NARRATIVE DISPOSITIONS IN MODERN VIDEO GAMES

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: The purpose of the study is to examine narrative dispositions in modern video games. Narrative dispositions are the ways in which video games tell stories.

Research methodology: The study employed a multidimensional framework to analyze narrative dispositions. This framework included elements such as plot structure, characters, conflicts, themes, player agency, and player-character relationships. The study also conducted a comprehensive review of existing literature on video game narratives.

Findings of the study: The study found that modern video games employ a variety of narrative strategies, including nonlinear storytelling, branching paths, and the integration of choices by players to tell unique narratives. The study also found that video games are increasingly using narrative to explore complex themes and ideas.

Conclusion: The study concludes that video games are a dynamic narrative medium that is capable of captivating audiences in unique ways.

Recommendations: The study recommended that game developers should continue to explore the potential of narrative to engage players and tell compelling stories. The study also recommended that critics and scholars should pay more attention to the narrative aspects of video games. The study also recommended that players should be encouraged to think critically about the narratives of the video games they play.

Keywords: *Narrative, Dispositions, Modern, Video, Games*

INTRODUCTION

Majek (2011) observes that video games are influenced by plot points and themes attributed to narrative forms. The growth of video games is eminent, from arcade systems to home consoles, handheld consoles, and mobile devices. Some video games have grown to be a narrative medium worth comparison with other narratives. However, video games have evolved more alongside technological evolution than multimedia platforms. According to Glancy (1996), the roots of the video game industry can be traced back to 1962, when Steve Russell, a student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, created a game called Spacewar! As the technological evolution path in video games can be traced, Ivory (2016) notes that a separate pedigree can be identified tying the text-based games to the narratives and fantasy settings of beloved literary classics. Since then, video games have aspired to grow towards incorporating narratives within them.

LITERATURE

The question of whether video games can be considered an art form has sparked extensive debate among scholars, critics, gamers, and game developers. Roger Ebert (2010), a renowned film critic, argued that video games would never be recognized as an art form. However, his perspective is limited to earlier games and fails to acknowledge the immense artistic potential displayed by modern video games. The art status of video games has led to a divide among theorists and scholars, with ludologists and narratologists differing on the focus of video game studies. While not all video games possess storytelling capabilities, recent releases have highlighted rich and complex narratives. Video games combine elements from various art forms, such as narrative fiction, film, music, and sports (Smuts, 2005). Narratologists argue that this ability to incorporate narratives elevates video games to the realm of art, comparable to literature and cinema. Early games could not tell stories, but in the mid-1970s, video games with underlying storylines emerged, experimenting with the integration of gameplay and narrative (Schell, 2008). Despite these advancements, defining the presence of stories in video games remains a challenge, with differing opinions among scholars and critics.

Schell (2008) suggests that video game stories can range from strong epic tales to subtle narratives. Even games without explicit stories often inspire players to create their own stories within the game. Juul (2001) argues that narrative cannot be viewed independently but only through a specific

medium, emphasizing the transposability of stories across different mediums. Chatman (1978) supports this view, suggesting that narratives are independent structures adaptable to various mediums. Initially, Juul believed that video games lacked the capacity for such transposability. However, the current trend provides numerous examples of stories from video games that can be retold in other media, as well as instances where video games draw inspiration from other narrative forms. Adaptations of video game stories into TV series and films, such as The Last of Us (2023) and Uncharted (2022), further demonstrate the narrative potential of video games.

By today's standards, modern narrative-based video games excel in storytelling. They have adopted storytelling techniques from literature and film, initially relying on written words for story progression (Lemon, 2018). However, what sets video games apart is the level of audience participation. Unlike passive audiences in traditional narratives, video game players are active participants who shape the story through their actions within the game environment. This active engagement distinguishes video games as a medium capable of delivering compelling narratives, albeit in a different manner than traditional media. Modern video game narratives often fall into two categories: linear and nonlinear storytelling. Linear narratives follow a traditional plot structure, guiding players from one predetermined point to another (Hurme, 2016). Nonlinear narratives, on the other hand, offer multiple storylines and endings, allowing players to make choices that shape the narrative's progression.

Role-playing games (RPGs) frequently employ nonlinear storytelling, granting players the freedom to determine their character's actions and influence the story's outcome. Video games have the unique ability to distort chronology, similar to the techniques used in movies, to convey information processing by the main characters (Hurme, 2016). Narrative-based video games not only entertain with puzzles and challenges, but they also tackle meaningful subject matters, drawing from genres in literature and cinema (Jenkins, 2004). The immersive experience provided by video games allows players to engage with these subjects on a deeper level. However, there is still much research needed to fully explore the aesthetics, form, and structure of video game narratives. Crawford (1982) suggests that we should consider the potential of video game narratives, rather than solely focusing on their current state. Understanding the narrative dispositions in modern video games requires critical analysis and further scholarly examination.

METHODOLOGY

The study applied a qualitative research design using observation and document/content analysis to acquire data. The study targeted narrative-based video games for PS4 published by Sony Interactive Entertainment that seemed to possess strong narratives. Purposive sampling (Whitehead and Whitehead, 2016) was applied to determine three video games: The Last of Us (2013) developed by Naughty Dog, until Dawn (2015), by Supermassive Games, uncharted 4: A Thief's End (2016), by Naughty Dog. The Last of Us won the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) Games Award for best narrative in 2014. Until Dawn was nominated for the same in 2016. Uncharted 4: A Thief's End won The Game Awards 2016 for best narrative. Observation guide and content analysis: document and video analysis were used to acquire data. Data was analyzed using a content analysis approach. Formalist film theory, concerned with the methodical reading of texts as instruments of symbolism to inform the environment of a subject/character, was applied to break down the form of narrative dispositions in video games. Formalism, also known as New Criticism, aims to classify, categorize, and catalogue works according to their formal attributes.

Analysis of Narrative

The narrative comprises structures through which stories, real or fictional, are recounted and conveyed to the audience. Bordwell et al. (2017) define narrative as "a chain of events linked by cause and effect and occurring in time and space" (p. 73). Seymour Chatman views narrative as a communication between two parties, a sender and a receiver: "On the sending end are the real author, the implied author, and the narrator (if any); on the receiving end are the real audience (listener, reader, viewer), the implied audience, and the narratee" (1978, p. 28). Going by these definitions, we shall refer to narrative as the organization of events, which consists of spatial and temporal elements and structures employed to tell a detailed story with a beginning, middle, and end.

Narrative Styles

Narratives can take on two primary styles: linear and nonlinear. A linear narrative follows a chronological order of events, presenting them in a straightforward manner (Domsch, 2013). This style is commonly found across various narrative mediums, including video games. In some

games, linear narratives are employed either entirely or briefly in conjunction with nonlinear elements. For example, The Last of Us utilizes a linear narrative throughout the game. On the other hand, nonlinear narratives do not adhere to chronological order. They may feature multiple outcomes or a single predetermined outcome, but the events are presented in a non-sequential manner (Stone, 2019). Nonlinear narratives often incorporate flashbacks, foreshadowing, and multiple mini-plotlines that contribute to the main storyline.

This approach is frequently seen in narrative-based video games. In certain games, both linear and nonlinear narratives are combined. The story may start linearly, but as the player makes choices, it diverges into nonlinear paths before eventually converging back to a linear structure. This allows players to shape the progression of the story while maintaining an overarching linear storyline. Uncharted 4: A Thief's End is an example of a narrative game with a predetermined ending, but it presents events in a nonlinear format. The game incorporates elements of nonlinear storytelling to engage players and offer them agency in their choices, while ultimately leading them back to the predefined linear storyline.

Branching Narratives

Video games offer a unique narrative experience by providing branching structures that allow for multiple endings, unlike traditional narratives. Branching narratives in video games involve multiple storylines determined by the player's choices, leading to different outcomes or converging into a single conclusion (Stone, 2019). Rouse (2005, p. 223) explains that players make decisions at different points in the game that significantly influence the progression of the story. Modern narrative-based video games incorporate choices that grant players agency to influence or alter the dramatic storyline. These games are often designed for replicability, offering entirely new experiences and stories with each play. Through the choices made during gameplay, the narrative can take diverse paths and unfold differently before reaching predetermined or multiple unique endings.

In a branching narrative game, Rouse (2005) asserts that players face new challenges based on their previous successes and forge alternative paths to explore different outcomes. Replicability allows players to make fresh decisions and thus experience a distinct and unique story from their previous play. An exemplary game with a branching narrative is Until Dawn, where the player's

choices and decisions significantly impact the unfolding story. The game employs the butterfly effect, highlighting how small changes can have profound consequences later on (Lorenz, 1994). Every decision made by the player carries weight, either favorably or detrimentally, affecting the course of events. Players face difficult choices such as saving or sacrificing characters, and maintaining or betraying trust, among others. These decisions can either haunt or aid the players later when survival is at stake.

The Last of Us (2013) by Naughty Dog

The Last of Us is an action-adventure game set in a post-apocalyptic world in 2033, two decades after a brain-altering fungal infection called Cordyceps has ravaged the global population. The infected humans have transformed into dangerous creatures known as the Infected, with the advanced stage resulting in fungal-headed creatures called Clickers. In response to the outbreak, the government has established quarantine zones to protect the remaining survivors. The story centers around a father who initially tries to protect his daughter but tragically loses her. Twenty years later, still haunted by his loss, he works as a smuggler and is tasked with smuggling a teenage girl out of the city. Compelled by the opportunity to reclaim his stolen ammunition cache, he reluctantly agrees to the mission. This decision creates a challenging and emotional journey for both characters as they face numerous obstacles while traveling across the country to deliver the girl to the Fireflies, as instructed.

Until Dawn (2015) by Supermassive Games

Until Dawn is set in 2015 on Blackwood Mountain and follows the horrifying experience of eight friends who are tormented throughout the night by creatures known as the Wendigos. The story begins with a tragic incident in which Josh, the host, loses his twin sisters, Hannah and Beth Washington, after a prank gone wrong. One year later, he invites his friends to the mountain for their annual getaway to commemorate the sisters' anniversary. However, Josh has ulterior motives of seeking revenge and playing pranks on his friends. As the night unfolds, their plans go awry, and they discover the existence of other horrifying creatures that haunt the mountain.

Uncharted 4: A Thief's End (2016) by Naughty Dog

Uncharted 4: A Thief's End tells the story of a former thief who, despite retiring, getting married, and making a promise to his wife to leave his adventurous life behind, is drawn back into the world

he knows so well. Alongside his older brother and mentor, he embarks on a secret adventure to uncover the hidden fortune amassed by a legendary pirate who orchestrated a monumental heist in the 1600s, accumulating riches worth 400 million dollars.

Elements of Narrative

Narratives contain elements that collaborate in the construction of meaning. According to Chatman (1978, p.19-20), both structuralists and formalists argue that narratives consist of two components. Structuralists identify the story, which comprises the sequence of events or content, and the existent elements (characters, setting), as well as the discourse, which represents the means through which the content is conveyed. Formalists employ fables (tabula), which represent the narrative's related events, and plot (sjuzet), which denotes how the story is narrated by connecting these events. Chatman explains that how the story is communicated to the audience relies on the individual elements of a discourse. These elements of narrative discourse can be observed in modern narrative video games.

Plot

Plot in narrative refers to the sequential occurrence of events with a focus on the causal connections between them (Roth, 2015, p. 22). These causal relationships depict how one event or action leads to another, and narratives often consist of multiple plots and subplots that converge towards the main message. Similarly, video games, which require extensive gameplay, often incorporate numerous interconnected plots and subplots. In *The Last of Us*, set twenty years after the outbreak of the Cordyceps fungal infection, the failed attempts of vaccines have resulted in the collapse of civilization. Joel, a survivor and smuggler, is entrusted with the task of smuggling Ellie, a teenage girl immune to the infection, to the Fireflies to obtain a potential cure. However, their journey across the post-apocalyptic United States proves to be tough, as Joel grapples with the loss of his daughter and Ellie struggles to trust others due to past experiences.

Until Dawn revolves around a prank gone wrong, leading to the disappearance of twin sisters, Hannah and Beth. A year later, their brother Josh invites their friends back to the Blackwood Mountains to commemorate the tragic event. However, their gathering is faced with the presence of Wendigos, former humans transformed into cannibalistic creatures after resorting to extreme measures to survive a cave-in. In *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End*, Nathan Drake, who has retired from

treasure hunting, is pulled back into the world of adventure when his long-lost brother, Sam, resurfaces. Sam reveals he is in danger due to a debt owed to a dangerous drug lord. Tempted by the prospect of locating the legendary fortunes of Henry Avery, a renowned pirate, Nathan embarks on one last treasure hunt to save his brother. These narratives demonstrate the significance of the plot in driving the events and creating engaging storylines within the respective video games.

Theme

Theme in narrative refers to the central idea or recurring message conveyed to the readers or players of the text (Hart, 2011). In the world of *The Last of Us*, set in a post-apocalyptic environment, the theme of survival and the innate human desire to endure in collapsing civilizations take center stage. The game explores the lengths to which characters are willing to go to survive, regardless of moral considerations. The initial destruction of Joel's family unit, with the loss of his daughter to a soldier's gunshot, shatters the hope, confidence, and sense of security associated with protection. Players are left to rely solely on themselves for survival, with Joel's experiences on both ends of life-and-death situations guiding his actions. Another prominent theme in *The Last of Us* is the father-daughter relationship.

Joel and Ellie's bond is woven throughout the game, starting from a fragile connection and gradually developing into a strong and profound relationship. Joel's grief leads him to isolate himself for 20 years, suppressing any mention of his late daughter, Sarah. Meanwhile, Ellie sees Joel as a father figure and finds solace in their growing relationship. Ultimately, Joel accepts Ellie as his surrogate daughter, leading him to protect her at all costs. When their goal of delivering Ellie to the Fireflies to develop a cure jeopardizes her life, Joel chooses to save her and lies to her about the events to shield her from the harsh reality. Ellie, as a symbol of hope for humanity's future, harbours the determination to see a vaccine created that can save people from the infection.

Until Dawn revolves around themes of relationships, survival, deception, and revenge. Josh, haunted by the disappearance of his twin sisters, orchestrates a reunion with friends at the Blackwood Pines, hoping to alleviate his guilt. True friendships are tested, as players must make challenging decisions that either strengthen or fracture those bonds. Survival becomes a paramount objective as players navigate through the night, seeking rescue at dawn. The choices made by characters such as Chris and the Stranger during encounters with the Wendigos determine their

fate. The game also explores the consequences of deception, exemplified by the prank played on Hannah, which results in her and Beth's disappearance. Struggling to cope, Josh seeks revenge by plotting his prank on his friends.

Family, pursuing one's passions and betrayal are prominent themes in *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End*. Nate and Sam, left to rely on each other after their mother's death, face the dilemma of balancing a normal life with the allure of adventure. Nate's decision to help his brother, presumed dead, jeopardizes his commitment to his wife Elena. The theme of family intertwines with the pursuit of passions, as Nate, driven by his love for treasure hunting, lies to Elena about taking a job while embarking on a quest with Sam. Elena, discovering the truth, reluctantly assists them due to familial ties and her yearning for adventure.

The game's narrative also delves into profound betrayals, notably the ultimate betrayal between Avery and Tew, who poison their fellow pirates under The Founders' alliance. Rafe, another treasure seeker, betrays Nadine and manipulates the loyalty of Shoreline soldiers for his gain. The cycle of betrayal continues as Nadine turns on Rafe and leaves him and Nate to their fate. In these video games, themes serve as foundational pillars that drive the narrative and provide depth to the characters' motivations and actions. They resonate with players, allowing for emotional engagement and a deeper understanding of the story's underlying messages. Whether it is the struggle for survival, the complexities of relationships, or the consequences of betrayal, these themes enhance the player's experience and contribute to the overall impact of the narratives presented in the games.

Setting

Characters exist and events happen in a particular time and place (Edgar-Hunt et al. 2010, p.119). The setting of a narrative plays a crucial role in establishing the time and place where the story unfolds. In the context of video games, the setting is predominantly fictional but often reflects aspects of reality within society. For instance, *The Last of Us* is set in a post-apocalyptic United States, the year 2033, and two decades after the outbreak of the Cordyceps Brain Infection. The world is gripped by panic, and government officials have implemented strict measures, including quarantine zones, to contain the spread of the infection. The story takes players through various deserted locations across the country, depicting different weather conditions and seasons. In *Until*

Dawn, the events occur in 2015 within the wintry woods of the Blackwood Mountains. The mountainous area is densely forested, and characters rely on cable cars to access the lodge. The setting is inhabited by a variety of wildlife, including wolves, grizzly bears, and deer, adding to the sense of danger and isolation.

The narrative unfolds primarily during the nighttime, with key locations such as the Washington Lodge, guest cabin, and Blackwood sanatorium serving as the backdrop for the events. *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End* takes players on a global adventure, featuring diverse and visually stunning locations. The protagonist, Nate, engages in underwater diving expeditions with salvaging boats and explores scenic hilly forests in Madagascar. The story also includes scenes set in the ruins of Spain, the Panama prison, and an auction at the opulent Rossi Estate in Italy. Each location presents unique challenges and opportunities for the characters as they navigate through the game's thrilling narrative. By crafting immersive and captivating settings, video games provide players with a rich and engaging experience. These settings transport players to imaginative worlds, allowing them to become fully immersed in the narrative and enhancing their overall enjoyment of the game.

Characters

Hart (2011) observes that great narratives regardless of the media told in rest on characters as they drive the story and sometimes become the story. He adds that a fiction work that has a long-lived outcome uses the characters in its pages to do so. Characters have classes with different abilities. They can be classified into heroes, villains, enemies, allies, and neutral ones. Video games have characters that are very sentimental in interaction and immersion into the game world. In narrative-based video games, the player either controls the characters or lacks control of the characters. As such, video games group characters into two categories of Playable Characters (PC) and Non-Playable Characters (NPCs).

Playable Character (PC)

The playable character (PC) in a video game is the character that the player controls while engaging with the game (Dille & Platten, 2007). As mentioned earlier, narrative-based video games rely on player interaction to unfold the story. Carlquist (2002, p. 10) emphasizes that video games require at least one player to actively participate and interact with the game to convey the narrative, as they cannot function independently. Farca (2011) asserts that without player movement and control

over the playable character, no events would occur in the game, resulting in the absence of anyone or anything to engage with the story (p. 23). In narrative-based video games, the playable character often assumes the role of the hero, as the player's identification and connection with the hero are crucial, surpassing other narrative media. Players desire to experience the hero's journey rather than embodying the role of the villains. Skolnick (2014) highlights the players' desire to fully control and immerse themselves in the game world, essentially inhabiting the character's body. Thus, playable characters hold significant importance in narrative video games, as players themselves actively experience the story through their interaction with the game, rather than it being solely contained within the game itself.

In *The Last of Us*, the playable characters include Sarah, Joel, and Ellie, each progressing the story at different points in the timeline. Initially, players control Sarah, then primarily take on the role of Joel for the majority of the game, with brief switches to Ellie before returning to Joel. In *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End*, Nathan Drake serves as the primary playable character, with players briefly assuming control of Sam as he recounts his encounter with Hector Alcazar during their prison escape. In *Until Dawn*, the game allows control over multiple playable characters simultaneously, enabling the progression of the story with various characters concurrently. Unlike *The Last of Us*, where different playable characters correspond to different timelines *Until Dawn* permits character switching freely among all the available characters. However, there are instances in the game where character control switches forcefully due to triggering events, leaving players with no choice but to adapt to the new character's perspective.

Non-Playable Characters (NPCs)

Apart from the character whose role the player controls in narrative video games, there are many other characters in the game world. These characters are important in advancing the story as they interact with playable characters. These characters are controlled through the artificial intelligence (AI) of the game and are referred to as non-playable characters (NPCs). Domsch (2013) defines non-playable characters as those characters not controlled by the player (human being) normally part of the program and their command is through the artificial intelligence (AI) of the system. As much as a player cannot control these characters directly, Dille & Platten (2007) assert that the player can influence the actions of these characters through the choices they make during

gameplay. As discussed earlier, video games are full of choices presented to the player, especially in the non-linear format of storytelling. As with the butterfly effect, the decisions taken by the playable character greatly affect the surrounding characters in the game.

Ally

A character who either helps the playable character/player or has to be helped by the playable character/player in the adventures of the game world is an ally (Dille & Platten, 2007). In *The Last of Us,* several characters are allies of Joel and Ellie. Tommy, Joel's brother, is the first ally as he helps the two throughout the game to meet their objectives. Tess, who was Joel's friend and partner in smuggling, the brothers Sam and Henry, Bill, and Maria, Tommy's wife, are allies. The Stranger in *Until Dawn* helps the group by giving them more information on the Wendigos and trying to help them survive the dangerous creatures. Sam, Sully, Elena, and Vargas in Panama prison are the allies in *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End* as they help Nate throughout his adventures of treasure hunting.

Enemy

An enemy is any character that will actively make hostile attempts to the playable character not to accomplish his/her mission and goals (Dille & Platten, 2007). These characters come in different forms. They can be self-motivated with their agendas which conflict with that of the hero or have levels of powers to offer challenges to the hero. In video games, the enemies are persistent as it is the challenges that they offer to the player that keeps the game interesting. The Fireflies, headed by Marlene, are the biggest enemies alongside the Clickers, in *The Last of Us*. During winter, as Ellie goes hunting for food, David and James become their enemies trying to kill or recruit Ellie into cannibalism. In *Until Dawn*, the Wendigos and the masked man are the enemies tormenting the eight characters until dawn. Rafe and Shoreline, headed by Nadine, are the constant enemies of Nate, Sam, and Sully always trying to be ahead in the search of Avery's treasures in *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End*.

Neutral

A neutral character is neither an ally nor an enemy to the playable character (PC) but is very significant to the game world as they give life to the game while establishing the reality in which the game takes place (Dille & Platten, 2007). The neutral characters in *The Last of Us* begin with

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their neighbour Jimmy, fellow civilians trying to escape the pandemic, military officials, and some bandits stealing from civilians. In *Until Dawn*, Dr. Hill and the Mountain Rangers are neutral characters. Nate's daughter Casey, Father Duffy, Sister Catherine, the old lady, Nate's boss Jameson, salvaging colleagues, the prisoners, and the members of the public in New Devon City in *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End* are neutral characters.

Conflict

Conflict is a vital element that fuels captivating narratives. According to Evan Skolnick (2014), conflict represents the clash between opposing forces that gives a story its significance and serves as its driving force. It arises when characters have desires but face obstacles or opposing forces that impede their progress. Skolnick emphasizes that a story must have at least one central conflict spanning its entirety to be considered a story. In video games, conflicts take on various forms and players actively engage in experiencing them. Player agency and engagement are prioritized, with multiple conflicts driving both the story and gameplay. Players are motivated to overcome these challenges and obstacles to progress and achieve victory. These conflicts serve as the driving force behind the narrative, providing meaningful goals for players to pursue and overcome. Without conflict, narratives in video games would lack depth and purpose, making them less engaging and compelling for players.

Types of Conflict

Conflicts in narrative come in two categories; internal and external conflicts. Internal conflicts come from within the character while external conflicts are those between a character and an outside force. Dille & Platten (2007) observe these types of conflicts;

Man vs. Self

Man versus self is an internal conflict where the character struggles with forces within him/herself. Dille & Platten ascertain the hero is at war with his demons, such as addictions, and phobias. Man versus self is an internal conflict that occurs when a character battles with inner forces. Dille and Platten highlight that the protagonist is at odds with their demons, such as addictions, phobias, fears, or unresolved past experiences that haunt their present. This type of conflict is evident in *The Last of Us*, where Joel and Ellie both face internal struggles. Joel, who lost his daughter due to a soldier's gunfire, is consumed by grief and is unable to fully accept her loss. For two decades,

he keeps her memory locked away, avoiding any mention of her and becoming angered by reminders. When tasked with smuggling Ellie out of the quarantine zone, he resists due to his haunting fear of failing to protect another child and his mistrust of authority figures. Ellie, having lost everyone she cared for, struggles with trust issues and is afraid of being abandoned again, leading her to keep others at arm's length. In *Until Dawn*, Josh experiences the trauma of losing his sisters during a party where his intoxication rendered him unable to help them. As a result, he grapples with hallucinations and mental instability, evident in his encounters with Dr. Hill. His psychological struggles drive him to plan a vengeful scheme against his friends as retribution for their perceived wrongs. Similarly, *in Uncharted 4: A Thief's End*, Nathan Drake is married to Elena and has committed to leaving behind his risky treasure-hunting lifestyle. However, when his long-lost brother reappears and the allure of adventure resurfaces, he finds it difficult to resist returning to his old ways. He deceitfully involves himself in dangerous exploits with his brother, betraying his promise to Elena in pursuit of his past desires.

Man vs Man

An external and a major conflict arises when the protagonist faces off against the antagonist. *The Last of Us* presents constant threats from various antagonists such as Clickers, bandits, hunters, and the Fireflies, who obstruct Joel and Ellie's goals. *Until Dawn* features tormentors like the masked man and Wendigos, constantly hindering the eight characters throughout the night. *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End* introduces formidable adversaries like Rafe, Nadine, Shoreline, and Gustavo, who offer significant resistance to Nate, Sam, Sully, and Elena. Nadine and Shoreline, aided by Rafe's intellect, always stay one step ahead on their path. These conflicts serve to challenge the protagonists' progress, heightening the tension and stakes in the narratives.

Man vs Nature

In narratives, the conflict of man versus nature arises when characters face the powerful forces of the natural world, such as storms or disasters. *The Last of Us* portrays a post-apocalyptic world where civilization has collapsed due to the Cordycep Brain Infection pandemic. Joel and Ellie must navigate abandoned streets, increased bandit activity, and the threat of cannibalism as they desperately search for the Fireflies to obtain a vaccine. The hostile environment constantly challenges their survival. In *Until Dawn*, characters are left stranded on the mountain during a

storm after a distress call for help from the Mountain Rangers. As hope dwindles, they must endure the torment of evil creatures until dawn. In Madagascar in *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End,* Sam insists on renting a 4X4 Land Cruiser. Heavy rains stagnate the roads, making them slippery and obstructed. At sea, Nate and Sam face a fierce storm while escaping from the pursuing Shoreline organization. The raging seas and limited visibility further endanger their escape, adding an extra layer of intensity and difficulty.

Video Games Narratives

Video games offer a unique narrative experience compared to other forms of storytelling. The player's actions are central to the story, making player interaction an essential component. This active agency distinguishes video game narratives from passive media consumption. Video games employ nonlinear and branching narratives, allowing players to actively shape the story as they play. *Until Dawn* exemplifies the use of branching narratives, where players face tough decisions that significantly affect the story. The butterfly effect concept emphasizes that even small choices can have profound consequences. While the branches ultimately lead to a predetermined end, players feel actively involved in shaping the story through their decisions. The game keeps players engaged as they anticipate the effects of their choices on trust, loyalty, and other character dynamics. These deep themes are equally conveyed to the player through the agency. While playing Joel in *The Last of Us*, players cannot help but sympathize with him as he loses his child.

Character development plays a crucial role in video games, as players often assume the role of the protagonist. The main character's obstacles are intertwined with their personal growth, providing players with a deeper connection. For instance, *The Last of Us* introduces Joel as a single father who loses his daughter, establishing the player's emotional investment. *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End* introduces Nate in a storm, setting the stage for the conflicts he faces throughout the game. Video games effectively transform character arcs over gameplay. Both playable characters (PCs) and non-playable characters (NPCs) experience seamless growth as the game progresses. In Until Dawn, character relationships depend on player decisions, either strengthening or fracturing connections. *The Last of Us* displays the gradual development of trust and loyalty between Joel and Ellie. *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End* portrays Nate's transformation from an adventurous individual to someone seeking a simpler life. The conflicts presented in the games help to shape

the characters as they go on. Being a key component of video games, the conflicts cannot be detached away from the story in these games.

Modern narrative-based video games excel in creating immersive settings for players to explore. The environments in *The Last of Us* reflect the post-apocalyptic world and enhance the player's mood. Settings in *Until Dawn*, such as the Blackwood Mountains, create a chilling atmosphere suitable for a horror story. *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End* features diverse settings that align with the adventure theme, matching the story's tone and providing believability. The success of modern narrative-based video games can be attributed, in part, to collaborations with experts from traditional narrative media. To enhance player engagement, these games have sought the expertise of filmmakers in storytelling techniques. For instance, *Until Dawn* was written by filmmakers Larry Fessenden and Graham Reznick, while *The Last of Us* and *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End* benefited from the creative writing and direction of Neil Druckmann, who has a background in film. On top of deep themes, branching narratives, creative character arcs, immersive settings, and conflicts, video games revolutionize storytelling by incorporating player agency. These elements contribute to the success and appeal of modern narrative-based video games where the players not only play the story, but also get to live the story.

CONCLUSION

The ongoing debate about the artistic nature of video games highlights their potential as a unique medium for storytelling. While opinions may differ, it is evident that modern video games contain significant narrative elements and deliver immersive narratives, drawing from various artistic elements. Their interactivity sets them apart from traditional media, allowing players to actively participate and shape the story. By incorporating linear and nonlinear storytelling techniques, video games offer a diverse range of narrative experiences. As the industry continues to evolve, the bar is raised even higher for video games that incorporate these narrative dispositions in their development. Further research is necessary to analyze and appreciate the narrative dispositions within video games and to establish their place as an art form.

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