

How can game mechanics be used to create immersive narratives in games

By Kemal Thomson

Abstract

What is at the core of a games appeal and how can such an appeal be used to harness a player's investment in a games story to create an immersive narrative that the player feels committed to a game.

How a players makes decisions within a game conflict with the desired experience a designer wants and how is such a conflict resolved.

By creating a proof of concept trailer to experiment with and explore, considering the depths of human interaction and perception in relation to the creation of a narrative, the themes and topics supported by research here will inform the design of the trailer with the Concept trailer itself offering practical experiments to examine for comparison.

This will begin to define how to use games to their fullest potential for player engagement and how best to use the art form to convey a story that immerse the player in the experience.

Introduction

"Can games express their story and themes through play as opposed to dialogue and cut scene's?"
(Daniel Floyd. 2012)

If we are to understand how to use game mechanics in order to create an immersive narrative in games a grounded understanding of the rules and practices of Game Mechanics, Gameplay Narrative and Narrative Itself is necessary.

Jesper Juul's defined games like this *"A game is a rule-based formal system with a variable and quantifiable outcome, where different outcomes are assigned different values, the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, the player feels attached to the outcome, and the consequences of the activity are optional and negotiable."* (Juul, J. 2005)

It's here that we have the main difference between gameplay narrative and game mechanics, Gameplay Narrative in games can then be described as the reciprocal nature of action and reaction between the player and the system that generates meaning and context for the player which can be interpreted or influenced.

Whereas Gameplay Mechanics are a means that allows a player/s to interact with the system within the game yet it's devoid of context and meaning, following a set rigid system and predictable outcome.

This is commonly referred to as the narratology and ludology debate *"from the narratology point of view, games are novel forms of narrative; from the ludology point of view games should be understood as formal systems of rules"*(Natkin, S. 2014)

This difference leads to two different styles while creating games and presenting their story, games such as Candycrush saga can be considered ludological games with their play firmly rooted in a purer gameplay system focusing on a systematic style of play whilst the Banner

saga's rooted its gameplay in their Game Narrative digging deep into the emotional value of the human attachment to characters.

In CandyCrush saga you have a UI based system of puzzles, matching 4 or 5 candies in a certain formation to make them disappear and collect points raising the players score with the main goal of gaining a higher score each play through.

There is not much to be said for using this particular style of game to investigate an immersive narrative experience, such games are capable of it but can't provide the necessary depth to explore this concept properly.

Ludological games, in of itself themselves, tend towards predictable outcomes and base their entertainment towards the challenge of playing against its system, using Interactivity to create engagement with the player but usually having little, or no, story.

A different example comes from The Banner Saga where the Gameplay is rooted firmly in Gameplay narrative, its use of dialogue choices to place the character development and plot progression into the hands of the player.

Its battle system allows the player to define characters personality through character progression and item management, effectively allowing the player to decide how certain characters would act and behave in each fight.

How the characters progress and develop as well as, with some limitation, how the story plays out is decided by the player own agency with a game.

Gameplay narrative exists in what the player does, through the use of interactivity and mechanics to tell a story there is no story in simply progressing from left to right on a screen yet place obstacles in the way and give the player a choice in how to deal with that obstacle and you empower them to create moments of narrative all of their own.

"The single most powerful choice a writer of a game-story can make is this: 'what is the player going to do from minute to minute' because in a game, the player is making the decisions, and decisions (and their repercussions) lead to an emotional response – a response potentially far more powerful than an empathetic one traditional media delivers." (Lebowitz, j & Klug, c. 2011..p 233) the power of the players own agency can't be underestimated, allowing for creative and free expression of agency with a narrative can be tricky.

Most games are built around a basic journey that the designer wishes the player to go down, this revolves around giving the player goals yet by engaging with the player by giving them more freedom to complete that goal by their own initiative will offer a more emotionally engaging play experience than a follow by instruction style game.

The limitations around this philosophy create a boundary problem however, where in the set mechanics of the game limit the player's actions while the designer is attempting to offer them freedom.

Examples of this can be found in many open world games where the player is granted a huge expansive map, with smaller maps within, which simulate exploring a whole world yet

offering whole and total freedom of exploration has its limits as often the map cannot go on forever whilst maintaining a coherent story.

Yet it is natural for players to explore this world and eventually find these walls of their in game world and be denied their own agency.

"The core research challenge is how to balance the need for a coherent story progression with user agency, which is often at odds." (Riedl, M. and Bulitko, V. 2013. P 68)

Enabling the player use their own agency in taking action within a set plot is a tricky problem, it requires the designer to be able to anticipate their audiences ideas of how to act within their games system, a set story progression that follows a clear and satisfying arc all without letting these two conflicting goals being readily apparent to the player.

So then the key goal of narrative in games is to take a player's actions in game, as well as the reactions of the game's system, and to present these as part of the game's story whilst maintaining the illusion that these are all derived for the players own initiative and thus fully immerse the player in the game.

No matter how directed events in games are it is ultimately the player's actions in the game that should tell the story. Interactivity is one of the key elements that set videogames apart from other media, and thus is its unique strength for artistic expression.

In order to explore these ideas placing choice and decision making at the heart of the last boss meant that it was possible to explore how relating tropes, themes and presentation can influence a player into following a set path through a games story with a proof of concept trailer.

Using a non-interactive medium to convey how to use an interactive might seem a contradiction however the project focuses on the design side, the first step to creating a well designed set of choices that convey, through atmosphere and themes, a clear set of actions within the mind of a player.

Effectively using cut scenes to convey meaning is a way of building a pre-set view point without stripping the player of their control of events, life often presents people with passive events which are only capable of being viewed and using this to build suspense, Terror or wonder is a powerful tool.

To take an example from Dark Souls;

The boss battle for the gaping dragon prepressed its battle with a cut scene to show of the size and monstrosity of the creature the player must now fight, taking a particular delight in showing this boss slowly crawl from its hiding hole, apparently quite small at first but with its continuing movement forward its huge size being slowly revealed to the player.

Climax in the creature rearing upwards to reveal an inordinate amount of teeth.

Moments like this don't take the player out of the game as they're used to convey meaning to the player and implant a set of expectations in them, building up the realisation that they will have to fight this creature and ensuring that such a battle is dripping in menace.

Another example comes from Fallout New Vegas wherein the opening cut scene the player's character is bound and helpless then shot through the head, seen in the first person this works to make the attempted murder seem personal and as the player survives instils a desire to find out why and perhaps vengeance.

Thusly even passive media like cut scenes with an interactive narrative have an impact on the player's agency and attachment to events, Non interactive events and information offer context to gameplay.

A motivation to act, a cause to fight and reason to engage.

The last boss centres on an exploration of the archetypical overlord commonly present within the old school action games.

How does such a person come to control the Kingdom/Real/World that they are set in and can narrative design be used in order to convince a player to act in a villainous way that is distinct from the usual mode of interaction for a player.

This dynamic will allow for an examination of player driven narrative, taking a role that a player would not normally wish to enact and then present them with situations and characters that naturally derive this attitude.

The proof of concept will offer a vertical slice of a whole game design, presenting an opening cut scene, two choices for a player to make, a boss fight and a results screen.

Exploring how cutscenes can be used to convey the beginnings of player motivation, what is needed to guide a player through choice based play, what implications does battle have for the player and can the conclusion (Results) of these three parts itself be used to further motivate a player.

Contextual Review

Motivation, Meaningful choice and player agency (addressing the Boundary problem)

"Einstein took to the stage, and looking out at a largely non-academic audience consisting of old ladies, he explained to them that he certainly could talk about his work, but it was a bit dull, and he was thinking perhaps instead the audience would prefer to hear him play the violin. The host and audience agreed that it sounded like a fine idea. Einstein proceeded to play several pieces he knew well, creating a delightful experience the entire audience was able to enjoy, and surely one they remembered for the rest of their lives." (Schell, J. 2015. P 98)

The first thing to understand from how to engage a Player with a games Story is to understand why a person choses to play that game, looking at games based in the Action, Adventure, comedy, Role playing game or first person shooter will give a different idea as to what experience a player expects from them.

When it comes to the Adventure game Genre for example we have games such as Minecraft which is about Exploration, survival and Creation, The secret of Monkey Island which is about comedic mishaps of its protagonist interacting with pirates and Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney about a defence attorney's attempts to prove the innocence of his clients.

Compare each game to one another and you'll find different expectations of content and action let alone comparing them to different genres, Minecraft's gameplay experience is one of total autonomy giving the player an expansive world to explore, build and survive in without any real guidance in game.

Phoenix Wright's Gameplay is one of Dialog and verbal puzzles, emotive character and plot investigation but ultimately guided by the heroes (Phoenix Wright) allies as he tries to uncover the truth about his client's innocence.

The secret of Monkey Island stages its game as if in a play with actors and parts waiting for their mark with the player acting like a director, the story unfold as they direct it too as they explore the comedic world before them.

These encourage very different modes of play, Minecraft drives the player to consider their needs to survive and seek out the resources to do so, Phoenix Wright to investigate the evidence and think about the inconsistencies within presented evidence and Monkey Island encourages the player to interact with its character and world exploring the story.

The basics of all adventure genre games centre around puzzle solving of one sort or another but remember Einstein's violin, people came for the puzzles in their many different forms and presentation, yet they stayed for the story told.

"The game is not the experience. The game enables the experience." [Schell, J. 2015. Page 10] is a good phrase to remember when attempting to motivate the player to enjoy a game, certain things bring a player to a game.

A genre, an art style, a gameplay mechanic or so many more yet to motivate a player to invest in a narrative driven game it is important to craft something that the player can relate to and understand, we can sympathise with Phoenix Wright's desire to prove his client's innocence, we can imagine ourselves going on Guybrushthreepwood's adventure with pirates and we can emotional invest in Minecrafts battle for survival.

By building this investment in their own way, each game immerses the player in the experience, by crafting gameplay that encourages the play's own agency they are no longer bystanders, they are the main character of the story, Carolyn Handler miller tells us of an experience she had of such a thing in real life. *"In a flash, we went from being observers to being participants and began to experience los posadas in an entirely different way. Marching with the procession, we became a part of the drama, too, and fully immersed in it."* (Miller, C. H. 2004 Page 59)

Understanding what it is that your potential audience expects is important but investing your player in the games events makes their desire to follow the stories path grow creating a more fulfilling experience.

The people who came to meet Einstein did so because they believed that meeting such a great man would be a once in a life time experience and they were right but not for the reason they thought.

“Einstein was able to create such a memorable experience because he knew his audience. As much as he loved thinking and talking about physics, he knew that it wasn’t something that his audience would be really interested in. sure, they asked him to talk about physics, because they thought it would be the best way to get what they reall wanted – an intimate encounter with the famous Albert Einstein.” (Schell, J. 2015. P 98)

Plot and story in pursuit of motivated gameplay

“A story must not build to a final action beyond which the audience cannot imagine another.” (McKee, R. 1998 pp 140)

Motivated gameplay relies on the player’s involvement in the Gameplay and/or story without breaking their own immersion through forceful and intrusive breaks to the player’s agency.

Whereas a games mechanics are defined by the rules of its system the narrative element gives the player a differing set of goals where if built organically offer an input per game allowing for players to participate in the events depicted in the games story.

This creates an inherent limitation when it comes to enabling a player to act on their own initiative in a game, someone will think of a better way to do something, It is possible that the game designer or writer will create a conflict and present the player with the way to resolve them without realising that a far more convenient and rationale alternative exists to resolve the conflict already set within the games plot.

“The goal of an interactive narrative system is to immerse users in a virtual world such that they believe that they are an integral part of an unfolding story and that their actions can significantly alter the direction or outcome of the story.” (Riedl, M. and Bulitko, V. 2013. Pp67)

Without proper understanding of this it can very easily create a disconnection between the player driven narrative and games mechanics plot, sabotaging the player experience as the players actions, and the mechanics they control, must naturally guide the player without overtly constraining their actions.

This means that there is a sleight of hand happening with the player, the story must direct the player down its set plot whilst maintaining the illusion that each action is driven by the player’s decisions to offer a coherent story.

“Video game designer and programmer, Johnson (2013), states that the challenge of interactive narrative games is to leave ‘room for the player, not just within the rules and mechanics and the systems, but within the story as well’. To do this, the author of the narrative must simultaneously attempt to deliver a cohesive narrative, while allowing the player to influence the outcome of that narrative (Sharma et al. 2010).” (Joyce, L. 2015. P 53)

Including the player in the plot progression of a game is tricky even with a well-crafted story as it often requires branching paths in the story for the player to choose from, even if all paths lead to the same conclusion this is a daunting task.

Yet there are simpler ways to motivate the player, the first metal gear solid game crafted a simple mechanic for its stealth based espionage gameplay, giving the player a radar that can be used to detect enemies. Conversely the enemy soldiers, once discovering the player character, can raise the alarm, jam the player's radar and call for back up to kill the main player.

By then providing wide spaces with hiding holes, giving the player items to distract soldiers and giving combat moves and firearms which are silent but often require precision or surprise to use and others that are loud enough to raise the alarm but are far more certain of a kill than the quieter non-lethal weapons you create a risk reward system that enforces the tactical espionage elements of Metal gear solid gameplay and story und the player's own motivation.

Motivated gameplay or, as Josiah Lebowitz and Chris Klug called it, Player driven storytelling is found in the players actions towards the plot *"Player driven storytelling is a term I coined (Though I wouldn't be surprised if others were using it before me) to differentiate stories that are merely interactive from ones which the player is given a more significant role in their progression and outcome. To state it simply, if an interactive story is one in which, the players make can in some way interact with the story, a player driven story is one in which, through their interactions, players can alter the story in signigant ways."* (Lebowitz, j & Klug, c. 2011. P 119)

Narrative and Gameplay mechanics

When it comes to narrative in games it is the point where user input and a games mechanics meet that much of a stories narrative can be created, according to Mark Stephens in Pause and Effect *"The point where imagery, Narrative and interaction converge has been the focus of my career."* (Meadows, 2002 : ix) Making his studies in the art of interactive narrative informative towards the assessment of this subject, yet contradictions appear within his work.

Referring to himself as painter Meadows asserts the image as primary, whilst this might seem a contradiction he does not seem limited to static images *"I'm transfixed by television. I gorge myself on movies. I love comic books. And yes, I played dungeons and dragons."* (Meadows, 2002 : ix)

Few of these are the province of painters, dungeons and dragons even being mostly an oratory medium informed by lore and statistics, yet if we take that still imagery isn't the main field of interest but visuals are, that how a piece is presented that meadows considers primary.

One subject Meadows covers in detail leans towards this view, Perspective, discussing Giotto an Italian painter and architect from Florence in the late Middle Ages use and study of the use of perspective.

One particular example Meadows cites the church of San Francesco in Assisi (Meadows, 2002: p11), designed by Giotto, when viewed the paintings on the walls seem at odd angles yet if you stand at the right spot the paintings will snap into a horizon creating an image of peering into a series of virtual rooms.

“It’s a specific location where you need to stand to see it, but it’s clearly what the painter had intended. It’s as if Giotto’s ghost is there, standing behind the visitor, guiding them, telling them where to stand.” (Meadows, 2002: p12)

Elegant design can lead a viewer to the artist’s desired perspective but this is something to consider about narrative and gameplay mechanics, both are bound by their literal perspective and it is here where the two can be wedded into an immersive and interactive narrative without breaking the player’s motivational gameplay.

Perspective is where the game designer builds his first block of interactive narrative, what the player will be looking at, what do they see and how does that affect them. Perspective, both visual and metaphorical are what define the player’s motivation and will spur their choices as they explore the games story or choose not to, it is also what ties this sections quotes together.

How you present a tale creates the tale.

It defines it more than the content it holds, what would The Secret of Monkey Island be without its near pantomime framing and humour? What would the city of New Londo in dark souls have appeared so massive and imposing without the great height the player first viewed the city from? What would loneliness be without transferring our own perspective onto a dot?

Lesser.

This is why how the player will observe events, and interpret them, is crucial to building the world the player will inhabit as he plays. How they interact with that world. How they will feel or not for its characters. Or how they will affect the narrative.

An adventure game does not follow the same conventions of a first person shooter but not because they have different gameplay. It is because over time each, and every, genre adapted a core way of presenting the game to a player.

The key take away is that Narrative sits on Gameplay mechanics shoulders, Perspective is used to influence the player in ways they do not necessarily have to be able to recognise as such in order to be guided by it.

“The perspectivist approach looks at the environment and its context as being a thing that informs the actions of the occupants of that environment. It assumes that the environment will affect the decisions of the people there.”

In games this is not an assumption, the use of environment design, light, colour, shadow, character interaction, cut scenes and sound are tried and tested ways to influence where and what a player does but also how they will act and feel in that environment

Methodology

This project would be best served by using qualitative methodologies as it centres on user experience and through case studies and practice refine the methods by which we use game mechanics to create narrative consisting mainly of practise---based research, case studies and literature reviews.

Case study: The banner saga

The banner saga bases its gameplay and narrative in strategy & choice using a turn based Isometric strategy style battle system with a branching path system of dialogue choices supported by cut scenes to engage players with its story, characters and world.

Each choice, at least appears, feeds into the events that follow and influencing the characters relationships with one another, this control over the each conversation and most decisions works well as a way to bind player interest into the game and drive motivated gameplay.

Further the story idea and structure are well balanced against each other, each scene and set piece works to build the world and the journey of our main characters without overloading the player with large unintelligible info dumps.

As the main villain, the dredge, return we meet two band of travellers, one a procession of warriors, merchants and nobles heading from the right to the left of the screen. The second a group of refugees fleeing the dredge after they destroy their village this time moving from the right to the left.

The player is the one who decides how these two groups act within themselves through a point of view character as choices and discussions are presented to them, these define the characteristics of the point of view character and how the characters are themselves seen by their own groups.

By taking this dynamic of character interaction and placing it at the heart of the banner saga the game manages to quickly establish its plot, setting the scene for the battles to come both from dredge, Varl and human.

Yet far more important is the connection made between the Varl chief's simple desire to finish his trade journey and the human chief flight from the dredge, very carefully human moments are built into both Varl and human characters to engage the player's motivation and inspire a choice to protect these two characters.

It is a slower and more ponderous mode of gameplay and yet by taking the time to carefully weave these people and their lives in this world the player becomes more attached than if they were constantly in battle or watching a cutscene as it is the player that has made many of the decisions that brought them into harm.

Meaningful choices are so often that because they are the decisions individuals themselves have made and by taking that premise and using it as the main tool for interactivity and progression with The Banner saga Stoic studios managed to generate one of the better examples of motivated gameplay that can be found.

Case study: Rouge legacy

The game features all the common metroidvania tropes and themes, a shifting random dungeon of a castle, deadly creatures of monstrous origin, ghastly boss fights and item collection by and large it's fairly typical.

Yet one of the most interesting aspects to Rouge Legacy is how it plays with an established convention of Rouge Like games to create a narrative in the games system, like with most Rouge likes Rouge Legacy features perma death, every time the player dies they must choose a new character to play as.

Choosing from a random choice of three, each with differing abilities and flaws, these individual player characters aren't merely disposable templates to increase the difficulty of the game experience.

Rouge Legacy is about a dynasty of heroes, a long line of adventurers questing to defeat the archetypal evil within a castle style game yet as each character dies it is added to a long gallery that is attached to the character selection screen, Each character that dies is automatically assigned a name by the computer when

This helps to back up the games plot of each father/mother dying to be replaced their children and so and so forth for as long as it takes to defeat the boss.

Case study: Loneliness

When it comes to loneliness something important to understand is that there is no dialogue, no cut scenes, no text crawls nor any traditional methods of telling a story.

The player controls a square dot, not much different from a pixel just a little bigger, the background is white while the dot is black the players actions are restricted to moving forward, back as well as left and right.

As you move forward the screen scrolls downward without letting you backtrack, as you continue you begin to encounter clusters of square dots but as you approach them they seem to flee, fading away and moving faster than the player's dot.

Continuing upwards you encounter more clusters of dots in diminishing size, each cluster reacts the same disappearing before the player's dot can join these groups until eventually there is only one dot left in the pattern which flees like the rest leaving the player's dot alone to progress to the top of the screen.

Yet the player's reaction to this is not static nor is it set, as the numbers of each cluster of dots dwindle perhaps the player gives up attempting to interact with the dots, perhaps they persevered and kept trying to gain entry to each cluster.

The interpretations are the player's own and their actions in response are what create the narrative.

This is important as it uses pure gameplay in order to tell a story indicative to the human experience of isolation and loneliness using play and play alone, with just a few dots and some basic navigation controls loneliness conveys the feeling of isolation as well as abandonment.

This shows that meaning does not require a lengthy text crawl nor a story or set plot.

Practice

The last boss features a set thematic struggle, the battle between heroism and leadership, the main character the player controls is in fact the villain of the story. Cavil is referred to both as the Overlord and mayor of Ilya, the city Cavil controls, due to his control of the nobility of Ilya which is odd in the Realm (Name of Cavil's country) as the other cities controlled by different mayors are fairly chaotic.

After bandits consistently steal food shipments to Ilya Cavil grows tired of the constant problems and issues caused by the ineffectual leadership of the mayoral system in the realm and decides to begin working to take over, however, the realm is beset by Faux Heroes, one of the problems the mayors have caused.

The faux heroes are people who are not heroes but merely affect an air of chivalry to justify their often criminal actions, of them only the paladin is the true hero destined to defeat evil.

Designing the game around the conceit that the Overlord is a competent ruler who gets tired of the inability to rule of his peers was a way to build player engagement with their main character despite his increasingly villainous actions and in order to take over Cavil must act villainously but not openly so, or the true hero turns up to kill him, unless it's the last level where the overlord is strong enough. Otherwise he cannot defeat the true hero.

Separating the gameplay into three stages, Choice, Battle and results was informed by the case study for The Banner Saga as it managed to convey choice and consequences many times through a similar concept of interaction and reaction with its gameplay mechanics and narrative driven choices.

At the beginning of each level the Player is in the throne room with three advisors, The Spy, The Knight and The Counsellor, some, one or all prompt the player to interact with them and begin a dialogue option puzzle.

The choices themselves consist of, Ineffectual, in that it doesn't allow the Overlord to complete his goal and or/task. Too many of these choices and the player eventually loses his mayoral office and can no longer be in charge of his city.

The rational choice is the choice that should most often be made, presenting it as a way to meet the Overlord's goals that is acceptable to people and as such won't be challenged.

The evil choice is the choice most likely to get the hero killed because it's evil and will bring the paladin.

As the player makes the choice/s the next stage begins, the battle, wherein the faux hero turns up to stop the overlord's actions, rob him or just kill him. It is important to note that if the player acts openly evil the true hero Paladin arrives, however, no one single wrong choice should immediately fail the player and making a wrong choice should be allowed for a chance to be remedied next stage at a cost.

If the player wins against the Faux Hero stage three starts which is the results of your choices and battle, these matter as they affect the next level but for simplicity sake only the next level.

Taking cues from Schell, J. Natkin, S. and Meadows, M. from the research into Motivation, Meaningful choice and player agency, other ideas were toyed with such as different choices not Ineffectual, Rational or Evil however for a first level concept it seemed as if it was overdoing an introductory level and so not included in the proof of concept animatic. The simpler introductory choice creates a risk/reward system that can be readily shown and understood whilst not being overcomplicated.

Developing the story beats the Proof of concept trailer needed to convey this tale of the main character hiding his attempts to take over the realm he inhabited Terry Pratchett's Lord Vetinari's was an instrumental example to draw from, particularly the books going postal, jingo and Nightwatch.

With a clear idea of how the game would play and the characters act creating story boards to rough out the designs of The Overlord, the spy, the knight, the counsellor and the first level faux hero as well as the overlord's main hall were created. This was also a good chance to create text based dialogue and gauge of how the exposition played out as it was being assembled in premier pro.

From here the dialogue exposition through text boxes was hammered out for an opening cut scene, as the animatic went through eight iterations and the production of the Pixel art

for the final animatic was created many changes, additions and reductions were made to depict clear meaning and intent for a player through discussions with class and tutor for guidance as to how each piece could be interpreted.

The various changes made focusing on the bigger alterations;

- Design of the overlord removed spike from helm as it looked like a crown confusing people as to the references to the king.
- Removed the King to keep the politics simple, Mayors are the only rules.
- Rebalanced the three advisors dialogue so concerned over the food shortage but just as concerned over their boss's position to subtly indicate they care about the food only because it threatens their rule.
- Made exposition lighter and introduced the faux hero "Whispering Penely's" name earlier with more detail as to his petty bandit nature.
- A map was added to the start of the animatic as it lacked an establishing shot that conveyed where the player was.
- A gag in which the camera zoomed in towards the larger castle on the map but then veered towards the smaller Overlords city was cleared as a humorous "you thought they were the big guys?" did not stem from the misdirection only confusion over where the people speaking through speech bubbles were.
- Speech bubbles were removed and replaced with text boxes with portraits of the three main advisors for the overlord.
- Instead of static storyboard frames for the battle scene between the overlord and whispering Penely use of pixel art frames and motion tools to simulate movement more effectively.
- Created text boxes for the dialogue option and made a better choice selection menu as well as slimmed down extraneous information.
- Upgraded the text boxes, added a border around the frame during the cutscene at the beginning that disappears when the level starts to indicate gameplay, title cards to indicate the start of stage one, two and three, moved results to come after battle stage and added graphics to indicate buttons being pressed during gameplay as the overlord interacts with the characters and world.
- The boss battle with Whispering Penely was lengthened to better demonstrate the combat system
- Pixel art was put through multiple iterations, the overlord had three designs, the Spy two as with the councillor and with Whispering penely and the finished designs experimented with inside the animatic premier pro file.

Having used this slow process of iteration, testing and design allowed for a deliberate, if cautious examination of the designing of narrative with the intent of building a story that encourages a player to act in a villainous way.

What has become apparent is that the simpler and more direct routes to this path are often the most satisfying, with a more focused presentation of events and story in the trailer it draws people in more readily than when there were lots more people in the setting or longer dialogue, carefully thought out short sentences managed to define better character, motivation and humour throughout the trailer leading to a more enjoyable experience.

Relevant Literature and case study findings

Results

In order to convey an immersive narrative, the content of a game and how it is presented to the player is a vital beginning to enthralling a player in a games story but it is not the end, by presenting the player with choices and conflicts with clear goals and accounting for their actions to those goals and weave them into the narrative.

By crafting a set of mechanics that drive the player to act in ways the story asks them to, guiding them through clever use of design to shroud the game world that's leading them along the path set down before them as well as by emotionally investing a player in the stories events you keep a engaged player from seeing the cracks in the play experience and guide them down a set and well-crafted Narrative experience.

Without this frame work, a guide around which the player can be led down then the immersion can be broken, a player wondering what they are supposed to do, how they are meant to succeed or wondering if a plot progression is even interesting.

The player should always be viewing a point of view or event leading them to the next and the next until eventually reaching a satisfying conclusion.

Discussion

The implications of this are that much of games are effectively a magic trick, using their own version of smoke and mirrors, design, to befuddle and confuse players into not realising the limitations of the medium.

That seems like a fair analysis except for one point, shouldn't it be about overcoming limitations, an immersive narrative doesn't just lead a player down a pre-set path but takes them on a journey and by using these principles that journey through a tale can fantastical than traditional linear narrative can be for the simple moments when the player begins acting on the plot of their own initiative, from their own sense of what they should do.

This builds attachment and investment into playing the game each player slowly realises that they wish to see to the end of the game not because the goal is to get too the end of the game but because they have become invested in its outcome and striving to play their own personal part in the story.

Conclusion

By harnessing a player's motivation and agency then presenting it to them as integral part of the narrative of the game you capture a part of their spirit building it into the gameplay for them to explore.

This requires a great deal of knowledge about the various ways you can utilise a games mechanics, careful and deliberate attempts to factor in what a player will want to do with the set rules of a games system and either account for this or adjust the system so a more desirable player experience is readily apparent that aligns with the desired reactions with the set narrative experience.

In a well-executed game this blends in seamlessly with Mechanics of the game with the Narrative driving forward the players own agency all the while making it seem as if every choice and action was their own choices.

This creates an immersive narrative, when the player cannot see the strings of the games narrative pulling them along because they are running along with it.

Bibliography

Bell, S. 2004. Plot and Structure: techniques and exercises for crafting a plot that grips readers from start to finish. Writers Digest Books. America

Daniel Floyd. 2012. *Extra Credits: Narrative Mechanics*. [online] Oxford: Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQJA5YjvH DU> [Accessed 7 November 2014].

Joyce, L. 2015. Creating Collaborative Criteria for Agency in Interactive Narrative Game Analysis. *The Computer Games Journal*.4(1): pp.47-58.

Juul, J. (November 2005). *Half-Real: Video Games between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds*. The MIT Press, Cambridge.

Lebowitz, j & Klug, c. 2011. *Interactive storytelling for video games: A player centric approach*. Focal Press

Meadows, M. S. 2003. *Pause & effect: The art of interactive narrative*. New Riders.

McKee, R. 1998. *Story: Substance, structure, style, and the principles of screenwriting*. York: Methuen.

Natkin, S. 2014. *Interactivity in Games: The Player's Engagement*. Paris Cedex 03, France.

Riedl, M. and Bulitko, V. 2013. *Interactive Narrative: An Intelligent Systems Approach*. *Ai Magazine*.

Schell, J. 2015. *The art of game design: A book of lenses*. 2nd ed. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press

.Wolf, M. J. P. and Perron, B. 2003. *The video game theory reader*. Routledge. Chapter 10

Reference

Daniel Floyd. 2012. *Extra Credits: Narrative Mechanics*. [online] Oxford: Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQJA5YjvH DU> [Accessed 7 November 2014].

Juul, J. (November 2005). *Half-Real: Video Games between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds*. The MIT Press, Cambridge.

Natkin, S. 2014. *Interactivity in Games: The Player's Engagement*. Paris Cedex 03, France.

Lebowitz, j & Klug, c. 2011. *Interactive storytelling for video games: A player centric approach*. Focal Press

Riedl, M. and Bulitko, V. 2013. Interactive Narrative: An Intelligent Systems Approach. *Ai Magazine*. 34(1): pp.67-77.

Schell, J. 2015. *The art of game design: A book of lenses*. 2nd ed. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press. P 98

Miller, C. H. 2004 . *Digital storytelling: A creator's guide to interactive entertainment*. Oxford: Focal Press. Pp 59

Schell, J. 2015. *The art of game design: A book of lenses*. 2nd ed. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press. P 98

McKee, R. 1998. *Story: Substance, structure, style, and the principles of screenwriting*. York: Methuen pp: 140

Riedl, M. and Bulitko, V. 2013. Interactive Narrative: An Intelligent Systems Approach. *Ai Magazine*. 34(1): pp.67-77.

Joyce, L. 2015. Creating Collaborative Criteria for Agency in Interactive Narrative Game Analysis. *The Computer Games Journal*.4(1): pp.47-58. P 53

Lebowitz, j & Klug, c. 2011. *Interactive storytelling for video games: A player centric approach*. Focal Press p 119

Meadows, M. S. 2003. *Pause & effect: The art of interactive narrative*. New Riders. ix