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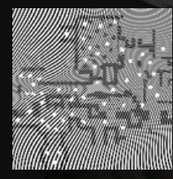
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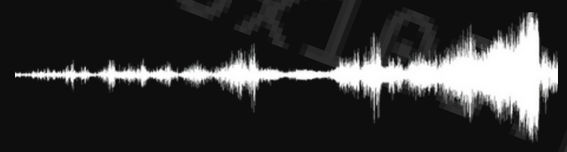
BACKROOMS







VHS_Found_Footage
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CLASSIFIED INFORMATION: 绝密

"The Backrooms: A VHS Horror Game" is a first-person horror game I developed during my Year 13 project. The game was created with the goal of immersing players in a surreal, unsettling environment inspired by the internet's 'Backrooms' mythos, a concept that revolves around endless, featureless rooms and corridors that evoke a sense of being trapped in an infinite, inescapable space. The core of the game's design centers on a retro VHS aesthetic, which I used to create an atmosphere of disorientation and dread. The intention was to emulate the look and feel of 90s horror films and 'found footage' media, which rely heavily on their low-quality, analog visuals to amplify fear. In this review, I will be talking about the key design decisions I made during the development process, offering an in-depth analysis of the game's mechanics, and reflecting on its strengths, weaknesses, and areas that could be improved upon.

The game is set within a labyrinth style structure composed of eerily repetitive rooms and corridors. These spaces are intentionally designed to create feelings of claustrophobia and isolation, which heighten the horror elements of the game which is in line with the Backrooms mythos (Krishika, 2023). The player experiences this world through a first-person perspective, allowing them to become fully immersed as they explore the environment in a desperate attempt to find an escape. The horror experience is further enhanced through the game's visuals, which mimic the distorted quality of VHS tapes. The grainy textures, static interference, and dirty camera lens aesthetic add a layer of authenticity to the ‘found footage’ style, making the player feel as though they are watching old, nostalgic video footage from the 90s. The lighting in the game is dim and ominous, with flickering fluorescent lights casting eerie shadows across the rooms, creating a sense of unease and anticipation (DevDylan98, 2022). The journey begins in an abandoned parking lot where players must navigate through a desolate area and find a strange elevator that transports them into the Backrooms, an endless maze that is both interesting and terrifying.

One of the most important design choices I made was implementing a VHS-style visual filter. This decision was crucial in reinforcing the game’s unsettling atmosphere and creating a sense of nostalgia for the low-fi aesthetic of 90s horror films. (Kill Screen, 2016). The grainy video quality gives the player the feeling of watching corrupted, old footage, which perfectly aligns with the eerie and distorted world of the Backrooms. This VHS aesthetic taps into the 'found footage' genre, which typically relies on low-quality visuals to make the horror more personal and immersive. In terms of gameplay, I opted for a minimalistic design to allow players to project their own fears onto the environment (Elvtr Magazine, 2024). The absence of visible threats plays into the psychological horror, where fear of the unknown is more terrifying than any overt monster or danger (judytl, 2022).

Achieving the VHS aesthetic proved to be one of the more technically challenging aspects of the game's development. Replicating the look of VHS grain, static, and visual glitches required a lot of trial and error, as I had to manipulate post-processing effects and fine-tune the textures to achieve the right level of distortion without making the game too difficult to play. Too much static and interference would have frustrated players, while too little would have removed the effect I was aiming for. However, it was incredibly rewarding to see how these visual elements amplified the game's tension and overall atmosphere. One of the most successful aspects of this aesthetic was how it added to the player's unease as they explored the Backrooms, as if the environment itself was unstable or corrupted.

Despite the game’s success in creating an eerie and disorienting atmosphere, there were areas where it could have been improved. One issue that I came across during playtesting was the pacing. The open-ended nature of the Backrooms, with its repetitive maze-like structure, meant that some players felt lost or directionless at times. While this was intentional to an extent as it contributed to the unsettling feeling of being trapped, I realized that the lack of clear objectives could lead to frustration rather than fear. To address this I would consider adding subtle hints or clues to guide players towards their next objective without breaking the immersion or tension of the game. Another area for improvement would be incorporating more interaction with the environment. Feedback from playtesters suggested that the addition of audio cues, narrative elements, or more interactive objects could help increase the immersion and maintain player engagement (Brown & Cairns, 2004).

Overall, "The Backrooms: A VHS Horror Game" achieved its primary goal of creating a tense and atmospheric horror experience. The VHS aesthetic was a key element in creating the game's mood, successfully invoking feelings of nostalgia while also creating a disorienting and creepy environment. While there are certainly areas where the game could be refined such as improving player direction and increasing interactivity, the core design choices effectively tapped into the psychological horror genre that I was aiming for, making the game both memorable and unnerving. If I was to continue developing this game, I would continue refining these elements to ensure that players feel fully immersed and engaged in the experience, while still maintaining the unique visual style that defines the game.

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BACKROOMS





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