

The image features a decorative border made of white, stylized, swirling lines on a black background. In the center, the word "MARIONETTE" is written in a bold, serif font. The text is enclosed within a decorative frame consisting of horizontal lines and ornate, symmetrical flourishes at the top and bottom, resembling stylized wings or floral motifs. The entire composition is centered and balanced.

MARIONETTE

SUMMARY

Marionette is a narrative-driven, psychological horror game, where the players take on the role of an actor trapped in a cursed theatre, forced to perform against their will. The game dynamically shifts based on the player's choices, perception and defiance of the script.

The game offers 2.5D point and click side scrolling gameplay, combining branching narrative paths, environmental storytelling, surreal horror and some small puzzles. This game emphasises player agency through narrative prompts, where every action— spoken line, gesture, or act of rebellion— affects the environment, story progression and the nature of the protagonist's identity.

Marionette will appeal best to fans of narrative rich, atmospheric and experimental horror games, aiming for ages 17+. It may also appeal to those who love indie horror, theatre or more surreal, artistic games.

I wanted a unique approach for this game, using a theatrical horror setting as a stage for psychological horror. Every set, spotlight and curtain shift is meant to lean into the larger metaphor of identity and control. There's also the script-based choice system, where dialogue and actions are framed as performance cues. Players need to choose between following the script, improvising or rebelling— each with consequences that alter the stage and story in real-time.

I also feel as though this game has a meta-narrative storytelling approach, leaning into fourth wall breaks, potential audience reactions and unreliable narrators/ narrators (the NPCs). Players are going to be made to feel as much a performer as they are a participant, making them question their own control.

This game's narrative has character driven psychological themes, looking into themes of creative control, identity and even emotional abuse in artistic spaces. A lot of the NPCs are the personification of rich character archetypes and some of the inner conflicts of those characters.

Ludology Vs. Narratology- Game Vs. Story:

Ludology theorists believe that games are a system of rules and that the narrative is secondary to this or considered an emergent narrative- an example of utilising narrative like this is the Dark Souls series. Narratology theorists believe and argue that games function as strong pieces of storytelling media, using the game mechanics to enhance the narrative- an example of this would be The Last of Us series. This theory allows for the exploration of how a game's structure can impact the way that a story is told- whether that is a linear, branching or emergent narrative. Potential theorists that I could research into in regards to this theory are; Jesper Juul, Gonzalo Frasca and Janet Murray.

Interactive Storytelling and Player Agency:

There are plenty of different ways for player agency to be handled. Of course, different narratives impact player immersion and emotional engagement for these narratives. This theory mostly focuses in on branching narratives- shown in games such as; Mass Effect and Dragon Age- compared against emergent narratives- for example; The Sims. Potential theorists that I could research into in regards to this theory are; Janet Murray and Marie-Laure Ryan.

Trends:

Current trends in the game industry- AI (use for non-playable characters) but brings in the problem of it being used for narrative writing, character profiling- taking away jobs.

Cloud gaming becoming popular- allows people to stream games without needing all the expensive hardware.

Game Types:

Soulslikes have come from action RPGs that have notoriously difficult combat, stamina management and methodical gameplay. These games are usually challenging in the sense that the enemies hit incredibly hard and dodging/ blocking their attacks are crucial for the player to progress in any capacity. The stamina-based combat requires patience and precise timing. The world and environment is usually interconnected in these games as well, often including shortcuts and hidden areas. There is also, usually, a loss of resources when the player dies but there is usually a chance to collect them- for example; in Elden Ring, there is the chance to collect your 'souls'. Examples of Soulslike games are; Dark Souls, Bloodborne and Lies of P.

A Sidescroller is a game where the camera follows the player from a side-view perspective, typically moving left to right. These games are usually 2D movement with platforming, combat or puzzles. They usually feature level-based or interconnected worlds-Metroidvania Sidescrollers include backtracking as is the nature of Metroidvanias. Some Sidescrollers focus on precision platforming (Celeste) while others lean into combat and exploration (Hollow Knight). Examples of games like this include; Little Nightmares.

Game Genres:

Horror Games:

Again, this genre delves into plenty more subgenres, but the main focus is to create fear and tension with gameplay. This could lean towards survival horror, psychological horror and action horror, all having various different takes on the horror genre, however I personally find that psychological horror causes the most fear and tension rather than action or survival horror because I feel that giving the chance of combat and a weapon to the player takes away the tension slightly. There are so many good titles in the horror genre including; Silent Hill, Amnesia, Dead Space and The Evil Within.

Indie and Experimental Games:

Many different indie games blend genres which offer more innovative ways of storytelling as well as more innovative mechanics. The developers are experimenting with different mechanics and how they merge together which leads to new subgenres and therefore more unique gaming experiences. Some really good titles include games like INSIDE which is a platformer game that is blended with psychological horror, or Hollow Knight which is a Metroidvania blended with a Soulslike.

Narrative Types:

There are usually three different narrative structures in games, and in writing a narrative overall, and these are linear, branching and emergent narratives. The design of the narrative plays such a crucial role in shaping the player's experience within a video game, and these structures offer different levels of player agency, as well as the depth of the story.

Research



Background Outcomes



Character Outcomes



Other Outcomes

CONCLUSION

Marionette stands as a deeply conceptual and emotionally resonant psychological horror game. Intended to blend theatrical themes with narrative agency to immerse players in an oppressive world of performance and control. With compelling characters like The Jester and The Director and the haunting environment of The Grand Marionette Theatre, the game is intended to create a setting that is somehow both intimate and unsettling. The mechanics, for example the defiance/ obedience rose system, the interactive props, and even the branching dialogue all reinforce the central themes of the concept: identity, manipulation and self-expression.

While focusing on narrative depth, art direction and unique structure, Marionette places itself between gameplay and narrative. The concept challenges players to navigate physical spaces as well as psychological and moral boundaries, making the game all that more immersive. It offers a potential experience where every line, act and cue may lead to freedom, or complete entrapment.

As a university project, Marionette offers a feasible opportunity to explore world building and character design, UI development and interactive storytelling. The groundwork laid here— through narrative, visual development and symbolic systems— make a strong foundation that could easily be expanded on— which I plan to continue with until it is a full-fledged indie release.

Marionette is a project about reclaiming autonomy through art. It invites players to not just play a part but decide whether they will follow a script or ultimately choose to break it.