

“Heavy Rain”: Blurring the Line Between Story and Game

Written by Luke Hamilton
Thursday, 11 March 2010 08:27



2005's *Indigo Prophecy* was an interactive thriller in which players took the roles of two police officers and a murderer, and it was praised for the freedom it offered and cinematic storytelling through multiple points of view. Unfortunately it fell short with a story that started as a crime drama and turned into a paranormal experience involving ancient cults and actions scenes almost ripped straight from *The Matrix*. With its new game *Heavy Rain*, developer

Quantic Dream has rectified that story misstep with a game that not only brings story immersion to a new level but pushes the limits of gameplay graphics.

The game's story is told from the viewpoints of four strangers all linked to the Origami Killer, who murders only young boys, leaving an origami figure and an orchid with each body. At predetermined times, the perspective switches between two of the four characters: investigative reporter Madison Paige, FBI agent Norman Jayden, private detective Scott Shelby, and most importantly Ethan Mars, a father whose son has been taken by the Origami Killer; he has to prove to the killer how far he's willing to go to save his son.

It's a solid story, but what makes it most enthralling is how it develops and changes based on your decisions. In an early scene with the private eye questioning the father of a victim in a convenience store, a robbery occurs. In scenario one, I did nothing and the owner was killed. I confronted the crook in scenario two and was shot in the arm. I snuck up behind him in scenario three and knocked him out. Scenario four saw me try to talk to the robber and end in a struggle for his gun. I convinced him to walk away in scenario five. In the end, keeping the shopkeeper alive gained me some evidence about the Origami Killer, while his death gave me nothing.

Players are constantly making similar choices, and the repercussions can range from something minor (such as a clue) to major game events such as a person believing that you are the serial killer and murdering you. (The story doesn't end with a single death, though; it continues on until the end or until all four protagonists die.)

“Heavy Rain”: Blurring the Line Between Story and Game

Written by Luke Hamilton

Thursday, 11 March 2010 08:27

One of the game's great features is the ability to replay any scene with the option of having it be part of the continuing story or a no-commitment run to satisfy your curiosity. I don't know how many potential endings the game has, but I've found three radically different conclusions, from happily ever after to a ghastly breaking point your characters reach.



The majority of gameplay is in the form of "quick time events" in which you only have seconds to respond to a prompt that pops up on the screen. Sometimes you need to hit a button immediately, but other times it's wiser to wait. Some activities you can repeat if you fail -- such as starting your car and shifting it into gear -- while other times you're forced to make a split-second decision: Will you pull the trigger on someone who might or might not be innocent? It's less a game than a 10-hour interactive movie.

While I like the adrenaline of being forced to twist the controller to steer a car, *Heavy Rain* goes to mundane extremes, such as shaking a controller to dry off after a shower. It's almost like the developers wanted to remind players that life includes things other than the exciting parts.

I've gushed before about how I think *Uncharted 2* is the best looking-game I've seen, but *Heavy Rain*

provides some solid competition. The details are sharp -- from the dirty streets to the bright clubs to the most realistic facial details I've encountered. The sound work succeeds just as well, with stirring voice talent selling me on emotion and a soundtrack that puts you in every moment, whether it's a tense showdown with the police or the tenderness of a father pushing himself further for his son.

Heavy Rain represents a radical departure from the norm of action-based gameplay, but it's a welcome one. The situational tension and urgency kept me on my toes and eager for what was next. Add onto that the feeling that you're in a hybrid of *Se7en* and *Saw*, and *Heavy Rain*

is something special. I don't see it as a game telling a great story; it's a great story that you help shape.

“Heavy Rain”: Blurring the Line Between Story and Game

Written by Luke Hamilton

Thursday, 11 March 2010 08:27

Heavy Rain is available for PlayStation 3 for \$59.95. For this review, the author completed the story, tested the chapter-replay features, and guessed wrong on the identity of the killer.

Luke Hamilton is a buyer, creative designer, and online coordinator for Video Games Etc. He can be reached at ssj_4luke@hotmail.com.