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From Watch to Embrace Horror: Early Development of Horror Video Games

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Abstract: This paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of commercial horror games from the 1970s to the 1990s, based on the genre definitions of horror games by Bernard Perron, Richard Rouse, and Carl Therrien, as well as the community consensus reflected in contemporary gaming magazines. Using the framework of art history to describe, interpret, and evaluate these games, the paper seeks to establish a detailed account of significant early horror games. Drawing from primary sources such as game content, player experiences, and media reviews, the paper traces key milestones in the development of the genre, including games regarded as pivotal, while also exploring lesser-known titles within this period. The paper aims to provide a comprehensive retrospective of early horror games and investigate the shift from merely observing horror to fully embracing it within the genre.

Tags: horror games, survival horror, game history

1 Introduction

Since the publication of The Castle of Otranto by the British novelist Horace Walpole, which is often regarded as the inception of Gothic fiction, this genre—characterized by darkness, terror, suspense, and supernatural elements—has carved out a distinct literary niche. However, although The Castle of Otranto is frequently hailed as the "pioneer" of Gothic fiction, its original publication included the subtitle "A Story," with no reference to "Gothic." It was only in a later edition that the subtitle was revised to "A Gothic Story," accompanied by a preface in which Walpole explained that "Gothic" referred specifically to the architectural style in which the story, set in a dreamscape, unfolded （Wang, 2011）. This distinction suggests that the "Gothic" nature of The Castle of Otranto was

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initially conceived quite differently from the later, broader cultural understanding of the term, which came to encompass themes of terror and the supernatural.

In 1896, Georges Méliès created Le Manoir du Diable, the first horror film in cinematic history. (Li, 2022, p.2)However, in this brief two-minute silent film, Méliès did not establish the horror genre but rather adapted the content of a vampire-themed novel for visual impact. The true emergence of the horror film genre occurred in 1931 with the immense success of Universal Studios' Dracula, Frankenstein, and other seminal horror films. These films, characterized by their focus on monstrous figures, chaos, and the battle between good and evil, were specifically crafted for a mass audience, marking the beginning of a distinct cultural and cinematic phenomenon(Chen, 2011, p.38).

While Le Manoir du Diable made a significant impact by pioneering the visual representation of vampires on screen, it can be seen as a continuation of the Gothic tradition rather than the foundation of the horror film genre. The true evolution toward what would later be known as the "classic horror film" era emerged as audience demand for shock and sensation spurred a series of films that replicated the success of earlier genre-defining works.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the horror genre found a new outlet in the form of video games, with a surge of violent, gory, and unsettling titles emerging across the United States, Europe, and Japan. These early horror games, building on the legacy of Gothic literature, horror paintings, photography, and film, laid the groundwork for the commercial expansion of the horror game industry. Over the decades, the genre underwent significant transformations, but it remained consistently popular. Scholars have examined various aspects of these games, including hardware compatibility, "horror pleasure," "fantasy tension," player identity, and Gothic influences, in order to better understand their appeal. However, much of the existing research has focused on individual case studies, and there remains a lack of comprehensive analysis on the broader developmental trajectory of early horror games.

Similar to the evolution of horror films, horror games have drawn extensively from a rich reservoir of source material, including novels and films, while benefiting from the unique expressive capabilities of the interactive medium. As such, studying the early development of horror games invites comparisons with the trajectory of horror films. The transformation of horror games—from initial reliance on gore, violence, and the mimicking of novel and filmic imagery to the cultivation of thematic independence and a deliberate pursuit of the horror experience—remains an area ripe for further exploration.

2 Dialogue with Predecessors: Reconsidering the Typology and Historical Writing of Horror Games

Richard Rouse III (2009) defines horror games through a complex "effect combination," arguing that these games must subtly convey information, creating a distorted narrative that interacts with worlds that inevitably cause distortion and transformation. The resulting fear and anxiety stem

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from the player's relationship with their avatar. However, this definition has become less relevant in contemporary discussions, as dark themes and fragmented narratives have proliferated across many game genres. The dual axes of narrative and mechanics no longer provide a clear boundary for what constitutes a horror game.

In contrast, Therrien and Perron adopt a more flexible, historically informed approach to understanding horror games. Carl Therrien (2009) contends that rigid ontological methods should not be applied to categorizing horror games. Instead, analytical tools should be developed to trace the evolution of the horror game genre across different historical periods. Bernard Perron (2018, p.29), in his typological analysis of "horror," argues that the definition of horror films (and by extension, horror games) should not be based on rigid classifications, but rather on "the changes in the understanding of horror." Perron asserts that any new narrative of horror will inherently disrupt existing definitions. Drawing from the typological theory of film, Perron introduces the "pyramid of horror games" (Figure 1), which categorizes games based on the extent to which they engage players in horror experiences. At the base of the pyramid are games that feature only frightening imagery and text, followed by games that introduce sporadic horror effects, such as disturbing environmental sounds or horror events triggered during gameplay. At the pinnacle of the pyramid are those games where gameplay and presentation coalesce to deliver a comprehensive horror experience. As one ascends the pyramid, the intensity of the horror experience increases, and the game more fully embodies the typological characteristics of "horror games."

While Therrien and Perron share a typological framework, their perspectives diverge with regard to the historical interpretation of horror games. Therrien (2009) strongly critiques the "teleological" approach to the history of horror games, arguing that studying the genre under the assumption of a purposeful evolution toward a specific endpoint results in the distortion of historical realities. Conversely, Perron (2018) maintains that a teleological perspective is unavoidable in the development of increasingly frightening horror games. His metaphor of "climbing the mountain" in the pyramid (Figure 1) alludes to this view, suggesting an inevitable progression toward more intense horror experiences. Consequently, Perron divides the history of horror games into distinct phases, marked by milestones such as Haunted House (Atari, 1982), Alone in the Dark (Infogrames , 1992), and Resident Evil 4 (CAPCOM, 2005), which represent key turning points in the evolution of "survival horror ."

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However, Perron's historical categorization, which is closely aligned with typological research, appears to fall into the very "distortion of teleology" that Therrien criticizes. This article therefore builds upon the work of both Therrien and Perron, but it adopts a historical context that challenges whether specific works—understood, predicted, and defined as "horror games" in their time—can still be considered representative of the genre. The historical writing of horror games presented here may include works that, from today's perspective, may not seem particularly terrifying or may even appear "ridiculous." Yet, these games were once capable of evoking genuine fear, provoking widespread media concern over the potential negative effects of violent horror on children's development, and even attracting legislative regulation to restrict their sale. Why, then, should these early works be excluded from contemporary discourse?

In response to Perron's teleological approach, this article adopts a contrary path, one that resists purpose-driven constructions of horror game history. Instead, the focus is on the game medium itself, as well as player experiences and media commentary, to construct a historical narrative of early horror games. The goal is to uncover the intertwined development of horror themes and game mechanics, and to explore how these elements evolved in parallel, shaping the horror game genre as we know it today.

3 Innocence and Exploration: 1982–1989

Horror requires a carefully constructed setting (mise-en-scène), and this, in turn, demands the appropriate audiovisual technology. Fear cannot exist without being deliberately staged. In 1982, a period dominated by pixelated graphics and 8-bit music, the medium of video games was far from ideal for evoking horror. Despite these technological constraints, some game developers endeavored to bring gothic castles and homicidal figures to life, striving to deliver a spine-chilling experience. While many of these early attempts may now seem laughable, they represent the first forays into horror within the video game industry—akin to a child dressing up as a ghost to frighten others: video games were beginning to assert their potential to scare us.

3.1 Haunted House: The "Thunderclap" Forerunner

In 1982, programmer James Andreasen created Haunted House (Atari, 1982), a graphic adventure game for the Atari 2600. The gameplay was simple: players controlled a pair of disembodied eyes, exploring 24 rooms in a haunted house in search of a magical urn. Along the way, they had to avoid monsters and navigate the house by lighting matches to reveal their surroundings. A review in Video Game Future Shoots for Stars aptly described the game as "a standout" for its unique approach: "In an era when most games involved 'shooting laser guns until they died,' Haunted House was a noteworthy departure." (Onosko & Tim, 1982) This early review highlighted the game's innovation—unlike most games of the time, Haunted House did not allow players to fight back. By removing this traditional agency, the game tapped into the horror mechanism of "sensory deprivation," making players vulnerable to the unknown.

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Beyond its innovative gameplay, Haunted House also made a notable attempt to integrate horror themes. The game's box art set the story in a mansion destroyed by an earthquake in 1890, with Atari, as the mansion's gatekeeper, setting a "test of courage" for the player. The objective was to collect pieces of a magical urn while navigating the haunted house. The game offered various tools, including a master key to open doors, a magic wand to banish spirits, and, crucially, matches to light the way through the darkness. Haunted House used gothic elements like crumbling mansions, giant

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bats and spiders, and supernatural spirits, helping to establish an eerie atmosphere. The sound design further intensified the experience: footsteps echoed as players moved, strange noises accompanied their ascent of stairs, and wind sounds grew louder as monsters drew near, occasionally extinguishing the player's matches. If the player was caught by a monster, they didn't simply encounter a "Game Over" screen but were greeted by a thunderous sound, symbolizing their painful death, as their eyes rolled frantically

Although Haunted House was far less thrilling than later horror games such as Resident Evil or Silent Hill, it was a groundbreaking attempt to merge gothic horror with interactive gameplay. Despite the Atari 2600's limited graphic and narrative capabilities, the game successfully interwove simple in-game visuals with evocative external text and sound effects, establishing a rudimentary but effective atmosphere of terror.

The "thunderclap" sound in Haunted House can be seen as a metaphor for the dawn of horror games. As players ventured into the dark mansion, following the instructions on the packaging, they encountered gothic monsters and, upon their inevitable death, heard the thunderous sound—an auditory cue heralding the arrival of horror games as a genre.

3.2 The Texas Chainsaw Massacre and Halloween: Imitations of Horror Films

Game adaptations of films were an integral part of early video game history, with E.T. (Atari, 1983) (which contributed to the infamous "Atari Crash") being one such adaptation. Horror games, too, began to capitalize on the success of popular films. Between 1982 and 1989, six commercial games based on horror films were released, with The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (Wizard Video Games, 1983) and Halloween (Wizard Video Games, 1983) being early examples of the intersection between horror cinema and the video game medium.

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre was released for the Atari 2600 in 1983. In this game, players controlled the iconic villain "Leatherface," wielding a chainsaw as he hunted down victims while avoiding obstacles such as fences and cow bones. The objective was to kill five victims before the chainsaw ran out of fuel, with each kill replenishing the fuel. The mechanics were simplistic, and the narrative elements from the film were reduced to pixelated representations of characters and the grisly chainsaw murders. Despite its rudimentary execution, the game attempted to capture the film's horrific premise, albeit in a limited form.

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Released seven months later, Halloween allowed players to control a babysitter trying to protect children from a knife-wielding killer. Players earned points by guiding children to "safe rooms" or by attacking the killer with a knife. As the player accumulated more points, the killer's speed increased, heightening the tension until the player inevitably lost all three lives. While the design was more innovative than The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, Halloween's adaptation of the original film's narrative was minimal. Aside from the game's cover art featuring the movie's poster and the inclusion of the Halloween theme as background music(Gregory, 2001), the game bore little resemblance to its source material. The characters were nameless, and the graphic murder scenes were exaggerated to the point of absurdity, often resulting in graphic "decapitations."

In an interview by Scott Stilphen (1982), Ed Salvo, one of the producers of The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, commented that the game is not much different from other games by Apollo. In fact, none of our team members had seen the original film. We had to watch it for inspiration during development. This statement underscores not only the disconnection between the game and its source material but also reflects a broader attitude toward horror as a genre: horror themes were seen as interchangeable with those of other genres, requiring only iconic symbols to invoke the requisite sense of terror.

Despite the primitive graphics and simplistic gameplay, both The Texas Chainsaw Massacre and Halloween garnered attention as early examples of horror games on the Atari 2600. A horror game enthusiast described Halloween as "terrifying because Michael Myers chases you with a knife through the house,"(Reverend, 2008) although the crude graphics and exaggerated violence could not prevent the game from being viewed through a lens of camp. Players could engage with these early horror games not as faithful adaptations of their cinematic counterparts, but as extensions of iconic film symbols, requiring players to recognize these elements in order to experience the horror.

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4 The Formation of the Heterogeneity Paradigm: 1989-1996

If the history of horror games before 1989 was about finding, either cleverly or clumsily, ways to incorporate external horror elements (such as Gothic novels or horror films) into many "cave adventures" and "castle explorations" in text-based games, and tracing the lack of independent awareness of horror games behind the "observing" attitude, then from 1989 to 1996, with the large number of works emerging during this period, this article will no longer sift out a few "gems," but focus on grasping the heterogeneity paradigm constructed by horror games, which distinguished them from other media.

4.1 Sweet Home: Breaking Out of the Horror Movie

Sweet Home (CAPCOM, 1989) is a game developed by CAPCOM and released in 1989 for the NES platform. As a game adapted from a horror movie of the same name, Sweet Home did not become infamous like predecessors such as The Texas Chainsaw Massacre or Halloween; on the contrary, it won the Famitsu Best Popular Game Award that year and was highly praised by the media, with some even stating that (future) horror games owe the blood debt of this forgotten 8-bit game. (Reeves, 2016)

Producer Tokuro Fujiwara (2003) explained in an interview with Japanese game magazine Continue why Sweet Home became a milestone "opening the way for future horror games": "I wanted the gameplay of Sweet Home to be an interesting combination of non-traditional concepts, and to attempt something the industry had never seen before."

The main gameplay of Sweet Home follows a conventional RPG model: the player controls five characters, each with their own exclusive items to advance in the game, and the characters can be combined into teams for exploration and puzzle-solving. During exploration, players randomly encounter enemies and must engage in turn-based combat. However, the addition of the "inventory limit" mechanism added strong strategy and tension to the game: in addition to weapons and exclusive items, each character can carry only two additional items. Therefore, players need to keep most of the characters in the same area, but the design of group exploration inevitably causes character separation. This decision-making pressure is pervasive: players are always uncertain about what to keep or discard, and retrieving an item that has been misplaced may require a dangerous trek through a room full of zombies. This design created a strategic focus on inventory management and cooperation, providing space for clever level designs. For example, when players need to collect a few pieces of wood to cross a river and move into more dangerous areas, they must decide whether to discard healing items or leave behind a rope that might soon be useful. This decision becomes even more intense when players know that the next area holds the toughest enemies yet. The design of permanent death, combined with inventory limits, intensifies the pain of these decisions: although the player can find special tools to replace some items, this occupies another inventory slot, so a character's death means the loss of three slots, intertwining the

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pressure of inventory management with the need to preserve as many characters as possible.

On this basis, Sweet Home "expanded and embellished the narrative of the movie in an unprecedented way," long before the era when "a game accurately conveying the main content of its original work would be considered a masterpiece"(Tieryas, 2019), exploring the limits of the game medium. The movie Sweet Home tells the story of a small group of people who, while shooting a documentary, enter the abandoned countryside mansion of the famous artist Ichiro, only to be haunted by spirits and ultimately perish. However, the game's narrative design frequently expands on the plot hinted at in the film by providing fragmented information. For example, the film briefly mentions that the crew discovered the grave of Ichiro's young son, who died unexpectedly, and that Ichiro's wife committed suicide after the child's death, becoming the vengeful spirit haunting the mansion. This plot point was not further explained in the film, but in the game, Fujiwara added a series of collectible diary entries that explain how Ichiro's wife went mad after the death of her child and how she lured other young children to "sacrifice" in order for her son to have playmates in the afterlife. As a result, the mansion is filled with young ghost children, becoming the center of the supernatural events.

The details revealed by Fujiwara (2003) in interviews further demonstrate the independence of Sweet Home from the original movie: Continue: Sweet Home is not a direct adaptation of the film, but is based on your own ideas, right? Tokuro Fujiwara: Even Kiyoshi Kurosawa, who directed the movie version of Sweet Home, told me not to worry if the game didn't follow the rhythm of the film exactly. I thought, if that's the case, I could handle it. C: Unfortunately for him, everyone says the game is scarier than the film. (laughs) TF: That's because I used the film as a reference. I watched

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the film, visited the set, and used whatever I thought would work in the game. I thought carefully about how to bring elements of the film onto the game screen. C: The film has a lot of elements that I don't think you could include in the game, for example, burning maggots with candles. TF: I did actually bring that part from the big screen. In fact, the opposite is true: there were some items I wanted to include in the game, but I had to cut them because they didn't fit the atmosphere of the movie. C: The game's classic ending leaves a bittersweet aftertaste. Was this done to align with the film's ending? TF: Yes, because the film doesn't have a happy ending either. If it were made by someone else, I might have wanted a happy ending. But when I tell a story, somehow, it always ends up feeling sad. (laughs)

As the first horror game to "successfully combine RPG, adventure, and horror genres in a 'creepy' way," Sweet Home undoubtedly became a benchmark for this genre and the pioneer of the role-playing horror game paradigm.

The innovative "inventory limit" was later expanded upon by the "survival horror" genre, and the pursuit of creating fear through game mechanics became deeply embedded in the DNA of horror games. Fear is not just about visual shocks of darkness and monsters, or the auditory torment of screams and eerie music; it becomes an emotional effect that game mechanics should evoke. The narrative is established according to the "game developer's" rhythm and ideas, critically using the horror elements of the original work… This approach is completely different from the attitude of the Texas Chainsaw Massacre team, thus Sweet Home was able to create the game Sweet Home rather than mechanically extending the movie into the video game world, ultimately achieving the feat of being "scarier than the movie." In this way, Sweet Home left a legacy of confidence for future horror games to explore their own "language," a "meta-paradigm" that sparkles with inspiration for the self-aware development of horror games.

4.2 Alone in the Dark and The 7th Guest: Returning to Horror Films

When Sweet Home achieved great success in the Japanese market due to its innovative "non-cinematic" approach, a French programmer, Frederick Raynal, who had just completed the 3D game The Cube was in his father's video rental store watching one horror film after another. At that moment, an idea quietly emerged in his mind: "I love horror films, especially George Romero's Dawn of the Dead, where the heroes are trapped in a supermarket besieged by zombies. From that moment, I knew that, if technology allowed, I would definitely create a game like that." (Alexander, 2012)

Compared to Sweet Home, which grew from a movie script, Alone in the Dark (Infogrames, 1992) stemmed from Frederick Raynal's desire to "recreate horror films in video games." To achieve full 3D graphics on the DOS engine, Raynal wrote a 3D modeling tool based on physical photos, and with the help of an art team, transformed the entire visual experience into 3D animation. This innovation earned Alone in the Dark praise as a "gem in graphical representation." (Savignano, 2014) However, the true realization of Raynal's dream was not just in the use of new technology, but, as he said, "i

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Beyond setting a heavy, dark story backdrop, Raynal imbued the core operations of the adventure game, such as exploration, with anxiety and fear: players had to stay alert to face dangers in the middle of a hallway, behind wooden doors, or on the street; they had to discern whether readable books were “necromantic books” that would lead to death; and they constantly worried whether limited ammo would be enough to handle a sudden monster attack… As Raynal himself said, “We scare players by making them perform actions they are already doing.” However, these game mechanics could only transform into a fear experience that was different from 2D horror by relying on cinematic camera techniques. Years of watching horror films have taught us that when the perspective shifts, something is usually happening, and Alone in the Dark used the same logic, integrating camera angle changes into the movement of the characters, as though multiple cameras were aimed at the player from different angles, constantly hinting to them that every action they take is tied to the dark truth, leading to terrifying consequences—just like the suggestive cinematography in horror films.

Jacob Blackford (1993), a reviewer for Computer Shopper magazine, praised Alone in the Dark as “like a movie.” This “movie-like” horror game not only featured dynamic visuals through 3D modeling and camera angles but, more importantly, integrated the cinematographic language of horror films with the player’s agency, reversing the traditional relationship between film and game and making Alone in the Dark the first game that created a horror film. It can be said that Raynal’s desire to emulate films ultimately highlighted the independent power of horror games themselves.

If Alone in the Dark was the pioneer of 3D graphical adventure in horror games, then The 7th Guest, released a year later in the U.S., was the pioneer of integrating interactive movies with horror games.

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The 7th Guest (Trilobyte, 1993)placed real video clips at the heart of its gameplay. Players progressed through the game by continuously clicking, solving puzzles, and watching new videos. Although it was praised as “the first truly captivating interactive CD-ROM game,” The 7th Guest was fragmented in its design, with players facing classic puzzles such as chess, mazes, and logic problems that were unrelated to the horror narrative framework. As a result, the interactive movie’s horror story and gameplay became disconnected, making The 7th Guest an awkward hybrid of a horror game. However, The 7th Guest injected “interactive movie” elements into horror game development, laying the groundwork for the appearance of other horror games using interactive movie formats, and signaling that films had become a symbolic representation of horror games.

Alone in the Dark and The 7th Guest both chose to return to horror films, each taking different paths—emulating films and creating interactive films, respectively—becoming the harbingers of two new genres in horror games: 3D graphical adventure and interactive movie.

4.3 Orogiriso: The New "Flesh" of Horror Novels?

With its complex mechanics, rich dynamic visuals, and thrilling combat, Sweet Home and Alone in the Dark had already pushed the boundaries of 1980s video game technology, leaving players dazzled. However, in 1992, Koichi Nakamura, the producer of Dragon Quest, realized during a date with a non-gamer girl that “perhaps it was necessary to create a game for people who had never played games before.” (Parish,2018) Motivated by this thought, Nakamura simplified the game’s “mechanics” to the extreme: 3D simulation was reduced to images and music; fragmented plot elements hidden in the game’s progression were replaced by straightforward text; complex command operations were simplified to decisions made by clicking. Thus, the “visual novel” genre, where players read the story and make decisions to shape the plot, was born.

The addition of horror elements to Orogiriso (Chunsoft, 1992) was an extension of Nakamura’s game design philosophy: “I believe that at its core, a sound novel (visual novel) is a visual experience that combines sound effects and music… What can sound and visuals do? What emotions or experiences can they bring to players? I think the strongest emotion they can evoke is fear.” (Parish,2018) Inspired by Sweet Home, Nakamura set the story in a dark mansion where a young couple, lost in the woods at night, accidentally takes refuge and encounters a series of supernatural events. With a combination of eerie imagery and strange music, the game creates an experience where players are afraid to even click to continue the story.

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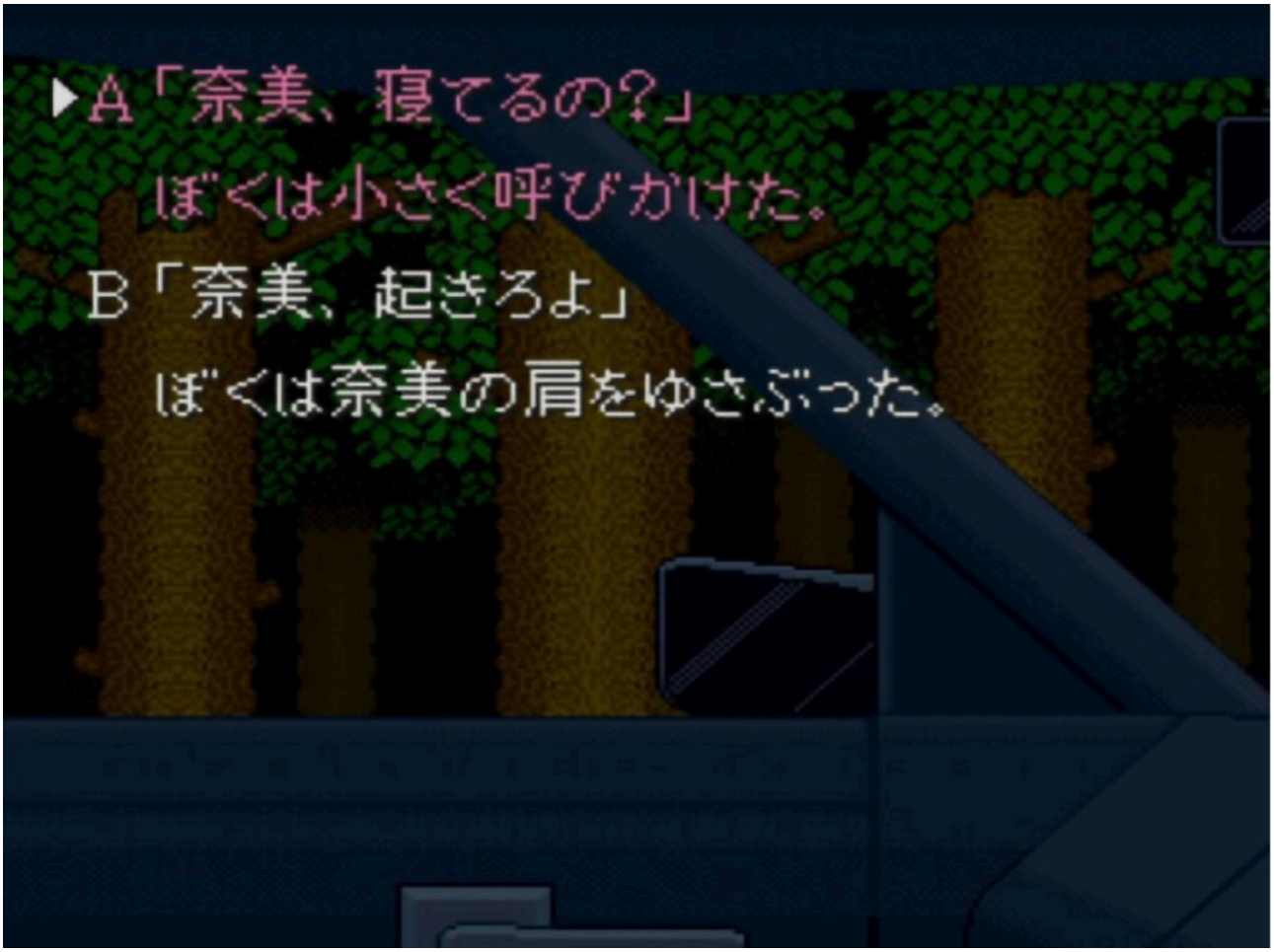

Some media viewed Orogiriso as just a digital version of 1980s ghost house adventure novels, but from Nakamura's process of simplifying the game mechanics and matching them with horror themes, Orogiriso is not just a new "flesh" for horror novels but a perfect marriage of simplified game mechanics and horror themes. It was essentially a bold innovation in the "language" of games and quickly gained fame for the "visual novel" genre.

5 Towards Maturity: 1996

5.1 Resident Evil: Embracing Horror

After the release of the PlayStation, CAPCOM reached a licensing agreement with Sony, entrusting Sweet Home's producer, Tokuro Fujiwara, with the important task of creating a game for the PlayStation that would surpass Sweet Home. This idea aligned perfectly with Fujiwara's own thoughts: "(Sweet Home) was mostly frustrating in terms of graphics... (With the PS's technical capabilities) I believe horror games can become a genre in their own right." (2003) Thus, Fujiwara and Shinji Mikami embarked on the project that would become Resident Evil (CAPCOM, 1996).

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From the very beginning of Resident Evil, the team faced a conflict between technical limitations and game mechanics. The PlayStation's capabilities were not sufficient for real-time rendering from a first-person perspective, and after nearly a year of failed attempts, Fujiwara and Mikami opted for a fixed camera third-person perspective, which demanded lower rendering resources. Unlike the "virtual camera" mode in Alone in the Dark, Resident Evil's control method bound movement to the character, meaning players controlled the character's movement within the "fixed camera" frame. After finalizing the core control system, Fujiwara and Mikami began exploring how the game's visuals could enhance the "horror experience." The most iconic example is the opening of Resident Evil, where a seemingly normal man slowly turns around to reveal his "zombie" features. This scene was originally intended to be rendered in real-time, but due to the poor quality of the graphics, Mikami decided to create a pre-rendered cutscene. However, this approach, combined with the fixed camera angle and inserted animations, led to a confusing control system—when facing the camera, players had to push the joystick in the opposite direction to make the character move in the correct direction. Furthermore, pre-rendered cutscenes like the "door-kill" and "boss reveal" interrupted the player's control, creating temporary spatial disorientation. After continuous optimization, these flaws were preserved as unique mechanics to amplify the feeling of losing control and to increase the difficulty.

Resident Evil undoubtedly drew from earlier horror games. Mikami admitted in interviews that Resident Evil heavily referenced the horror elements and "inventory management" mechanics from

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Sweet Home. The core inspiration was "zombies and an old mansion" and the constant scarcity of resources—the so-called "haunted mansion" concept. It also took lessons from Alone in the Dark's "ultimately not scary" approach, avoiding polygonal models for key scenes in favor of more detailed CG animation, among other improvements.

However, what made Resident Evil a milestone in the maturation of horror games—earning the recognition that the term "Survival Horror" did not exist before its release (Wiese, 2009)—was its intentional integration of gameplay mechanics with horror themes, formalizing them into the genre of "Survival Horror." The game's Japanese cover prominently featured the term "Survival Horror," alongside katakana for promotion, and also included it in a small box on the back cover to describe the game's genre. Additionally, when players loaded a saved game, a message appeared: "You have entered the world of Survival Horror again. Good luck!" The term "Survival Horror" was defined by

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CAPCOM as a genre that did not simply describe horror themes or moods but signified a game that focused on "survival" elements like inventory management, 3D action, and puzzle-solving as core mechanics. More importantly, it indicated that horror games had evolved into a distinct genre, with enough divergence from other game genres (such as action, adventure, and role-playing) to be seen as an independent genre.

The Resident Evil series achieved commercial success well beyond the gaming world. It sparked a revival of "zombie culture" and shifted from supernatural themes to science fiction themes. Movies, novels, and comics based on the Resident Evil IP also hit the market.

Looking back at the series' origins, the development of horror games shows two key threads: one where horror games, as carriers of horror themes, gradually became independent and rivaled films and novels; and another where horror games began to explore new gameplay mechanics and languages distinct from other genres, thus evolving from simply observing horror to embracing it.

From Texas Chainsaw Massacre's symbolic extension of cinema to Sweet Home's creative optimization of film narrative, and Alone in the Dark's first subversion of the film-game relationship, Resident Evil declared that horror games could actively draw from and create their own horror content, could evolve from a medium attached to others into an independent one, and could stand alongside horror films and Gothic novels.

Moreover, by categorizing its mechanics as "Survival Horror", Resident Evil heralded a shift in horror games, where "horror" became central to the game design rather than being an appendage to "adventure" or "action." It signaled that horror games had their own distinct "language." Thus, the early development of horror games reached maturity in these two directions. However, as Chris and Jill escaped the "Mansion of Evil," the story of Resident Evil was just beginning... This marked a new starting point in the history of horror games.

5.2 Silent Hill: A Different Path of Haunting

Silent Hill (Konami Co., 1999)used inventory limitations and awkward controls similar to Resident Evil, and also featured numerous puzzles and twisted monsters. However, it evoked a different kind of horror to elicit fear, attempting to create an unsettling atmosphere for the player, which sharply contrasted with Resident Evil's more visceral horror and action-oriented approach.

To run in real-time 3D, Silent Hill filled distant scenes with thick fog and darkness, which not only reduced visibility but also created a sense of isolation and claustrophobia. The dilapidated buildings, flickering lights, and eerie silence of the real world filled the player with dread at every moment. When the player enters the "Otherworld", a nightmarish version of Silent Hill filled with rust, blood, and twisted architecture, the visual effects become even more disturbing. At the same time, the game’s music suddenly shifts, using industrial sounds, environmental noises, and eerie melodies to amplify the atmosphere. Sudden, jarring noises or distant howls break the silence, keeping players on edge.

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More importantly, Silent Hill itself is a psychological metaphor, reflecting the internal turmoil and conflicts of the characters. As the characters wander through the foggy streets and encounter unsettling creatures, they are confronted with their own fears, guilt, and trauma. For example, the "lying figure" monster represents a twisted, bound patient, symbolizing James' inability to touch and comfort his wife Mary during her illness, creating psychological pressure. Its toxic gas attacks represent the verbal abuse James often suffered from Mary while she was sick. "Pyramid Head," with its executioner's appearance, symbolizes James' inner desire for judgment and punishment, a yearning to be absolved of the guilt of killing his wife. The multiple endings and moral choices reflect the character's psychological state and the consequences of their actions. The idea that "everyone has their own Silent Hill" elevates Silent Hill from a virtual digital landscape to a psychological experience that triggers fear, guilt, and regret within all players, blending tangible environments with intangible mental states.

As a response to Resident Evil, Silent Hill and its pervasive fog heralded a new path for horror games. A "psychological horror" language was born, which delved deeper into the essence of fear as a psychological experience. This provided a stark contrast to the "action-oriented" horror in previous games, pointing to a future that would be darker, more complex, and unpredictable.

The next chapter in horror game history would emerge from this mist, leading the genre into a future filled with even greater mystery and uncertainty.

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