

Amnesia and Soma creator Thomas Grip explains how he makes games terrifying

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Video produced by Justin Wolfson, edited by Patrick Biesemans. [Click here for transcript.](#)

Welcome to “Scare Tactics,” a pilot for a video series that aims to explore how different creators make horror games. We see horror as a special genre—horror games aren’t always played for the same reasons as other games. They aren’t necessarily *fun*, and their reward often comes from overcoming one’s own fears, rather than from overcoming the game’s mechanics.

We’re starting the series by cozying up to Frictional Games cofounder Thomas Grip. To call the release of Frictional’s *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* a watershed moment in horror gaming would be a severe understatement—it launched the careers of many Let’s Play YouTubers and spawned dozens of copycats all trying the same scare-your-brains-out formula. The company is currently working on *Amnesia: Rebirth*, but Grip took time away from finishing *Rebirth* to take us through his philosophy and approach to horror game design.

(Along the way, he also shared some *Rebirth* previews with us, and our video above showcases a few *Rebirth* gameplay elements that haven’t been seen yet!)

Things that go bump in the night

No matter how you slice it, horror is ultimately subjective. We'll never agree on which things are scariest, which gameplay elements are necessary, or even what the experience is for. This puts horror game creators in a weird position—how do you make good games in a genre where “good” doesn't necessarily mean the same thing as it does elsewhere?

On a personal level, I've been a fan of Grip for years, and I really respect his views on game design. He also directed *Soma*, which was a masterpiece—and the scariest game I think I've ever played. (Outside of the atmosphere and the setting and the monsters, *Soma* actually managed to give me nightmares because of the questions it caused me to ask about life and existence and humanity and consciousness. And isn't that what any good piece of art should do?)

Enlarge / These games aren't always frightening for obvious reasons—*Soma* in particular has things lurking under the surface that go far beyond body horror or jump scares.
Frictional Games

With strange aeons

This isn't our first dive into horror—we've done videos on the genre before, including talking with the venerable Glen Schofield about *Dead Space* and previous chatting with Grip about the original *Amnesia*.

But consider those earlier efforts as prologue, because "Scare Tactics" as a series is a passion project of mine. We don't really plan on doing reviews or previews of games, but rather using the release of a game as an opportunity to explore a whole genre. Like "War Stories," we want to apply that Ars Technica special sauce to a subject and give brilliant designers like Grip the chance to talk about the nuts-and-bolts of how they make us afraid. (So if you happen to have any favorite horror genre games you'd like us to dig into, please drop a note in the comments!)

Amnesia: Rebirth will be out on October 20 for PC and Playstation 4. It's currently available for pre-order on Steam or GOG for \$26.99.

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