This *Gamasutra* article on horror game design heavily influenced this piece.

Outlast/Horror Game Design Study

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Tutorial/Outdoors:

Mechanics introduction order:

- Collecting files
    - Context - In passenger seat of SUV.
    - Trigger - In game cutscene.
- Reading files and checking notes
    - Trigger - Closing first file from SUV.
- Walking
    - Trigger - Reaching gate with SUV.
- Opening Doors
    - Context - Text on screen.
    - Trigger - Reaching the first door.
- Camera
    - Context - Text on screen.
    - Trigger - Reaching center of courtyard.
    - Reward - Note on what was recorded.
- Crouch
    - Context - Hole in gate too small to walk through - text on screen.
    - Scary sound trigger.
- Climb ladder
    - Context - Text on screen.
    - Trigger - Reaching ladder.
- Jump
    - Context - Text on screen.
    - Trigger - Reaching gap on scaffolding.
- Climb ledge
    - Context - Text on screen.
    - Trigger - Reaching grabbable cliff on scaffolding.
    - Scary sound trigger.

Aesthetics:

- Slight grain filter over everything.
- Leaf and fog particles.
- All vegetation has slight motion.
- Fluorescent lighting darkens background light and changes hue of scene (in this case from amber to green).
- Taking damage cases red vignette and distorted spatial perception (mimicking adrenaline).

- Running increases the FOV slowly over time and stopping almost immediately brings it back to normal.
- Walking causes slight rotation on camera.
- Running causes more rotation and bounce on camera.
- Player starts making exasperated noises from running, landing from high fall, etc.
- Dying - blood splat with quick fade to black.
- Reviving - quick fade from black.
- Invisible triggers that play ambient scary noise, as well as when other things happen.

Asylum (intro/tutorial continued):

Mechanics introduction order:
- Nightvision
    - Context - Text on screen.
    - Trigger - Lights going out in first room of asylum.
- Squeezing through tight places
    - Context - Text on screen.
    - Trigger - Approaching narrow space.
- Battery system
    - Context - Text on screen.
    - Trigger - Finding first battery.
- Damage from enemies
    - Normal mode = 2 hit death, health regenerates over time.
    - Learned by dying.
- Difficulty setting
    - Enemies do more damage and detect you from a further distance.
    - Learned through playtesting.

Guiding the player:
- Hiding better than fighting
    - Context - Text on screen in opening scene, Dying SWAT member tells you.
    - Trigger - Starting game, finding Dying SWAT member.
- Linear hallway with tight squeeze that causes mandatory cutscene introducing Chris Walker (recurring enemy) where you're thrown off ledge to meet religious inmate. Proceeds to introduce the first **game loop**.
    - This trigger breaks the player's assumption that they are safe while squeezing in tight spaces, resulting in a scare and informing the player that the game will break its own conventions.

Aesthetics:

- Darkness impossible to navigate without nightvision or max Gamma (poorly).
- Asylum residents running, opening and closing doors in background upon entering an area for the first time.
- Tree branches hitting window to create a tapping sound.
- TV's play static.
- Player is indirectly guided by light, blood trails, doors without boarding, vents, crouching places, and sound cues.

Level design:

"*Previewing*" a level layout - Player explores a level that they will later navigate through while being "chased". Patrolling AI optional and single or multiple objectives in different rooms.

Chase sequences - After the player reaches some milestone, escape through the previewed area while being pressured by time (flooding, gas, closing door, etc.), enemy, or both.

CHASE SEQUENCE:

A largely linear level where tension is present from an enemy pursuing the player as well as a lack of alternate paths. Mechanics may be introduced to encourage risk taking, with a reward of more resources to evade the enemy.
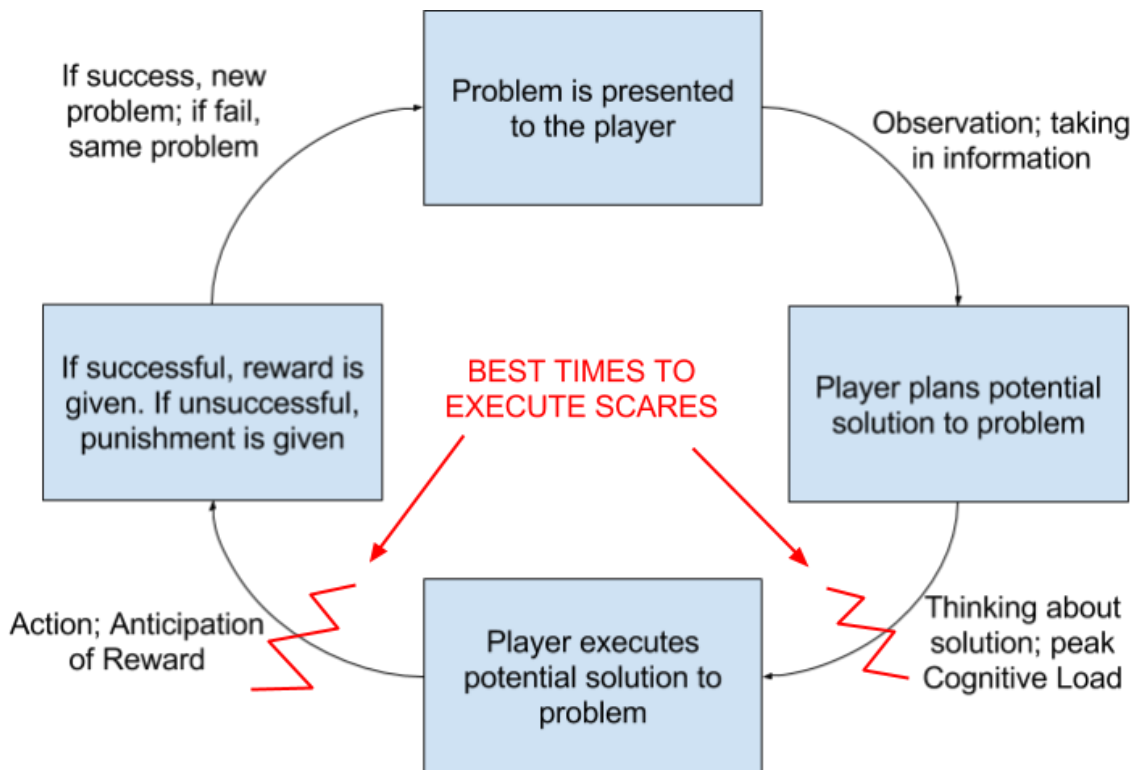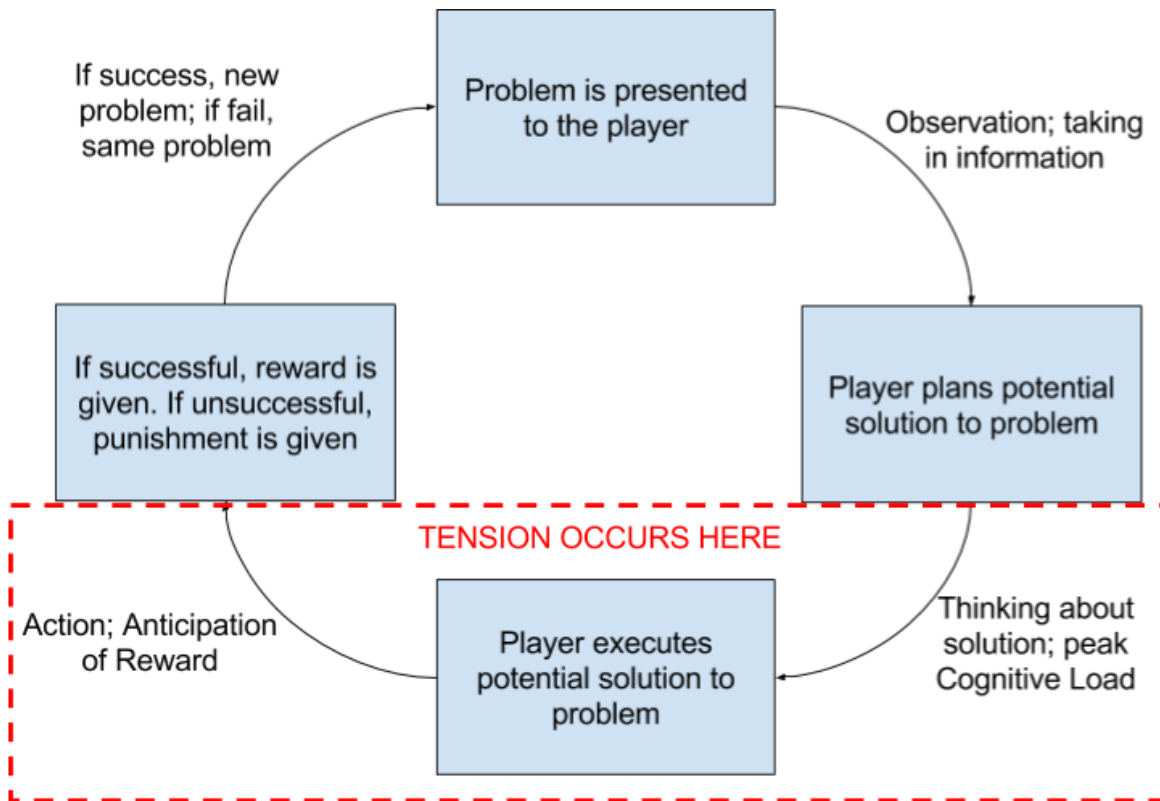*- Jared Mitchell, Gamasutra.*

Level conventions:
- Hiding:
  - Dark areas, lockers, beds.
- New room/delay enemy:
  - Doors(without boards), door blockers, narrow openings.
- Intended route:
  - Air vents, crouch holes, narrow ledges, open windows, ladders, elevators.

Gameplay:
- Torturer escape (linear) and Dr. Trager "preview" + escape (nonlinear).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPWRkfg6-EA

Game loop:

Problem is presented to the player

If success, new problem; if fail, same problem

Observation; taking in information

If successful, reward is given. If unsuccessful, punishment is given

Player plans potential solution to problem

TENSION OCCURS HERE

Action; Anticipation of Reward

Player executes potential solution to problem

Thinking about solution; peak Cognitive Load

Problem is presented to the player

If success, new problem; if fail, same problem

Observation; taking in information

If successful, reward is given. If unsuccessful, punishment is given

BEST TIMES TO EXECUTE SCARES

Player plans potential solution to problem

Action; Anticipation of Reward

Player executes potential solution to problem

Thinking about solution; peak Cognitive Load

Example game loop:

Problem:
- Find a way out.

Leads to - Exploration - Opportunity for scare.
Plan:
(where to hide, where to close doors behind them, how much time they have)

- Open locked door -> security panel in another room -> open main door ->

Leads to -
Execution:

Leads to -
Game interfering with plan:
- **Scare/tension strategies**: Break player assumptions of mechanics <u>rarely</u>.
- TENSION: Pressure that occurs when the player experiences a loss of resources, which may prevent them from accomplishing goals.
- JUMP SCARE: A sudden event that interrupts a gameplay loop, either disrupting a player's thought process during peak cognitive load, or denying an immediately anticipated reward
    - **Chase sequence**:
        - Introduce new enemies.
        - Alter player's intended path.
        - Disable a mechanic suddenly (i.e. lights go out).
        - Slow player movement or other mechanic (i.e. player takes a fall)
    - **Patrolling AI**:
        - Change AI behavior when new area is explored or objective completed.
        - Make AI check hiding places around the player.
        - Introduce new enemy or mechanic(s) such as water monster in Amnesia (time constraint, new enemy, branching pathways that lead to the same place), Ghost in Outlast (hard to see unless using night-vision), Robots in Alien Isolation (or alien entering vents, dropping from ceiling, multiple aliens, etc.).

Leads to -
Player success or failure:

- Success - player moves on to next gameplay loop (area) and learned behaviors are reinforced or problems overcame if learned behaviors are tampered with.
- Failure - player is punished with death, scared, and has to replay area or chase sequence. Also learns what not to do.

List of game loops:

Learn about the Asylum as a risky investigative reporter.
Find a way out upon seeing corpses/dying SWAT member.
Use security panel to escape.
Turn on generator.
Escape solitary confinement.
Follow the blood.
Get to the showers.
Get to the sewers.
Flush the sewers.
Escape the torturer.
Escape the doctor.
Find the priest outside.
Get to the female ward.
Get to the third floor.
Get the key to the chapel.
Escape through elevator.
Navigate sublevel labs.
(Linear escape sequence) Unplug the Walrider.

Example game loops:
- **Bold** indicates a problem.
- Plain text indicates a planned and executed action.
- Green is a player "preview" of the level.
- Red is a new game loop.

Early game:
- **Door is locked** -> access security panel in another room -> open main door -> **power turned off in basement** -> go to basement to activate generator -> **enemy patrolling** -> sneak around enemy -> **needs two switches** -> plan hiding places, AI pattern avoidance, generator activation, and escape -> reactivate main door -> **priest sedates you and locks you in solitary confinement** -> let out by prisoner in new area.

Late game:

- Turn on sprinkler system to extinguish fire to reach kitchen -> **switch requires 2 valves in different rooms** -> locate switches while planning hiding places and escape route -> **enemy patrolling** -> get chased out or sneak out -> new area.
- **Camera falls down 2 stories while getting to 3rd floor** -> navigate down 2 stories without night vision while planning an escape -> **get chased back up with camera by 3 enemies** -> follow the blood.
- Get the key to open a door to reach the chapel so the priest inmate gives you the key to the elevator which leads to the exit -> go downstairs (only option) -> **key trapped with dead guy in locked laundry shoot** -> try to activate laundry shoot door -> **fuses on switch are blown** -> get 3 fuses while planning escape -> **get chased by multiple enemies back to laundry chute** -> **laundry falls down so go down a floor** -> new gameplay loop.
- **While being chased by new enemy type** -> turn off life support -> turn off power -> **enemy lowers your mobility** -> unplug patient.
  - This last example is more of a linear escape sequence, as it is the final objective in the game.

Story

Synopsis:
- Reporter willing to cover dangerous or mysterious cases travels to an Asylum for a solo investigation based on a leaked document from an IT contractor who said that human rights were being violated and the corporation in charge is suppressing information.
  Backstory:
- Former Nazi scientist works with offshore corporation to test on asylum inmates for cell regeneration when subjects are put through extreme terror and happens upon a "gateway" breaching into the spiritual realm, unleashing "Walrider" a spirit tied to a test subject in the secret underground facility that breaks containment and kills everyone who tries to enter or leave the facility.
  Themes:
- Asylum inmate psychology.
- Human nature when in crisis, specifically tortured, psychotic, and sometimes dangerous inmates.
- Religion as a means of dealing with supernatural beings and acceptance of futility/escapism in "the sand" (tv static), specifically rejected by staff and scientists, but followed by inmates. The player is guided by a "priest" inmate who calls him "the apostle" who will show the world of the inmates' sacrifice.
- Science as a tool that is both enlightening and dangerous if reckless or when violating human… or other, rights.

Slender Man study:

- Simple mechanics, goal is to find 8 notes.
  - Stamina - only run for a certain duration before needing to recharge.
  - Flashlight - Used to see level, too dark to see otherwise.
  - Looking at slender man - stops him from moving, but looking directly at him increases his move speed, and eventually kills you.
  - Music adds layers of spookiness as the player collects more pages.

- Previewing level - early game exploring.

- Chase sequence - as notes are collected, slender man chases player more intensely, as flashlight and stamina are running low, and music plays more intensely.

- Game loop:
  - Restarting on death.

P.T. Study:

- Simple mechanics.
  - Walking.
  - Flashlight.
  - Running.
  - Crouching.

- Previewing level
  - Differences in game loops being erratic along with the feeling of being watched is stressful because there is no escape sequence, self defence ability, or explanation/pattern as to what is happening, just a radio and the level.
  - Planning an escape might play into a trap, as the only place to run is into the same situation with unknown differences

- Chase sequence
  - None.

- Game loop:
  - Walking.
  - Looking around.
  - Gathering clues/fragments of pictures.

- ○ Listening to radio.
- ○ Activating scary events to continue.
- ○ Repeating game loop.
- ○ Observing differences in game loops.

- ● Story (wikipedia):
  - ○ *P.T.* centers on an unnamed protagonist who awakens in a concrete-lined room, and opens a door to a haunted corridor,[a] in which he can only walk through a hallway which continuously loops and redecorates itself. The first time he passes, a radio reports on a familicide, which was committed by the father, and later mentions two other cases exactly like it.[4]
  - ○ Later on, the protagonist encounters a hostile and unstable female apparition, presumably named Lisa, and upon entering the bathroom and being locked, he obtains a flashlight and finds a creature resembling an underdeveloped fetus crying in the sink.[12][13] He soon gets out, but finds out that the apparition is watching him. If the protagonist is attacked by the ghost, he reawakens in the first room of the game, beginning the loop again, but it's possible to avoid her completely. In the room, a bloody moving paper bag speaks to him, speaking of a disturbing experience, and stating the same quote seen at the start of the game - "Watch out. The gap in the door... it's a separate reality. The only me is me. Are you sure the only you is you?"
  - ○ The next few loops feature a refrigerator hanging from the ceiling, leaking blood, the muffled sound of a hysterically crying baby can be heard from the refrigerator and it violently shakes and moves, implying that the baby is trapped inside. This happens several times, each time being more severe than the last. As it transitions, the radio issues a Swedish message referencing the 1938 radio drama *The War of the Worlds*. In the next loop, the lamps turn completely red, the player's vision blurs, and the character moves abnormally quickly, with a set of disturbing illusions. Eventually, the protagonist listens to a murder being committed in the bathroom through the bathroom peephole. After the audio ends, the bathroom door opens by itself and the player enters upon the fetus-like creature addressing the protagonist that ten months earlier, he lost his job and turned to alcoholism. His wife then landed a part-time cashier job in order to financially support the family, but the manager was sexually attracted to her, implying a motive for the familicide.[14] The corridor then corrects itself and the protagonist eventually hears a voice uttering "204863" repeatedly and the player's perspective distorts, before the game displays a false crash message.
  - ○ Upon restarting, the protagonist awakens in the beginning room. The player continues the loop with only the flashlight as a light source. The player then discovers the torn pieces of a photograph, scattered throughout the hall and reassembles it in its frame. After the picture is completed and a set of tasks are done, a telephone rings and the radio's voice says "You've been chosen." The protagonist sees the door unlock and leaves the building.

- ○ In the subsequent cutscene, the radio's voice remarks about having lived a life of regularity until his father killed him and his family without any creativity; he then voices his intention to return with his "new toys".[4][15][16] The protagonist steps out into the streets of a deserted city and is revealed to be Norman Reedus. The credits then reveal the nature of the Playable Teaser.