

SCREAMING IN SPACE:

AN INTERVIEW WITH STEVE PAPOUTSIS

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The survival horror genre has roots in gaming as deep as the FPS, but it's very rare for a new title to come along and completely redefine the terror. With its haunting portrait of our potential future *Dead Space* reinvigorated gaming's horror scene with its sci-fi nightmare.

Dead Space 2 is evolving the series even further with all-new abominations for hapless protagonist Isaac Clarke to fear and a multiplayer mode that will scare even the toughest online jockeys. With so much to terrify players with we thought it would be worthwhile sitting down with executive produce Steve Papoutsis to talk about what it's like designing a truly frightening experience that makes players afraid to play with the lights off.

In your opinion, what makes a really good horror game and how does *Dead Space 2* compare to your ideal?

It needs to be relatable in some way, and believable. With *Dead Space* the future we have outlined could potentially happen, and the environments and settings are intended to mirror what we think the future might be like as an example. I think we did a very good job of nailing those two elements in *Dead Space 2*.

As designers how do you properly gauge what players will find scary? Do you have a barometer for terror that lets you know when you've hit the sweet spot?

The best way we evaluate horror / tension is by really focusing on the pacing. We try to make sure that we leave moments of quiet or stillness in the game in order to set the stage for a scare. If the game is always super bombastic it is very difficult to get a good scare in. We also focus on letting the audio foreshadow a good scare. Sometimes you will hear a sound and nothing will happen, other times it will. There are a lot of different elements that go into a scare moment and constructing them is very tricky.

Things always seem to get less scary the more people you throw in the mix, how does *Dead Space 2* keep the horror alive in the new multiplayer mode?

In our multiplayer mode the atmosphere and environment help set up the horror. The other big piece is that you need to work together to be successful, that can be very tense as you really have to coordinate with the other people on your team.

Traditional game design dictates that as the player progresses through the game, they get more powerful by earning new weapons or abilities. How do you balance providing that sense of progress without letting the player feel empowered to the point they're no longer scared?

Focusing on making sure the challenge of the enemies continues to require skill is the way we try to mitigate against the feeling of becoming too powerful. A good example is how the Slasher becomes much more challenging later in the game when you start to encounter the Super Slasher variant.

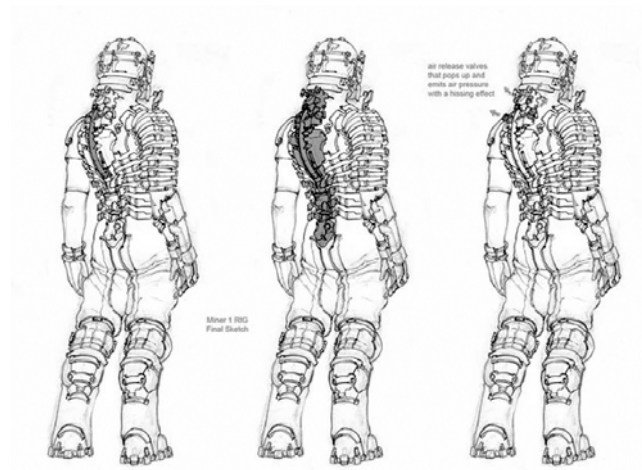
In the original *Dead Space*, Isaac was an engineer stuck in a bad situation. How have the events of the first game changed him as a character in *Dead Space 2*?

This is a big part of the story in *Dead Space 2*, understanding what sort of effect his encounter with the Necromorphs and the Marker have had on his psyche. Clearly dealing with such a horrific experience has altered his personality a bit, but players will have to play the game to see exactly how that manifests itself in *Dead Space 2*.

The Necromorphs had a very distinctive 'twisted soul' motif to them, how has their design evolved in *Dead Space 2* and what was learned in the process of updating them for the sequel?

The biggest change has been to add more variety. We added more different types of Necromorphs as well as different skinned variants of the Slasher. In total we have around 27 different looking enemies now.

Traditionally horror games don't really rely on fast action gameplay, *Dead Space 2* is really unique in this way. Where did



the decision to make a quicker horror game come from and why does it work so well?

Our motto is to never let the controls inhibit the player. What we believe is that the controls should be an extension of the player and be something that a player can feel masterful interacting with. Speeding up our aiming and overall responsiveness just fit natural with our goals. The scares come from the atmosphere, the music, the setting, the enemies, and the specific set ups. We never want a player to feel like they are being scared because they are not good at controlling Isaac.

With *Dead Space* leading the charge for a new wave of horror titles, what do you see in the future of the genre?

I really hope there are more Survival Horror games, the Team and I enjoy playing them and the more games that come out the more the genre will advance and continue to get better.

