

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, a trend has cropped up centering on something – very dear to me.

-boom in-

It's a type of horror that is – difficult to explain. One of those things where – once you're in it and *really* stop and look around, it hits you.

Allow me to introduce you to a little something called *PS1-horror*, an entire genre rooted in the idea that, for those of us who grew up during the era, the ambience and graphic fidelity, or lack thereof, of popular PS1 titles had set a very specific mood that hindered on being unsettling – even if the source material wasn't.

The maddening, low-poly silence of *Shadow Man*, the absolutely haunting rigidity of *Juggernaut*, and the surreal, unexplainable amalgamation that is *LSD Dream Emulator* has made for an entire generation of games so unintentionally scary, that they've spawned an entire genre of modern titles that have set out to emulate the conventions that the PS1 brought upon us.

The devs behind *Puppet Combo* and *Chillas Art* are some of my personal favorites employing this style, and I highly suggest you check their games out if you're looking for more after this video. Tonight, however, I would like to focus on something special – a new Halloween tradition that I would like to start *with you guys* – centering on a little something called the *Haunted PS1 Demo Disc*.



The Haunted PS1 Demo Disc is a collection of PS1-esque Demos curated each year into a free downloadable file on [itch.io](https://it.ch.io). These compilations began in 2020, intended to recreate the old-school feel of classic PS1 demo discs that were so incredibly popular back in the day. The difference between those and these, however, lie in the fact that within those from Haunted PS1, the games are intricately crafted to *feel* haunted, to frighten you. To give you that sense that something – isn't right.

-snippet-

Unlike traditional demo discs of yore, Haunted PS1 establishes a very specific mood for each of their collections. For instance, in the 2021 release, the games were tied together through a very interesting museum hub world run by this cheeky fellow named Skully. He essentially gives us free reign to check out his barren museum, chock full of liminal spaces, a deafening silence, dim, unsettling lighting, and this unbridled sense that someone – is watching us.

-ambience-

It's a game, within a game, and I think that's what makes the Haunted PS1 Demo Discs so special – they foster exploration, replayability, and consistent discovery at your own leisure – and even hold secrets for those willing to entertain the games puzzles because *yes* these hub worlds have them, and *yes* - they're pretty damn cool.

Now, with that being said, we *are* three years late to the party, and throughout the reign of Haunted PS1, tons of incredible experiences have come out of these annual releases. Tonight, you and I *aren't just going to dive into this years disc*, ... because we are doing all three. Throughout the past month, I've gone and played through each demo that has come out so far and have gone through the impossible task of hand selecting three of my personal favorites from each year. You and I are going to go in chronological order from least to most recent in hopes of exploring some of the creepiest, most unique, and mind-bending experiences that have come out of this project so far.

And so, [shut PS1 lid] we've got nine games in total, over three years [press on button] – So grab that candy bowl, shut off those lights and kick back, because tonight, you and I are diving down the abyss - *of the Haunted PS1 Demo Disc*.

-cut to black, fade in IRL shots of room lit up with CRT, like a movie trailer-

THE OG – Haunted PS1 Demo Disc 2020

Roused by the crackle of static, a lingering sense of dread crawls across the floor. You sit alone in your room. A dimly lit memory repeats in your head. 17 demos too horrible to describe keep you from your bed. Each one is a personally crafted nightmare. You've tried to tell others, yet no one understands. A CRT you don't remember owning flashes to life. Frozen in place you look upon the flickering screen to spy a dismal, bloodied scene. A cracked and faded jewel case sits close beside. A pale grey plastic box sits in front, emitting a low whirring noise. Will you take to the controller or let yourself be taken over?

-head on CRT, PS1 startup, Haunted PS1 bumper, then main menu-

Contrary to the others, unfortunately the collection for 2020 isn't banded together by any sort of fancy museum or mall, but that's okay, because we're here for the demos anyway, and also this menu's pretty damn cool.

First up on our journey is a game called Filthbreed, created by a dev named @bzoza – and described as the following:

Filth comes crawling out of the cracks. ... Let's get to it.

-PS1 sound-

FILTHBREED

-opening-

This is a short game, but is one that packs a hell of a punch.

Here, we take the role of an amateur detective, dispatched to investigate a string of strange disappearances that have taken place around Detroit within the past few months. Reportedly, a truck driver named Louis Burton is the prime suspect, however rumors have been circulating about him being abducted by a strange group and held in an unknown location.

Luckily for us, though, his semi-truck has been spotted near an old warehouse, and so we're sent to investigate.

-open game-

Nope. Nope nope nope nope.

-turn around ending-

You turn back straight away, and tell your superior you found nothing.

Your quick return and short report raises some eyebrows in the office, but nobody was buying that “cult nonsense” anyway.

You feel like an absolute coward and quit the force shortly after.

The trail goes cold, and the case is eventually archived.

Well, there ya go.

-DEMO main menu, then cut to black-

Alright for real, yes, this game does have multiple endings, and yes you can wuss out.

-open game-

For those willing to traverse what lies within, however, you’re in for a ride.

We begin within a warehouse. It seems to have been abandoned for quite some time, trash lines the hallways, and notes are scattered, giving us some backstory on the world being built here. Within them, we get references to people changing into something inhuman, roaches breeding within a person’s mouth, and even a mention someone called *The Licemother*.

It’s clear that something beyond our understanding is taking place here, and contrary to our initial belief, it seems like it may not be abandoned – after all. After poking around a bit more, we eventually encounter a gun, and well, you know what that means.

-pick it up-

A malformed human-like creature begins to pursue us, and after taking this guy out, we have the option to progress, or end our journey here. Going with the latter gives us an ending where our superiors intervened after our report. And ominously, after sending veteran officers in to investigate, they return with maimed legs, infested with a strange larva. They mention something about “*feeding mom*”, the case never makes the news, and we never return to the force – ever again.

Yeah, so, “*feeding mom*”? I’m not explicitly *saying* that what’s taking place inside this warehouse is that of a crazy supernatural cult, but...

-CAMERA: deep sigh, “It’s a cult”.-

Upon heading back in and towards the backrooms, we’ll begin to find that insects are slowly becoming more abundant. Weird sounds can be heard in various rooms, and this strange heat emanates through doorways. After heading upstairs, we discover a podium holding a book with text in an unknown language – because *cult*. However where things really get squirmy is when we finally find – the guy we were dispatched to catch.

-snippet-

Immediately in front of him is a path to a basement, and upon exploring it, we realize that this place is heavily infested with massive insects that prowl the walls around us. Egg sacs adorn the floors. And an unknown fluid resembling bile festers at our feet.

Unfortunately, there's not much else down here, and from this point we're left with no other option but to leave, thus bringing us to our third and final ending.

With this one, our supervisor takes our report even though it is absolutely batshit crazy, and in response he suggests that we take a break. We do, and come morning, we wake up to the news of a massive fire at the warehouse. *Everything* is gone, yet twelve inhuman shells of bodies have been recovered. And after it's initial wave in the news, the case of Louie Burton - is presumed to be forgotten.

-fade-

Filthbreed is a *very effective, eerie little game* based upon a grounded, relatable premise. I think what makes it so scary to me, is the fact that this entire game feels like one *very brief*, yet disturbing nightmare that the protagonist can hardly wrap their mind around. The finer details of who these people are, why they're here, and what the fuck is going on with these parasitic larva are never fleshed out – it's not even something we care to learn more about. Like any normal human being, the first thing we do is bury it – to get as far away as feasibly possible from ever reliving the hell we just went through by the hands of creatures completely alien to anything we have ever known.

I think the real horror of Filthbreed is that they have to live with that. With knowing that something as disgusting and repulsive as what they witnessed exists in the same world they do, but given that they quit the force and put it behind them – the rest of humanity is none the wiser, and they – are left to fester.

-fade, then main menu, head over to Heartworm-

HEARTWORM

Sam receives a strange tape the mail. Watching it brings her back to a deeply unsettling place that seems strangely familiar.

-PS1 sound-

Heartworm is a very special game, and is one of the more PS1-esque projects that've come out of these demo discs. Created by one person named Vincent, the game dives into the inner psyche and how memories shape who we are.

Delivered with tank controls and a fixed perspective, we take the role of a woman named Sam. The game opens in her studio apartment, and it's like any other day. Things are quiet, our book sits on our coffee table, and for all intents and purposes, life is – painfully ordinary.

Curiously, near the back wall is a document, and after inspecting it we learn that it's a clinician's evaluation – for her. She's unfortunately undergoing severe symptoms from childhood trauma, including insomnia, intrusive thoughts about self-harm, low self-esteem, obsessions, panic attacks, and high baseline anxiety. These are chronic, and ever encroaching on how she lives her life.

At the end of the document, they suggest that Sam tries Exposure therapy – a form of treatment focused on facing the trauma source head on. At this point, it's unclear how long it's been since she received this evaluation, or if she ever went through with it, but what we soon find is that – we have a visitor.

-tape-

We pick up the tape, and place it into our VCR, yet instead of watching it –

-transition-

We live it.

Before us is a large home with the phrase “DO YOU REMEMBER” draped along the fence, and with this message, the implications are clear. Whatever happened on this tape is or is part of the childhood trauma that's been plaguing our entire life. Something psychological – is here.

After making our way inside the home, we find that it is – strangely, quiet. Novels about trauma-based hallucinations are scattered across the desk, the TV, remains on with no one to watch it, and strange context clues like these track marks and this missing book, plead for us to solve them.

For most of the demo, puzzle solving is what we do. We take the key and make our way to the garage; we discover a novel about fearing death, we find the missing book, we unlock the basement, and towards the very end, we get a letter –

Sam, I tired calling but your phone is disconnected and I didn't know what else to do. Everyones worried. Your boss called mom and said you stopped showing up. I called Jane but she said she's not talking to you anymore. I know I haven't always been there for you but if you need anything I want to help. What's going on with you? Is this about what happened? It was ten years ago Sam. It's not your fault. You can't hang onto this forever. I love you. Please call me. T.

Following this, we proceed down an elevator, revealing a dreamlike path leading to yet another television. And upon turning it on, the device itself does not boot, but rather – an alternative version of us. One that is out to harm us. To plague us.

-slight pause-

Almost like a traumatic memory.

-fade-

The Heartworm demo is, by every stretch, a walking simulator that ends on a very effective cliffhanger. For those with a keen eye, however, an inventory system *does* exist, and in the full release, yes there will be combat, and yes – the world becomes fully realized.

Yet even aside from all of this, the small snippet of atmosphere we got was *masterful*, and there were moments when I genuinely had to stop to soak it all in.

-play snippets of environments-

The subject matter Heartworm entertains revolves around the depths of the mind, all wrapped up within a love-letter package to the survival horror masterpieces of yore. The dev is a one-man team, and if you're interested in helping them realize this gem to its full potential, they welcome any and all assistance they can get. Heartworm is a haunting A+ from me. Please play it.

-fade, main menu, head over to Neko Yume-

NEKO YUME

Neko Yume is an ambient exploration game in which you traverse a cat-filled dream world.

-PS1 sound-

As we bring the 2020 demo disc to a close, I figured we'd lighten the mood – well, just a bit.

-LSD Dream Emulator scenes-

At this point, everyone knows about LSD Dream Emulator – a surreal, dreamlike walking simulator with no defined goal. To this day, it's one of the most recognizable video games ever made, primarily due to its randomly generated worlds, vivid colors, nonsensical textures, and other – things – living in the same world you do. All living their own life. All carrying a history of their own. All just - existing – forever.

-slight pause-

Enter Neko Yume, or Cat Dream, a game developed by Modus Interactive, and heavily inspired by LSD. From the get-go, the similarities are abundant – the main menu is the exact same, the visual style – the exact same, and the absolute off-the-rails inexplicable weirdness?

-play snippets of world-

– yeah, its there.

Contrary to LSD, however, this build of Neko Yume *does* have a defined goal – and that's to search for and catch four cats hidden throughout this world. At the beginning of the game, we're dropped into this hub area with a large, foreboding cat head staring down upon us. We initially have no idea who it is or what its for, and – who am I kidding? Making sense of anything in a game like this? Hopeless.

As we explore, we're greeted with a small handful of randomly generated events and mini-puzzles, like the one in this area where the cat we need to catch is below the water's surface. It took me a bit but as it turns out, you can flip the world by staring into the sky at a very specific spot – generating a path to catch them. Because of course you can. To be honest, aside from running around and hunting down cats, there isn't much else to Neko Yume, but I think that's okay because the takeaway from its experience isn't so much about the gameplay, but the abstract environments given to us. As we explore, we notice that the day/night cycle slowly changes. And with it, each region inherits an entirely fresh, surreal feeling that maintains this odd sense of uniqueness, even when revisiting places you've already been to.

-slight pause-

This game is one massive liminal space, compounded by the otherworldly NPCs, and animals that we encounter along our journey. For instance, we find fish with cat ears. Bizarre two-legged cat heads

bouncing around – to nothing. A lone random, forever fiddling with this marble. A librarian, trapped inside hallways with nothing to watch. And massive, godlike heads shooting off into nothing.

This game isn't disturbing by any stretch of the word, but it instills this uneasiness due to how absolutely *weird* it is. Nobody with any sort of logic as we know it exists in this place. Yet at the same time, perhaps *we're* the outsiders, or even, just as nonsensical to them as they are to us.

What *is* normal in this world, anyway?

-slight pause-

Neko Yume is a very brief game, yet its one that I couldn't *not* talk about in a video like this. It is one of the most faithful recreations of LSD Dream Emulator that I've ever seen, and the bonus is that – hey it's got cats, so that's pretty cool.

If you're in the mood for a surreal, dreamlike trip into a world unexplainable, then this game awaits you with open arms. A full release is reportedly in the works, so hopefully in the near future, we can immerse ourselves into a fully realized world to *really* see what the inner confines of a cat's mind – has in store for us.

-fade-

A VENTURE INTO SKULLY'S MUSEUM – Haunted PS1 Demo Disc 2021

It's 2021, and you awake to find yourself in a room swathed in shadow, the memories of your arrival much too painful to confront in your uncertain state. The room is empty - save for one thing. A stone pedestal, nakedly imposing. Something wants you to approach.

And you do.

On the pedestal lies a lone, cracked jewel case. Your fingers run across the surface...

DEMO DISC.

Without warning the darkness dies, sickly light flooding the room, and you find yourself in a massive building of stone walls and marble pillars. The air is cold yet stuffy, as if you breathe gaseous dust. A showcase - you stand within a showcase, a showcase of curious remnants of the culture outside this place, of the culture you'll never return to, and the shapes within the displays sting your eyes like glass needles...

-boom onto title screen-

-play opening of game to museum foyer-

And so we make our way to Skully's Museum. A masterclass in liminal, atmospheric design, and a long deviation from the cold, derelict shopping mall we just endured.

-play Skully Intro-

This place is grand, and *completely* open for us to explore at our own leisure. Multiple floors, showrooms, bars, themed entrances, and even an attic await, and much like the Spectral Mall, this world is filled with secrets that we can uncover. For instance, in the bar area, you may stumble upon this curious PC terminal, however, small problem – it's locked a password.

Does Skully know it? Is it revealed after playing certain demos? Is it written on a note? Not quite.

Of all things, it's scribbled – *in the bathroom*, and after combining the two phrases and entering them into this terminal, we're able to snoop around this PC like a hacker. Also, this is home to a *very* creepy hidden game that I won't spoil for you here, but just know that it involves disturbing imagery, a hidden interactive video tape, and an OS – hiding *something*.

-play snippet-

But that's a story for another time. Because for now, you and I have *other* arrangements. So floor two – let's go.

-walking shots-

And so it goes.

THE HEILWALD LOOPHOLE

The Heilwald Klinikum once had a reputation of being one of the most reliable medical facilities in Germany. That all changes when that weird loophole appeared...

-PS1 sound then play opening-

The Heilwald Loophole is a very interesting first person game in which we take the role of an unnamed protagonist in an extraordinary situation.

We begin inside of what appears to be some storage rooms. We have no idea why we're here, and for some reason, there's a massive hole above us. With no other option, we poke around and discover various items like boxes, shelves, and syringes, until we eventually run into –

-snippet of Dr.-

Welp, there he is.

So, Dr. Randolph as far as we know, is the head of whatever building we're in, and thankfully, he expresses concern about our well-being and informs us that he's here to help!

And so, we follow him to his office and everything seems pretty chill. He tells us to remain standing, and that he's going to make this quick, before – [jumpscare warning] – *this happens*.

-play liver-

Doctor Randolph is – *not* on our team, and this facility is not that of good. The pristine hallways we see on the outside are nothing but a front – and we need to get out of here. Jumpscare warning.

-play hall death-

So the game has a heavy focus on puzzle solving under pressure. In the storage rooms, we're given various dialogue cues that, perhaps we *may* need to find an unused syringe somewhere in this building to take care of Dr. Randolph. And so, after a few trials, we eventually happen upon *one* full of anesthetics, tucked away within this random storage closet. From here, we're left with none other than to use it on the doc and to get the hell outta there, however what we'll soon find is that our nightmare – is merely beginning.

*While scouring through the offices storage room you discover some left over anesthetics. You don't care if they're expired; all you want is to get rid of Dr. Randolph and whatever sick treatment he has in mind for you. Thus, you manage to escape – into the **sick ward**.*

-sick ward sequence-

The sick ward is – eerily – quiet. On the beds are neglected patients, making noises inhuman. The floor is covered – with an unknown grime. And within the hallway? Well, that's where one of my favorite jumpscare that I have ever seen in a videogame takes place. Jumpscare warning.

-play jumpscare-

Oh my fucking god, I love this game.

Entertaining this patient leads us to a bathroom stall that looks like a nuke went off, and the little guy asks us to bring him some water, lest he summons *Nurse Heideltraut*. And ho boy lemme tell you, you don't wanna meet Nurse Heideltraut.

N E X P *-snippet of Nurse-*

Needless to say, we don't ever end up finding water, trust me I tried, and so the tattling little shit lets her know we're here.

-tattling-

The cool thing about the Heilwald Loophole is that numerous endings exist, each dropping a short bit of lore about what happens to us as punishment. If we don't find him water, we're guilty about it. If Dr. Randolph catches us, we're placed into the Prison Block. If the nurse finds us, we're given electric shock therapy. And if we manage to find a crowbar, avoid the Nurse, and pry open this door – we learn that we - escape. Well, the from sick ward, that is.

Unfortunately the demo ends past this door, however the full game *is* available for those hungry for more. There are so many more terrors, areas, and characters in the full release, and if you're looking to have a panic attack, mixed in with a bit of humor and a damn good mystery about why the hell our protagonist is stuck in a time loop, then The Heilwald Loophole? Don't worry, it'll take care of you.

-door shut sound, inside HEILWALD ROOM, head to WALK-

散歩 WALK

A demo for an upcoming horror game from Japan.

-PS1 sound at open-

This is a game with no exposition, and absolutely no instruction, aside from:

-WALK-

We play as a little girl – walking a city street in Japan. We don't quite know where we're headed, however after a bit of exploring, a coin beckons for our attention. Unbeknownst to us, though, picking this coin up has – other – consequences.

-play stalker-

For some reason, a disturbing, demonic abomination is stalking us and wants us dead. Where does it hail from? Who cares, we have no idea, and all we can do is hide. And if we dare run within its proximity?

-death-

As we explore this rich environment, we'll happen upon a few curiosities, like this vending machine harboring a key. As it turns out, it costs 100 more yen than we currently have, and so we're left to try our luck, avoid this monster, and see if we can find another coin.

After heading past the back alley, we eventually find it, and so we're able to grab that key that we have absolutely no context about. Meanwhile, the demon can be seen relentlessly stalking us, and unlike other games that employ the same mechanic, the fixed perspective combined with the awkward control scheme makes for an experience that is horrifying. At all times, you're able to see the monster in frame, even if it can't see you, and this makes for one of the most unique feelings of dread and anxiety that I've ever experienced in a horror game.

-snippet-

Speaking of perspective, towards the latter half of the demo, you'll stumble upon an alley, however contrary to how the game's been presented this entire time, for a brief moment, we take the perspective of the *monster*, while still controlling this little girl. It is one of the most fascinating gameplay sequences that I have ever seen, and the anxiety that comes from this quick 15 second snippet of gameplay can and will cause your anxiety to spike through the roof.

-slight pause-

Eventually, we make our way out of its reach and into a home. The words "TYPE IT" adorn the back wall, and on the TV screen in front of us, is a message:

Can you hear me? Can you feel me? My voice, coursing through your fingertips.

-ambience-

If we play this game with a keyboard and mouse, we're left to sit here, with nothing to do. And if we leave the house, surprisingly, it finds us. And our game ends there.

-fade-

But wait no it doesn't because if you play with a controller, you'll notice something:

-camera shot of controller vibrating-

A pulse. And if we tap the action button in sync with it, the game fundamentally – changes.

-transition-

From here, the game turns from a fixed-perspective slow-burn horror to first-person exploration of a desolate wasteland. Atop the mountain exists a beacon of light, and upon traversing this massive, winding pathway, we find the bird monster again stalking us. Once we make it to the beacon and traverse the stairway, we witness ritualistic imagery circle around us. Whatever we're getting into, we know that this isn't good, and once we finally make it to the top –

-dead-

We, again, meet our demise.

Walk is one of most haunting experiences you can play, and I think it's because of its simplicity. The consistent, foreboding atmosphere, the intricately crafted set design utilizing rich color in each new area, the lack of direction or sense of place in this world, these claustrophobic streets devoid of *anyone* to help, and a disturbing, unknowable demon that is *always* in view, and that *will* get you – makes for a horror experience that is phenomenal. Whether this actually is a demo, or a standalone release of a completed game, Walk shines on all fronts, and *absolutely* commands a spot as one of the greats.

-fade, then door shut sound facing out of WALK ROOM, head to ECHOSTASIS-

ECHOSTASIS

Step in to your chamber. Let her do the rest.

-PS1 sound, play trailer-

Echostasis is a demo from Enigma Studios, and centers around Artificial Intelligence and its relationship to the human mind in the far future. In a way, it's like SOMA combined with Observer in the sense that in this timeline, the development of AI has reached such a point to where the concept of a virtual utopia can be promised to those willing to experience it.

If you've ever played Observer, however, then you know that when artificial intelligence and the human form combine, the result is - detrimental.

-fade game in-

Our journey begins with a tutorial. We're dropped into a dreamscape with a foreboding Sarcophagus in the distance, and communicating directly with the player is some sort of sentient program. They inform us that we need to help them – to establish something called *Echostasis* by *reclaiming this land*, even though this reality is apparently not our own. And so, with what appears to be an angel in the distance, we find a shotgun and fire at it, unleashing something – beyond our level of comprehension.

-play sequence-

We find ourselves in what appears to be base reality, at least, in some aspects.

The rest of the game takes place within this chamber, and upon looking around, it's clear that life as we know it has progressed beyond a point of recognition. AI terminals command the world. Humans exist in delicate pods, living within an algorithmically generated utopia designed to maximize the output of dopamine and serotonin. Advertisements promise an entire new world and,

-cut to problem dialogue-

Something is wrong.

A cyberattack is taking place inside someone's chamber, and we're tasked, as an engineer, with helping to solve this problem.

Interestingly, we're able to interact with this terminal in form of specific input prompts, and entering terms like ECHO, and UTOPIA generate dumps of lore that are pivotal in worldbuilding. The way it works within Echostasis, starts with the human mind. Upon entering a chamber, or POD, a new reality, known as an ECHO is generated based upon your cerebral profile. Initially, it begins as a copy of reality as we know it, however over time, it'll slowly morph into something that will maximize the entertainment and pleasure - of you.

Echostasis, however, is something that you do *not* want. It's the point to where the connection between the human mind and body, known as a CORE – are severed, forever locking a version of your consciousness within their world, and in turn leaving your physical body - braindead.

-slight pause-

After poking around a bit, we learn that the human in that pod is subject number 65, and after entering their ID into the terminal, we find that they're undergoing a slow but steady Echostasis, without even knowing it. The subject is so distracted within their perfect utopia, that they haven't even realized the finer details corrupting before them.

The good news is – that we can help, and so we utilize a tool known as DREAMSCAPE to jack into their mind, to find their CORE, and to reestablish the connection.

-show DREAMSCAPE MENU-

Curiously, we only have one full minute to explore their mind, yet are given unlimited opportunities to try this. And so with trial and error, we're able to speedrun this environment, unlocking shortcuts for our next run, and discovering paintings and artifacts from the depths of their psyche.

Eventually, we find their core, and much like the beginning, a shotgun is given to us. Once we grab it, we use it on this thing at the request of the AI, however the result of our actions –

-play shot-

Just - might have killed them.

We're then thrown back into the hub world, with everything awry. We are complicit in this. Echostasis was successful. We have committed murder.

-play end-

You guys know I am an absolute sucker for sci-fi horror, and ECHOSTASIS nails it with flying colors. The musical score, the real-life implications of our actions, the world so far removed from ours, and the natural apprehension of listening to the commands of an AI make for a surreal, disturbing experience that provokes thought and introspection.

It's experiences like this that make me ponder about the future. When I was interacting with that terminal, I was picking its brain on this world's lore, and it said something that stood to me more than anything else: *First, we had algorithms that would simply suggest media that a user may like. Then, these algorithms learned how to generate this media themselves. Today, the ECHO represents the natural conclusion of this process. An entire reality – algorithmically generated from the users cerebral profile. Our algorithm stands as the very best in artificial intelligence. We are very proud of her.*

-slight pause-

Humanity has lost touch with itself to algorithms. Singularity has long been reality. But, at that point, what even *is* reality, anymore?

-fade-



In the before-time - THE MALL stood king among shopping locales. People of all kinds flocked to them, swarming store after store, purchasing copious amounts of tie-dyed fabric and greasy food and novelty knives. But now the people are DEAD, and the corporate catacombs stand silent. Their only customers now are rats and cockroaches.

Of late, though, there have been murmurs in the emptiness - flashes of too-bright colors, flickers of wires and flesh, strangled electric sounds, almost like SCREAMS.

Your town bore one such DECREPIT MALL, a hopeful tourist destination long since abandoned by the few teens that frequented it. Yet you find yourself standing before it in the gloom, for the first time in years. Lights flicker from within, tinny music emanates from disconnected speakers. And a phrase BURNS in your mind as if carved with a burning knife...

-TITLE SCREEN, then start-

-silent ambience-

This game's atmosphere is incredible, knocked out of the park by this opening foyer that is full of endless darkness, as snow rains down upon us. The storefronts – are derelict, forgotten, and very cleverly serve as the entrance point for each Demo.

Curiously, it becomes immediately clear that there's a mystery here. Doors are chained up, storefronts are blocked off, and an entire upstairs area beckons – yet there's no way to currently get there. And so,

we're effectively given two options – we can entertain the mall's secrets and unlock its puzzles, or we can dive straight in to the demos available to us. If we go with the former, we'll discover hidden items that unlock specific doors, introducing us to a sprawling network of claustrophobic hallways reminiscent of Skully's museum. Hidden within this mall, are dimly lit bathrooms, filled with crippling silence. An abandoned arcade – harbors a dark secret. The basement is riddled with an unknown presence, and, oh yeah. We aren't alone here.

-play creature-

What they've done with this is amazing, and as a fan of old, rudimentary graphic fidelity, everything here just feels *off* in the very best way.

But while I could rave about this Mall for another half hour, you and I are here for something else – *the demos*. So, with that being said, I would like to make our way towards the first game on our last disc – *Dead Letter Dept*, so we can *finally* feast - on what's in store for us.

-head to DEAD LETTER DEPT, approach-

DEAD LETTER DEPT

Working at a temp data entry job, you transcribe the lost mail and letters that have nowhere else to go. But as the days carry on, oddities in the mail begin to emerge.

-PS1 sound-

Dead Letter Department begins with a sequence in which we craft a letter to a family member, and while we're given options on how to write, one thing is clear. Our protagonist is now in a new city, far away from family, far away from their past life.

-fade in hallway-

When the game starts, we're greeted with a foreboding green hallway, establishing a *very* atmospheric mood. It seems like we're on the night shift, because I dunno about you but – seems like no ones around. We're here – alone.

After making our way to the end of the hallway, we're greeted with an empty room with nothing but a table, a chair, and a computer awaiting us, and here is where the bulk of the gameplay loop begins. As referenced at the beginning, we're stuck doing data entry, transcribing letters that computers weren't able to. For a solid 15 or so minutes, I was entering address after address, and I'm not gonna lie not having a numerical keypad for this was a god damn nightmare and I'm sorry for my typos I was constantly resetting my hands *but I digress*.

For most of the beginning, the letters are relatively normal, however we slowly begin to realize that some of these are pretty damn weird. One letter references a rat lungworm and how it infects its hosts, another outlines a recipe involving *testicles*? And there's one that even references a real world cannibal named Armin Meiwes, yeah it gets strange.

But where this demo really takes off is towards the end, when we realize that all the work we've been doing – all the labor, long hours, stress, and isolation –

-play disappearance-

Was for nothing. At least, it seems that way. From here, the game transforms from a typing simulator back to exploration, and as we poke around our office building, it's evident that nothing is as it was. We're being – toyed with, but by who, what, or why – is currently unclear. Is this even real? What is happening to us?

Unfortunately, those questions will have to wait, as the demo ends there. While it's relatively brief, Dead Letter Department is an eerie, unorthodox experience, and if you're interested in getting some keyboarding in while getting freaked out, this one's definitely for you.

-fade, then facing AWAY FROM DEAD LETTER, head to GOB STOREFRONT-

GOB

After a deep slumber, a trip to the vending machine spirals into an unintentional journey underground.

-play opening-

It goes without saying that the art style Gob utilizes is definitely its strong suit. Taking stylistic cues from prior horror titles like Garage: Bad Dream Adventure, we're thrown into a grungy, hyper-detailed world that feels so incredibly lived in that from the very first second we're here, we feel like we're in a place far removed from home.

Here, we take the role of Gob, an ordinary dude living in an extraordinary location. And the premise is simple - he's hungry, and so we're left to solve that problem, to find food – *somewhere*. Upon poking around our home, we learn that we can not only crawl around to reach hidden spaces, but will also need to keep a keen eye out for items scattered around the environment itself.

Gob utilizes a simple mechanic, but one I love so much and typically see in point and click games like [X], and that's this incredibly hyper realistic first person view of whatever item it is we're examining.

Whether it be a doorknob, our fridge, the toilet, some shelves, all of them are shown to us with such intricate detail, that we feel it to our absolute core. We are, for all intents and purposes, in Gob's world now, and - god dammit, we're still hungry!

After making a contraption to knock the rust off our front door, we learn that outside – is a sewer. We're living underground, yet aren't quite sure why or if anyone else lives here too. Eventually we make our way to the vending machine, however learn that – dammit, coin.

Next to the vending machine is a cat hiding a key, and after taking it, we realize that we can use it on the door next to our home. And so we make our way out, and encounter – daylight, and inside the storm drain connecting our world to theirs is a Grabber. Taking the grabber back to our place allows us to catch a coin from our shelf, we're gonna get some food if it's the last god damn thing we do. And so with the coin in hand, Gob makes their way out and back to the vending machine. Chippy chips here we come

–

-drop coin-

I feel for him man, that sucks.

You might notice something off to the right there – because those symbols are on the vending machine. It's a code, and so – we enter it, revealing a hidden path – *very unfortunately* leading to the end of this Demo.

-slight pause-

Gob is such a cool project, and even though this demo was short, it gave me all I needed to add this game to my wishlist. The hyper-detailed, surreal world, the heavy, atmospheric ambience filling those corridors, and a simple, relatable premise that devolves into something deeper makes for an unforgettable experience. Since the beginning, Garage has always stuck with me, and I've got a feeling Gob's gonna do that, too.

-fade, then facing away from GOB, head to MOTHERED-

MOTHERED

A young girl named Liana arrives home after major surgery and is met with a strange mannequin claiming to be her mother.

-PS1 sound, then play liminal concept render-

You remember those eerie liminal 3D concept renders from the mid-2000s? Imagine *that* combined with the bizarre, awkward FMVs that were prominent in PS1 titles back then, and that's what you get with the visual style in *Mothered*. And trust me, it makes for a combination that is absolutely chilling.

We begin the game in a car. We're with our Father, and he claims that he picked us up from a major surgery. Oddly, he makes bizarre claims like the fact that we'll have to "stay with mother" in order to get back to our normal self, and that he's "glad he got us out of that place". Even stranger, we never see his face, and towards the end of our drive, he gets incredibly weird about how everything he and our Mother do is for us. I could be way overthinking it but seems almost like he wasn't supposed to pick us up – like why do we have to stay with Mother? Why does that sound so strange?

-SUNDAY bumper-

Eventually, we make our way home, and our dad asks us to bring him a box. We head in, and from here, we get our first look at what I was talking about earlier.

-switch light on-

Tell me this art style isn't unnerving as all hell.

Eventually we find the box, take it outside, our dad leaves without giving us a hug, and we make our way back in. Eerily, Mother is nowhere to be found, and we can hear crying from a bedroom. Even more perplexing – the bathroom mirror is taped up, supposedly "*for our own good*", and in the far distance, we can see a foreboding barn engulfed in flames. So, what in the world is going on here, and why is everything so – off?

-MONDAY!-

Ahhh, It's a happy morning. The birds are singing. The sun is shining. We're alive, and making us breakfast, is none other than –

-play "Mother?"-

Well, Mom's gotten a little weird. And our breakfast? Textureless.

-Monday afternoon-

On Monday afternoon, Mother gives us a tour of the home. She explains various house rules, like how we're forbidden from entering the downstairs bathroom, forbidden from entering our brothers room, and once again, that the mirrors are covered for our own good. At this point, it really making me wonder what it is she's hiding from us – this game is like a weird mesh of Illusion of Bias and Goodnight Mommy and this idea culminates in its purest form on Monday night, when we're just about to get ready - for bed.

-play snippet-

Admittedly, Mother keeps things pretty abstract, yet the delivery was absolutely haunting. Something about looking up at a massive, alive, and foreboding mannequin staring down upon you airing out their life regrets instills a feeling of dread that I haven't entertained in quite some time.

-slight pause-

Eventually Mother tucks us in and we head to bed, and the next day we're tasked with meeting her outside for a chat. Here, she goes on this long spiel about her orchard and how it was the one thing in her life that allowed her to feel a sense of control. Control over the creation of fruit – over the creation of life.

To look at this orchard, you don't see all the heartbreak that was involved in creating such beautiful life. Creating an environment where they can thrive and come to their own.

Spending your energy on helping them grow, only to have to dispose of the failure. That's where our hope comes in, and I have hope.

It's a strangely profound method of thinking for something like an orchard, and it makes you ponder if she may be referencing something else entirely. During this demo, however, we're none the wiser since this idea is never fully realized, yet that question bothered me.

-slight pause-

We then meet Mother behind the house. She introduces us to the barn, before – this happens:

-play DO NOT ENTER to TUESDAY NIGHT-

It's like analog horror – in a video game format, and this single event makes the context behind the barn fire that much more ominous.

-slight pause-

From here, we're left to poke around the house at night. It's, strangely quiet, yet, for the very first time, our brother surprisingly has a few words for us –

-play brother dialogue-

This entire time, Mother's been feeding us dirt, and we've been taking it like it's normal. Needless to say, everything about this family is far from that, and whether this reality is even real or not quickly gets called into question. We never see ourselves eat, we never see Mother make breakfast, and we never even saw ourself pull up to this home in the first place. Also, down the hallway – someone is watching. So we approach.

-play end snippet-

Mother sucks up to us, explaining how she always preferred the apples we picked from the garden over our brother's, before telling us to talk to him.

We head over, and he knows it – it's almost like it's a routine he's been through a million times. The screen begins to glitch and distort as commands fill our point of view, and with no other option – we follow them.

-you should get to it-

As the demo draws to an end, reality distorts further and further while we're given conflicting commands almost like Weather Service from Local 58. There's some sort of conflicting AI dynamic at play here, and it almost seems like none of who we thought we were – was ever true. And, at the very end – it clicks.

-snippet-

So, Mothered is a game from Enigma Studios, the same group who brought us Echostasis, and after experiencing this ending, it's connection between them is clear. An entire overarching story is at play here, likely involving the AI system we saw back in Echostasis. Curiously, this demo also has another secret, too, because the full release of Mothered has been out for over a year. If you've played and beat it, what happens here is not the games end, because it unlocks an entire sequel – all with a massive continuation to the story, and all tying in to the other masterpieces from this game developer.

It almost pains me that I can't delve into this further tonight – as this segment could easily go on for another half hour. What I will say, though, is that in the very near future, you *will* be seeing more from Echostasis, Mothered, Enigma Corp, and the grander storyline at play here. This is like a meta-AI-analog horror nightmare, and it's one that I'm thrilled to flesh out in proper detail.

For now, though, please try this Demo out. Try Echostasis, and envelop yourselves in that world. You and I will be back real soon.

-cut to black-

You can count on it.

CLOSING REMARKS

-fade in Spectral Arcade-

Tonight, you and I took a trip through some of the most eerie, disturbing, and haunting video game demos that have come out of the Haunted PS1 Demo Disc over the past three years. This video was an absolute joy to create and even though I know it's different, I hope there was at least one experience tonight that has unnerved you as much as they did to me.

As a heads up, a link to each developer, along with the Haunted PS1 team are in the Pastebin in the description, so if you're interested in checking any of what we've covered tonight out in further detail, or if you wanna take a crack at the demo discs yourself, they're ready for you.

With that being said, I think I'm gonna go chill in the food court for a while. Heard they've got some bomb ass pizza so, I guess I'll just wait for them to open – seems like I'm early.

-cut to black, then camera shot of me-

I hope you guys have had an amazing holiday, and thank you from the bottom of my heart for joining me for a fifth Halloween in a row. I look forward to many years to come, and, hey I hope you all do too.

Thank you much for watching, I'll see you in the next one, I love you all, and GOOD NIGHT!

-roll credits-

N E X P O 