

still wild to me that the game industry is like "writers are here to dress up the game" rather than going "the game is a story, and all the elements of the game act to serve the story."

a lot of people are like "if you have story first, the gameplay will suffer!" because we still think 'story' is cutscenes or lore text, which absolutely CAN disrupt the pacing of the game. But look at Yakuza--they're actually doing story first game design there.

A normal game will be like "now u have to kill 5 crooks. Okay good. Here, kill the super crook."

Yakuza is like "this man... asked you to give up 20 years of your life for him, and you did it gladly... and he BETRAYED you. This man treated you like a SON... how could he DO THIS" and by setting context, Yakuza propels you forwards--you want to do the objectives it gives you because it is emotionally compelling. You aren't just ticking off objects on a list. You are on Nagoshi's Wild Fuckin Ride.

Without context, this moment in P5R means nothing, right? But 150 hours in, this is one of the most "hell yeah" moments in any video game I have ever played. I cannot think of a single prompt that was this fucking satisfying. It's god tier storytelling that got you here.



And here's the thing; both Persona 5 and Yakuza 7, which I played last year, had the same fucking EMOTIONAL process in their quest design.

What do I mean by this? Well, in a lot of typical AAA video game design, quests work like this:

You have to go from A to Z to chase down the boss of the main plot. But when you get to point C, D, E, F, etc, someone goes "ah I'd love to help you, but there's a complication."

This quid pro quo approach to narrative design tends to drain all the emotion right out of the experience; you are doing something you don't care about in order to get to what you want.

In Yakuza 7, after you are shot and left for dead, rather than doing some quid pro quo bullshit, your first action is like "I need to survive. So I'm gonna find a place to sleep." Your needs aren't "here's a person getting in the way of the plot."

Now, in a traditional AAA game, the NEXT step is like "gosh, protagonist, I really want to help you find and kill Hitler, who I understand is about to drop nukes on literally every corner of the planet, but first, I need you to help me figure out why these carrots aren't growing"

and you're like "the fate of the planet is at stake does that really matter?" and he's like "no i suppose not, but all the same, i need you to find Doctor Carrotfixer. He was at either the library, the hospital, or the combination library/hospital. I'm not sure."

and what happens is, you'll go to objective one, and you'll find that no, he isn't there, but you have to kill 5 bunnies. then you will go to objective Bravo, and you have to kill 5 werebunnies. and then you will go to objective c, and you will have to kill 3 waves of bunnybots.

and at the end of going to three (and it's almost always three) distinct objectives, you will get a cutscene where doctor carrotfixer is located and you escort him (or he'll teleport, either way) back to the guy who is stopping you from KILLING HITLER

quid pro quo design, combined with rule of three design, creates predictable and emotionally non-resonant impedances. You do not want this if you want people to finish your game.

When Industry Voices are like "gosh games are too long these days" and then turn around and are like "OH MY GOD FOLKS YAKUZA IS AMAZING" that should tell you--games aren't too long, but a lot of games are TOO BORING

BUT!

THIS IS NOT HOW YAKUZA OR PERSONA DO IT

In Persona, like, as you talk to people (and thus come to care about them), you learn that like, oh no, these people are shaking this poor woman down for money, or this school bully is beating this weird kid up because he's a pushover.

When you see a guy go "oh my family sword, my precious heirloom, is missing" in a game, it means nothing. In Persona, it's like you see a character going "gosh I feel so inadequate..." and eventually you get introduced to the heirloom and SEE HOW IT MATTERS TO THEM.

"oh I see, this person feels like they can't live up to the expectations put on them in the fencing team because their older sister, who died in a car crash, was a brilliant fencer, and now I've had to witness people mocking them as a shit fencer. It makes them feel AWFUL."

when you WATCH people go "lol u became a sex worker to make ends meet because i'm blackmailing you and IM GONNA KEEP DOING IT HAHHAHAHAHA" you go "I am going to fucking execute this motherfucker."

This relationship building and LETTING YOU SEE THE EMOTIONAL STAKES OF THE SITUATION brings you DETERMINATION and makes you WANT to see this plot through.

In Yakuza, when a homeless guy says that there's a kid who says hi to him and has eventually confided in him that his father isn't really ever around, and the homeless guy finally reveals to you that when HE had a family, he also overworked and abandoned them, so he feels bad.

"it's the kid's birthday soon and his dad doesn't even know. I want to give him something but I'm just a homeless guy... no one wants that from me." But no!! You can see it!! You can see how for him, this is a kind of redemption!!! he needs this as much as the kid needs this!!

and you're like "he likes books, let's make him a book shelf," so you go beat up gangsters for planks and nails. And you build a fuckin bookshelf. And you and the homeless guy give it to the kid, and the kid seems SO HAPPY...

UNTIL YOU FIND THE BOOKSHELF IN THE TRASH

and the guy is fucking DEVASTATED. And he's like "god... it's true... no one cares about homeless people. I'm worthless. I was a failed father, and now here I am, failing again. I'm terrible. I do not deserve love" and you are like NO THATS NOT TRUE. WE'RE GOING TO SOLVE THIS.

and you find out the kid's shitty dad made him throw it out and the kid actually really looks up to the guy and then the dad's like "fuck, I'm a businessman, of course I will fistfight two homeless dudes," and you beat him senseless and help him see he's a shit father.

every step of the way, quest design in yakuza and persona is about getting you to _care_ not only so that you _WANT TO DO THINGS_ but so that you FEEL AMAZING WHEN YOU _FINISH THEM_

so yeah, it's goddamn weird to me when people are like "oh well, u see, stories distract from games"

games are literally storytelling!!!

You can't just go "here is objective. player will want this." You want to go "here is why you are going to travel to the human subconscious and beat up the psychic manifestation of these two awful people who are blackmailing MY FRIEND"

What's better, a combat system where button presses feel really good, or a combat system where button presses feel really good and the REASON YOU PRESS THEM IS FOR EMOTIONAL CATHARSIS?

STORY IS A WAY TO MAKE THE AUDIENCE _WANT TO DO THINGS_ AND CREATING A SYSTEM OF _OBJECTIVES_ WITHOUT _EMOTIONAL IMPETUS_ WILL LEAD TO A GAME FEELING LIKE IT'S WAY TOO GODDAMN LONG

why would someone say "games are too long" and then brag about having 24,000 hours in Dota 2?

The only game that is too long is a game where you STOP CARING.

And "kill 40 bunnies" WILL NEVER BE SOMETHING YOU CARE ABOUT UNLESS IT IS A COMPELLING PART OF A STORY.

"I was cursed to be a frogge, and until I kill 40 bunnies, i am TRAPPED as a frogge"

"doc aren't you making a game where two guys just walk around literally shoveling pig shit while talking about life?"

yes, this is because my hope is that you will buy in emotionally to the relationship happening. but also my game's ENTIRE BUDGET was less than some people in AAA get as a bonus check. PEOPLE DO SHIT BECAUSE DOING THE SHIT FULFILLS A NEED.

STORYTELLING IS THE ACT OF GERMINATING A NEED WITHIN THE PLAYER

P5R will literally just sit you down at a restaurant with the weird kid who betrayed you to the abusive teacher one time but who is trying to make up for it by helping you out, and you'll just... talk to him, and find out he feels inadequate and doesn't want to feel worthless

and then the game will underline and bold this point by having a character walk up and be like "WELL WELL WELL, if it isn't Sadboi Nerdly. What's up NERD, I bet you're STILL SAD ALL THE TIME, huh. Lick my boots." AND you'll be like "THIS MOTHERFUCKER," and Sadboi? well--

sadboi will literally like, sit there and they will rotate his character model 180 degrees, and a speech balloon will pop up going "protagonist... don't owrry, i deserve this" and then the character model will disappear and a speech ballon will say "licking sounds"

and your character will show a frowny face and you'll have a thought balloon go "damn... he's licking their boots! this willNOT stand!"

and it's SO low budget, right? it's not the last of us shirt scene, right? it's just some speech balloons and model hiding and whatever.

But it actually MATTERS to you EMOTIONALLY because You Watched Your Friend Who Is Trying To Make Up For Being A Fuckup Get Humiliated.

I don't 'want' things in a game because a character kills 500 dudes and then kills one other person and is like "god im SO SAD, watch this VERY brilliantly animated shirt removal animation."

I want things that seem low budget as fuck if the EMOTIONAL STAKES MATTER.

tl;dr,

https://video.twimg.com/tweet_video/EsPxXK0XcAEjdTG.mp4

My thesis here is that you have to CARE.

Yes, either way, you are still beating up dudes or shooting bunnies or getting wolf pelts or whatever, but the emotional context--that's what matters.

beating up a man because you WATCHED THE EMOTIONAL CONSEQUENCES OF HIS BEING A SHITBIRD TO BOTH A CHILD AND A HOMELESS MAN is way more COMPELLING than beating up a man because you need to progress the plot and someone won't help you until you punch him in the face

look, I personally want to one day, as a writer, write a story without any words at all, but I recognize the obscene cost of doing that. Imagine playing a game where NOBODY SPEAKS. that would be WILD, right?

pretty emotionally compelling, even?

like, I don't know...

https://video.twimg.com/tweet_video/EsP1cQjW8AAbSb7.mp4

Look, you don't have to be a writer to do this, okay? ANYONE can do this. Anybody. This is a skill anyone can learn.

over the years, I keep hearing how the 'best' narrative studios in games literally rip off scenes from movies without understanding how those movies earned those scenes, but all the actually great stories in games are all about earning the moments they deliver.

like last year's big goty winner has a shot for shot remake of this scene from the walking dead:

<https://youtu.be/0Gdk6UUY22M>

what did the boss man of the game have to say?

Well, on the challenges of adapting his game that copies scenes from television shows,

"In removing the interactivity of the story, how do you make it unique for this other medium"

A pretty open admission that your narrative isn't unique--which is unsurprising as it literally borrows everything it does from other stories--and you are running into trouble adapting it back to the medium you lifted it from as that reveals unoriginality.

That's AAA, baybee

anyways thanks for reading this thread. if you found it through someone going "wow, thread," please note I wasn't finished when most of them did that and possibly said things they don't endorse so please don't hold it against them.

I should have just written essay but im bored

if for some ungodly reason you want an essay for me, I wrote about horror writing and then I laid out what's effectively a pitch for the game I'd like to make next, which is like deus ex but horror

<https://docseuss.medium.com/you-are-capable-of-writing-better-horror-stories-311ed334080f>

from, even. i t's 5:12 am and im eating hot dogs, do not expect me at my best
game design is the art of motivate a player to engage in interesting behaviors

narrative design is about making the player give a fuck
MOTIVATING.

it's 5:22 am and I'm blasting Take Over on my speakers, drinking a mountain dew, and thinking about catching a kyogre

it's fucked up how people are like "cool i read this book at an airport and i think it would make an amazing movie, let's adapt it," and then they find actors who want to play the characters, etc etc.

and in games?

"oh shit we're shipping in 3 months the writer will fix it"

FUCK IT OKAY ILL DO AN ESSAY

every game is a story

What's your favorite single moment in a video game? Like... what moment do you look back on fondly, what moment gets you to evangelize the game to everyone who will listen? When I ask people this question, without fail, each and every one tells me about their favorite story beat.

Maybe it was that moment where BT caught you as you were falling in Titanfall 2. Maybe it was when "rules of nature" hit *just so* as you were slicing a giant robot in half. I remember one of my friends telling me that the absolute *relief* on Alyx's face when she found you in the rubble of Half-Life 2: Episode 1 was the most important moment for them in a video game. People have told me about Jose Gonzalez's "Far Away" hitting in Red Dead Redemption.

It's always story.

if you want to support my writing simply give me \$20 million dollars to make a video game about a new and sinister moon voiced by mike patton telling you he wants you to kill the old moon and giving you a gun



"doc wait is this just another tweet thread designed to slowly introduce people to ACE COMBAT???"

yes,



YOU SEE, FOLKS, ACE COMBAT IS ACTUALLY THE PERFECT EXAMPLE OF HOW GOOD GODDAMN CHARACTER AND PLOT-DRIVEN REASONS FOR DOING THINGS CAN MAKE YOU FUCKING SOB AS ENEMY FIGHTERS BEGIN WHISTLING YOUR NATIONAL ANTHEM AS THEY BETRAY THE SINISTER PLOTS OF THE GREY MEN AND JOIN YOUR SIDE

you know im fucking correct.

if you make someone care about your fucking fighter jet,s they will appreciate every one of these

WHAT I PLAYED



WHAT I EXPECTED



WHAT I GOT



