

IAT 313 – Multi-linear Narrative Project Analysis

Collector!

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1) Plot and story:

The main points of the plot presented in *Collector!* are the struggles of the NPCs at the point in time that the player character comes to encounter them. The Forest world deals with a cold front threatening the forest elves' way of life, the Mountain/Ice world deals with the running of the Magi's blizzard machine, the Water world deals with the Mermaids encountering pollution in the ocean, and the City world changes based upon previous actions from a happy life, to economic collapse, to a town full of zombies. In terms of perceived story, players will likely imprint their own personality or idea for one upon the main character and make decisions based upon that. There are purposeful gaps left in the story for this purpose, with the player having to determine what they believe to be the different groups' motives and intentions in order to decide whether or not to assist them.

2) Character:

The traits of the main characters are very loosely defined, in the intent of allowing greater player impression upon the story, as was done back in the days of similar early platform games. While modern Mario games for instance, have begun to include story elements, the charm and attraction to the original game was in its simplicity of story and everyman main character that was a blank and relatable slate.

There remain some personality traits given to characters in the game. The elves appear friendly and very proper in their wording, using articulated sentences rather than simple slang. The magi are alternatively much crabbier and harsh, and seem to care mostly about themselves. The mermaids are simple and nice, though with intelligence to back that up. They are the most empathetic characters. As the game engine took longer than anticipated to create, extra actions and planned assist/hindrance effects in the final level based on character's reactions to player actions had to be cut.

Such actions would have shown further plot development, but in lieu of those, the effects of the races' actions can be observed through conversation with the city residents. The magi can be observed to have kept winter in the forest and are revealed to have been amicable and very useful to the cityfolk. The forest people can in some endings be seen to have created a plant monster that is the opposite of their friendly appearance. Either of these groups can save the player in some of the worse endings based upon the actions taken with them earlier. The mermaids can be observed as causing the ruin of the ice city through use of their star machine to purify the water.

3) Who knows What When?

In the beginning the player does not know all of the groups motives and goals and may assist them in ways they otherwise would not. Upon finishing the game once, they may utilize this newfound knowledge to try to either improve the ending or see how much chaos they can cause. The revelation of the crabby mountain-folk as arguably the most 'good' group is the primary example of this.

4) Theme:

The main conceptual themes that this story relies upon are that of empathy and trust. The player must decide upon speaking with and looking at various characters whether or not to take their words at face value or if there is something suspicious to worry about. Empathy can play a big role in this, as in many tests players especially wanted to help the nice sounding elves despite not having any alternative perspective to evaluate them on yet.

The design of the narrative comments on these themes in that people should not be written off right away, as there may be more to them worth caring about than they let on through the Magi, that even the nicest and smartest sounding people can end up backstabbing you if you rush in blindly to support them in the case of the elves, and that even actions with good intentions can cause more harm than good if not properly considered in the case of the mermaids.

5) Analyze your multi-linear narrative works in terms of the following concepts from the course:

Bolter and Grusin- REMEDIATION

Collector! is a rather hypermediated experience, with key prompts such as the Spacebar, Down to Talk, and Y and N keys displaying themselves on screen at the necessary times. A HUD is also consistently displayed to convey to the player the amount of items they have collected towards their goals. Speech is also implemented through text bubbles to advance at the player's pace rather than actual sound clips.

Immediacy is low in this piece for the most part although the game does feature mechanics such as gravity which allows the player to better understand navigation of the game world as analogous to the real world. Things such as ladders behave as one would expect as climbable. The water level in particular contributes to this by slowing mobility but allowing for multiple 'jumps', much as a character would move in water. (though only if denser than a normal human)

Zimmerman's FOUR KINDS OF INTERACTIVITY-

The cognitive aspect of this work is somewhat minor, as the storyline did not manage to be fully fleshed out within project deadlines, but still manages to implement multiple paths and allow the player to see the impacts of their actions affect the citizens of the final level, tending to have the player desire to start again and think harder about what effect their previous actions had and what they would like to do differently.

The functional end of this piece is its strong suit, with an interact-able world (albeit one that often results in player character death), where every piece has its own rules of interaction from seed collection, to platform collision, to enemy stomping, to ladder climbing. The mapped keys for these actions are all logical and allow for a seamless play experience in terms of player movement and exploration.

The game has multiple implementations of explicit choice that can effect the outcome of the piece's narrative. 6 out of 9 character interactions in the first three levels can tweak the experience of the end sequence. Explicit choice on whether to attempt to collect items or not can effect the opportunities for later choices as well.

The game's cultural interactivity is essentially nil, with only vague game mechanic and visual references to 8 bit games of the NES era. While a small audience may catch the visuals and a large one will understand the mechanics, neither expands the piece very far beyond its original scope at all.

Zimmerman's TWO MODES OF INTERACTIVITY (EXPLICIT CHOICE)-

The piece has a strongly embedded narrative, with one major arc that does not change until the last quarter or less. Despite this, there is a reasonable amount of emergent choice given to the player, with everyone's experiences bound to be different simply from playing and interacting with the platforming elements differently, compounded by the choices and decisions dealing with NPCs that effect the embedded story.

Murray's FOUR QUALITIES OF DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTS-

The procedural rules of the game environment are well thought out with objects able to interact with each other in logical ways and various user choices influencing a dynamic and changing story tree.

While there are a variety of optional interactions and paths to take, the participatory aspects of the game are somewhat limited, as the user can still not create their own unique content or actions to add to the narrative. This is helped however by the player's ability to add their own ideas subtextually to the story and assign beliefs they have about character's backstories, as well as different paths and approaches to the levels.

The rules of interaction within the game are almost entirely spatial, with every non talking action involving various forms of objects colliding or missing each other. As gravity is added to the equation and later a water medium, spatial laws govern the player's experience between textual story elements.

While on an initial run there appears to be little encyclopedic content to the game, upon achieving a variety of endings a player can begin to piece together further background and understanding of the various character groups in the game. This was still rather limited due to time constraints however.

Murray's AESTHETICS OF THE MEDIUM:

The game's visuals and interface design do not afford a high level of immersion, but the consistency in interactions and embedded rulesets contribute to a believable and somewhat immersive experience nonetheless, albeit not one that could exist in the 'real world'. This is much akin to the difference of being immersed in a Looney Tunes environment compared to a drama with actors.

Agency is available within this piece to a decent degree. Players' decisions will have observable and understandable effects on the narrative outcome. In terms of exploring and traversing the game

world, players' actions also have agency in terms of defeating and being defeated by enemies, jumping and climbing on various objects, and collecting pickups. All of these result in an observable reaction to the player's choice.

While the narrative has a predetermined number of arcs, there is still some sense of transformation to such a setup, particularly when one accounts for a player's filling in of the blanks in the game and how they connect the dots that are given to them. If a player is particularly attached, they may even incorporate how they played the levels into their versions of the narrative. (lots of deaths, speeding and breezing through, being a slow and steady collector)

6)Overall

Overall *Collector!* is a fun, if simple multi-linear narrative that focuses on incorporating interaction through game mechanics and interaction with a world rather than through a deep and complicated storyline and characters. The game has potential for endless expansion, and was designed with that in mind rather than being constrained to a one time contained narrative. While time constraints kept a lot on the drawing board and out of the game, it manages to incorporate choice and multi-linearity into a genre that is definitely not known for such endeavours.