

Game Narrative Review

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Game Title: Beyond: Two Souls
Platform: Playstation 3
Genre: Interactive Drama /Pick Your Own Adventure Drama Game*
Release Date: 10/8/13 North America
Developer: Quantic Dream
Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment
Game Writer/Creative Director/Narrative Designer: David Cage

Overview

“Game: 1) a physical or mental competition conducted according to rules with the participants in direct opposition to each other” or “2) activity engaged in for diversion or amusement” from Merriam-Websterⁱ.

**Beyond: Two Souls* does not fall into the first definition of “Game”, failing at one of the quick time event rules does not result in “fail state” like one would in a game like chess by failing to see a checkmate in one. Failing or succeeding in *Beyond: Two Souls* can cause the player to see a different cut scenes, however the overall story is still the same as there is no “fail state” in the game.

Beyond: Two Souls falls into the second definition of “Game” as it actively engages the player in diversion/amusement through an Interactive Drama game with a style of a “choose your own adventure” book. The player plays from both first person and third person perspective depending what character they are controlling. The player will need to switch between these two to interact in the game world to progress. These actions will allow the player to “choose their own adventure” in a “Game” format.

“I think we need to accept this idea of growing up and finally become adults”, Dave Cage at DICE Summit 2013ⁱⁱ

Beyond: Two Souls is a drama about Jodie Holmes who is connected to a second soul named Aiden. This soul creates many dilemmas for her as she grows from being an outcast and living life in a lab to being on the run from the CIA. She has to overcome her shortcomings and correct some innocent mistakes that come back to haunt her. The whole game takes place over the course of her life, with extreme changes in her life style.

In Pulp Fiction like structure, chapters are not told in chronological order, as the game skips across different times in her life.

Characters

The player controls two characters through the course of the game.

- **Jodie Holmes-** One of the two of playable avatars and protagonist; She has unique and different gift that also is curse to her, a second soul named Aiden. Jodie grows up as an adopted child as her mother Norah Gray was left in a coma after her birth by drugs. Her journey changes her, as she goes from being a test subject in a DPA lab for Nathan Dawkins and Cole Freeman, to being recruited as a CIA agent by Ryan Clayton, to living homeless on the streets. Her motives change over the course of her life from wanting to be like other girls, to being ashamed of the actions in the CIA for killing incidents that leads her to living the life of running on the road.
- **Aiden-** The second of the two playable avatars and the second protagonist; he lives in the Infraworld, a world that exists in parallel to ours where souls exist. Aiden is Jodie's twin brother, who was born stillborn; however he became her gift as an entity that is connected to her. He is both a guardian angel and a devil to his sister. The choices he makes are up to the player at times. He can help Jodie when she is in need and he can take control of those as well kill them. Aiden can also interfere with Jodie's social life. It's up to the player to decide if Aiden is a blade or a shield. Aiden navigates the world as if he is a ghost.
- **Nathan Dawkins-** A DPA researcher of paranormal activity and works with Cole Freeman, to understand Jodie's relationship with Aiden and the effect they can have together. His wife and daughter are killed by a drunk driver. Jodie and Aiden connect with him so that he can see his family. This act of kindness starts the transformation of Nathan to become the eventual antagonist as he becomes obsessed with the Infraworld. He begins his quest to cheat death and connect the Infraworld with real world to be with his wife and daughter.
- **Cole Freeman-** The other DPA researcher works with Nathan Dawkins to understand Jodie and Aiden. He is a protective brother to Jodie. He calls her "Princess" while still acting as an authority like figure in Jodie's life. Jodie takes advantage of him through Aiden one and night to go to a bar. He helps Jodie find out about her birth mother and travels with her so that she can see her mother Norah in the mental hospital.
- **Ryan Clayton-** He can be Jodie's love interest but doesn't start out that way. He is rude to her as her CIA trainer. He does everything by the book and does not question orders. He sends Jodie on a mission to kill a warlord but also ends up

killing a child's father which causes her to go on the run. He eventual gives up his views of by the books. The government tries to drug up Jodie like they did to her mother.

Breakdown

Beyond: Two Souls is not told in a linear fashion. The game jumps around the timeline. Due to this nonlinear structure, the order of events will be explained in the order that the player is told, with reference to its chronological order with C and the number next to it

	Play Order	Chronological Order
1	Prologue	My Imaginary Friend
2	Broken	First Interview
3	The Experiment	First Night
4	The Embassy	Alone
5	The Party	The Experiment
6	First Interview	Night Session
7	Welcome to the CIA	Haunting
8	Hunted	The Party
9	My Imaginary Friend	Like Other Girls
10	The Condenser	The Condenser
11	Homeless	Separation
12	First Night	Welcome to the CIA
13	Like Other Girls	The Embassy
14	Alone	The Dinner
15	Navajo	The Mission
16	Separation	Hunted
17	The Dinner	Homeless
18	Night Session	Broken
19	The Mission	Navajo
20	Old Friends	Old Friends
21	Norah	Norah
22	Briefing	Briefing
23	Dragon's Hideout	Dragon's Hideout
24	Haunting	Black Sun
25	Black Sun	Prologue
26	Epilogue	Epilogue

The game starts off in “Prologue”^{c25} with Jodie explaining to the player about her memories as she is trying to put them together. As the screen fades to black, the player is returned to the chapter “Broken”^{c18} where Jodie is being asked questions by a sheriff. In every question that is asked, there are flashbacks that act as a flashback for Jodie, foreshadowing for the player the events that have already pasted chronologically to Jodie. When the sheriff notices a scar on her head, he becomes concerned just as a coffee cup goes flying off the table. This is the first time the player becomes aware that there is

something special about Jodie. A SWAT team arrives and we find Jodie alone in the room. A noise is made and Jodie responds to that noise saying she knows they are coming, suggesting that Jodie is connected to this object. Aftermath leaves the SWAT team dead on ground and the surrounding area in filled with blood as Jodie walks away. This is the first time that Aiden at the time unknown to player is both guardian angel and a blade at the same time.

Flashing back to when Jodie is a child in “The Experiment” ^{c5}, Jodie is at the test facility that both support the characters, Nathan Dawkins and Cole Freeman. Nathan and Cole are testing Jodie and Aiden. It is as much a test for Jodie and Aiden, as it is for the player. It acts as a tutorial for the player, so that they can understand the controls of the game. The tutorial takes place in a test room with test subjects on the other side of a wall and is given a variety tasks. This is the first time the player is also given the eye of Aiden and is fully aware of him. As the tutorial finishes, up the player is given his or her first choice on how Aiden will behave. He can continue to scare the test subject or he can stop scaring the subject. After the test ends, Jodie sobs to herself, as she tells her it will never be over.

Moving ahead in Jodie’s young adulthood life “The Embassy” ^{c13} serves as a way to convey to the player that there is more than one way to solve problems in *Beyond: Two Souls*. Jodie finds herself in the Middle East with Ryan who wants her to find out the information being held in a safe. This shows the player that you don’t need to be fully successful in order to progress in the game. This reinforces that failing at a task at hand at doesn’t create a loop until you successfully complete the games’ goals in a skinner box.

Jumping back in time to Jodie as a teenage in “The Party” ^{c8} shows the player how she doesn’t fit into society. She is invited to one of Nathan’s colleague’s daughter’s birthday party. Here the player can decide if Jodie dances with other boys, drinks beer for the first time, or smokes her first joint. After the player makes a choice, Jodie finds herself being harassed by the others at the party. She is seen differently than everyone else and is thrown in the doorway under the stairs as if she was some kind of witch, further suggesting that those who are different don’t belong in normal society. Afterward, her guardian angel Aiden frees Jodie from the doorway. Here the player can make another decision does, Aiden punishes those who aren’t accepting of her being different or does one just walk away.

Jumping back further back in time, where Jodie is still just child in “First Interview” ^{c2} the player finds Jodie blaming her gift of being different for meeting Nathan Dawkins for the first time. It is here where Jodie explains to both the Player and Nathan about the entities.

Afterwards, the player is jumped ahead in the timeline to “Welcome to the CIA” ^{c12}. The second tutorial explains the quick time events in the game and the stealth events. Afterwards these skills are put to a Skinner box test. Ryan is Jodie’s trainer in this section. “Haunt” ^{c16} is a test for the player to put the skills that they learned in the previous chapter to the test in an action sequence on a train. The player can fail at the task

at hand in the quick time events but the plot will move forward. The actions of the chapter changes depending on if Jodie is caught by the police or if the player succeeds and they continue to be chased or if they fail and are captured and need to escape. They offer different solutions to the problem that Jodie finds herself in. This is the second time the game reinforces the idea that there is no “fail state”. Outside of being a test for the player there not much here going on plot wise.

“My Imaginary Friend” ^{c1} is a jump back to the first event when being different sets the events of the rest of the game in motion. Here we find the parents that adopted Jodie starting to struggle dealing with her being different. It’s not much different those who have a child who is different and often have trouble dealing with this realization. When Jodie tries to sleep this off, she is attacked by entities; creatures from the Infraworld and Aiden who once again becomes her guardian angel.

“The Condenser” ^{c10} jumps the players to accidents related to the world known as the Infraworld where Aiden lives. Here souls are leaking through to the real world causing much death to the facility where the portal to the Infraworld is held. This is another test for the player in quick time events.

The player is given a break from the action scenes as the game jumps ahead to “Homeless” ^{c17}. Here the player finds Jodie as homeless person living on the streets on a cold winter night. She passes out and finds out Stan is the one who saved her and takes her to his home where he live with other homeless people. The player’s finds out how desperate she is to end it all by trying to jump over an edge onto a freeway. Aiden stops her. She heads back to find money for food. It is here the player is given a moral choice, as Aiden pushes money out of an ATM, does the player take or does the player find some other way to find money. Afterwards, Jodie finds out that one of the other people living with Stan, Tuesday is pregnant and has to help delivery the baby. Soon after the building catches fire and Jodie saves everyone, but not after getting knocked out after she saves herself. This is where the player is shown another foreshadow of another baby being delivered but is taken away before being sedated.

“First Night” ^{c3} takes the player back to the first night where Jodie is child and spends the night in the test facility. She is attacked by the monster again here. The next chapter “Like Other Girls” ^{c9} has Jodie as a teenager who wants to socialize like other normal girls. She is once again told she will never be normal. She sneaks out on her own using Aiden. Jodie arrivals at the bar, but none of her friends are there. At this point the player can stay or leave the bar. If the player stays at the bar other men in room will attempt to rape her, but Aiden will act as a shield and fend off the attackers. “Alone” ^{c4} takes us back to Jodie being left to live in the test facility, at this point the player can choice to kill Jodie’s adopted father as he had much influence in the decision as he leaves the room.

“Navajo” ^{c19} takes the player back to Jodie homeless, she finds herself living with Native Americans who also are haunted by another world. Here the players help them close a portal again and brings up some quick time events to break up the placing as the chapter

has a long running time. The game goes on a side tangent here and could have been cut. It is a small part of the overall plot; however the player is allowed a different mode of transportation horseback riding. "Separation" ^{c11} jumps back to where Jodie as young adult meets with Ryan for the first time, and doesn't have kind words for him as he forces her to leave Cole and Nathan. "The Dinner" ^{c14} jumps to the point where Jodie and Ryan are dating while they are in the CIA the player can interfere with the date if they wish to." "Night Session" ^{c6} jumps back to when Jodie is a child again. Here the player and Jodie find out that Nathan's wife and daughter have been killed by a drunk driver and starts his transformation.

"The Mission" ^{c15} goes back to a time when Jodie is on a mission with CIA. This event changes Jodie forever and causes her to go on the run. Jodie and the player end up killing not only the father of a child but also the wrong target as she was given wrong information while out in the Middle East. "Old Friends" ^{c20} takes Jodie while still on run to meet up with Cole to find out about her past. She finds out that her mother is still alive in a mental hospital. "Norah" ^{c21} takes place next when Cole takes her to the hospital. Jodie connects to mother Norah via Aiden's and finds out she been in drugged induced state and can't leave. The player has the option of ending her pain or leaving. When Jodie leaves she is captured by the CIA which begins the events of "Briefing" ^{c22}. Back at the CIA after being captured Jodie finds out that Nathan is working on portal to Infraworld for the military. It is here where Jodie is sent out on another mission to deal with another country portal to Infraworld and closed it for good. She meets up with Ryan and is reluctant to trust him in the mission in the chapter "Dragon's Hideout" ^{c23}. Dragon's Hideout feels most out of place in the plot as it adds nothing to the story at all. It is mostly action scene with quick time events.

The game jumps back to the start of the timeline in "Hauntings" ^{c7}. Here is where Jodie turns Nathan into the being obsessed with Infraworld as she links him to his daughter and wife that were killed. This act of kindness backfires in the last chapter "Black Sun" ^{c24}. The player jumps back to Jodie in the CIA when she completed Dragon's Hideout mission. Nathan reveals to Jodie that he has been keeping his daughter and wife connected via the condenser as he has found a way to cheat death even though they cry out to be let go. On the way out of the CIA she is stopped and is put in a drugged induced state much like of her mother Norah. The CIA can't let Jodie just go as they do not know what will happen with her and Aiden. Ryan frees Jodie and they set forth to stop Nathan and close the portal to the Infraworld as it has become unstable. Depending on the action of the player various event will play out. The player can take reason into Nathan and have him end the madness that he created if played out properly. It is here that player and Jodie find that Aiden is Jodie's still-born twin brother who died at birth by the umbilical cord. Here Aiden leaves Jodie and gets stuck in the Infraworld. The portal closes. The ending has writer show Jodie alone after the whole ordeal and that she can't a normal life despite being normal now. On her TV Aiden writes that he is still here despite not being linked anymore. The game ends with entities flooding the world as Jodie watches on and waiting to fight.

Strongest Element

Jodie Holmes is different or special depending how one views gifts as. Early in her life when her adopted parents find out about this special gift they struggle to find a way to deal with her. This is very much like some children who have a mental disorder which causes distress among the parents as they struggle to find a way to deal with the issue at hand. She also has trouble fitting in with normal children as well, much like those who have a “mental disorder”. Jodie’s characterization as a child with issues is rarely explored in games, but often is in other media like films and books.

Unsuccessful Element

Nathan Dawkins transformation was rushed in the context of the plot and in the order that the game reveals the events that causes him to transform. Slightly past the 2/3 mark in the game in the chapter “Night Session” it is revealed to the player that Nathan Dawkins wife and daughter were killed by a drunk driver. This is the tipping point which starts the antagonist transformation much like with Harvey Dent from The Dark Knight film. This tipping point takes places chronologically sixth in the timeline, but yet it is revealed late in the game. Nathan finally crosses the threshold in the second to last chapter “Haunting” which happens chronologically seventh. Jodie Holmes shows Nathan his lost wife and daughter in the Infraworld, Jodie loses contact and Nathan begs to bring them back, this is what causes him to become obsessed with the Infraworld. When the game fully develops, the player is already at the start of the final chapter “Black Sun”. The game does not build on this transformation at all until the last two chapters in game. It feels rushed from the player’s perspective when it is told.

Highlight

The highlight of *Beyond: Two Souls* is the homeless chapter; it is the strong narrative section in the game. In the chapter Jodie is homeless, out in the streets in a cold winter night. She passes out and is saved by another homeless person, Stan. She wakes in an under pass with other homeless folks. She then begins to walk to the edge of the under pass. Here the player can decide if Jodie jumps off when Aiden interferences or walks away. Afterwards, Stan tells Jodie that they are out of food and money. They walk the streets to find money, Jodie comes across an ATM and Aiden will pull money from the machine, the player can take the money or leave it. The second way Jodie can earn money is from playing a guitar, the song she plays is "Lost Cause" from Beck. Themes and settings outside of blood and violence aren't explored very much in today's mainstream games.

Critical Reception

Beyond: Two Souls overall has mixed critical reception ranging from the 20's to the high 90's. The game currently holds a metacritic rating of a 70ⁱⁱⁱ. The reviews that are mentioned are not included in the metacritic average.

Chris Sullentrop from the New York Times review discusses interactivity and story. *“Interactivity does not demand that all games become Choose Your Own Adventure stories. The decisions you make in Beyond are still significant, and they allow for a collaboration among player and designer that isn't possible in other forms of storytelling. The point of the choices in Beyond is not to make the game replayable but to make you emotionally invested in the story.”*^{iv}

Sullentrop did not give a score; he was disappointed but was still looking forward to David Cage's next game.

Brett Molina from USA Today review gave the game 3 out of 4 stars discusses the Pulp Fiction like structure of the game.

“The path players follow with Page is tricky to navigate. It's presented in a non-chronological format, so players witness different events that molded Jodie's life... It's hard to establish a foundation for Beyond's plot because it seems to jump all over the place, leaving players to piece together exactly what's happening. Players explore Jodie's life in the CIA, and then we're jerked back to childhood years, then present day, and then back to Jodie as a teen. It's dizzying.”^v

Lessons

- “Pulp Fiction Story Structure”
 - There are times in *Beyond: Two Souls* where this story telling structure fails on itself. One example is Nathan Dawkins transformation from a supporting character to the antagonist that was brought in the unsuccessful element section. The placing and timing of these events are off and doesn't have time to properly build up over time. Another example is the timeline jumping that is in the Brett Molina review that thought the player is jumping between different times in Jodie's life. This structure allows the player to jump between events in her life that were slow in the pacing, so that the player doesn't get stuck in one of Jodie's life style for too long.
- No “Fail State”
 - In games a “Fail State” is a way to punish in classical conditioning.
 - The player for not following the rules or not completing the task at hand. It is here where player might quit the game and never return to see the rest of the story that has yet to be told. In *Beyond: Two Souls* the “Fail State” never gets in the way of the story and the player can continue to play regardless of skill mastery. There is also no best way to play the game because of the removal of the “fail state”. It does not punish the player for failure but instead different actions will play out on screen.

- Alternate Touch Control Inputs
 - Asking a person who has never used a gamepad before to navigate a virtual 3D space through a 2D plane is tough. Not everyone can just pick and play using a gamepad. They shouldn't have to go through the growing pains of learning a new input device. *Beyond: Two Souls* allows players to use their iOS and Android devices as an input device via the touch screen, provided that the Playstation 3 and iOS/Android device are connected to the same network. There are more touch screen devices than there Playstation 3 game consoles. One shouldn't be limited or discouraged to play games by their input device. This option allows the game to be more accessible to play, even to those who have trouble using a Dualshock 3/Six Axis gamepad.

- Voice Acting
 - *Beyond: Two Souls* is a story driven game and much like a story driven film it needs a strong cast to carry it through. It cannot rely on other features in the game such as gameplay, multiplayer, or graphics only to carry itself. Actor Willem Dafoe and Ellen Page help carry the sometimes poor writing above and beyond. The traditional game voice acting would have hurt the game over all. The "Homeless" chapter would not have been as effective if there wasn't an actress on same the skill level as Ellen Page.

- Themes
 - *Beyond: Two Souls* mature themes/setting and characters have been seen in various other media's but rarely in the interactive one. Let's be glad that Fox News^{vi} didn't pick up on some of the themes in *Beyond: Two Souls* like they did in *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* back in 2009 over the "No Russian" mission. Interactive Media's theme need to "grow up" just like David Cageⁱⁱ said, and *Beyond: Two Souls* is just that.

Summation

There really is nothing like *Beyond: Two Souls* on the market (as the time of writing) outside of David Cage's other games. The game can hit an emotional high with chapters like homeless, which rarely have been seen in the game market. There are times when the game plot can be unwilling thanks to its Pulp Fiction like structure.

Beyond: Two Souls is its own identity that takes the strongest aspects of both and merges them together. This is a kind of narration that has yet to be fully realized because it's longer than a film, but shorter than book series.

References

ⁱ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/game>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.theverge.com/2013/2/6/3960630/david-cage-video-game-industry-grow-up-already>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.metacritic.com/game/playstation-3/beyond-two-souls>

^{iv} <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/08/arts/video-games/beyond-two-souls-a-supernatural-thriller-for-playstation-3.html>

^v <http://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/gaming/2013/10/09/beyond-two-souls-review/2953205/>

^{vi} <http://kotaku.com/5402067/modern-warfare-2-on-fox--friends>