

= Robbing the Cradle =

" Robbing the Cradle " is a level created by Ion Storm for their final video game , Thief : Deadly Shadows ( 2004 ) . Unlike other levels in the game , it features a strong survival horror theme , in addition to the stealth gameplay typical of the Thief series . Players traverse an abandoned , haunted orphanage and mental asylum called the Shalebridge Cradle , while attempting to free the soul of a young girl from the building 's captivity .

The level was designed by Jordan Thomas and Randy Smith , with a soundscape composed by Eric Brosius . Using theories of interactive horror design developed by Smith in 2000 , the team sought to create the scariest level ever to appear in a game . They took influence from works such as House of Leaves , Session 9 and the Silent Hill series , and they studied mental asylums and reportedly haunted buildings for inspiration .

" Robbing the Cradle " was widely praised , and it has been described by publications such as Computer & Video Games , PC Gamer UK and Bloody Disgusting as one of the scariest scenes in the history of video games . Jordan Thomas went on to create the " Fort Frolic " level in BioShock , and to serve as creative director for BioShock 2 . The positive reception of " Robbing the Cradle " inspired Eidos Montreal to create a similar asylum level in Thief ( 2014 ) .

= = Overview = =

" Robbing the Cradle " is the penultimate level of Thief : Deadly Shadows ( 2004 ) , a video game developed by Ion Storm . In addition to the stealth gameplay typical of the game , the level features a strong survival horror theme . " Robbing the Cradle " takes place inside the Shalebridge Cradle , a conscious , malevolent and abandoned orphanage and mental institution . It is patrolled by creatures called " Puppets " , the reanimated bodies of former inmates . Protagonist Garrett enters the building in hopes of solving a mystery related to a supernatural murderer , the Gray Lady . Once inside , he encounters the ghost of a deceased orphan , Lauryl , who was killed by the Gray Lady . She is trapped within the Cradle because it " remembers " her .

The Shalebridge Cradle is divided into two sections : the " Inner Cradle " and " Outer Cradle " . The player begins in the Outer Cradle , which is designed to terrify players , but which secretly contains no dangers or enemies . The Inner Cradle is roamed by Puppets . The building 's backstory is unveiled in a nonlinear fashion , via clues scattered within the level . The player must free Lauryl by locating and disposing of artifacts that allow the Cradle to remember her . However , after completing this objective , Garrett discovers that the Cradle has remembered him . To escape , the player travels back in time within the Cradle 's memory , while fleeing from silhouettes of the Cradle 's staff . The player ends the level by leaping from the Cradle 's highest window , which convinces the building that Garrett is dead .

= = Development = =

The central ideas behind " Robbing the Cradle " were conceived by Thief : Deadly Shadows project director Randy Smith in 2000 . Smith had designed a horror @-@ based level , " Return to the Cathedral " , in 1998 's Thief : The Dark Project . Although he had intended only to make it " atmospheric and suspenseful " , the level was widely held to be terrifying . In 2000 , Smith was in the process of being hired at Ion Storm to work on Deadly Shadows , and he was contacted by PC Gamer UK writer Kieron Gillen to discuss " Return to the Cathedral " . As the interview progressed via email , Smith developed a theory of horror design to retroactively explain the success of the level . His core concept was that players try to establish boundaries between safety and danger , and that fear results when these boundaries become unpredictable , or when the player is compelled to cross them " of their own free will " . Smith decided to consciously apply this theory in Deadly Shadows , and the result was " Robbing the Cradle " .

Smith 's goal with " Robbing the Cradle " was to create the scariest level ever to appear in a game , which would " knock ' Return to the Cathedral ' off the charts " . Designer Jordan Thomas joined the

Deadly Shadows team in November 2001 , in part because of his interest in horror design . Smith worked with Thomas during the early planning of " Robbing the Cradle " , which was referred to at Ion Storm as the " haunted house " . Thomas explained that the key to their design was " dread " , which he described as the feeling of being " seven steps from the unspeakable " . Thomas drafted a level design based on this idea , while seeking to retain the stealth focus of other levels in Deadly Shadows . He saw " Robbing the Cradle " both as a level and as a test of the possibilities of interactive horror design . Smith later noted that his own biggest contributions were the level 's beats : he designed ways for players ' boundaries to be regularly violated , such as by forcing them to explore threatening areas . Thomas spent a large portion of his off @-@ hours working on the level , and Smith stated that Thomas was responsible for " all of the implementation " of the level 's theories .

The team worked to discover the causes and mechanics of fear , and they analyzed horror films for inspiration . " Robbing the Cradle " includes influences from the Silent Hill and System Shock series , from the films The Devil 's Backbone , Jacob 's Ladder and Session 9 , and from the books House of Leaves , From Hell and The Shining . Thomas applied psychological horror techniques that he hoped would stay with the player even after the level 's end . To generate fear , he used a combination of scripted sequences and unplanned , emergent factors . Every light source in the level dims and brightens at an imperceptibly slow speed , which Thomas hoped would create a " subconscious sense of breathing " and thereby make the Shalebridge Cradle feel like a living entity . Lights were programmed to flicker when approached by Puppets ; however , Puppets roam the level in real @-@ time , and so Thomas was unable to predict which lights would flicker at which times . He believed that this gave the player the feeling of being hunted .

Thomas explained that the Shalebridge Cradle 's design was based on " dozens of actual , existing Victorian hospitals and reputedly haunted buildings " . The Danvers State Hospital was a key influence , and Smith went with other members of the team to visit an abandoned asylum in Austin , Texas . Thomas gathered photographs by urban explorers and studied past methods of treating mental disorders , and he " read reams of patient and staff interviews " . Audio director Eric Brosius composed the Cradle 's soundscape , which Gillen later described as " a drunken miasma of sound [ ... that makes ] you uneasy until an unexpected noise splits asunder " .

= = Reception and legacy = =

" Robbing the Cradle " was widely praised . It was the subject of a ten @-@ page feature by Kieron Gillen in PC Gamer UK , the first and only article dedicated to a single level in that magazine . Gillen hailed it as " one of the most brilliant and disturbing levels ever committed to PC " , and he believed that it was " probably the scariest level ever made " . Tom McNamara of IGN wrote that the level " just has to be experienced to be believed " , and he praised its sound design . He considered the level to be a high point of Deadly Shadows . GameSpot 's Greg Kasavin called the level " remarkable " and " nerve @-@ wracking " , and IGN 's Shunal Doke noted in a retrospective feature that the level 's audiovisuals combine to " scare the living daylights out of you " . In April 2013 , the level was highlighted as " powerfully atmospheric " by Valve Corporation writer Marc Laidlaw .

Maximum PC included " Robbing the Cradle " in its list of the " Scariest Video Game Moments " , with the magazine 's Brittany Vincent noting that the level features " a frightful mixture of lobotomized patients , suffering spirits , and evil intentions " . Bloody Disgusting placed the level fourth in its " The 15 Scariest Moments in Non @-@ Horror Games " , and its staff wrote that the level " managed to burn itself into our minds forever , as well as creep us the hell out . " Writing for Official Xbox Magazine , Ryan McCaffery ranked Deadly Shadows fourth on his " My Top 5 Scariest Games of All @-@ Time " list , based solely on " Robbing the Cradle " . He considered the level to be " perhaps the single most brilliantly designed mission in a genius trilogy of games . " In a reader poll conducted by The Daily Telegraph , Deadly Shadows tied as the twelfth scariest video game , in large part because of " Robbing the Cradle " . The level led Computer & Video Games to place Deadly Shadows on its list " Fear Factor : The 12 Scariest Games Ever Made " . The magazine 's Iain Wilson wrote that the level is " considered one of the scariest levels ever created " .

After finishing work on Deadly Shadows , Jordan Thomas went to Irrational Games , where he designed the " Fort Frolic " section of BioShock . He later became the creative director of BioShock 2 . Because of tensions and disagreements within the Deadly Shadows team , Randy Smith was fired from Ion Storm near the end of the game 's production , and he founded Tiger Style with fellow Deadly Shadows designer David Kalina . Smith later wondered if the team had " overdone it " with " Robbing the Cradle " , and he stated , " I worry a little bit in retrospect about people who just wanted a ' sneaking around mansions and stealing stuff ' experience [ being ] forced into their deepest nightmares . " The positive reception of " Robbing the Cradle " inspired Eidos Montreal to create a similar asylum level in 2014 's Thief .