

The background image is a digital painting of a long, narrow hallway. The walls are a deep, textured blue. The floor is dark and reflective, showing a bright yellow light source at the far end of the hallway. A figure, possibly a ghost or a person, stands in the distance, illuminated by the yellow light. The overall mood is mysterious and eerie.

P.T.

A VIDEO GAME GHOST STORY

AN UNOFFICIAL INVESTIGATION BY
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By Joel Couture

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For Julia & Ellie

Prologue

“I walked. And then, I saw me walking in front of myself. But it wasn’t really me.”

“Watch out. The gap in the door...It’s a separate reality. The only me is me. Are you sure the only you is you?” (1)

P.T. slithered, innocuous, into existence at Gamescom in August of 2014. Featuring visions of a dark walk, a shadow-bathed man, dim hallways, and a glimpse of an unsettling presence, it offered a promise of fear to those who wished to brave its halls (especially judging from all those people screaming and saying “Oh my God” over and over again in its trailer, right? IT MUST BE SO SCARY).

We couldn’t know how powerful this fearful thing would be when it first appeared. How could we?

P.T., the playable teaser for *Silent Hills*, is the pinnacle of fear – perhaps the most frightening game ever made. This seems like a tall claim for a game where the player marches down the same hallway over and over again, all while only sometimes being dogged by a creepy ghost woman named Lisa as they try to figure out some incredibly complex riddles. It’s one ghost, one hall, and some deliberately bizarre mysteries. It all sounds kind of weak on paper, doesn’t it?

Those who’ve played it know better. Those few who will ever be able to play it, that is. But let’s not get too far ahead of ourselves.

P.T. exudes a powerful atmosphere through its repetition, dragging the player ever deeper into a hallway that becomes more dreadful with every moment spent walking through it. This repetition soon leads the player to see this place for what it is: a nightmare purgatory from which there is no escape, but instead a steady worsening of elements as the halls grow darker, the sounds grow sharper and more unsettling, and the things that mean you harm creep closer and closer, steadily reaching a frightening crescendo where the player is always in lethal danger, but they must press on. Otherwise, all that exists is

more and more halls, the danger never backing down or fading away.

It is a chilling experience, distilling pure horror into an experience that is no less intense for its brevity. A skilled player can beat *P.T.* in less than an hour, but most will take far, far longer as they avoid the dangerous touch of Lisa, or as they try to break down the game's confusing solutions.

This was part of the magic of *P.T.*'s horror. Not only did it place the player in a tangled, frightening environment with a disturbing phantom whose design seemed built to stop the heart on sight, but players would have to rifle around through texts in various languages, notes buried in all manner of places, and decipher clues that made almost no sense without hours of consideration and contemplation. Doing all this while afraid and endangered made *P.T.* absolutely terrifying, reaching points where it could make me sick with anxiety.

Which is exactly what Hideo Kojima, developer of *P.T.* (and who is kinda, sorta famous in games for those Metal Gear whatsits. I'm sure you've never heard of them), was aiming for. "If a game is too scary, people won't play it," says Kojima at a Q&A session at Gamescom 2014. "The one thing in movies or attractions [...] if it gets too scary, just keep your eyes shut and somehow it will be over. But if it's a game, people won't just stop... That's why there's a limit on how scary you can make a game."

"But in this case, we're totally ignoring that. And, you know what, if you don't want to keep playing through the game, so be it. We don't care. That's the game we are aiming for. We're aiming for a game that will make you shit your pants." (2)

Kojima aimed to pull no punches with *P.T.* and *Silent Hills*, looking to make the player ill with fear. It was up to the player to decide if they could possibly endure the atmosphere and events long enough to see them through to the end. And, for many, it was too frightening to stomach.

"*P.T.* was actually WAY too scary for me to personally play. I'm secretly a big baby about first person horror games and jump-scares," says Let's Player/Streamer Voidburger, who, along with BobVids, worked on the Grate Debate series of analyses that studied the symbolism and secrets of *P.T.* and

the *Silent Hill* series. “I have appreciated *P.T.* from afar, and have edited videos about it while keeping the shots of Lisa to a minimum.”

For those that could stomach the game, things were beyond chilling – even those whose entire task was to learn to finish the game as quickly as possible, like *Silent Hill* speedrunner Niall Cormier. “My first playthrough was really careful. The graphical quality was something we hadn't ever seen before. *Silent Hill: Downpour* had only come out a little over two years previous, and other horror games had come out as well, but the crushing atmosphere of *P.T.* was exponentially worse with how good everything looked. It was totally out of nowhere, and the quality only made everything scarier. Even with theories for the final puzzle, I know my first playthrough was at least an hour, maybe two.”

My own experience was of a game that could paralyze me with fear, leaving me snivelling in a digital corner while praying that Lisa would just go away. With the sun down and the lights off, I attempted to walk through those repeating halls, my confidence high from years and years of horror games. I'd learned to shrug off *Fatal Frame*, *Resident Evil*, *Silent Hill*, *Outlast*, *Clock Tower*, *Rule of Rose*, *Kuon*, *Haunting Ground*, *Siren*, *Hell Night*, *Sweet Home*, and just about any other horror game I could put my hands on. If it was scary in any conceivable way and released on a console, I had played it.

This was something beyond all of what I'd played before. This wasn't just something that made me jump every once in a while or that creeped me out in general. This made me sick and fearful and brought my mind to halt. I could not bear to face down what I was dealing with, and the game brought me to my knees within a handful of screens. It was that scary to me, which was completely fascinating.

I had never gotten such a physical reaction from a horror game – a churning of the guts and a paralysis of the mind. I don't know if I'd ever been that scared of anything in my life before, let alone some made-up images on a screen that wasn't actually occurring in any way. Horror was good to get a little jolt of fear, drumming up a powerful feeling of that emotion within a relatively safe environment, but that had been it. It was exciting, but I was safe at home.

But this game was so much more than that. *P.T.* pushed me so much harder, and while I sat in a corner staring at the wall, praying I wouldn't have to look at what was hovering just behind my shoulder, I wanted nothing more than to shut off the game and be free. I could have clicked a few buttons and escaped this crushing fear any time I wanted to.

But could I ever fully get away? For many horror games, the fear fades when the game is off. Hitting those buttons closes that world off, freeing you from it. However, the more powerful experiences, such as *Fatal Frame*, can leave a kind of fearful scar upon the player that they remember when the game is off.

When I played *Fatal Frame* years ago, I started getting the sense that something was coming up behind me during the days I played it. It was awful at night, as even though the bathroom was only across the hall from my room, it made for a tense move across the dark hallway to make it there. There would be moments when the dark corridor yawned wide on either side of me, hiding unseen horrors that lurked, clutching, at someone who wasn't within the light. I could dismiss this logically, but in the background of my mind, I felt it so keenly that I ached. I'd leap across the hall, hands clawing at the light switch in the bathroom to give myself safety.

This feeling persisted until I beat the game, something I remember clearly. I had this sense that the ghosts in the game could feel that I had not finished my task and banished them, and could creep free of the game. I was almost twenty at this time, I'd like to add. Well beyond these kinds of scares. And I was, to an extent, but I could still FEEL that fear, no matter how much my logical mind felt it could dismiss it.

And this was for a game that didn't scare me that bad as I played it – more making me a bit jumpy (although my brother was kind enough to always play it with me).

P.T. brought me back to those days when I looked in my mirror in the bathroom at night. Now in my thirties, I would laugh at myself, forcing the sound to bubble up as I looked down at the sink while washing up in the cloying gloom. I would be laughing, but my eyes refused to rise to look in the mirror, fearful of finding myself staring into the grimy surface and seeing

something standing behind me.

Why would I willingly do this to myself?

Something about this emotion felt important. Something about this experience felt important. Whatever happened, I needed to see this through. Why, though?

P.T. brings up many questions in me through my stubbornness to play it, even when it's making it hard to just go to the stupid bathroom in the night. Why would I willingly subject myself to this? What was it about this particular setup and atmosphere that made me wish to stay and keep playing? What would it tell me about myself and the draw of fear? And why was something so unreal so able to frighten me?

Kojima, working in tandem with director Guillermo Del Toro, actor Norman Reedus, and horror manga artist Junji Ito, was set to create something chilling with *Silent Hills*, but I wonder if it could have ever surpassed what was done in such a short time with *P.T.* While there are many elements here that made for sickening horror, could these have worked in a full-length game? Could players have endured these mysteries and fears for eight hours? Six? Four?

I have my doubts, but after Konami's decision to scour *P.T.* from the PlayStation Store in April of 2015, seemingly on the tail of some extremely bad blood between the publisher and Kojima over a split between the two we would only find out about a while later, we will never know. Konami's decision to cancel *Silent Hills* means we may never have any idea what the game could have become.

Not only this, but now, many wouldn't even be able to see its earliest glimmers with the removal of *P.T.* Without being able to download it any more, this meant that the only copies in existence were already out and about in finite supply for those who'd managed to grab a copy while it was still live. Now, almost four years later, how many hard drives have been wiped, consoles konked out, and accounts tampered with? How many of those copies of *P.T.* still remain? How many will continue to exist in five years? Ten? Twenty?

This piece of horror history is disappearing, taking with it the most chilling experience in interactive fear. It is our history fading away, and yet, somehow, I cannot think of a more fitting end for the game.

For what better end can there be for such a powerful horror experience than to be found, languishing, on some used console in a pawn shop, waiting for some unsuspecting player to find it? Than for people to forget all about it, only to stumble across it like some spectre from a ghost story?

“I bought this old PS4 from a yard sale, and it had this creepy game on it called *P.T....*”

Can you imagine it? Stumbling across this game that no one knows about and with no copies in existence you could ever hope to find? Seeking information only to find a select handful of people still plagued by its horrors? Perhaps with some of them meeting discomfoting ends? It’s the stuff of campfire stories and whispered tales, of the crackling of the fire as someone tells you about this fearful thing you pray isn’t real.

Only *P.T.* is real, isn’t it? Bleeding steadily into reality in its decline, we see a game that redefines horror – one that sends its frightening tendrils into the real world in its own way.

P.T., in its terrifying power and sudden disappearance and death, is a video game ghost story. So, won’t you sit closer and let me talk to you about it for a while? Don’t mind the noises in the night, though. They don’t mean you any harm.

For now.

1.

P.T., when it was unveiled at Gamescom during the Sony press conference in 2014, took much of the world by surprise. Coming right on the heels of a trailer for *Metal Gear Solid V*, it asked if players could solve its riddles, teasing a red-lit corridor, a creature lurking in the dark, and a talking bag of cockroaches. Following this, we were told it was available right as the trailer finished, before moving on to the next part of the conference.

It was fascinating even before its connections to *Silent Hill* became known as well. Shabana Arif, a journalist with works on IGN, VG247, and GamesRadar+, and who would be the first person to complete *P.T.* on stream (where she is known as Soapy Warpig), recalls this period and what drew her to the mysterious title when it was first revealed.

“I was watching the Gamescom stream in the summer of 2014 when Hideo Kojima, creator of the *Metal Gear* series, took to the stage to talk about *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* during the Sony press conference. Immediately after the showcase of the new cardboard box designs - with swimsuit models plastered across them, acting as decoys for sex-starved soldiers in Afghanistan - the screen faded to black,” says Arif.

“‘7780s Studios’ flashed up next, asking if players could ‘decipher the enigma’ of the ‘world’s first Interactive Teaser.’ Sony’s Jim Ryan walked out on stage after a short montage of reactions from gamers who had played the teaser, their contorted faces bathed in the green hue of a night vision camera, accompanied by screams that would have the police knocking down the door down in any other context. This was apparently what we were in store for, should we decide to play.”

“‘*P.T.* is a new title from a new studio, and the exclusive interactive teaser is live right now on PS Store. Check it out,’ he said, before quickly moving on. And that was it. I was immediately intrigued,” she continues.

“From a visual standpoint, the trailer looked fantastic, and while I’m not particularly fond of horror - a commentary on my constitution rather than any

perceived failings of the genre - I booted up my PlayStation 4 and put it on to download. I tend not to put much stock in 'reaction reels' - perhaps because my British sensibilities find them to be somewhat boorish and contrived - so I wasn't put off. The penchant for cheering, screaming, whooping, and hollering in theaters and the like, remains a cultural vestige of the U.S. that we don't generally indulge in on this side of the Atlantic."

Despite the ridiculous "reaction reels", Arif would set herself up to stream what would be one of the most terrifying pieces of media ever made.

"The decision to stream the playthrough was an impromptu one. I don't consider myself to be a streamer, dabbling only when I have the time, but I thought it would be fun, and there was no pressure to perform or entertain, as my channel had a handful of followers, and that isn't my cup of tea anyway. I wasn't expecting an audience of more than one or two people, if that."

She, like many, would soon feel the power of *P.T.*'s seemingly-innocuous hallway, and the frights it would contain as reality began to unwind within it. "The most standout memory for me has to be Kojima Productions' Fox Engine, first and foremost. Stepping into that now infamous corridor, the photorealism of what is a fairly humdrum, mundane setting was simply stunning."

"As for the gameplay itself, I recall the intense crests of fear and maddening troughs of frustration, as the unsettling backdrop of the seemingly infinite corridor offered up its secrets, one after another. That pricking feeling on the back of your neck, the sense that something is lurking, just out of sight, was captured perfectly in that innocuous hallway," says Arif.

P.T., around its ending point, seems to reset back to its startup state (with some subtle changes many could be forgiven for not noticing). After navigating its horrors for the first time, Arif found herself back at this opening corridor, feeling that the game was done. Online murmurings hinted that there was more to find, though, pushing her back into the corridor and the thing that lurked within it.

"Initially, I thought I'd finished at the end of my first stream," says Arif. "But there were murmurings on social media that the teaser held further secrets -

some even (rightly) predicting that it was a *Silent Hill* game - so after topping up my energy levels with a generous slice of chocolate cake, and mustering the ragged remnants of my courage, I went back for another run, to try to unlock the rest.”

This would have her facing down some truly devious puzzles and riddles, many of which form the backbone of the game’s terrifying power, and hint at a story of a mind coming undone. “Each puzzle required a number of steps performed in a certain order. Player agency was somewhat limited and having the character repeat a seemingly infinite cycle, performing a series of subtle actions - that were limited to simply looking at things for the most part - created a sense of growing madness within the narrative; his obsessive, compulsive behaviours manifesting the changes in the environment around him.”

As one of the first people to complete the game live, Arif found this to be a bit of a surreal experience, solving some aspects by accident, the world opening up to her for seemingly no reason, even as its horrors grew stronger. “I can’t say that I knew what I was doing every step of the way. There was a lot of bumbling around, and I’m sure I inadvertently solved a number of the puzzles through sheer fluke. It was made all the more difficult by the pervasive sense of dread that saturated the moments between them.”

“It’s a strange thing, to be equal parts exasperated and terrified, and I think gaming is one of the few activities during which you can experience such a whirlwind of emotions simultaneously,” she says, touching upon another important aspect of how *P.T.* sows fear, panic, and paranoia.

Still, Arif powered on ahead, facing down those difficult, almost maddening puzzles with a little help from the handful of viewers who’d tuned into her stream. “I can’t take all of the credit for cracking the enigma of *P.T.*, although I had enough of a handle on the last puzzle to be able to recreate the series of events with each run through the corridor during that final phase.”

“There were three viewers watching the stream and two of them - ithurststopoop and pheonixeye - became more engaged as we came tantalizingly close to solving what, unbeknownst to us, was the final puzzle. We knew we had to trigger something, and ithurststopoop suggested

investigating the phone again - which I'd already been poking around by - but I headed back over nevertheless, aware that the nature of some of the solutions weren't immediately obvious or straightforward. The thing about video games is that, most of the time, everything that's going wrong or not working out is, generally, your own fault. Something that doubles as a valuable life lesson to boot!" says Arif.

We wouldn't know what would solve the puzzle at this point, though. Through determination and a little bit of luck and a lot a bit of courage, Arif managed to complete the game, finding out a secret that would draw players to the game in droves. "I knew we were on the cusp of solving that particular riddle, teetering on the brink, with the climax just out of reach. When we triggered the last piece of the puzzle - clearly by dumb luck if you go back and watch the stream - I was ecstatic, and felt reinvigorated, ready to take on the next seemingly impossible challenge."

"I walked through the door at the end of the corridor and the screen turned to black. Never have I been so excited at the absence of...anything. And the rest is history. Cue a series of shrill squeals and expletives as Hideo Kojima's name popped up on the screen, followed by Guillermo Del Toro's, and finally, Norman Reedus'."

"*P.T.* was a teaser for *Silent Hills*," says Arif.

When word got out about what it was, it caught the attention of many players with its mystery and ability to terrify, as well as its connections to an all-new *Silent Hill*.

"I don't recall *P.T.* being especially on my radar until my boyfriend turned to me with the news of 'Hey, honey. That *P.T.* thing.... apparently it's actually a *Silent Hill* game and Kojima is making it,' and I went through a very fast cycle of denial, excitement, confusion, and skepticism that went sorta like: 'Hahaha what really?'" says Voidburger.

"OH MY GOD of course Kojima is making it... OF COURSE!" Voidburger continues. "This makes total sense. Oh wow, maybe Konami will let him do what he wants, but why would they do that now, and with *Silent Hill* of all things?" Which was immediately followed up with 'What if it still sucks

though? It IS still Konami, who have faithfully mishandled this franchise for about 10 years.' Then I got sad that being a *Silent Hill* fan has trained me to go through this process within a few sentences instead of over the course of a whole dev cycle, like *Sonic* fans usually do."

BobVids, the other half of The Grate Debate duo, and the person who finally cracked *P.T.*'s greatest mystery in a reliable way, was also drawn to the game a little bit after its appearance. "I'm a huge fan of horror games and the *Silent Hill* series, so when I heard there was a mysterious teaser for the next *Silent Hill* game and that Hideo Kojima and Guillermo del Toro were involved, I had to play it. Ran out and bought a PS4 to play *P.T.* the day after the game was released."

"Before *P.T.* came out, there were rumors that a new *Silent Hill* game was on its way with Hideo Kojima at the helm, which led to a bit of a rift in the *SH* community. Some were absolutely thrilled about the possibility, pointing out that the series had been languishing for some time with mediocre titles and Kojima would bring a fresh perspective as well as additional funding from Konami. Other fans thought this was unlikely - the mediocre titles previously mentioned had made them jaded and convinced that Konami didn't care about the series enough to bring in their top talent," he continues.

"I was part of the optimistic group of fans that anticipated Kojima helming a main *SH* title. Not only were the rumors at the time believable - Kojima himself said in 2012 that the president of Konami asked him to make the next *Silent Hill* title - but the series seemed perfect for his subversive brand of puzzles and narrative seen in the *Metal Gear* series. After all, a strong story and intriguing puzzles are core to what make a good *Silent Hill* game."

The quote BobVids is referring to comes from a Eurogamer Expo developer session, in which Kojima says the following:

"In the past I've mentioned *Silent Hill* in interviews, and as a result of that the president of Konami rung me up and said he'd like me to make the next *Silent Hill*..."

"Honestly, I'm kind of a scaredy-cat when it comes to horror movies, so I'm not confident I can do it. At the same time, there's a certain type of horror that

only people who are scared can create, so maybe it's something I can do.”

"That said, I think *Silent Hill* has a certain atmosphere. I think it has to continue, and I'd love to help it continue, and if I can help by supervising or lending the technology of the Fox Engine, then I'd love to participate in that respect." (3)

BobVids goes on: “I wasn't aware of *P.T.* when it was released on August 12, 2014 at Gamescom. After Soapy Warpig managed to finish the game for the first time that same day and discovered the teaser for *Silent Hills*, the *SH* community blew up. That's when I took notice.”

The Grate Debate team wasn't the only crew that became aware of the game when its connections to *Silent Hill* were revealed. The speedrunning community, and specifically UfoTekkie, a runner known for doing many fun, yet also blazing fast runs at various *Silent Hill* games, quickly took notice of the new title that would connect to a favored franchise, even if the PS4 was so new that he had to borrow one just to play the game.

“This was all the way back in August 2014 - the *Silent Hill* speedrun leaderboards were still just a Google spreadsheet with a handful of runners. There wasn't really much of a spring to action from the small community we had back then. It had been a little over a year since the PS4 was released, but I don't remember any active runners of other *Silent Hill* games owning one. I had to borrow my roommate's PS4 to get some recordings done, and I think I only had two sessions before I gave up on hijacking his equipment over and over.”

UfoTekkie ran into more than just the wall of not owning a console, though, although he did manage to get through it via a helpful accident. “My best time after those sessions was a little over 20 minutes. About half of that is getting through the first section - that includes everything up through the segment where the game glitches out and respawns you back in the original room, setting up the final puzzle. This was three days after the game's release, so the rumors about certain sounds or words triggering the final puzzle solution had gone around. I responded to something in chat with ‘Dude, what?’ and the laugh triggered. I finished that up and tried a few more playthroughs, but nothing happened faster than that 20 minute run.”

These would be followed, over the years, with some quicker runs that took the game in different directions. “Things were pretty dormant in the *Silent Hill* community for *P.T.* after that – a few runs were picked up from Youtube, but not a lot was definitively learned. Runs under 12 minutes sprung up fairly quickly, since all you needed was a quick final puzzle. A few ideas were tossed around, like the foundation that would eventually lead to the current door glitch method, but not much changed until Plywood (the current world record holder for *P.T.*) picked it up about a year ago and started focusing his effort. Naturally he'll have much more to say about that but finding a relatively consistent final puzzle solution was the biggest hurdle, and the door glitch found fairly recently brought the time down significantly as well,” UfoTekkie continues.

Excitement quickly grew around the mysterious title all over the world, with players diving into its frightening environments. I, too, hopped on board around this time, excited at the prospect of a new *Silent Hill* game (I love them all, in their own ways), but also at the idea of this strange, viciously-difficult horror game. Little did I know that, even when armed with a walkthrough, I would still find myself trapped in the endless darkness with a spirit who could frighten me hard enough to make my chest hurt, my fingers stinging from gripping the controller so tightly.

2.

“The feeling of gameplay in a single hallway, the concept, the visuals, the controls, the story hints, the map, the sound, the directions, all those are important to the overall game.” – Hideo Kojima

P.T.’s L-shaped hallway, like the quote above, has to carry a great deal of the game. It’s the only location, save for that tiny, square room at the beginning and a discomfortingly scuzzy bathroom, that the player will be travelling to throughout the course of the game. It will shift and distort in various ways, but overall, this is our home for the next little while. So, let’s take a walk down it.

We begin with a gray, concrete room, with twitching antennae flicking just within our sight. A pair of mating cockroaches move past into the player’s line of sight, and the dark door before them clicks open a crack. The player’s vision fogs with a pair of clicking noises as the character rises, a single, leather coat-clad sleeve moving into view.

If the player leaves the controller alone, they can see that their character is not quite steady on their feet, the screen wobbling ever so slightly. This happens whenever the player is standing still, keeping up a constant, almost stumbling movement.

If they take a moment to look around the gray room, they’ll find a table in the corner, but it’s too dark to see if there is anything on it at this point. There are scratched lines all along the walls, though, like a prisoner keeping track of the days, weeks, months, or years of their sentence. A fluorescent bulb, dirty at the edges, shines above the door. *P.T.* is asking you to move forward. And what else can we do?

We move from here to the hallway, taking uncertain, almost-stumbling steps out into it. It’s an ordinary place. Well-lit – almost painfully so by one extremely bright light on the left wall. Another light, further up the hall near an alcove on the right, has burnt out. A beautiful, reflective hardwood floor provides a resonant thump with each of the player’s steps. It’s scuffed from

what may be years of footfalls, the finish chipped.

The walls are cracked from age and bubbled from poorly-applied paint. Dirt and gouges are spread all along the walls and ceiling. It feels dirty, but more from a family too busy to clean up after the bumps and knocks of everyday life than from some sort of abandonment or squalor. It feels lived in. Ordinary.

Paintings line the hallway. These grayscale images are covered in filth, though, and are foggy and faded. What appears to be a valley is on the right, a house behind a tree on the left. A city street, or perhaps the inside of the pub is colored in filthy black and gray further up on the right, while a single tree is on the wall on the left.

From here, we come to the first hints that something may be off – our first moment of uncertainty. The bulb on the left beyond the paintings is out. The one before it is not, and there is a light on the ceiling, further up the hall, that is on. It doesn't seem like a significant event, but it does give the sense that something is off in this tiny place. It's also the first spot in the hallway that has something the player cannot immediately see. It's the first unknown in this hallway – the first place where something may be wrong and we would not know it.

Until this point, the hall has been a straight shot with a clear line of sight. If something odd were to happen, the player would see it in the light. Not only this, but the hallway is long, giving the player a great deal of time to react to anything that would happen. It's something we know just from a glance, and this long hall, therefore, provides comfort in knowing what we could do.

Although, if we take a look back at the door that we walked through to get in here and notice that it has closed, our confidence may waiver. Doubly so if we push up against it, feeling the controller vibrate as the door clunks, making it very clear that we're locked inside. The pile of empty liquor bottles may also give a sense of something being off (or that this is a college rental, which might make a lot of stuff make even more sense).

So, we have no choice but to move forward to that little alcove on the right. The one shrouded in darkness, and presenting a blind turn to the player. As of

this moment, anything can be there. It could lead down an entirely new hallway. A creature could be lurking within it. Some items or characters or pictures or anything could be within it. We have no idea right now.

While someone who knew the game was a horror title would be unsettled by this dark spot in the hall, assuming you went into this game blind, you would likely still be feeling something isn't right. The silence in the halls is eerie, like the kind you hear when all alone in your house with nothing but your footsteps. It's the kind of quiet that tells you that no one is anywhere near you. No one is coming to help you if something goes wrong. Not that you expect anything will, but that sense of being all alone dredges up that fear, doesn't it? That irrational stuff that rattles around the back of your mind when things are all too quiet.

We also have the title card to hint at something being wrong, as well. *P.T.*'s (sort of) title screen shows a single, grave-like stone standing in a wooded area, white paint dashing the letters P and T on it. It's off-center, drawing the eye to the corner of the image, which creates this strange effect from the very start. It's unusual to position a game's title card there, rather than dead center. Not that there aren't many games that do this, but it's normally to get the title away from some key art that they want the player to look at. This is just empty woods, though, and there is this sense of discomfort from turning away from them to look at something on the side.

This may be reaching. Still, having one's back turned to the woods, all alone, can create a certain discomfort.

The stone does look like a grave, though. And graves are SPOOKY! Especially an unmarked one with paint on it. It screams horror – clumsy horror, honestly – and that there will be things in the game that are meant to terrify us. Its rectangular shape is unmistakable. The dead are going to be brought up in this game, so we had best watch out!

That card is more than enough to set a certain state of mind, and even if it hadn't, the foggy paintings, weird rooms, and deafening silence carry the player into a mindset that something is wrong, even if it's only a notion that's tapping at their subconscious mind. It's building discomfort, especially in us modern folks who are used to our noise. Pure silence, at least to me, feels

fairly disquieting.

Still, you wanna play the demo, right? Besides, horror games tend to pace themselves out. Let the player get a little sense of atmosphere first. They're not gonna jump you at the very first corner. So, you step forward, confident, but maybe just a little uncomfortable.

Beer cans, more bottles, a dying potted plant, some shredded papers (or is it pictures?), books, and a small cabinet with a clock radio on it. It's 23:59, because of course it is. It's not exactly a surprise, and if you'd been aware of that niggling fear, you're likely chastising yourself, here. Stupid. It's just a bunch of junk.

But that time, though. SPOOKY.

More unsettling, honestly, are the pictures on the wall, here. The dark makes it hard to see, but there appears to be a picture of an open field lit by street lights, and a moon coming through the trees (or it could be the sun, as the lack of light makes it difficult to see).

Another picture is on the left, although this is more abstract. It's a hoop with a dot in it, as well as some black blotches alongside it on the right. Any attempt to say what it is would likely say more about me than what the picture actually is, feeling more like a Rorschach test than anything else. Most of these pictures feel the same way, to be honest, with their indistinct details and hazy imagery. This one just clarifies that. Plus, it's just a strange thing to have hung up on the wall.

Finally, there's a picture hanging here, but someone has torn the face out of it. A pearl necklace hangs from the headless body, and the following words have been written on it.

"My voice, can you hear it? This sign, can you read it? I'll wait forever if you'll just come to me."

It's a strange thing to have written on a picture, yet seems kind of pretty. It's something that could be written by a loved one, but it's also just a hair strange, isn't it? In this quiet place, and on a picture that's been torn up, it just

doesn't feel comfortable.

While we've been here, the time has not changed, either. It's a small thing, like all of the other elements here, but it makes the place feel not quite right. We're still just toying with the subconscious mind, though. Hinting at a distortion in reality. There's nothing overt to be afraid of, yet.

A stained forest picture on the left, the sun over the mountains on the right, and what could be clouds on the left. The frames are scratched, paint flecked. My character still wobbles back and forth, all of those empty bottles seeming to imply a less-than-sober protagonist. On the right, the sun over water.

A bright, circular light dangles down from above. A lamp glows on the chest of drawers on the left. A corridor, dark, shoots off to the right. We have conflicting feelings, here. The bright light creates a sense of curiosity, implying there's something worth looking at, here. There's also a ton of objects on top of the drawers, and anyone who's played games for any period of time is likely thinking there's some items of interest there. Something in that pile of pictures and unclear objects is probably useful!

But to look at those means turning our back on that dark hallway to our right. It creates a conflict in the player, as there looks to be a reward to our left – some sort of goody that will make us stronger or increase our chances of winning the game. It creates the tiniest bit of stress to put that instinct aside and check to the right to make sure everything is safe. It may not consciously affect us, but there is already a sense that the game is luring us into a trap with this setup. Something wants us to look left, first, leaving us open to whatever is coming from the right.

We're too clever, though, aren't we? So we round the corner and sneak a peek right into the unknown beyond. This perceived reward, in a sense, has gotten us to step into that unknown a little too quickly, though. The need to get our new trinket has made us blunder forward a little too hurriedly into the dark hall, possibly wandering into something dangerous, and while we aren't punished for it here, it does still manage to trip us up, or at least tries to.

And there is no way out of here without avoiding at least a small stressor.

Looking to the right reveals an ordinary hallway yet again, though, with a door open into a dark room far down the hall. Another alcove is off to the left. A light sways above this part of the hall, and something about that quiet movement feels upsetting, to a small extent. That movement implies that something has set it to moving, be it wind or something brushing it as it passes by. There's no sound of wind or movement, though, again dialing up that background sense of something being wrong. Still, nothing is currently devouring our face, so we can finally turn back to examine our rewards.

The lamplight illuminates a picture of flowers, a golden frame surrounding the colorful (for this place) picture. Below it is a set of branches in the moonlight, their details sharp. A picture of foggy woods lies to its left.

There's no goodies on the desk, sadly, but there is a lot to look over. Four pictures of various people are on the desk. A serious-looking man stares back at the player, his haircut, fashion, and the black and white style implying the picture is old. On the far right this same man is looking at a blonde woman in a pearl necklace (perhaps the same person from the torn picture down the hall). Between them is a picture of a man with a beard in a library, and two people sitting down at a table together. Their details and features make it unclear if it's the same people or other family members.

The pictures aren't all that are there. An open candy bar, small chocolate Easter eggs (Miracle Chocolate, they're called), and what may be nuts or bonbons are lying among reams of pills. There are dozens of them in push cases, lying in piles all over the cabinet. They, combined with the open bottles and beer cans, hint at substance abuse, or, at minimum, that someone who lives here has been allowing it to fall into squalor.

The phone is also off the hook, and a camera is sitting behind the righthand picture. It's all quite odd, and again, works to dial up that sense that things are not all right. Also, for those who are paying far too close attention to these items, light effects from the game may be flickering on and off, or the focus will blur in and out, giving more frightened players some unintended starts.

For those who are expecting a horror game, after all, they're expecting a monster to show up. Some hint that danger is close. That can be a musical

cue or a visual one, but at its simplest, a monster appearing will cause the game to change in some way, and since players are far too early in the game, they may have no clue what that change will be. So, that change can be just about anything, adding frightening meaning to any and every change in the environment.

The drawers don't seem to hold any secrets for us, sadly, and now, it has come time to turn around. Having one's back to so much of the game world will load this moment with its own terror as well, as we have not been keeping an eye on things to make sure we're still safe. If something had changed while our back was turned, we wouldn't know it. So, we're now presented with a very uncomfortable possibility that anything could be lurking behind our back (*Layers of Fear*, another excellent horror title, uses this trick often).

So we turn. Turning speed is another item of note in this game, as the character turns somewhat slowly. It forces the player to really drink in what they're looking at, and if they suspect something is behind them, there's an almost interminable wait involved in checking to see if there is. It's only a wait of a few seconds, but each millisecond longer than instantaneous feels like a lifetime. Something is there, creeping up behind you, but all you can do is slowly turn to face it.

More hallway meets us, a single light swaying to draw our eyes. If players haven't been taking a ton of time to examine all of this stuff as I've been, they're likely to be catching (or have already been enticed ahead by) the sounds of a radio news announcer speaking about a rather chilling case.

"The brutal killing took place while the family was gathered at home on a Sunday afternoon. The day of the crime, the father went to the trunk of his car, retrieved the rifle, and shot his wife as she was cleaning up the kitchen after lunch. When his ten-year-old son came to investigate the commotion, the father shot him, too. His six-year-old daughter had the good sense to hide in the bathroom, but reports suggest he lured her out by telling her it was just a game. The girl was found shot once in the chest from point-blank range. The mother, who he shot in the stomach, was pregnant at the time."

"Police arriving on-scene after neighbors called 911 found the father in his

car, listening to the radio. Several days before the murders, neighbors say they heard the father repeating a sequence of numbers in a loud voice. They said it was like he was chanting some strange spell.”

“There was another family shot to death in the same state last month, and in December last year, a man used a rifle and meat cleaver to murder his entire family. In each case, the perpetrators were fathers. State police say this string of domestic homicides appears unrelated, though it could be part of a larger trend, such as employment, childcare, and other social issues facing the average family.”

Cheery. Again, if you’re still somehow feeling comfortable in these empty halls, this case may just put some uncomfortable ideas in your head. The father was still alive, listening to the radio, at the end of that case. Kind of like you’re doing now. But you haven’t killed anyone yet, have you? Still, the idea of him just sitting in the car with the radio on, blood pooling on his kitchen floor from his fallen children and wife, chills.

It’s an unsettling image to be carrying around in an empty house, and for those who’ve played games to any extent, you also know that very few things go into them with no purpose. A developer is unlikely to have just stuck that message in the game if it wasn’t foreshadowing something. That’s one of the funny parts of horror games – developers can use a player’s expectations of games against them. This isn’t just some idle radio program, but a hint at what’s to come.

Still, we don’t know what that is yet. We’ve still got some hallway to comb through.

Assuming the lights and radio program haven’t convinced you to pick up the pace despite your trepidations, you’ll be rounding the corner to sound of rain pattering against a nearby window. You can watch as the droplets splatter against the glass, drawing a bit of peace from the natural sound of it all. However, this calming sound also helps draw the player into the reality of the location, making it feel, once more, like your own home. It’s so ordinary that it makes this unreal place feel more normalized and real, steadily drawing the player’s mind into accepting that what happens here IS real.

There's another sound that's far louder than the rain, though, which is impossible to miss once the radio broadcast is done. The swinging light down the hall (the only source of illumination there) is making a loud squeaking sound as it moves back and forth. It's a high-pitched creaking sound, and while the mind wants to connect it with that swinging light, doesn't it sound just a little bit like something whining or crying? An animal, perhaps?

Like the paintings previously seen, the sound is open to interpretation to an extent, even if we largely feel that we know what it's supposed to be. A swinging light + a creaking sound = perfectly normal thing. It's just the swinging light. However, there's still a part of the mind that's wrapped up in dark corners and substance abuse and child murders and the fear of being all alone. That part is reading a bit more into that sound, wondering if we're making a mistake in our interpretation of things. What if it IS something whining in the dark?

On the right-hand wall, there are images of empty fields and what may be a fire or just light. They're odd choices, but a door nearby is far more interesting to us. Pushing up against it sends a vibration through the controller, the door thumping against us as we try to blunder through it. Locked. Another painting of trees is on the right wall, which we pass beside as we move before two more open windows.

Another alcove awaits us, from a distance it looks to be on either side. The radio, in all likelihood, has us moving forward at this point, looking for the source of the voice. The distorted sound suddenly makes far more sense as players begin to see an old radio on the right side on some drawers (even if the creaking light above still doesn't feel quite right). There's still the doorway down the hall, but things are quite dark down there. No need to rush that way.

A plant, a radio emitting a dim red light, keys, cigarette butts, more candy wrappers, and beer cans. Also, a banana peel (NOW we're worried about eating healthy?). A picture of some faraway shore peeking out of a misty fog. A lamp, unlit, sits behind a picture of a smiling couple, the blonde woman holding a bouquet. It seems like a wedding photo, judging from the smiles, clothes, and flowers. They look happy – far moreso than the picture of that same couple from the other table. If you sat here listening to the radio

announcement while looking at it, you may wonder, though.

There's nothing to interact with here, though, leaving us with the doorway behind us. A picture of leaves is to our left, a rare color picture of a stream is to the right. Two coats hang from a coathanger by the door, which is also locked. Turning back leaves us with that dark, dark hallway before us. The one that doesn't have any light emerging.

A painting of shapes is on the left, birds flying together on the right as players muster the courage to go down into the basement-like environs that are left to them. It's the only route still open, with players passing more empty bottles on the way down. There is a small light down there – a single bulb illuminating the only door remaining.

So we move against it, maybe expecting it to open, maybe expecting that same impotent thump. Either way, it opens, and we move through, the door closing behind us with a click.

This...looks familiar.

3.

P.T. begins by tricking the mind into feeling a hint of familiarity in its environments, breaking down the barrier between the player and the game. Once it starts to feel like a familiar place, the game can then take its next step – eroding feelings of safety in that reality.

This begins with the fact that the hallway loops back on itself once the player walks all the way through the hall, past the bathroom and radio, down the stairs, and through the basement door, leading the player back out into a place that looks pretty much exactly like where they started (minus the gray square room they begin in should they reload or die).

The first time the hallway loops in *P.T.*, the player is likely a little bit thrown off. It's kind of unusual to go through a door in a video game and have it lead to a place you had been to before, resulting in a bit of confusion for a few moments. This is something I worked to dispel by wandering around the environment to see what had changed. It's not like it would just spit me out in the same hallway again, would it? Something was new.

In moments, this made me highly vigilant towards anything that would be different in the game, and also very interested in the details of the environment around me. From a purely video game stance, it seemed unlikely that I would just walk through the same area twice. Everything within a game is purposeful, after all, as Kojima himself has stated, so why would a developer purposely put me through the same thing twice? Again, something had to be new.

This can do a number of things to most players. In some instances, the player will assume that since the first bit of hallway looks exactly the same, the rest must be all the same, too. No need to examine anything, as this loop is just going to be a repeat of what they saw before. Therefore, they can just breeze through it without paying all that much attention. Something likely was different, but the developers would probably make it perfectly clear, so no need to pay attention to fine detail.

Another camp may also wonder at what had changed so subtly that they didn't notice. The developers wouldn't just send you through the same dumb hall again, would they? SOMETHING was new. This meant poring over every little bit of floor and photo in order to see what had changed, making the player focus on everything in great detail.

Both of these are desirable outcomes for *P.T.*'s next trick. Whether the player is so intensely focused on objects or if they're ignoring them altogether, instead homing in on the door to the next loop, they're not really paying direct attention to whether there is danger around them. Both of these players are trapped in a mindset that has taken their thoughts off of the potential spooky thing (remember the GRAVE?) that exists within this world.

The radio is likely a distant memory because of the confusion around being looped into the same place, but its words are still rattling around in our minds. We still remember the family that got shot, pregnant mother and children slaughtered by a man calling out numbers like a mantra. We're nervous, perhaps, but more puzzled by the loop at the moment. Maybe we're a little perplexed that it's not playing at the moment, but it's not that big of a change. It has, after all, conveyed the bit of background story or spooky narrative it already needed to tell. Having it repeat here would be kind of annoying.

But that does mean that something is different this time, and maybe that's it.

Also worth noting is that the light is swaying above the player, making a loud, metallic creak with every movement. It's a strange sound, the sort of thing that almost sounds like a wounded animal whining somewhere out of sight. That could just be an overactive imagination, though, as we can see the lamp swinging around. That has to be it. Still, it sows just the tiniest seed of doubt. Also, was it swaying the last time we were through?

No matter what, though, we're not entirely paying attention to the danger as we plod ahead or find ourselves staring into the pictures, looking for differences. The radio is a minor one, hardly enough to draw our attention with its lack of presence (which wouldn't be as captivating as something new occurring), so we're not quite focused on the danger of the moment. Our minds are elsewhere.

By this point, we've likely seen that the door at the end of the hall is closed. This is the major change we've been looking for, hinting that we are making progress in some sort of way, but also reminding the player that things aren't quite right, here. Before, there was a means to escape when the radio was talking about its creepy events, making the empty halls feel just a little bit more menacing with their speech on murdered families. That was creepy back when we could leave, though, and now we cannot even do that.

The repeating loop makes us hyperaware of this one change, either by ignoring all elements while pushing to the changed item, or by taking a deep look at everything until, suddenly, our answer is staring us down. It creates a momentary sensation of being trapped – caught here in this world where someone has killed their family. It's a moment of discomfort at what it could mean, but there is still hope within the player at this time. The door might open when we push into it. After all, the door at the bottom of the basement stairs wasn't locked when we pressed into it, even though most other closed doors wouldn't. It may still open. We're afraid that the closed door means we're caught, but there is still a hope that allows us to move forward.

This is when the next change makes its appearance, with a pair of cockroaches dropping down before the player. These will give players, previously focused on the door ahead, a small start, leaving some wondering if they saw something or if it was a trick of the eyes. It's a neat moment, as it gives the player a temporary sensation of being unsure of their senses in here. It's so small that it could have been something flitting by the screen, but happens when the player is so drawn to the door that it's probably just enough to startle them. It was enough to make me twinge and doubt.

If the player can pull themselves away from the lure of the way out (which is locked anyway, forcing them to follow our next small change in the environment) and follow the cockroaches, they will scuttle back the way the player came from. With a locked door behind them and no place to go, what else is there to do?

If the player is focused on the roaches, they won't be all that prepared for the loud bang that comes from the side door, something hitting it so hard the door rattles in its frame. A rhythmic banging will occur a few times before coming to a halt, the roaches continuing their path past the door. Now, we're trapped

just beyond the door, with another locked door at our back.

It seems likely that something will grab us the moment we step past it, which is a far cry from moments before when the player's only concern was about what had changed in the environment. That sensation of being trapped is much, much stronger than it was back then, as we are literally caught up with no other route to take besides right past a door that was barely containing an angry being. Something was hitting that door, and we now have to walk past it so very, very closely.

We've come a long way from our ordinary hallway, haven't we? What was once familiar and almost comforting is now foreboding and dreadful, and from little more than a closed door, a pair of insects, and some banging around. A little courage will get the player past this moment in the game, with a few more jarring bangs at very specific times startling the player some more, but none of this is a ghostly spectre coming lunging out to grab the player. We only have the hint that something might be inside the hallway with us and that's it.

P.T. has taken efforts to create a hallway that feels ordinary to the player, and through the next step, erode that sense of normalcy. Things are still entirely natural – there's no reason someone couldn't just start banging on your bathroom door in the night, after all – but they're beginning to take on a form of menace. The radio program, the noises, and the hall are all taking on a sense of dread, but there is nothing supernatural about it all. It's still something that could happen in your own house. And some of this place is starting to look an awful lot like home.

The rasping laughter that comes if players hesitate by this door is, while extremely discomfiting, not far beyond the realm of reality, either. That's reaching a bit, but this mixture of pained moans and laughing, however creepy, still isn't an impossibility for reality. That person would likely be pretty odd, but it's still not impossible.

These small beats steadily erode that sense of safety the player could feel in this place. After taking several steps to make the player feel like this was a familiar place they could feel some comfort in, the game starts to chisel away at bits of that sensation, doing so through a small change in the environment,

a bang, a creak, or a laugh. This dials up the dread the player feels without immediately taking them out of the atmosphere that's been created. This is all still within the possibility of reality, even if it's starting to push that limit a little hard. It's all still able to be real, and with the legwork done to make the player accept this reality in the previous loop, it feels all the more chilling.

Further loops will continue this erosion of safety, with the next loop seemingly innocent enough until the players get to watch the door to the basement close, only to turn back to see the side door that had been banging about in the last loop start to swing open. The dimmed lights of the loop after that, followed by a quick, but bone-chilling appearance before being bathed in darkness, all serve to erode what the developers created in that first loop of the hallway. This deterioration happens hard and fast, but by riding on the hall's sense of reality in the beginning, the player is forced to accept, on some level, that these events have a reality to them. It's all normal so often that, when it's not, it breaks their feelings of safety apart, but does so at a pace where it doesn't quite destroy that sense of reality. Instead, it makes the real world feel like a place where these things could happen.

And this could all happen in your house, as well, couldn't it?

4.

The sheer ordinariness of the hallway doesn't seem like the kind of place that would induce fright. It lacks the overt decay of the haunted house, the blood-smeared walls of the dangerous space station, or the natural gloom of an old castle. There is nothing about this place that screams that things are abnormal from the beginning. There are some bugs (and that's gross), but that's about it.

Horror is an interesting emotion to capture, though. Fear is a response to a sense of being in danger or trouble, and playing a video game is probably about as far as you can get. If you can sit, back turned, to your living room and flick some buttons and control sticks for hours on end without something bashing your head in with a hammer, you're probably a good distance from any real need to feel fear. That you can relax enough to dismiss the world around you means there's not much to feel afraid of, or at least, not right at this moment. It's awfully hard to concentrate on *Mario Kart* if you're in real, imminent danger.

Fear is born from a sense that you, personally, are in some kind of danger or under threat. It's a reaction that makes you work to get out of your current situation. Which means it's kind of hard to trick the mind into feeling it when it knows you are not in any kind of physical danger.

This is the strange part of horror games. There's a part of our minds that knows that we're perfectly safe in our little hidey-holes when we're sitting there tapping the buttons and moving into a digital darkness (or flipping through pages of a spooky book, or watching teenagers steadily get killed off in our moving picture show). We're fully aware that we're safe, but comfort can be a strange little emotion, too. It's a sensation that often fades into the background when we feel it. Unless comfort is something out of the ordinary, it can be something our minds take for granted, steadily just becoming part of our mental set dressing.

I feel comfort in my own home. There's a sense of being free from the garbage of the outside world when I enter it. While I know it isn't

unassailable from bills and work problems and idiot arguments, there is a sense that those feelings fade away once I step through the side door into my kitchen. When that door shuts, I am free of those outside things, if only for a few hours. I'm lucky to be able to feel this way, but my home is where my family, loving dog, and relaxing hobbies are. It's where I finally allow myself to be free.

That brings comfort, and while I might keenly feel that some days, most of the time I don't notice that weight come off of me when I walk through that doorway. It's still there, though, and it's always in the background when I play horror games, too. Whether here or at a friend's house, I still have that feeling that everything will be all right in this environment, even when I'm digging deeper into a mansion filled with zombies or creeping through a fog-obscured city. I know, in the back of my mind, that I'm safe.

However, that sensation is just distant enough that you can push it aside with the right elements.

Sometimes it's forcefully shoved out of the way with a space station filled with gross monsters that can kill me in endless bloody ways, like in *Dead Space*. *Dead Space* offers an aggressive kind of horror – one where things will go from complete silence to utter mayhem in moments, which creates a tension in the player as they explore. You are safe in this moment, but every heartbeat brings a chance for everything to go to hell. That keeps the player wound tight, creating a fearful anxiety in them as they play.

However, when I shut off *Dead Space*, that fear is gone by the time my screen has dimmed. Sometimes I may have nightmares about what I've seen while playing it, but it's not something that makes me nervous if I wake up to go to the bathroom at night. The tense fear is still powerful, but the use of the space station location makes it feel like I'm missing a key aspect when the fiction goes away. There's no reason to feel afraid in my reality, as I share nothing in common with the world of *Dead Space*. There's nothing to trick my mind into feeling like the reality I temporarily inhabited was real.

This also erodes some of the fear I feel while playing a game like *Dead Space*, too. Necromorphs (the game's goopy, misshapen monsters) are scary because they're gross and weird and highly dangerous, but they look like

nothing I've seen in real life. They're not even close to any animal or creature. Likewise, the space station is so far from reality that it helps my mind better tell me 'This is fiction,' even when I'm not thinking about it. There is still a niggling sense that I'm not really there, and while that can be obliterated by a tense encounter with a Necromorph where I have to struggle to survive (which connects me to the protagonist), it still fades much more when the fight stops. *Dead Space* still excels at making the player feel unsafe constantly with its surprise attacks from all angles, but my brain still disassociates this world from reality with little problem.

Amnesia and *Soma*, other incredible horror titles from Frictional Games, while no less capable of making the player feel fear, also have a similar issue in that their environments aren't conducive to connecting their world and mine. A creepy castle and abandoned underwater facility make for some chilling walks, and while their subject matter can give one a very different kind of dread that does bleed into their lives, I am still not afraid of their boogeymen in the real world. I don't walk away from those games with a kind of fear that becomes a part of my existence.

This is why the ordinariness of *P.T.*'s hallway starts to show its sheer power. It's just a plain, nondescript section of a house. Nothing out of the ordinary about the paint on the walls, cracked from lousy crackfilling and covered in bubbled color from a clumsy painting job. Its scuffed floors have been in any number of homes I've lived in or visited all my life. The pictures have that odd familiarity to them that feels like visiting a friend's or grandparent's home – a sense that the player might know these people, but age and time have made them indistinguishable.

We don't know these places or people, but we have been with people we know and seen paintings and pictures that give off that same sense of familiarity. The trees and landscapes, faded as they are, match the same pictures of fields and streets we've seen in any number of friends' homes over our lives. It doesn't have to be exactly like something we know, because it draws upon that feeling we get in a friend's home and see their family's pictures on the walls. We know them, but we don't.

I talked about the comfort I feel in my own home, but how does this connect to a home I don't know? I've gotten a similar feeling from entering a friend's

home, even for the first time. There's a warmth that comes from going to the place your closest buddies feel safe in, and while you're not always going to get that feeling, I've felt it many times. Perhaps it's something I'm mixing up with the simple joy of spending time with a pal, but there is that sense of comfort that comes from being in your friend's home that isn't quite the same as hanging out with them in a pub or restaurant or concert. It bears similarities with coming home (at least with good friends), but still can feel unfamiliar.

This still isn't quite where *P.T.* sits, though, is it? We're not exactly at a buddy's place looking to play a game, are we? The paintings on the wall still pull from that odd sense of being home, but not.

There is a sense of belonging in being brought into a home, though. An intimacy that comes from being able to walk beside someone's personal belongings and photographs. It feels like being allowed into their place of comfort. "I care for you, therefore I welcome you into a place when my guard is down and I feel safe." There is an invitation into a person's life when being brought willingly into that person's living space.

That I am allowed into this space tells me one of two things: that I have been invited, willingly, into this place. That I belong, which is why the photographs and pictures seem to carry this sense of being familiar. This is either the character's living space and I belong, therefore I share a connection with the people and pictures, or I have been invited in by someone who lives here, creating that familiarity and warmth from a friend's home.

The other possibility is that I am an interloper in this place, and that what should look familiar is instead judging and reminding me that I am breaking someone's comfort by being inside. Imagine a break-in in your home. For those who have endured it, your safe space no longer feels unassailable any more. The home takes on a new, uncomfortable sensation despite the brick and wood remaining unchanged. Something about your living space is now different in your perception of it because an uninvited presence could get inside (among other psychological effects).

There is a sense that you do not belong in this place, and that the eyes in the photographs are watching and judging the player for being here. The people

seem eerily stern. I have never been inside a home where I have not been invited so I cannot say this with certainty, but it seems like there would be a powerful fear involved in the process. A sense of eyes all over, watching for you. This is in the nature of not wanting to be caught somewhere you don't belong, and *P.T.*, in its photographs alone, tells the player they do not belong.

Or that they do, which could possibly make its later moments even worse.

The artwork works to continue to make the player feel that this is an ordinary, lived-in place. In *P.T.*, the art is often vague, faded, and nondescript, depicting the kind of natural or urban scenes that you could see in any home. It's not like the trees, valleys, and branches indicate specific places – they simply seek to capture the kind of pictures folks hang in their homes (including me). It makes the place feel lived in and familiar, even if it isn't.

It's not just the photographs that feel familiar. The clock radio was one I've grown up seeing in many homes throughout my childhood. MY parents still have one just like it sitting in my dad's basement workshop, its numeric glow able to pierce any gloom, yet still seeming oddly blurry. Same for the old radio that sits on a cabinet around the corner, or the older phone that sits bathed in lamplight. These objects are all older, but for my specific childhood, all look like any number of the same products I saw growing up.

Perhaps I am biased from this, where a younger player might simply draw a timeline from it rather than a sense of the familiar, but for me, these objects, and the paint and walls around them, all create a sense that I have been here before. Maybe not this exact location, but it's a place that I could have occupied at some point, or may still go to. It feels real, put simply.

It doesn't hurt that this game looked stunning in its ordinariness. *P.T.* is very, very pretty for a game that looks to just capture a normal place. The doors and walls look perfect to my eye, bordering on picture quality. Right on down to the imperfections, my mind is willing to accept this as a real place. One that is so familiar I may have even been there. I feel like I've definitely seen that flooring in someone's house.

All of this serves to toy with my mind as I play. I haven't been to a place exactly like this before, and I don't currently live in a place that looks exactly

like this, either, but I keep getting twinges of recognition and the familiar as I wander it. *P.T.*, through its use of simple objects, artwork, and photographs (all presented in a realistic, believably-damaged visual style), drums up those same feelings of visiting a friend's house, or of being in a home where I do not belong. It creates that sense of connection with it, and alongside it, that feeling of comfort that comes from being home, or the discomfort of being somewhere we should not be.

The sensation of comfort convinces the mind to drop its guard, just a little bit. While here, we can feel safe like we do at a friend's house or at home. It's not an overt sensation, and it may not work for everyone who does not find this kind of environment familiar, but it does try to coax that sense of home out of the player. It likely won't also work across all cultures and lives, but aspects of family pictures, dirty hallways, and scummy bathrooms will likely create at least one twinge of familiarity.

Whether feeling comfort or discomfort, this familiarity allows us to start breaking down the barriers between the game and the real world. The player could easily be walking through a real-world place as they march through the halls of *P.T.*, which makes it far easier for the mind to accept that the events in the game are really happening to them. Instead of that split with reality that comes from exploring undersea stations or haunted pagodas, here we see horror happening in an ordinary home. One that may even bear some similarities to your own.

Again, fear is not something that comes easily from games, movies, and fiction. We know, deep down, that these things aren't happening. For them to work well, we have to discard the self for a little bit and adopt another persona, or step into another world. We know this place isn't real, either, so our ability to forget that is what allows for truly effective horror. The best titles in the genre will make that easier for the player to do in various ways, and *P.T.* chose to start that with setting and environment.

This was an aspect of why the game chose to have little in the way of a UI, too. Players don't need to track health or stamina or anything like that, which makes its removal a simple one, but the usual trappings of game information that can be present in horror games are not present here, allowing the player to simply exist within the game's world without some on-screen information

reminding them that they're goofing off with a game.

This is also the likely reasoning behind the first-person perspective. This allows the player to witness events as if they were walking through *P.T.*'s halls themselves, having them embrace a kind of reality along with it. It looks just as it would if you were moving through it, breaking down any sense that you're watching an avatar do so instead. Yes, it is happening on a screen, which does dilute the sensation a bit, but it is still as close as the game can come to feeling like the player is honestly walking through these halls (but can you imagine playing this on PSVR? NO THANKS).

These small decisions continue to strengthen that connection between the game and reality – that blurring of the separation between player and game. The choice of perspective and the lack of UI help the player leave the real world behind, looking at *P.T.*'s realm as if it is its own world, and the player a part of it.

Place in *P.T.* is meant to feel close to the player's life. There is no way to get that exactly, but the developers were able to come very close to it, drawing from a reality that creates a sense of home and the familiar in the player. From painting styles to scuffed floorboards to family pictures, it gives a feeling that this could be a place the player has been in real life. This, therefore, creates a connection with the player's real existence despite it being a construct of code. It's not real and never was, but a part of our mind wonders if it could be.

With this first little doubt, a part of us accepts that an aspect of *P.T.* could be real. And if part of it could be real, how much else here could be? What other things could start to trickle out of this place? It has begun to chip at the wall between player and game, creating those first doubts that the self outside and the avatar within the game are separate beings. Even if we know they are, we doubt just a little bit, don't we? Especially as the game continues to twist its world, dragging us out of our own lives and into the one it has crafted for us.

After doing all this work, it seems strange that the game would use visual distortions and glitches in it at some points, though. Throughout the game, *P.T.* uses various visual distortions, like screen tearing and varied error screens, as well as some screen-blurring at uncomfortable points, to tell the

player that the game world is starting to break up. Seems like a strange decision for a game that's trying to make the player feel like it's a part of reality, doesn't it?

Well, these 'glitches' are not supposed to happen in games, are they? Glitches are something that happen by accident, but here, they are used to purposeful effect to lie to the player about the reality of what they're seeing. The supernatural within the game's world is able to reach outside of the game and into the code that composes it, causing errors that reach out into reality.

This is a risky move. Glitches during a horror game make it abundantly clear to the player that they're working through a game. It's not like the real world glitches out, right? So, when we see these things in a game, it threatens to snap our immersion in moments.

P.T. has already gone a long ways in making the player feel at home in its world, though. This place already feels like it's formed a bridge into our world through familiarity, but now, our view of that familiar voice is askew, and reliably so. When these things purposely happen, they become part of the way in which the haunting works.

Think about it like this. The scary bathroom events, the spooky voices, and the ghostly apparitions all exist within the game's world to frighten its protagonist. The character, therefore, is the main person the game is attempting to scare, with the player being a secondary target. The game, within its own narrative, is after its own characters. Therefore, a disturbing glitch hints that the actual target has been the player all along, and that there is no main character. The player is the main character, and the person who has, in fact, been drawn into this hellish world.

So what? Horror games scare people. Leon Kennedy is not who the developers set out to frighten with *Resident Evil 4*. By seeking out the player as a target of fright through glitches, though, the game draws the player deeper into the game's world. They are the main character within it, and as such, events are happening to them rather than some digital avatar.

This takes the scares and creates a reaching into reality of sorts, which the game has already been shown to have been doing through its use of ordinary

environments. *P.T.* is constantly trying to affect the player in their own reality, first by bringing them into this place, and now, based on how it attempts to create fear. Glitches aren't frightening on their own, but when they mean that, maybe, the game is trying to reach outside of itself to scare the player in reality, they form a moment of unsettling fright that this might not just be a simple game.

Haha, very funny. A game reaching out into the real world. Sure. That couldn't happen.

But doesn't a part of you doubt it, some nights? Wonder at what could really be when you're all alone in your house, in the dark? When your home seems an awful lot like the halls in *P.T.*, and something outside starts banging around, and you look up into your foggy bathroom mirror, wondering what is shifting in the mist.

On some level, don't you wonder?

5.

P.T. is not a game with a great deal of time to work with. Being a short, playable demo for a fuller experience, it needs to build up dread within the player at a brisk pace, but do so without feeling like a carnival funhouse meant to slam out jump scares fast enough so that their customers don't ask for their money back when they get out.

Repetition is a key element to drawing the player into the game's world. While comfort isn't exactly something one associates with horror games (but, as we've seen, is a useful tool, the repetition of *P.T.*'s halls allows the player to feel comfortable and familiar with them. On top of making the player feel at home in them as a form of false reality, they also become comfortable because the player knows them well. Like an old neighborhood, the player feels that this place has become a part of them.

Fatal Frame, the game of defeating ghosts using a special camera, utilizes something similar. While the Himuro Mansion is a sprawling complex, the game still never really leaves its set halls and rooms, with players slowly gaining a familiarity with them. Same for *Resident Evil*, which steadily unlocked parts of a single mansion that players would be able to navigate extremely well by the end of the game. It's about creating a landscape that the players can draw some comfort from that allows them to focus on other aspects of the game.

Knowledge and familiarity aren't exactly helpful when it comes to horror, it would seem, but they do help in some regards. When a player is exposed to a new environment or place, they have to spend time learning its nuances through exploration. They need a moment to learn how to navigate it, and may, consciously or subconsciously, want to spend time seeing if there are useful items, interactive elements, or other things for them to play around with. The place, as some shiny new object, takes a piece of the player's attention away from the dread the developer is trying to build. Not that it's impossible to build atmosphere over several locations, but this is one way to tighten it up in a short period.

P.T. uses familiarity in the environment to keep the player focused on what is out of place in every scene. The player doesn't need to take any time soaking in a new environment where everything is different, but instead just has a laser focus on the few changes that have occurred in this one hallway they know well. It speeds up the pace of the game by removing distractions, and also makes every small, horrifying change strike home that much harder because the player has little inclination or reason to focus elsewhere.

In short, the only thing to occupy them in *P.T.*'s game space is to stare into the elements placed there to frighten them. All they can think about is their dread. There is nothing else to take them out of it. No items to pick up (well, sort of). No interactions to play with. No new environments to explore. Just them and their fears.

This also creates a loop of its own, as the player, who can only focus on changes, will very quickly learn that change is very, very bad for them. So, change is all that draws them forward into the next loop, but every single change is a hint that things are getting worse for them. When their flashlight changes color, a bag starts talking to them, or a door begins to open, it is the impetus to move the game forward, but it is also another way that the game means to horrify them.

These events happen in quick succession, too, and in a variety of ways that keep the player from getting to know them all too well. The player soon finds themselves locked in the bathroom where the presence had been banging around, sharing a moment with a crying, twisted fetus lying in the sink. After that, they find the radio shifting in tone, its voice seemingly angered as it offers more cryptic information and threats that seem to be directly meant for the player. A window comes crashing down. A fridge sways manically from the ceiling, a baby howling somewhere nearby.

These events are all separate from the game's main apparition itself, but still leave the player feeling lost and confused within the game's halls. This goes against the feeling of familiarity that the repeating hallway creates, forcing the player into a twisted mental state where the unreal becomes the normal. They are comfortable in this place and know it well, but must come to accept that they don't understand it and cannot comprehend it at all. They're fearful, yet knowledgeable at the same time.

What is odd about these events is that they do not seem to represent an escalation. With many horror titles and experiences, there is a sense that the terrifying presence is drawing closer with each new element. Things seem to be growing worse over the course of play, but there is little in *P.T.*'s events to suggest they are getting worse. Is a broken window worse than a swinging fridge? Laughter worse than a baby's cry? Lights and objects and sounds shift in and out of the game's world, but the haunting, arguably, doesn't seem to be getting worse. It's just changing. Not that it doesn't ever use a sense of escalation, but for the most part, it doesn't seem to need it.

This is part of how the game doles out its narrative, but it's also how it keeps the player in a state of perpetual dread. The events, which don't seem to be getting worse, remain at a moment where the player is unsure when their tipping point will occur. The player is introduced to the game's phantom presence early on (meeting Lisa only a few loops in) so they know something is coming for them, but given that there is little appreciable escalation of events at first glance, things always seem to be on the verge of the ghost's appearance. The game's lethal presence is always just about to appear.

This leaves the player constantly afraid and confused, lingering in this state where a jump scare, in all honesty, would break the tension. Being caught by the ghost would be a form of release, here, as the player has been carefully coaxed into a realistic world, made to be afraid of it by believable events, then drawn into a realm of the bizarre and supernatural while their guard was down. Now, they hover, waiting for the source of these varied events to appear and break the spell, scaring them and letting them finally be free of the tension, but it refuses to come.

This lack of escalation means that *P.T.* does not have to concern itself with rushing to certain setpiece moments, or of creating a series of things that hint at the haunting growing closer over a set time period. The game can simply keep creepy events occurring all around the player that hint that the haunting is frighteningly close, and the dread continues to build. And it can happily do this at whatever pace it likes, as it doesn't need to hint that the danger is getting closer. In these tight halls, the danger is always close. We feel it just as keenly through a banging door or a light shutting off. It's right there, staring us down, allowing the game to create fear quickly without having to

worry about an escalating pace.

It doesn't hurt that we're introduced to our frightening apparition quite early on, either.

6.

P.T. gains a great deal of its effectiveness by messing with the player through its environments and bizarre events, but these are all strengthened by the presence of its ghostly antagonist, Lisa. However, a great deal of work needed to be done before she could appear.

An important aspect of great horror is anticipation. The moments before the scare itself are the most difficult – the times when the player is a taut spring, almost hoping the ghost or creature appears just to take the pressure off. Players need to feel that the scare is close – that the monstrous presence that means to harm them is near – for that fear to take effect. It's the anticipation of the frightening thing that fills us with dread, and balancing that can be the greatest challenge for a horror game.

Wii horror title *Cursed Mountain* is a good example of building anticipation before the first scare. You're forgiven if you've never played its mixture of ghost hunting and fishing (not really, but banishing spirits felt an awful lot like playing a fishing game using the Wii remote and nunchuk in some unique ways). Players ascend into a snowy mountain in the Himalayas, seeking their lost brother, finding empty settlements and camps as they look for him.

Very early on, the player enters an empty city. Multi-colored flags flap in the wind as the player walks through its dull, snowswept streets, passing by empty houses and structures as they wander. Very little happens in this section of the game, but the mixture of the bright, colorful flags and the empty homes creates this sense that there was life here not long ago, but now, it's all suddenly left.

This void puts a pressure on the player, especially one who knows it's a game about creepy ghosts (and since its cover has a spooky phantom in the icy wind, you DO know this), using the emptiness to create anticipation in the player. You know that something scary is coming at some point, and this huge, empty city seems to scream that something awful happened here to take all of the living people away. Something that you're likely only a few steps

away from.

P.T. creates a similar setup using the hallway. As we've already said, it creates a sense of a lived-in place, one that may or may not seem familiar to the player. However, it's completely empty, but left in relatively clean conditions. Yes, there are pill packets, empty liquor bottles, and candy bar wrappers everywhere (which, in their volume, hint at possible substance abuses, making us uncomfortable and wary), but the place is in pretty good shape. It's messy, but it feels like someone lives here, or at least that someone should.

This can drum up a couple of feelings. If you think someone does live here, you may be nervous that soon they'll come home, and that they'll be none too pleased that you're creeping through their house (and that they like their drink and pills, so there's a chance they may be a hair temperamental when they get in). If that doesn't click with you, you may be sensing that something used to live here, but that it suddenly had to depart, leaving its photos and personal belongings behind. Since most people bring their stuff with them, it implies that they either died or were forced to leave without touching a single thing they owned. Both are unsettling in their own ways, and both are correct on some level.

These mingled feelings create a sense that something is still here, and that it may be hostile. It also implies that something died or was scared off from this place. Both give the environment a sense of hostility even as it feels familiar, and create this tension in the player where they want to leave before the thing that appears comes back. Living or dead, they know they want nothing to do with what's coming home based on what they've seen.

P.T. drops many implications about what's coming home, too, in its radio broadcast about the murderous father and the series of killings that seem to be occurring. Hearing that fathers seem to be killing their families, especially while wandering a really strange house covered in signs of substance abuse, hints that maybe the person or thing that's coming home may be a little bit homicidal. Not saying it for sure, but it plants the worry in players' heads.

This is all the game wants to do, too. If the game had come out and said that the killer father was missing from a home that looked exactly like the one the

player inhabited, it would create a little tension, but also given them some certainty. We'll talk more on this later, but for now, it's important that the player never be given concrete information about what is going on. Concrete information of a killer coming is scary, to be sure, but what's much more frightening is never having a sure answer on what is going on. The monster we don't understand is much scarier than the one we do.

The step through the doorway to find yourself in the same corridor also carries some unsettling implications about whatever is coming home. It implies that the player will be trapped with whatever is coming for them, and that there is little hope for escape. Going through the halls simply takes the player back where they started, so there will be no getting away. If the player had continually moved through different rooms, it would give them a sense of constant forward progress. Even if they didn't know where they were running to, if they were always seeing different rooms, it meant they were getting somewhere.

P.T. refuses to give the player that kind of hope. The player is shown forward progress through constant changes in each loop so they don't feel like they're just wasting their time in one spot, but it still reminds the player, each and every loop, that there is no escaping the thing that lurks inside it. They are trapped in this horrible funhouse for as long as the presence means to keep them there. It solves the gameplay issue of players thinking they're not accomplishing anything, but still gives them that feel of being unable to get free.

Sound isn't helping the player's anxiety, either. If it isn't the radio broadcast talking about the killings, it's the creaking of the swinging light. As mentioned before, it's making that sharp whine, not unlike someone crying in the distance, and while you know it's just the light swinging around in this place, a part of your mind wonders.

It's been wondering, after all, because it's struggling to interpret what all of this means for it. Is someone or something coming home? What sounds would herald the presence coming to the house? Will the player hear keys rattling in a lock? A door banging? What sounds or events would indicate that something is coming for them?

Audio is highly important for horror, in this regard. If something was hiding in the darkness where we can't see, we're likely to hear it before any other sense shows us it's near. If something is creeping up on us, the sound of faint footfalls is all that will give it away. Our hearing is often highly sensitive to changes in the environment in horror games, listening for any change that might indicate danger. A single, strange sound can paralyze in this regard.

The Stairwell is a simple horror game, one where player must go down an undisclosed number of steps until they find a frightening presence, then get away from it safely. The stairs go down, on and on and on, in this neat little freeware title, using repetition and small changes in sound to truly wind the player up. As players see the same gray steps for minutes on end, small musical changes will occur, each bringing about a gut-churning fear.

This works so well because our other senses are giving us very little information, and without any idea on what kind of creature is coming for us, we don't know what to anticipate. What kind of sound will herald the creature's arrival? Is that new, squeaking noise something getting close? Does that single stray thump mean it's near? In a realm where visual information is limited to a small cone of vision and a repetitive environment, we're left to wonder what means our doom is coming. We're likely reading too much into things, but since we have little input and don't know how the dangerous presence works, we have no choice but to load every audio event with lethal meaning.

The same goes for *P.T.*, where we may be sure that a swinging light is making that creaking noise, but we still wonder. Maybe something IS whining in the darkness just beyond where we can see. It doesn't matter if we ever think that is true or not, though – only that we are uncertain, or at least unable to dismiss the possibility entirely. A player who can't dismiss the fear is still getting wound tight by it.

This is followed up by loud bangs on the next loop through the hall, something that is unmistakably not good. Seeing and hearing that loud sound is the first time the game startles us (unless the cockroaches moments before gave you a little jump), and is also the first clear indication that something is definitely sharing our living space right now.

It comes from a door we have already dismissed as locked, having tried it once or even twice to find it has been barred off from us. However, now we can see and hear that something is behind the door. Maybe we're not sure if it's a real, living something or just an object banging against the door (and again, being unsure is all we need to feel nervous), but it dials up that dread. We're no longer expecting that something is coming back to this place. We already know it's probably here now, only separated from us by a few inches of wood.

And it's not happy. Nobody bangs on a door like that when they're in a good mood, right? Although the sound is oddly rhythmic, coming at very set intervals. It creates a little discomfort in that as well.

The important thing here is that, again, the game has not given the player a clear answer on whether something is here. They haven't seen a presence with their own eyes yet, but they still know that it's close. Something is on its way, and the player doesn't quite know what that something is. They do know that it's insistent in its attempts to get in there, though, and likely not meaning to help them out.

They know all of this when the game forces them to walk back past the shuddering door, as the route to the next area is locked tight on this run. The game forces the player to accept that the lethal presence is right behind that door, or at least think it's very likely, and then it wants them to walk right on past it in search of the new way forward.

Horror games are all about confronting fear, but this is often done at a time when the player is fully armed with knowledge on how to deal with the source of that fear. The first zombie encounter in *Resident Evil* seems to run counter to this at first, placing the player in close quarters with the game's initial foe, but it does so in an area where they can turn heel and run, or back off into the hallway to get a better angle on the fight. They're given the ability to avoid their fear or take time to learn about it before fully engaging their enemy.

P.T. essentially asks the player to get close enough to spoon the ghost without having any idea what it is or how to deal with it. Yes, the door, sacred barrier in video games for ages, means it's possible some players are confident the

creature won't come through, but anyone who's had the dogs burst through the windows in the original Resident Evil also knows that these blocks won't hold enemies for long.

"It's going to break out right as I walk by." I thought it, and I imagine you did, too. A part of you may even be relieved, although wound up extremely tightly in the moments before. Again, the expectation of a scare is some of the worst parts of it, creating a tense anxiety within the player because you don't know when or what to expect. What will this thing do to me? What will it look like? How will it act? You know nothing, and it is making you sick with fear as your mind loads up nearly infinite possibilities on how it will frighten you to death or kill you.

And we've already seen the game work to drag the player into its world and forget the self, creating that anxiety within the player about their real life (to an extent).

But when it grabs you, a part of you will be free. You'll no longer need to worry about when it's going to gank you. You won't have to wonder about how it kills you any more. No more worry about what those sounds mean. You'll have knowledge of how your foe works, and the horrible anticipation will be over.

So, when you walk by without incident, it's not a relief. It just tightens the coil. You still don't know how this foe works. Still need to worry about when it will come for you. And now, we cannot even walk past that door without wondering if, even if it's perfectly still, this will be the time it bursts open and lets loose the being inside.

Another loop takes us to the start. The door is banging louder, the creature behind it seeming to be more insistent as you can hear it well before you round the corner. It stops before you can get there, though, leaving you to march past the door yet again. Will this time be it?

A booming bang seems to indicate that it is, giving players a start yet again. However, players will also notice that there's been no activity since that loud bang right beside them. Their character is alive and well, still staring down the hall into the open doorway that will take them into yet another loop.

We're not done with sound, though, as players begin to hear a rasping, pained laughter or groaning. Something within the doorway thinks this is quite funny, or is wracked with pain inside. The mixture of feelings in the sound is jarring, and froze me to the spot, personally. The thumping on the door was something alive. Something menacing. I now knew, for sure, that something was waiting for me inside. It's a rare moment of certainty, but one of utterly no value. I couldn't get inside the door, and had no idea when what was in there intended to come out.

This moment still isn't done with us, though. While there, cockroaches skittered away from the door, creating a natural revulsion, too. Because why not feel grossed out on top of being afraid? Whatever is hiding there can also call up a sickness in the body, giving it another connection to the player's reality. At least it could for me, as I despise insects to the point where the idea of touching one makes my stomach churn.

Would it lash out when I took a step away from the door? Would it only attack if I didn't move? The mind swirls with possibilities in these moments, thoughts on the verge of panic. What did it mean, and would my inputs have some effect on its behavior, now? What would finally trigger this creature to attack?

Then you take a step, and you're safe. Then another. Soon, you're moving through the door, walking into yet another loop. They're only getting worse, something made clear as you round the corner, taking steps toward the end of the loop again, only to see the basement door swing shut before your eyes. Pressing on it reveals that it's locked, a clicking sound behind the player likely making them sweat with fear.

You don't need to turn around to know what just unlocked, do you?

The anticipation for that room and what's inside it has been growing for only about five minutes now, depending on how quickly the player's been pushing ahead. However, it is likely reaching crushing levels. Turning around to see that door opened just a crack isn't going to be taking any of that pressure off with its promise of clarity about what has been making that groaning, moaning laughter. Maybe a hint of hope at relief, but now, you must take a long, long walk up to see what's inside - what's been making all of this

commotion that's been scaring you this past while.

Maybe sooner, maybe later, you're forced to creep up on the door, hearing the strange sounds, a droning music added to it all. And a baby's crying as well. It's a cacophony of noise, all mixing and layering on top of one another. It's almost overwhelming – possibly even is overwhelming when added onto the pressure that's been building before it.

All of this noise means so many different things, and draws up so many different questions, that the mind is dizzy with possibilities. Also, even though you'd only been separated by a few inches of wood before and may have felt that it was as close as you could get to the creature without being killed, it now somehow feels even closer. So close it doesn't even feel possible – skin on skin. A membrane separates you from what means to end your life. And now you have to walk right up to it, again, unaware of anything about it.

But you shove on the door, and it won't open. *P.T.* doesn't aim to give you that kind of satisfaction. Instead, you have to peer into that door that's only opened a crack. You don't deserve to cross the barrier yet. Instead, you have to look into the gloom to see what's inside.

It's going to do something scary and you know it. You know it almost down to the second, and your anticipation is reaching heights that may not have felt possible. Anxiety is through the ceiling.

The game wants you to push forward into that fear, and not even just by looking through the gap and into the bathroom. When you peek inside, seeing the bathroom fixtures and the hints of movement coming from a sink under a grimy mirror, you still haven't done enough. You're at your limit, waiting for the scary event that's been hinted at to happen. The banging, the murderous broadcast, the crying, the laughter – it's all pointed to here, but even now, at its threshold, you aren't close enough. You have to get just a bit closer.

It wants you to look close, zooming in to see what's there. Clicking the stick will let you zoom into the room, staring deep into what terrifies you. For a few scant moments, there is nothing other than the zoomed point of view. It gives the player, who has seen the door cease banging, the laughter mean

nothing, and the hints of danger fade without an incident, a split-second of hope that maybe the game is still just jerking their chain.

This could be a moment where the game tipped too far in one direction – where it chose to leave the player alone rather than scare them. Anticipation can only last so long in a horror game, though, and even though we've only been playing for a few minutes, it's time for the developers to tip their hand, if only just a little bit. The player has earned a glimpse at what's to come.

She moves so fast it's hard to see anything but her grin. The door shuts in the player's face, closed by the laughing force that has been taunting them so far. Being startled here feels almost painful from its proximity, so close that she could have touched you, but instead chose to taunt you further. My heart was slamming against my rib cage, here, and I loosed a gasp that hurt. My body was tense.

The door down the hall clicks open. You're allowed to move on. It feels like a trap, and again, the fears swirl in your head. It's designed to make you feel unsure what to do. You still know nothing about how our phantom works, or how she intends to do you harm. But you've seen her, now, and what feels worse is that she's seen you. Has likely been watching you the whole time when you couldn't see her. It feels awful and terrifying, and it's only going to get worse from here.

There is a kind of beat to horror games that comes around the scare. After a moment of extreme tension, there is a calm period where the player is allowed to get their bearings and calm down. Keeping up tension for too long can be too much for some, creating a sensation that is actually, physically uncomfortable. Being on the verge of panic for minutes on end is genuinely taxing, and so there are lulls in events to let the player calm down a bit. Hopefully not so long that the player gets relaxed, then bored (*Clock Tower: The First Fear* could often be guilty of this, allowing for too much time between appearances of its stalker-like enemy, Scissorman, to pass).

However, every once in a while, it's important to go in for that second scare almost immediately. Players, over the course of a six- to eight-hour game, start to learn the beats of a horror game. They soon learn that they will get a few minutes of peace after a big scare. They know they can take a break and

relax their nerves, even if only for a little while.

Fatal Frame's foes would often back off after the player had finished a fight with one of them, giving them a few rooms worth of chill time before starting a new encounter. This would let players get immersed in the atmosphere and give them enough time to physically and emotionally recover, but it also knew to throw another scare at the player almost immediately to keep them from thinking they'd always get a break. As always, certainty is our mortal enemy.

Which is why *P.T.* immediately throws the player into direct contact with Lisa in the next loop.

7.

When the player rounds the corner during the next loop, they're in for a surprise.

Lisa can be seen standing in the middle of hallway, blocking the player's means of escape as she stands right in front of the exit door. She's standing perfectly still, all while her laughter comes from all around you, gently rasping. A steady, droning song plays, continuing to build up the dread.

Players may be frozen by her presence here, like I was. There has been a great deal of build-up, showing her in only the slightest hints, so to have her appear right out of nowhere when the player isn't expecting it can be quite a shock.

Her appearance here is important to note, as well. While she has been fully revealed in a way, she is bathed in shadow. Many of her features are hidden from sight, only giving the player a faint outline of her plain dress and features to go on. She's right there in front of the player, but she is still obscured. The developers get the benefit of the phantom fully appearing before the player, but still don't quite unveil everything about her. It unveils, but still obscures.

This, again, runs counter to arming the player with knowledge. Not knowing what a monster looks like is a source of fear as well. When players haven't see the creatures your game contains, they are forced to use their imagination to fill in the blanks, creating something uniquely terrifying for themselves.

Still, that's assuming they've put that much direct thought into wondering what is coming. Even if they don't have something put together in their minds, their thoughts have been bouncing possibilities around. Ideas on what could be creeping near. They may not have put a monster together, but the idea that this monster could be anything is terrifying with possibility.

Here, we have a hint of a reveal, but have still held onto those infinite possibilities. They're a lot less now, given that we see that Lisa is humanoid in form, and is possessed of an unsettling grin, but she could look like

anything beyond those two features. The mind still races with things she could be, even though she is standing right in front of us.

We do know a little bit about her already, though. We know that she is the source of our terror at this time, because she is the only thing capable of agency that we have encountered. As a human being, she is able to move and think and act, and is therefore capable of harmful actions, either supernatural or realistic. She is very able to harm us, which is also conveyed in her towering stature. She feels large and menacing in that hall, and players know there is no way they will be able to move past her.

However, what we don't know, as usual, frightens us more. Firstly, we have no idea how Lisa intends to do us harm, but have been driven by the atmosphere to know that she will harm us. Many monsters in horror games are aggressive to an extent – they will start moving toward the player or begin an attack on sight. Silent Hill's creatures may be content to shuffle around foggy streets for a while, but if they catch a hint of the player, they will begin to approach. This indicates that danger is on its way, but also that the player will soon begin to understand how they act and fight.

Lisa doesn't budge here, though, waiting for the player as long as they're content to stand still. She isn't ready to start a fight, but she does mean us harm. How she intends to harm us is still hidden from the player, keeping them in the dark about how they will work to survive the game, let alone this encounter with her.

Even the act of movement would at least indicate to the player that Lisa needs to be in close proximity to do them harm. It would tell them something about how she works, but the game still refuses to give the player anything at this time.

The player knows nothing about her or how to live through her presence, and currently, the only way to get those answers or progress at all is to step a little bit nearer. Get a closer look. Move toward the thing that is standing, frozen, at the end of the corridor, laughing at the player. Taunting them. Come closer, she whispers into the mind. Closer.

A step or two forward causes the light to snap off, Lisa gone with its glow.

The murk at the end of the hall isn't so dark that you can't see the open door beyond, so you can see that she's no longer there. You can still hear that laughter, though, just as clear as it had been before. She is no longer in the player's sight to be watched, but she is still so, so close to the player. Still able to do them harm.

When the player builds up the nerve to move forward, they will find her laughter growing louder as they move, shifting to her pained moans as the player soon finds themselves standing right where she stood. It's an uncomfortable moment, giving the sensation that she is still standing right there, even if the player can move through her, knowing that she is directly on top of them and likely to finally, finally lash out and kill them. It's finally going to happen and be horrible and awful but AT LEAST IT'S OVER WITH.

But it's not. Standing here for research for the book was awful – an endless sensation of wondering if she would kill me at every second, being dragged into the moment by the impossible tension of it all. I wanted it to end to break the spell, but dreaded every single second that meant it could happen. I kept having to pause just to breathe, finding a safe space within the menus (which is why many horror games offer cute little frightening effects in their menus to take that safe-haven away, but still give the player a means to leave to answer the phone or empty their suddenly-full undergarments).

She won't kill the player, either, or at least hasn't as far as my heart can take this research. Lisa's first appearance is just the game continuing to wind the player up, and we're not about to end that pain just yet. For now, we can step through the door and into the next loop, continuing our descent into this personal hell.

Well, after the light flicks on, scaring the player with a flash of cockroaches and the end of the laughter. For now.

8.

P.T. will not be showing dear Lisa to us for some time, but she will never stray far from our hearts after that first encounter. Still, it's time for the game to wind up the dread within us a little bit more.

We move on from that brief encounter with Lisa to another loop of the hall, this one featuring her droning song immediately. When Lisa is nearby, *P.T.* plays a broken, quiet tune filled with strange beeps, metallic thumps, and shuddering static distortions. It's like a mechanical groan, winding up and down as it plays with the player's mind. It's an uncomfortable noise, not just in its meaning, but from the very music itself, which carries the kind of mysterious power and otherworldly fear that *Silent Hill*, and the works of Akira Yamaoka, were capable of.

It's an important step in establishing that the player is never truly free of Lisa from here on, making them feel that she is near and hasn't gone anywhere despite changing loops. For a moment, there may have been some hope that she'd gone away, after all. Hearing the notes of her distorted song makes it very clear that she will never be far from the player's side any more, making it so the fear of her touch never goes away.

We also still don't know what she'll do to us on contact, a fear that will persist for much, much longer before finally becoming clear.

For now, though, the bathroom door, the crux of many of our fears, is now open. The doorway is all clear. And we know, without the slightest hint of a doubt, that this is where we need to go next. Also, in the idea of an escalating kind of horror, that Lisa is probably inside.

We have seen a steady increase in the power of things over the last few loops, moving from relatively calm spaces to strange noises, strange occurrences, visual manifestations of the presence being nearby, to visual confirmation of the presence itself. Moving from hinting at a haunting to showing it's close to showing it in shadows indicates to the player that it's going to be coming right for them on the next run. It's only going to get worse, and likely right

on this loop, in that room, marking the game's one clear line of escalation.

Except it doesn't follow through.

This sense of escalation makes the act of walking inside the bathroom a terrifying one, but like many other places in the game, standing around doesn't feel like much of a way to escape it. With noises playing with the player's mind, it seems like Lisa will be creeping up on the player regardless of whether they move inside or not. It feels like Lisa is on her way whether the player wants to move or not. That song tells the player she's coming, even if it's only within that animal part of the mind. So, die in the hall or die in the bathroom?

There's even a flashlight on the floor to coax the player in. This was a powerful touch, as, like a certain writer and the bathroom light, its glow offers a sense of protection. Light hints at knowledge and clarity, which the dark and hauntings work to counter. Lisa and the events surrounding this place are elements of confusion and lack of knowledge – things the player cannot know or understand. These things are given limitless power in the player's inability to know them. Lisa can, theoretically, be anywhere and do anything in this moment, right? We don't know what she can do, so right now, she can do anything and be anything, which leaves the player's mind a jellied, terrified mess.

A light source can reveal what is missing, though. It can show the player that Lisa is standing nearby, dispelling the murk that hides her before the player can stumble upon her. It can also show that she is not there in the distance, encouraging a feeling of safety. It will let the player know more about this place than they could before, unveiling clues and hints and truth with its light. It's a simple thing, but something that offers a powerful balm against the fear that's boiling them from the inside.

Walking in gives the player the flashlight almost automatically, but the tradeoff for picking up a source of knowledge is being buried in a place we don't even have a basic understanding of yet. The bathroom is an unknown at this point in the game – a filthy room covered in dirty, bloodstained tiles and a disgusting sink. Cockroaches scatter in the glow, again drawing upon a player's sense of revulsion.

From here, the player's eye may be drawn to the hole in the wall above the tub, or the grimy mirror on the wall. That dirty smear hides the place one might see a ghostly form creeping up behind them, which is almost a relief in the room, and yet it shows just enough of the lower torso that you know you would see something creeping up on you. You just wouldn't see its face – not until the game deigned to finally show you Lisa's visage in her final actions against you.

That will be how the end comes. I knew it here – that I would get one ghastly look at it before I was gone. It is what I will fear for the next few hours. For now, though, I need to look at this weird chicken/fetus thing that is whining in the sink. The one that is crying and clearly trying to make me take my eyes off of the mirror for a minute (don't think I don't know what you're up to, *P.T.*).

In the sink lies some weird mixture of chicken/fetus, crying and quivering within. It's a mess of bloody flesh, looking unformed and disfigured as it slowly moves within the sink. Simply looking at it can create discomfort at its broken shape and pathetic voice. Maybe even a bit of pity at this poor being that finds itself trapped here, although the game doesn't let you do anything with this presence. You can only watch it cry, helpless, as you stand before it.

There is a sense of impotence here – that the player, normally capable of saving or helping people through their actions in a game, can do nothing to save this creature despite its pleas for help. If one thinks on this a little further, perhaps its cries are not from a need for help from the player's avatar, though. Perhaps the avatar's reluctance to touch it implies that the player is what the fetus fears.

Watching the gross little red fetus thing cry brings to mind the radio broadcast, in case it had slipped from your mind from all of the haunting presences, reconnecting the stories if you were unsure they were related. It drums up thoughts of dying, unborn children, indicating a haunting presence, or perhaps a hint of the real should the unborn child survive, however briefly, the death of its mother. It's an impossible thing, but reality has been breaking up, here, which leaves the player prone to making the impossible possible.

Also, this haunting, gross as it is, is innocent, but no less jarring. Especially if you happen to have a newborn yourself when you're playing the game to research.

Its cries are alarming, but part of it feels kind of like a cheap little trick – a trope of the infant crying in the dark to lure the protagonist out. Except you usually don't find yourself looking at an unformed child in the sink when the trope comes up. Usually. So, here we have the discomfoting sound, but we're also marrying that to being an obvious distraction from potentially real danger (Lisa coming up behind the player in the mirror) and a hint of revulsion mixed with curiosity. It's a weird looking creature, sickening with its deformed body, but it's also a child that needs help. It's quite a cocktail of emotions and thoughts, one that left me staring into the sink wondering what was going on and what I should do.

You are witness to most of the events of *P.T.* without much ability to interact, though. Short of the single 'Gouge It Out' interaction with one of the pictures that comes during one loop, much of what the player does throughout *P.T.* comes from looking at things, or, at most, looking at them closely with the zoom function. That the player's only interaction there is to do harm is an interesting thing to note, as is the fact that, beyond being endangered, the player can do little but witness what the game's horrors have in store. In short, we're made to feel helpless and ineffective while playing the game, making Lisa's power over us, as well as the power of the place itself, feel that much more frightening.

A place with a frightening power over the protagonist. Where have I come across this before? Oh Kojima, you tease.

So, all the player can do is choose what to look at in the scene with the fetus, again driving that sense of helplessness home (not that you feel like you can accomplish more with a real baby. Those make you feel pretty helpless, too). It doesn't help that the door to the room has locked behind you while you were in here, trapping you in with your newfound pal. You'll likely notice that once you hear something tapping about outside the bathroom, drawing your eye to the locked door.

A few minutes of being trapped and you'll be free, but that time in there feels

quite unsettling. On top of the sensations coming from the fetus' presence, players are likely keenly aware that they're in Lisa's old hideout. These were her stomping grounds for the first few loops, so it makes sense that she's likely coming back. There's also no place to run, as the player can only take a few steps around the cramped room. Not that there was much escape in the hallway should she have come for the player, but just being able to back up or try to run past her gives the player some hope they can survive. Where will you go within the confines of this room?

While staring into the mirror, the door opens, freeing the player eventually. This was one of the moments in the game when I didn't even think about what dangers could be lying outside the door, instead just rushing outside without a thought. When the door was open at the end of the hall as well, I beelined in that direction, too. Anything to get out of this loop. And luckily, the developers allowed me this single breather. Then again, I would have expected Lisa to attack here. It would have been just a little bit predictable for her to make contact on the loop after she appeared in person.

P.T. avoids predictability with its mysterious nature and the placement of Lisa. It doesn't want the player to guess when she'll appear, or to have any real idea on what to expect next. It wants the player swimming, clueless, through chaos, and that meant removing Lisa entirely from this loop. That way, the player has no idea what to expect in terms of her next appearance. The escalation of appearances is thrown off, and in doing so, who knows where she'll be next?

Having been left without her during the last loop, we think she'll show up on this loop when the lamp is out at the end of the hall upon entry to the next one, don't we? All of that darkness for the entire walk up the initial hall seems perfect for a ghostly attack, but it's likely just a counterbalance to our newly-found flashlight. Which doesn't actually illuminate all that much, but still provides a small comfort to us.

"Don't touch that dial now, we're just getting started!" booms out from the radio, in a tone that seems almost angry and cruel compared to the previous announcer. It's the same voice calling out in the dark, but it sounds irritated somehow. If that doesn't strike the player as odd, much of what it announces over the next few minutes will.

“You can’t trust the tap water!”

“204863”

“Look behind you.”

“I said, look behind you.”

Very strange stuff, all hinting that the world is coming unravelled. This isn’t exactly something normal to be playing on the radio, hinting that the player’s perception of reality may be off, or that reality itself is somewhat off-kilter. Neither of which is a good thing, but in terms of frightening the player, both are quite effective. You know, in case things had seemed a bit normal up until this point. Also, again, the strange radio announcement isn’t all that outlandish as far as potential real-world occurrences go, working that realism angle just a little harder.

The radio broadcast has the added effect of bringing the player close to the photos on the cabinet the radio is sitting on (plus the way out is closed. AGAIN), one of which now has a big blue X on the blonde woman from the wedding picture, “GOUGE IT OUT!” written nearby. Interacting with this picture will poke out her eye with a wet, sickening sound, something that’s just a bit weird for putting one’s finger through a picture, making the door at the end of the hall open.

Here, we may feel that we’ve become complicit in some disgusting act – the sound effect makes putting a finger into a picture sound like it’s done a little bit more than just ruin an old photograph. Our actions have become something far more sinister, hinting at a past action that our protagonist is recalling, or that our actions carry heavier consequences than we can understand in this place. Combined with the radio broadcast that has turned sinister (which carries a frightful connection to the past one, where the father had been chanting a number and listening to the radio before he killed his wife and family. Probably listening to a very weird radio, not unlike a certain player is right now), it paints an ugly picture of our protagonist’s potential past or of the power his seemingly simple actions carry now. Neither thought line bodes well for us, so we may wish to hurry down the hall again.

Our escape route comes with something new now, though. “Forgive me, Lisa / There’s a monster inside of me” is written above the door. This gives a bit of new context to the radio story, assuming we’re connecting the two things in our heads. We have no clue as to whether Lisa is the woman in the photo...or do we?

Let’s look at the last few moments. We’ve just gouged the eye out of a photograph, which came with a rather gross sound that implied our actions are a bit worse than just wrecking pictures. Now, we are given the message “Forgive me, Lisa There’s a monster inside of me”. But we’re not the person in the game world, are we? We’re inhabiting a body that was already there, awakening as we hopped inside of it.

To be fair, an in-game avatar is fairly common, but the body within these games often has its own story and life. We just happen to control its course for a little while. And now, we’re jumping inside the faceless protagonist of *P.T.* for just a tiny bit. Are we the “monster inside” right now, and did our actions connect (if only symbolically) to the harm that was carried out? It would make sense, given that we are being punished within the game’s realm by its hauntings. We’re the monster, and that’s why we’re being tortured, here.

At the very least, it hints that monstrous acts were carried out that need forgiveness, and that they are likely tied to the actions moments before. The blonde wife appears to be Lisa (despite a difference in hair color with the dark-haired phantom Lisa), and given the harm done to the photograph and its connections to Lisa’s charming face (that we’ll be all too familiar with quite soon), we can tie all of this together. It is just a tiny bit disturbing that we’re hearing weird radio messages now too, isn’t it? Again, we, personally, are becoming connected to the monstrosity in the game.

Crossing to the next loop greets us with the baby’s cries in the hall, but alarming noises are becoming the norm, here. The player is forced to move on, soon rounding the corner to find some writing on the wall in the left alcove past the bathroom. Depending on how quick you read, you’ll likely be most of the way through “I can hear them calling to me from” before a window or painting comes crashing down, breaking glass jarring the player with a quick scare.

This physical aggression continues to spike the player's anxiety, and only gets worse if players look up to where the object fell from quickly enough. Lisa is visible in an inaccessible hallway above them, but still obscured a bit in shadows, not quite unveiling all of her features. It reveals a bit more of our haunting, but also, finds a middle ground between visual appearance and full-on attack. Even if the player doesn't notice her up there (I was too busy looking at glass fragments my first few runs, apparently), they'll still hear her gasping sounds.

The loop afterwards features a red light coming down from the upper floor, and walking around the corner reveals a fridge dangling down, blood seeping out the side. "After killing his family, the father hung himself with a garden hose they had in the garage" ('garden hose' gets replaced with 'umbilical cord' if you listen close or look up the mined audio files) comes from the radio, our calmer announcer having returned. The dangling fridge seems to symbolize the dead father. Well, that or Lisa has more in common with Wile E. Coyote in terms of how she means to end your life.

Walking under the fridge is a bit nerve-wracking, but also seems a little too outlandish to be a means to end your life, making this an oddly quiet loop. It seems to be setting up the staging ground for the next one, dragging up curiosity just in time for the player to get inundated with sound in the following loop. A baby is howling somewhere in the distance, and turning the corner shows that it is not coming from the bathroom. Instead, it's coming from the fridge, which is swinging wildly in the red light, as if something inside is trying to break its way out. These swings often stop and start at odd times as well, moving in an unreal fashion that makes this all just a bit more discomfoting as well. Walking under this fridge is Not Fun, as it feels like something will finally break its way out just as you pass beneath.

Lisa has also been suspiciously absent for the loop before this and for this one. It doesn't make it feel like she's gone, though. More that she has moved out of our sight.

Here, players need to glance at a section of wall marked with the word 'Hello!' written on it, which is right by the phone. Looking from there to the spot in the alcove, players will find a new letter has appeared on the wall under the message "I can hear them calling to me from", which has been

scrawled onto the alcove wall.

If players do this a handful of times, they'll soon find the message "I can hear them calling to me from HELL". Cheery. Just a bit cheesy, too, honestly. It's a bit too direct and goofy, really, and is one of the points in the game where I feel there was a misstep. Perhaps some players deeper into the atmosphere were feeling this one, but it seemed just a bit too cliché to fit. Still, we are discussing this after talking about how a swinging fridge doesn't break immersion, so maybe don't listen to me all that much.

This solution, strange as it is, marks the beginning of the kind of cruel puzzles the game has in store for us later – the kind that can only be solved by curiosity and some odd moves.

The following loop takes the fridge away, replacing it with a swinging red light that seems to hint that we were just seeing things. A dangling fridge is pretty weird, after all. Doubting our senses is something that affects the player themselves, though, giving them the slightest inkling that maybe they are not entirely all right while exploring this world. Instilling hints of self-doubt again connects the game to reality, and may factor into how little you'll want to look in your bathroom mirror that night.

A Swedish radio broadcast plays here. I don't speak the language, though, so it meant little to me, although its sudden change in language indicated a shift in locations that made me feel like this location continuously moves through time and space, existing all across the world and in varied realities. Its repetitions also made that feeling clear, but this sudden language shift also made me feel like others had come here from different places. Was this where many people had come to be punished. Again, this seems to tease at Silent Hill, a city of guilt that awful people just kind of end up in.

I am not up on my Swedish, but luckily, there is a translation available courtesy of SilentHillMemories.net:

"Close your eyes. Let your ears listen to the radio. Do you hear my voice? Can you hear your own soul's scream? Let us choose. My voice that tells the future. Or your tortured mind. Well, what do you choose? You can choose. Your life, your future. Wise as you are you might already have discovered

it.”

“Yes, the radio drama from 75 years ago was true. They are here on our earth and they monitor and see all. Don't trust anyone. Don't trust the police. They are already controlled by them. That's the way it has been for 75 years now. Only our best will prevail. You have a right. A right to become one of us. So, welcome to our world. Very soon the gates to a new dimension will open. 204863. 204863.” (4)

Fun stuff, again drawing the player into the mindset of the men who caused harm to their families. At least, assuming from the paranoid inklings, the fear it promises, and a hope of becoming “one of us” through a secret number. It implies the player is being further dragged into the kind of thoughts the murderous father had, or is at least living through a re-enactment of (or a twisted alternate reality vision of) the time before the murders.

This theory gets a little stronger as the player enters the next area, which seems to be one of the strangest the game has to offer. The hallway seems mostly the same, but the whole place is bathed in a washed-out, gloomy red glow. It's not something you can focus on for all that long, though, as a single step makes the screen blur and distort, the avatar taking a lunging step forward. The player moves much quicker in this area, and given the slow pace of the previous ones, seems to indicate to the player that they ought to run. That's sure what it felt like for me, at least.

All of the photos and pictures that hung on the wall have now been replaced with eyes, all spinning and swirling around in their sockets. It's an unHINGING effect, creating a feeling of being watched by ill minds, or that something has been witness to all of your secrets. It gives a sense of extreme vulnerability – our sins laid bare before some dangerous force that means to judge us. Or maybe just the fact that who we are, sickening truths and all, will become clear to someone soon. We feel naked before these gazes, and no amount of running will hide us.

There's little escaping this viewpoint, either. The eyes are on every surface, swirling away in sickening ways as the player rushes through halls which have now become endless in another way. The hall now loops in on itself without any doorway transition, which makes the sense of repetition and

feelings of being trapped all the worse. At least the step through the door gave a hint of hope that you were moving on, or that you were free from that loop's tortures. Here, it never, ever ends.

Changes used to mean something was wrong, but the blurred, crimson hallway will leave many players begging for some indication that something is new – that their flight is doing something. You feel suffocated and afraid, charging blindly ahead in hopes that something is different. Lisa may be anywhere, but your feet cannot stop running. It feels like you're being pushed forward by fear and horror, and the changes you used to fear are something you would give anything to see. Just any sign that you won't be trapped here forever.

I carelessly ran down these halls for minutes on end, but it felt like I was there for at least an hour, flying away from danger or judgement or whatever these eyes had in store for me. It was a jarring moment when the place, and being stuck there, felt worse than being caught by Lisa. It hinted that dying at the hands of a lethal spirit may have been a preferable end to what the world itself might mean to do to me.

Eventually, the player will notice a peephole, one that gives them a glimpse into the bathroom from the hole they likely noticed what feels like ages ago. Looking into it with the zoom function feels like a bad decision, but what else can one do besides continue to rush down the halls? Lisa has become a bit less of a concern in the endless corridor, but she's still something that feels very, very close, and we haven't forgotten what happened the last time we zoomed in on something in the washroom.

Once we dredge up the courage to look inside, we find our irritable announcer has returned with more to say. "I've got message for all you folks down there in radio land. Now's the time for action. Our society is rotten to the core. I'm talking to all the fine, upstanding folks got their welfare cut, got their jobs pulled out from under 'em. Yeah, you! You know what to do! Now's the time! Do it!"

While listening to this broadcast, the player can hear the disturbing sounds of a woman being attacked, seemingly drowned, and then stabbed or cut with something sharp, the sound of tearing flesh and screams echoing in the

player's ears before an eerie silence settles in. All while looking at nothing in the bathroom, giving the sense of an auditory hallucination, or some vision of the past coming to life. And again, we're hearing an unsettling broadcast just like a certain murderer did.

"No turning back now" is written above the peephole when we finally look away. It felt like there was no turning back a long time ago, though. But perhaps this indicates that our transition into this world is complete, having borne witness to the events that created Lisa? That we are a part of this place now that we had lived through the memory, in a way? Or that we're so close to understanding that no one would turn away from the final truths to be found?

Movement speed has finally returned to normal, and as the player walks, they will soon come back to the start of the hallway. The clock on the small end table is blank, showing no numbers. The hall is dark, save for the lamp on the table covered in candy and pills. The writing above the basement wall is gone. We are beyond time, lurking just outside of the game's final dangers. We can shut it off here to save ourselves from the most ruthless of its cruelties. Turn back. But we won't.

"No turning back now"

We step forward, moving into the next loop. The clock is set to 0:00. Visual distortions begin to occur, creating jarring tears in the screen. It's an effect that reminds us that we're playing a game, but doesn't feel like it breaks the spell of immersion. Here, it feels more like an indication that *P.T.* continues to bleed into our own reality, readying itself to haunt our dreams and the halls of our homes.

Something begins to chant "204863" over and over again. A droning chant echoes up from nowhere in particular. More distortions occur.

Then, a game crashing screen. This can be one of several, but a new player doesn't know that. I remember the one I got. I'll never forget it.

The screen was blood red, white writing in dozens of languages saying, "I'm heading there now".

I was chilled. I wanted to stop. I could feel it, like something pushing at the membrane of reality, a thin veil keeping the game out of my life. I want to tell you that this is just some stupid thing I made up for dramatic effect, but I remember feeling it so powerfully that my chest hurt. It was real. It was impossible, but it was real.

The logical part of my brain was screaming at me about how I was wrong, but *P.T.*, with its atmosphere of terror and its monstrosities and strange occurrences and insistence on making my mind accept it as a kind of reality, wouldn't let me listen. A part of me strongly felt like I was under attack from this game, and that, by playing it, I had allowed something frightening to enter my home and existence. I know it's impossible, but for an unsettling amount of time, I felt like it was happening.

And the only way to stop it? Finish the game, just like back in the days of *Fatal Frame*. Only this time, that would not be as straightforward as just playing through it. Here, as *P.T.* began to reach its crescendo, it would do something that would cement it as the most frightening thing I'd ever played, and ensure that I would not be escaping Lisa's clutches for some time.

9.

So far, many of our examples of what *P.T.* does to frighten players so well have highlighted excellent choices in horror design. The game's realistic setting helps the player create a connection, and the visual fidelity strengthens that bond. The steady erosion of feelings of safety through increasingly bizarre events coax the player into believing in the world while also dialing up dread. The humanity of Lisa makes her a believable opponent, while her ability to attack at will (which we'll go into soon) gives her an eerie existence and leaves the player incapable of feeling safe.

All of these are excellent ideas, but save for the last one, many have been explored in other horror games just as well. Arguably, *P.T.* has brought them all together for a powerful horror experience, but there is still something more to it that makes the game an even stronger horror experience.

P.T. features some downright bizarre, extremely complex puzzle solutions. The kind of stuff that would be impossible for the average player to figure out on their own. UfoTekkie offered some of the details he knew from speedrunning the game.

Not that it starts that way. "*P.T.*'s design is simply a handful of repeating loops that move on to the next loop when you complete the current task. Some are as simple as walking to the exit, and some have puzzles that must be solved. These are all fairly simple and were solved quickly, and amass to 13 loops total before the final section, if I remember correctly," says UfoTekkie. "The initial segments up to the laughter puzzle are all relatively simple - poke the picture's eye out, get the flashlight in the bathroom, nothing too crazy."

This lulls the player into the game's world. Yes, it's extremely scary and the ghost is terrifying, but the puzzles are not overly complicated. Often, the player just has to go back and forth, or keep moving through the game, in order to slowly progress. Many players will be able to work their way through these sections with little problem on their own, or drawing from an online FAQ to figure out what they're missing. No harm in a little cheating

when Lisa intends to snap your neck while you dawdle.

However, things do not remain so straightforward, luring the player in with apparent ease while some cruelties continue to form in the background. The final puzzles of the game are anything but straightforward, requiring players worldwide to work together in trying to figure out how on earth to escape the game's cruel halls.

When the player is booted out of whatever crash screen they are given, they'll find themselves awakening in the cement room once more, a place that feels far distant from where they'd been before. A bag lies in the corner, something like blood seeping out of the bottom. It'll talk to you if you stare at it long enough, bizarre curiosity that it is.

"I walked. I could do nothing but walk. And then, I saw me walking in front of myself. But it wasn't really me. Watch out. The gap in the door... it's a separate reality. The only me is me. Are you sure the only you is you?"

It seems like creepy nonsense, but with hindsight, it seems to hint that players ought to think about all of the other people in the world who were playing the game. There is only one voice across all of the games, but there are many other people who are inhabiting this avatar's shoes in order to get them through this realm. There are others out there. Perhaps you'll need them, soon.

Most probably didn't feel that way just yet. Not until they spent some time in the game's halls, aimlessly wandering through the loop. Stick around in this one long enough, looming in the darkness, and players would hear the clock strike twelve, indicating the change of day. Before long, Lisa would make some form of appearance at this time, visibly wandering the halls or lurking near objects. She could be seen patrolling, giving the player plenty to be afraid of. She wasn't backing off this time, either, often forcing players to back away or meet the dizzying end she had in store for those who made contact with her (more on that soon). Then, they'd be back at the start of the loop again.

However, stepping through the door this time wouldn't bring players to a new loop any more. Time would reset to just before twelve, indicating that the

loop had started over. I moved through this loop several times before I realized that nothing was changing. Here, I would have to do something. But what?

This is where the game becomes very, very confusing, requiring players take a series of extremely specific steps if they hope to escape the nightmare.

“The final puzzle only ends when you get the 'You've been chosen' call, which only happens after three sound effects of a baby laughing.” says UfoTekkie. “One of the laughs can be triggered consistently with ten steps after the clock in the area strikes midnight. The second is triggered somewhat consistently with a microphone – ‘Jareth’ seems to work best, though people have reported everything from ‘Kojima’ to the *Metal Gear Solid* detection sound effect also working. After two laughs, as long as the player doesn't input any control, the controller will vibrate, and the third will trigger automatically. This will cause the phone call, and after that the player can leave, thus completing the game.”

Is there much to indicate that the player is supposed to carry out these actions at this point? No. Nothing comes right out and says how to do these things. A few things seem to hint at them, though, such as pieces of text that the player can find by locating six incredibly hard-to-see pieces of a photograph. One of which is hidden in the pause screen, in case you wanted to know just how hard the developers wanted to make this. You could find these throughout most of the demo, but here, when you're lost, was when I ended up looking around for them.

Picking up these fragments will make words flash on the screen for a few seconds, all in several different languages. “I whispered your name, but the wind of the night took your voice away,” is written in Portuguese. “I didn't move anymore during the waiting, then his finger slipped on my hand,” is in Italian. “It was a cold hand, body was trembling,” in Japanese. “And through the mist of fading consciousness I believed, I heard a phone,” in German. I may have understood “Never moving a step, his hand in mine, I waited for it to pass,” but the words are also written in a blurry font, making them hard to read on top of it all. (5)

These could have easily passed for story elements for all but the most

dedicated players (but only a super dedicated player would have looked for translations, so...), and dismissed by most as just more lore, creepy messages, or something they only slightly understood. At least, until you'd been trapped there for some time and had no way of finding your way out.

Many players, like myself, would spend ages wandering these halls, dealing with Lisa's appearances while trying to find some clue or meaning that would get us through. The inattentive (me, again) would stay here for hours, only to find Lisa's chilling embrace over and over again. With each attack, the hands become less steady. The mind loses its ability to focus. Panic settles in. This loop's solutions become more and more challenging the longer the player takes to solve them, and by their bizarre nature, they are bound to take a long time.

This, through a fluke or accident of purposeful design, would be a challenge even for those who looked up a walkthrough on how to win. Not just because of how frightening Lisa was, but because the solution just wasn't all that reliable. But we're getting ahead of ourselves.

When *P.T.* first hit, finding out how to solve this final puzzle caught the attention of many, many players who were all struggling together, on Twitch Streams and in YouTube videos, to figure out just what to do.

"*P.T.* came out pretty suddenly, but it was completed only a few hours after its release," says UfoTekkie. "The first day or two after it came out were pretty wild – streams with nearly no followers would have over a thousand people watching them try all these different phrases into the microphone to try to complete the puzzle. Hundreds of videos sprung up on YouTube very quickly all claiming to have 'solved' *P.T.* and all with these different theories about how the game works."

And there were many different solutions to the final puzzle. Many people had managed to figure out that the player needed to take ten steps and then stop, as well as stand still until the controller vibrated (I found out that one while cowering while Lisa was about. Yay cowardice!), but the final solution evaded many.

Bob from The Grate Debate (or BobVids) would be one of the first to crack

what that solution was, finding the answer to the audio cue puzzle that had been worked into the game. “Figuring out *P.T.*'s mysteries wasn't something I initially intended to do. After all, Soapy Warpig had beaten it already, and nearly everyone who played the game had their own ideas of how to complete the final puzzle. But once I started playing the game, I realized that no one really knew what was going on in the final loop. I tried several guides on how to beat the game, and finally managed to do it after a few hours, but it didn't feel like I 'solved' it. It felt like I brute-forced it by just throwing various inputs at the game until one of them worked. There was no logic to any of the supposed solutions, and all of them had unreliable results, which felt wrong.”

Not that he was the very first person to complete the game, as others, he admits, had done it themselves. Still, no one seemed entirely sure why they had managed to complete the game, with many different accounts offering unreliable methods on how to win. Nothing seemed to work consistently, and from the nature of the actual solution, it's not surprising that it would take a while to figure out what the player had actually done to complete the game. “Really, the community had figured out most of the puzzles by the time I started playing, but the one puzzle everyone was hung up on was the one to beat the game - the one in the final hallway loop.”

To figure out just how to come to that solution, BobVids started doing exactly what many of us were all trying: running the game repeatedly. “To figure it out, I began by simply playing the game over and over to familiarize myself with it and gather context for the various theories about it. During these replays I also researched some of the hidden messages that pop up when you find the scattered photo pieces and others that come up randomly, which turned out to be integral to solving the final puzzle,” says BobVids.

These tests were no less taxing on BobVids than they were on me or any of the other people who were terrified of Lisa, either. “I'd been playing with my girlfriend Rachel, who was similarly intrigued with the final loop. We both wanted to get to the bottom of it, but after a while she had to quit helping me. Something I think a lot of people don't understand about figuring out *P.T.* at that time is that the game is actually terrifying. Lisa (specifically her jump scare) is legitimately scary and the atmosphere of the hallway can really get

under your skin. It got to the point where even hearing the sound effect for navigating the menu caused Rachel stress, so I had to create a kind-of ‘*P.T.* zone’ in my living room where I could play the game without freaking her out while still having everything hooked up to my computer for testing.”

Still, this terrifying work needed to get carried out in order to figure out what the final solution was. Luckily, some of the groundwork had already been done when he came to it. “I wasn't the only one trying to make sense of the game. Many people who had been playing before me had figured out various things about the hallway's puzzles, including documenting and translating the messages that appear in the game. At the time, Reddit, NeoGaf, and GameFAQs proved to be great sources for theories and test results,” says BobVids.

These messages, naturally, would form key components for solving the puzzle, requiring the player reach outside the game and into the real world to find their answers. Save for finding the odd horror fan who happened to be fluent in several languages specific to this game, there would be no way for anyone to figure out what all of the clues meant. This would mean that players had to rely on people all across the globe, working together to see what they could decipher.

A handful of things were already known when BobVids set to work. “Everyone knew a few things about the final puzzle: You need 3 baby laughs to exit the hallway, you can walk 10 steps after the clock strikes midnight to trigger a laugh, you shouldn't move when the controller vibrates after the second laugh, and to leave the hallway you need to answer the phone when it rings. The issue was that no one knew how to consistently trigger the second baby laugh. From reading about various theories and watching videos on how to solve the puzzle, I knew that the PS4 microphone played a part in solving the game.”

This helped BobVids connect them to the messages the player had been receiving throughout the game, both in references players would get at specific points or at random ones. “Eventually I realized that the hidden messages scattered throughout the game were related to the things you need to do to trigger the baby laughs. Specifically, one of the messages was translated to mean ‘I believe I heard a phone’, referencing the final call you

get when you leave the hallway. Then I knew I just had to rearrange those messages and test them until one worked.”

One particular clue started to stand out for BobVids. “A few of the messages said something about saying a person's name out loud - a man. This made sense considering what was known about using the PS4 microphone to beat the game, but I really had no clue who it could be. None of the names for people who created *P.T.* worked, so I looked for anything in the game that would give me a clue. I eventually found that during the loop before the final puzzle, one of the scripted error messages that comes up is signed by a person named ‘J’.”

“I then began testing ‘J’ names, but they weren't working. I even tried just saying ‘J’ a bunch of times, but it rarely worked. So, I looked deeper, and came up with a theory about a code that appears throughout the game, ‘204863’, and how it actually stood for a name that began with ‘J’. I went on one of those online baby name lists while I was at work one day and wrote down every name that started with ‘J’ and contained 6 letters. When I got home that night, I tested them over and over,” he continues.

Looking at a book of baby names is hardly a normal solution for a horror game, adding onto the already incredible complexity of a solution that would require a knowledge of several different languages from across the globe, and doing all of this when a ghost could grab the player at any moment and break their neck in horrifying fashion. Still, BobVids seemed to be making progress.

“I did an initial pass of the names, saying each one once in the final loop after I triggered the first baby laugh, to see if I was on to something,” BobVids says. “I dropped every name that didn't work and did another pass of the names that did. Eventually I started testing the name ‘Jarith’ and realized very quickly that it was working consistently. Test #3 - worked. Test #5 - worked. Test #10 - worked. Test #32 - worked. After the first 10 successful tests I yelled to Rachel that I figured it out. It was exhilarating to be sitting on this information that no one knew yet, and since I'm a video producer by trade, I naturally decided to make a video about it. I contacted some Twitter friends and had them test out my theory, and when they all confirmed that it worked, I wrote a script, recorded it, and started editing that same night.”

This was exciting news, but even as a fairly consistent solution, it was not absolutely consistent, as the speedrunning community would come to know well. “One of the sound effects is seemingly sound-activated - saying ‘Jarith’, or similar variations, into a microphone. That ended up being the only real barrier to consistent speedruns, but it was a big one,” says UfoTekkie.

“No matter how much ‘Jarith’ seemed to be the solution, it was still inconsistent,” he continues. “The problem with a voice-activated trigger is you never know if it's not working because of the recognition technology, or if it's simply not the solution at all. And, of course, since *P.T.* is so obfuscated on purpose, you never know if the game might just be messing with you. Maybe it only works after taking a certain number of steps, or looking at a certain object? Even now, there are tons of questions about the game that are unsolved.”

I can vouch for similar problems. Again, I wasn't even wearing my headset the one time that I completed the game properly (although it was on, likely catching my terrified screams anyway), and cannot seem to get it to register the names “Jarith” or even “J” now. Perhaps it is a problem with my headset, but either way, the solution does not feel like a guaranteed answer, giving a sense that the game can sometimes reject the player's answer purely to mess with them. Perhaps the tech isn't working, perhaps the recognition isn't picking up what you're saying, or perhaps, something within the fiction of the world itself, wants you to stay just a little while longer.

BobVids admits to similar issues. “Even though my original ‘Jarith’ theory turned out to not be the actual solution to the final loop (the game's been data-mined and we now know the name it's looking for is simply “Jack”), I still recommend using it. The PS4's voice recognition is wonky and won't register ‘J’ all the time, but using ‘Jarith’ works more often for some reason (Note: the PS4's voice recognition has been updated since *P.T.*'s release and now works better). But really, I'm just happy I made the video so I could help others finish *P.T.* for the first time. My method was the first one that worked consistently, and I can't tell you how many people messaged me after that video was released saying how grateful they were to finally beat the game. That really made the experience worth it.”

The solutions to *P.T.*'s final puzzle required global cooperation, intense

research while under extreme stress, knowledge of multiple languages, and even baby name catalogues, all far beyond the kinds of solutions most games would require. For many players, this would mean spending tons of time in close proximity to Lisa at the very least, growing close to the frightening ghoul over time but never getting used to the fear she created.

For a horror title, this seems like an excellent idea. Getting players to think on challenging topics, catch split-second messages and translate them, and then try various strange methods to complete them makes for some frightening experiences, with players trying to balance finding a solution with staying alive, all done while many are likely already too nervous to think, forcing players into a fear that feeds itself. Players are afraid of Lisa, but must push forward into where she hides in order to solve the game's puzzles, spending hours in a place we want to escape more than anything else to be free of it when all we have to do is shut it off. It's a recipe for panic, forcing players to face their terrors even as the game has done everything within its power to ramp that fear up.

This complexity, therefore, is the final part of *P.T.*'s cruel recipe, giving players an extreme challenge to manage as they work to overcome the terror the game has built. Atmosphere, location, the presence of Lisa, and the sheer challenge of the final puzzle work to keep the player off-balance, afraid, but forced to keep pushing forward into the darkness. They have to keep moving and trying new things, even as Lisa terrified them, in order to ever hope to complete it.

And one final, inescapable fate would likely meet them on this path.

10.

Lisa's kill is not only frightening in its ferocity, but also in the unpredictability of her appearances in the final act of *P.T.*

I had initially thought that there would be some pattern to how Lisa appeared, or what she would do and how she would kill the player, and sought out information from the *P.T.* speedrunning community to see what they knew about her behaviors and patterns. If anyone would know how Lisa worked and how best to avoid her clutches, it had to be someone whose entire goal is to run the game as quickly as possible.

Speedrunner UfoTekkie is a moderator on the SpeedRun.com board for *P.T.*, with their own world record attempt sitting on the game's leaderboards. UfoTekkie is no stranger to running horror games, and *Silent Hill* games in particular, having multiple, incredible runs across many frightening games, including holding the top spot for *Silent Hill 2* on Hard.

Reaching out to UfoTekkie, I expected to learn that Lisa's attacks did have some sort of pattern to them, or that she would be able to attack at set intervals or only from specific places. It is a game, after all, and all games and beings within them have to follow the rules that have been programmed for them. Even if these rules are expansive, they are still in place, somewhere, and players, through dedication, could learn them all.

"In the final section of the game Lisa, will reappear, seemingly at timed intervals – it's pretty obvious when she comes back, since you can hear her from any part of the map," says UfoTekkie. "She generally floats along a set path and in only a few parts of the hallway, so she's not difficult to avoid. However, there are tons of videos out there of Lisa attacking in some pretty crazy conditions – standing in the bathroom, in the room you start in, even immediately out of the pause menu."

That's where a large part of the fear of Lisa comes from. Early on, the player does not have much of an understanding of how she behaves or what triggers her to kill the player. We assume contact will do it, but what triggers her to

appear? And what places can she appear?

There are, of course, rules to her appearance, which the community seems to have uncovered. The timed intervals can help, but the fact that she can appear anywhere, with little indication outside of her laughter, adds to the terror of these encounters with her.

“In addition, her spawn locations aren't always so repetitive – there's video evidence of her appearances on the second floor and outside the hallway windows, neither of which I've personally ever seen myself. Like everything else about the game, it's mostly solved, but to this day weird and new things still happen,” says UfoTekkie.

Many horror games feature moments of safety, whether intentional or not. Running into a save room in *Resident Evil* gives players a moment of respite, or even just transitioning to a new area can at least buy the players a few moments of peace from whatever had been chasing them in the previous room. Even without something like that, many horror games at least have a pause button that will let the player escape danger at their own pace, finding temporary solace.

Just as many horror games work to erode this feeling of safety as well. *Resident Evil 3* introduced Nemesis, a hulking beast that would follow the player across various areas, and *Resident Evil 2* featured a single door where zombies would come through when the player was in the door-loading transition, which had previously been a sacred space where players could at least manage a calming breath. *Fatal Frame* would also feature ghostly faces appearing during the pause screen, giving players a start when they came back from the bathroom or if they lingered on the screen too long while getting their heart rate in check.

At its simplest, there are typically moments where and when the player can or cannot be attacked. For many horror games, this will happen when they can conceivably see their attacker (or hear them). *Silent Hill*'s foes are all visible to the player, and even if they're not looking the right way, a hissing radio provides an audio cue that they are around. There are also often areas of relative safety, like the aforementioned pause menu or rooms the player eventually learns are free of monsters. Even if it's something as simple as

knowing a monster dies after a certain cue, it tells the player that they have a short window to let go of their fear.

As early as *Resident Evil*, developers have been playing around with this moment to frighten players. Zombies may go down after a few shots, but many overzealous players likely found out that they'd get right back up again, or start gnawing on their legs, should they try to run past them without making sure they were dead. This ran counter to the idea that a fallen enemy was dead during the time, and provided many frights in its era.

Also, when a zombie was killed in *Resident Evil*, it stayed dead when the player returned. This was a welcome addition due to the game's limited ammo supplies, but it also served to lull the player into a false sense of safety. Later on, when the Hunters were introduced, many areas the player had cleared out would be filled with the dangerous creatures instead, eliminating the previously-built feelings of comfort in often jarring encounters.

P.T. works to remove those familiar feelings of safety as well with an erratic, dangerous opponent. This begins with the possible lethality of contact with Lisa, which UfoTekkie lays out for the curious.

“There are two kinds of attacks – one is instantaneous, one is a 'cursed' state that will inevitably lead to a kill. Her one-hit kills are usually by surprise, such as wandering into a 'haunted' area where she's hanging around without realizing it. If you wander into her while she's lingering around the halls, she can also do a 'rush' attack where she flies straight through the player. After this attack, the player's referred to as 'possessed', and at some point, seemingly randomly, but inevitably, the regular one-hit kill will happen to the player. Once the player is possessed, I believe you can't finish the game. After the attack, you respawn in the intro room and start over from your current section.”

Yet even here, we see an uncertainty in the outcome. Contact with Lisa WILL kill the player, that much is certain, but the question is when it will kill them. Players may be braced for an ugly death scene (with Lisa staring into the player's face, her own twisted features seen close and in extreme detail as she snaps the player's neck), but it may not come.

There is a kind of comfort in the knowledge that you will die on contact with a monster. Once that contact has been made, the player knows what will happen, and can react according to however they wish to deal with it (resetting the game, watching the death animation through, turning away from a gruesome yet expected scene). After a time or two, the player knows what to expect of themselves and the game.

Lisa does not give the player this comfort. While the player may be able to tell if they've blundered into Lisa and will be going directly into the death cutscene, they may also just be rounding the corner as Lisa is rushing at them, entering a cursed state instead. That jarring expectation of the death animation may not come, but instead leave the player in a state where any moment can be their last. Sure, the player can just give up here now, but even UfoTekkie, having run the game many, many times, is still only unsure if the player can complete the game while cursed. Perhaps it is worthwhile to try rather than give up.

Even if the player gives up, there is a unique despair that comes with that kind of defeat, isn't there? To suddenly accept the inevitability of your death and shut the game off? Sure, many have looked at their ammo and healing supplies in a horror game and given up in defeat, and this draws from a similar spirit, but it creates a feeling in the player that runs counter to that spirit that has them playing to begin with. In horror games, you will often die, frequently, but you fight that fear of death in order to press on. Yet, in this small moment of imminent defeat, the player feels this battle much more keenly. Failure is inevitable, yet in most runs, you draw from hope to keep going, and this snatches that hope from you in moments.

All of this leaves the player unsure whether they will live or die from contact. They're asking themselves whether they will live through contact as Lisa bears down on them, their mind swirling with confusing questions rather than simply accepting death and waiting for another run at things. There's a mingling of hope and fear rather than an acceptance of failure, even if the player is just going to lose the longer game anyway.

And at a random interval, too, something that never ceases to be terrifying. Pushing through a cursed state in hopes that you will win, though, is just part of that spirit that makes players work through horror games. In all likelihood

I will die, but what if I don't this time? It's felt most keenly in the unknown amount of time the player has left after Lisa curses them.

That's also assuming most players put that together for themselves. For many, it may feel like Lisa miraculously missed making contact with them, even though the halls are so narrow. Not only this, but the first-person perspective makes it so the player cannot see anywhere but right in front of them, meaning a player killed by the curse might assume that Lisa just got them from an angle they didn't notice. Without putting hours and hours of play into the game, players might just assume that Lisa could be anywhere, even (especially) sneaking up right behind them. Lisa could be coming to kill them at any second.

This line of thinking seems to bring us right back to the idea that Lisa kills on contact, thereby eliminating that possible uncertainty in her lethality that makes encounters seem more unsettling. Arguably, though, it is simply a different kind of discomfort, one that adds additional layers for the person who plays it many, many times, allowing for a different kind of fear. It's a nice touch.

For many, though, it's the idea that she can be anywhere and everywhere that is the most chilling. The game is happy to indicate her appearance with her laughter and the distorted sounds that play, but beyond that, she could be anywhere within the halls and rooms. Pause screens and opening areas are not off-limits, and players can be killed at any time. There is no hoping for a peaceful break from her, even for just a few moments, as players could find themselves dying just as they're exiting the pause screen.

The pause screen death is of particular note, especially for the connections *P.T.* makes with our own reality. As mentioned, horror games like to blur the line between reality and game, doing so to bring the player more in line with the digital world so they can truly feel its frights. *P.T.* has already worked to accomplish this through the hall's similarities to real-world places, its visual style, and its human-like opponent. It's all within the realm of possibility within reality.

Now, when a player pauses a game, all play is supposed to stop. Everything within the game's world is frozen in time while the player takes a break or

messes with the options. However, Lisa is still, apparently, able to move during this time. She's still capable of motion even when the game world is locked down, hinting at the possibility that Lisa is able to move independent of the game world and its rules. Lisa is not bound by the rules of the game, acting like a separate entity.

That's stupid, I hear you thinking. No one thinks that. And you're probably right. Probably.

The idea of Lisa's independence is further strengthened by her erratic nature. Put short, her whole motive is not designed around attacking the player. She does not beeline for them every time she appears, and not all of her appearances are built around attacking the player. As UfoTekkie stated, she can appear in windows or on the higher floors, shuffling to locations that are not designed to kill. They sure may be designed to frighten the player, but they show that her whole goal isn't the player's death.

Enemies in horror are often singular in their focus, and while this makes the player certain that they are dangerous entities, there is a sense of being a coded creature with little ambition beyond following their written orders. They feel very "video game"-y in this regard – they're just monsters to antagonize the player. Lisa acts under this same principle, with her goal being to scare and kill the player, but this autonomy to go to various places, whether they kill the player or not, gives her an alarming sense of being an actualized being.

Lisa decides what she wants to do based on the code she was created from. She has been given a set of rules that bind her, but she is able to interpret those in surprising ways that are rarely the same twice. She only has so many places she can be, but she does the choosing through her options. She doesn't appear in a handful of places and then beeline for the player. She can appear almost anywhere, sometimes killing the player and sometimes not, sometimes appearing someplace she can hurt them and sometimes not. She chooses, in her own way, though, and it is difficult to tell what she will do.

This is disturbing, as it gives Lisa this semblance of life (unlife?). She is capable of deciding for herself what she intends to do to the player. She will do so with no logic the player can comprehend, once that logic is set in

motion. She's been taught to think with her coding, and then set loose on people using it. Like Frankenstein's monster, she is a creation that has been set free, for ill.

Not even speedrunning the game has eroded her ability to frighten, either. Even after playing the game so many times, UfoTekkie admits to a hint of doubt and fear when they play. "Given everything I mentioned about Lisa being... well, controlled, but also doing some crazy random things sometimes, playing the game actually still makes me really nervous. I know where Lisa should and shouldn't be, but there are so many recorded cases where she attacks in random, sometimes ridiculous areas, and since it happens so quickly it can't really be avoided."

"I still power through it, but the final section still scares the heck out of me because of how dangerous Lisa is, even if I haven't had any truly crazy experiences myself," says UfoTekkie.

As a video game enemy, she's terrifying in her ability to appear anywhere in the game, whether it makes sense or not. She is also capable of a lethal touch in moments, something that's terrifying when you see her walking your way. That she can appear anywhere and do this bloats every moment of play with dread, leaving players with a crushing fear that makes it very difficult to move on, or even to stand still. Just having the game on becomes a test of will, leaving the player to wonder if Lisa will do something even more surprising that no one has seen yet.

And what if she is only beginning? No one can entirely say they know everything she is capable of, can they (except the developers, and they're not talking)? What other tricks does she still hold? What ways to die have we not seen or misunderstood? Lisa still continues to offer a tantalizing possibility of death in many places, so are we sure we've seen them all?

We don't know. And that makes her even more unsettling.

11.

All of *P.T.* boils down to a single, heart-stopping jump scare (one I most decidedly did not want to research). We've talked about the fear of dying from Lisa at any given point already, but now, we need to discuss the importance of the ferocity of that kill.

As a little lead in to it, simply seeing Lisa quivering in the hall adds some layers to the expected kill. For starters, the final hallway is the first time we'll have seen Lisa fully exposed to us. We can take in almost all of her details, watching as she approaches us in the very hall we've been walking through all this time. Now, let's take that closer look at her.

Lisa's movements are extremely unnatural, taking stuttering steps toward the player as her head shakes at speeds that should be impossible, or at least snap her neck from the force of her movements (hint hint). It is utterly jarring to watch her freaking out as she moves down the hall, especially seeing it happening to a humanoid frame. It plays with our expectations of reality from human creatures, giving a sense of (admittedly, messed-up) reality versus something very unreal. These conflicting feelings result in a powerful sense of "I don't want to get anywhere near that."

Proximity, therefore, is an excellent addition to the kill. When the player gets a sense of revulsion, forcing them into close proximity can make an enemy attack that much more uncomfortable. Perhaps this is why the game begins with the pair of roaches, showing a typically sickening thing up close to the player's face right from the start.

As we'll find out, the player can be killed from outright contact with Lisa, or from getting a little too close to her and being rushed, causing a curse state that will kill them at some point in the future. This lunge is something to behold, with Lisa able to whip her body toward the player in a single, blinding movement. It happens much quicker than her steps would have the player believe, so if the player has been watching her speed and been feeling comfortable about being able to dodge her, this will cause quite a jump. It also serves to erode any attempt to feel that we know how she works,

thwarting the player should they try to gain knowledge and a sense of safety from it.

This also all happens in extremely tight corridors with no way out, so moving away from her doesn't help much. She can cover large distances with this attack, so trying to get away doesn't often feel like a viable approach. Cowering in a corner often does work, if you're curious. I've done tons of research on this method to draw from.

The curse and Lisa's nasty habit of popping out in places gives the player the feeling that Lisa can get them just about anywhere they are, and whenever she likes, as we've laid out previously, which leaves the player constantly on the cusp of the jump scare. It forces them into a start of borderline panic, sick with worry, and it leaves them there, because the end can come at any point. Any point at all.

Now that she has us, though, it's time to walk through what happens.

It will occur quickly, with the player shifting their gaze. Lisa's face moves into an extremely close zoom, getting far closer than she ever has before. Her face also isn't jittering about, which would have made it difficult for the player to get a good look at her features previously. Everything has been keeping the player from getting a clear sight of what she looks like until this point, her features hidden by shadows and distance until now.

Her face is pale, black hair seemingly smeared to the back of her head. A green ooze trickles down her mouth, dribbling past her smile. She is grinning almost the entire time during this attack, her joy making things that much more uncomfortable. A single, bulging eye glares at the player, but it doesn't seem human, appearing damaged sickening. Her other eye is missing, an empty socket that was gouged before (perhaps by someone's actions earlier with the photograph). Her skin is pockmarked and gray, covered in what may be dried blood or her flesh rotting away. She is beyond revolting to behold, and would churn our stomachs if most of us weren't too busy screaming.

She draws the player close and then far away, her head going back to quick quivering, although not quite as fast as she does when she moves through the hallway. It's enough to show her movements are still unnatural, but not

enough that the player will have her unsettling gaze removed from their line of sight. The point here is to linger on her closeness and sickening appearance. To languish in it.

The movement seems to indicate the player is being shaken or strangled until their neck breaks with a crack, their vision twisting to one side before being dropped to the floor, their vision going dark. However, there is another death the player can undergo, one where the player is dropped to the floor, slumping to their knees before hitting the ground (two distinct stops, one at a medium height, one at the level of the floor, hint at this). The player will find themselves staring at some trim and flooring as they hear the sound of something like a belt unbuckling, a zipper being undone, and then a wet tearing or chewing noise fills their ears. If you weren't sickened before, this ought to do it.

This is a startling attack, one that will hit most players hard purely by the speed in which it happens. Players will transition from playing the game to dying in less than a second, and with little visual or audio indication that something is happening.

Most horror games play around with this bit of preamble. A jump scare, while often quite jarring, may be hinted at through bits of silence or a change in music, or at least we're made aware that an enemy is in the area through hinting at its presence through shadows/light/movement, or through a decided lack of enemy encounters over some time. We tend to be given a little lead in that a jump is coming, even if the preparation is rarely helpful.

P.T. doesn't offer any visual or audio clue at all. In fact, it has been playing in relative silence most of the game, something that is unsettling in and of itself. Voidburger found this to be of particular note in her own first experience with the game.

“My first experience with *P.T.* was watching it through my fingers at a friend's house while my boyfriend played it, and it still made me a total nervous wreck. And with most of the visual information gone, the sound design is what left a huge impression on me, because it's insidiously perfect and it still messed me up all by itself. The sound design of *P.T.* is woefully overlooked. What was shocking to me was the LACK of sounds, the lack of

music,” she says.

“A lot of games rely heavily on musical cues to tell the player what they should be feeling: ‘Tense violins are rising to a crescendo, a jump scare might happen!’ but *P.T.* did none of that stuff and it made me even more scared because the game was basically leaving me rudderless without that little musical comfort. You could hear your own heart beating and it was just awful, haha. The confidence to leave the player in almost-silence really impressed me and made me think that the game’s creators really understood (more than anyone in games so far, in my opinion) how to manipulate a player’s emotions. It was art,” Voidburger continues.

Lisa does indicate that she is near with that distorted ditty, but we have so far experienced it without an attack. By this point, players might even be wondering if she’s going to attack at all, as they’ve heard the tune multiple times without having been killed or affected in any way. It’s simply meant that she’s around, possibly even luring some into false feelings of safety. She’s just a boogeyman who won’t do anything.

For me, I still had an inkling that an attack was coming. So, this moment is made a little worse because it is still the first real contact we’ll be making with Lisa during the game, too. Like I mentioned in my Cursed Mountain example, it’s the lead in to that first attack that can be the most horrifying, as our imaginations are still setting us up for the worst things we can come up with. We have no idea what to expect, so our minds are swirling with the possibilities of that first lethal touch.

That scare does not disappoint, as we’ve seen, jarring players with a sickening look at the antagonist, the speed with which the scare hits, its ability to come out of nowhere, and the lack of any indication that it is coming. It’s a disturbing moment that strikes hard, making for a powerful payoff for the extreme buildup the atmosphere has been guiding us to.

We’re not done here, though. I want to point out a couple of things before we move away from this spectacular death. When Lisa attacks the player, she breaks their neck in both types of death, then lets them drop to the floor, sometimes attacking in some further way judging from the sound effects. This is then followed by a fading to black, seeming to indicate that the player

is passing on (finally free of this place, perhaps).

A broken neck isn't always fatal, though, is it? It's enough to paralyze someone for life, but it may not necessarily kill them all of the time. So, there is a chance, albeit a smaller one, that Lisa has not done enough damage to the player to kill them, but rather gravely wounded them. You could be very much alive after the injury Lisa has inflicted, with the player only passing out from the attack afterwards. You may not be dead at all. Just something fun to think about.

Also, dying in this way simply resets the player into the gray room. This is kind of natural for a video game, as dying isn't typically something that boots you out of a game forever (but might make for an interesting horror title), but does send you back to a previous point in the game. That's usually tied to some sort of Game Over screen, or a return to the title image. It indicates a severing of the plot at this particular junction – that this story was not supposed to end this way. Therefore, the game reminds you that you've screwed up with an indication that this reality isn't real, and you must try better to move on through the appropriate reality.

P.T. isn't having that. Rather, it loops you back to the concrete room, as if you had just awoken, jarred but still alive. And now you have to do all of the hallway stuff over again (assuming you know what to do, yet).

This gives *P.T.*'s play a sense of continuity, as its loop is not unlike the ever-repeating doors. The game has simply brought us back to where we started again, quite intact. It has been built from repetitive loops up until this point, and because of this, death feels like just another part of the loop again. Instead of transitioning through a door, now, we transition through agony, fear, and pain.

This strengthens that sense of being unable to escape, only instead of a looping area and something that makes us afraid, it's a loop of endless suffering. It's a kind of hell where we suffer the same fate, over and over and over again, only to awaken to another round of broken necks and devoured innards. We never get to truly die here, but instead suffer for eternity.

And good luck doing that on your own with the puzzles the game has. So,

feel free to enjoy this endless loop of suffering and confusion as you struggle to escape it, all while drowning in the game's atmosphere and a terror that can be so strong it physically hurts.

12.

I've spent quite a few words praising every aspect of *P.T.*, lauding its visuals and presentation and atmosphere and monstrosities and puzzles. Every aspect of *P.T.* provides elements that wind the player up tight and leave them lost, confused, and afraid. The fear is right on the border of painful through the work the developers did, and they should be endlessly proud of this horror achievement.

However, I have my doubts that *Silent Hills* could have ever touched what *P.T.* accomplished. I mean this without any cruelty toward the developers who lost their jobs or whose work was destroyed. I'm not glad that things ended up the way they did, as *Silent Hills* would not have lessened *P.T.* by being released. I do feel that *Silent Hills* could not have done what *P.T.* did, though.

A teaser trailer from Tokyo Game Show back in 2014 (6) shows a *Silent Hills* that is definitely going in a very different direction from *P.T.* We're still wandering down a hallway, but the atmosphere is more designed to push things toward the sickening and absurd. A ball bounces against a wall, rolling into a room where someone is holding a severed head whose mouth is filled with bugs. The protagonist turns away, only to see the halls lined with what appear to be leeches.

The character continues to walk. Brightly colored toys flit about the floor as a naked form sits in the distance, but then a huge, humanoid hand reaches out from the dark, connected to some mass of flesh we only see in snippets.

The protagonist takes off down the hall to get away, doors slamming closed as they seek any way out. They come to the end of the hallway and watch bloody handprints appear all over a door before it explodes outward, smashing against the wall. Rather than fall to the floor again, it tilts open, off-kilter, revealing a stone stairwell. Taking one last look back at the creeping creature, the protagonist walks down the stairs, the visuals fading away to reveal the title card.

It's exciting, to be sure, but there's little in the way of building up atmosphere. It's an incredible trailer that definitely captures the imagination, but it lacks any of the subtlety of *P.T.* It aims for the heaviest, most sickening punches it can pull, grossing players out then hitting them with a daring chase, followed by a creepy bit of stairs that work in an odd way.

I liked it a lot when I first saw it. It's still a horror game that I'd happily play, as it seems completely out of control. It is also nothing like what I would want from a game teased by *P.T.*

The thing is, *P.T.* is not something that ever could have been a full game.

But why not? *P.T.*'s creepy corridors are a perfect playground for players to scream their heads off in, using the familiar and then mixing it with just a hint of ever-increasing paranormal to make reality feel like it's crumbling. A game could easily take place in a few such places, with this game being a possible expansion on the ideas behind *Silent Hill: The Room*, the game that featured players moving through their ever-more-haunted apartment while escaping into other worlds. Again, I'd play that. I'm excited just contemplating it.

Lisa could easily dog the player over the course of an entire game. She's terrifying to behold, and her unpredictable behavior would make her a challenging opponent. Tons of games have done something similar, from *Clock Tower* to *Amnesia* to *Outlast*, and dozens of other horror games along with them. The frightening stalker is highly popular in the genre, and with *Slender* already showing just how successful a teleporting phantom can be for players.

It's the third aspect, the one that makes *P.T.* as powerful a horror experience as it was, that makes this difficult to do as a full, six- to eight- hour horror game: the puzzles. *P.T.*'s puzzles are designed to be confusing, offering almost nothing in the form of solutions for anyone other than the most dedicated and sharp-minded player. The amount of work that went into finding *P.T.*'s solution involved a global community of players all working in different languages and on different clues.

Not that this meant it took long for this many people all working together to

solve it, according to Kojima in a 2014 interview at Gamescom. “The last puzzle is ridiculously difficult. This is intentional. I, personally, expected this to take at least a week to be solved and I was really surprised. Less than half a day! I underestimated the current fans.”

“I wanted to create something that required people from different countries – different parts of the world – to cooperate to be solved,” he continues. (7)

That camaraderie is quite an accomplishment, and a testament to the power of people on the internet working together to solve something. That said, it took people across the globe in order to figure out a section of the game that is about three minutes long, if players can do it correctly. A single, highly-complicated chunk of the game was where players would spend most of their time.

And this worked. Players working to solve this puzzle would be stuck with Lisa for hours on end, constantly attacked and killed by the unpredictable ghost as they prodded at every surface, read every single line of dialogue, and stood, silent, waiting for an answer on every bit of floor and in every room. In real time, the puzzle was solved quickly, but for the people enduring the attacks by Lisa, it must have felt like eons.

That challenge of breaking those puzzles and doing critical thinking while enduring Lisa’s chaotic attacks would make for some of the most crushing horror ever experienced. It did for me, who, at first, refused to look up a walkthrough for the final solution. This meant creeping around this place and poking at its various objects and items, praying to find some sort of solution.

This sort of complex puzzle is unprecedented, at least for a mandatory solution. Sure, there are dozens of games with extremely elaborate Easter eggs buried in them that require knowledge of extensive lore, other games, world history, and several other pieces of obscure clues that lead to even more obscure hints. Many require leaps of faith and borderline precognitive abilities, or the powers of hundreds and thousands of people all trying different solutions. Those are all out there in video game land, but as far as I know, this is one of the first times such a solution was mandatory to “complete” a game.

I was not able to handle finding the solution myself. Naturally. Seeking it without anything to interrupt me would have been hard enough, but with Lisa constantly dogging me, it was all but impossible. I was too scared to think straight, and far too frightened to even keep track of what I was doing. I simply wandered the place in a blind panic, staring at the walls when I heard Lisa coming, hoping she would leave me alone.

I would still be there if I hadn't broken down and looked at a walkthrough. And you know what? It didn't help.

I have played *P.T.* a few dozen times. I have completed it once.

P.T.'s final solution requires the player take a set number of steps, say a name into a headset, and then stand perfectly still. Of those items, two out of three work reliably, with the voice option being so unreliable that it didn't even seem like a real solution. It's still the accepted way to beat the game in many circles, but there are dozens of theories out there that seem to work, according to the people posting them.

It's the internet, though. There are idiots and liars everywhere. As we've heard from the speedrunning community, though, the solutions to the final puzzle still aren't set in stone. "The microphone baby laugh, as mentioned, has a few mostly-consistent triggers, but it also happens under tons of other circumstances. Lots of completions were done without a microphone at all," says UfoTekkie.

So, a final piece of the puzzle often works under different circumstances that, even four years later, are not 100% effective.

And here's where my story comes in.

I saw that the solution required players to say a name into their headset, which I figured was pure internet nonsense. No way that it could actually require I do that. So, I ignored them entirely for the better part of two hours. Then, when my nerves were starting to crack, I figured I'd give it a shot.

I said Jarith. I said it again. Said it a couple of times. Said some choice cuss words about people making up garbage on the internet. Said a few more

things. Then, I gave up, tossing the headset across the room. Still nothing for some time as I worked my way around the room, pushing up against objects and trying the X button on any surface I could think of.

I have no idea what triggered the second baby laugh during that run. I don't know if it was our screams or idle complaining or water moving through the pipes, but something made the second baby sound come bubbling up through the speakers. I flipped out and stopped moving, finally getting that cutscene I could have just watched on YouTube ages before. I had finally earned my prize.

To this day, I haven't been able to repeat these conditions.

This is a game with a known solution, even if it took a ton of work from many people to get to it. It's a game that took hundreds of people working together to come to a single, unreliable solution that may or may not get people through it, but that still works enough of the time that it's the accepted completion criteria.

Can you imagine having this kind of puzzle in every act of a game? Every fifteen minutes? Every hour?

As a small experience, the developers can absolutely get away with this. Spending a few minutes in purgatory with Lisa is something I can accept, and my courage can possibly hold out for. Doing this for 7 or 8 hours, or even three or four, would be more than I could take. Also, having to look up bizarre solutions that may not even work would also break some of the immersion the game worked to weave.

P.T. can get away with this for its short duration. It can get away with a solution that may not work because, as a tiny horror experiment, it doesn't come with the baggage that comes with a longer play experience. Confusion is fine as a short-term gameplay occurrence, but over a long period? Players will get annoyed, and an irritated play is no longer a frightened one.

Knock Knock is an example that may clarify things. In *Knock Knock*, players must spend the night in a strange house, avoiding ghosts until the morning sun can chase them away. The house, the phantoms that haunt it, and the use

of light all obey rules that aren't made clear to the player. Hiding will save you from a ghost sometimes, but in others, the specter kills you anyway. Sometimes light seems to be a good thing, and in others it does nothing. The house itself even shifts, offering gateways to other worlds that never convey whether they're helpful or not.

It makes for some solid horror, as it keeps the player confused and afraid of the things that come for them, but it is also extremely irritating when the game constantly kills you for being unable to understand it. Some ghosts just kept killing me regardless of whether I hid or not, with the same ghost style changing how its rules worked seemingly on the fly. I couldn't trust any aspect of it, and found myself repeating the same sections over and over again as I struggled to get through.

When playing a game I want to push through, for story or play or whatever reason, getting stuck on something that doesn't make sense can get aggravating. It was definitely tiresome throughout *Knock Knock*, and even though I do like the game deep down, I can't deny that it makes me extremely angry almost all the time when I play it, if the ghosts decide I'm having an off night.

Half the time, I'm not afraid of what's happening in *Knock Knock* because I'm too furious with it to care about being afraid. I just hunker down somewhere in hopes the ghosts leave, cheat by hiding on the stairs (ghosts can't touch you on the stairs due to a glitch), or burn through each stage as fast as possible. I like *Knock Knock* when things are going right and the confusion is only periodic, but when nothing I do seems to work, that emotion swiftly becomes anger, and the fear fades away.

I cannot imagine the entirety of *Silent Hills* utilizing this kind of complex puzzle. It's too much to expect players to bash their heads against the wall for such a full-sized experience, and while they could look the solutions up, having to repeatedly reference a walkthrough is an excellent way to break the tension the developer is working to create. Plus, if you're looking at walkthroughs all the time, what is the point of exploring a horror game at all? You're literally following an instruction manual through a spooky house. They can still be frightening with a walkthrough for other reasons, but it's hard to deny them being just a little bit easier to take. The scares, a little

duller.

It could have been done that way, but it would have lacked the power of *P.T.* As a concise experience, it's just short enough that players can accept its eccentricities. Players can tolerate highly complex puzzles for a short time, and figuring out the solutions while dodging Lisa is something the heart can take a little easier over a tiny game. Having to do this for hours across varied areas would be hard on the heart and mind, and risk falling into irritating territory with its unreliable solutions.

I'm not saying they couldn't have tried it. It may have been quite good all the same despite my feelings that it wouldn't have worked. I just can't imagine that it could have, though, or that it wouldn't have stumbled from its own length and complexity. It would have been too much of itself, and its tricks would have worn thin.

As a brief experiment, *P.T.* offers powerful terror, though, trapping players in a confusing dimension from which there is little hope to escape. And, in its brevity, it's all right to be incapable of escaping it. The player is not going to get mad that they spent sixty dollars on something they could only play for fifteen minutes on their own. They're not going to get upset about being stuck in a dark dimension with an enraged ghost that can attack them at will.

In an experience of this length (and that was free), the player is likely perfectly fine with never being able to escape from Lisa. The experience of trying to solve the puzzles and failing to avoid her is enough. It's a horror game that excels in a lack of completion, instead of in its completion. It's at its best when players cannot figure out how it works, and yet stubbornly try. Playing with voices and steps is an interesting end to a horror title, but it's still the time spent buried in a horrifying pocket world with this frightening figure that makes for the better game.

As a free, short experience, that's fine enough. And, as such, *P.T.* makes for some fine, fearful evenings, even if I think the full game never would have touched its terrifying power.

13.

Secrets have given *P.T.* an incredible power to frighten, but did we discover them all, yet? What else lies buried in the game's code, waiting to frighten unsuspecting players? luxox18, a data miner who uncovered what may be the last of *P.T.*'s secrets back in December 2016, just wanted to know what was still lying there that hadn't been seen.

“*Silent Hill* is a very important franchise to me. I've played the games for years, and just like a lot of players, I want a new *Silent Hill* too. This new game, *P.T./Silent Hills*, promised a change in the franchise under the direction of people with a long career and great prestige. Unfortunately, none of this happened, converting the game into a kind of internet legend that was almost buried, generating a special interest in many people,” says luxox18.

“Personally, I love the ambient and mystery that we can see and feel in *Silent Hill* games, where everything, in the end, is paranormal and there are not answers for everything, contrary to games like *Resident Evil* where everything has a human origin in its creation (*Resident Evil* is a good game too [laughs]).”

“Now, based on my experience in game data during these years, it's very common that developers add content to the final game (intentionally or not) that will not be used. This happens due to multiple factors like time, sudden changes, future plans, lots of people working in the project, large amounts of data, etc. Maybe you know that developers need more storage to create a game than players will need in the final game. For example, *Killzone Shadow Fall*, a game developed by Guerrilla Games released during 2013, had a size of 45GB approx, but developers needed about 12TB of storage during its creation. That is lot of data discarded that we will never see. Imagine that in famous titles like *Metal Gear*, *Resident Evil*, *Silent Hill*, etc.”

Data for unused objects, creatures, and music is often left inside the game, whether by developers forgetting about it, meaning to use it later, or for any number of reasons that busy professionals might not remove it over. This possibility was tantalizing for luxox18, especially given the already

mysterious nature of *P.T.* “Obviously, we don't know if a game has removed content that is still included until we can research the data. This increases the desire to find out their secrets. I would have loved to know the development and have the end of the story told,” says luxox18.

Luxox18 found a few interesting tidbits inside of the game, doing so with the help of many other users and dedicated fans across the world, all of whom played a part in the multiple steps required to crack their way into the game's code. “The security added by Sony in the PS4 console and in the game packages is very strict, so to data mine the game, it was necessary to obtain a decrypted version. This was finally possible thanks to the members of the PS4 scene that were able to obtain data, bypassing the security measures added by the developers. Otherwise we would have to wait more months or years.”

“With the first part solved the next task was figure out the Fox Engine formats,” luxox18 continues, trying not to get too technical. “Fortunately, this was resolved too, because a lot of people developed tools some months before for *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* that basically used the same engine with some minimum changes. Then, the most difficult task was converting models and textures, but some people from the Xentax forum (a forum for deep game research) made great discoveries that helped us to find more things and to automate the process.”

This process, while different every time, has allowed luxox18 to make some interesting discoveries in multiple games, some interesting and some silly. “In part, I feel good for find things the devs invested time and effort into, but we will never see due to unknown decisions. Some of the hidden models have amazing details, and I feel that basically means that the time invested was important. Also, there are other models that are used as placeholders, at times. These models have zero relation with the game or ambience, but are sometimes very funny.”

Luxox18 feels that many of these discoveries are important, archiving things that developers put a ton of work into and that deserve to be seen, whether they made it into the full game or not. He often wonders whet these games would have been like with this kind of content included. “I feel bad sometimes, because some of the content is amazing! Imagine what kind of

game would have resulted if that content was added (music, models, images, story, dialogues, etc)!”

This attitude led them to work on seeing what they could discover within *P.T.*, hopefully to find even more interesting secrets that still lay buried outside the game. And indeed, they found some, revealing creatures and details that could hint at more of the game’s stories and secrets. “In mining *P.T.*, it was very interesting to find the monster with the big hand that we can see during the trailer (the one from Tokyo Game Show 2014), or see some extra details in characters. The main character, for example (Norman Reedus), had a phone in his pocket.”

The monster with the large hand, a gray, humanoid creature, and some other details became known through luxox18’s efforts. It was revealed that the inside of the paper bag – the one that talks to the player – is empty, although this may not be for any deep reason. The character models for Lisa and the protagonist were even made available for some people online to make silly videos with. The strange creature, the one we would see in the later trailer, hints that perhaps more was slated to be added to the demo at a later date, or perhaps some features had been cut for various reasons.

Still, many have developed complex theories on the game based on these unveiled secrets, which pleased luxox18, but he remains humble about it. “The questions based on the content that I found and in the content of other people are infinite, basically as far as the human mind can imagine, without receiving official feedback from Kojima. My finds have helped some people develop elaborate theories that are wonderful, but it is not just my own merit. Lots of people have found amazing things in the games and in *P.T.* I just was the first guy to check the game files – sooner or later, another person would have found the same things.”

Are these all that remain in *P.T.*, though? Do we know everything about it, and can lay our fears of its mysteries to bed? Judging from Lisa’s still-mysterious behavior and some words from luxox18, perhaps not.

When asked what he was looking for, he answers: “I was hoping to find ‘something’. Nothing specific. Maybe a discarded character, some unreleased sounds and/or textures, or an image with a message that we cannot see in

game because we are not able to correctly trigger the action. And, yes, basically all that I expected has been found. Except the actions, because I've not checked the scripts to find other triggers in-game, so maybe there are more secrets still there.”

There are still some things that luxox18 hasn't looked into – still some final mysteries that the game holds in store for those who play it. While knowing everything might have eroded some of those fears players get while exploring *P.T.*, even four years later, there are still some questions on how our monstrous ghost behaves, as well as what other behaviors the game has hidden and done. There is still much we may not know about the game, as while we can see all that it holds, we still may not know all of what it chooses to do to us.

14.

We've spoken at length on why *P.T.* is a chilling horror title, and how it excels at frightening me. It's to the point where the fear can get physically painful, winding me up so tight that I need to take breaks (preferably not by pausing). It promises an endless loop of pain, suffering, and fear, taking the player through an almost literal hell should they choose to play it.

So why on Earth would I do this to myself? Why would I endure this? Why would anyone?

What draws us to this kind of experience that feels so miserable? Is it really just as simple as the desire for a shot of adrenaline in a safe environment? I'd like to think it's a little more complicated than getting a little chemical high from the brain. Not that this means it necessarily is, but I hope it's more than that.

Why would someone create something like this, too? It would seem like it's a taxing process to explore horror so deeply, something that Kojima himself verified in an interview with IGN about why he would no longer work in horror.

"I get scared very easily. Actually, this is true of Alfred Hitchcock as well as Steven Spielberg. Because they scare easily, because I scare easily, it's actually easy for us to make something that is scary, because we understand what is scary. But while in that process, we're constantly imagining, like, terrifying situations so it ends up giving me bad dreams. That's the reason why I don't want to make a horror game." (8)

Horror always draws me in for some reason, though. There's something about being afraid that keeps bringing me back. Something about its exploration of darker topics of the human condition, or the very real danger represented by the beings within it.

When the very people who make these games get feelings of dread in their creation, what makes any of us want to explore terror? What is the appeal of that facing of fear?

“I can’t speak for everyone of course, particularly as voluntarily putting myself in frightening or unsettling situations (even if it is just for a couple of hours while watching a film) isn’t something I necessarily enjoy, but for the most part, I think it’s a fair assumption that people who enjoy the horror genre are seeking a type of thrill we don’t often experience in our daily lives,” says Arif.

“Carl Jung posited that horror films tap into the primordial archetypes buried deep in our collective subconscious, and I think that’s largely true. Terry Pratchett followed a similar train of thought - whether knowingly or not, I can’t say - with the notion of the first bogeymen in (the character of) The Hogfather.”

“‘I was the dark in the cave! I was the shadow in trees! You’ve heard about...the primal scream? That was...at me!’ it laments, recalling a simpler time, with simpler people; tree-dwelling primates who knew the true meaning of fear.”

“‘Didn’t really used to be children back in the ice times...just big humans, little humans, not children...and...and there was a different world in their heads...In their heads, that’s where the old days were now.’”

“Sir Terry was on the money. The worst terrors are, after all, those we imagine for ourselves. None are so frightening as those conjured up in the boundless realm of the mind. Perhaps some people find it cathartic to summon the dark in the cave, the shadow in the trees, and face it, if only briefly, through the medium of their choosing,” she continues.

“Exposing ourselves to scary movies, books, or games, affords us a measure of control while we explore the darker side of the zeitgeist; an emotional rollercoaster that takes us to the precipice of terror, before gently pulling us back in as the credits roll, and the monsters return to the dark and dusty recesses of our mind, until we’re ready to face them again. As for me, it’s a ride I don’t often take, so it needs to be something truly special to persuade me to buckle myself in. And Hideo Kojima’s *P.T.* was just that,” says Arif.

For UfoTekkie, there is also a certain pleasure to be found in facing fear. “I actually wrote a speech about this topic in high school for Academic

Decathlon. I don't have it on hand but it boiled down to the proximity of the fear response the brain can dish out during scary experiences to the pleasure response. If the viewer has that subconscious awareness of safety, the adrenaline rush of a fight-or-flight response can still occur with the knowledge that there isn't any actual danger. You can definitely find more academic sources about the topic than myself, but I think a lot of it is just simply 'for that rush.'”

Still, it is not only about chasing scares for an emotional high for UfoTekkie. It's also about the kinds of stories horror games can concoct. “Personally, I'm also a huge fan of surrealism in art and of body horror in general. Many of my favorite games are enriched by this – *Silent Hill*, *Fatal Frame*, *Rule of Rose*, *Eternal Darkness*. There's a world of expression you can only explore when you allow macabre themes and motifs. It's artistic curiosity, on top of a lot of other things,” he continues.

BobVids expresses a similar sense of pleasure from facing his fears, but more than that, finds the subject matter more compelling, whether it goes right or wrong. “I enjoy scary games because the experience is kinda like riding a roller coaster – it's fun to get your adrenaline going and power through all that tension. Horror is also a genre that's always pushing the envelope for affecting the player, which sometimes translates into a great story – and I'm all about innovative, affecting stories in games. On the flipside, it's very easy to get horror wrong, and as a guy who grew up watching MST3k I have a deep fondness for schlock. Nothing tickles me more than a jump scare executed terribly.”

“We live in a society where almost all things are controlled, sanitized, assured, etc.,” says luxox18

“Centuries ago, people didn't know if they would return home every day, because getting food was a true life or death adventure. Two or three generations back in our occidental hemisphere, the people didn't know if they would be able to reach age thirty due to wars. Obviously, there are exceptions to this because there are parts of the world where, even today, obtaining food or surviving is difficult. That fear of the death has formed the society and the humanity that we know now.”

“Humans being love the adrenaline and other basic sensations. We want to feel fear and danger because we lost something that accompanied humans during centuries of evolution. I call this ‘controlled fear’, because we know that nothing will happen if we play a horror videogame – nothing will kill us, nothing will make us lose a leg or something like that (consciously or unconsciously),” he continues.

Finding new ways to terrify the player can go beyond just finding a more sickening monster or more jarring jump scare, often exploring narratives of personal fears and more human frights in order to delve into what scares us on a deeper, emotional level. Rather than startle, these stories seek to explore loneliness, fear of death, fear of our peers, fear of the unknown, and other, almost primal terrors that have plagued us since humans existed. Good horror strives for something deeper, seeking what scares us deep within. More than made-up boogeymen, it seeks the fear in existence.

“As for what I'm hoping to feel when I play horror games? I'm looking for new takes and perspectives on topics – interpretations I wouldn't have considered on my own,” BobVids continues. “Horror is chiefly about affecting the player, so it's a natural playground for innovation on how to do that. Other genres tend to play it safe with their plots, and I'd much rather play a game that says something new.”

For Chris Pruett of Robot Invader, developers of *Dead Secret*, a mystery game where the player is stalked by an unsettling, masked assailant, part of the draw of fear was in doing something that let him be true to the subjects he wished to explore – ones similar to what BobVids describes as the appeal of horror to him.

“I’ve spent most of my career in the game industry making games for other people. I made games for kids, I made some super hero games for teens, I worked on virtual worlds and mobile games and all kinds of other stuff that was really fun to build, but not designed for me. I learned a ton and have massive respect for those titles, but when I got the chance to work on *Dead Secret*, it was one of the first times I could build something that played specifically to my own tastes. And I got the idea that maybe it should be very strictly aligned with my tastes because (hopefully) there are others out there that share my tastes,” says Pruett.

“I’m interested in mystery, in tension, in suspense. I’m interested in stories that you have to puzzle over, to activate the critical thinking parts of your brain to decode. I’m interested in negative space, the area where the exposition gives way and allows the reader to construct the rest. To put these things into a video game, horror is a natural choice. I’m not interested in gore or shock (though these do have occasional utility), I am interested in cognition and in emotional investment. So, for me, a suspenseful non-combat, murder-mystery-turned-horror exploration game was the right thing to build. In the future maybe I’ll figure out other ways to express myself, but for now, horror is a good fit,” Pruett continues.

Voidburger feels drawn to the mystery of these places, drawing on a fear of the unknown to create spaces that seem unknowable and frightening. “I dislike a fair majority of horror games, but I’m a *Silent Hill* mega-fan. I’m not even a huge fan of most horror movies because most of them are very invested in jump-scaring the viewer. My favorite horror films (*They Live*, *The Thing*, *Get Out*, *Jacob’s Ladder*, *The Cell*) have more to do with psychological/social horrors and are pretty light on the actual ‘BOO!!!’ moments in comparison to the majority of other horror films. Can’t stand ghost movies at all, by the way (which is why Lisa was way too much for me to handle)! I like things that are more ambient-scary than in-your-face scary.”

“Sad truth: *Spooky’s Jump Scare Mansion* was a gauntlet of constant stress for me and that is downright pathetic because it is literally a game where adorable drawings on sticks just pop into your view while making goofy sounds. That’s how absurdly anti-jump-scare I am!”

For her, horror’s appeal comes in the worlds it creates, and how its terrors, like those we all share, cannot be overcome so easily. “I think the thing that interests me the most when it comes to horror is world-building, done in a natural, but mysterious way,” she continues. “Things are weird and no one is precisely sure why, or when exactly it started being like this. It just kinda IS, and can’t easily be stopped because it’s somehow an unquestionable state of being that is ungoverned by logic. It appeals to me when even the characters in the story are just guessing what’s going on, and in the end, there are some blanks that the player/viewer can try to fill in for themselves.”

“*Resident Evil* never strongly appealed to me the same way *Silent Hill* does

because those games always seem to be shoving notes in your face penned by in-world experts, tediously explaining the inner workings of the cartoonishly evil corporation that is to blame for all these dang zombies. Meanwhile, *Silent Hill 2*, (the one that got me hooked on the *SH* series and, by extension, interested in its lore) has practically zero explanations in it – it’s all psychological horror and guesswork. There’s no note in *Silent Hill 2* explaining, from a point of definite authority, why the town is messed up. In fact, there are multiple notes that are all phrased as vague conjecture about why (many of which mildly conflict), and the series started going a bit downhill once it started bogging itself down in various, more official-sounding explanations (in my opinion).”

“Mystery is what’s scary and interesting. And even though I’m completely averse to ghost stuff and jump-scares, the mysteries of *P.T.* were too great to not still be extremely attracted to it and have an urge to examine it, even if it’s from sorta far away,” Voidburger says.

Pruett’s own explorations into the topic mirror what draws Voidburger to explore horror in this way. “The topic of why people enjoy works of horror has some pretty significant research behind it. Victoria Nelson argues in *The Secret Life of Puppets* that the popularity of horror is a response to the dwindling influence of religion in modern society. The spiritual world, the idea that there are forces beyond our understanding the universe, used to be the purview of the church. In the face of modern science and reason, the supernatural is the domain of art,” says Pruet.

“I like that idea, that horror fiction, film, and games are a way to add some mystery back into our lives in a world where everything is so much more concretely understood than it was a century or two ago, but I also think that within the broad spectrum of horror, suspense, mystery, and supernatural stories, there is a diverse array of styles, each with a different effect,” he continues.

“At some very basic level, I think that frightening experiences are just ways to get adrenaline pumping without leaving a safe space. Roller coasters, haunted houses, and a lot of horror media is just designed to thrill by giving you a taste of danger, by putting you under just enough stress that your body responds physiologically. That sort of physical arousal is pretty fun—your

heart rate goes up and your brain starts releasing chemicals. I think a lot of people like scary stuff because thrill seeking feels good. There's nothing wrong with thrill seeking, but it's not my area of interest. I think that horror draws people in because, as a narrative form, it has the ability to be subtle, engaging, and a vehicle for ideas that society otherwise has a hard time talking about."

"As a pulp genre, horror generally flies below the radar when it comes to public conversation. And yet, it is a genre with massive appeal. More than half the audience is women. This quiet influence gives horror the chance to discuss issues that are taboo or the topic of social unrest. *Godzilla* is about the bomb, *Night of the Living Dead* is about American race relations, *Candyman* is about slavery, and *The Ring* is dealing with gender equality issues. The best film I saw last year was *Get Out*."

"In games, *Silent Hill* is about child abuse, *The Suffering* is about capital punishment, and *Life is Strange* is about growing up. These are not topics that video games generally cover. I mean, *Silent Hill 2* is about sex, frustration, and hospice. These titles can get away with discussing these topics because they wrap themselves in the cloak of horror and, as a result, manage to stay out of the public eye. They sidestep the debate and deliver their message directly to the audience," Pruett continues.

Not only can horror explore subjects we often skirt around, but a requirement for the genre, in many instances, is forming a connection with the characters within it. For players to care about the protagonist being harmed, they have to care about them as people.

"Horror stories are often about the protagonists facing some sort of danger that is difficult to define and thus difficult to overcome. For this sort of story to be effective, the author needs his audience to feel empathy for the protagonists—otherwise the danger that they face isn't meaningful. That drives the author - forces their hand, almost - to make their characters interesting and relatable. We have to believe that they are real people and worry about their well-being for the scares to be effective," says Pruett.

"This idea is counter to the way a lot of video games are written. In many games, the protagonist is nearly invisible, and exists only as a proxy for the

player himself. Stress might still be evoked by the game mechanics themselves, but we usually aren't stressed about the life of our main player character, or any of the other characters who may appear. We don't need to know what conflicts or flaws Link has to enjoy *Legend of Zelda*, but we absolutely need to know those things to play as Harry in *Silent Hill*," he continues.

"This is why I think the horror genre has lead the game industry in writing and narrative for nearly twenty years. I began studying horror because I wanted to understand the way that horror games managed to be so emotionally effective while more mass market titles with bigger budgets and better tech were not. Today, the systems we associate with 'narrative game play' stem almost entirely from work done in the horror genre (e.g. walking simulators)."

For some, like Voidburger, horror can be a high price to pay, even if its worlds and characters have the ability to draw her in. The horrors of *P.T.* were a bit too much, but unlike a certain writer, she knew to keep to her limits. "When it came to The Grate Debate videos, I basically experienced the game vicariously through Bob (BobVids), who was reporting much of his experiences back to me to spitball on some theories. I don't feel like this method was 'preferable' knowledge-wise (and it certainly hurts my nerd-cred to admit that I have personally barely touched *P.T.*), but stress-wise, it was the right decision for me (laughs). I have anxiety problems and insomnia already, I don't need a game that harrowing to be at the forefront of my mind when I'm trying to go to sleep. :)"

Not that playing things in this way made *P.T.* any less frightening for Voidburger, instead making it tolerable enough to explore its themes and worlds. "I think that experiencing it vicariously improved my enjoyment and ability to process the game — that way, I could approach theory-crafting from a less emotionally stressed standpoint. My cognitive functions basically don't work if I've been jump-scared to death (laughs). My brain just loops back to the thing that scared the bejesus outta me, instead of focusing on 'what could that one thing in the game mean?'"

"As a side story, the second most memorable thing I recall about my first *P.T.* experience was actually driving home afterwards, oddly. It was nighttime,

and the headlights of my car looked almost exactly like the flashlight in *P.T.* (that damn flashlight is the most realistic one I've ever seen in a game), so every completely normal thing that my car illuminated gave me a mini-heart attack, because I had associated 'new thing in my flashlight's view' with 'OH GOD IS THAT LISA?' A game has never made me this jumpy. I was nervous to use the bathroom at night for a week afterwards (laughs)," says Voidburger.

This disruption in the ability to play is what drew James Earl Cox III to horror, exploring it with several of his own experimental works. *You Must be 18 or Older to Enter*, his horror title about sneaking a peek at adult images while your parents aren't home, draws from some very real fears players likely felt at some point in their lives – fears probably much more powerful than the idea of getting caught by some monster.

"As an experimental developer, I love how horror distracts from flow and ruins a player's efficiency in play; how we can use that as a method to shape a player's experience," says Cox. "What I love about horror games is that, as games are systems, most of our time in-game is spent maximizing our playing: we learn to jump better, shoot better, collect coins better. We begin to mentally separate the art from the actual hitboxes, begin to understand the code behind the aesthetics. By the end of most games, we're better at navigating the systems in them than we were in the beginning. It's a fair bet to say a replay would go much faster now that we've mastered the skills any game presents us with."

"Horror, however, throws a big wrench in all this. Not only do we have to navigate systems within the game, but now we also must fight our fears while doing so. Horror games can use the player's imagination and humanity against them. To me, a great horror game doesn't end when the game does, it follows us in real life, forces us to fight the monsters on our side of the screen. In *You Must be 18 or Older to Enter*, the horror is not only present in being caught in game, but in reality as well. It turns a social taboo of being caught in real life into a very possible scenario. How can you concentrate on playing *You Must be 18 or Older to Enter* when you could be sucked into an embarrassing conversation at any moment? Having the player grapple with this while they play is great. More so, I hope players win against their fear

and conclude that it really shouldn't be embarrassing," he continues.

Here, we see horror bridging the gap between real and unreal, a large part of what makes horror effective, but in Cox's mind, also what makes a game more effective at becoming an experience rather than an exercise in learning how to overcome systems of challenge.

Still, being terrified seems like a difficult price to pay to experience these kinds of stories – to physically suffer so that we can explore frightening worlds, to feel a hint of pleasure at our fake survival, and to delve into stories that affect that heart and our most intimate fears. However, not every search within will give us an answer that we like, or deal with something that we enjoy.

Matters of the heart, or matters that deal with our deepest emotions and fears, are not always going to be pleasant to explore. They are often frightening and unsettling topics that many of us would happily sweep under the rug instead of facing them directly. Thinking about death – the void of nothingness that awaits us all, or perhaps whatever realm your religion or belief leads you to – it all feels so uncertain. There is no one who knows about it with any real evidence, and for me to think on it is a beyond uncomfortable. It's a topic I often shove from my thoughts quite quickly.

Horror allows me to look at this out of the corner of my eye, in a sense. It allows me to experience a brief, highly affecting look into my own mortality, and the way my death is unavoidable, some day. *P.T.* especially explores this, taking the player into a realm where death feels like it could come at any minute, and makes the player face that mortality if they wish to continue. And they do, because we're all saps for the solution to mysterious places, aren't we? We want to know, and so we push on.

Then, we soon find that there are awful ends awaiting us here, and that perhaps there are fates worse than death, living through our most terrifying end without any hope of it being over. Perhaps. In some instances and mindsets, an acceptance of death, which I cannot imagine myself feeling in my current life, could be felt in those circumstances.

This isn't all that I come to horror for, but it does let me think and feel on

these topics in an indirect way through their stories, touching on things that are important in my thoughts but doing so through a safe lens of fiction. As such, these stories touch me on a personal level, even just in their horrors, but at a distance I feel more comfortable with. They help me to accept parts of myself and my reality and emotions that can be difficult to, otherwise. They help me to feel that which I fear.

Which again, lets them bleed a little bit into my own reality. This is because, while I'm allowing myself to feel a little of my own real, personal emotions in the game's world, a part of it sometimes follows me back when the game shuts off, and maybe I don't want to look into my mirror late at night for fear of what I'll see twitching behind me.

I am drawn to games that explore our emotions and what we all feel and fear. Games like *Depression Quest*, *A Mortician's Tale*, *Everything is going to be OK*, *Bury Me My Love*, *You Must be 18 or Older to Enter*, *Enola*, *Silent Hill 2*, *Undertale*, *Cibele*, *One Night Stand*, and many, many more titles, while not necessarily being horror, have all looked deep into what we all feel and fear in our private existences. Not necessarily through fear, but perhaps all of them reflect something that, on some level, scares me. Whether lack of understanding for a depressed friend, fear of ever-growing intimacy, or the fears that simply override some aspects of my life, they all tie into things that scare me, at least a little.

On the flipside, they all explore topics I wish to understand more within myself and others, be they plights I can scarcely comprehend, or fears I think I am long past knowing, or just reminding me to be kind. They help me look inward as I play them, trying to grow closer to the people around me and understand them better. At the very least, they ask me to try.

"It's my personal fears. I am terrified of life and what it does to people," says Nathalie Lawhead, developer of *Everything is going to be OK*, a multi-faceted game of cute bunnies facing the horrors of existence with humor, when asked about why her work touches often touches on horror and fear in its own way, even if it doesn't involve spooky things creepy up on you.

"To me, life is that big horror monster that you are completely at the mercy of. It's not a complete intention to directly tap into horror in my work. It kind

of happens when you very honestly face phobia. I think there's a relatability because a lot of people share that tension and uncertainty about the future. I think a good aspect to horror is that relatability. A good monster (life in this case) is something everyone has on some level or another experienced. It's solidarity. This type of solidarity is important to confrontational art that asks you to 'look at this horrible thing.' Explore your fear. In the case of art that is uncomfortable, and talks about these darker things, it can easily become horror."

What draws her to explore this kind of fear in her own work, though?

"There's a profoundness in something that holds your hand and safely takes you down the path of staring down fear. This is a genre where you can safely do that using stories, avatars of you, or characters similar to you and people in your life. There's a type of personal growth that it enables."

"In a way, I think everyone wants to be free from these darker horrible fears, and horror allows us to confront that. It's our guide to understanding ourselves through fear. That's probably why it's such a sport to get upset at how dumb some of the people are in horror scenarios, 'NO! Don't touch that! No! Don't go there! What are you even thinking?' because we're constantly thinking of what we would do in that situation. We're given a way to safely confront, or explore, that fear."

"I very much hate horror, although I keep seeking it out. The last thing I watched scared me enough that I couldn't sleep, but I would totally watch something like that again. One of my favorite things, that I love to hate is to get warm and comfortable along with food and watch, or play, something really scary. I get to watch people have the worst time of their life while I'm very comfortable and well fed. The contrast makes me so happy. I know I'm not the only one that gets a kick out of that. Something about that makes me happier about my own life. All the bad stuff is smaller after that. I suppose comedy does the same thing, but horror gets you there a lot faster and uncomfortably. Both comedy and horror are important aspects to good art," Lawhead says.

I feel that the fear reminds me of the terrors that haunt us all, and that we are all joined in the things that scare us, even if we look at them from different ways or react to that fear poorly. I feel that, in examining what scares us, we

can maybe learn how to better care for one another, and better become closer as human beings. We can learn that we cannot let our fears rule us, and that we can all strive to help one another through the frightening times, or better stop those times from coming.

Or maybe I do just like it when spooky things yell boo at me. Except I hate that. So maybe it's the more heartfelt one. At least, I hope it is. We're all scared here, kiddos. If we can make some people feel less afraid, or show that our fears can be overcome, maybe we'll all feel that our trip around this blue planet was a little easier.

Maybe *P.T.*'s terrors, and the puzzles within that helped connect with people across the planet, make me feel closer to the humanity that connects us all. Or the end that all of us will face, which may be better than being trapped, eternally, in a hellish place of mystery and pain.

15.

There is yet another mystery tied to *P.T.*, one that many, many people have been quiet about. Where did it come from? Why was it cancelled so strangely? What happened to it, and why was it pulled from the online storefronts?

To find out the facts behind the strange story of *P.T.* and *Silent Hills*, I reached out to a few people who had been working with Konami at the time. Many declined to comment or would not reply at all. However, one source did answer with some possible explanations that may help clarify what all happened to bring about the demo's end.

To start with, it helps to go a long ways back into the history of Kojima Productions and Konami. "Kojima Productions, for several years before *P.T.*, was sort of like the tail that wagged the dog. They had been working on the Fox Engine and what came to be known as *Metal Gear Solid V* for many years. I think he had dumped like one-hundred million dollars, or some crazy amount, building that engine and the game."

"Konami, understandably, wanted to use that engine for multiple things: more *Metal Gear* games, and I guess they're using it for *Pro Evolution Soccer* right now. From what I've heard, it's a really difficult engine to use. I think Kojima initially said that they were going to license this engine out so students could use it. Kind of on the same level as Unreal. That didn't get followed up with anything because it was really tough to work on."

"Now, this is just something that I had heard. Kojima had used up millions of dollars on the engine and *Metal Gear*, and at the same time, the mobile development team released a game called *Dragon Collection*. It was a very gachapon, loot box-heavy kind of free-to-play game, and a very low development cost game. And it made a ton of money. I don't have exact figures, but something like a million dollars a day."

"In this situation, a lot of the higher ups were thinking 'This low-cost game is making millions of dollars a day, and we have Kojima's studio asking for

millions and millions more to finish this game.’ Seeing it from the executives’ point of view, this is crazy.”

While this doesn’t appear to have much to do with *P.T.* at this time, we can see a strained relationship between Kojima and Konami, *P.T.*’s publisher. Kojima’s alleged promises to create something the company could license and make money off of was not turning out as intended, and as *Metal Gear V* continued to absorb time and money while mobile made cash hand over fist, things started to boil over between the company and Kojima.

This isn’t helped by the fact that Konami is run largely by people who know business, but not necessarily games, according to our source. “You should know that Konami is notoriously bad at making decisions. It takes too long to make a decision. They overanalyze everything. A lot of the executives spend their whole lives learning business and accounting to the point where they don’t really play games themselves. A lot of these businessmen who are taking over at Konami, they don’t even know the Konami characters.”

This situation, already a difficult one, is where *P.T.* makes its sudden, and unexpected, appearance. “They’re in this mindset that mobile is doing much better and *Metal Gear* is taking almost a decade and costing millions. And around the time that Kojima first announced *P.T.* (Gamescom 2014), what I was told was that Konami had said not to show it at Gamescom. They had told him not to show it, and the main reason for that was that Konami didn’t have the whole contract lined up. Kojima, being the tail that wagged the dog, did it anyway.”

This seems to jive with the fact that it was Sony, and not Konami, who showed the game’s trailer during that Gamescom back in 2014. This does not necessarily prove that Kojima didn’t have permission beyond what the source had heard, but it does allow for that possibility.

“There might be a reason he was so adamant about showing it at Gamescom even though it wasn’t supposed to be shown there. Maybe there is a special reason. You never know with Kojima, right? There may have been a specific date, or another reason, offering some meta-level clues.”

“I believe he had said ‘Oh, I had plans for people to have solved this puzzle

in a month,' or something like that, but people had solved it in well before the show ended. In hours, someone cracked the code. And what I had heard was that Norman Reedus, at the time, his contract was not done. He hadn't signed anything. Then, either he or his representatives had caught wind that people were so excited about him being in *Silent Hills*, and then they suddenly asked for a lot more money."

This, supposedly, further fragmented a relationship that was already in trouble, dumping yet another cost on Konami that they did not wish to pay. "Again, the executives are thinking that you're using up all of this money, and now you suddenly want even more money to finish this contract for something that you showed that we told you not to show."

"Anyway, Reedus' group came back refusing to sign the contract until they got more money, and Konami is always slow to make decisions and they were already using up so much money. They had built up three new studios – had suddenly gone from one studio in America to three or four on the West coast alone, so they were just hemorrhaging money. So, I think this whole thing with Kojima was at a boiling point already."

Right from its announcement, we can see that *P.T.* is in danger due to the difficult relationship between its developer and publisher, if our source is correct. Before it has even been solved, things were already coming to a head that would make its existence rocky, and that of *Silent Hills* all but impossible.

Still, Kojima had been a staple of Konami for decades. Despite his penchant for causing trouble, who could willingly remove such an important developer from the company? Another story from our anonymous source may shed some light on why things still went south.

"Now, a lot of the people who were promoted to become executives were the mobile guys who were making millions of dollars off of that *Dragon Collection*. Now, another thing that I heard was that Kojima was very condescending toward the mobile guys when they weren't proven successful yet. He was working on the next big thing, and they were working on a mobile game, and while this is all rumored, someone may have said something to Kojima, and he said something condescending back about their

game. This person would go on to become president of Konami Japan.”

Whether the comment of the story is true, *Dragon Collection*’s Executive Producer, Hideki Hayakawa, would move on to become president of Konami Japan, and Hayakawa stated in an interview with Nikkei that mobile was “... where the future of gaming lies.” (9) It does seem to be a precarious position to find oneself in, as the new president indicates that anyone who did not see mobile’s potential as a redundancy in the company.

Only a few months before this article, another mentions that troubling treatment of Konami staff who wouldn’t follow the company’s vision for the future. According to Kotaku’s translation of another Nikkei article: “Konami game developers who aren’t seen as useful are reassigned to jobs as security guards, cleaning staff at the company’s fitness clubs or roles at a pachislot machine factory. This includes not just junior staff, but producers who have worked on well-known game titles.” (10)

Here, we see a situation where Konami is perfectly willing to come down hard on developers who will not do as they’re told, or who won’t acknowledge the future of mobile. While Kojima may have never made any sort of comment to Hayakawa, we can still see that there is enough bad blood between Kojima and Konami that the company could possibly be willing to make his life very difficult.

“So, now, the executives are saying, ‘You think you’re a big shot. You’re doing things when we tell you not to. We’re not going to deal with this contract.’ I think that was ultimately the death knell for *P.T.* and *Silent Hills*. They’re not going to move forward with it.”

“It was around this time that things became a kind of roller coaster ride between Kojima Productions and Konami – when they requested removing his name from *Metal Gear Solid V* and a bunch of other stuff. The events at that Gamescom started the divorce of KJP from Konami. It all fell apart very quickly, but very quietly.”

“Immediately after that, they started clamping down on things. They hid Kojima in a different office area when all those stories started happening. They were very strict on watching what people were doing and saying at that

time.”

Things would be very quiet indeed, but before long, we would see the cancellation of *Silent Hills* and *P.T.*’s removal from online storefronts. That such a horror titan could be felled by something like money squabbles and friction in the workplace seems like a terrible thing, but such is the reality of making games. It’s a dull answer as to why the game slowly lost traction and was then scoured away, but it feels like a likely answer as to what all happened.

It was barely a year later before the demo would disappear, for as uninteresting a reason as the rest of the game falling apart. “I don’t know the full facts on this, but I believe the contract with Sony, at that time, was only for a year for that demo to begin with. That demo was always going to come down. But I think the original plan was to have that demo change into a *Silent Hills* demo. You weren’t going to lose out on the content because you could always download the *Silent Hills* demo.”

P.T. was only to be made available for a year, then followed up with some further demo that would connect it with *Silent Hills*. Whether this would have used similar aspects or shifted in scope is difficult to know, but the appearance of the large-limbed monster from the Tokyo Game Show trailer being unveiled by luxox18 in the game’s code does seem to indicate that the demo would attach to that content at some point. The data mine for *P.T.* did reveal that this creature was in the code, implying a connection between the demo and the later trailer, but this may have been cut content that was used later as well. It hints at a connection and this possibility, but doesn’t prove much.

While much of this cannot be corroborated due to silence (and Konami’s ability to keep its employees quiet), it paints a realistic picture of why *P.T.* would fall apart and disappear. It’s not the most noble end for such a powerful horror experience, but in the end, even these great achievements are still tied to the businesses that create them, and all of the mundane contracts and deals that give them their existence.

Even the game’s brilliance may tie into costs and financing, according to our source. “The whole idea of the repeating hallway probably to save on

designing art assets. It's only one character and a moving bag. Some cockroaches."

I was hoping to find a more intriguing story behind the game's cancellation, and yet, here we are, bogged in paperwork and money battles. It's a truly realistic kind of horror story, for what it's worth, but an ignoble end for such a powerful horror experience.

16.

Things have not quite finished becoming strange for *P.T.*, though, have they? Part of *P.T.*'s terrifying power lies in the outside world, and the very real decisions made by the company that released it.

A little under a year after it was released on the PlayStation Network, *P.T.* was removed on April 29, 2015. It wouldn't be too long afterwards before we would see Kojima himself leaving Konami after his name and studio being scrubbed from all of his recent work with the studio. The developer has thankfully landed on his feet afterwards, but the fate of Silent Hills, and even the already-released *P.T.*, had been sealed.

As of now, the only way to play *P.T.* is to hunt down one of the consoles in the world that downloaded the game before it was removed from the network, and play it with the original account of the person who downloaded it. Lacking either of those, it is all but impossible to play. Threads still continue to pop up here and there all over the web, with players asking if there is any way they can find *P.T.* now, but there is no answer beyond finding one of those consoles and accounts. With PSN accounts tied to personal information and credit cards, it's highly unlikely that, short of knowing someone with the game, it is possible to play.

Emulation has saved many a lost game before, and preservation projects are underway for any number of lost or buried games all the time. Perhaps there is some hope that *P.T.* will be saved and that people will be able to experience it in ways besides YouTube videos, but for now, there is no way to find it otherwise.

A store page on the PSN still hints at its existence, but little else, save for calls from fans to beg for its release or fan-made projects that aim to capture what *P.T.* pulled off, speak of the game's existence.

This doesn't paint a pretty picture of *P.T.*'s future. What I would call the most frightening horror game of all time is now doomed to slowly fade away as consoles die or accounts get lost, deleted, or cease being hosted by Sony.

Hard drives will break down, systems will no longer boot up, or the company that hosts the online account will stop supporting the system, leaving *P.T.* in a state where it likely won't even slowly fade from memory. Will it even be playable at all within a few decades?

It's a sad fate, but perhaps one that's oddly fitting for something so terrifying. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

The sun warms your face even as the cool morning air slides through the shadows of your walk. An old man stands behind a table made of wooden planks sitting on plastic drums, lawn chair creaking as he leans back, hat covering his eyes. You've walked through this neighborhood several times, but never seen him before, or if you have, you waved and dismissed him from your mind.

On the damp grass lie piles of brown boxes, edges ripped and worn. A price is written on them in black marker, the number just behind the blue, grimy cases spilling out of the top. Looks like games from the old PS4 from years ago. It piques your interest, so you walk over. You catch a hint of a crooked-toothed grin on the old man's face, but he doesn't say anything.

You lean into the box, recognizing some classic titles. You smile, thinking back to your dad playing them with you back when you were growing up. Rifling through them, you notice a black console sitting beneath them all. The dark plastic is gouged, like someone had been cutting at it with a knife or scissors. It probably doesn't work, you think to yourself. Shame. Your dad would have gotten a huge kick out of this the next time he came to visit you and the kids.

"Looking at the PS4?"

His voice draws your eyes up. "It work?"

The man's smile seems to grow wider. "Sure does. Tried it the other night. Couple of games on there, too, that still work. One's real special, too."

"What one?"

His smile pushes toward the edges of his cheek, sliding up towards his eyeballs. It doesn't look right, and you turn back to glancing through the box of games. The games are neat, but the thought of looking at that weird grin makes you want to just get on with your walk. Besides, what do you need with his busted system, anyway? He's just lying.

"Take them."

"I'm sorry?" Excitement pushes fear out of the way a little bit.

"You remind me of someone. Loved the game that's on there. Couldn't stop playing it. I'll never understand why he kept playing that one, though."

"So what was the game?"

The smile pushed upward even further. The teeth, turned and yellowing, jut out of scarlet gums.

"Can't remember. But you'll like it."

You stand up, waving at the old man as you look away. "Thank you, though. Wife'll kill me. Don't need any more games in the house."

The old man doesn't say anything as you jog away, looping through the blocks on your morning run as you make your way home. The sun beams down over your home, the dog barking at something in the back yard, kids laughing along with him. As you listen to both, bird calls echoing through the air, a wind comes cleaving through you, chilling you.

You clasp your arms and rub them, moving through the front door. It thumps before it can open all the way, something blocking its path. You lean inside.

"Honey, what is..."

A box, old and ratty, sits behind the door.

It's a stupid little story, isn't it? But how many stories just like it exist out there on the internet? There are dozens of stories of haunted cartridges and consoles, offering glimpses into realms of madness, death, and destruction for

those who happen to look upon them. Many of them all start the same way, with these unique, but damaged games or systems being found by some hapless person just looking to play something fun.

How long before *P.T.* only exists on a few stray consoles out there in the world? And how long before parents, grandparents, or the owners themselves feel that they're just worthless junk to be sold for next to nothing at the next family yard sale? Twenty years? Ten? Less? In the current era of games, you're only ever about a decade away from being old news and forgotten. Save for those few who recognize the historical value of *P.T.*, how many of those systems will get sent out into the wild with no indication of what they hold? And then, how many will be played without being formatted? How many will look at *P.T.* written on a tombstone and then boot up the game to play?

Konami has actively scoured all of *P.T.* that it could from the internet, leaving just the dozens of articles from game sites that have been posted about it. Still, ten years down the road, how preserved will these articles be? How long will it take before we all move on from *P.T.* and forget about its existence? In time, it will happen, just as it has happened for many other titles that have been announced, closed, and had the developers move on. Eventually, despite their importance, these games become forgotten footnotes in history. They are just memory fragments, and even then, only for those who have an inclination to look.

Is *P.T.* doomed to be forgotten, like many other games that have faded with time? With few copies being saved, it will only grow more scarce and more difficult to remember. Stories of its play will replace actually being able to play it, and even those will fade with the march of time on the internet.

It may take some time, but how long before the scenario above plays out? Maybe not exactly, but in time, short of some dedicated attempts to preserve it, will we see someone coming home with this secret, terrifying game that no one has heard of and no one has played? Through the millstone of time, a publisher's anger, and the finite nature of console technology, *P.T.*'s future seems to be that of the stuff of a video game ghost story.

It's the weird game found on an old console, even today, but information

about it is still available. People can still learn about it and watch videos. In time, that too will fade away, players and the world forgetting about this frightening marvel. It will still be lurking out there, though, for some unsuspecting player to find, waiting to prey on them.

These players, all alone, will face the relentless phantom of Lisa, hunted down through the purgatory of the hallway as they struggle to find a way out. The mysteries and frights will haunt them, and them alone, in a game that was designed to be solved by the world working together. This small, maddening, horrifying experience will plague these people, and they will whisper their stories.

“Have you heard of *P.T.*?”

“What the hell is *P.T.*?”

“It’s this super creepy game I found on this busted old system...”

This is what the future holds for *P.T.*. This particular end seems oddly fitting for the most terrifying game in existence, though. For it to become the stuff of legends and hushed stories, spoken about from a position of rarity to the point of seeming like a ghost itself. For it to become a unique horror to be accidentally unearthed from parents’ and grandparents’ attics, played by the unsuspecting and giving them nightmares for ages afterwards, is a fitting end to such a powerful piece of horror.

I am sad to see it fade away – to know I am going to watch it disappear. I hate to see such an important piece of horror history disappear. I hate to see the incredible work its development team did get forgotten. However, to see *P.T.* become the stuff of ghost stories, is the most powerful end I can think of for it.

Not that this is its most likely fate, according to The Video Game History Foundation’s Founder and Director, Frank Cifaldi, who I spoke to about *P.T.*’s. new form of fading video game history.

“There are lots of situations throughout history where demos were made and distributed for games that were never completed or shipped. *Titan A.E.* for

the PlayStation 1 was based on a Disney movie and there was a demo disc you could get out of stores and they never finished the game as far as I know. There was a George Romero zombie game on the original Xbox that had a demo on a magazine demo disc...There's lots of situations like that."

"The only thing, I think, that makes this situation unique is that the demo was distributed digitally. So, its absence from the world feels new and scary because it was available to anyone who wanted it for a long time, and then pulled. I don't think the reaction would have been this severe if it was a demo disc you could have grabbed and can still get on Ebay," Cifaldi continues.

"This hardly marks new territory for disappearing video game history, though, as many have witnessed with the death of the Xbox Live Indie Games section, which eliminated the storefronts for many indie games that were available on the Xbox 360, or the constant loss of the history of mobile games as titles on iPhone, Android, and the many, many previous phone formats get lost as their digital distribution platforms close, they are removed from the stores, or become unplayable due to system updates. Video game history is in a grave position in the digital era."

However, that doesn't mean that all hope is lost for *P.T.*'s potential rescue, according to Cifaldi. "I think it's a scary situation for a lot of people because it's new, but it's no different than full games that were available to purchase that are now delisted for licensing reasons. I, myself, have developed a game that is no longer available for licensing reasons because that's just how it happens. I was the lead on an iPhone game based on the *Sharknado* movie franchise. It was on the App Store for maybe a year and then had to be pulled because the contract expired with the game publisher and NBC."

"That game is much more endangered than *P.T.*, which was a free demo that many, many people have on their PS4s right now. I don't fear that *P.T.*, as a playable thing, will disappear from the world, whereas a playable version of *Farmville* is much more likely to actually disappear," says Cifaldi. "I don't believe that it's going to completely disappear, and that someone who needs to access *P.T.*, from an academic perspective, that they can't access it. I don't anticipate that video game libraries won't have a PS4 with the game running in the back room. I don't anticipate that it will be impossible to buy a used PS4 with *P.T.* on it. It may be very expensive, but it's not going to be

completely inaccessible.”

“I understand it was a hotly-anticipated game from creators that people like. I think the reality is that its disappearance from the marketplace is far less scary than the disappearance of most iPhone games from the App Store. Literally most iPhone games,” he continues. “Someone went and dug up, I think from 2009, the list of the fifty best iPhone games according to Edge Magazine, and I believe that forty of them are completely gone now,” says Cifaldi.

In theory, someone could even acquire the rights and let it loose on the world again, for the right price. “We’re speaking purely in the theoretical. Theoretically, the legal rights to *P.T.* are all clearly defined on paperwork somewhere and, theoretically, if someone wanted to, they could license the demo and then distribute it again, but I see no commercial value in once again distributing a free demo. I don’t see a likely scenario where that demo is made legally available again, no.”

“I think, in the grand scheme of things, there are more copies of *P.T.* in circulation than the majority of video games throughout history. That said, it’s unfortunate that the average consumer can’t access this easily.”

“Will a historian in the future be able to access and play *P.T.* as intended? I think yeah, absolutely. It’s not hard unless all of the PlayStation 4s that have the game die, and/or unless no one ever solves piracy on the PS4, which I think is inevitable. I don’t think that game is going to be completely inaccessible. Will it be easy to acquire? No. But 99% of the games from the 90’s are not easily accessible without buying antiques on Ebay. To me, it’s the same exact situation.”

To Cifaldi, it seems highly unlikely that my doom and gloom situation will come to pass. Having been developed by such big-name creators, and the likelihood of its high download rate combined with the likelihood of these systems all burning out means it’s likely that *P.T.* will always be around in some capacity.

Still, it’s possible it could happen. And not everyone trawls the internet for every piece of information on games and consoles, especially cancelled ones.

So, what if someone does find a console with this unknown game on it?

Perhaps, in this way, *P.T.*, some day, will be nothing more than a ghost story – a secret to be shared with friends and online by only a handful of people in the world. A story of a game that doesn't seem to exist, and yet hearing stories of "I have a friend who found *P.T.* on an old console!" told between friends and on message boards. A ghost of a game resurrected by the few who have heard about this lost horror game that no one knows about.

P.T. may one day be a video game ghost story. And I just can't think of a more fitting end for such a frightening experience. A more fitting way for its horrors to become real as it transcends code to become the haunted game and console it deserves to be remembered as.

But it probably won't. My fears seem likely to be unfounded. But then again, what comfort does the unfounded fear offer me when I'm looking into my bathroom mirror in the dark night?

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Joel Couture basically won't shut up about games, writing about all sorts of them for Siliconera, Gamasutra, Warp Door, Indiegames.com, and CG Magazine. If you have games, please talk to him. He has become a bottomless maw for games and we are no longer sure if we can keep him under control.

Despite being a wimpy baby who is scared to look in the bathroom mirror in the dark, he is obsessed with horror games, seeking any way he can frighten himself with a controller. And he'd kind of like to know why that is.