

GDO750 Major Project S3S1 (22/23)

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Submitted by

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1 Introduction

How does the Removal of Respite Mechanics Affect Emotional and Spatio-temporal Immersion in Survival Horror Games?

(Self, 2023)

My fascination with horror in video games began with a mission in Halo: Combat Evolved (2001) called "The Library". It was in this desolate swamp landscape that the iconic Master Chief faced a zombie-like enemy known as the Flood. This initial experience led me to explore the world of survival horror, from classics such as Metro: 2033 (2010), Amnesia: The Dark Descent (2010), Alien: Isolation (2014) and more recently, Resident Evil 2 (2019). However, while enjoying games from other genres, I couldn't help but wonder if the traditional survival horror could benefit from a fresh perspective.

This thought occurred during my playthrough of Elden Ring (2022), my first "souls" game. The absence of a real pause button in the game led to heightened anxiety as I navigated its user interface, fearing my character's vulnerability. This realisation prompted me to dig deeper, leading me to an intriguing article about a Dead Space (2023) developer's desire to remove the pause functionality for a more immersive horror experience (Inverse, 2023). With this inspiration, my research journey began. I started to ponder what a horror game would look like if the mechanics providing respite were completely removed. How would this absence impact different forms of immersion? And would such a game appeal to casual fans of the survival horror genre?

Scholar Bernard Perron, as discussed in his book "Horror Video Games", suggests that *"the evolution of the horror genre runs parallel to the evolution of the medium as a whole, whose "mode of address" seems progressively geared towards player gratification"* (Perron, 2014). This concept prompted me to delve into another thought-provoking question: To what extent can a player obtain gratification from a game that eliminates respite from its mechanics? I aspired to create an experience that would enhance immersion, although I couldn't help but question whether it might lead to player frustration rather than a genuine sense of accomplishment. It was from these ponderings that I embarked on the development of my own survival horror game, Seven Nights in Horshaw House. A concept in which the player would assume the role of a paranormal investigator tasked with solving a murder mystery within the confines of seven in-game days, drawing inspiration from a rich collection of horror fiction, ranging from The Spooks to The Haunting of Hill House.

2 Research & Design (Sprint 1)

2.1 Moodboard

My initial steps involved compiling a list of potential research sources for future citation within my proposal. During this phase, I began contemplating the wording of my research question. It's worth noting that, at this point, I hadn't yet determined the specific types of immersion to focus on when evaluating the impact of removing respite mechanics within the context of a survival horror game. This thought only occurred to me after my first meeting with my supervisor. Consequently, my original research question read as follows: "How does the removal of respite mechanics in horror games redefine player immersion and enhance the gameplay experience?" With this in mind, I focused my attention on creating a moodboard for *Seven Nights in Horshaw House*, an endeavour aimed at visualising the game's concept.



Figure 1 - Self 2023. Seven Nights in Horshaw House Moodboard [GIMP]

The purpose of creating the moodboard (*see figure 1*) was to establish a colour palette and explore various design concepts for Horshaw House. I wanted the designs to exhibit a high level of realism to effectively immerse the player, choosing realistic assets over low-poly ones. Moreover, I intended for Horshaw House to exude an ominous atmosphere, evoking a sense of foreboding. I aimed to exaggerate its characteristics to distinctly convey to players that this was far from a welcoming place to be. After I was satisfied with the moodboard, my next steps included organising my upcoming weeks using an online Kanban board called HackNPlan, initiating the Unity project and setting up version control software.

2.2 Project Planning & Version Control Software

I selected Unity as my preferred game engine because of my prior experience. Although I briefly explored alternatives such as Unreal Engine, Godot, and GameMaker, my decision to work with a familiar engine and coding language (C#) stemmed from the need to manage multiple tasks, including writing the proposal and conducting research. This choice was initially comfortable, but in hindsight, I should have invested more time in evaluating the most suitable engine. For instance, Game Designer Rachel Cordone, in her book "Unreal Engine 4 Game Development Quick Start Guide," suggests that Unreal is particularly well-suited for 3D projects (Cordone, 2019).

My preference for familiarity also extended to the choice of version control software, where I opted for GitHub (see figure 2) due to my years of experience and its seamless integration with Unity. I did not consider alternative version control software like GitKraken or Perforce, as I intended to allocate the time spent learning the software to other aspects of game development. The next phase involves developing the proof of concept while examining other survival horror games, including the recent Amnesia: The Bunker (2023), to assess the features that provide players with respite.

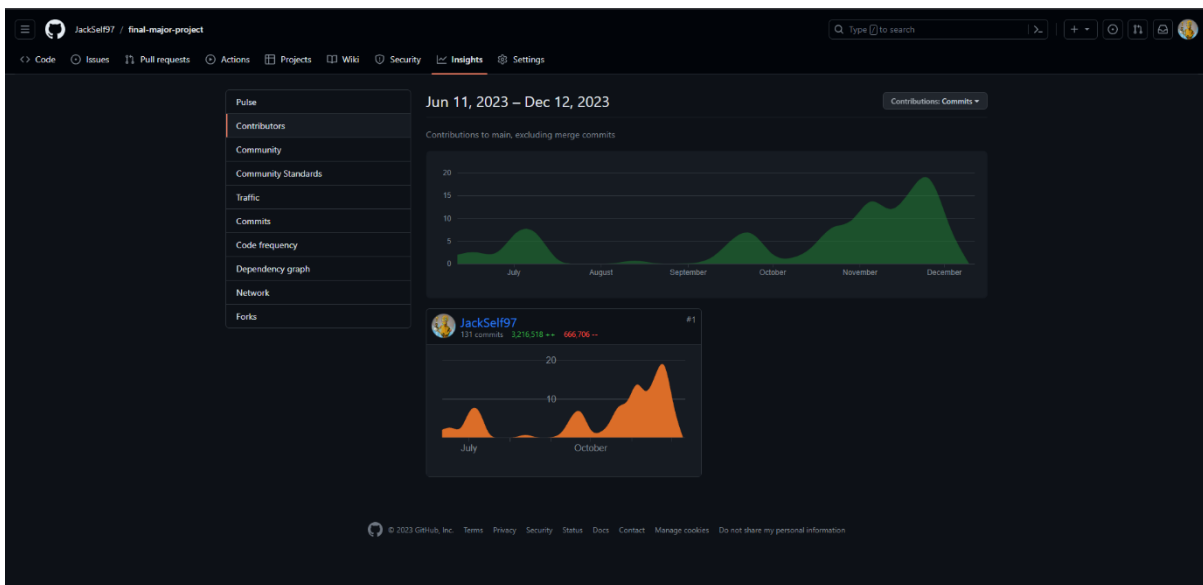


Figure 2 - Self 2023. GitHub Contributions [GitHub]

3 Proof of Concept (Sprints 2 & 3)

3.1 Emotional & Spatio-temporal Immersion

Before programming the core mechanics, it was essential for me to determine the type of immersion to investigate. Additionally, I sought to identify the scholar whose definition closely aligned with my research, considering the debated nature of the term "immersion" among scholars. I categorised the types of immersion into the following: Spatial, emphasising the sense of physical presence within the game world; Emotional, designed to evoke strong emotional responses; Narrative, centred around absorption in the game's story and lore; Sensory, aiming to engage players' senses, especially sight and sound, for an enhanced experience; and Ludic, focused on captivating players through engaging mechanics, challenging puzzles, and rewarding progression systems.

Following discussions with my supervisor and considering the game's emphasis on the passage of time through a ticking clock, compelling players to stay engaged and confined within the haunted house, we identified emotional and spatio-temporal immersion as the relevant types to investigate. Subsequently, I came across scholars like Chenyan Zhang, Andrew Perkis, and Sebastian Arndt, who define emotional immersion as *"the state where users feel emotionally aroused and absorbed by the narrative content of the story"* (Zhang, et al., 2017). Additionally, Marie-Laure Ryan defines spatio-temporal immersion in video games as *"a sense of being fully present within the game world, experiencing a seamless connection between space and time"* (Ryan, 2015). Considering the different types of immersion and the scholars who have defined them, it was time to start working on the proof of concept.

3.2 Programming the Core Mechanics

During this proposal phase, I adopted an agile approach, iterating on initial design choices while maintaining a clear vision for the proof of concept. It's important to mention that, initially, I envisioned developing a linear narrative. However, for the playable proof of concept and to showcase the mechanics, I conceived the idea of the player discovering eight skulls, drawing inspiration from the concept of finding eight pages in *Slender: The Eight Pages* (2012).

I initiated the development process by establishing player controls and greyboxing the house layout using Unity standard assets. Swiftly getting the player to explore the surroundings was crucial for an early assessment of the game's feel. Subsequently, I focused on implementing player interaction and an inventory system, enabling the player to pick up and store in-game objects. Utilising scriptable objects facilitated efficient storage of each item's data, later transforming them into quest items and notes integral to the game's narrative (*see figure 3*). The inventory system emerged as a pivotal element in shaping the game's storyline.

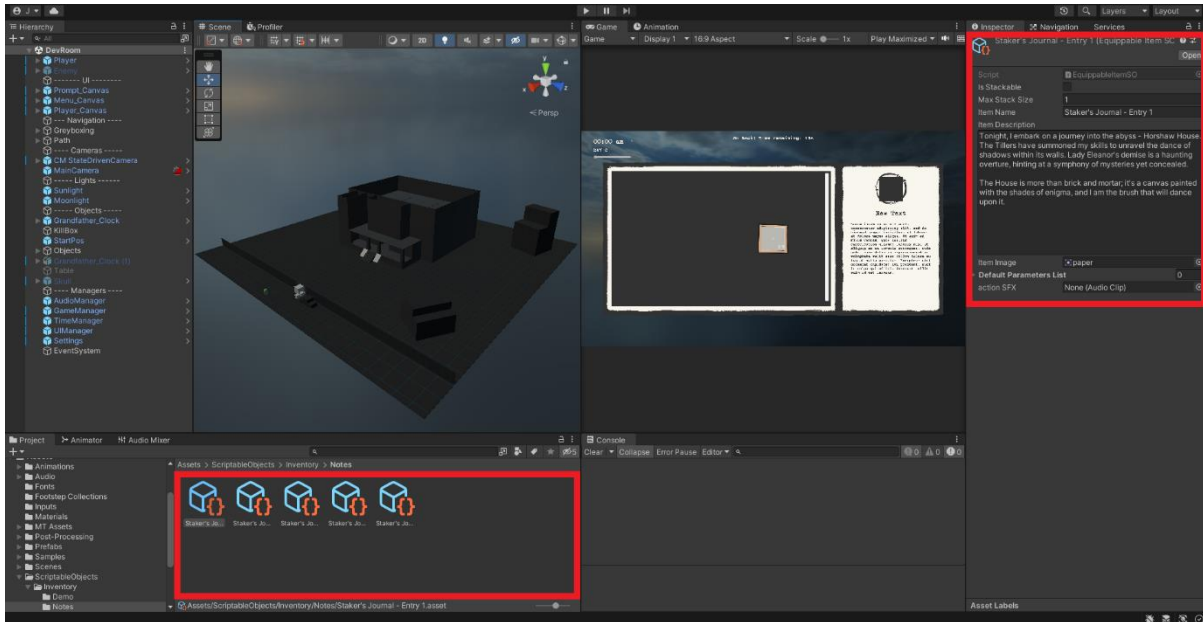


Figure 3 - Self 2023. Scriptable Objects [Unity Editor]

Moving forward, I introduced a day-and-night system to evoke a sense of time progression, ensuring the player remained actively involved in the quest to unravel the game's story. I then crafted a basic enemy AI using a finite state machine concept. This enemy would spawn during the nighttime, patrolling the house based on predefined waypoints (see figure 4). Upon encountering the player, it would initiate an attack, transporting the player to another realm - the spirit realm - where time moved faster. To exit this realm and resume the investigation, the player had to retrieve their body from the location of where they previously died.

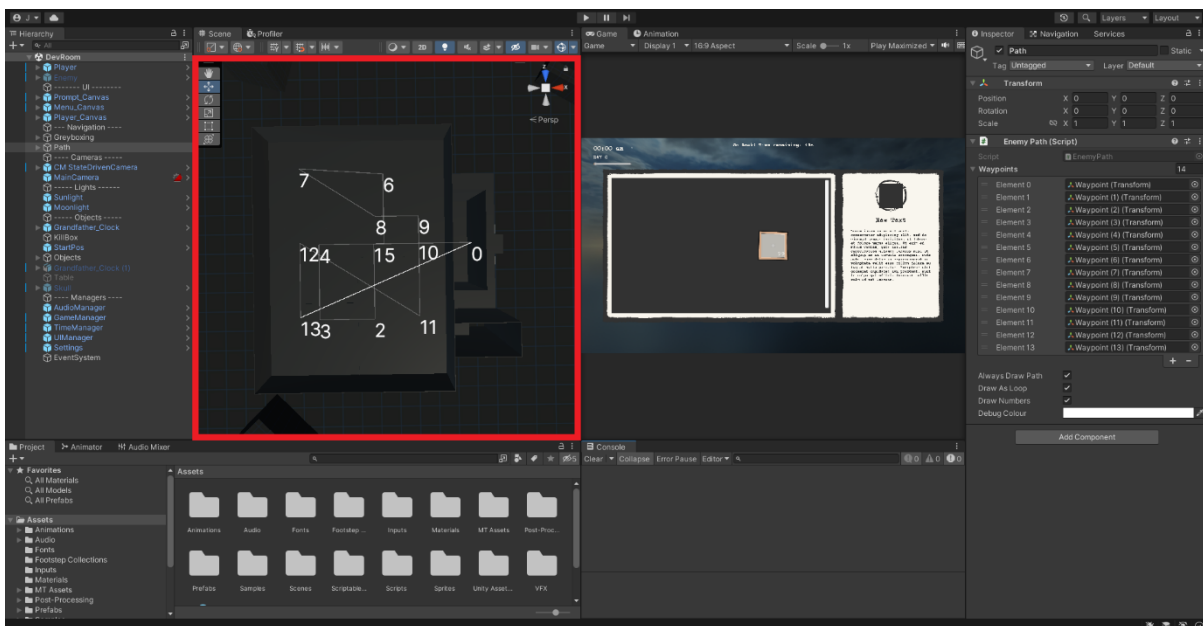


Figure 4 - Self 2023. AI Waypoints [Unity Editor]

Feedback from my supervisor highlighted the frustration of locating one's body while under attack. In response, I modified the enemy AI to attack only in the material realm, addressing this concern. Notably, during this phase, I conducted extensive research by playing horror games like *Amnesia: The Bunker* (2023) to observe how monsters were introduced and their behaviour in the presence of the player.

As mentioned earlier, I opted to shift away from a linear narrative towards an arcade-style approach. I determined that the objective would be to collect eight skulls scattered throughout the house and its surroundings. To ensure sustained player interest, I introduced 32 potential spawn points for the skulls, once again employing scriptable objects to store the position and rotation of each spawned skull (see figure 5). Ensuring that each playthrough differed slightly from the player's previous experience. This design choice aimed at enhancing replayability, drawing inspiration from games like *Five Nights at Freddy's* (2014).

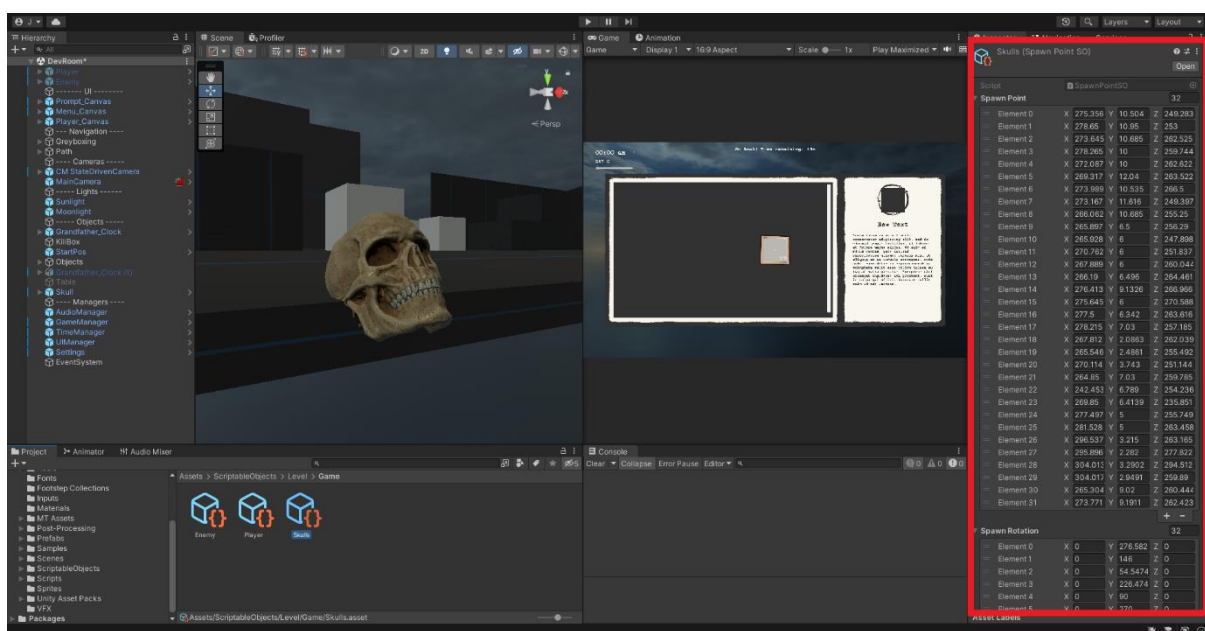


Figure 5 - Self 2023. Skull Locations [Unity Editor]

The inclusion of 32 spawn points proved beneficial during bug testing, as it allowed me to systematically assess each spawn point by spawning all 32 skulls. Additionally, this system facilitated adjustments to the total number of skulls, responding to player feedback that finding eight skulls within the given seven-day period was overly challenging (see appendix 5). Consequently, based on this input, I modified the total to seven skulls, a decision that also resonated with the emphasis on the number seven within the game's theme, deviating from the initially planned eight skulls.

3.3 A/B Testing

Finally, I implemented the initial respite mechanic, known as static pausing, to evaluate my research question. In this approach, I provided one tester with a demo featuring static pausing activated - meaning that when they paused the game, the in-game time would freeze. At the same time, I gave another tester a different version of the same demo, where pressing pause did not freeze the in-game time.

During the initial testing phase, my supervisor evaluated the demo with static pausing turned off and noted a lack of inclination to pause the game, though acknowledging it as a solid start. It became apparent that the pause screen, at this stage, had little incentive for use and featured only a restart button (*see figure 6*). With this insight, I dedicated efforts to develop a more comprehensive pause screen. The enhanced version (*see figure 7*) included options for resume, last checkpoint, a respite mechanic tab, settings tab, restart button, and an exit button.

Having established the core mechanics, the next step was to finalise the proposal and utilise the proof of concept to illustrate the user journey. After ensuring my satisfaction with the progress, I presented it to my supervisor and proceeded to work on advancing towards the Alpha build.



Figure 6 - Self 2023. Seven Nights in Horshaw House [V0.3] Pause Screen [Video Game]

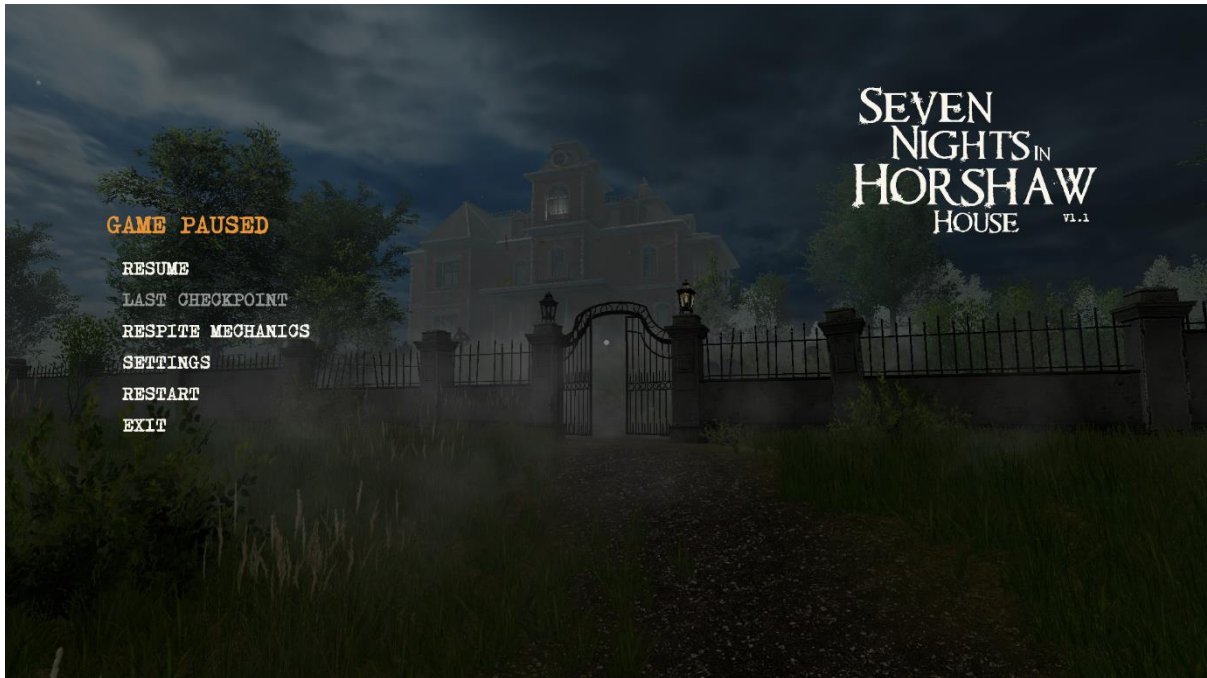


Figure 7 - Self 2023. Seven Nights in Horshaw House [V1.1] Pause Screen [Video Game]

4 Alpha (Sprints 4 & 5)

4.1 Competitor Research

In Sprint 4, the focus shifted towards finalising the proposal, leading to a temporary pause in the development of Seven Nights in Horshaw House. During this period, I took the opportunity to consider the game's eventual release strategy. After careful consideration, I opted to publish the game on Itch.io rather than Steam. While the idea of having the project on Steam was enticing, I recognised the experimental nature of the game and the need for extra attention in its delivery.

In this phase, conducting competitor research was imperative to anticipate how the game might resonate with my intended target audience. It became evident that Seven Nights stood out as a distinctive horror game, sharing similarities with titles in the “souls” genre such as Elden Ring (2022) and Dark Souls (2011), particularly in its lack of respite. Recognising the need to position Seven Nights as an experimental horror game, I understood the importance of crafting a compelling press kit with captivating images and a trailer to engage my audience. With the plans firmly in place and the proposal officially submitted, it was time for a brief respite before the commencement of the next module and the official start of development.

4.2 Dynamic Respite Mechanics

As previously mentioned, I expressed my intention to provide various demos for the purpose of conducting A/B testing. However, during the break between modules, I designed a more efficient approach to conduct A/B tests by incorporating toggles (see figure 8). These toggles would allow users to turn on and off respite mechanics during runtime, eliminating the need for distributing multiple demos and enabling iterative testing on a single version.

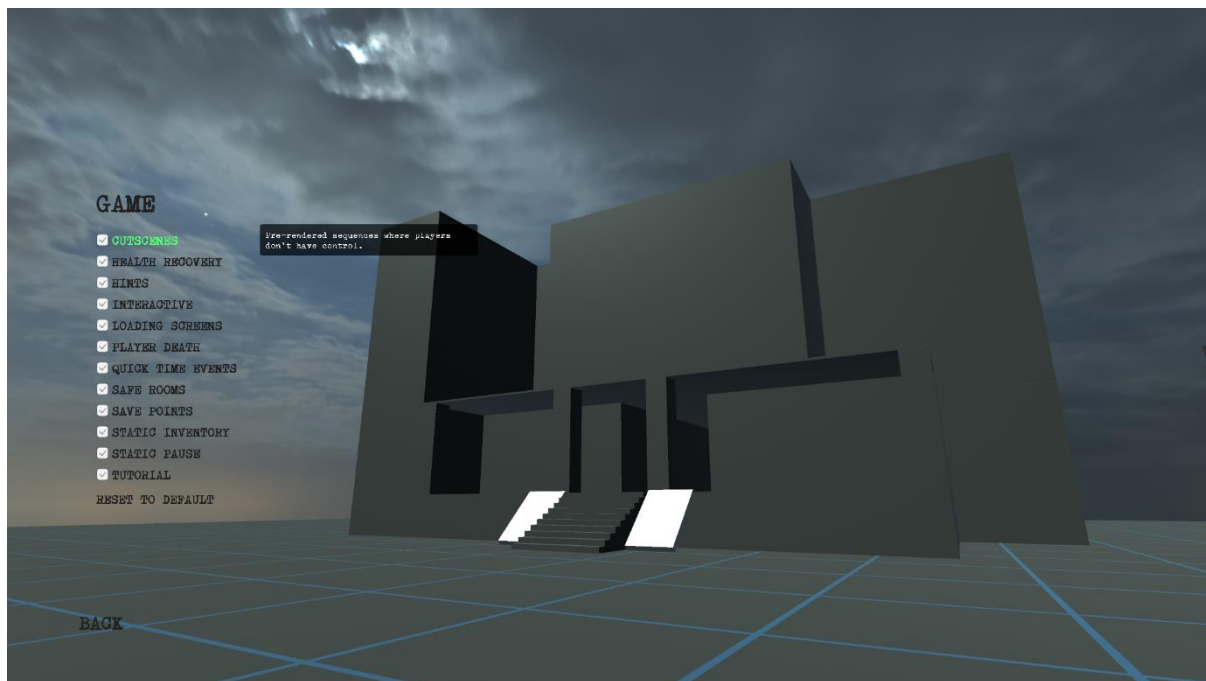


Figure 8 - Self 2023. *Seven Nights in Horshaw House [V0.3] Respite Mechanic Toggles [Video Game]*

Initially hidden in the settings, I moved the toggles to a dedicated tab within the game, each accompanied by a description. In its default setting, *Seven Nights* became an experimental indie horror with all respite mechanics turned off. Later, I introduced a "classic mode" toggle, enabling users to experience a traditional horror game with all respite mechanics (see figure 9). While unable to include all 15 proposed mechanics in the demo, I tested key ones like Static Pausing, Static Inventory, Checkpoints, Player Health, Loading Screens, and HUD.



Figure 9 - Self 2023. Seven Nights in Horshaw House [V1.1] Classic Mode Toggle [Video Game]

Having successfully implemented a dynamic respite mechanic that allowed players to toggle it on and off during runtime, the next milestone was progressing towards the Beta phase as outlined in the development timeline.

5 Beta (Sprint 6)

5.1 Visual Improvements

At this stage, it was imperative for me to swiftly incorporate assets so that my testers could fully immerse themselves in the world I had created. Additionally, the footage they provided would be instrumental in presenting my findings during the end-of-term presentation. I integrated the assets I had previously wishlisted, ensuring to credit the owners in the game's credits, and focused on quickly getting the player into and moving around the house. Work included aspects like blackout refinement, UI updates for improved usability, the addition of a ticking clock on the grandfather clock for a more diegetic experience, and enhancements to the day and night cycle, transitioning between two post-processing profiles for a realistic nighttime and daytime effect. Finally, I introduced the monster (*see figure 10*), replacing the red capsule that was utilised in the proof of concept.



Figure 10 - Self 2023. Seven Nights in Horshaw House [V1.1] The Faceless Monster [Video Game]

Visual improvements were made to the spirit realm based on the film *Insidious* (2010), giving it a more spectral feel (see *figures 11 & 12*). The AI was updated to patrol within the house, and a jump scare feature was introduced so that when the monster grabbed the player, they experienced a fright before entering the spirit realm, enhancing the emotional immersion of the game.

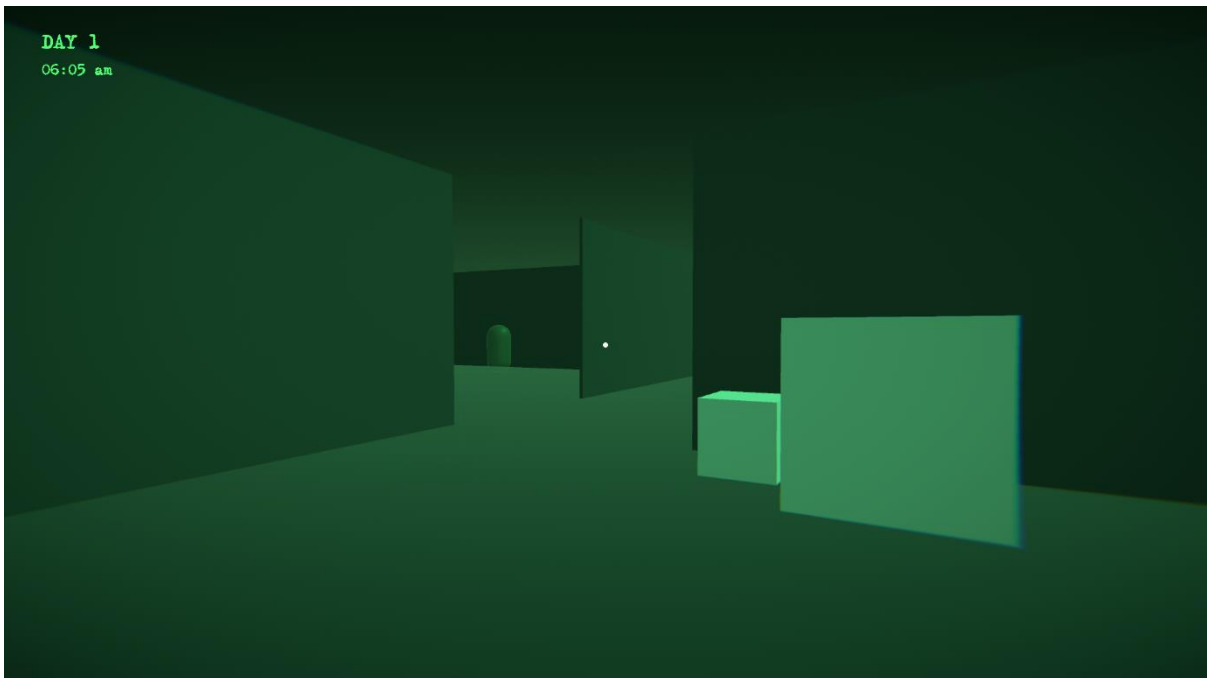


Figure 11 - Self 2023. Seven Nights in Horshaw House [V0.3] Spirit Realm [Video Game]



Figure 12 - Self 2023. *Seven Nights in Horshaw House [V1.1] Spirit Realm [Video Game]*

I introduced lose and win conditions to give the Beta a conclusive ending. The final touch involved incorporating essential gamification elements, such as in-game prompts to help players understand the controls. During continuous testing at this stage, I realised that the game's design was causing an abrupt end after the player found all the skulls, a concern I intended to address with my supervisor before entering Sprint 7.

5.2 King of the Hill Mode

To fulfil my research question, it became crucial for players to remain in the game as long as possible. Thus, I introduced a King of the Hill mode, influenced by Halo: Combat Evolved (2001), where players needed to stay inside the house for a period of time before the seven in-game days elapsed (see figure 13). The slider incremented only if the player remained in the hill, adding a strategic element to the gameplay as players decided when and how to search for skulls while fulfilling the hill's requirement before the time expired.

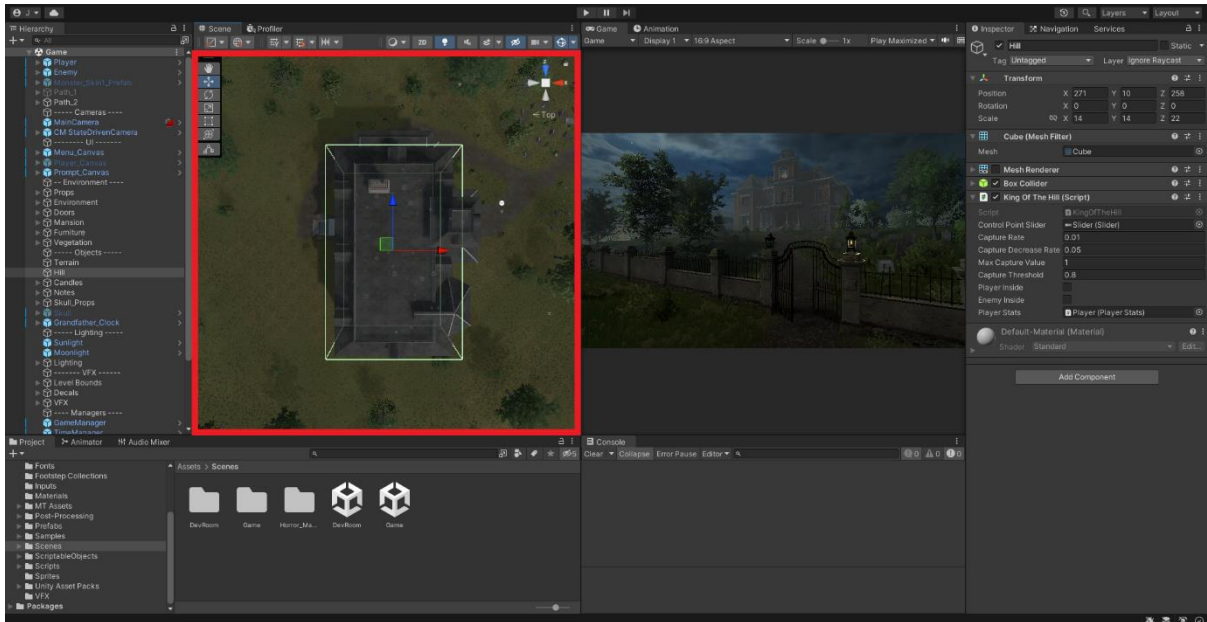


Figure 13 - Self 2023. Seven Nights in Horshaw House [V1.1] King of the Hill Mode [Unity Editor]

5.3 Game Design

Given the design philosophy of Seven Nights, where players are encouraged to discover mechanics organically without explicit guidance, I took great care to avoid any unintentional misdirection. However, tester feedback highlighted a challenge in locating notes, which sometimes blended in with other non-interactable books (see appendix 5). Moreover, a few testers noted the potential use of flickering lights to signal points of interest, but in reality, they were intended to establish a sinister ambiance (see appendix 4). Swift adjustments were made to address the former concern, ensuring that players can still explore and uncover elements independently without encountering misdirection. Players, especially those investing 40 minutes or more, independently discovered the game's mechanics, fostering longevity and engagement (see appendix 4).

Following that, I refined the static pausing and introduced static inventory and HUD as two additional respite mechanics to be integrated. Subsequently, I worked on refining doors, establishing spawn points for both the enemy AI and the player when transitioning to the spirit realm. I also updated player controls by replacing the left mouse button, initially used for interacting with the environment, with the 'E' key, which was designated for picking up objects. This adjustment aimed to streamline the interaction process based on user feedback.

5.4 Sound Design

Before advancing to the Gold stage, I had a few testers play the game at this juncture, and their feedback highlighted a desire for sound incorporation to enhance immersion. Consequently, I focused on sound settings, including an ambient track and dynamic footsteps that considered surface materials and the terrain height map. This involved a raycast from the player's feet, associating a number with a material, and selecting a random footstep sound from a pool of six sounds per material, with an additional consideration of adjusting the pitch within the range of 0.5 and 1.5 to avoid repetition (see *figure 14*). This mechanic significantly contributed to bringing the game world to life and immersing players fully.

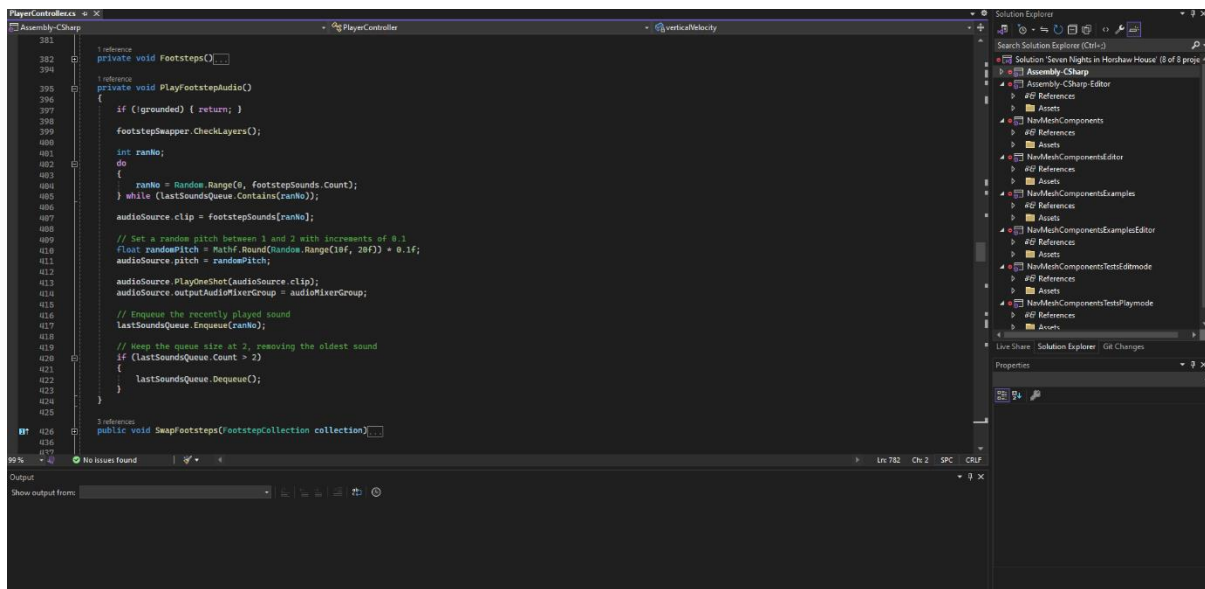


Figure 14 - Self 2023. Dynamic Footstep Sounds [Visual Studio]

After completing the sound design and addressing numerous bugs, I created a brief video showcasing the day and night cycle to gather feedback from my peers. This marked the prelude to entering the Gold stage, where I would enlist numerous testers to play the game before submitting the final project (see *appendix 5*).

6 Gold (Sprint 7)

Now at the Gold stage, it was time to release the game. In this phase, I focused on optimising settings to ensure the game's compatibility with various hardware configurations. I purchased and imported the last of my assets and updated the player's corpse with a skull. Enhancements were made to the win and lose conditions with the inclusion of the King of the Hill mode.

Three additional respite mechanics were integrated, introducing checkpoints, loading screens acting as a disclaimer at the game's start, and extra player health, transitioning the game from horror to the survival horror genre. Finishing touches involved updates to lighting, UI, and enemy behaviour based on user feedback. Sound effects were added for item collection and the monster, and notes were incorporated to enrich the game's narrative and offer hints about its mechanics. All changes were meticulously documented in GitHub and communicated to my supervisor before our meetings.



Figure 15 - Self 2023. *Seven Nights in Horshaw House [V1.1] Itch.io Page [Online]*

Before I started to work on the press kit, it was crucial to allocate ample time for bug fixing and polishing, given the intricate systems in place. Addressing a particular issue in how the enemy activation was handled, I refined the approach by sending the enemy away and having it return at specific times to avoid script reference loss. To mitigate potential issues with player exploration, level bounds were implemented, resetting the player to the house if they ventured too far.

Seven Nights at Horshaw House version 1.0 was distributed to testers, along with instructions on which respite mechanics to enable or disable. The demo was shared first with my supervisor, followed by my friends, my Falmouth University cohort, and finally, my undergraduate cohort at Solent University.

7 Results of User Testing (Sprint 8)

To gather comprehensive feedback on the game, I requested testers to record their playthroughs, preferably including a face cam for behaviour evaluation. The testing strategy involved providing specific respite mechanics to some testers and assigning different ones to others. This approach aimed to assess the impact of each respite mechanic on emotional and spatio-temporal immersion. However, pinpointing the most effective mechanic proved challenging in tests where multiple mechanics were activated simultaneously.

Surprisingly, most testers preferred keeping the respite mechanics in the game, stating that their removal negatively impacted immersion, making the game excessively difficult. Players frequently exhibited a desire to thoroughly explore the mansion, hinting at a preference for narrative immersion over the challenge-based immersion discussed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in his book, "Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Additional noteworthy points include that, among ten testers, 40% expressed their intent to retain the toggles for the final game release, indicating a level of uncertainty among players regarding the experimental nature of the game (see figure 16). Furthermore, 50% of eight testers noted that the passage of time added suspense to the game (see figure 17). The diverse enjoyment experienced by different testers supports the notion that the game's various mechanics appeal to a wide audience.

From your perspective, would you opt to remove this respite mechanic from the final version?

10 responses

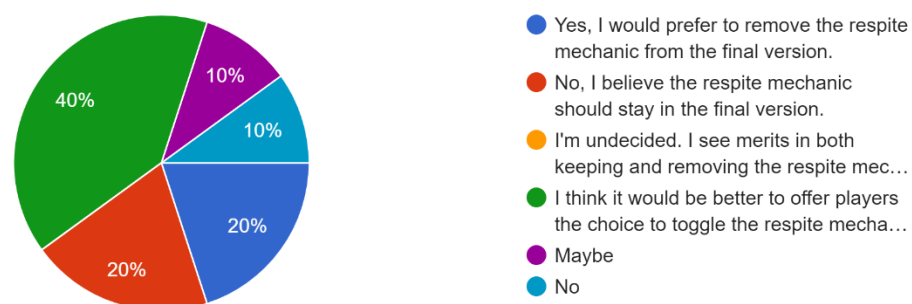


Figure 16 - Self 2023. Seven Nights in Horshaw House [V1.0] Survey Results - Respite Mechanics [Online]

How did the passage of time affect your state of mind?

8 responses



Figure 17 - Self 2023. Seven Nights in Horshaw House [V1.0] Survey Results - Passage of Time [Online]

Additionally, 40% of players from the pool of ten testers found the task of locating all seven skulls challenging (see figure 18), expressing satisfaction when successfully finding one, as indicated by their facial expressions. This valuable feedback played a crucial role in further developing the game. So, how did I go about adjusting the game to achieve a more balanced experience, allowing players to explore the house and face a challenge in finding skulls without making it too easy for them to locate all the skulls on the first day? It necessitated some modifications, as the review of user tester footage revealed that players were overlooking skulls even when they were clearly visible (see appendix 4). I made adjustments, such as reducing the game speed by 40% to allow players to explore the mansion at a more reasonable pace. I also repositioned some skull spawn points to enhance accessibility. The full patch notes are available on the itch.io page (see figure 15 & appendix 2).

How challenging was it to locate all seven skulls?

10 responses



Figure 18 - Self 2023. Seven Nights in Horshaw House [V1.0] Survey Results - Skull Locations [Online]

8 Conclusion

In summary, my initial hypothesis, suggesting that the absence of respite mechanics would enhance immersion, was challenged during user testing, with most testers expressing that their removal detracted from the experience and caused frustration due to the game's design. Nevertheless, the research findings have significant implications for game design and the horror genre. It appears that players are most engaged in a narrative-based spatio-temporal immersion, requiring occasional respite for optimal engagement, while excessive challenge and difficulty can detrimentally impact the overall experience. Considering this, I believe the game and its research would benefit more from a story-driven experience reminiscent of *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* (2010) rather than a game mode such as *King of the Hill*.

Moreover, with additional time, I would have implemented an automatic toggling feature for the respite mechanics based on player performance. For example, if a player regularly encountered difficulties navigating the pause screen because they were being attacked by the monster, I would automatically activate static pausing. This adjustment aimed to prevent frustration and enhance the immersive experience by tailoring the respite mechanics to individual gameplay needs.

Nevertheless, the major project serves as a strong portfolio piece, reflecting my commitment to industry-standard coding with over 130 GitHub commits, establishing a bug-free and robust foundation for future research. Reflecting on this journey, my skills have developed alongside a supportive cohort. Moving forward, I plan to continue working on this project, contributing to new research in this ever-evolving industry.

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Video Games:

- Alien: Isolation (2014)
- Amnesia: The Bunker (2023)
- Amnesia: The Dark Descent (2010)
- Dark Souls (2011)
- Dead Space (2023)
- Elden Ring (2022)
- Five Nights at Freddy's (2014)
- Halo: Combat Evolved (2001)
- Metro: 2033 (2010)
- Resident Evil 2 (2019)
- Slender: The Eight Pages (2012)

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11 Appendices

11.1 Appendix 1: GitHub Repository

The GitHub repository for Seven Nights in Horshaw House can be located here:

<https://github.com/JackSelf97/final-major-project>

11.2 Appendix 2: Itch.io Page

The Itch.io page for Seven Nights in Horshaw House is available here, and you can access it using the password: 777.

<https://selfmadegames.itch.io/seven-nights-in-horshaw-house>

11.3 Appendix 3: Seven Nights in Horshaw House - Project Presentation 2023

https://youtu.be/8Z_2vPNGtjw

11.4 Appendix 4: User Testing Videos

- Seven Nights in Horshaw House [V1.0] User Testing - Kieran Clements
https://youtu.be/UKoFF5_UB38
- Seven Nights in Horshaw House [V1.0] User Testing - Kyle Cornwell
<https://youtu.be/D8PYeHL9da0>
- Seven Nights in Horshaw House [V1.0] User Testing - Oli Self (Part 1)
https://youtu.be/G0vl_tjAyaU
- Seven Nights in Horshaw House [V1.0] User Testing - Oli Self (Part 2)
<https://youtu.be/HtsKQ9YALrc>
- Seven Nights in Horshaw House [V1.1] User Testing - Oli Self (Part 3)
<https://youtu.be/783BldwDDj0>
- Seven Nights in Horshaw House [V1.1] User Testing - Oli Self (Part 4)
<https://youtu.be/E3DkrufZZKc>

11.5 Appendix 5: Survey Results

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1BxXsEK-T0M5NbNdbUA7Kjruvlvg_ivYX-qUwnSF4MHw/edit?usp=sharing

How did the inclusion/exclusion of this respite mechanic make you feel?

10 responses

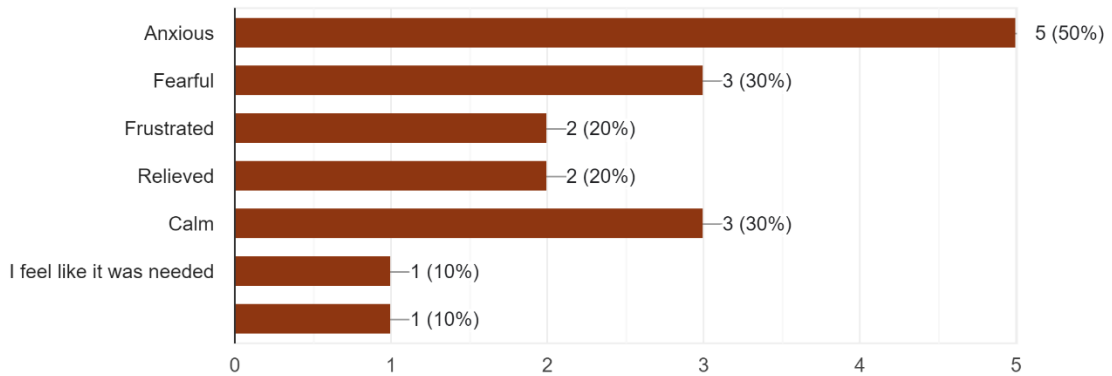


Figure 19 - Self 2023. Seven Nights in Horshaw House [V1.0] Survey Results - Feelings [Online]

Which feature in the prototype brought you the most pleasure or enjoyment?

8 responses

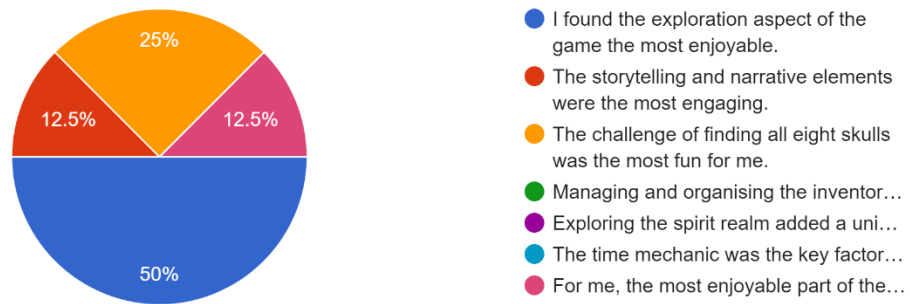


Figure 20 - Self 2023. Seven Nights in Horshaw House [V1.0] Survey Results - Features [Online]

Did you manage to find all seven skulls?

10 responses

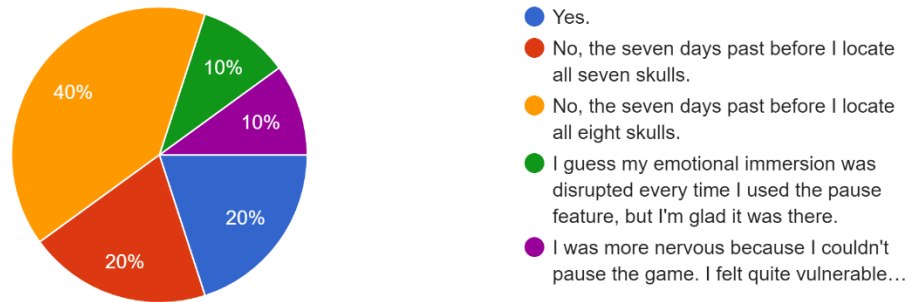


Figure 21 - Self 2023. Seven Nights in Horshaw House [V1.0] Survey Results - Finding all Skulls [Online]

Kindly rate your overall experience, ranging from a sense of frustration to a state of satisfaction.

10 responses

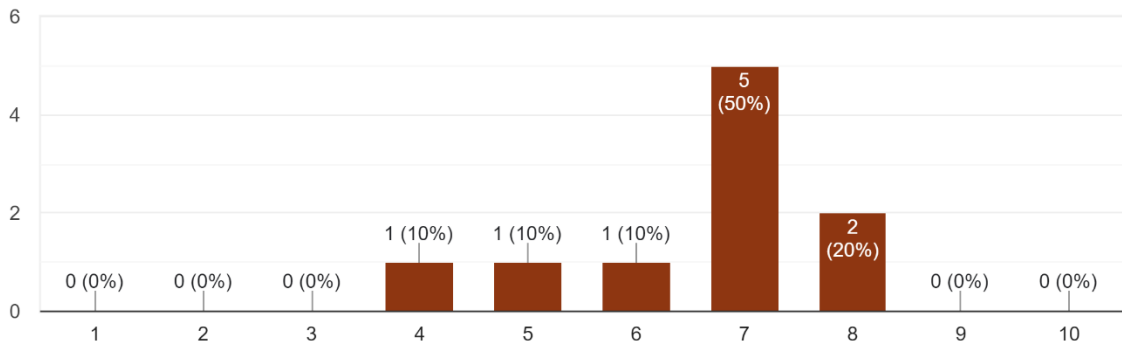


Figure 22 - Self 2023. Seven Nights in Horshaw House [V1.0] Survey Results - Frustration v Satisfaction [Online]

Any additional feedback would be highly valued, including any suggestions you might have or any bugs you came across. (8 anonymous responses)

1. *"While this is early, I would say having more sound would help build the tension, even if it's just the footsteps of the creature wandering around or the ticking of the clock when you get near."*
2. *"Some audio, footsteps, ambient night music would help with the immersion."*
3. *"It was very difficult to find the skulls. I found that even while in the shadow realm you needed to be looking directly at the skulls for you to 'see' them. I feel as though the illumination of the skulls once in the shadow realm should be amplified. Additionally, to this, I found that it was also very difficult to locate the journals. The monster made*

almost no noise when approaching you, and while this added to the sense of fear and anticipation it also made the game feel somewhat heavily stacked against you, especially when having to look very hard for the skulls in all corners of the map. The actual house and grounds, however, were very believable and the textures of the house were impressive. I felt as though the HUD should be a default in the game, and I don't think turning it off aided in any immersion - the HUD, health bar, plus the time, however, were well put together. Overall, it was a good gaming experience and the first few times that the monster chases you it gets the heart rate going. His speed also was maybe a bit too slow. I feel as though the chase was finished with some ease, and you could bypass him altogether by jumping. Enjoyable experience, and for a BETA, I am impressed. I found all 8 skulls after just a couple of days and found myself just standing around waiting for the game to finish. After multiple playthroughs, this made it feel as though the game was more of a 'luck-of-the-draw' type situation than anything skill-based. The story and narrative aspects of the game aided in its immersion; however, if you failed to find all the journals it would be easy to miss out on a lot of that immersion.”

4. *“Finding the skulls was a little frustrating but rewarding when you did. I could only ever find 6 skulls. I thought the game was very well textured with high detail objects. The Monster is easily avoidable as his speed is a little slow, and players can jump over him. However, the monster looked great and gave me a few jump scares. I feel the game could do a better job of storytelling before you enter the game as the journals are even harder to find than the skulls, giving the player no information.”*
5. *“A way to keep track of how many skulls you have, I didn't notice anything like that, at least glancing through the pause menu.”*
6. *“I found the overall experience very interesting and fun. I didn't fully aim to test out the respite mechanics as I wanted to get a feel over the general experience of the game during my playthrough. However, after playing through it, I did feel a lot calmer and safe with adding the HUD to assist in environmental surroundings within the map as the sense of unknown enhanced my fear and anxiety levels throughout the playthrough. The AI mechanics worked to a smooth degree, especially with the ability to follow the player and presumably hearing them through footstep intuition. Another enjoyable aspect was the visuals when entering the ethereal realm when the faceless monster attacks the player. Like being taken away from your physical form and having to return before your soul is condemned. To conclude, without the addition of respite mechanics creates a stronger presence of player fear and adopts a*

paranormal nature. Also, do the skulls spawn in a sequence after each playthrough when recovering one after the other? Notable bugs found during playtest: Sound mechanics when ranging from the grounds to the house, the player can hear the footsteps of the faceless monster from a great distance which could potentially be modified for a further accurate feel in atmos. Still effective but something to consider. UI bug regarding use of pause menu. When pausing to access the settings, time scale seems to cancel out when opening the settings page (not tried all UI pages). Known before as a potential problem with unity game engine but I'm sure an easy adjustment to make. Player & Mouse movement/sensitivity seems to be a bit fast when it comes to inside the house. useful for the outdoor environment and quick getaways from AI but just a suggestion to compare when interacting with items in an efficient player situation. Perhaps the difference between the game engine and the built version causes this. Player skull pickup. When attacked by the AI, player spawn to the house is a useful mechanic, but when collecting the skull and AI is still patrolling within the death area, this can cause potential frustration to continue further progression. Well done on the development so far! Looking forward to seeing the finalised build.”

7. *“The game rarely felt scary to me - although I did get a nasty jump when I opened a door, and the monster was there! I would love to see you build on some atmospheric elements to create a truly terrifying game”.*
8. *“This is a real masterpiece! I could not play long though because it got too scary (my nerves are just not too stable for this). The set is so atmospheric! The birch trees are very beautiful. Tried to leave the area but was returned by the script. The lighting effects and sound are very immersing.”*