

Game Narrative Review

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Game Title: Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 4
Platform: Playstation 2
Genre: Role-playing, Social simulation
Release Date: July 10, 2008 (JP) / December 9, 2008 (NA)
Developer: Atlus
Publisher: Atlus
Game Writer/Creative Director/Narrative Designer: Katsura Hashino (Director), Azusa Kido (Scenario and Social Link Planning Leader), Yuichiro Tanaka and Akira Kawasaki (Scenario Writer), **US Localization:** Martin Britton, James Kuroki, Mai Namba, and Jensen Kamiya (Translator), Nich Maragos (Lead Editor)

Overview

Persona 4 is a Japanese Roleplaying Game (JRPG) in which a group of high school students are trying to capture the culprit responsible for a chain of murders and kidnappings that began plaguing their town starting April 11, 2011. In the town of Inaba a rumor is going around that by looking at a TV screen at 12:00 AM on a rainy night the face of the viewer's soulmate will be revealed. The player takes control of a second year high school student who is forced to move to the countryside and live with his uncle's family for an entire year while his parents are overseas on business and, as a result, becomes inexplicitly involved in the supernatural chain of murders. Victims that are thrown into the TV are attacked and ultimately killed by their Shadows, or manifestations of their repressed psyches, and are found dead in the human world on days of fog. The protagonist and his team of Persona users, must brave the horrors and unknowns of the mysterious TV world populated by Shadows, beings that represent the generally negative emotions and psyches of mankind, in order to seek the truth behind the chain of mysterious murders and their connections to this mysterious rumor, rescue the victims, and uncover the identity of the culprit responsible.

The story of Persona 4 is told over the span of a single Japanese school year and the player must balance the investigation and dungeon-crawling exploration of the TV World with the character's school and social lives and other after-school activities. One such endeavor is to spend time with people and form "Social Links," or bonds with others, which not only provide bonuses when creating new Personas but also serve as the driving

force behind character development, character growth, and further understanding and connection with the game world.

Characters

- **Protagonist:** The nameless, silent protagonist whom the player uses to interact with the game world. He has no spoken dialogue in the game with the exception of declaring attacks in battle and his overall personality and his attributes reflect the decisions that the player has made throughout the course of the game. The protagonist is a second year high school student who moves to Inaba to live with his Uncle Dojima, the lead detective on the mysterious murder investigation, and cousin Nanako while his parents are overseas. He is the first character in the game to awaken his Persona abilities and is the first of the party members to enter the TV World. As a result he becomes the de facto leader of the Investigation Team.
- **Yosuke Hanamura:** A main party member and classmate of the protagonist, he can be considered the jokester of the group, has a boyish enthusiasm, and often lets his emotions get the best of him and acts without thinking. Like the protagonist, he moved to Inaba from the city the year before because his father is the manager of Junes, the local chain department store from which the Investigation Team meets to enter the TV world. He is in love with a third year student name Saki Konishi who ends up becoming the second victim of the bizarre murders. He and the protagonist enter the TV world to investigate her death and after confronting his Shadow forms the Investigation Team with the protagonist. Yosuke's Shadow reflects his inner desire to be special and for something exciting to happen so that he can escape the boredom of the rural town he hates. Should the player complete Yosuke's Social Link, he will come to term with Saki's death and come to accept Inaba as his precious home.
- **Chie Satonaka:** A main party member and classmate of the protagonist. She is a tomboy that is obsessed with kung-fu movies. She is the first character in the game to befriend the protagonist and is with him and Yosuke when they first stumble upon and are initially trapped in the TV world. At first she has no desire to be involved with the TV world until her best friend Yukiko becomes a victim and is forced into the TV world. After confronting her Shadow, which reflects her jealousy of Yukiko's femininity and her dominatrix desire to control Yukiko, she awakens her Persona and joins the Investigation Team in order to catch the culprit responsible for throwing Yukiko into the TV in the first place. Should the player complete Chie's Social Link, she will realize that she genuinely wanted to protect Yukiko and that her obsession with kung-fu was a means to obtain the "power to protect [the] people" she cared about.
- **Yukiko Amagi:** A main party member and classmate of the protagonist. She is a calm and shy introvert who displays a peculiar sense of humor around her closest friends. She is regarded as the class beauty and is the heir apparent to the ownership of the Amagi Inn which the first murder victim was staying before her

death. She is the third victim overall in the investigation and the first victim that the player, Yosuke, and Chie save. She is nearly killed by her own Shadow, which signifies her sense of being trapped in a birdcage and resentment at the fact that her destiny had been decided for her, but once she is saved she helps find the Investigation Team with the protagonist and the others. Should the player complete Yukiko's Social Link she will initially try to find a career that will take her away from Inaba and the responsibility of running the inn but soon finds that she cannot leave everyone who supported her throughout her whole life and as a result decides to succeed the ownership of the inn, but of her own volition and not because she is being forced to.

- Kanji Tatsumi: A main party member and first-year underclassman of the protagonist. He is the quick-tempered and brash son of the textile shop owner. He becomes the fourth victim overall and the second one that the protagonist and the Investigation Team saves. He is really good at arts and crafts, but he receives a lot of ridicule from women for being girly. This conflicts with his sense of masculinity and sexuality as he develops a complex where he prefers men over women. This complex is reflected by his Shadow. Once he is saved and hearing about the situation Kanji decides to join the Investigation Team and get vengeance on the person responsible for putting him through that suffering in the TV World. Should the player complete Kanji's Social Link he will come to terms with the fact that the "other him" is a part of him and that he should not care about what other people think but instead take pride in his skills and be with those whom accept him for who he is. The game never fully states Kanji's sexual orientation and that topic is left open to viewer interpretation.
- Rise Fujikawa: A support character and a cheery "girly-girl" first-year underclassman of the protagonist. Prior to moving back to Inaba she traveled the world as the former pop-idol "Rissette" but decides to retire after growing tired of being in the spotlight. Although very flirtatious with the protagonist, she harbors an inner fear of not having a true self to begin with. Shortly after arriving in Inaba she is kidnapped and is nearly killed at the hand of her own Shadow which represents her resentment of being typecast as an airhead popstar and sex icon. Once she is saved by the protagonist and his friends she joins the Investigation Team and lends a support role in battles. Should the player progress through Rise's Social Link she will at first be happy at her retirement but, after hearing news concerning a fellow rising idol and receiving letters from her dearest fans, she comes to regret quitting and decides to become an idol again reasoning that "Rissette" is a part of her.
- Teddie: A main party member and mysterious inhabitant of the TV World who promises to help, and eventually join, the Investigation Team capture the culprit responsible for throwing people into the TV so that the TV World will become quiet again. He is first met by the protagonist, Yosuke, and Chie upon entering the TV World on their first visit and for the most part acts as the perverted, comic-relief mascot character of the game, especially in the fact that he "grows" a

human body to interact with the human world, but his showy behavior masks the true turmoil within. It is revealed throughout the course of the game that he is a Shadow that eventually developed a conscience and desire to interact with the human world and form bonds so that he would no longer be lonely. His shadow reflects his empty existence and belief that there is “no real me.” Teddie’s Social Link is unique in that it progresses automatically throughout the course of the game and deals with him coming to grips with his existence and sense of belonging with his friends.

- Naoto Shirogane: A main party member and underclassman of the protagonist. She is a world-renowned detective and begins investigating the murder case shortly after Yukiko’s kidnapping. Calm, cool, and calculating, she dresses like a boy and hides her gender in order to garner the respect of the police which she views as a male dominated profession. She confronts the party several times throughout the course of the game and is able to deduce the Investigation Teams involvement as well as the culprit’s modus operandi for selecting the victims. She willingly becomes a victim and, as a result, must confront her Shadow which represents her conflicted views on gender roles in society and fear of being treated like a child. Upon being saved by the protagonist and his friends, she awakens her Persona and becomes an invaluable asset to the Investigation Team. Should the player progress through Naoto’s Social Link she will rediscover her joy in being a detective was in solving problems and helping people and she should continue to do so despite who she is and accept the fact that she is herself.
- Taro Namatame: He is a former government official who is forced to resign and help run his family delivery service after his affair with TV reporter Mayumi Yamano, the first victim in the murder case, becomes public knowledge. As a result of his disgrace he becomes a defeated, depressed, and overall timid person. He is later revealed to be the one responsible for sending people into the TV World by using his job as a cover to knock his victims out and send them through a plasma TV concealed in the back of his truck. He is caught after kidnapping Nanako. After Namatame is captured the player can progress along different endings. Should the player spare Namatame it is revealed that he was not responsible for the deaths of Ms. Yamano or Saki Konishi but instead was led to believe that the only way to “save” the people shown on the Midnight Channel was to send them into the TV World even though he was unaware of the dangers inside.
- Tohru Adachi: The primary antagonist and true culprit behind the mysterious murders. He is a detective at the police department and is Dojima’s junior partner. For a majority of the game the player is led to belief that he is a blundering, incompetent idiot who seemingly accidentally slips crucial information pertaining to the investigation at opportune moments. However, this incompetency was merely a ruse to conceal his manipulative and sadistic nature. The party uncovers the truth about his involvement in the murders. Not only was he responsible for using his ability to enter the TV World to kill Mayumi Yamano

and Saki Konishi because they rejected his feelings for them, but he also tricked Namatame into embarking on his venture to “save” the victims on the Midnight Channel. Ultimately, he reveals to the Investigation Team that he was motivated out of pure boredom and belief that this rotten world was better off fusing together with the TV world where everyone would become Shadows and live on pure instinct. He is ultimately defeated and arrested so that he can pay for his crimes.

- **Izanami:** The true antagonist and brilliant mastermind behind the TV World and the Midnight Channel. Disguised as the gas station attendant that the player meets at the beginning of the game, she is the one responsible for bestowing upon Namatame, Adachi, and the protagonist the spark to enter the TV World and awaken their Persona, as well as spreading rumors of the Midnight Channel to achieve her goals. She is rather cold and emotionless and seeks to fulfill mankind’s desire, which she interprets as turning humans into shadows which act on instinct and avoid suffering by blissfully being unaware of the truth.

Breakdown

Overall, Persona 4 offers a compelling narrative that will have the player enthralled with what will happen next. One problem that the game’s narrative suffers from is that it spends two hours establishing the atmosphere of the plot from having the player move in with his new family, establishing the player’s new school life and friends, and even more importantly setting the stage for the murder investigation that will drive the plot throughout the game before giving the player free reign on everything that the game has to offer. However, like many JRPGs the core engagement of Persona 4 is the focus on narrative and as such has a division between the player and the protagonist in order for the developers to tell a well-crafted story; in that vein the player has little influence on how the main narrative proceeds.

As mentioned previously, the story of Persona 4 takes place over the span of a single Japanese school year, in this case from April 11, 2011 to March 20, 2012. The player controls a silent, and initially nameless, second year high school student. The fact that the protagonist is silent is supposed to invoke a sense that the avatar is the player and therefore the player is able to promote their own views and opinions into the narrative. The protagonist is forced to move to the countryside and live with his uncle’s family for the entire school year while his parents are overseas on business and becomes inexplicitly involved in the supernatural chain of murders. Two victims, a TV announcer named Mayumi Yamano and a high school student named Saki Konishi, are found dead hanging from an antenna and telephone pole shortly after appearing on the supernatural Midnight Channel. The protagonist and his party accidentally stumble across the TV world, a mysterious world within the TV which is inhabited by monsters called Shadows, and deduce that the murders stem from the victims being thrown into the TV and are killed when attacked by their Shadows, or manifestations of their repressed psyches. The Investigation Team formed by the protagonist and his friends tasks themselves with uncovering the culprit behind the murders while simultaneously braving the horrors and

unknowns of the mysterious TV world to save rescue potential victims from the same fate. In general, the game takes place on a month-to-month, victim-to-victim basis in which a new victim or adversary finds him or herself secluded in a dungeon in the TV world and the player must defeat their Shadow before the deadline: the next day of fog. Each dungeon is unique and act as a manifestation of the inner turmoil that the victim is the root of the character's suffering. These flaws make the characters more relatable and more interesting as player actively partakes in the character's dynamic complex transformation and acceptance of their hardships. The Investigation Team throughout their search for the culprit are able to save Yukiko, Kanji, Rise, Teddie (although he was not kidnapped), and Naoto from their Shadows. All of them, along with Yosuke and Chie, accept their other-selves and awaken their Persona.

One area of the storytelling in which Persona 4 excels is the utilization of the mystery to build suspense and provide twists that the player would not expect. The simple act of leaving the question of, "Who is the murderer?" unresolved ensures that the player will remain invested in that part of the narrative throughout the course of the year, but this is only magnified because the game is constantly messing with the player's expectations. After the party rescues Yukiko, the player is led to believe that all of the victims are female and had a connection to Ms. Yamano but this theory is almost immediately debunked by the presence of the next victim, Kanji Tatsumi. With Rise's kidnapping the party deduces that the one commonality was that all of the victims had appeared on TV prior to appearing on the Midnight Channel but, once again, this is immediately debunked by the murder of the high school teacher Mr. Moronoka. The Investigation Team is able to catch his killer Mitsuo Kubo in the TV world and he takes full responsibility for all of the murders. At long last the killer has been caught, or so the player is led to believe. After several months of peace the story reveals to the player that Kubo, while responsible for Moronoka's death, was merely a copycat killer with no knowledge of the TV world. By keeping the player constantly on their toes with the identity of the murderer and his modus operandi the game not only ensures that players are entertained by the suspense but are also actively paying attention to how the story unfolds.

Things take a turn for the worst when Dojima, the player's uncle, accuses the protagonist of being involved with the murder-kidnappings. While the player is being interrogated, Nanako, Dojima's daughter, is kidnapped by the man responsible for throwing the people in the player's party into the TV, Taro Namatame. Dojima pursues Namatame in a high-speed chase but is severely injured in an accident while Namatame escapes with Nanako into the TV world. The group hunts Namatame down and after fighting a shadow-possessed Namatame monster captures him and returns to the real world with Nanako in critical condition and Namatame in custody. Both of them are taken to the Inaba Hospital.

The story for the most part is straightforward. The overall plot is pre-determined and many events are set to happen on certain days regardless of the actions taken by the player. For example, the player cannot adjust the deadline to save a victim no matter what they do. However, one of the most pivotal scenes in the game is reliant on the

choice of the players to determine the course the narrative will take. After Nanako dies the party, minus Teddie, confront Namatame in a rage and contemplate getting revenge on him by throwing him into the TV world with no means of escape and alone to be killed by his Shadow. Ultimately this decision falls onto the player. Should the player choose to kill Namatame the player will progress along the Bad Ending. In this ending Nanako dies, Teddie returns to nothingness, and, with the team unable to solve the mystery, fog encompasses Inaba which will ultimately bring about mankind's demise. Choosing to spare Namatame, however, will embark the player on the path to uncovering the identity of the true killer, Adachi. The Investigation Team pursues Adachi into the TV world where he admits to his crimes and explains that he was motivated by pure boredom and the twisted belief that mankind would be better off reverting to Shadows. After defeating him, Adachi is possessed by Ameno-sagiri, the God of Fog, who reveals that the fog will wipe out mankind. The party fights against Ameno-sagiri and after seeing their resolve and willingness to live in a world regardless of the truth Ameno-sagiri lifts the fog. Adachi willingly turns himself in and professes that he will take responsibility in the world that the player created.

The game flash forwards to the day before the player leaves Inaba and like the confrontation with Namatame in the hospital the player is presented with another choice that will influence the progression of the narrative. After saying good-bye to everyone the player can choose to return to the Dojima residence at which point the Normal Ending will trigger, but if the player chooses the right options when talking to Dojima and Nanako by the river the player will proceed along the True Ending to resolve the last unresolved element of the story: the mysteries of the Midnight Channel. In all honesty, the identity of the true mastermind is brilliant. The gas station attendant, the same one that the player met only once in an unvoiced cutscene in the first fifteen minutes of a 60-80 hour long game, is revealed to be the goddess Izanami in disguise and she provided the initial trigger for the game's events in order to fulfill mankind's desire which she interprets as a world enshrouded in fog, blissfully unaware of the truth. The party confronts her in the TV world but are unable to defeat her. Nearly defeated, the protagonist receives strength from all of the Social Links that he was able to max out during his stay in Inaba to create a new arcana, the World. The new Persona from this arcana the protagonist is finally able to defeat Izanami and, as a result, lifts the fog from the human world and returns the TV world back to its original state (not enshroud in fog). All three endings depict the party sending the protagonist off; the only variation is the mood and emotions expressed by the party and the protagonist's family in each case.

While Persona 4 has a magnificent plot, it is not the game's plot that sets the game apart from other fantastic game narrative experiences. The gameplay and narrative elements that truly allow Persona 4's story to shine are the amount of choices that the player is able to make, the characterization of the characters, even the NPCs, and how they are able to work hand-in-hand with the overall gameplay. As mentioned before, the overarching narrative of Persona 4 cannot be altered by the player no matter what choices are made, and the player has to keep in mind that there are certain days reserved for specific events and/or deadlines. For every other day the player is free to do as they see fit. In this case the act of choosing is taking advantage of video games innate ability to facilitate as an

interactive storytelling device. The player can perform Social Links, albeit as long as it's on a day that that particular Social Link is available, explore and grind for experience in the TV world, work at a part-time job to earn money, study and/or read to build the protagonist's parameters, etc. The sky is the limit in regards to what the player can do with his free time, but this freedom tends to lend itself best to forming bonds in Social Links if the player is looking to expand upon all of the stories the game has to offer. Social Links by themselves can be classified as over twenty mini-stories that explore the intricate lives and issues of the interesting characters inhabiting the world of the game and players have an extensive degree of freedom in shaping how these bonds develop. Facilitating and deepening the bonds with these various Social Links helps to enrich the player's immersion in the game world and expand the scope of the game's story beyond that of the self-contained murder mystery.

Strongest Element

The strongest element of Persona 4 is the confrontation with the party members' Shadows and the game's Social Link system. The greatest strength of Persona 4 is the degree of exploration and development of both main and minor characters. Story dictated confrontations with a victim's Shadow are memorable because they involve the character coming face-to-face with their inner id, faults, and aspects of their personalities that they would rather deny. Not only does this allow the player to introspectively reflect on their own personalities and motives, but the strength exhibited by the character in question as they awaken their Persona by accepting their faults and weaknesses provides insight of the character in question and makes them more real and believable. Social Links go a step further in that they provide the player the opportunity to become more involved in the tragedies and struggles. Each Social Link begins at level one and maxes out at level ten. Initially, the interactions are lighthearted in nature, and selecting which actions to take during Social Link events provides an added dynamic in developing the personality and character relation with the protagonist. But as the player continues to interact and form stronger bonds with their Social Links, character of the particular Social Link's issues and inner turmoil come to light. The one advantage is that their issues are so relatable and the characters themselves are so fleshed out and complex that the player cannot help but care for the characters. Altogether both experiences work in harmony to provide the player with a stronger sense of connection and attachment to the characters and add an extra aesthetic and sense of realism to a fantasy world.

Unsuccessful Element

Love it or hate it, Persona 4 falls into the JRPG aspect of being a story-driven game. At times, for the sake of presenting Persona 4's narrative, the game will take control from the player and force him or her to perform tasks in sequence. Several instances of this removal of control occur throughout the course of the game and at times ruin the sense of agency and flow of the narrative experience. Many choices that the player can make are entirely dependent on the five stats the player has at that point in the story. On the one hand limiting the choices a player can make based on these decisions makes sense; if the player neglects to study at night and increase their knowledge stat then it would make

sense if the player character could not answer a particular question or do well on a test, and having social links only be available on certain days of the week makes sense in that a lot of them are tied to club activities which only meet on certain days and not everyone is available 24/7. From a design standpoint it also makes sense to try and spread the social links throughout the course of the school year by requiring certain stat thresholds be met before they can be initiated. However, often times these limitations are imposed unconventionally.

For example, early on in the game Chie states, “I dunno, I guess that’s what draws people to you, or something like that,” and later that day a prompt will appear reminding the player that, “You haven’t yet asked Chie for her contact information.” If the player tries to answer with the responses, “Falling for me huh?” and “Ask her straight,” respectively he or she will be told by the game that they do not have enough courage, meaning their courage stat is too low, and thus must pick another option. In this case the illusion of choice is shattered because the game is forcibly and intrusively telling the player, “You do not have full control here.” If such a choice was meant to only be available in a second playthrough then it would have been best to not present the unselectable option at all. This lack of control issue extends to some extent to the overall pacing of non-“murder mystery investigation” scenes, especially the school festival later in the game, which cannot be skipped or paused. The problem arises in that these scenes can last for more than an hour which can be trying for players that are not ready for that time commitment and separation from the dungeon-crawling and social simulation aspects of the game.

Highlight

The moment in the narrative that stands out the strongest in Persona 4 is the confrontation the Investigation Team has with Namatame in the hospital. Prior to this confrontation, Namatame attempted to flee into the TV World after kidnapping the protagonist’s younger cousin Nanako. After tracking down and defeating a Shadow-possessed Namatame, the Investigation Team rescue Nanako and Namatame from the TV World and they are taken to the nearby hospital. Nanako dies and a grief-stricken party confronts Namatame attempting to flee the hospital. It is at that moment that the player is asked to make the difficult choice of whether or not to take a life. On the one hand it tests the bonds that the player has made up to that point as half of the group is for throwing Namatame into the TV, unlikely to ever get out, while the others are hesitant to go through such a plan. The rage and sadness expressed by the party members epitomize how much they care about the player, and the fact that the penultimate decision of whether or not to carry out the operation is entirely dependent on the player clearly demonstrates the faith and trust that the party is willing to put in the player.

Perhaps the main reason why this confrontation represents the strongest point of the narrative is that it epitomizes the theme of the game: Seeking the truth beyond the fog of deceit and falsehoods. On the one hand, the game goes to great lengths to persuade the player to enact vigilante justice. Yosuke especially goes to great lengths to point out that all of the evidence up to that point points to Namatame as the one putting people into the TV and that he can’t be convicted in the real world for the murders. The appearance of

Namatame's shadow on the TV in the hospital room only further serves to reinforce the idea of killing Namatame by depicting him of having no remorse for his actions and the willingness to continue "saving" people. On the other hand the party, and by extension the player, is left in the dark about Namatame's motive and his side of the story. Naoto phrases this dilemma elegantly when she says that there is a difference between failing to understand and failing to listen. Both options lead to the fact that the player has agency in what type of ending he or she gets for the game, whether to give into impulse, choose to remain in the fog, and receive the Bad Ending or to instead try to understand the reasoning behind Namatame's actions, take the first step towards finding the true killer, and head towards the Normal, and potentially, True Ending. So not only does the encounter fit the underlying theme of the game, in this one instance the player's choice truly matters and plays a pivotal role in the unwinding narrative that they will experience.

Critical Reception

Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 4 since its release in 2008 has received universal acclaim and overall positive reviews from critics and fans alike. The PS2 version of the game still maintains a 90 Metacritic score while the Vita is slightly better with a score of 93.

Polygon's Philip Kollar gave the PS Vita version of the game a perfect score of 10/10. While he criticizes the game for its ridiculous amounts of time between combat, particularly the opening sequence for the game, he immediately iterates that the game can manage to get away with it due to its "...entertaining writing and strong character development," and characters that "...have interesting and memorable quirks that blossom into depth." He even applauds the relative control the game allows the player to exhibit in story sequences by forcing the player to make tough management decisions about which friendships to foster, if at all, and such decisions influence gameplay as the protagonist becomes stronger the more he develops and becomes involved with the Social Links. Finally, Kollar praises the way in which the game's Social Links manage to explore serious topics like the death of a loved one, teenage confusion with sexuality, and anonymity in an intelligent and thoughtful manner.

<http://www.polygon.com/2012/12/11/3756766/persona-4-golden-review-a-little-help-from-my-friends>

Similarly, Ryan Mattich of RPGFan highly praised the game for being able to present intricate and serious subject matter, but also claimed that the game maintains a perfect balance of serious tones to lighthearted humor and poignant moments. Such humor, whether it pertain to the constant cussing of the homeroom teacher, to pranks, and the ripping off of Teddie's "head" result in even minor characters that are irrelevant to the main plot of the game becoming fully fleshed out three-dimensional characters that the player cannot help but become attached to. Mattich overall gave the overall game a 94% and the story a 95%.

<http://rpgfan.com/reviews/persona4/index.html>

Jeff Haynes of IGN gave Persona 4 a 9/10 and thought that the murder mystery elements were interesting but felt that the plot slows down and suffers because of it. One interesting aspect that Haynes discovers is the use of the dungeon designs as

representations of the characters and their personal fears and psychological issues. The dungeon design in this case enhances the narrative and empathy for the characters by providing greater insight into the characters' problems.

<http://www.ign.com/articles/2008/12/10/shin-megami-tensei-persona-4-review?page=1>

Lessons

- **The use of the blank-slate, silent protagonist is still an effective narrative tool** that can be utilized by the player to project their own views and beliefs in player-to-character interactions. Let the player become attached to their avatar by having them believe that they are the avatar.
- **Provide the player with plenty of meaningful choices.** Whether the choices concern the dialog choices during Social Links and story sequences, or how the player chooses to spend their time, the player should always feel like they have agency in shaping the narrative that he or she experiences. The illusion of choice is shattered to a degree in that subsequent levels of Social Links do not remember the player's responses, and several choices are distinctly better than the others. One way that these choices could be more meaningful is if the developers added a differing line in the dialog that acknowledges the choice that the player made.
- In narrative driven games, **gameplay and story are intertwined and build on one another for a seamless interactive experience.** Players feel like their choices carry more weight when they influence mechanics further in the game. In Persona 4's case, furthering Social Links not only provide boosts of strength when creating Personas of the same arcana but one Social Link in particular reduces the cost to replenish the player party's health and magic, an action that is invaluable when progressing through the more difficult dungeons later in the game, and increasing the Social Link of party members provides them with support skills that help the main character in combat.
- Characterization is more than characters interacting with each other through dialog in cutscenes. **Games require interaction and players need a sense of agency to feel as if they have meaningful choices that influence the game world.**
- **Strong multi-dimensional, well-developed characters with flaws that change over time when used effectively can be used to promote relatability with the player and establish a sense of attachment to the game world.**
- **Delivering a narrative experience should not come at the expense of sacrificing the pacing of the narrative.** If a game starts out too slowly the game can fail to establish the player's attention for the rest of the experience. Conversely, if a cutscene or other situation that the player has minimal control is too long players may no longer be immersed in the narrative, not be invested in the game, and consequently immediately shut the game off.
- **The localization of a game's script, especially when trying to maintain the humor, appeal, and cultural significance from the original script, is crucial in bridging the gap between the player and the world the game is trying to present.**

Summation

In an age when video games were emphasizing visual fidelity, cinematic presentations, and high quality visuals as the selling points for an immersive experience Persona 4 took a step back and proved to the market that one aspect gamers can appreciate, even if not necessary in providing the experience the genre is trying to present, is a well-crafted narrative with holistic characters in a fully realized world. Immersion in a game is dependent not only on the world but also the characters and the degree of freedom the players have to express change in the game world. The developers went to great lengths to develop and flesh out each individual character and Social Link, main and NPC alike, with their own unique personalities, habits, pasts, issues, and relationships with each other that they seemed more like real people with real problems than mere fragments of code and art assets. These better characters allow the player to become more emotionally invested and in turn become more involved with the story. In conclusion, Persona 4 did an excellent job of telling a cohesive and solid plot while simultaneously giving the players freedom to fully explore and express themselves.