***Back To Black*: Features and Changes**

Back To Black is a comedy-horror game which is narrative driven. The player is an unnamed protagonist who awakens in two horror scenarios, the first titled I Scream, You Scream, and the second The Jenga Killer. Initially, the game was developed as a survival-horror game where the goal for the player, whose character is a black man, has to avoid being the first person to die in the scenario. This concept drew from the trope that often in horror films, the black person is first to die. As we began to write the scenarios, this racial component of the game became less prominent and the game become more about creating absurd parodies of typical horror scenarios. The result was the main drive the game then became less about  survival and more about narrative progression. This change to the game was the result of some creative differences within the group, as well as some scheduling and time conflict that resulted in the story development being fragmented.

With "I Scream, You Scream", we created characters that were based loosely upon the members of the group, but were meant to represent archetypal horror-movie characters, thus, the Stoner, Jock, Investigator (based on Fred from *Scooby Doo*), the Nerd, and the Mysterious Foreigner. Character is one of the strongest features of our game. It was within developing these hyperbolized versions of ourselves that we developed a formula based off of character interactions for each scenario that solidified a sense of cohesion between them. This was our intent from the beginning, and it proved to be one of the most successful aspects of our game. The 6 characters we've crafted over the past 4 months were inspired by various classic horror tropes we have come to know and love over decades and decades of pop culture, with tidbits of our own (Teh Revolution) appearances and personalities being sprinkled into the mix. The main

thing we aimed for over this process was to evoke feeling within the player, be it through the artwork, music, dialogue or decisions you make. Even just judging by the cover of the game, the player is reflected as having conflicted emotions and is ultimately presented with a fork in the road of their adventure into the world we've created.

Initially we planned for *Back To Black* to have three full scenarios, however due to a shortage in our time and a desire to spend more time developing and improving "The Jenga Killer", we never finished our third story tentatively titled "Evil Doctor Bad Acid Infection Observation WTF Mystery". So, canonically we're going to say that *Back To Black* does have three scenarios-- the third one is just a DLC[1]. The "Evil Doctor" scenario combines the Mad Scientist trope and the Infection trope popularized in movies like Human Centipede, and Quarantine. For this scenario we began developing some puzzles, which would have given it a more game-like feel than the narratively linear "Jenga Killer" and "I Scream, You Scream".

We had a few other ideas for the game which we regret did not make it into our final product. The first was a probability function where certain choices would have both positive and negative outcomes that were determined randomly. This would have added more immersion as that player's choices would have more meaningfully impacted the direction of the narrative. In the finished version of the game, your decisions do not have a chance-based or moral valence that impacts the narrative. The choices you are given follow a linear right/wrong path, and the outcomes of your choices are usually lead to progression or death. So, there is a direct path you have to take in order to "win", and many ways to lose.

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[1] Which may, or may not ever get made.

The Death Counting mechanic is a tool which quantifies your failures, and is meant to motivate the player to either try and max out as many deaths as they can, or try to get through with as few as possible. In a more developed version of the game, the Death Counter would have been a way to gain achievements by way of collecting a funny number of deaths (666, 420, etc), or getting through death-free. There are other statistics saved in game, such as how many times other characters died, how your character died and what endings you have obtained; this may be helpful for players who want to see everything the game has to offer.

There are not any serious consequence to death in the game. Originally, we had conceptualized that when you died you would be shuffled through the scenarios at random, and have to start again in a different place. This idea was scrapped because in order for this to be successful, we'd need more than 3 scenarios to create a feeling of real disorientation from death. So we opted for the more simple option of having to begin the scenario from the start after death. The result of this is that you can explore other options, or speed through quickly to get to the point you last died at. We decided not to include a "back" option, because we wanted a small consequence for death, and felt that given the relatively short length of each scenario that having to speed through to get to your last-point before death wasn't a huge burden to the player, while still being slightly frustrating.

One music track was added to each scenario, and a sound effect was added for each death. In addition, an image was made for each character as well as a title ad end image.

**Lessons Learned:**

Working on this game has been a roller coaster of laughs, trials, and compromises. In the beginning we were eager to put our thoughts onto paper, not knowing the mountain we had to scale. We wanted to build the best text based game ever; a game with multiple stories, music, and images. This was naive of us, as we faced numerous setbacks and compromises throughout the process.

If we could go back in the past and have a conversation as a group, the first piece of advice we would give is K.I.S.S (Keep It Simple Stupid). Originally we created 3 unique game scenarios. They each had different game mechanics unique to the narrative. For example, in the Jenga Killer scenario, you would have a limited inventory box that would allow you to pick up items and and solve puzzles. The inventory spaces would be limited so you would have to pick up only the relevant items or else risk back peddling. Originally, the third scenario was to be titled "Jungle Fever". The player would have a health, energy, and thirst meter that depleted with every turn. You would have to eat and drink fresh water to sustain yourself throughout the entire game, and your energy level would determine which routes you could take.

Our downfall was spending too much time theorizing what *could* happen with the game, and not enough time spent working on what the game would actually be within our time and man-power , (we had one programmer) limit. K.I.S.S. we would have been much better off writing a nice simple, and well-executed story than a shadow of an ambitious effort.

This would have been more streamlined had we delegated the writing the responsibilities more tactfully, either appointing a leader or dividing up a full scenario per-person. While it's good to have multiple people contribute ideas, a lack of leadership brought challenges.  We would had inconsistent voice and tone in the game text, and scheduling all three of the writers

was sometimes impossible due to other commitments. That, and the creative process took much longer as we often argued about the direction of each narrative. If we had chosen one lead writer, it would have made the entire writing process a lot more efficient and consistent. However, had we chosen one main writer, the delegations of work might have ended up being unequal, and that would also have been problematic.

The big lesson we learned is the importance of conflict. As a group we were easy-going and didn't push our opposing creative views too harshly as to maintain the positive energy of the group mentality. This created a group-think where ideas were entertained no matter how good, bad, or inconsistent. This meant we wasted a lot of time arguing ideas rather than getting the story down.

When you're depending on other's contribution to get work done in a timely manner, it can be difficult to get things dones unless everyone is fully committed to getting things finished on time. Deadlines were sometimes pushed back, and no one really faced any consequences for showing up to meetings having done nothing all week. Some group members had to take it upon themselves to do extra work outside of their responsibilities. Pressure creates diamonds and we didn't pressure each-other enough.

With these lessons learned, we are positive the end product would have been much more different and more aligned with our original vision. To our past selves: Try and get some nights where you can sleep a full 8 hours, and good luck with the project!

**Walkthrough:** The fastest way to an ending


**Scenario 1:**
Try to free yourself
Talk to the Stoner
Ask Her to Untie You
Let's toke it up!
The truck suddenly screeches to a halt
Look for the source of the temperature drop
Look for something to plug the hole with
Give up
Two Endings:
    Wait (x5)
        **SCENARIO COMPLETE:**
**Happy Ending**
    Channel your inner Han Solo
        ANY
        ANY
        **SCENARIO COMPLETE:**
**Murder Ending**

**Scenario 2:**
Any option
Talk to Investigator
Why don't you try opening the door?
You hear a click as the TV springs to life
Why don't you try opening the door?
You hear a click as the TV springs to life
What the hell does that mean?
Leave the room
Check out the basement
(continued in right column)

Head downstairs
Search the basement
Check out the Door
ANY
ANY
Let's play
GAME ON
Ignore her
Ignore her again
Try B5
Ignore her
ANY
Head back upstairs
Follow Blockhead
Let the Nerd handle it
Help keep him calm
Leave the kitchen
Head upstairs
What the hell…
Follow the Jock downstairs
Run
Dive for the closet
20-Sided Die
SMASH HIM
FINISH HIM!
Let's Finish This
Jock and you
**SCENARIO COMPLETE**