Story Through Gameplay

Design Patterns in Journey and Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons

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Abstract

This is an analysis in which we played the games “Journey” and “Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons” with the goal of identifying game design patterns that were used to convey the games’ narratives. Using the method known as formal analysis we examined different situations in the games. Having identified which design patterns seemed significant we decided upon a template with which we would present our findings. We found three patterns that we deemed were important enough to be defined in this paper; “Player guidance through Non Player Characters”, “Manipulation of controller effects” and “Visual reminders of the Player’s Goal” and explain these thoroughly. In our discussion we examine the value of our findings and how effective we found our method to be.

Keywords: Gameplay, Narrative, Design Patterns, Characters
Sammanfattning


Nyckelord: Gameplay, Narrativ, Design monster, Karaktärer
# Table of content

Abstract ............................................................................................................................................. 2
Sammanfattning ................................................................................................................................. 3
1 Introduction ...................................................................................................................................... 6
   1.1 Background ............................................................................................................................. 7
   1.2 Research Question .................................................................................................................. 7
   1.3 Essay structure ......................................................................................................................... 7
2 Theory ............................................................................................................................................ 9
   2.1 Terminology ............................................................................................................................ 10
3 Method .......................................................................................................................................... 13
   3.1 Us as researchers ..................................................................................................................... 14
   3.2 Study Objects .......................................................................................................................... 14
      3.2.1 Journey ........................................................................................................................... 15
      3.2.2 Brothers: A tale of two sons ............................................................................................ 15
   3.3 Study Focus ............................................................................................................................. 15
   3.4 Execution ................................................................................................................................. 15
4 Results ........................................................................................................................................... 17
   4.1 The games ............................................................................................................................... 17
      4.1.1 Journey ............................................................................................................................ 17
      4.1.2 Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons .......................................................................................... 17
   4.2 Visual Reminders of the Player’s Goal .................................................................................... 19
      4.2.1 General Description ........................................................................................................... 19
      4.2.2 Study object example: “Journey” ....................................................................................... 19
      4.2.3 Study object example: “Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons” .................................................... 20
      4.2.4 Discussion ......................................................................................................................... 21
   4.3 Manipulating Controller Effects ............................................................................................. 22
      4.3.1 General Description ........................................................................................................... 22
      4.3.2 Study object example: “Journey” ....................................................................................... 22
      4.3.3 Study object example: “Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons” .................................................... 23
      4.3.4 Discussion ......................................................................................................................... 24
   4.4 Player Guidance through Non-Player Characters ..................................................................... 24
      4.4.1 General Description ........................................................................................................... 24
      4.4.2 Study object example: “Journey” ....................................................................................... 24
      4.4.3 Study object example: “Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons” .................................................... 26
      4.4.4 Discussion ......................................................................................................................... 27
5 Discussion .................................................................................................................................... 29
5.1 Study object comparison ................................................................. 29
5.2 Method Discussion: ....................................................................... 30
Conclusions .......................................................................................... 31
References ......................................................................................... 32
1 Introduction

As the both of us study game design at Södertörn University and have an interest in developing game narratives, we decided upon writing our bachelor thesis around the various ways one can convey story solely through gameplay. We chose to study *Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons (2013)* hereafter *Brothers*, and *Journey (2012)*. Both games have been very well received by game critics and earned a score of 90+ on Metacritic\(^1\). Here are some voices:

“I don’t want to be misconstrued as generic or uninspired when I say that *Journey* is an awesome game. In the most classical, archaic sense of the word, *Journey* is a beautiful, evocative and unequivocally transcendental experience.”

*(Joystick Mar 1, 2012)*

“The brothers' commitment to their goal and to each other is so strong, the various parts of this game so superbly crafted and woven together, that it's hard not to feel deeply touched when you finally reach the end of the road and see how deftly this game marries its gameplay to its themes in a way few have before.”

*(Giant Bomb Sep 19, 2013)*

*Journey* have won several awards. Some of the more notable are Game of the year\(^2\) and Innovation\(^3\) and the award *Brothers* have received is Best Xbox Game at the 2013 VGX Award Show\(^4\) and is nominated by Gamespot\(^5\) as Game of the year.

\(^1\) A well respected critic’s site for movies, games, TV and music.  
\(^2\) Awards from Game Developers Choice Awards, Interactive Achievement Awards, Joystiq, GameSpot, IGN, Entertainment Weekly, Kill Screen, Playstation Life Style, Russia Igromania,  
\(^3\) Awards from Game Developers Awards and Interactive Achievement. Nominated by BAFTA Awards.  
\(^4\) An award show for games.  
[http://www.spike.com/vgx](http://www.spike.com/vgx)  
\(^5\) A website for game reviews.  
[www.gamespot.com](http://www.gamespot.com)
1.1 Background

The narrative of games has evolved from the early text based games and arcade games. One of the methods that was used to convey some of the narrative was to use the arcade box art and manuals due to the technical limitations during this era of games (Juul, 2013). When technology advanced so did the games. The game creators could add more and more art, cut scenes and sounds into their games. Now they have evolved to big games such as Bioshock Infinite (2013) and The Last Of Us (2013). But the games still borrow from other forms of media like movies and books to tell their story (Alexander, 2013).

We are interested in the narrative of games and did a pilot study about narrative structures in games. During this pilot study we came across two games that was said to tell their story in a different and special way compared to other games and had gotten good reviews from game critics. We decided to take a closer look at these games to try and see what is special about the way they tell their narrative.

1.2 Research Question

What are some of the design patterns used to convey narrative in “Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons” and “Journey”?

1.3 Essay structure

This essay consists of seven major parts. These are “Introduction”, “Theory”, “Method”, “Results”, “Terminology”, “Discussion” and “Conclusions”. Under the “Introduction” heading we present the background of the study as well as its purpose. In the “Theory” section we present research that is related to this field of study and that has aided us in writing this essay. We then provide an elaboration regarding how we have conducted the study in the part named “Methods”. Armed with this knowledge, the reader can gain a full understanding for our research material and the data we have gathered in the “Results” section. We then present some of our own thoughts about the study under the “Discussion” headline. Lastly, we end the essay by presenting a conclusion based
on our results and the process through which we performed the study, this section is aptly named “Conclusions”.
2 Theory

The concept of narrative is a broad one and on that has taken many forms during the course of human history. Aristotle among the first known individual to discuss the nature of stories and to formulate an ideal for how an enjoyable story should be structured (Aristotle, 2006). In “Poetics” he presents concepts that formed the foundation for the three act structure (Field, 2006). As the name suggests it assumes that a story consists of three acts. The first act tells the beginning of the story, where most characters are introduced and the main conflict is presented. The second act consists of a series of trials which the protagonist must transcend. Finally, the third act is where all plotlines are resolved and where the main conflict is handled (Aristotle, 2006).

In “The Gameplay Gestalt, Narrative, and Interactive Storytelling” (Lindley, 2002) the author makes a distinction between narrative in games and in other media. In Lindley's meaning game narratives often make use of tools utilized in other media, such as the three act structure, but in a different way than films or novels do. He points out that the narrative of video games is often conflict based, conflicts being what motivate characters and drives the story forward. This is something that does appear in other media, but to Lindley it seems especially common in games. Games tend to focus on the second of these acts as this usually consists of a series of trials which can easily be translated to gameplay challenges. The central conflict that the entire structure revolves around is usually recursive regardless of genre, and the protagonist whose task it is to resolve them, is almost always the player character (Lindley 2002). While the obstacles within the acts are mostly passed through the player's interaction the resolutions of the three acts, such as the slaying of boss monsters or important conversation, are commonly depicted through cut scenes. The core conflict is resolved at the end of the game.

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6 Stronger enemies usually encountered at the end of a level
In our opinion, Lindley’s observations mainly apply to games telling their story in a traditional manner, through voice acting, written text and cut scenes. These games are not the focus of this study however, but we feel that it is important to be familiar with the techniques that are most common for conveying story in games to understand the alternative narratives of *Brothers* and *Journey*.

What, then are the channels through which a game developer can tell this story to a player and create a narrative? Richard Boon (2007) lists the tools he argues can be used to deliver narrative. These different tools are: Text, Recorded Dialogue, Static Images, Camera Cases, Cut Scenes (In-Engine), Scripted events and Cut Scenes (FMV). According to Lankonski (Lankoski 2010) the narrative can also be told through gameplay and character actions.

A game narrative consists of more than the so called formal narrative that can be delivered through these specific tools though. In his text, Boon also mentions a phenomenon he names Implicit Narrative which involves interaction of elements within the game system that causes effects that can be interpreted as story. It can be said that the story emerges from what the player experiences in the game, regardless of this being the result of narrative design or not.

### 2.1 Terminology

In this essay, we will be using some terms that might not be known to all readers. We have chosen to not produce our own definitions of these terms but to make use of those put forth by other researchers in the field of game theory. These are as follows:

**Gameplay** - In “*Worlds in Play: International Perspectives on Digital Games Research*”, Ermi and Mäyrä provides following definition for the term gameplay:

*“The gameplay experience can be defined as an ensemble made up of the player’s sensations, thoughts, feelings, actions, and meaning-making in a gameplay setting.”*  

(Ermi & Mäyrä, 2007, p. 37)

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7 Full Motion Video, meaning the use of pre-recorded visuals in video games
Make note of the fact that Ermi and Mäyrä mention "meaning-making". In our opinion this is closely tied to the characterisation and story of a game. Through gameplay, a player experience events in game and it is then up to him/her to interpret these events. This is important to remember when discussing a player’s interaction with a game which is the mayor reason we have chosen to make use of this definition rather than another.

**Narrative** - Richard Dansky (2007) makes this statement in regards to the meaning of narrative:

“For this book, we define narrative as the methods by which the story materials are communicated to the audience.”

(Dansky, 2007, p. 1)

**Design Pattern** - We have chosen to use the definition of Design Patterns presented by Björk and Holopainen in “Patterns in game design” (2005). Instead of using their pattern format, we use a simpler form that was constructed by Hullett & Whitehead (2010, p. 2):

• Noticing and naming common structures that produce specific types of gameplay,

• Describing the key characteristics of these structures and how they affect gameplay,

• Helping the designer address level design concerns in a logical way, and

• Allowing for different approaches to create the desired gameplay. “

(Hullett & Whitehead, 2010, p. 2)

**Story** – Dansky defines story in the following way:

“The story is what happens, the flow of the game that can be separated from the game mechanics and retold as a narrative.”

(Dansky, 2007, p. 2)
We feel that Dansky makes a very clear distinction between story and narrative. Since this definition makes it very easy to distinguish between the two it is the one we have chosen to use.

**Implicit Narrative** – Richard Boon provides this definition of implicit narrative:

> *Implicit narrative, often called emergent narrative, involves the interaction of elements within the game system to develop events that may be interpreted by the player as story.*

(Boon, 2007, p. 45)

While it can be difficult to differ between implicit narrative and narrative that has been planned by the developers we will attempt to focus our study on this form of narrative. This definition may seem similar to Ermi and Märyä’s definition of gameplay, but the essential difference is that implicit narrative also takes other systems in the game into account and not only a player's actions. According to Boon’s definition, it is not all meaning-making that can be concerned as implicit narrative but only the gameplay that also strengthens the on-going narrative in the player's mind.
3 Method

The field of game studies is still rather young and there exists many forms of methods to analyse a game. Two of them are Aarseth (2003) and Björk & Holopainen (2005).

Aarseth outlines a methodology for the aesthetic study of games. According to him there are three main ways one can gather information about a game. Firstly one can study the rules of the game, taking an objective approach and studying the game systems mathematically. Secondly, subjects that study the game can be studied and analysed. Thirdly, the researchers can play the game themselves. He also states that while playing games is paramount in understanding them, scholars should also make use of other sources when making their conclusions. Because of time constraints we are only going to play the games, take his opinion and search other forms of information like interviews with the creators and videos of others playing the games (Aarseth 2003).

In *Patterns in Game Design* Björk and Holopainen (2005) present a framework that describes the game on what activities the player can do in the game. They make the assumption that:

“Playing a game can be described as making changes in quantitative game states, where each specific state is a collection of all game values of all game elements and the relationship between them”

(Björk & Holopainen 2005, 8)

We are using the same method as Lankoski uses in his case study and dissertation (2005; 2010). We are going to play the games and give our interpretations and experiences of the game and present our patterns. When applying the formal analysis method the researcher plays the game to derive formal features. He/she finds out which actions are available to players, what their goals are and how other characters react to their behaviour. The researcher then looks at the meaning of these relationships and tries to find meaning in them.
But we will also use Aarseth's (2003) view on game analyses. We will also use the patterns that is presented in Patterns in game design (Björk & Holopainen, 2005) as an aide to find patterns in Brothers and Journey. We aren’t going to analyse the games using their method but use their presented patterns as a help to break the games down into more easily understood parts and to help us find patterns we may have overlooked.

3.1 Us as researchers

Prior to conducting this study, neither of us had any experience of playing Journey and Brothers. We had, however read articles reviewing the games which is what drove us to study these particular titles. Aside from the aforementioned games we both had much experience of playing video games and have enjoyed this form of entertainment for years.

3.2 Study Objects

We choose Journey and Brothers because game critics argue that they offer a different game experience especially in the narrative way. Journey we had heard about from friends and seen online reviews about the game. We found Brothers while we were working on our pilot study about narratology. In the video What’s in a game?: A discussion of gameplay and narrative (2013). The game critic Totalbisquit⁸ talks about his views on this subject and mentions Brothers as a very good example on how to mix gameplay and narrative and that it is the future of games.

This caught our eye and we got really interested in how Brothers tell its narrative through gameplay and what makes this game the future according to Totalbisquit.

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⁸ Real name John Bain, also known as TotalHalibut and The Cynical Brit. He is a game critic and commentator
3.2.1 Journey

*Journey* is an online adventure game in which players are connected to one another seamlessly with no knowledge of the others’ identity. It was released in 2012 for the PlayStation 3 and was developed by the California based studio ThatGameCompany⁹.

3.2.2 Brothers: A tale of two sons

*Brothers* is a single player adventure game in which the player controls two separate characters simultaneously, the brothers that the game’s title alludes to. Brothers was released in 2013 and developed by the Swedish company Starbreeze Studios¹⁰. The game is available for PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 and Pc. Brothers is an adventure game about their quest to find a cure for their sick father.

3.3 Study Focus

For this study we have chosen to focus on the player’s interactions with the game and the emergent story that is created through their actions. While we are aware that other aspects of the game can also create implicit narrative, such as various graphical elements, animations and sound we have chosen to focus on this subject since we both study game design and not computer graphics or sound design.

3.4 Execution

Both of us made sure to experience the entirety of each game three times. During each of these playthroughs we worked individually, discussing our findings only afterwards. When experiencing the games for the first time, our goal was to only gather our initial impressions in an attempt to investigate which aspects of the works that stood out the most and were the most apparent. As soon as we felt that we had a better understanding of which particular patterns we wished to

⁹ More information about the studio can be found here: [http://thatgamecompany.com/](http://thatgamecompany.com/)

¹⁰ More information about the studio can be found here: [http://www.starbreeze.com/](http://www.starbreeze.com/)
focus on we played each game a second time with the goal of studying the different ways these patterns have been integrated in them. When playing the games for the third time, we were attempting to discover additional material that would help strengthen our reasoning and flesh out the descriptions of the design patterns presented in this paper.
4 Results

4.1 The games

4.1.1 Journey

You play as a robed figure never knowing what you really are. The player starts with the character sitting in a vast desert and the goal for the player is to reach a mountain that looms in the distance. The way to the mountain takes the player through several chapters and each chapter presents an obstacle that must be overcome. In our opinion the game is a rather easy game to play and a beginner would be able to complete it without trouble. The game does not focus on the obstacles so much as the experience you get from traveling to the mountain. The creators further enhance this feeling through the option to play online. If you choose to go online the servers will randomly pair you with another traveler so you can experience the game together. The only way to communicate with each other is through the interact button (also known as shout or ping). When the button is pressed the character emits a small white transparent bubble and a music note that the other player can see and hear. This is also used for interacting with the cloth creatures and to activate stone pillars. The bubble gets bigger the longer you hold the button but when reaching max limit which is done in under a second the bubble gets released. 

Journey is a short game that can be completed in two hours and the player cannot die, the only fail state is when you as the player falls down and need to go up the pillar again. The game saves automatically saves after each chapter is completed.

4.1.2 Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons

The first impression of the world is the idyllic eighteenth century village you start in. It feels happy, safe and not threatening. But as we continue the quest and get farther and farther away from the safety of home we realize that this is a fairytale world with trolls, giants and fantastic creatures. The communication in Brothers is devoid of words both in text and speech. The sounds that characters in the game use are best described as flavorful gibberish. The games combine this gibberish with gestures, postures and reactions to communicate.
controls are somewhat unusual in this game because you control both brothers at the same time, the older brother with the left analog stick and the younger brother with the right stick. They both have an interaction button that is used for interacting with NPC, items, physical feats and to help each other. According to the creators they refer to this type of controls as one player co-op.

The two brothers are trying to get to a tree which can cure their sick father. As they journey they encounter obstacles in the form of puzzles and enemies they must overcome. These obstacles focus more on the player being able to control two characters at once, rather than making the puzzles and enemies difficult. The game saves after each chapter and uses a checkpoint system. After you have completed a task there is a checkpoint so you never have to complete several tasks in a row if you fail.

In this section we will present our findings. By studying multiple occurrences of the same narrative tools we were able to find some common characteristics which we then used to create the bases of our patterns. While explaining the nature of the patterns we have defined we will also present examples from each game, these are among the game sections that created the foundation for our patterns. Each pattern will be described in the same manner, the text being divided into these four sections:

- **General description**, where we provide a short explanation of the pattern’s nature.
- **Study object example: Journey**, where we present a section in *Journey* in which the pattern is utilized.
- **Study object example: Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons**, where we present a section in *Brothers* in which the pattern is utilized.
- **Discussion**, where we discuss the positive qualities inherent in the pattern and give our opinions on the examples from the games.
4.2 Visual Reminders of the Player’s Goal

4.2.1 General Description

In both *Journey* and *Brothers*, players are often reminded of the protagonists’ goals, the reward they hope to win by completing their journey. This is done by either showing the destination they are moving towards in the distance or by letting characters display visual representations of the goal such as the murals in *Journey* or the parchment in *Brothers*.

4.2.2 Study object example: “Journey”

While analysing *Journey*, we found that the clearest example of this was the fact that the mountain can always be seen towering above the horizon during the first part of the game. The peak is often depicted on many of the murals that appear during a majority of the game’s cut scenes.

![Figure 1: The peak of the mountain is clearly visible in the distance.](image)

When the player has progressed through the tutorial part of *Journey*, they reach a rock statue at which they can activate a cut scene. During this event, the player is shown a fresco depicting the mountain they are travelling towards. When the cut scene has ended the player walks through a passage before entering a deep valley. To progress, players must use the speaking abilities of their character on
different pieces of cloth around the level which will cause small cloth creatures to build a ramp leading out of the valley. When the puzzle has been completed, players can travel up the ramp and continue towards their destination. As they reach higher altitudes and the camera displays areas above the valley, players will see the iconic mountain on the horizon.

Figure 2: The bridge puzzle in the valley from which the mountain cannot be seen. When ascending the ramp players will see the mountain on the horizon.

4.2.3 Study object example: “Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons”

In Brothers, the elder brother often displays a parchment on which the spring of life is drawn. This usually occurs when one of the player characters interact with other sentient beings in the game world.

After the very first section of the game has been completed and the brothers have successfully brought their father to the town healer, they walk outside and encounter a non-player character\textsuperscript{11} hereafter NPC. The character is a young man, standing in the player’s way and blocking the path the brothers must take. If the player walks up to the man with the younger brother and uses the “activation button”, he will mutter angrily and stomp the ground. If approaching the NPC

\textsuperscript{11} In game character that the player cant control.
with the older brother, however, he will produce the sheet of paper and try to desperately convince the young man to let them pass.

Figure 3: The older brother displays the parchment, reminding the player of his/her ultimate goal.

4.2.4 Discussion

Visual reminders of the Player’s Goal can serve a dual purpose, such as in the example from Journey. When players see a distinct landmark on the horizon it keeps them focused on the main goal of the game while also acting as a subtle reward for the completion of a challenge. By showing the landmark in frame and letting the player see that they have gotten slightly closer to it, the player feels as if they have made progress towards reaching it. In these short play experiences, we believe that it is paramount to narrow the focus of the story down. To give the characters a clear goal that the observer is constantly reminded of can potentially be an effective tool for doing this.

We believe that the implementation of this design pattern causes players to better understand the motivations of a game’s protagonists. Constantly presenting them with the goal of their quest will also remind them of the problem that can be solved by reaching said goal which in turn increases their feeling of agency.
4.3 Manipulating Controller Effects

4.3.1 General Description

By changing the way player characters react to the player’s input, it is possible for designers to draw focus to a particular aspect of these characters. This is done most efficiently by first allowing the player to interact with the game world through a set of specific actions with specific variables attached to them and then changing the qualities of these actions. For the change to seem meaningful it is important that players have grown accustomed to the way they control their character(s).

4.3.2 Study object example: “Journey”

In Journey, this design pattern is utilized at the very end of the game when the player has reached the summit of the mountain. The goal is to finally step through the crag that has been the destination of the player throughout the game. It is impossible for the player to return from the plateau they have reached as they will be suspended in air if they walk back over the edge and will remain so until they jump up again. The only way is forward. When approaching the

Figure 4. The player characters arriving at the top of the mountain

white light emanating from the crag, the speed at which the player character moves decreases. Even if the player would give such input that earlier would have caused the traveller to move at its maximum speed, the pace at which the
character moves will not be near that speed. Instead of racing forward, one walks into the light slowly and solemnly.

4.3.3 Study object example: “Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons”

After the cut scene that depicts the older brother’s inevitable death in Brothers, only the younger brother can be controlled by the player. Having removed one of the characters and thus effectively half of all the actions players could take before, the designers of Brothers has made certain that players notice the change. The death of the character does not only affect what the player sees on the screen but also impacts him/her directly since the options they have in the game have been severely limited. The player has an easier time relating to the younger brother’s loss since, in a way, it is a loss for them as well. Having buried his older brother, the player character returns to the town in which the game began. Here, the puzzles are all solved by using the dead brother’s “activation button”, which will cause the controller to vibrate and the younger brother to be able and complete feats that had been impossible before. It also conveys the fact that the younger brother has grown and changed as a person during the journey. As Joseph Campbell (2004) would put it, he has gone through the entire process of metamorphosis and now returns to his home to impart this knowledge on others, such as his father.

![Figure 4: The younger brother reaches the ladder, a task that previously required the assistance of the older brother.](image)
The goal of the scene that follows is to bury the older brother by dragging his corpse into the grave and then closing it up with dirt. The younger brother however, does not move as he did while the older brother still lived. When walking, the character hangs his head and sobs audibly at regular intervals. The developers have also chosen to lower the walking speed to a fraction of what it was earlier in the game.

4.3.4 Discussion

As these elements come together, we argue that they have the potential of conveying the emotional state of the character in a quite powerful manner. Our opinion is that utilizing this pattern can cause players to be more likely to focus on the deeper meaning of a scene or a plot device. When something that is essential to the way we experience a game is modified, players cannot help but pay attention to it.

4.4 Player Guidance through Non-Player Characters

4.4.1 General Description

We noticed that both games uses NPC (Non-Player Character) to guide and help the player move forward. The games uses their NPC a bit differently. We choose to call this occurrence Player Guidance through Non-Player Characters. In *Journey* they are mostly used as guides that the player can choose to follow if they wish and in *Brothers* they are also used as a narrative device.

In *Journey* the NPCs are not as tied to the game mechanic as they are in *Brothers*. In *Journey* the player have the choice to follow or not but in *Brothers* the NPCs are more tied into the game and must be followed or used to be able to complete the game.

4.4.2 Study object example: “Journey”

The carpet creature is first encountered in the third chapter of the game. When you first encounter this creature you come across what looks like a toppled statue with tattered cloth waving in the wind.
When the player gets close to it and uses the ping ability the cloth repairs itself and the box opens. Out from the opening a carpet creature appears. It flies around the character charging the scarf and then flies away over the desert. As it does that it beckons the player to follow with a ping and a sound that reminds of a dolphin.

Figure 6: The Creature flies away over the desert

When the player follows it pings to keep the player following and it leads to another toppled statue with tattered cloth. Here the player releases several more
cloth creatures and they all fly around pinging and making sounds. One of the creatures swoops down and picks the player character and gives him a lift up the steep sand dune. The pack will eventually guide the player to a valley with several ruins of towers and bridges. The creatures shows the way to where the player start to ascend the pillars. As the player ascends the tower they will encounter three points where they cannot continue on their own. At each of these points there is a carpet creature waiting for the player to interact with it. When the player interacts they swop down picks up the player character and drops him of at the next level.

4.4.3 Study object example: “Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons”

In *Brothers* a player will meet several NPCs during the boys’ quest but only a few follows and helps them. We will focus on two of the NPCs that join the journey for a short time - the troll and the young woman. The brothers encounter the troll soon after exiting the village in chapter one and the young woman late in chapter five.

The troll is sitting alone at his table sobbing as the brothers carefully go closer. At the table there are two plates and the players see two beds with hearts on them. This are clues that the troll is missing someone. He notices the brothers, gets up and waves hi and the younger brother waves back. The older brother unrolls the picture of the tree that he carries with him throughout the game. The troll scratches his head and then point towards the mountain in the background, then gestures for them to follow him. The troll goes to the side of a cliff and stand there with his arm stretched out waiting. The brothers needs to be close to the troll if the player wants to interact him, when interacting the troll picks up one brother and tosses him over the gap and then the next brother is tossed. The next obstacle is a ledge that the player cannot get to. After a short period of time the troll have caught up with the brothers. He hunkers down on a rock and stretches out his hand. When the player interact with him he lifts one brother after another. The newfound companion helps the player scale the mountain using his arms and body as a bridge or by tossing them over gaps until they reach the summit.
In chapter five of the game the brothers come across some savages that have caught a young woman. As a player we save her and the trio dashes to safety. During this part of the adventure the player gets some inclination that something is not right with this woman because she can do feats of strength the brothers haven’t been able to do during the their quest two examples that stand out. The first example is a jump over a large gap the other event is when she moves a boulder from the opening into her lair. In the town there is a large gap that one of the brothers need to go over and he does this by climbing on a wall around it while the woman is able jump over this. The other event takes place after the trio have managed to navigate out of the town. She leads the brothers to a small cave entrance with a big boulder in front of the opening and then proceed to roll it away needing no help from the brothers. As players we reacted to these events because they conflicted with our perception about what was possible as a human in the game and made us question her motives.

4.4.4 Discussion

Populating a game world with characters is an effective way of making it seem alive. For the player to become immersed in such a world, we are of the opinion that the player – NPC interaction must feel believable. It is also a very powerful tool when it comes to characterization. In a wordless game, the only indication of a character’s opinion of another is their actions. This is especially clear in Brothers where the different actions the two protagonists perform, as reactions to NPC in the world, is a major factor in the way we as players perceive their personalities.

The difference in how NPC is used in Brothers and Journey is how attached/identified one feels to them and how they tie into the gameplay of the game. In Brothers they manage to do this very well with the troll following and helping. When you play it feels like he is there with you, as a player, and not just a game object that tags along. Because the game does not have any text or dialog in the game one is forced to watch the characters and interpret their gestures this forces the player to focus more on the NPC to see what it is doing, and what it is trying to communicate. As players this method gave us two different reactions to the lady and her feats of strength. One of us reacted with distrust
and felt something was not right with her while the other thought it was poor game design and didn’t think much about it. The method of giving clues through NPC characteristics is not a foolproof way to make sure the player understands what is going on, as we can see from our two different reactions. Our opinion is that it is an effective method to immerse the player with but difficult to implement in a game.

In *Journey* the NPC work more like breadcrumbs on a string that the game pulls away when the player gets close until the player character is in the right place. This type of guidance works well to guide the player forward, or to increase the pacing of the game. In *Journey* the game world is a barren desert with little life and as players when we saw something move and “ping” it sparked our curiosity to follow it.
5 Discussion

To use gameplay as a game’s main method of storytelling is not the only way to convey a game’s story. However, it does open up certain venues of narrative that are unique for this approach and indeed to digital games as an art form. This is the very reason we were drawn to the subject and are still fascinated with it. Players will experience each moment of the story in a way that is unique to them while still receiving the same major plotline as every other player.

While we reason that everyone has their own view on aesthetic experiences, due to their individual frames of reference, we find that works such as Journey and Brothers have the unique ability of conveying a coherent narrative while still allowing the player to interpret many aspects of the experience freely.

According to Josef Fares (FZPlay, 2013), the creative director of Brothers, the value of this narrative form lies in the fact that the character development is an interactive process. Players will experience the same events but it is up to each of them to construct the mental image they have of the characters. In his opinion shorter, more streamlined experiences are the way forward as far as game design is concerned, and this is the way forward.

5.1 Study object comparison

In the article The Gameplay Gestalt, Narrative, and Interactive Storytelling (Lindley 2002) Lindley proposes a new way of looking at gameplay. His proposed view is that gameplay is as a pattern of perceptual, cognitive and motor skills. Depending on how difficult the gameplay is, it takes away some or all of the focus for interpreting and understanding the narrative in a game.

We think this is an interesting idea because Journey and Brothers are both “easy” games where the gameplay is not difficult to master. In these two games the player is able to focus more on picking up the story and experiencing it. It is maybe because of this easier gameplay that the games are able to deliver their narrative so well.
In our opinion we think that *Brothers* manages to deliver their mix of narrative and gameplay better than *Journey*. In *Journey* the gameplay feels a little disjointed from the narrative but in *Brothers* the gameplay and narrative feels more like one entity. In *Brothers* every little interaction tells a little more about one of the brothers and game world. While in *Journey*, the majority of the story is told during the cut scenes in between the chapters, and very little through interacting with the world.

We feel that we got more attached to the two brothers when we had to explore through gameplay how they are as persons. One example is that instead of just telling the player that one brother is not good at handling cats, the game shows this if the player goes and picks up a cat with the younger brother. It curls up in his arms and purrs and if the older brother picks up the cat it tries to get away. This method of giving information passively to the player is a good alternative way to the common style of actively telling the narrative through dialog and text.

5.2 Method Discussion:

The method we chose was well suited for this form of analysis. We do however feel that we could have reached a deeper understanding of our study objects had we been willing to spend more time on our analysis, which in turn would have given us more material for writing this essay. We have not applied Aarseth's method in all the ways he suggests, and only applied the first stage of it during our research. This constitutes that the data presented in our “Results” section only reflects what we, the researchers experienced during our play experiences. It is therefore hard to argue that our selection of which data to focus on was made entirely objectively. By observing other players and taking into account the opinions of game critics and the games' creators we may have discovered other data points. We might also have been able to focus on the narrative patterns that a broad range of players found prominent and interesting rather than basing the selection solely on our own opinions.
Conclusions

The goal of this study was to answer our research question “What are some of the design patterns used to convey narrative in Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons and Journey?”. As this is a fairly open ended query it may appear difficult to gauge how successful we have been in answering it. We did indeed manage to define a number of patterns which were the ones we felt were the most prominent and interesting. These were: “Player guidance through Non Player Characters”, “Manipulation of controller effects” and “Visual reminders of the Player’s Goal”. But we are of the opinion that relevant research does not only study existing phenomena but also provide material for future studies. By providing ways of describing how one can describe design patterns related to narrative with the theoretical background presented in this study and our template for describing patterns we hope that this essay has a value in a greater scientific context. By using the terms and methods we have put forth to identify and define design patterns, we are confident that one has access to useful tools for this purpose.
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