

Game Narrative Review

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Game Title: *Destiny*

Platform: PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4, Xbox 360, and Xbox One

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Release Date: September 9, 2014

Developer: Bungie

Publisher: Activision

Game Writer/Creative Director/Narrative Designer: <https://www.bungie.net/en-US/Destiny/Credits>

Overview

Long ago, The Traveler arrived – a mysterious being of extraordinary power. It brought with it great boons for humanity, transforming Venus and Mars into hospitable environments, allowing us to colonize, explore, and expand. It was a time of peace and great prosperity, and would become known as the Golden Age. We reached for the stars, but our wings were hewn clean off by “The Collapse” - an event that would have seen humanity’s extinction were it not for the sacrifice of the Traveler. It was all long ago, but even now, despite the Traveler’s sacrifice, we still fight to survive, not as a man or a woman, but as a species. As the Traveler was the Light, we now face the Darkness. Hostile alien races have laid claim to Mercury, to Venus, to Mars, and to our moon. Earth lay in ruins and our civilization has been reduced to a single city. There is hope, however, for in the Traveler’s dying breath, it created the Ghosts, who, even to this day, wander the remains of Earth, finding, resurrecting, and empowering Guardians. Guardians are the blades and shields of our civilization, and it is this role that you play in *Destiny*.

When *Destiny* first launched, its narrative elements were met with overwhelmingly negative reviews. Since then, it has improved substantially, filling voids, piecing together plotlines, and coloring in a world that started out rather grey. Though *Destiny*’s story still leaves some players wanting, its latest installment, The Taken King, not only illustrated that Bungie is indeed committed to delivering compelling narrative, but also revealed that there had been seeds of lore lying dormant since launch, just waiting to come to life. Bungie had been committed all along – their tale just needed time to mature.

Characters

- **Ghost** – An entity of Light created the Traveler. Every Guardian has their own Ghost, and the player is no exception. Despite the personal connection, however, the player's Ghost is still referred to simply as "Ghost". Ghost plays an enormous role in the player's experience, serving as a vessel for narrative exposition, comedic relief, and player guidance, in addition to more utilitarian functions like enabling resurrections and...opening doors.
- **The Speaker** – Voice of the Traveler. The Speaker is the Traveler's representative, held as the keeper of the Traveler's will. Despite his position, he actually plays an extremely minor role in the story so far, delivering a bit of backstory and "pretty speeches", but is otherwise out of sight and out of mind. This may change drastically if the storyline begins to focus on the Traveler.
- **The Stranger** – A mysterious Exo hunter who, though not a Guardian herself, is an ally. Though she makes only a select few appearances early in the game, and hasn't been seen or heard of since, she has some extremely well-known quotes, including her first appraisal of the player: "You're interesting. Not entirely interesting, but...you have promise." She serves as the narrative beacon that draws the player to Venus, introduces them to the Vex, and ultimately sets them on the path to Black Garden – the end objective of the launch storyline. She is also the source of the quote: "I don't even have time to explain why I don't have time to explain." which comes into play later in the lore when, at the end of a substantial quest chain involving a long-dead Guardian, Praedyth, the player is rewarded with an exotic pulse rifle that not only looks like the Stranger's rifle, but is also named "No Time To Explain". This is curious since, aside from the gun, there is nothing that seems to link the Stranger to the questline or to Praedyth.
- **Commander Zavala** – Titan Vanguard. Sells Vanguard variants of Titan armor. Besides acting as a quest-giver for Titans, Commander Zavala has served very little purpose thus far. He has minor parts in dialogue, both as participant and subject, but seemingly only as a matter of flavor aside from a bit of exposition regarding Rasputin.
- **Cayde-6** – Hunter Vanguard. Sells Vanguard variants of Hunter armor. Like Commander Zavala and Ikora Rey, Cayde-6 served little purpose for the first year after launch, however that changed with The Taken King, in which Cayde-6, along with Eris Morn, played the largest supporting roles. Guardians found themselves needing a stealth drive early in The Taken King, and Cayde-6 just happened to have one hidden away atop a tower in the Cosmodrome. His subtle speech patterns quickly began to give insight into his character. When asked if he had advice on which way to go while traversing the Cosmodrome tower, he replied simply, with a hint of playfulness in his tone: "Yeah. Up." During this mission to retrieve Cayde-6's stealth drive, he also asks that the player not loot any of his other hidden stashes should they happen stumble upon one; it sounded like clever dialogue, alluding to something that wasn't even meant to be searched for – until someone found one. We were familiar with Eris Morn from The Dark Below, but we were just getting to know Cayde-6. Turns out, Cayde-6 is a character, and quite the "roguish commander" indeed. He's a lighthearted but wary, fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants but be ready for anything kind of guy, and he played an amazing counterbalance to Eris Morn's ominous, grim presence.

- **Ikora Rey** – Warlock Vanguard. Sells Vanguard variants of Warlock armor. Like Commander Zavala, Ikora Rey has served little purpose so far, having minor parts in dialogue, but little else. There is, however, one line of note regarding her, in which an NPC at the Reef describes her as “a magical terrorist”. This slander is given no context, leaving players wondering what exactly is going on, or what happened in the past.
- **Master Rahool** – Cryptarch, Last City. Master Rahool is somewhat of a middleman, a necessary step between players and most of their loot. Although he wasn’t likely intended to really serve a narrative purpose, because of his central, mandatory role in the original loot system, he ended up becoming the face of the system itself, and since players initially hated the system, they came to hate Master Rahool as well. Bungie ended up using this to their advantage, however, as discussed in the Lessons section under “Being able to laugh at yourself is awesome.” From the Reef to the Tower, from the forums to the memes, due to Bungie’s tactics, Master Rahool ended up being the focus of quite a bit of dialogue, both in-game and out-of-game, transforming an otherwise boring character into one of *Destiny*’s superstars.
- **Banshee-44** – Gunsmith. Sells weapons, ammo syntheses, and other weapon-related goods. For *Destiny*’s first year, Banshe-44 served essentially no narrative purpose, and even in terms of gameplay, he was typically only visited for ammo syntheses, and even that slowed to a trickle with House of Wolves, which introduced a vendor that sold ammo syntheses at much lower prices. With The Taken King, however, Banshee-44 not only became an important aspect of gameplay, but became a vessel for narrative as well. As for gameplay, he began offering bounties for the field-testing of weapon prototypes and managing work orders for desirable weapons from various foundries. As for narrative, the focus is on the foundries, Banshee-44 just serving as the means by which players interact with them. Previous to The Taken King, players were well-aware of SUROS, thanks to their popular exotic auto rifle, SUROS Regime, but had likely never heard of Omolon or Håkke, let alone the lesser-known Tex Mechanica, all of which players are now not only conscious of, but have a feel for.
- **Amanda Holliday** – Shipwright. Sells vehicles and ships. Amanda Holliday plays only a minor role as a vendor and likewise does little to further the narrative, acting as the patron for some of the beacon missions, but otherwise being involved in only a single questline. Between her visuals, her lines, and her voice acting, Amanda Holliday is the only character in *Destiny* that comes anywhere close to a girl-next-door archetype, making her, if nothing else, an interesting contrast to the rest of the lineup.
- **Kadi 55-30** – Postmaster, Last City. Kadi 55-30, despite not being involved in any quest or storyline, still has a surprising impact on the ambiance of the Tower. Due to her being the postmaster of the main social hub, players visit her frequently, and because of her central location, she is passed by often even when her services aren’t required. The result is that her voice and lines are commonly heard, contributing greatly to the Tower’s soundscape. She may not play an important role in any plot, but she certainly does a lot in terms of setting.

- **Eva Levante** – Guardian Outfitter. Sells emblems and shaders. Eva Levante serves as a vendor and a beacon mission patron, having little to do with either gameplay or narrative. However, during the Festival of the Lost, the Halloween event new to The Taken King, she acted as the ringleader, a role that reflected well on her due to how lighthearted and incredibly amusing the event was – fun by association.
- **Xûr** – Agent of the Nine. Xûr is a mysterious vendor, showing up only at certain times and in random places, serving an unknown group, or entity, known only as “the Nine”. Xûr describes himself as a mere “trash collector”, doing the will of the Nine by selling some of the most powerful weapons and armor in the game in exchange for Strange Coins – currency that is otherwise completely useless to players. Xûr appears to belong to an alien race unlike any other in *Destiny*, adding not only to his own mystery, but to that of the Nine as well.
- **Lord Shaxx** – Crucible Handler. Sells Crucible variant armor. Although Lord Shaxx is, for the most part, just a vendor, he also serves as commentator for all Crucible pvp matches. Lord Shaxx’s influence on the Crucible is much like Kadi 55-30’s influence on the Tower, doing little in terms of gameplay or narrative, yet because of their frequent interjections of flavor, their voices become familiar and their lines well-known, doing much to establish ambiance. Lord Shaxx, however, goes a step further than Kadi 55-30 by feeling much more personal. While he comments on general game states, he also takes note of events specific to the player such as multi-kills and kill streaks, giving players the impression that in addition to him overseeing the match in general, he’s paying specific attention to them – and their exploits. When a player does something outstanding in the Crucible, even if nobody else saw it, Lord Shaxx did, and he’ll comment on it. Being recognized by an NPC is better than not being recognized at all, and regardless of who did or didn’t bear witness to the feat, getting the audio feedback from Lord Shaxx is still appreciated, especially since sometimes the accomplishment would have otherwise gone unnoticed even by the player who accomplished it.
- **Arach Jalaal** – Dead Orbit representative. Arach Jalaal serves little purpose besides that of a vendor, his biggest contribution being to link the Dead Orbit faction with the Awoken. Dead Orbit itself has played no part in the storyline thus far either, but likely will in future content.
- **Executor Hideo** – New Monarchy representative. Executor Hideo is essentially just a vendor and a way to link New Monarchy with humans. Like Dead Orbit, New Monarchy has played no part in the storyline so far, but seems equally likely to do so in future content.
- **Lakshmi-2** – Future War Cult representative. Like her peers, Lakshmi-2 is, for the most part, just a vendor and a link between her faction and her race – Future War Cult and Exo. Lakshmi-2 and Future War Cult, however, have not been completely uninvolved in the narrative, playing at least minor parts in the Praedyth questline, connecting Future War Cult not only to Praedyth, but also, somehow, to the Stranger. Just as Dead Orbit and New Monarchy are expected to play significant roles in future content, it’s anticipated that Future War Cult will as well, the first pieces perhaps even already being in play, depending on how the Stranger fits into the bigger picture.

- **The Queen** – The Queen of the Reef, likewise the Queen of the Awoken, often simply referred to as the Queen, was a curious character. She came across as wise and cunning, patient, and insightful, counterbalanced by her brother, who was blunt, aggressive, and rude. Her first interactions with the player showed her to be understanding, and willing to give Guardians a chance. In the next audience with her, she showed faith in the player, in spite of her brother, and granted the player the assistance they sought, but was also sure to make it known that these favors were expected to be repaid at her leisure, making note of this after the Guardians were already in her debt. These tactics lent her a foreboding air, likening her to an archetypical mob boss despite her aura of dignity and her status as an ally. Regardless, players seemed to like her, as evident by what followed her death in *The Taken King*. Shortly after the original launch, after most players had already completed the main storyline, having already had their encounters with the Queen and her brother, there was the Queen's Wrath event, in which players were able to do event bounties for desirable gear customized with the Queen's colors. This event was heralded and hosted by Petra Venj, an emissary of the Queen, whose arrival at the Tower was dramatically marked by her ship, docked behind her, extremely distinct in form and flying the Queen's banners on top of that. In the *House of Wolves*, players were able to obtain one of these ships for themselves. A lot of players used it because of how it looked, even more simply because it was new and shiny, but over time, it was seen less and less. Until the Queen died. Suddenly there was a marked resurgence in the use of these ships – the ships that had been associated with the Queen, almost as though Guardians were paying homage to her. It was an unexpected, interesting phenomenon that illustrated just how much players liked the Queen, despite the fact that they'd only interacted with her on a few occasions. A link to *The Taken King's* opening cinematic, in which the Queen dies, has been included; aside from the script and voice acting, facial expressions and music are used to superb effect, and worthy of note while watching, or, perhaps, re-watching. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lf-Vv2mXnJA> It wouldn't be terribly surprising if future content introduced some plot twist that resulted in the Queen not being dead after all since we didn't actually see her die – or her brother for that matter – but, for now, she, and he, are presumed dead.
- **The Queen's Brother** – Brother of the Queen. Antagonistic, abrasive, and all-around-obnoxious, he served as an excellent backdrop by which the Queen could shine. As a standalone character, he was of little importance, but he played such a major role in framing the Queen that he's worthy of consideration. When initially encountering the Queen and her brother, we first meet her brother, who makes it clear that as far as he's concerned, we're not welcome, and that we don't deserve an audience with the Queen, but the Queen has agreed to see us despite what her brother thinks. The Queen is preceded by Fallen, who Ghost and the Guardian perceive as a threat, and move to attack. The Queen's brother stops the Guardian, a dagger at their throat. The Queen arrives and assesses the situation, immediately understanding that the Guardian doesn't realize that the Fallen are under her command, noting such, and in doing so, excusing the Guardian for their mistake and calling off her brother. After asking for help and having more unpleasant exchanges with the Queen's brother, the Queen once again calls off her brother, summoning him to her side for words in private. She seems to explain her thoughts to him, a conniving look to the moment, but ultimately the verdict is that the Guardian is to be assisted in their quest. The second encounter with the Queen starts with the Queen simply noting that the

Guardian is still alive. Her brother immediately turns to mockery, assuming the Guardian is alive because they fled – an assertion that the Guardian denies – and the Queen reinforces the denial immediately, calling her brother's assumption into question. Ghost provides the head of the slain Vex Gate Lord that the Queen's brother thought the Guardian was incapable of collecting and the Guardian one again asks for assistance. The Queen's brother takes another jab at the Guardian for needing help, but the Queen immediately checks him, agreeing to assist. Her brother responds by jumping to conclusions, which she responds to with words of wisdom – not a matter of helping or hurting the player, but still showing contrast between the two. Finally, the Queen's brother extracts the eye from the Vex head and shows the component to be dead, pronouncing the effort wasted and the journey in vain. The Queen, however, proclaims her faith in the Guardian's resourcefulness and decrees that the component be gifted to the Guardian despite its state. Her brother reluctantly obliges, giving the Guardian the eye as well as the location of the Black Garden, which the Queen agreed to disclose earlier. I hope it's apparent why I felt the Queen's brother merited examination for the role he played in establishing her character.

- **Petra Venj** – Queen's Wrath representative. Petra Venj served as the Queen's emissary not only for Queen's Wrath events, but also throughout House of Wolves. She instructed Guardians, sent them on quests, acted as a vendor, and yet, somehow, still seemed somewhat uninvolved and rather underdeveloped - yes, despite her eyepatch and dagger flipping. Petra Venj struck me as perhaps the clearest example of untapped potential, her personality pointedly chipper, but otherwise seemingly empty. With the loss of the Queen, Petra Venj may end up playing an important role for the Awoken and/or the Reef – hopefully she gets fleshed out if so.
- **Eris Morn** – Crota's Bane. Eris Morn has played a significant role in *Destiny's* narrative, participating in an enormous amount of dialogue, acting as the primary guide in *The Dark Below*, and as a secondary guide in *The Taken King*, taking the backseat to Cayde-6, but still very much involved. Dealing with the Hive just seems to entail Eris being along for the ride, and since both *The Dark Below* and *The Taken King* were focused on the Hive, it was only natural that she played integral roles in both episodes. Even ignoring her substantial involvement in Guardians' affairs, Eris Morn is an interesting character in and of herself. Though many NPCs are supposed to be war heroes, having taken place in, for instance, the Battle of Twilight Gap, most, essentially all, lack any detail to these pasts. But Eris Morn is different. Eris Morn's past is explored in depth – in fact, the player walks in her footsteps. Between her lines and tonal cues, and as the player delves deeper into the darkness, Eris' healthy caution begins to sound more and more like outright fear, sometimes even coming across as symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. She seems fragile due to the incessant fear and pain that define her, but likewise strong, having survived her past, and continuing to face the darkness despite the horrors she's endured. Her visage is similarly intriguing, looking more like a villain than an ally, her ship more Hive than Human. She serves not only as a guide and a medium by which to gain insight into the Hive, but as a point of contrast to the other war heroes, showing the side of someone who's seen too much, been through too much, lost too much, and taken too much. She's a beautiful example of a tragic heroine, someone who could have easily ended up a broken veteran, but somehow endures despite, perhaps specifically to spite, the terrors of her past.

- **Variks, the Loyal** – House of Judgment representative. Variks serves as the ambassador of the House of Judgment, a Fallen house that allied with the Queen in defiance of other Fallen houses. He also serves as the warden of a Reef prison and the overseer of the pve events that take place therein. His biggest impact on gameplay was to undercut Banshee-44's ammo synthesis prices, but his impact on narrative was quite substantial, giving context to the Fallen the Guardian encountered heralding the Queen months prior, delivering exposition on Fallen houses, and, through some select ambient quotes, even causing players to question his intentions, evoking mistrust, if not even outright suspicion, that someday he, and his house, will betray the Awoken.
- **Brother Vance** – Disciple of Osiris. Brother Vance serves as a vendor for an advanced pvp event called the Trials of Osiris. While there is little to note regarding Brother Vance himself, his importance comes with his link to Osiris. Brother Vance is one of few references to a warlock named Osiris who ventured to Mercury after the Vex had transformed it and who hasn't been seen since. Osiris is spoken of in reverence, as though some sort of legend, seems to have developed somewhat of a cult-like following, as illustrated by Brother Vance, and is perhaps the most enigmatic character currently playing a part in *Destiny's* lore. Such characters tend to lend weight to their disciples as well, and although this page has yet to be turned, it seems likely Osiris and his followers will serve a significant purpose in future content.
- **Rasputin** – The Last Warmind. Rasputin is an artificial intelligence whose purpose is to protect humanity – a Warmind – and the last of his kind. Rasputin comes up often in lore and is also a figure of focus in gameplay, playing a role, if not even the central role, in multiple story missions as well as a strike (cooperative content designed for three players). One of the original story missions tasked the player with tracking the Cabal, discovering what they were after, and stopping them. The Cabal were after an AI that once connected to the Warmind of Mars, but upon defeating them, we find out that the AI didn't actually need our help. Ghost observes: "Rasputin's controlling it. I can't get in and neither could the Cabal. He's everywhere now." In *The Dark Beyond*, Rasputin's bunker beneath the Forgotten Shore was breached by the Hive, led by Omnigul, in an attempt to destroy, or perhaps corrupt, Rasputin, but Guardians came to Rasputin's aid, destroying Omnigul's forces and forcing Omnigul herself to flee. In *The Taken King*, Rasputin's bunker was breached again, twice, once by Taken, for unknown reasons, and once by Fallen, in an attempt to hijack Rasputin's systems to gain control of warsats, and again, Guardians protected him. Despite the goodwill Guardians have shown Rasputin, and despite his very existence supposedly being to protect humanity, according to Commander Zavala, the last time a team was sent to contact Rasputin directly, their dismembered bodies were found scattered across the Skywatch. Though Rasputin is portrayed as a nigh-godlike AI with inconceivable knowledge and power, native to Earth, but whose reach extends at least to Mars, he is likewise a character that is pointedly vulnerable, extremely limited in his ability to defend himself once one of his physical locations have been breached. Guardians have had to rescue him three times now, developing an interesting interdependency that will likely be the focus of much more narrative in future content.

- **The Fallen**—Hostile alien race found primarily on Earth, the Moon, and Venus. The Fallen have an industrial theme, wearing mechanical limbs and worshipping machine gods, but also come across as nomadic scavengers, most of their technology having a primitive, even scrapped-together look to it. Enemy types include Dregs, Vandals, and Captains, and their machines: the lesser Shanks, and the greater Servitors. Fitting with their theme, Fallen combat tactics rely on mostly on technology and opportunity, having advanced weaponry, but being patient in its use, taking advantage of cover and proximity. The Fallen are divided into a variety of “Houses”, the House of Devils, the House of Winter, and the House of Wolves, to name a few. These Houses may join forces in some instances, but generally operate independently of each other, owing allegiance only to their own leader, if any, and are prone to in-fighting. The House of Judgment, for instance, stood in contempt of other Fallen (specifically the House of Wolves) and decided to forsake their brethren, instead swearing loyalty to the Queen of the Reef, allying themselves with the Awoken, and through them, the Guardians. By separating the Fallen into Houses, it gives the race as a whole a tribal quality that ties in nicely with their already-nomadic feel. Between the names and their visuals, the Fallen seem very much to be an alien race of space pirates, wandering the stars collecting anything and everything they can find to build new weapons, new ships, and new gods.
- **The Hive**—Hostile alien race found primarily on Earth and the Moon. The Hive have a gruesome theme – featuring exoskeletons and little-to-no clothing or armor, they look more like twisted corpses than they do living beings. Enemy types include Thralls, Acolytes, Knights, Ogres, and Wizards. The Hive boasts perhaps the most interesting array of enemies: basic Thralls rush into melee without arms or armor, using swarm tactics to overwhelm Guardians, trying to simply claw them to death; Cursed Thralls are slower than basic Thralls, but are not only explosive, but also willing to self-detonate; Acolytes use cover and distance to attack at range with simple weapons; melee Knights are aggressive, like Thralls, but are much more dangerous, wielding huge, primitive swords, and being much harder to kill, while ranged Knights are more like Acolytes, using range and cover to their advantage, but are, again, much more dangerous, lobbing in hard-hitting exploding projectiles and being much tougher to take down; Ogres aren’t aggressive until they engage, at which point they’re as aggressive as Thralls, the difference being that Ogres are terrifyingly powerful both at range and in melee, and are extremely sturdy – thankfully they’re also very large, making them easy targets, especially since they don’t even attempt to use cover; Wizards have shields, use cover liberally, allowing them to regenerate those shields, have a strong offense at any range, can drop clouds of damaging poison that also hinders the movement and jumping capabilities of their enemies, and can fly, making them all the better at all of the above. Although some Hive stay at range and use cover, the overwhelming feel one gets when facing the Hive is exactly that: overwhelming. They are aggressive, relentless, and seemingly endless. This ties in well with their dark, morbid theme, making them *Destiny’s* version of the proverbial army of the dead.
- **The Vex**—Hostile alien race found primarily on Venus and Mars. The Vex, though organic in some ways, are mostly machine, and as one would expect from a race of machines, their technology is unparalleled. It may be worth noting that Vex technology and Fallen technology look very, very different; Fallen technology looks industrial and mechanical, with steel and pistons – one might even expect steam – whereas Vex technology looks sleek and futuristic, with beams of light and

floating parts, unlike anything one would generally think of as mechanical. While the Hive are crawling out of holes and the Fallen and Cabal are arriving in dropships, the Vex are appearing out of thin air or stepping through mass-transit gates. Vex technology is not only extremely advanced, but is also heavily themed around the manipulation of time – the mass-transit gates mentioned, for example, are called “time gates”, and are not meant to transport Vex from one location to another, but from one time to another. The difference would be a matter of semantics were it not for the fact that Guardians use these gates as well, allowing the distinction to sink in much better than it otherwise would have, and thereby lending an incredible amount of weight to the perceived threat of the Vex: the enemy is not merely every Vex that exists, but also every Vex that ever has or ever will. If that wasn’t threatening enough, the Vex also share a single consciousness. They also aren’t limited to teleporting through time – they teleport through space as well, half of their units using teleportation as a staple in their basic movement. Enemy types include Goblins, Hobgoblins, Harpies, Minotaurs, Hydras, and Cyclopes. In addition to their overwhelming numbers and endless streams of reinforcements, the Vex also feel unstoppable due to how they act in combat, generally advancing at a leisurely pace and not bothering to use cover – weaknesses that are all-but-negated by the fact that all of their units can attack at range. With overwhelming, unending numbers, the essence of the Vex is that of the infinite, and they’re fighting a war of attrition.

- **The Cabal** – Hostile alien race found primarily on Mars. The Cabal are a deeply-militarized race of relatively normal-looking humanoids, most of which are bulky and heavily-armored. Enemy types include Legionaries, Phalanxes, Centurions, Psions, and Colossi. Cabal Psions are lithe and quick, lightly-armored, using cover to survive, and strike with magical blasts. None of the other Cabal use any sort of magic and all other Cabal are large and slow, making the Psions rather mysterious. Other Cabal units rely solely on raw power, boasting strong offenses, strong defenses, or both. The Legionary, the Cabal’s weakest unit, has poor defense but wields a quick-firing grenade launcher. The Phalanx has a poor offense but carries a large, impenetrable shield to protect itself. The Colossus wields a heavy machine gun with incredible damage output, can fire volleys of homing missiles, and has excellent armor as well. What the Cabal lack in patience and maneuverability they make up for with brute force. This is reflected not only in their visuals, but in the slow-paced, methodical beats of their theme music as well. For now, the Cabal remain the least-encountered of the alien races, appearing in number only on Mars and not yet playing a major role in the overarching storyline.
- **The Taken** – Hostile alien race not native to anywhere. The Taken are essentially warped versions of other aliens, transformed by a Hive demigod, “The Taken King”, Oryx. The Taken can phase into and out of existence as easily as the Vex, like shadows, and possess an extremely versatile roster. Enemy types include Thralls, Acolytes, Knights, Wizards, Psions, Phalanxes, Centurions, Vandals, Captains, Goblins, Hobgoblins, and Minotaurs. As if that lineup wasn’t enough, since they’re all controlled by Oryx, they’re all allied with the Hive, essentially adding the entire Hive roster as potential combatants to any encounter with the Taken as well. Most Taken are simple variants of their original forms, for example, a Taken Thrall mindlessly rushes towards its enemy to attack at melee, just like a Hive Thrall, the only difference being that Hive Thralls run whereas Taken Thralls advance through a mixture of walking and teleportation. Some Taken, however,

differ greatly from their original versions, Taken Psions being able to duplicate themselves at terrifying rates, Taken Goblins being able to grant invincibility to other units, Taken Captains hurling blinding orbs of darkness, etc. Despite their great versatility, the Taken come across as a single, monstrous force, not only because of their uniformed aesthetics, but also because of their underlying lore: they're all just Oryx's pawns – the Taken, as a whole, an extension of his will.

Breakdown

Destiny begins with the player already in unknown territory, immediately defying the traditional template that starts out with the familiar before moving onto the strange. The opening cutscene shows explorers on Mars discovering the Traveler, some backstory is delivered that involves supernatural miracles and lurking cosmic dangers, and next thing we know, we're on Earth, but a post-apocalyptic version of it. Before we even get to gameplay, we see aliens and a strange, flying, probe-like robot. The robot was apparently looking for us, and once it finds us, it...resurrects us? Apparently the player starts out dead. The robot refers to itself as a "ghost", notes that it is now ours, and explains that the player has been dead "a very long time" – apparently the player started out not only dead, but as mere skeletal remains. We're immediately prompted to flee from the hostile aliens we saw before, soon find some weapons, and are thrown headlong not only into the action, but into the unknown. An integrated tutorial leads us through a dark indoor area, traversing the interior of a giant wall, and the next time we see the sky, we are greeted with enormous, peculiar towers and a signal flare that draws our attention just enough to see an alien spaceship warping into existence before our eyes. At first, our sense of scale is at odds with itself due to our lack of perspective, but as the spacecraft knocks over one of the towers and draws closer, we soon realize that it's absolutely gigantic. The mission continues, more enemies, more enemy types, and concludes, gameplay-wise, with a Fallen Captain – an enemy that isn't terribly difficult, but which does actually pose a threat to the player, flying in defiance of the trend that seems to have taken hold in that players should be babied for the duration of their introduction to the game. The Fallen Captain also introduces the shield mechanic – essentially secondary health bars that some enemies have which replenish quickly if they haven't taken damage recently and which must be depleted before damage can be done to their actual health. The mission ends with a cutscene in which the player acquires a ship, learns that their Ghost can teleport them into it, is introduced to yet another enemy type without having to engage it, and also catches a glimpse of who will become known as the Stranger, watching them as they fly away. This is a summary of the first mission of *Destiny*, in which players are hurled into the unknown. Mechanically, players are expected to learn fast and perform competently. Narratively, they're expected to adapt quickly and be comfortable with unanswered questions.

Destiny appears to deviate from the Hero's Journey template laid out by Joseph Campbell in his 1949 work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, having Ghost act as the Supernatural Aid before gameplay even starts and likewise arguably serving as The Call to Adventure, but doing so after having already acted as the Supernatural Aid. While these terms fit nicely into Campbell's monomyth, they're out of order and completely skip Refusing the Call. Additionally, the player starts off in an unfamiliar setting surrounded by strange entities where, were it to adhere to the monomyth layout, the player would start in a familiar, comfortable world before being plunged into the depths of the unknown. *Destiny* continues this trend, offering glimpses of pieces that appear to fit into a predefined template, but ultimately do not.

Destiny's campaign as a whole looks very much like the Road of Trials, almost every mission presenting the player with a significant challenge to overcome, slowly transforming the player as they gain experience, unlock new abilities, and acquire powerful items. But if the campaign and its missions are the Road of Trials, where was Crossing the Threshold? Where was the Belly of the Whale? It's certainly arguable that *Destiny* adheres to the Hero's Journey closer than I'm giving it credit for. Perhaps the state of normality was simply death, before Ghost revived the player, that the threshold guardian was the Fallen Captain at the end of the first mission, and that the Belly of the Whale was the player's departure from the Cosmodrome via their new-found ship, but it just doesn't quite seem to fit. Could the first fifteen minutes of gameplay in a game whose narrative is meant to unfold over the course of years really have been meant to embody the entire first act of the Hero's Journey? If so, it would certainly leave the campaign and its missions as the Road of Trials, but even if not, the Road of Trials seems to be the bulk of *Destiny's* gameplay. The story missions at least. But what about the raids?

The Vault of Glass felt more like a tangent than part of the story, fitting in only by virtue that it dealt with the Vex, who had been the focus of the campaign. The Vex had been made out to be threats, but we had no other context for who, or what, the Templar was, nor Attheon, and especially after the mission in which we learned that the Vex were not invading, but "returning home", defeating these raid bosses felt like slaughtering the neutral giants in *Shadow of the Colossus* – not like conquering evil villains. This changed with The Dark Below, Crota coming across as more of a true antagonist primarily due to our interactions with Eris Morn. Eris Morn gave us the narrative context for Crota that we never had for Attheon. To slay Crota was not only to avenge Eris and her fallen fireteam, but also to accomplish what she, and they, could not. The Taken King continued strongly in this direction. Not only did we have reason to face Oryx – a clear and present danger, not to mention the fact that he killed our beloved Queen – but also, he had reason to face us – we killed his son...with his own sword. It made for an interesting setting, benefitting from personal vendettas rather than simply pitting good against evil. With Oryx dead, however, or at least floating lifelessly towards Saturn, *Destiny* finds itself without a main antagonist. Oryx was, as far as we've seen or heard, the pinnacle of Hive power, so with his fall, we may have, more or less, beaten the Hive. Even if so, this still leaves the Fallen, the Vex, and the Cabal yet to be addressed.

As for the Hero's Journey, the Guardians of *Destiny* still seem to be on the Road of Trials. We've not met with any goddesses, been tempted, sought atonement, or anything else that would fit into the later stages of the monomyth. Confronting Oryx could potentially be seen as Atonement with the Father for the Hive subplot, but seems ill-fitting, as no Apotheosis, nor Ultimate Boon, followed. It would seem that *Destiny's* overall structure is either not following the Hero's Journey at all or is doing so only moderately and is still in the Road of Trials stage. The beauty of it, as I see it, and half the reason I chose *Destiny* as the subject for this essay, is that the story is ongoing. We've seen precious little of the saga that Bungie intends to tell and can do little but watch in patience and anticipation as the story unfolds over the years – and the fact that it's going to take years is something that Bungie can, and has, used to their advantage.

Attempting to capitalize on nostalgia is nothing new to role-playing games. Many RPGs successfully evoke feelings of nostalgia by leading players back to places of importance, or perhaps to where they first started, by having them cross paths with characters they haven't seen since early in the game, and so on. These games, however, save select examples like *World of Warcraft*, tend to have lifespans measurable in days, if not hours, an entire playthrough typically taking somewhere between 20 and 50 hours. This is to say that these games can be played, in their entirety, in perhaps a month. Perhaps less. Perhaps much less. Nostalgia is powerful, and its effects can be noteworthy even if not much time has actually passed.

How powerful, then, can it be when a lot of time actually has passed? Thanks to some long-standing games like *World of Warcraft*, we know the answer to that question: it can be unbelievably powerful – powerful enough to be a factor in player retention. Now then, what if that scale of nostalgia was intentionally woven into the game’s narrative, by design, from the start? What if the developers knew that players would be looking back not hours, or days, or weeks, but years, reflecting on the past, remembering previous events, places, and people? What if indeed, but this is exactly what Bungie appears to be doing – wielding a secret narrative weapon seldom seen actively used: time itself.

Strongest Element

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYzrORAhtWk>

The narrative in this cutscene is exquisite, the script enhanced by the voice acting, the voice acting brought to life by the motion capture, the motion capture capitalized on through the subtle use of body language, and all of it rounded out by glorious music. The Stranger all-but-opens with perhaps her most memorable quote: “I don’t even have time to explain why I don’t have time to explain.” The concept of having so little time gives the player some insight into what this Stranger’s life must be like, and the quote, while memorable in and of itself, also comes into play in the lore over a year later, making it seem even more timeless. The Stranger soon turns her attention to an unseen communications device, speaking to an unknown third party. The player learns that the Stranger has allies, likely a fireteam. She then calls the Guardian’s Ghost “little light” – perhaps not a moment of exposition, but fantastic writing nonetheless as evident by the playerbase’s overwhelming positive response to it. Ghost notes that he’s a Ghost, objecting to being called a little light. The Stranger turns back to her communications device, this time, based on the Stranger’s response, the unknown party apparently asking specifically about the player’s whereabouts. Following this transmission is an excellent non-verbal moment in which the Stranger pushes Ghost away from her, apparently annoyed by Ghost’s intrusive observations, but does so in an utterly gentle manner, showing no anger or malice whatsoever, the only hint at her annoyance being the fact that she did move Ghost away from her. The Stranger proceeds to deliver another memorable quote, “Evil so dark it despises other evil.” This quote, however, is seen by many to be cheesy, and seems to get recalled in jest. The player then learns, in a few moments of brilliant dialogue, voice acting, body language, and bass, that the Stranger is not a Guardian – that she was, as she put it, “not forged in Light.” She then alludes to a potential alliance as she crushes a fallen Vex underfoot, showing a side of her completely opposite of what was seen with her interaction with Ghost. She asks if we’ve heard of the Black Garden. As players, we haven’t, but Ghost has, and his response is telling: “We’ve heard the legends.” Before he responded, we knew nothing. Now we know, if nothing else, that it’s important enough to have legends about it. The Stranger then delivers some narrative regarding the Black Garden, setting the player on the path to the final objective of the launch campaign. The player asks the Stranger if she can help locate it – she says she cannot. Ghost points out who can, introducing the Awoken, which the Stranger briefly comments on as well before giving us a final memorable quote: “A side should always be taken, little light. Even if it’s the wrong side.” It’s worth noting that although she was addressing Ghost, she turns to her attention to the player before saying “Even if it’s the wrong side.” Is she suggesting that we’re on the wrong side? Is she talking about herself? Is she referring to the Awoken? Before we know it, she’s gone, hurried off to assist allies after receiving a transmission that, based on her responses and her reaction, seemed dire. The player asks Ghost how to find the Awoken and Ghost responds ominously before initiating a fan-favorite moment that ends the scene’s dialogue. Ghost asks, as a rhetorical alternative to visiting the Awoken, “Can’t we just stay here with the murderous

robots?” The player responds mischievously, “No, little light.” Ghost, indignant: “Don’t do that.” Cue the music, outro the camera, and that’s a wrap of one of the most effective cutscenes in *Destiny*.

Unsuccessful Element

In *Destiny*, players will occasionally do something that unlocks lore related to whatever they just did. Lore unlocked in this way is delivered in text format via “grimoire cards”. Many players are turned off by the “walls of text” method anyway, but the part that really hurt was the fact that the grimoire cards aren’t even accessible in-game. If a player wants to delve into the lore they just unlocked, they have to log into Bungie.net to do so, which means, at the very least, switching their attention from their console to their PC, phone, etc. And if they don’t have a device handy to log into Bungie.net? Leave their console to go look up it up? Wait until they can? Forget about it entirely? Ideally, the lore would be introduced through gameplay, but at the very least, players should be able to access the grimoire cards from within the game. As it stands, if you want to know the lore, you have to put down your controller and turn your attention away from the game – I can’t think of a more reliable way to break immersion.

Highlight

You’ve only begun to explore the Moon. You’ve encountered the Hive before, but only sparingly. You’ve just found the remains of another Guardian lying at the base of an enormous, eerie-looking door. The runic seals on the door begin to glow, then break. Your Ghost advises you to move back. The door opens.

Ghost: “We’ve woken the Hive!”

The Hive pour through the door like a flood. Thralls lead the charge. They look like twisted, grotesque corpse-demons. And they’re fast. And there’s dozens of them. Some of them are running straight at you. Some of them are veering off to the sides, presumably to flank you. Acolytes follow. They’re almost as hideous as Thralls. There’s several of them, and they’re smart enough to take cover while firing at you from a distance. There’s a boomer Knight too. It looks like some sort of unholy crusader whose armor is made of bones, and it’s shooting huge exploding balls of death at you.

You’ve woken the Hive.

Critical Reception

Destiny was met with harsh criticism of its narrative elements, critics calling its storyline minimal, weak, and disjointed, its character development little-to-none, and its narrative pacing irregular. They also found it odd that players had to log into the game’s website to read the “Encyclopedic grimoire entries” (Miller 2014, p.1) that were meant to deliver much of *Destiny*’s lore. Despite their disappointment with its narrative elements, the critics cited gave *Destiny* overall scores of 8.75¹ and 7.8².

¹ Miller, Matt. Flawed Structure, Engrossing Action.

<http://www.gameinformer.com/games/destiny/b/xboxone/archive/2014/09/15/destiny-game-informer-review.aspx>. gameinformer. 2014.

² Ingenito, Vince. Destiny Review – IGN. <http://www.ign.com/articles/2014/09/03/destiny-review>. IGN. 2014

Lessons

- **Some stories take time to tell, and that's okay.**

This rapid-fire interview with creative director Luke Smith is not only interesting, but entertaining: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7FmaUOD1TUg>. At 2:07, Luke Smith makes light of the fact that *Destiny's* narrative previous to *The Taken King* had been pointedly weak while likewise noting that *The Taken King* would be changing that fact. Some would argue that *Destiny's* storyline is still lacking, but nobody can rightfully say that it hasn't improved substantially. Guardians logged into *Destiny* after installing *The Taken King* and were greeted with a lengthy, beautiful cinematic...in which the Queen dies. How's that for a plot twist? Before you can even do anything in the new expansion, the Queen is dead. Her brother too, probably. Hopefully.

As gameplay continued, more and more pieces started falling into place – pieces that have been in play since the original launch, but which lacked context. Praedyth's Revenge was a sniper rifle obtained in the Vault of Glass, the raid that was available at launch, and was extremely popular due to how good it was not only for the raid, but for pvp as well. Praedyth's Timepiece was a pulse rifle from the same raid. At the time, Guardians simply appreciated the excellent weapons and thought only in passing, "Who is Praedyth?" With *The Taken King*, a year later, now we know. We found his Ghost. We found his bones. We followed breadcrumbs and slew hordes in his name, and, ultimately, we were rewarded with an exotic pulse rifle called "No Time To Explain". The name of this reward alone means something to Guardians, the Stranger being well-known for her quote: "I don't even have time to explain why I don't have time to explain." So then, how is Praedyth linked to the Stranger? Through Future War Cult? Seems unlikely since the Stranger "was not forged in Light" (not a Guardian). Guess we'll have to wait and see. More questions than answers, but sometimes that's for the best.

Another example of pieces falling into place, and my personal favorite, starts with Phogoth. He was the first strike boss I remember, and I remember him because of the reaction I had to his name. "Phogoth the Untamed, Spawn of Crota" – this...thing...had a name, a title, and a lineage. I didn't know who Crota was, but the mere fact that Phogoth's lineage was important enough to mention made him all-the-more intimidating. Months later, I met Crota, Son of Oryx. I didn't know who Oryx was, but two things jumped out at me. First, that back in the Phogoth days, there was mission in a place called the Shrine of Oryx where the objective was to destroy a device that was communing with the Hive's "god, or king". Second, that Phogoth was the "Spawn" of Crota while Crota was the "Son" of Oryx. Suddenly Oryx started to feel much more important, and because of that, as well as due to the distinction between "Spawn" and "Son", Crota became much more impressive. A year after first encountering Phogoth and the Shrine of Oryx, I met Oryx himself. It wasn't that he owned the shrine, but that he was the "god, or king" that it had been communing with. I destroyed the shrine, killed his grandson, Phogoth, then his son, Crota, then his daughters, the Deathsingers, and had finally come to challenge him face to face. A year before, when I first came across Phogoth, I never imagined just how much of his bloodline I would end up facing. Sometimes what appears to be simple flavor turns out to actually be seeds of lore – seeds that will necessarily lie dormant until the time is right.

Players complained about the story at launch, but launch was only the first act, the first three months of a saga that is meant to span years. It's comparable to complaining about the story of *The Lord of the Rings* (the entire trilogy) 30 minutes into the first movie. Character development takes time, as do plots, and though Bungie was hammered for not having a strong story arch in *Destiny's* initial content, they've demonstrated with *The Taken King* that there are larger tales being woven, and players have responded positively. Even from an outside perspective, it seems clear based on *Destiny's* numbers that Bungie has been forgiven for how slowly their story is developing, suggesting that, indeed, some stories take time to tell, and that's okay.

- **Being able to laugh at yourself is awesome.**

Bungie has made their share of mistakes with *Destiny*, but they're learning, adapting, and taking it in stride. Early-on, *Destiny* players were extremely unhappy with the engram loot system and Bungie struggled to appease their discontent. Engrams are essentially mystery loot that have to be "decrypted" by the Cryptarch, Master Rahool, to get the actual item. The main complaint against how the engrams worked was the fact that they had a high chance to drop a quality level when decrypted. Legendary engrams would decrypt into rare items as often as they did legendary items. Rare engrams would turn into uncommon items as often as they did rare items. Players hated this, and, eventually, Bungie changed it, instead allowing engrams to decrypt to a higher quality level, but not to a lower one, but not before players had developed an uncanny hatred of Master Rahool, Destroyer of Dreams, the hardest boss in *Destiny*. With the launch of *House of Wolves*, Guardians gained access to the Reef, and with the Reef, the Reef's Cryptarch, Master Ives. Since *House of Wolves* gave players a lot of reasons to frequent the Reef instead of the Tower, Master Rahool lost a lot of business to Master Ives, making it easy for players to catch some of Ives' lines like "You'll find the Reef Cryptarchs are somewhat more competent than that...Rahool..." or, "I assure you, the Reef Cryptarchs are not the degenerate schismatics you're familiar with."

Bungie going out of their way to poke fun at themselves, and their NPCs at each other, was met with great approval, and Bungie seemed to take note of this, because we saw an enormous influx of such banter with the Festival of the Lost this Halloween. Banshee-44, the Gunsmith, who recently became a significant source of weaponry for Guardians, was wearing a Master Rahool mask, made even better by the pompous smirk the mask featured. More laughs were had at Master Rahool's expense, but this time he took a page from Bungie's book, not only taking it in stride, but actually contributing to the laughter by himself donning an Exotic Engram mask. NPCs participating in the event gave out candy...except Eris Morn, who gave out tiny boxes of raisins. Cayde-6 wore an Eris Morn mask. One of the festival quest objectives was to get sword kills in pvp while wearing a Crota mask, Crota being a raid boss well-known for his swordplay – amusing, but not as good as when Bungie, again, made light of previous mistakes by having one of the other objectives be to simply kill yourself by jumping off the Tower while wearing an Atheon mask, Atheon being a raid boss who could initially be defeated just by throwing grenades at him until he fell off a ledge trying to avoid them.

My argument is this: games like *Destiny*, which are still getting updated, whose developers are still interacting with their playerbases, can capitalize on that narrative by incorporating it into the game. It's meta, it breaks the fourth wall, and not everyone will appreciate it, but many will, and some will appreciate it a lot. Players like knowing that the developers are hearing them, especially when the developers are also listening to them and changes are actually being made. Bungie has shown themselves to be good listeners who act on feedback. They've responded humbly and playfully to harsh criticism and even outright mockery. But what really made them shine was how they were able to improve the game by drawing upon not only the feedback they were receiving, but the dialogue itself, and not only the answers, but the problems as well.

- **Encouraging players to stop playing your game is counterproductive.**

The horse is already dead and beaten, but here we go again. In *Destiny*, a large amount of the lore is delivered through grimoire cards which cannot be accessed in-game. Players wishing to read these text entries, to engage in the game's lore, must quit playing the game to do so. This is counterproductive, as lore should work to further immersion, not destroy it. The lore would ideally be introduced via gameplay, but even if left in grimoire card form, it should at least be viewable in-game.

Summation

Destiny is worthy of analysis because it's pioneering a new narrative structure in gaming – something previously only seen in television series like *Game of Thrones*: delivering saga-scale narrative in episodic installments. Also making it worthy of attention is the fact that *Destiny* appears to be deviating from, if not outright ignoring, the conventions set forth by *The Hero's Journey*, a structure that seems to have become seen as somewhat of a golden template of storytelling but which is far from one-size-fits-all. In *Destiny's* infancy, its narrative was met with merciless criticism, but it has persevered and grown, and players are starting to see bigger pictures forming. The stage is so grand, and the questions so many, that once things start coming into focus, it's hard not to buy into the future of the story. What was once just a gun now evokes memories of the fallen Guardian, Praedyth, of Future War Cult, and of the Stranger. What was once just a strike boss is now understood as being the grandspawn of Oryx, The Taken King, demigod of the Hive, belonging to a bloodline that Guardians have now faced three generations of. Only time will tell whether or not Bungie continues these trends, but *Destiny's* story has only been getting stronger, is poised to continue its ascent, and is still young, with years of narrative yet to be seen. Regardless of how *Destiny* ultimately turns out, there are learning opportunities in watching the evolution of the game and its story, the interaction between its developers and its players, and its numbers. *Destiny's* success or failure could determine whether or not its model has a future in the industry, so for anyone interested in games of epic proportions, *Destiny's* fate is worth paying attention to, and for anyone interested in following in *Destiny's* footsteps, so are its triumphs and missteps.

All assertions made in this essay were based on observing gameplay. No grimoire lore was referenced.