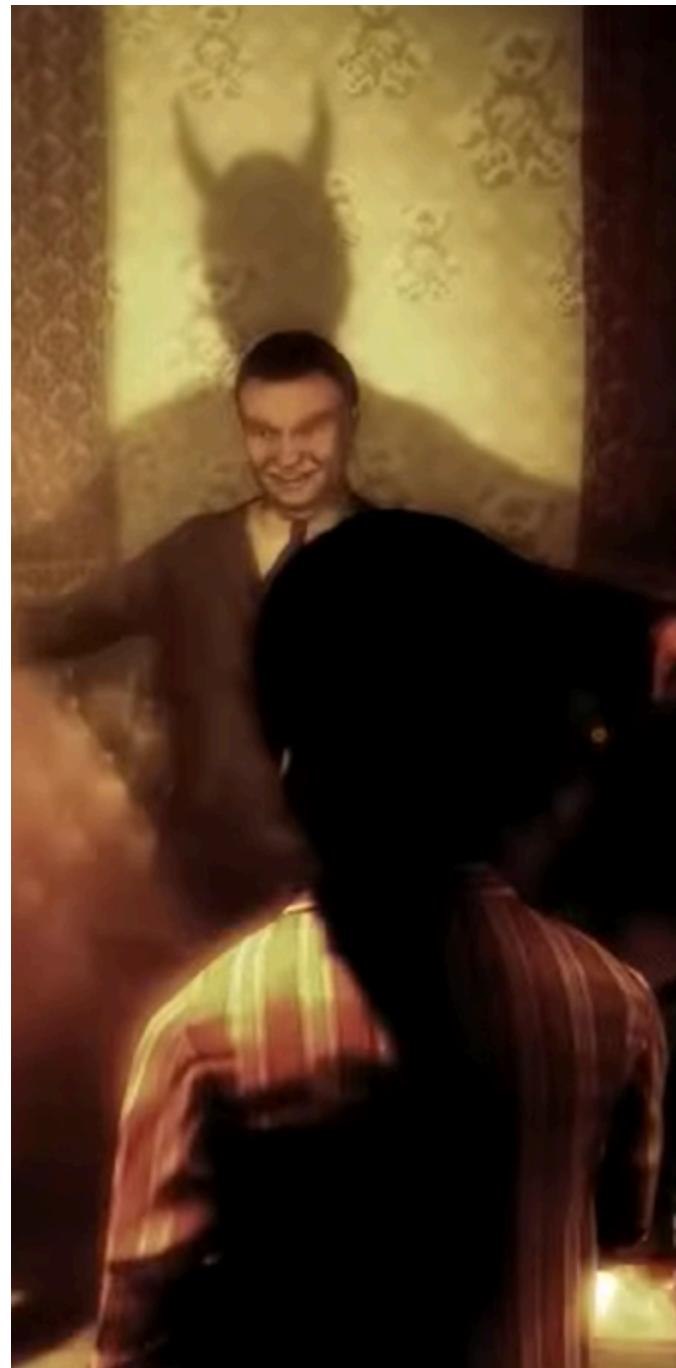
The loop becomes:

**Plan → Execute → Reward → Power Upgrade
→ Next Murder**

Reference

A shout-out for [ToughGamingGuy](#), so I could appreciate the game systems:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zZwjj2l6tFI>



Conclusion

Lucius blends stealth, puzzle planning, and environmental manipulation to deliver a horror experience from the villain's perspective.

By controlling movement, interaction, and camera focus, the game creates a sense of secrecy and tension.

Every action feels risky but calculated, and every "accident" feels like a puzzle solved. With each kill, the powers grow, the stakes rise, and the detective comes closer to uncovering the truth, creating a unique tension curve unlike most horror titles.

Lucius stands out as a system-driven horror game where the fear comes not from monsters, but from being caught doing monstrous things.

