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| Genre: | Horror Investigation Survival Game |
| Release Date: | 4. September 2020 |
| Studio: | Kinetic Games |
| Analysis by: | Andi Wille & Sara Hug |

[gameplayphasma.mp4](#)

Let's play by Sara:)

Game Description

Phasmophobia is a cooperative multiplayer horror game in which 1-4 players take on the roles of ghost hunters investigating a variety of haunted locations. Using tools such as EMF readers, spiritboxes, UV-lights and cameras, the player's goal is to gather evidence of and ultimately identify the supernatural presence haunting the area. The ghost, meanwhile, reacts to the players' voices, movement, and behaviour as they navigate the often cramped hallways and rooms of its haunt. Teamwork and voice communication are essential in successfully identifying the ghost and getting out of the location alive.

Sound Description

Phasmophobia's soundscape is immersive, diegetic and focuses heavily on ambience. It is purposefully mundane, eschewing music and complex effects for quiet background white noise and the occasional creaking staircase or ticking clock. The game uses long, quiet moments to build tension and allows every sound to carry tremendous weight. Apart from the quiet background ambience, most sound is produced by the players and the ghost and is fully diegetic. Notably, the ghost's sounds stick out amongst the rest as purposefully alien to the established environment, reinforcing the ghost as a supernatural presence that exists far beyond the players and their abilities.

Example - Player Death

[phasma_death.mp3](#)

Immersion

The eerily quiet ambience and mundane, realistic sound design of Phasmophobia strongly reinforces the game's immersion. The environment responds accurately to manipulation - different surfaces and materials, such as wood or metal, produce different sounds when interacted with or walked upon. Interactable objects reflect their age and wear not just through visuals but also through sound.

Example - Player Truck

[phasmo_truck_start.mp3](#)

Example - Prison Door

[phasmo_prison_door.mp3](#)

Feedback

Though most sound effects are kept simple, they still give clear feedback to the player - light switches click on and off, slowly opened doors creak while locked ones rattle. Sound is also used to supplement visual information about the player's status. For example, the player needs to literally catch their breath if stamina is low, expressed through laboured, heavy breathing.

Example - Locked Door

[phasmodoor_closed.mp3](#)

Example - Out of Breath

[phasmo_out_of_breath.mp3](#)

Example - Light

[phasmo_light.mp3](#)

Drawing Focus

Sounds produced by the ghost can range from objects clattering to the ground to the sounds of a crying child and cut cleanly through the normally quiet ambience of the game, drawing immediate focus to the ghost's presence and potentially revealing its location. Certain tools in the game, such as the parabolic microphone, can be used to purposefully hone in onto these sounds, drowning out the surrounding ambience.

Example - Ghost Sounds

[phasmo_ghost_event.mp3](#) [phasmo_ghost_activety.mp3](#)

Player Actions

All sounds produced by the player are wholly diegetic and located in-world, from footsteps over opening doors to specific ghost-hunting tools. As with the environmental sound, these sounds are kept simple and grounded but still offer satisfying feedback. These sounds are enhanced furthermore by the fact that ghosts can hear and react to the sounds made by players, which makes the usage of

louder tools require careful consideration. Although there is almost no voice over beyond certain ghost sounds, the game features a fully realized proximity voice chat system that allows players to communicate with others nearby.

Example - Player Equipment

[phasmo_equitment_sound.mp3](#)

Example - Movement

[phasmo_start.mp4](#)

UI

In keeping with its creative vision, the UI in Phasmophobia is also diegetic, designed as a paper journal kept on hand by each investigator. This is reflected in its sound design, which features sounds of rustling paper and turning pages while the player is navigating it. In the lobby, the UI is presented on various corkboards as well as a desktop PC, which also both feature fitting sounds that make them feel like they are part of the game world as opposed to laid on top of it.

Example - Navigating Journal

[phasmo_journal.mp3](#)

Environment

Though the environmental sound is quiet and subdued, it still provides players with important information and navigational assistance. As the locations featured in Phasmophobia are normally very dark, the presence of a ticking clock or an open window can greatly aid players with spacial awareness. In certain locales, the usual ambience is supplemented by weather effects such as wind blowing on a snowy winter night or the pattering of rain on the roof and windows. Other sounds are not modified by the environment - it does not matter if the player uses a tool or speaks inside or outside, it sounds the same either way.

Example - Environmental Ambience

[phasmo_enviroment.mp3](#)

Example - Weather

[phasmo_wetter.mp3](#)

Review

Phasmophobia expertly utilizes its purposefully minimal sound design to build an unsettling, uncomfortable atmosphere that feels asphyxiating in its silence. The few environmental sounds there are help to ground players in the world and build a slow, steady tension that is only occasionally released when a ghost event cuts through the usual silence. The game features a multitude of tools that utilise or modify sound, making the game's audio an integral part of the gameplay experience. Although the quality of the individual sounds varies heavily, they are utilized very effectively and

greatly reinforce player immersion.

Example - House Exploration [phasco_environment.mp4](#)

Comparison to Dead by Daylight

While both Phasmophobia and Dead by Daylight are multiplayer horror games that feature groups of cooperating players pitted against an all-powerful foe, the genres of horror they feature differ greatly, which is reflected in their sound design. The arcade-y, action-packed gameplay of Dead by Daylight is supplemented by a constant stream of sound whose main purpose is to carry information, while Phasmophobia places a much heavier emphasis on building an immersive, grounded soundscape to accompany its much slower, investigative gameplay. It places a heavy emphasis on keepings its sound diegetic, with even the UI sound design reflecting this philosophy. Dead by Daylight meanwhile features a variety of audio cues that are not located "in-world" and are often only audible to the triggering player.

One comparison that can be drawn between the two games is the way they use sound to aid players in finding specific locations, interactables and other players. For example, the ghost in Phasmophobia can sometimes be located by the sounds of moving objects or distant wailing, while in Dead by Daylight an attentive killer can find injured players by following the direction of their pained grunts.

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