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Is anyone else tired of blatantly anti-religious cliches in games?

(self.Games)

submitted 7 months ago by Sloshy42

Full disclaimer: I am a religious person, but this doesn't have a significant bearing on what I'd like to discuss here. The following discussion prompt has less to do with my own personal beliefs and more to do with a perceived laziness in storytelling.

Today I'd like to talk to you about something related to religion in video games that I was recently reminded of when I decided to pop in Final Fantasy X/X-2 HD Remaster this evening. I haven't played the original PS2 game in a long time, so I decided to listen to the bonus content on the new edition, mainly an audio drama (Final Fantasy X - Will). It's a short, 30-minute episode containing a prologue to a possible follow-up story for fans, and while I found the premise engaging, I was bothered significantly by a conversation between two characters.

Without spoiling anything, in Final Fantasy X and many other games, usually JRPGs, there are questionable-at-best religious organizations that often house corrupt, scheming villains whom the player must defeat or otherwise fight against. More often than not, the religion or occult beliefs presented are completely fake, invented for the sake of controlling people, profit, and so on.

In the episode in particular, a new character has a conversation with Wakka, a main character from the first game, about the Yevoners, a group of

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people who follow a reformed kind of religious teaching. Wakka insists that the religion allows its followers to overcome their weaknesses and do good to better themselves and others through altruism, but the new character (who is also the narrator) insists on their weakness being *because* of their religion. She says how they need to branch out and learn how to live without it, instead of unifying together under what she sees as a harmful waste of time.

Normally in storytelling, I'd be perfectly okay with characters disagreeing with each other like this. Characters with differing experiences and worldviews create moral ambiguity which allows for a greater artistic freedom from the storyteller to present ideas and compelling situations instead of lazily preaching to his audience.
Unfortunately, from what I remember from Final Fantasy X and many, many other games like it, this is not the case and it bothers me that we haven't moved beyond such a painfully obvious cliche. The episode in particular did not actually develop any kind of meaningful religious-themed dialogue between the characters or add a new layer of depth to the story; rather, it repeated the underlying themes of the past two games through pandering and snark, which left me with a bad taste in my mouth and reminded me of so many other games that also fail at this kind of storytelling.

Religion is such a wide, varying resource of historical context, meaningful stories, wise words, and cultural experience that it's such a shame that it's often reduced to a strawman villain that characters campaign against because they're written to be thoughtlessly evil. You know the formula that JRPGs usually go by, for example:

- Characters are faced by a religious or religiously-inspired entity controlling people through tradition, belief, and loyalty in

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order to control the world.
- Villain is literally god, or becomes god (or godlike) through some mystical means near the end
- Characters expose the lies of the villain but they're too late as he's about to win
- Cue speech about how "humanity can achieve anything when we unite together" or some such sentiment, often with a blatant or heavily-implied condemnation of religious or cult-like behavior (though the game usually labels all religion as destructive)
- Characters defeat the god-villain through brute force like some anime-styled reading of Nietzsche
- Everyone lives on happily ever after because of no more controlling, evil, religious influences

Even in non-JRPG games like Assassin's Creed, religion being a force for evil and misdeeds is one of the main themes, though the way it goes about it is significantly different than most examples so it has a bit of political intrigue to go along with it. Other games, like Dante's Inferno, are painfully-obvious exploitations of religious writings by turning them into something the creators would have been absolutely repulsed by (a gory, sexy hack-'n-slash) instead of actually building upon the themes of the original source material.

Now let's all leave our differences in belief at the door here and think about this in terms of quality of storytelling alone. I don't care if you think religion is literally the worst thing ever or if you go through a dozen rosaries every day; we're all mature adults (hopefully, partially) and we can see this all for

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what it is: boring, lazy, unoriginal, pandering, and even potentially insulting. Really, even if you are in complete agreement with a lot of the sentiments expressed in these game narratives, don't you think you're being pandered to? Don't you think we deserve better, more thoughtful and complex narratives that don't simply tell you what you believe you already know by force-feeding it in the most overdone ways? What enjoyment is there to get from a narrative that simply tells you what to think, no matter what it is?

I'm going to diverge from video games for a brief moment to talk about what I personally felt was a brilliant way to use a heavily religious narrative without pandering or creating strawmen villains: Noah, the 2014 film by Darren Aronofsky (dir. of Requiem for a Dream, The Wrestler, Black Swan, etc.). Noah is based off of the traditional Jewish story of *Noah and the Ark* where God floods the sinful world, leaving Noah, his family, and a small selection of animals to repopulate the Earth and start over fresh. The interesting thing to note about Noah is that it was written/directed by who I am told is a Jewish-raised atheist. That is, he does not explicitly believe in a god, but he has cultural religious connections that have clearly influenced him and his work. This is especially prevalent in Noah, a religious story to begin with that is significantly changed and altered for "artistic interpretation" purposes.

In the film, Noah struggles with the thought of humanity's innate sinfulness. How evil humans are to one another, how greedy and selfish and violent they are, etc. He is lead to believe that not only does God want to flood the world, but that God is doing it because He has grown to hate humanity itself. He tells his family on the Ark that they are to be the last human generation, going so far as to threaten murder. Obviously, none of these details occur in the original story, but they were not carelessly inserted. Throughout the film, Noah is portrayed as this crazed, religiously

driven monster of a man who sees no hope for the future, while his still-religious family and even the main antagonist share their own views. The religious nature of the story is not used to portray an obvious villain or a thoughtless exercise in moral pandering for hours. Instead, the story being left up in the air creates tension and genuine concern for both the characters as well as the underlying meaning of the story, which changes over time as God's intentions are finally revealed near the end.

Noah got very positive reviews from critics and it is among my personal favorite films of 2014, but there are quite a few people who are vocally opposed to it. The argument I'm making regarding the film here is not to say "hey, this is a good film" (because we might strongly disagree), but rather, it's to say "hey, this film attempts to use a religious context in a smart, approachable way for people of all faiths and beliefs." The underlying message of the film can be appreciated by anyone, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Atheist, you name it, because it's not designed to be pandering to a specific worldview and is rather designed to be appreciated by people who love to meditate on the actions and words of characters instead of taking them at face-value like so many of these games seem to ask.

To conclude, I'm not saying that anti-religious plotlines are inherently bad. If you want to write a story that showcases your own beliefs, go for it! More power to you! Rather, I am saying that there's just so little variety with how the subject of religion is approached in storylines, mainly in video games such as JRPGs, that it becomes repetitive and downright insulting to partake in. I can think of at least a dozen games off the top of my head that have this problem, and it's not specific to games either. As a religious person myself, I find stories that pander to my own beliefs or never challenge me to be boring and insulting, so how

come I don't hear more concern over the lazy, overdone "religious villain" plot devices in so many game stories?

Reddit, what are your thoughts? Are there any games that use the idea of religion and spirituality in a more thoughtful, approachable way without pandering to any (pro- or anti-religious) worldview? How has this kind of storytelling affected you, if at all, and how would you approach the subject given the chance?

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[–] **_MadHatter** 13 points 7 months ago

Are you saying that games such as FFX and Assassin's Creed are pandering to anti-religious world view?

Why? Having corrupt religions in the game doesn't mean the game is pandering to anti-theists. That is ridiculous conclusion. I never thought FFX's message was 'religions are bad.' At least in my opinion FFX was about a story about a son who was following his father's footsteps.

I am not completely familiar with story of Assassin's Creed, but weren't religions actually corrupt during those time periods? Not to mention almost everyone were religious, not just villains.

permalink

[–] **Sloshy42** [S] -9 points 7 months ago*

Assassin's Creed spoiler

In truth, it's definitely an interesting story and the implications are engaging, so it's far from the list of worst offenders. It still rubs me the wrong way, though, how I didn't notice a single person in the game being positively religious. Even Victor Hugo, who was strongly anti-religious IIRC, had a variety of characters in Les Miserables that didn't all converge on a single plot concept ("religion is bad").

I appreciate your comment and I'll add a bit more tomorrow about FFX as it's getting very late for me right now.

permalink parent

[–] **_MadHatter** 9 points 7 months ago

You have to understand the world they build does not need to coincide with their belief. That is like saying devs must be encouraging stabbing people because the game is about assassins.

permalink parent

[–] **Sloshy42** [S] -3 points 7 months ago

That's not what I'm saying at all. I'm just saying that it's a lazy form of storytelling that leaves no room for thoughtful discussion. There are ways to portray religious leaders as corrupt without becoming harmfully, stupidly preachy.

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[–] **_MadHatter** 7 points 7 months ago*

> *Dev team's religious beliefs is inherently suspect.*

That is literally what you said. Since devs created 'atheistic world' therefore dev team's religious beliefs is inherently suspect. That is nonsensical logic. Developers of Postal aren't psychopathic murderers. Developers of Witcher 3 aren't racists or sexists.

> *harmfully, stupidly preachy.*

. . . Again, I don't know about Assassin's Creed series, but FFX was not at all 'harmfully, stupidly preachy.' You are basically arguing that many games are propaganda for anti-religious views, but I have not seen any games of that nature.

permalink parent

[–] **[deleted]** 7 points 7 months ago

Sorry man but your reasoning is staggeringly backwards.

If Ubisoft or whoever creates a world in which _____ happens, that does not mean that they believe or support _____. Are Rebellion an anti-Semitic company because they included Hitler in their Sniper Elite games? Do Game Freak believe Pokémon actually exist? Get a hold of yourself mate. It even says, to prevent your sort of interpretation, that the game is crafted "from people of different worldviews".

permalink parent

[–] **brunnon** -1 points 7 months ago

Assassins Creed games are about a fictional story intertwined with real world history. The portrayal vs endorsement example gets much more murkier in that example.

As you've already Godwin'ed. How about, instead of rewriting history so that the Church is an evil secret organisation trying to rule the world through the use of mysterious artefacts, you created a game where Hitler was a noble hero trying to save the world from an ancient evil?

I doubt the portrayal, not endorsement argument would hold much water in the shitstorm that would come your way if you wrote a game like that.

permalink parent

[–] **Sloshy42** [S] -2 points 7 months ago

When did I ever say that they actually believed that? I'm saying that it's a cliche with no breathing room. It's not an actually thoughtful plot point and instead just relies on this kind of straightforward strawman like I outlined earlier. The problem isn't that they've included bad religious people. The problem is that its portrayal of religious people is overwhelmingly negative in a way that doesn't do itself any favors.

Imagine a game or a movie where every single religious thing was overwhelmingly positive and the non-religious people were portrayed as selfish, greedy, and controlling. Would that not be a problem as well? You'd probably say how unrealistic it was or how it's pandering to a pro-religious worldview, right? See, I don't want that either. Religion is used as a generic villain cliche in the games without any significant depth to it either way. That's the problem I see. If they're going to be critical of religious people, they should at least be fair and mature about it.

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[–] **[deleted]** 6 points 7 months ago

> *The problem isn't that they've included bad religious people. The problem is that its portrayal of religious people is overwhelmingly negative in a way that doesn't do itself any favors.*

This is exactly the problem: you align not doing "itself any favors" with the negative portrayal. Whether that's because of a religious bias is irrelevant - you're overlapping a narrative lack of imagination with the religious context because you find it troubling. Meanwhile there are thousands of plots bereft of religious content that are equally unimaginative or uninspired, and conversely, a deference to religious themes has - in the past - emerged very interesting discourses surrounding the religious or narrative content.

> *Religion is used as a generic villain cliche in the games without any significant depth to it either way.*

So is the Russian villain archetype. So are allusions to compensatory self-enlargement, or the obliteration of the old in favor of the new. Yet, in spite of their occasional failings, all of these tropes have produced successful narratives. Bioshock Infinite's exploration of religious themes was *incredibly* interesting and gave a wonterful context to just about every detail of Columbia.

The issues you raised with Dante's Inferno really underpin where I think you're misinterpreting this issue. It's a poem that I'm incredibly fond of from both religious and poetical perspectives.

> *Other games, like Dante's Inferno, are painfully-obvious exploitations of religious writings by turning them into something* ***the creators would have been absolutely repulsed by*** *(a gory, sexy hack-'n-slash) instead of actually building upon the themes of the original source material.*

When has this *ever* been (intellectual property aside) a relevant factor in adaptation? Religious or not, the use of subject content should **never** give a fuck about the opinions or dispositions of the content's originator. That would be a total disservice to whatever adaptation / transformation entails after the fact. Do you think that Greek playwrites would be offended by the modern churnings of deux ex machina because it's no longer exclusive to the introduction of Gods, or that we should even care that they would have been offended? Of course not! It's nonsense. Narrative material and devices are *never* immune to recreation or

adaptation, nor should they be. If you weren't religiously inclined this post may well have been titled "is anyone else tired of blatantly anti-Russian cliches?" and it may well have met less criticism, not on the grounds that Reddit is atheistic, but because it's a more trudged up issue than that of religion.

> *If they're going to be critical of religious people, they should at least be fair and mature about it.*

Why? Even *if* AC is an expression of antireligious themes, why do they need to care about the other side of the fence? Academic papers don't automatically start citing possible objections or retorts: they present what they think, because that's their function. They have absolutely no reason to be mature or fair about anything. Did the bible have a small print at the end that said "uh guys by the way, God might not actually exist... different strokes for different folks". It didn't have to, nor did Ubisoft.

permalink parent

[–] **Sloshy42** [S] -1 points 7 months ago*

> *Meanwhile there are thousands of plots bereft of religious content that are equally unimaginative or uninspired*

I never said this wasn't the case. Is there a problem with pointing out a specific trope overuse that implies that I don't care about other lazy forms of storytelling? Am I not allowed to care about a specific form of lazy storytelling enough to write an essay about it?

> *Bioshock Infinite's exploration of religious themes was incredibly interesting and gave a wonterful context to just about every detail of Columbia.*

I've never played Infinite though its been on my list. I'm not saying archetypes are bad, just that they're very prone to abuse and lazy execution. If Infinite is as compelling as you say I should give it a try, but based on my personal experiences with the first couple games I'm a bit doubtful that it's really as thoughtful as anyone says.

> *Narrative material and devices are never immune to recreation or adaptation, nor should they be.*

What I tried to get across about Dante's Inferno wasn't that, by changing the source material, they were suddenly doing it a disservice. My analysis of Noah shows that I'm more than open to the idea of artistic reinterpretation of source materials. Heck, I usually find the movie versions of books better in the end because of how they tend to trim the fat and streamline the message, like the film adaptation of Fight Club significantly changing the ending.

Rather, my concern is a form of criticism. Imagine if, say, someone made a porno based on Winnie-the-Pooh. A. A. Milne would be absolutely devastated, and I'd happen to personally agree. They'd certainly have a right to make said

porno, but that doesn't mean that it's free from criticism. Adaptations should, ideally, improve upon the original source, right? Whether this comes from rewriting the story, adding background details that flesh out the plot and characters, or creating a deconstruction that shows flaws in the original premise and conclusion. Dante's Inferno does not do any of this. It takes a story and twists it for financial gain, ignoring the moral and ethical subtexts present in the original work by being focused on easily-marketable "adult themes", for lack of an appropriate way of describing them. It's not insulting because it changes the original story, it's insulting because it chooses to ignore what made it so famous.

> *why do they need to care about the other side of the fence?*

Think of it like a sci-fi story. Good sci-fi creates situations that are inherently thoughtful and provide a variety of different perspectives that end up converging together as the plot moves. These stories often have an underlying moral or ethical "point" to them, but even if you disagree with them you have to respect just how thoughtfully they tried to come to their conclusion, yes? I'm not saying that they should care about "the other side of the fence" when dealing with religion; rather, I'm asking why they feel the need to hang around said fence at all. If religion is going to be a major theme in a game, it doesn't have to be this all-or-nothing preaching with no room for thought. Instead, it can integrate it into the story in a way that doesn't portray everyone as strawmen in order to forcefully "prove a point". Sci-fi works because it asks the reader or viewer to think about historical and technical consequences in the contexts of a changing world without beating you over the head with the "point" until they've convinced you to agree. Religion is just... control, brainwashing, lame and overused plot tropes that don't actually move the medium forward or provoke interesting discussion.

EDIT: I'd also like to add, in no way am I opposed to playing games that feature these lazy religious strawmen villains and "humanity can achieve anything without Gods" message (Xenoblade, Bayonetta 2, FFXIII series, etc.). I just groan whenever it comes across because it's just a copy/pasted narrative trope with no thought. They don't give me a reason to care or have any investment in the story at that point because they insist on beating me over the head with this morality that they've already figured out by writing the game so that there's no room for my own thoughts. It feels like I'm being force-fed a narrative instead of choosing to chew on it myself like so many better games that have meaningful stories that don't use these lazy tropes, religious or otherwise.

permalink parent

[–] **jacenat** 7 points 7 months ago

> *Don't you think we deserve better, more thoughtful and complex narratives that don't simply tell you what you believe you already know by force-feeding it in the most overdone ways?*

Note: I haven't played FFX-2 or listened to the audio drama. I also have not seen Noah.

Funny you bring this up in combination of FFX. Let me tell you my (atheist) view on this game's plot/world.

I see a world that was devastated by misuse of technology. This world has turned more inward. It also has become more spiritual. Tradition, spirituality and community drive most people in this world.

Then you (Tidus) come along. You are plucked from a world that stands in stark contrast to this one. You are individualistic and jumpy. You don't really understand how the world can be this way ... but then you start to travel with some of them. You see their plight, observer their discipline and feel their resolve. After a bit, you think you understand them and how they were shaped by their surrounding. You also understand that their way isn't necessarily bad, it's just different.

So it's not so bad for a while, even though there is struggle. Then you find out that some people manipulate the belief system in order to secure the status quo and at the expense of others (lives). You start to campaign against this and ultimately defeat the wrong doer(s). But in the process, you discover that you are actually an integral part of this belief system. You are litterally made of belief. And as people start to shed their old belief in favor for new ones, you disappear.

What I took away from this (some of which were also clear to me before) was that religion isn't inherently bad. For a good part it can positively influence people and drive them. Though they still are based on authority and thus prone to manipulation. Also it told me that religion is contradictory in nature (exemplified in the person of Tidus) and dealing with this conflict can make you stronger in accepting fate or asserting your individuality. I think this is Wakka's role in the game ... overcoming this contradiction.

So for me, the plot of FFX is largely religion positive. The bad guys are part of the religion, but they also violate the core principles of that very religion, making them not really good examples of that faith. Other characters (Yuna, Wakka) are better examples of that religion, even if they ultimately work to end it. Also, this in no way does mean the end of religion as a whole in the world of FFX. The end purposefully leaves open what beliefs develop after what happens in the big battles. But you still can see Yuna use the religious greeting when adressing the crowd in the final cinematic, hinting that maybe just a reformed belief took the place of the old religion.

I still recognize your argument as being somewhat valid for games overall. Though I think you have to view it in context. Video games are played mostly by young males in secular societies. It's easy to imagine them being attracted to settings without social stigma, discipline and authority. I think producers and writers just cater to the audience. They can, like in the case of FFX always include moral relativism or positivism towards religion, but it's their work and they can do what they want IMHO. And I like to think there are plenty of games that are also technology/science critical (Portal, Watch Dogs, Deus Ex, ...) to counter balance religion critical games. Games that focus on positivism towards either subject is hard, since most gameplay systems feed off conflict and this conflict is easier to stomach with an antagonist. Maybe that's your real gripe? That games can't do without anatagonists like many stories in other forms do?

permalink

[–] **Sloshy42** [S] -4 points 7 months ago

As for other games, the major difference for me is that in something like Portal or Deus Ex, they act as a form of thoughtful sci-fi. Good sci-fi by its very nature isn't critical of science or technology in general, but rather it poses interesting, thoughtful conundrums as "what if?" situations. We aren't limited to absolutes because anything we want to portray is inherently thoughtful to begin with, like in the recent film "Ex Machina" that deals with the idea of artificial intelligence. Even if you end up disagreeing with your interpretation of the film, it becomes an inherent point of discussion as a thoughtful, meaningful exercise.

With religion, a mostly unchanging force in the world, people are usually limited to making stories about how religion saves the day or threatens to destroy it in blatantly obvious terms. There's no room for thought, no careful analysis, no ambiguous characters, no intelligent discussion. You can't take a game like Xenoblade or Tales of Symphonia and have an intelligent conversation about religion in the game because it's portrayed as this inherently evil force with no room for argument. In something like Ex Machina, however, you can have a genuinely good discussion about whether or not the film's portrayal of artificial intelligence was realistic, possible, probable, and then how that would impact society in general.

permalink parent

[–] **ScruffCo** 5 points 7 months ago

I don't really find this to be the case...but I don't play any JRPGs. It's not surprising they wouldn't contain any deep spiritual themes though considering the majority of Japanese people are nonreligious, like most of Asia. There are plenty of dialogue heavy RPGs that do contain spiritual themes, a lot of BioWare titles for instance.

permalink

[–] **Sloshy42** [S] -5 points 7 months ago

I haven't played Mass Effect or Dragon Age yet but I did play a bit of Baldur's Gate (which is D&D so it basically approaches religion as mechanics from what I saw). I've always been meaning to get into their games, but I don't know where to begin that would hold my interest. What Bioware titles do you think have the most genuinely intriguing storylines? I don't care about spoilers if you really need them, but remember to mark them for others.

permalink parent

[–] **ScruffCo** 2 points 7 months ago

Have you played Knights of the Old Republic? That has the best storyline for sure. Mass Effect 1 is a close second for story but the gameplay is pretty clunky compared to ME2 and 3.

permalink parent

[–] **Sloshy42** [S] 1 point 7 months ago

Both of those are very near the top of my backlog so I'll be sure to give them a try! Thank you so much for your honest suggestions.

permalink parent

[–] **ScruffCo** 1 point 7 months ago

Yeah Kotor easily has the best good vs evil dynamic with the story and the dialogue options you can take. The Jedi/Sith can definitely be viewed as religious groups and the writers do a nice job at presenting both sides of the moral coin. Goes on sale all the time for like $2.50 on steam.

permalink parent

[–] **Merdrach** 1 point 7 months ago

Planescape: Torment. It's outdated in terms of graphics etc now, but if that doesn't bother you then play it and play it gooood.

permalink parent

[–] **Obadtza** 1 point 7 months ago

Planescape: Torment wasn't developed by Bioware but by Black Isle Studios. It uses the same engine as Baldur's Gate but different developers. Most Black Isle games are worth playing or at least trying in stark contrast to most Bioware games. Though not by Bioware, Planescape Torment is well worth playing if you're looking for an intriguing story in fact it's hard to think of a better game to recommend.

permalink parent

[–] **DrunkeNinja** 4 points 7 months ago

JRPGs have shown religion in many ways. The early dragon Quest/Warrior games had your character go to church to heal, though the US censored that until more recent releases.

Religion is shown in many games as the bad guys because religion has been, and continues to be, used that way in real life. People manipulate religion to control people and some games show that.

Dante's Inferno had you fighting Satan and his minions. It was an action game in the style of God of War.

permalink

[–] **Sloshy42** [S] -4 points 7 months ago

I thought about mentioning Dragon Quest because I was pleasantly surprised with how the game handles religion. It's just a force in the background and the games never seem to make much of a statement about it at all. Heck, in IX you play as an angel or something from what I remember, and the games were always so cheerful in comparison to other JRPGs. It's kinda funny how a game that barely even utilizes religious themes makes me feel good, which really says something about other JRPGs, yeah?

> *People manipulate religion to control people and some games show that.*

Like I've implicated in my post, this is true and I agree with the idea. It's just so overwhelming to me that it feels lazy in its execution. Every major religious leader in these games is corrupt, people are rarely ever shown actually doing good from being religious, and in the FFX series in particular people are portrayed as being sheepish for even following a religion, original, reformed, or otherwise.

The problem to me seems like the game is just setting up its own evil religious pins to knock down instead of actually creating a thoughtful story. It sets up the characters with no moral ambiguity to play into whatever underlying suspicions the main characters have because they end up being little more than preachy about it. The problem isn't religion so much as it is the way it's approached. I mean, imagine if I made a game that had the exact opposite message: religion is good. I'd write all of my characters to conform to this worldview and I'd leave no room for thought by portraying the characters the stereotypical ways I'd want people to perceive them. Religious leaders would be kind and generous, while non-religious people would be

selfish and rude among other things.

Obviously this would be unrealistic and it might bother some people, which is part of my point. By reducing these characters to caricatures, they stop having depth and become a way to lazily preach from my pedistal. The game isn't thoughtful or challenging, it's just telling you what I want you to think through obviously biased messages.

> *Dante's Inferno had you fighting Satan and his minions. It was an action game in the style of God of War.*

I'm talking about in terms of story. The way the game was advertised alone says a lot, with the game being advertised as this brutally gory, "adults-only" experience without being a more thoughtful and engaging work like the story it was based on. It doesn't use Dante's writings to produce a genuinely inspired work of content, it exploits it for cheap thrills and violence/sex appeal. It's a negative way to approach religious themes because of that, I believe.

permalink parent

[–] **MyLifeInRage_** 2 points 7 months ago

Sane people who don't believe in greater powers are unlikely to hire a band of mercinaries/similar thinkers and become the plot of a FPS game. Similarly they are unlikely to be the mega-villain in an RPG; someone with terrible power and a cruel plot. You want to stop it, you want the challenge to be great.

If the villain is completely sane and doesn't hold any overarching ideals/morality then they're not going to sell well in a AAA game. It isn't popcorn enough to have the major boss being a single dad trying to sell some dope on the side. That coke-fiend satan-worshipper with a child army of fanatics is going to be more challenging and "fun" to defeat.

It's safe money for the producers. Just like Noah.

permalink

[–] **Sloshy42** [S] -9 points 7 months ago*

This is very true and I appreciate your input. Obviously some kinds of generic-ish stories need to exist in terms of the villains, but it's distressing that I see so little genuine thoughtfulness these days in game storytelling. The only time in recent memory where I can think of a game that provoked honest, intriguing discussions beyond "this is why I liked/disliked this thing" was Catherine from Atlus. Meanwhile in TV, it feels like there's a new show or two every year that everyone is talking about for reasons beyond being easily approachable. Take a look at, say, Breaking Bad and The Wire where nearly every major character has huge, disturbing flaws and conflicting ideals. It not only creates drama, but even though they were complicated and therefore "not easy to sell", they still became some of the most critically successful shows known to man.

Other than Catherine, some games like The Walking Dead and Gone Home provoked similar conversations among people for their story-focused nature, but it still feels like they're too few and far between, which is unfortunate. I'm not saying that *every* game needs to stop pandering to people, but it would be great if the ratio was significantly skewed a bit, don't you think?

permalink parent

[–] **g_b** 0 points 7 months ago

Most people play games to relax, to have fun. (Assumption)

I don't think there is a market for a more intellectually challenging stories in games,

especially on the topic of religion which is a pretty big and complex subject.

permalink

[–] **brunnon** -1 points 7 months ago

It's something of an elephant in the room whenever I see diversity in player characters brought up in articles.

Where are the positive religious main characters? Games with a character who draws upon their religion, does not renounce their faith and are not betrayed by their church (or find out that their religion is evil). There are very few examples of main characters with real world beliefs that fit these criteria.

Given the percentage of the world that are active in religion, it's rather stark that despite playing games for 30 years, I would struggle to get onto my second hand if asked to count how many positive Christian, Jewish, Muslim etc. characters I can name.

Comparing religion in games to religion in films and TV is even more stark. In film we can have Arnie finding/restoring his faith by blowing up the devil with a grenade launcher and yet roll our eyes for it being such an over-used trope. In gaming however, if characters are religious, they invariably renounce their faith or find out the church is evil. Then of course there's the crazy religious fanatic stereotype.

It's invariably influenced by the beliefs of the people in both industries. Lots of directors, writers and studio heads in the movie industry are religious whereas in the gaming industry , religious people are a rarity. I remember reading that Bioshock Infinite was originally going to be much more heavy handed in portraying Christianity negatively and it was only team members typing up their resignation letters that led them to rewrite aspects of the games message to be more about Comstock twisting of religion rather than the religion itself.

When 85% of the world is part of a religion and a significant portion of the 85% are active worshippers, the lack of positive portrayals of religion in gaming is at odds to the user base that actually plays games. Religious diversity in gaming should be no less important than race or sexual identity yet there's a near complete silence on the issue from the gaming media.

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