

A PROJECT OF CGD



DON'T LOOK BACK

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GAMES DESIGN DOCUMENT

Game Design Document (GDD)

DON'T LOOK BACK

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1. Introduction

1.1 Scope of the Document

This Game Design Document (GDD) defines the creative, technical, mechanical, and experiential foundations of Don't Look Back, a first-person psychological horror parkour and maze escape game.

The primary objective of this document is to ensure that all individuals involved in the project maintain a clear and unified understanding of:

- The intended gameplay experience
- The mechanics and systems
- The visual and audio direction
- The storytelling approach
- The design philosophy
- The target audience
- The tone and emotional intent

This document is intended for use by:

- Programmers
- Game Designers
- Environment and Asset Developers
- UI/UX Designers
- Animators
- Sound and Music Designers
- QA Testers
- Academic supervisors and assessors

It acts as both a development blueprint and a reference manual, guiding future updates and ensuring the project remains consistent with the original design vision. As development progresses, the GDD may be reviewed and revised to incorporate improvements or new discoveries.

1.2 Elevator Pitch

Don't Look Back is a first-person horror experience where the player must complete a series of parkour challenges and escape a maze — all while an unseen enemy stalks them in the shadows.

The game combines movement-based gameplay with atmospheric dread, forcing the player to rely on instinct, awareness, and precision. There are no weapons. There is no combat system. There is only survival.

The journey takes place across two haunting environments:

1. A ruined monument-style parkour arena, with moss-covered stone walls, reflective water-like flooring, marble pillars, jump platforms, triggers, and moving platforms suspended above darkness.
2. A red-lit maze, containing four chess statues — the Rook, Knight, King, and Queen — placed deliberately throughout the structure. These statues act as cryptic guides directing the player toward the Queen. When the Queen is reached, a green light activates, a clapping sound plays, and the player is directed to find a hidden key in a basement staircase directly ahead.

Once the key is collected, the player must exit the maze. Upon escape, an end screen confirms the experience has concluded.

The experience is defined not by visible terror — but by constant psychological pressure and the suggestion of pursuit.

2. Game Overview

2.1 Game Concept

The core concept behind Don't Look Back is to merge parkour traversal and maze navigation with an oppressive horror atmosphere that constantly reminds the player that they are not alone.

The player must:

- Jump precisely
- Read the environment
- Remember directions
- Follow chess statue clues
- Retrieve an important key
- Stay alert
- Escape

All while feeling watched.

This approach removes traditional combat systems and instead uses vulnerability and exposure to generate fear.

2.2 Audience

The intended audience includes:

- Players who enjoy psychological horror
- Fans of escape-style games
- Those who like environmental storytelling
- Students and indie-game enthusiasts
- Viewers and streamers seeking suspense-driven content

The game is recommended for ages 16+ due to themes of fear, tension, and dark mood.

2.3 Genre

- Psychological Horror
- Maze Exploration
- Movement / Parkour
- First-Person Suspense Experience

2.4 Setting

The game world appears ancient, trapped in time, and decaying.

The monument-like structures show signs of erosion, moss growth, and abandonment.

The maze environment — bathed in red light — feels claustrophobic and predatory.

Green light symbolizes false comfort, hope, or discovery, creating emotional contrast.

Together, they create a tone of mystery and menace.

2.5 Game Structure

The game is split into three primary phases:

1. Level 1 — The Parkour Trial
2. Level 2 — The Maze of the Queen
3. Final Escape — End Screen

Each section builds increasing emotional and psychological weight.

2.6 Player

The player is deliberately anonymous. There is no visible character model, avoiding emotional separation and keeping immersion high.

The absence of identity allows the player to project themselves into the environment, increasing vulnerability.

2.7 Game Flow Summary

The game follows a linear emotional arc, moving from curiosity → discomfort → dread → determination → relief → unease → final closure.

Mechanically, players:

- Learn to move
- Cross parkour obstacles
- Explore maze corridors
- Follow chess statue guidance
- Reach the Queen
- Retrieve the key
- Exit successfully

Every stage reinforces the idea that the player is always one mistake away from failure.

2.8 Look & Feel

Visual Tone

- Dark & muted
- Wet reflective floors
- Heavy stone materials
- Moss-green surfaces
- Red maze illumination
- Green guidance lighting

Emotional Tone

- Isolation
- Anticipation
- Exposure
- Hopelessness
- Courage
- Temporary relief
- Lingering dread

The game is designed to keep the player psychologically engaged at every moment.

3. Gameplay

3.1 Objectives

Primary Objectives

- Successfully complete the first parkour environment
- Enter the maze and locate the Queen statue
- Trigger the guidance sequence
- Descend into the basement
- Retrieve the key from the table
- Escape the maze
- Reach the end screen

Secondary Objectives

- Maintain awareness of surroundings
- Navigate carefully to avoid failure

Failure Conditions

- Falling off parkour platforms
- Being caught by the enemy presence
- Failure to retrieve the key before attempting exit

3.2 Progression

Progression occurs through player mastery rather than upgrades or combat.

Level 1 teaches precision.

Level 2 tests memory, courage, and control.

3.2.1 Challenge Structure

Level 1 = movement skill & timing

Level 2 = spatial reasoning & survival instinct

The real difficulty is psychological — creating pressure without overwhelming the player.

3.3 Play Flow

Observe → Attempt → Adjust → Advance → Discover → Escape

Players learn the rhythm of movement, then adapt that rhythm to survival.

3.4 Difficulty

Difficulty scales naturally:

- Early gameplay is calm
- Later gameplay creates pressure
- Final gameplay demands focus

Failure resets progress, reinforcing caution and precision.

4. Mechanics

4.1 Rules

- All major actions are governed by player control input
- Jumping requires correct timing and spatial judgment
- Key must be acquired to unlock escape event
- Progression is linear but tension increases

4.2 Game Universe

The world reacts to the player subtly through:

- Sound triggers
- Lighting responses
- Environmental composition

These dynamic elements simulate a presence watching silently.

4.3 Physics

Physics feel grounded:

- Gravity affects falling
- Jump arcs must be judged
- Movement momentum exists
- Platform travel requires timing

4.4 Economy

There is no economic system or currency.

The absence of collectible resources reinforces minimalism and immersion.

4.5 Character Movement

Players may:

- Walk slowly for control
- Sprint when needed
- Jump between platforms
- Turn and look freely
- Interact with key objects

Movement is intentional and weighted to enhance immersion.

4.6 Player Interaction

Interaction is proximity-based and minimal to avoid UI clutter.

4.6.1 Game Menus

Menus are clean and functional.

4.6.2 Saving

Checkpoint-based progression ensures fair challenge.

4.6.3 Options

Players can adjust:

- **Sensitivity**
- **Audio levels**
- **Display quality**

4.7 Assets

Environment assets include:

- **Chess piece statues**
- **Piano**
- **Wooden dining table**
- **Stone wall meshes**
- **Water-like ground shader**
- **Lighting sources**
- **Parkour platforms**
- **Staircase meshes**
- **Key model**

5. Graphics and Audio

5.1 Visual System

Lighting emphasizes tension and uncertainty.

Shadows hide threats while glow hints at direction.

Red → danger or anxiety

Green → discovery or false hope

Textures emphasize decay.

5.1.1 Player Camera

First-person view encourages immersion and vulnerability.

5.1.2 Environment Layout

Level 1 = wide open danger

Level 2 = tight enclosed fear

The contrast deepens emotional pacing.

5.2 Interface

Minimal UI maintains immersion.

HUD only appears when essential.

5.3 Audio System

Sound design is atmospheric.

Every footstep, echo, and ambient swell reinforces dread.

5.3.1 Music

The soundtrack is slow-burn tension — quiet, uneasy, never comforting.

5.3.2 Audio Tone

Audio should feel like the world is breathing around you.

6. Story and Narrative

6.1 Backstory

The world is intentionally unexplained — implying deeper meaning the player may imagine.

6.2 Main Plot

Escape from a place you do not understand — before something finds you.

6.2.1 Plot Progression

Meaning comes from discovery rather than dialogue.

6.3 Cutscenes

Only the end screen confirms closure.

7. Characters

7.1 Main Character

Invisible, silent, unnamed protagonist.

7.1.1 Backstory

Unknown — encourages player projection.

7.1.2 Personality

Resourceful, fearful, resilient.

7.1.3 Appearance

Hidden from the player.

7.1.4 Abilities

Movement, navigation, interaction.

7.1.5 Relationships

None — only enemy threat exists.

7.2 Supporting Characters

No companions, reinforcing loneliness.

7.3 Enemies

The enemy is mostly unseen — more psychological than physical. Its ambiguity creates fear through imagination.

8. Game World

8.1 Look & Feel

Cold

Heavy

Silent

Ancient

The world feels alive but empty.

8.2 Locations

Parkour Environment

Ancient monument atmosphere with water-like floor and moss.

Maze

Red-lit pathways with chess icons guiding fate.

Basement

Piano & dining table frozen in time — the key lies waiting.

8.2.1 Connection to Plot

The chess theme suggests strategy, destiny, and being hunted.

8.3 Levels

8.3.1 Level 1 — The Parkour Trial

The player crosses unstable, dangerous gaps in a wide open ruin. Falling means restarting — reinforcing tension.

8.3.2 Level 2 — The Maze

Chess statues silently lead the way. Red lighting saturates the halls. When the Queen is reached, the color shift to green symbolizes progress — but does not remove fear.

The basement increases dread further through isolation and contrast.

The key is the only way out.

8.3.3 Final Escape

Once the key is secured, the end screen confirms survival — but whether the character truly escaped may remain emotionally ambiguous.

9. UI & UX

Designed clearly and minimally to support readability without reducing immersion.

10. Technical Requirements

Platform: PC

Engine: Unreal (as implemented)

Optimized for stable framerate during jump sequences.

11. Risks & Challenges

- Too-high difficulty frustrations
- Maze disorientation
- AI optimization
- Horror pacing balance
- Visual clarity vs darkness
- Audio tuning

12. Future Expansion

Potential additions:

- More maze levels
- New enemy behaviors
- Narrative notes or recordings
- Co-op escape
- Alternative endings
- Expanded key objectives
- VR version