

Game Narrative Review

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Date: 12th December 2012

GameTitle: Threads of Fate (US title), Dewprism (Japan title)

Platform: Sony PlayStation , PlayStation Network

Genre: Role-Playing Game

Release Dates:

- PlayStation - July 18, 2000 (North America), October 10, 1999 (Japan)
- PlayStation Network - April 19, 2011 (North America), June 23, 2010 (Japan)

Developer: Square (Now Square Enix)

Publisher: Square (Now Square Enix)

Game Writer/CreativeDirector/NarrativeDesigner: Daisuke Watanabe

Overview

Threads of Fate revolves around two characters : Rue and Mint. Rue is a doll created by a powerful ancient made to resurrect his creator. However, he has no memory of his purpose or identity and is given a home by the lady Claire. Mint is a spoiled and obnoxious princess of the Eastern Heavenly Kingdoms, famous for their knowledge and ability with magic. She is kicked out of the Kingdom with her claim to the throne taken away. Both of them are seeking an ancient power called the Relic. In particular, they seek the Dewprism, a Relic created by the ancient Valen, Rue's creator. The Dewprism has the power to grant any wish. Rue wishes to resurrect Claire with it, after she was killed by a phantom. Mint wishes to take over the world with the Dewprism's power.

Through a cast of memorable characters, the game is able to bring across its premise of the importance

on being the master of your own destiny. Characters are given voices through the well written dialogues, printed in dialogue boxes and an engaging score that emphasize the tone and context of the words. Each character has a unique set of animations, used repeatedly throughout the game to great effect in emphasizing their personalities.

Characters

The characters of Threads of Fate have purpose and premise in bringing across the themes of purpose, fate and destiny and the importance of family and companionship.

- Rue – A doll made by Valen for Valen's resurrection. Forgetting his purpose in life when he awakens, he is taken in by Claire. When Claire is killed by Doll Master, he makes his purpose in life to seek out the Relic and revive Claire. Rue is a determined and good willed individual. Throughout the story, he struggles to determine his true purpose in life. He has the ability to transform into any creature he has slain, a mechanic essential for completing the game. It reinforces the idea that his purpose is of his choosing and not determined by why he was made. The word “rue” means “to feel regret, remorse or sorrow”, which perfectly describes Rue's state of mind.
- Mint – True to her name, Mint is a hotheaded, obnoxious and spoiled princess of the Eastern Heavenly Kingdoms. After losing her right to the throne, she leaves home seeks the Dewprism so that she may conquer the world. Her kingdom is charged with protecting Relics from falling into the wrong hands. Mint has left that all behind and made a commitment to world domination. Her will reinforces the idea of individuals being in control of their fate.
- Prima Doll – A doll created for the purpose of unsealing the ruins housing the Dewprism. The player is involved with the restoration of this doll till its use to unseal the ruins and beyond. Prima Doll is the center piece on the discussion of purpose and destiny. After Rue discovers his true purpose, he finds himself in the same situation as Prima Doll. Through Prima Doll does Rue finds the strength and conviction to define his own purpose.
- Claire – The lady who cared for Rue and gave Rue a home and a family. She allowed Rue to stop worrying and pursuing his identity and purpose for existence. She is killed by Doll Master. Her soul resides within the life stone on Rue's forehead. She reinforces the point on the importance of family.
- Maya – Sister of Mint. She becomes the next in line for the throne. She is the direct opposite of Mint. She is more rationale and is every bit a responsible princess. She is always at odds with Mint, but through their conversations and conflicts, players can see a strong family bond and feel for.
- Doll Master – A doll made by Valen for Valen's resurrection. He awakened a hundred years earlier than Rue, knowing his identity and purpose. However, the life stone on his head is flawed and he does not possess any of the powers that Rue has. He works under Princess Maya, as an adviser, secretly learning all he can about Relics and how to revive his master. He

has a group of followers, lost souls whom he gave purpose to.

- Valen – Most powerful Aeon, an ancient. With the desire to become a god, he created the Dewprism. Fearing his ambition, the other Aeons came together and defeated him. Valen's body was destroyed, but he was able to seal his soul into the Dewprism, waiting for the time when his dolls would come and resurrect him.

Breakdown

Threads of Fate offers an engaging narrative with its cast of memorable characters. Characters are developed through their unique animation sets, theme music and dialog. Then through the characters, Threads of Fate's premise is brought forth and developed. Players are brought to caring for these characters and the premise by having the player interact with the structures of family and companionship that bind these characters together.

Modern games often create a vast variety of animations for any character that has a name. This can sometimes be over-excessive and distract players from the true nature of the character. In Threads of Fate, characters have a distinct set of animations that expresses the nature of the character and keeps them consistent. Mint's animation set includes her pointing at things, stamping her foot on the ground, flinging her hair and throwing her arms out in a “whatever” pose. These animations are the key animation sets used when Mint is talking with someone. She would point at the person she is talking to in a confrontational manner, get mad when someone rebukes her and start stamping on the ground, or arrogantly fling her hair and look away when she has won an argument. This is all consistent with her character, as she is a spitfire, headstrong and arrogant person.

There are no voice overs for any of the characters, so they are given voices through text in dialog boxes and their own theme music. Rue's theme is a melody of regret and sorrow. It plays whenever Rue is talking about his past. Rue would look at the ground in sorrow and the music would start playing. Mint's dialog box is filled with exclamation marks and upper-cased words as she is yelling most of the time. Her music is sly and deceptive. Soliloquys are often used to reveal the inner thoughts of the characters, and through them we learn more. All these elements work together to flush out the characters fully.

With these characters, Threads of Fate is able to present its story with a strong premise, that one must take charge of one's own fate. Traditionally in games, good and bad are represented by life and death. Good guys fight to embrace life, bad guys seek destruction and dying in the game is bad. Prima Doll is used to foreshadow the result of having your fate decided for you. After he had fulfilled his purpose of unsealing the ruins of Valen, he reverts back to being a lifeless box. This a metaphor for death being what awaits one who does not take charge of his own fate, and death is bad thing in games. Rue's purpose was to resurrect Valen while Mint's was to rule her kingdom. Had either of them simply fulfilled that purpose that would be the death of them, literally or metaphorically.

Threads of Fate has players caring for the characters and the premise because the characters care about each other and the premise. Seldom are characters introduced as individuals with no relations to anyone else. Everyone has a group, a family or an association with each other. Even the villains care

for each other. Doll Master, Rue's nemesis, has his own family of followers. He gave their lives purpose and in gratitude they serve him unquestioningly. Perhaps this is why Doll Master is so bent on fulfilling his purpose in resurrecting Valen, he yearns for the same family he has provided for his followers. Hence when both heroes and villains care about the characters around them, players are brought to care for the characters as well.

Threads of Fate has players constantly interacting with all these characters. There are no special graphics or animations used for cutscenes, so models and animations used in gameplay are exactly the same as those used for cutscenes. This helps the player truly believe in the interactions they are having with these characters. And true these characters is Threads of Fate brought to life.

Strongest Element

The strongest narrative element in the game is the strong characterization. Each character has its own theme music, that plays when that character is the main point of attention. Each character has its own unique set of animations, that reflect the characters responses and personalities very explicitly. They slowly reveal more of their history and inner selves as the game progresses but ultimately live up to the appearance and expectation of whom they are. No character exists alone, all of them are part of some group or family, reinforcing the importance of the bonds between people.

Unsuccessful Element

The monsters in the game do not really do much to help support the narrative in the game. They fit the setting of the level and help inject humor into the game at certain instances. Otherwise they do little with respect to the recurring themes in the game.

Highlight

The highlight of the game is the last stage. It begins when Prima Doll has broken the seal to the ruins of Valen and is on the edge of death. All of the player's actions till this point has been directed towards having Prima Doll break the seal. Hence players cannot help but feel responsible for Prima Doll's "death". Prima Doll is however grateful for the player for restoring him to his original state and sees Doll Master as the true villain. The player character promises Prima Doll that he/she would stop Doll Master from resurrecting Valen, as Prima Doll closes his eyes and turns back into a lifeless cube. Then the music of the final stage begins. Within which lies a violin solo that provides for an emotional reflection within the player.

Critical Reception

- Andrew Vestal, Gamespot, 7.9 / 10.0 Score -

"...Threads of Fate's greatest strength lies in the unquantifiable realm of "character." Rue may not say much, but he has a secret or two up his sleeve. Mint is a backstabbing, self-centered, greedy little princess who always gets her way - and you'll love her for it. You won't forget many of the supporting characters, either - like Rod, the egotistical duelist who hot-rods in his hydrofoil, the "pulsar-inferno typhoon omega" (which Mint nicknames "pinto"); Primadoll, the naïve yet outspoken Pinocchio boy; or Fancy Mel, a helpful adventurer clad in a bunny hat and poufy dress. Each outrageous character is brought to life via the humorous dialogue, which instantly creates a distinct and memorable cast. Square's strong localization streak continues with Threads of Fate - the English dialogue is witty and humorous, and each character speaks with a distinctive tone. The unique character designs and dialogue overshadow the throwaway plot, making the game a surreal and completely enjoyable experience....."

Lessons

- Characters are better built and defined by their relationships and interactions with other characters. As characters interact with each other, they reveal more about themselves. Each character's personality reflects off his or her peers.
- When all characters value the same concept, that concept is made a lot more important. Doll Master might be a villain for most of the game, but he still treasures his adopted family. Klaus takes Prima Doll in as his own son, and risked his life to protect Prima Doll from Doll Master.
- Repetition and emphasis on the theme and message of the game is important to make a compelling narrative. Visiting old haunts, seeing characters coming together in groups for a common goal, repeated animations to help them stay true to character are all great narrative devices.

Summation

Threads of Fate is a memorable game because of the strength of its narrative presented by its ensemble of characters. The strong cast supports the game's themes of fate, destiny and emphasizes the importance between the bonds between people. They grow in character together with the player, and drive the narrative forward with their engaging interactions with the player.