



Among Us is 2020s Best Horror Game



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October is finally upon us! Although I can't help feeling its arrival is somewhat muted this year given how overwhelmingly miserable January to September have been, the season of spooks and shocks barges in regardless. As with any holiday, millions will have their own horror traditions whether it be cosying up to watch Michael Myers murder a bunch of teenagers or brutally mutilating an orange squash. All a bit of good fun, right?

For me, there are few horror films that match the fine-tuned paranoia of John Carpenter's *The Thing*. Nothing screams nightmares like being trapped in a remote Antarctic base with a shape-shifting alien that can impersonate any of your friends and tear them apart in disgustingly creative ways. There's also a twisted irony that the entirety of 2020 has felt like an extended live theatre production of *The Thing*; every reasonable human being suspecting their friends and family of carrying a destructive virus has become par for the course. Granted, there were a lot of heatwaves so the Antarctic part might not be quite as accurate. Despite COVID-19's valiant effort however, there's another eerily compelling *Thing* simulator this year, one that has secured the title of 2020s defining piece of horror media immediately coming into October. It's already *Among Us*.



Putting us out of our misery?

I wouldn't be shocked if a passive spectator didn't understand why *Among Us* was such a rich source of terror upon first glance. The character models are primitive and even a little charming. Look at them running around that spaceship! They're having such a jolly time. The vast majority of actual gameplay is spent performing straightforward errands — fixing wires, inputting a sequence of buttons, swiping a keycard. Decidedly not scary. It's when taking an innocent stroll and witnessing the corpse of a crewmate torn in half that things get a little dicey.

Just like *The Thing*, there's an imposter(s) onboard and while they're not contagious, they're certainly lethal. The other portion of gameplay effectively operates like a streamlined version of its brilliant blood test sequence. Crewmates and imposters alike bicker and cross-examine until an obvious contradiction surfaces; a spot of sizzling blood that exposes one's true identity.

Depending on how you play, you can either receive instant confirmation that the person you just ejected into the deep nether was an imposter or wait until the final declaration of victory/failure. Whilst the former puts more weight on ejections (you very well could be next if you make a false accusation), the latter allows for Machiavellian strategies that even took me aback with their cunning. Two imposters can tag-team and deliberately perform a murder with a crewmate witness, only to quickly frame them as the culprit. Players can even perform simultaneous or ‘stack kills’, risky but brilliantly devious maneuvers that throw any match into turmoil.



No-one is to be trusted.

Among Us grants any would-be slasher villain the opportunity to live their fantasy — honing your skills in turn only heightens your malevolence. There is absolutely no way to be both good and *good* at *Among Us*. One must succumb to its darkly temptatious siren song if victory is to be within their grasp. As [Keith Stuart](#) and [Sam Sands](#) have already expressed in their brilliant analyses, *Among Us* is by all accounts the perfect game for our virus-stricken times and an uncanny encapsulation of the deceit and woe that has defined 2020 as a record-breaking low for humanity. As Sands aptly notes, it

functions as a microcosm of communities ridden by fabricated chaos, of how scapegoats and persistent falsities weave their way and gradually unstitch entrenched societal bonds. Some of us just want to fix wires and be done with our day.

After months of strained Zoom work meetings and online coffee breaks, perhaps *Among Us*' immense success represents a subconscious desire to break away from these artificial niceties and return to an imperfect but normal reality, one where we didn't have to reinforce how *everything is okay*. Horror has always operated as a cathartic outlet for spectators to unload their frustrations and fears with their waking life — as Sands notes, maybe that fear is that normalcy may never return whereas *Among Us* offers players that precious reprieve, the assurance that all this will “eventually relent”. Maybe we are all slowly drifting into MacReady's state in *The Thing*'s final scene; maybe we all crave nothing more than to sit back and see what happens.

Jacob Heayes is a freelance writer specialising in coverage and thinkpieces on the video game and film industry. Follow his Medium for more independent insights or his Twitter for quickfire musings. If you have any writing opportunities or would simply like to get in touch, contact me: jmheayes@gmail.com

Among Us

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