



EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT NARRATIVES

An exploration of the use of implicit and explicit narrative devices within a full narrative adventure game and a comparison of their uses to other examples within the medium and the theories thereof.

ABSTRACT

This document is an exploration of a wide variety of narrative techniques, exploring their use and relation to a major project playable game artefact.

Tai, Callum

Games Design (BSc) – GAM 6001

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1 BACKGROUND

1.1 PROJECT AIMS

Throughout both the Research Methods and Major Project modules, the project aimed to create an immersive gaming experience within a complete and interesting storyline, which could showcase all of the skills of each member of the team. The team, throughout the module, has worked on *Llama Noire*, a detective narrative adventure game, which requires the player to navigate and investigate the clues of their father's death at the hands of a mobster, paying homage to detective noir thrillers.

At the end of the Research Methods module, a small playable prototype was completed, and the team then polished and developed onto the single scene that was playable within the prototype. All the development was guided by results from ad hoc internal testing, and later, the results and feedback from external testing. (See Appendix B).

1.2 TEAM COMPOSITION

In terms of team composition, there were five members, two artists, a programmer, and two designers. Early into the project, it was decided that each member of the team would work within their strengths, with the programmer building the mechanics required, one designer building the levels, whilst the other crafted the narrative. The two artists would focus on modelling and texturing the props, environment and characters. The two designers would assist in any way they could to ensure completion of each facet of the project.

Following on from the findings explored within the author's literature review, they made multiple changes to the way that choices were presented, and the way the dialogue system was designed, increasing its modularity, and fleshing out the main character through increased dialogue but fewer choices.

1.3 PROTOTYPE

The prototype produced at the end of semester one consists of two levels, an exterior scene, of the city of St. Llamis, where the player must use the dialogue system to make their way into the second - interior - level where they are able to talk to another character, within a speakeasy. The characters in this version were all identical, but there were animations, there was basic lighting, some textures, and early versions of all the dialogue options.

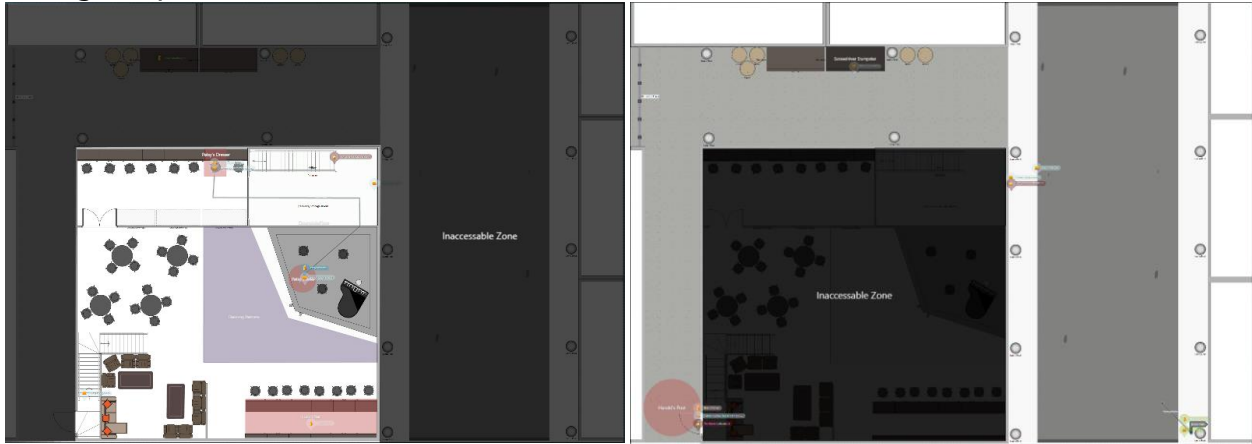


Figure 2 – CAD Plan of Speakeasy Interior for Llama Noire Prototype

Figure 1 – CAD Plan of Speakeasy Exterior for Llama Noire Prototype

Early feedback on the suitability of the dialogue was raised, proposing that the humour wasn't tonally correct, and may have pulled some players out of the immersion. The narrative tone of noir often featured "cynical or fatalistic tones, with protagonists put in desperate situations due to circumstances beyond their control." (McKittrick, 2018). After a closer review, it seemed possible that this tonal issue was inherent to the dialogue that was already in the prototype. This forced a decision to change this in the final product.

The quality of the prototype otherwise was a good indicator of the level of detail that the team could produce over the timeframe. This allowed them to progress into more scenes, including a tutorial and an apartment, as well as adding additional dialogues.

2 INTRODUCTION

This document is an exploration of the techniques that can be, and were used, in the process of creating *Llama Noire*, reviewing and discussing the quality and opinions around those techniques as well as their implementation. Within the team, one of the Designers worked on multiple aspects to drive forward the narrative, both within the game, and without. Within this, the below roles were completed:

- Cinematics
- Environmental Storytelling
- Branching Dialogue Trees
- Objective Design
- Multiple Endings

The author focussed on the branches that the story could take, as well as helping develop the dialogue and objective system within the Unity Engine (Unity Technologies, 2019). Alongside this, they could write the dialogue and design the choice system and pathing for each branch within articy:draft 3 (Nevigo, 2019), providing a large proportion of the playable content for the final product.

2.1 SUMMARY OF LITERATURE REVIEW

Within the literature review the author delved into the decisions that Games Designers would have to make to provide players with the illusion of choice, why these decisions were made in a multitude of scenarios, as well as how effective these choices were. The Designer learnt that when designing for player choice, the desired effect may be dampened when there is an obvious “right way” to play the game. (Legler, 2015), (Szczepański, 2017). Through this, conscious effort might be made to convince the player that their choices matter. Alongside this, the literature review also highlighted how integral to any game’s development cycle the narrative may be, with evidence highlighting how narrative games developed this way can be more successful. (Sanchez, 2007). (The full literature review can be found as Appendix A).

3 IMPLICIT NARRATIVE

Within the confines of the game, the Narrative Designer can immerse the player in the world. Chris Bateman (2018) put it forward as a Narrative Designer being the member of the team who “understands narrative tools but faces the challenge of integrating these seamlessly with the game design”. In the case of *Llama Noire*, the world is enough like the world that the player is used to that extra work might be required to truly immerse them in the more subtle changes. Alternately, the player may subconsciously fill in any gaps in their information with their own personal experiences. The act of the player filling in these gaps themselves is the implicit narrative. (Bateman, 2007). Here, this will be explored, whilst linking to the environmental storytelling and world building of *Llama Noire*.

3.1 ENVIRONMENTAL STORYTELLING

To ensure a full world is put across to the player, many environmental storytelling techniques were used, including showing off certain character’s personality traits, such as Armstrong’s (the game’s protagonist and private detective) alcoholism with the bottles strewn throughout his apartment and Pacone’s (the game’s antagonist and mob boss) paranoia with the collection of weapons he surrounds himself with in his office. There were also hints towards the story within the apartment, on Armstrong’s crime board, with references to the death that catalysed the story, Al Pacone’s criminal roots, and a map of St. Llamis to help root the player in this wider world. The emotion of a scene can also help the player feel immersed within the world. The “emotions play an important role in our subjective judgments and automatic responses, influencing our learning as well as how we understand, describe and react to the world and ourselves.” (Baños, et al., 2005). This was done through colour, lighting, fog, and puddles to achieve two things: Armstrong’s desperation at the situation through a pathetic fallacy, with the puddles within his dreams about his father’s death, the fog that shrouds his vision. Patsy is often bathed in light, as someone who fights for an honourable justice, incorruptible by Pacone’s evil, despite being so close to him, even working under him. This duality is represented by how she must frequent the darkness around her to get where she needs

to be. This concept of light and dark representing good and evil is a common theme in all media, present in the early philosophy of the Pythagorean table of opposites. (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2010).

All of these methods can be found within other games, such as *Dishonored* (Arkane Studios, 2012), where it builds on the psyche of the main character Corvo, changing the lighting and entire environment to reflect the player's choices throughout, highlighting the dark tones and introducing more zombie-like 'weepers' as the player kills more characters, and lightens the world and overall tone as they avoid those deaths. *Llama Noire* takes cues from this alongside the theories of colour and psychology. When surrounded by darkness, the eye looks for light as a way out. (von Goethe, 1840). A designer can take advantage of this, and place objects of importance within the light, and then use the colour itself to help clue the player into which emotion they should be feeling, that human instinct seems in tune with. (Ou, et al., 2004). For example, within *Llama Noire*, all imagery of Armstrong's father is bathed in natural light, while Pacone, and the murder weapon are lit with a red tint. Players are of two minds with this information, they know that red is often a threat, an instinct developed early in primates (Khan, et al., 2011), but they are also aware of the fact that they are playing a game. These two things work in conjunction, possibly triggering curiosity.

In some games, tangential story arcs are told through the medium of environmental storytelling, such as those of *Bloodborne* (From Software, 2015), which is something that could have worked for a larger scale project than *Llama Noire*. This could have been possible through the clue system that was in place, allowing the designers to allude to other crimes, as well as reference and hint future developments within the story. Within games like *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End* (Naughty Dog, 2016), this is used in a somewhat similar fashion. When the player can explore, they are able to learn about the history of a place as they pick up the collectables, through the lens of Drake – the main character – who's background in archaeology draws parallels with Armstrong's criminal investigative skills. These collectables also help serve to lengthen the playtime, slowing down a player's movements, and allow them to replay to gather any they've missed. (Bromley, 2011). When they're optional, the incentive seems only greatest to those who care about the storyline, be it tangential, or just providing background on other characters or locations. It can be said that an anomaly occurs for those who play games purely to complete them to the fullest degree, as the story isn't their main drive, but

even going into games to do things that others might consider a chore to receive the sense of achievement. These players might be an extreme subset of the Achievers quadrant of the Bartle taxonomy of player types. (Bartle, 1996).

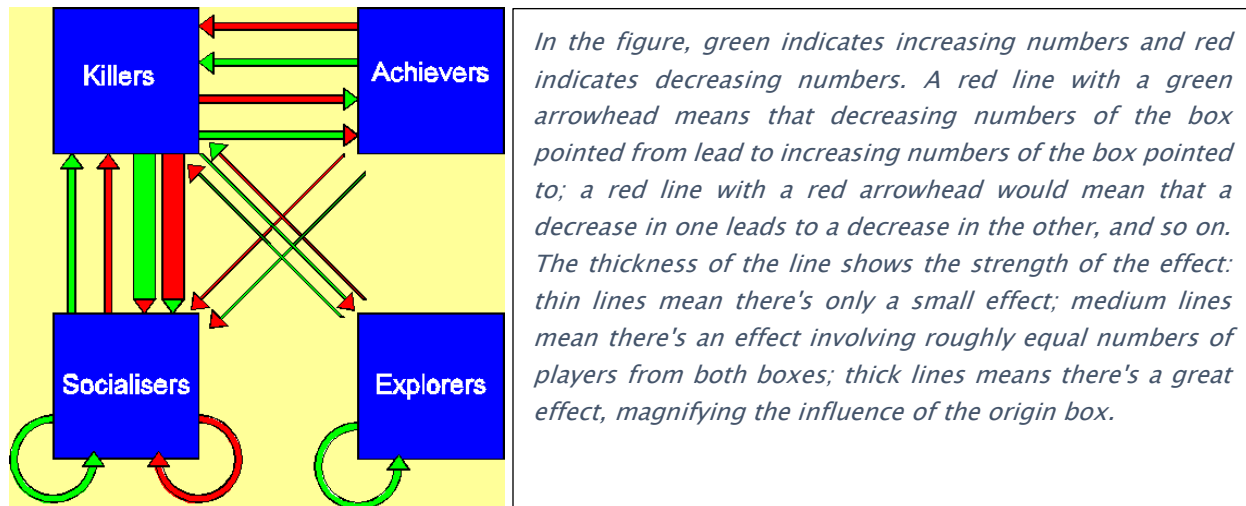


Figure 3 – Taxonomy of Player Types. (Bartle, 1996).

The immersion that is revolving around these collectables can be broken even if only one person believes it, as each player's individual experience is valid. It is possible, that if an object feels out of place within its found location, it'll draw more attention to itself. Without solid reasoning behind it being there, it might pull the player out of the situation, a result that could damage the enjoyment they are having, especially with adventure games with a developing narrative, such as *Llama Noire*. Players could feel like the designer is just "stuffing a thin plot with 20 hours of pointless busywork." (de Vries, 2014). On the opposite side of this issue, lies the opinion of those who feel that collectables, and the act of finding them, provide the players with reward for their curiosity, where "it lets you wander". (Donlan, 2017). This wandering provides the player with their reward, as long as the game is a joy to play anyway. It would seem that the plot doesn't need to be fleshed out if the game itself is inherently fun to play and explore.

3.2 WORLD BUILDING

World building within games can sometimes arise as an issue, with the world built for the player to explore, and see for themselves, as the Designers follow the philosophy of

'show, don't tell' that is prevalent through audio visual storytelling media. (Kroon, 2014) This philosophy of presenting developments as action, and not dialogue seems more difficult within a game like *Llama Noire*, where the dialogue is possibly one of the main sources of action and involvement for the player. Games that follow in this pattern are sometimes of a completely different genre, that of the visual novel, one that can and is contested as even being a game genre. (Estrada, 2013). Products like *Monster Prom* (Beautiful Glitch, 2018), convey massive amounts of world building through the dialogue, but through humour, or even meta-humour, with the narrator becoming a character explicitly for the purpose of expositing. The player is also only given the information that is immediately pertinent to playing the game, and then can piece together the gaps in their information as they continue to play. In this way, the world can feel full, and the player in turn may feel more like a part of the world. Eliezer Sternberg wrote in his study of the human subconscious that "the unconscious system in the brain pieces together fragments of our perceptions, anticipating patterns and filling in gaps when necessary... to devise a single, meaningful interpretation." (Sternberg, 2016).

The world of *Llama Noire* is much the same. There are simple facts of life that aren't explained to the player, such as why and how the characters are all llamas, where this is just presented as fact. Explanation of anything that the average character within the world would automatically understand is omitted. There are, however, allusions to the timeline that these characters have been through, with recognisable medals for Armstrong's father found in his apartment, allowing the player to think that there was a war fought. This also helps the player empathise with these characters, who are flawed, much like they are. When the player encounters humanoid llamas who act like humans, and do not exist with humans, they can look past that outward appearance, using them as stand-ins to empathise with. "Assigning those attributes for a nonhuman character or an inanimate object, will automatically humanize it and create a sympathetic response from your audience." When the character has recognisable emotions, feelings, and can communicate, then a human player is more willing to empathise, as they are anthropomorphised. (Zeman, 2017). Zeman also comments on how movement and locomotion are "essential human" qualities. The human movements of all the llamas within *Llama Noire* could help the players associate with them. This is also seen by how the players could understand the human-like relationships between the characters. (See Appendix B).

The timeline is also intentionally a recognisable one, but not one that the audience would be deeply ingrained with: 1920's gangs of the United States. This meant that any information that was not developed upon by the Narrative Designer could be filled in by the player through abductive reasoning. (Walton, 2005). Each inference made by the player continues into the next until something explicitly tells them otherwise. This meant that the buildings and level layouts couldn't have been allowed to be confusing and alien to the player, as this could have prevented the assumptions required to make the logical leaps to conclude that the world of *Llama Noire* - St. Llamis - wasn't too different from their own. Walton continues to state that although in scientific theory, this reasoning holds minimal ground as evidence, but when considering the human thought processes, it's more of a fact of life. This led to the choice to open *Llama Noire* with a scrolling opening, panning down into the belly of the city. The slow deliberate motion of the pan and the city in the background is reminiscent of noir films like *Cry of the City*. (*Cry of the City*, 1948).

World building also takes place at a character level. Any unspoken word between characters, especially in *Llama Noire's* interactions between Armstrong and Patsy, a government informant, their previous relationship is left deliberately vague. This allows for flexibility between the dialogue branches as each player experiences their play in a different way. Some of the player's understood that the two used to be together romantically, others that they were partners at work. (See Appendix B). The end goal was for players to understand that there was a history between them, and then come to their own conclusions.

4 EXPLICIT NARRATIVE

The explicit narrative is what is intentionally shared with the player. When two characters interact, it is what they communicate with each other about, developing the plot of the story they are a part of, for the benefit of the player. (Davies & Flynn, 2015). For the *Llama Noire* project, there were many techniques used to develop the explicit narrative. Within this section, the cinematics, branching dialogue trees and multiple endings will be explored, and contrasted with similar uses within the industry and their effectiveness.

4.1 CINEMATICS

Games that rely on the cinematic nature of the medium are common, including the likes of *InFamous: Second Son* (Sucker Punch, 2014), where one particular cutscene shows the change in the main character, Delsin, during his confrontation with the antagonist, Augustine, after the death of his brother. Throughout the game, Delsin can use powerful finishing moves, one of which, where he flies up into the sky, flashes the camera a smile and crashes back to the ground explosively. The battle with Augustine changes this when the player triggers it; instead of the smile at the camera, Delsin's face is one of pure anger and hatred for Augustine. In this it is the expectation subversion that draws the player in, informing them that this information is important. Although no words are spoken, the emotional difference between the two stands out.



Figure 4 – Delsin During Augustine Fight (*Sucker Punch*, 2014)



Figure 5 – Delsin During Normal Combat (*Sucker Punch*, 2014)

It's this use of emotion as a driving force in the storytelling that was intended for *Llama Noire*. With characters, those at the forefront of the field attempt to “pay particular attention to modelling and facial animation.” (Denjean, 2018). Without the use of facial animations, and limited character animations, the camera angles, blocking and focal points for this project became even more integral. Character relationships, emotion, and story had to be conveyed through simpler methods, and not just the dialogue.

The first interaction most players have is with the chalk outline of Armstrong's father. The Dutch tilt that the camera adopts indicates the uncomfortable sense of loss that Armstrong is feeling over the death. (Kroon, 2014). The player is also in this instant presented with a choice: to avenge their father's death, through violent action, or to find

justice, and bring the culprit in. It is these two choices that really permeate through the whole game. Even though this initial choice has no impact on the story itself, it does set the player up with at least a basic understanding of the options. The player's attention is piqued initially by the Dutch angle setup, signalled by the designer to pay attention, and then given the important information.

The cinematics that were used were simple in style, and short, meant to convey the emotion of the scene in a way that wasn't possible through dialogue alone. The pinnacle of this is in the way Pacone, the villain of the game, is thrown through the window of his office. The camera stares up, watching his fall from power, and then transitioning to look down on his lifeless body as the game ends. The low angle, with the camera positioned below the target suggest "a powerful subject who looms over" and the high angle to do the opposite, making "the audience feel superior to whatever they are watching". (Edgar, et al., 2015). As the player's perspective is lowered, it's clear they're having an impact; it was their decisions lead to this. The camera also symbolises Armstrong and the player's journey through the game. They start below the mob, and build up, toppling the structure above them, and then end up on top, only able to collect their thoughts after the deed is done.

The final confrontation between Pacone and Armstrong is meant to solidify the relationship between the two men. This is achieved through blocking, which can be seen as "the choreography of a dance or a ballet: all the elements on set... should move in perfect harmony with each other." (Marshall, 2009). Their distance signifies the difference between the two characters, and the positioning of Pacone by the window shows his power over the people below. Armstrong entering the room is itself a disruption of that power, one that makes Pacone uneasy, which could signal his downfall. The proximity of Sotto to Pacone, shows his fear of his boss, but is close enough, and across an invisible divide within the room, showing how, despite the sense of fear held by Sotto, they are on the same side. (Marshall, 2010). Others agree with Marshall, and raise that the motions of the characters can create an evolving sense of relationship without forcing unimportant dialogue. (McGiven, n.d.). The camera placement had to capture all of this, to ensure that the information was conveyed to the player.

4.2 BRANCHING DIALOGUE TREES

The branching dialogue found in *Llama Noire* took inspiration from *Detroit: Become Human's* (Quantic Dream, 2018) branching systems, and the visual representation found in the flow charts that the player could inspect post-level completion helped guide *Llama Noire's* design process.



Figure 7 – *Detroit: Become Human's* Flowchart Mechanic (Quantic Dream, 2018)

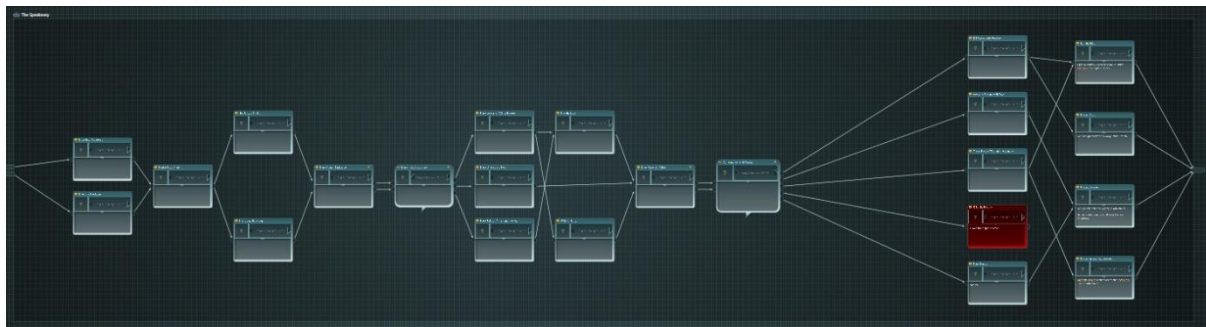


Figure 6 – *Llama Noire's* Design Process for the Speakeasy (Nevigo, 2019)

In the figures above the similarities are quite apparent. Branches occur regularly in both, and sometimes return to a common node, but as time progresses, there is an overall trend for more options. This process was used throughout the development of *Llama Noire*, including some options that weren't dialogue dependant, like collecting a drink to improve Patsy's response to Armstrong, which changed some of the dialogue choices and inputs within that conversation to be more appropriate within that character's positive response. Over time the process became more streamlined in dialogue, where fewer dialogue options would be presented, but each choice was developed upon, allowing for more direct correlation between choice and effect. This contrasts with the 'blooming' effect found in the original planned dialogues, as each dialogue became



Figure 8 – Early Dialogue Tree for Final Confrontation with AI Pacone in Llama Noire

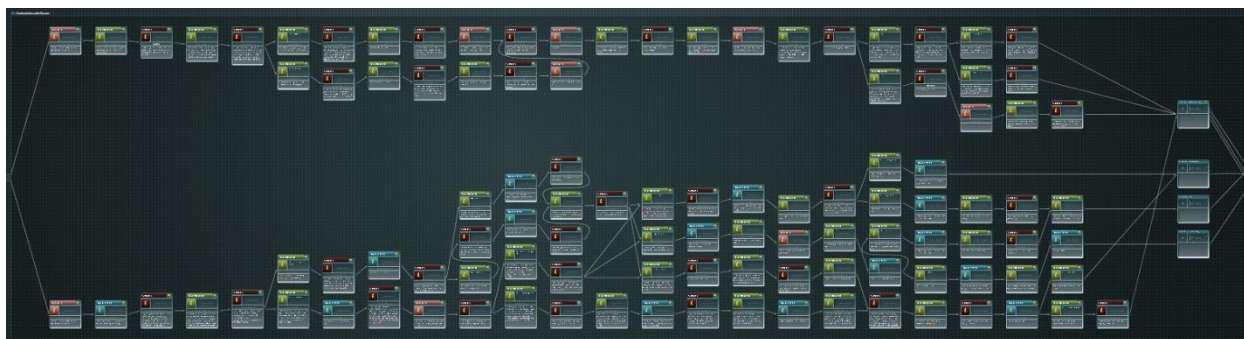


Figure 9 – Final Dialogue Tree for Final Confrontation with AI Pacone in Llama Noire

exponentially more complicated with each choice the player made. These contrasts are visible in the above figures.

This change in methodology also made it possible to include multiple characters naturally without making new dialogues for each variant. The simplicity also meant that the dialogue was more modular, and after the comments made by those tested (See Appendix B), could be altered faster and iterated upon with the gained feedback.

Branching dialogues can be seen as “clumsy, difficult to write and unrealistic”. (Freed, 2014). It does, on the other hand, allow for interactivity, when “interactivity is the strength of the medium”, and in a game like *Llama Noire*, which is dependent on both the player’s sense of interactivity, and the story itself, this could be as integral as possible. Strong writing discipline should always be followed, Freed continues, but the Designer themselves must remain in control of the branches, making the tree “easy to understand and easy to maintain.” This correlates with the design methodology choices made by the Narrative Designer for *Llama Noire*. It has also been said that branching dialogue allows for the development of four key ideas in relation to the player (Taylor–Giles, 2014):

- Agency
 - The player feels as though they have impact upon the game world.
- Ambiguity
 - The player is unaware of the illusion of player choice constraining their impact.
- Context
 - The player is aware of the information relevant to the situation they are in.
- Lack of Judgement
 - The player isn’t following a path of authorial bias, and is instead responding to them.

According to Taylor–Giles, the quality, or lack thereof, in these 4 ideas, is a key indicator of the quality of the branching dialogue itself. Following on from this, if the writing of *Llama Noire* could be a high quality, it would have to be seen that these are being achieved. The Lack of Judgement wasn’t tested by the team, but Context was measured via the question “was the main storyline clear to you?”, whereas Agency and Ambiguity were both represented by the question “did the game world feel full and immersive?”

(See Appendix B). Within these results, the team worked on assuring these values were scoring as highly as possible consistently. The Narrative Designer would focus within this upon high quality writing, and ensuring each branch would make sense, feel impactful, and provide context for each action.

4.3 MULTIPLE ENDINGS

The practice of multiple endings can be found within the games industry, for example, the *Mass Effect Trilogy* (BioWare, 2007–2012), contains multiple variances on approaches to multiple endings. The ending to the second game follows a single path, with changes being made depending on which party/crew members are assigned to the specialist roles. When a crew member is in a role that they are unsuitable for, or aren't loyal to the player (which each character has a mission to achieve this), then the player is punished through that character's death. This rewards optimal play with little to no margin for error. In the third game, the ending boils down to a final choice, combined with some additional cutscenes added or removed depending on other major choices made through the series. There are 4 options in the final version of the game, meaning that the player's choices are immediately more visible than in the second, but not necessarily more effective. It is up to the player to choose which ending they feel is optimal.

Within *Llama Noire*, there were three possible unique endings. With all three endings in place, players are rewarded with a choice to make in a similar fashion to *Mass Effect 3* (BioWare, 2012), where the choices they make in the final conversation are what determine the ending they are rewarded with. They can either arrest Pacone, and bring justice to the city of St. Llamis, shoot Pacone, or throw him through the window of the office. The triggers for these endings aren't explicitly signposted, but don't come out of nowhere. If the player acts with violence, threatening Pacone directly, they will shoot him when they have the information they need. If the player tries to get Pacone to react to their goading, they will counter and send him through the window. If the player approaches peacefully, with the assistance of Patsy, they work together to arrest Pacone without bloodshed or violence. Again, like *Mass Effect 3*, it is supposed to be entirely up to the player to determine which ending they feel is optimal.

This approach to ending structure is itself a draw for many audience members, seen as a rarity, where most fictions “tend to have one and only one ending”. (Cova & Garcia, 2015). Games of make believe, as Cova and Garcia put it, are the exception. Whereas if an author “proposes two official endings, we are likely to be surprised.” During a project’s planning and conception, many endings may be considered and developed. It isn’t just player choice that dictates which ending is reached however, with *Clue* (*Clue*, 1985) being released in theatres with 3 unique endings that the audience wouldn’t be aware of until the viewing was already well underway. Each ending could be seen as the ‘canon’ until the home media release, where one was identified as how the events actually occurred. The audience had no impact on the ending they were shown, and each ending is seemingly as developed as the rest.

It could be that this extra development that makes the choice to have multiple endings seem viable. If an ending isn’t as developed as its contemporaries within the eye of the audience, then the most developed might feel as though it is the ‘true’ ending, as Taylor–Giles spoke of. This “Authorizing” may well prevent a true Lack of Judgement, and they then go on to claim that the player will then seek out what they believe to be the true ending, as this would provide them with the greatest sense of reward. This reward can be seen as one of Fantasy (where the game is make–believe), Narrative (where the game is drama), and even Challenge (where the game is an obstacle), if the designer has placed obstacles in the way of the player’s goal. (Hunicke, et al., 2004).

5 REFLECTION

5.1 INDIVIDUAL

During the project the Narrative Designer followed early ad–hoc feedback on the prototype from the team that the tone and writing quality for many scenes wasn’t consistent or high enough in a frequency that meant that the full design had to be altered. This meant full rewrites of every encounter, new characters, altered emphases, and an entirely new sequence. This rewriting process caused additional issues as time that could have been used on improving other aspects of the game – such as linking every clue to the story in some way – had to be reallocated. As the content was in a

complete state prior to refactoring, the total content volume was also reduced to factor in testing, feedback and implementation.

Following on from this, they were able to take control of the tutorial section of the game, ensuring a consistent tone, early indicators of the form of the story being told, as well as catching players up with what they were missing with the excluded content via character dialogue exposition.

Considering the late nature of the addition of the moving cutscenes, another of the Narrative Designer's responsibilities, it's possible to see merit in their inclusion, as each helps to tie the game together into a more complete package. Comments could be made on their quality, and how they don't feel as polished as they could have, but the humour found in their surprise inclusion can earn credit as a positive way to end each play through.

5.2 TEAM

There was reason to believe in the possible success of the project, with the team hopeful and committed behind the idea that there was a niche within the market for *Llama Noire*. However, with the upcoming release of a similar project, *Blacksad: Under the Skin* (Pendulo Studios & YS Interactive, 2019) announced halfway through the project's development cycle, this niche began to seem filled. "Market saturation happens when a specific market is no longer generating new demand for certain products or services." (Gregory, 2018). This narrative adventure game also follows an anthropomorphised animal detective within a noir setting, highlighting its multiple-choice dialogue, multiple endings and investigative gameplay. This did prove that other members of the industry believed that the niche was there, but also that something that seemed an original IP, and a major selling point, no longer existed, with the source material for the *Blacksad* game being a previously existing comic book, and the products seeming to be in direct competition.

Within the project, it could be said that there were regular missteps by the team. Early in development, a plan was never truly set in place, so each facet of the team was working independently of the others. The lack of planning meant that additional levels were planned before the initial levels were completed. In another sense the programmer

within the team understood some of the narrative planning, but none of it was written down for the rest of the team, which led to a sense of disconnect between the parties, and common misunderstandings regularly cropping up. (Johnson, 2009) This meant that asset creation and development was independent of the narrative, which then meant that narrative freedoms were reduced, with the clues having to be pulled from the already existing asset lists. Simply, better planning, with a plot skeleton available to the full team should have been a much earlier priority than the prototype. This would have also reflected a more accurate representation of the scope possible once the prototype was completed.

Alongside this, there were discrepancies between the styles of the game in all of its stages. Some members of the team wanted a stylised art style, similar to that of *Sea of Thieves* (Rare, 2018), which could have complemented the character designs. The artists, however were sure of a more realistic look for the game's assets. In the end, the assets produced were of a very high standard, and did look realistic, instead of stylised, which did receive positive responses during testing.

It was said by some members of the team that they felt that the choice of engine plagued the project, holding it back, as achieving tasks in other engines of a similar class to the Unity Engine could be achieved by more members of the team, reducing the reliance on the minority of the group who had a positive working knowledge of the engine.

The end result of the project is still a strong one, despite issues that plagued *Llama Noire* from early on. The game feels unique in its story, and characterisations, at least at the time of writing. The project as a whole succeeds in its aims of being a fun, absorbing narrative adventure game, and fits the tone of the detective noir thriller. The skills of each member of the team are clearly on show, but the gaps in their knowledge leave parts of *Llama Noire* feeling unfinished. The characterisation of the main cast allows for interesting takes on some of the more common tropes within the genre. Unfortunately, beyond that, it offers little new progress to the medium.

6 APPENDICES

6.1 APPENDIX A – LITERATURE REVIEW

6.1.1 Abstract

This paper investigates the decisions made by Games Designers with the intention of providing and sustaining the illusion of choice, and the methodology behind the systems in use. Included are decision systems, episodic structure and quest-lines, and the paper breaks down the issues involved with each branch of logic, comparing and evaluating them for use in another project.

6.1.2 Introduction

“Choice does not truly exist in video games. Choice is merely an illusion which we as players believe creates a unique gameplay experience for every individual.” (Legler, 2015). No video game, no matter its budget can currently afford to give its players true freedom of choice. This is both through budget, but also through the definition of the game. Sid Meier (cited by Koster, 2004, p. 14), however, disagrees with Legler, stating that games are “a series of meaningful choices.” At first it seems that choice cannot be inherent to the definition of the game and at the same time be an illusion within the game but when someone begins to delve deeper into this discrepancy, some very thought-provoking arguments come to light.

When considering Dungeons and Dragons (Wizards of the Coast, 1974 – present) – a game that prides itself on the freedom it provides its players – it appears that even it cannot escape stipulating what the players cannot do. It must provide a framework; one which allows the game to flow in a way that convinces its players that they have true freedom. Choices aren’t free, and even the Dungeon Master must follow rules, and when they bend them, they cannot break; the game would cease to exist without its rules.

As a Narrative Designer, or even a Games Designer working with narratives, these rules need to be a known and understood, otherwise the illusion is easily broken. Working with Das Gnome on Llama Noire, this was an important value – the branching dialogue of the game needed to establish itself at a high level of quality, driving the player forward with choices that they wanted, but still hitting the story beats that were necessary for the emotional pull of the game. As the branches become more spread, the designer must work hard to maintain focus on the story, but also ensure that the bottlenecking of the player isn’t obvious, to provide a true illusion of choice.

In relation to this, there are two distinct fields in narrative design principles: strictly leading the player through a game, (showing the beats of the story one at a time, in a pre-determined order, intended to impact the players’ emotions the same way, every time) or pushing the boundaries with choice, (allowing the player the highest level of freedom the game can afford, allowing them to build their own story within the world).

Most games being released today exist between these two principles, avoiding the extremes as much as possible: gaming as a medium encourages a degree of non-linearity, and would suffer without it, but true freedom prevents the game from existing, and instead becomes an exercise in imaginary play.

6.1.3 Main Body

6.1.3.1 Choices

In games, choice is a peculiar thing. A game may present paths to its player, opening up its world, and according to Ingold (2018, slide 11), there are three ways to show choice, each with increasing amounts of freedom: “What am I supposed to do now?” where the player can see the choices of the game, and must follow them, “What can I do now?” where the player is able to test the limits of the game they’re in, and “Yikes what have I done?” where the player is given the opportunity to realise what they’ve done, changing the world around them. If a game encourages one of these questions, and then doesn’t deliver the opportunity for the player to explore them, that game will have failed in its narrative design.

Bartle (2004, p.14) agrees, and goes on to say “choice promotes immersion. It’s up to individual designers to decide whether to act on the fact, though.” The designer must know how free the player can feel in their game and design the game around that. Freedom isn’t inherent to narrative design, only to specific principles within.

When the player is given the opportunity to – and then proceeds to – analyse the choices they’ve made, the immersion can be broken. This was seen in the Mass Effect series (BioWare, 2007–2012), when the ending of the popular series sparked outrage with this very concept. The ending was just “choose a colour” according to user SmallHatLogan, and another user, Ariseishirou, added that “nothing you do up to that point matters”, (Gethsemani, 2015). Although being an online forum, this source shows some of the public’s reaction to the ending, rather than the critical reception. They felt that their Commander Shepard wouldn’t have acted in the way they did – the way the game forced them to.

The problem was that not everyone’s Commander Shepard was the same, and none of their choices could matter. This is an extreme reaction, but shows how invested some players are in the games they play. These types of invested players usually possess extreme and diverse motivation, tastes, and needs. (Yee, 2006). The writers and designers of series like this cannot envision how every player will play the game: Bartle (cited by Lindley, 2005, p. 2) stated that there four categories of player – achievers, explorers, socializers, and killers – each after a different play experience, and with many players existing in combinations of the 4 in different quantities. When these designers are crafting these worlds, the main plot is intricate, and winding, but still deceptively shallow and ultimately, linear. This can make it dissatisfying for some of its players, especially when they realise that they weren’t truly getting the experience they thought they were.

“The more the player understands about the Mass Effect universe, the worse the ending seems.” (Clarkson, 2012). Clarkson claims that the series itself, and the way it inspires the player’s immersion, eventually became its undoing. However, without facilitating and encouraging the players to have an emotional connection to the characters and worlds of the game, the uproar might not have existed, but the initial popularity wouldn’t have either.

The outrage of the fans eventually pushed BioWare to add more content to the ending, attempting to make it seem more personal to each player, whilst “maintaining the team’s artistic vision.” (Muzyka, cited by Stuart, 2012). BioWare had patched up the holes, but the damage was still visible. “Even if these endings are ‘better,’ they still suffer from the same problem as the old ones. Nearly all are identical in terms of what you’re shown.” (Tassi, 2012).

The problems with Mass Effect 3 (BioWare, 2012), especially, were all rear-loaded, with decades of story coming to its climax in both a loud and yet unsatisfying manner. It failed to resonate with fans, not just when compared to other games of its genre, but the series itself. When the player is provided with these choices consistently throughout a long-running series, they learn to expect them, and then the lack of choice expressed by the finale is only more noticeable. The games seemed to encourage the “What can I do?” and “Yikes, what have I done?” mindsets, but as it came to its close, only presented its players with “What am I supposed to do?”

6.1.3.2 *Episodes*

When someone raises the concept of narrative-driven games, Telltale Games are often spoken of in the same breath. Their specific brand of episodic delivery was both an incredible tool for storytelling, and a curse on the writer's freedoms. For the episodic system to work, each chapter would always have to bottleneck to ensure that the story could only deviate in minor ways.

Riedl & Boyang (2010) state that "customization of main plotline involves presenting the right story to the right person at the right time," showing how targeted the process has to be: the affordances of episodic delivery making that customization easier, allowing a development team to adapt to how players interact with the product with a much greater agency than iterating on an already released game. "Traditional game development does have a feedback loop, but with years between results." Whereas "with short iteration cycles, gameplay mechanics that an audience responds to can be used to turn a moderate performer into a hit." (Sanchez, 2007). The same can be said about the narrative path of these episodic games.

The pitfall of the medium lies in that each episode must have a defined beginning and end, allowing the transition from the previous episode and into the next. This also occurs between seasons:

"There are five distinct choices faced by Clementine at the end of season two — one with Kenny, one with Jane, or three variations of setting out alone with the baby — that must be homogenized for the sake of continuity at the start of the third season. The net result is that Clementine and the baby must start season three alone." (Baines, 2018).

To allow the player enough agency to shift the narrative to match the variety of choices they truly want, would result in a constant supply of insurmountable tasks for the development team, and a break of the episodic nature of the game. According to Pascal Luban (2016), a games industry veteran, "an episodic game is not cheap to produce." Adding to this might break the already fragile development cycle of these episodic games.

Because of the lack of agency that the game could afford to give the player-base, they began to feel disconnected from the game, and started noticing the lack of impact the supposed game-defining moments they participated in had on the game. Summed up for Telltale's *The Walking Dead* series (Telltale Games, 2012–2018): "For all of the switches and levers we pull to change route, the tracks have all led to the same destination." (Baines, 2018).

But one decision, according to Baines, does matter, the one that has no impact on the other episodes, no true bearing on the story, but instead has its weight and emotions rest squarely on the player's conscience. Lee's death is a constant, but his fate is truly each player's individual choice.

This – somewhat final – decision wouldn't have had the weight that it did without the choices preceding it. If the player hadn't started to look past the curtain, hadn't begun to think that their choices didn't matter, then the impact might have been softened.

Comparing this to the *Mass Effect* ending, despite being presented with fewer choices, this example being a binary choice, players were able to resonate with it on a higher level for a few reasons: the lack of choice worked to make the decision harder, and neither decision is the 'wrong one'. The player immediately receives payback for their choice rather than letting the consequences play out over a cutscene that they must sit and watch, removing them from the experience, as was the case with *Mass Effect*.

6.1.3.3 Quests

“The meaning of quests emerges from strategic actions, but these actions have thematic, narrative and personal implications.” (Howard, cited by Szczepanski, 2017). Each quest, no matter how detailed, has, at most, minor impact on the game’s world. As a designer, the difficulty lies in the balance of the freedom that the player gets. The ability to choose between paths within a quest is where the illusion of choice comes in.

Shown in Figure 1 are a collection of games plotted on a linear path between relaxed quest systems (those that allow the player to approach from any angle), and strict quest systems (those that tend to push the player down a certain path).

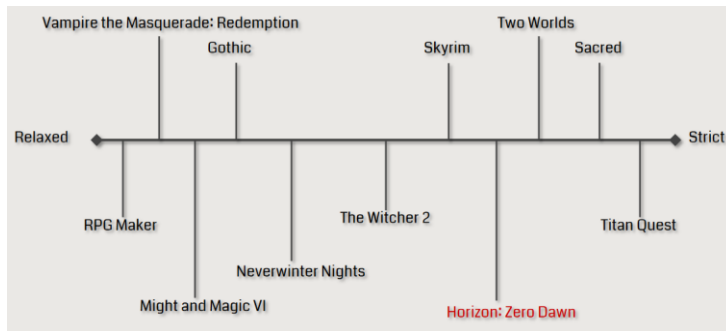


Figure 10 – Slide sorting and visualising linear and non-linear games. (Szczepański, 2017)

Much like the episodic structure, a quest must have “an obvious start, middle and end,” with each step existing as “a piece of narrative.” (Szczepański, 2017). The benefit of quest systems over the episodic structure is that the quests can overlay, with many occurring at once, with each climax happening in thunderous crescendo, often weaving through the final act like an emotional rollercoaster, the player increasingly invested, as they approach the end. With the player invested this way, the cracks in the narrative design can be overlooked.

The player is invested, despite already knowing that the characters fates “like those of all fictional characters – was, is, and will always be utterly determined.” (Self, 2015). When a choice is presented, the most the player can ever change is the path they are on, and the final fate of that path is often already determined.

Without procedural generation of the quests and intensive work behind the systems at work, each play-through of the game can be perfectly replicated, serving to highlight its pre-determined nature. (Riedl & Boyang, 2010). The player may be able to explore an environment differently, but the narrative isn’t changed by this: the world doesn’t truly respond to player input, and instead responds to set game-state altering systems that the player turns on and off unintentionally. A quest will often lead to the same conclusionary end-point, often without any choice beyond the player’s participation.

In a game like Divinity: Original Sin II (Larian Studios, 2017), much like Dungeons and Dragons in the freedom it affords, the player will encounter quests that drive them forward, and interacting with a wide plethora of characters. These interactions bring with them choice and decision making. These choices, however, are often only evident when replaying the game. The dialogue doesn’t change major outcomes beside some heavily scripted persuasion events, and it is instead the actions which change the world in more significant ways. How a player approached a problem has more impact the state of the world, with failure almost always just resulting in combat, and success sometimes still ending in the same way. However, this impact is often limited to small changes, side-character death, gaining a personal title, and similar changes, with the only changes on the grand-scale – in a game that revolves around the player character being ‘Godwoken’ – occurring too late in the story for their effects to be truly felt by the player.

Truthfully, this problem affects a large proportion of the games market. The game is over when the player finally feels that their actions have made an impact. This is due to a poor plot graph, one that isn't "comprehensive and flexible". (Trenton, et al., 2010). The narrative design should allow for failure to flow into more gameplay the same way success does. The best plot graphs will be invisible to most players, where the game can react and respond to nearly every action the player takes, without telling its players that it has done so, in the opposite of how *The Walking Dead* approaches this issue.

An example of this 'player action' and 'game reaction' system is seen in *Fallout 3* (Bethesda Game Studios, 2008), with the Megaton quest-line. Megaton is the second largest settlement in the game, and the player can decide the fate of the town, activating a nuclear blast at the centre, killing almost all the inhabitants, and affecting other character's interactions with the player. This shows how it is possible to have quests that impact the world occur before the end of the game, and give the player at least a small sense of consequence.

6.1.4 Conclusion

The approaches explored here each allow for a different impact on the player, relying on hard-hitting emotional beats, in how the player can impact the storyline with their decisions, and how the player can approach each problem in their own way; however, each must exist and within the framework the game provides. To truly capitalise on the power of games technologies and the writing skill of those involved, the narrative of the game must be as integral as the code.

What the game itself encourages cannot be denied to its players: when it encourages the player to approach a dialogue in the way that they see that character, as seen in *Llama Noire*, the designers must accommodate that style of play. There must be no 'right way' to play, with a large variety of approaches instead rewarding and punishing the player in an appropriate manner.

Each game must also attempt to allow for an impact to be felt throughout gameplay, not just a singular, final payoff. Actions have consequences, sometimes instant, and other times when least expected, but very rarely all at once in life. The quest system does allow for the most similar approach to this, but often rewards or punishes the player instantly at the conclusion of each quest.

Looking forward, more research into the details of branching narrative needs to be done, looking more at the games researched here, as well as *Detroit: Become Human* (Quantic Dream, 2018), *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* (Eidos Montréal, 2011) and its sequel *Deus Ex: Mankind Divided* (Eidos Montréal, 2016) alongside texts written about the specifics of branching narratives such as *Narrative, Games, and Theory* (Simons, 2007), Jon Ingold's talk on writing good games dialogue (Ingold, 2018) as well as the work and analytical texts of Chris Bateman. Analysing these alongside counterpoints will help provide a large base of knowledge, improving the narrative of *Llama Noire* even more.

6.2 APPENDIX B – ITERATIVE TESTING RESULTS

Das Gnome Testing Results (Iteration 1)									
Participant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Did you have fun while playing the game? (1-10)	2	7	3	6	7	7	8	6	3
Did the game world feel full and immersive? (1-10)	1	6	5	5	5	6	3	7	5
Was the main storyline clear to you during the game? (1-10)	1	7	7	7	5	7	7	5	1
How easy was the game world to navigate? (1-10)	4	9	6	8	7	8	8	4	10
Did the characters feel complete and unique? (1-10)	3	6	2	3	7	7	9	4	6
Is the Narrative/Gameplay balanced well? (1-10)	4	7	4	3	7	8	9	8	3
What was the relationship between Patsy and your character?	No idea, never met her. Wait no I told Harold that we were colleagues, that's it.	We were colleagues before.	They were in a relationship.	I don't know.	No idea.	She felt like an ally who help the main character with his investigation.	Friends.	Regretful, also she was a snitch?	I don't know, I didn't speak to Patsy, where was she? Who knows.
What was the relationship between Al Pacone and your character?	As far as I know he killed my dad, that's it.	I cant remember.	He killed my dad.	Al Pacone killed my dad.	Als a mob boss who shot someones father.	He killed Papa Floyd, he a bad man.	Unsure.	Didn't want to accuse with understanding	No idea, I skipped it all because I could.

Das Gnome Testing Results (Iteration 2)						
Participant	1	2	3	4	5	6
Did you have fun while playing the game? (1-10)	1	2	4	2	7	8
Did the game world feel full and immersive? (1-10)	2	1	6	4	7	6
Was the main storyline clear to you during the game? (1-10)	3	1	3	4	10	5
How easy was the game world to navigate? (1-10)	6	5	8	7	8	7
Did the characters feel complete and unique? (1-10)	3	2	4	1	7	6
Is the Narrative/Gameplay balanced well? (1-10)	4	1	5	2	6	8
What was the relationship between Patsy and your character?	Colleagues I think.	She used to work with you? Now she's Pacone's partner.	They used to be partners but I don't know what that means exactly.	They used to be colleagues	Patsy was a helper to Floyd who was investigating Al Pacone.	Former lovers
What was the relationship between Al Pacone and your character?	No Idea	He killed your father.	He killed my dad supposedly but I never saw it happen.	He killed my dad.	Killed your father. Floyd is trying to prove it.	My character suspects Al Pacone is the murderer of his father and wants the truth and revenge.

Das Gnome Testing Results (Iteration 3)										
Participant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Did you have fun while playing the game? (1-10)	7	9	10	10	7	6	8	7	6	7
Did the game world feel full and immersive? (1-10)	7	8	4	10	8	7	8	6	5	9
Was the main storyline clear to you during the game? (1-10)	6	8	7	8	6	9	8	8	9	9
How easy was the game world to navigate? (1-10)	8	5	10	10	8	9	8	5	5	7
Did the characters feel complete and unique? (1-10)	7	5	9	10	7	6	10	4	4	10
Is the Narrative/Gameplay balanced well? (1-10)	8	6	4	10	6	6	10	6	5	10
What was the relationship between Patsy and your character?	Friends	N/A	Used to work together.	Partners.	The main character has a close relationship to patsy, however, Patsy had something off about him.	Old colleagues.	Friends and partners.	I was able to understand his situation and wanted to help.	Patsy was a former employee and colleague of the character.	They used to work together.
What was the relationship between Al Pacone and your character?	He killed your father.	Al Pacone killed the characters father.	He killed the characters father.	Boss.	Good I suppose.	Mob boss and detective.	Family friend.	It was clear that there was a lot of bad blood.	Al Pacone was a crime lord who your character thinks killed his father.	Al Pacone worked with the characters dad and killed him.

Das Gnome Testing Results (Iteration 4)										
Participant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Did you have fun while playing the game? (1-10)	6	5	7	7	8	6	5	8	7	5
Did the game world feel full and immersive? (1-10)	6	6	5	5	5	7	6	6	5	4
Was the main storyline clear to you during the game? (1-10)	5	9	8	8	8	6	5	8	8	7
How easy was the game world to navigate? (1-10)	9	8	6	6	8	6	7	8	8	7
Did the characters feel complete and unique? (1-10)	3	7	8	5	2	3	4	5	5	7
Is the Narrative/Gameplay balanced well? (1-10)	4	7	8	6	8	3	2	8	6	7
What was the relationship between Patsy and your character?	An ex colleague I think.	Old friend who worked together.	Ex-partners.	Friends.	Former co-worker.	Ex-girlfriend.	I don't remember.	Unaware of their relationship together.	Ex-partners? When the voice acting is added it will be more clear who the character is and their role in the overall story.	No idea.
What was the relationship between Al Pacone and your character?	I have no idea.	Your father used to work for Al Pacone.	Mob boss who killed my dad.	Hostile.	Murderous.	Boss who knows your dad?	He killed the main character's dad?	He killed your father.	Patsy's father was Al Pacone's work colleague.	Killed your dad.

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