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Game Title: Killzone 2

Platform: Playstation 3

Genre: First Person Shooter

Release Date: February 27th, 2009

Developer: Guerilla Games

Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment

Game Writer/Creative Director/Narrative Designer: Mathijs De Jonge

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## Killzone 2

### **Overview**

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Killzone 2 follows the story of the Interplanetary Strategic Alliance's (ISA) retaliation assault on the Helghast home planet. The Helghast, a race of mutant-human hybrids, had two years prior launched a blitzkrieg strike against an ISA controlled planet. The ISA intend to storm the capital city and take the leader of their enemy in hopes of using his capture to end the war.

The plot follows the player controlled character and primary protagonist of the game Sergeant Thomas "Sev" Sevchenko. He is a member of a special forces unit that is deployed behind enemy lines. Sev soon learns that on their home planet his enemies are a more formidable foe than ever: they have harnessed the power of the planet's lightning storms and are using them to strike back.

The game lets the player see through the eyes of a character who is fighting a terrifying and brutal foe, one that he has little hope for defeating. It takes the player through the invasion the city allowing them to witness the affect the horrors of war have had on it. It then expands outward as the war becomes more dire and Sev's missions become critically important to the war effort. Sev must fight to protect his squad members, while still marching forward at the order of his commanders.

### **Characters**

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There are unfortunately only a small handful of characters even worth mentioning in Killzone 2, let alone worth going into detail about. There is little in-game characterization and much of

what is written here comes from the game's manual or other sources. There are, however, a few interesting characters and those are the one's listed here.

**Sergeant Thomas "Sev" Sevchenko** is the primary protagonist of the game and the playable character. He is a natural leader who has a strong patriotic belief in defending his homeland. He is a member of the ISA Alpha Squad and is perhaps the most level headed of the group. He is a quick thinker which gets him and his squad out of many situations. He is not perfect however. As a young soldier, he has already participated in many military campaigns and these clearly have had a negative effect on him. He is withdrawn and almost separated from everything that is happening.

**Corporal Dante Garza** is a close friend of Sev and another member of Alpha team. He is a bit laidback and a loner. Garza is the team's technical specialist and sniper. This reflects his persona quite a bit. He tends to do what needs to be done, even without being ordered to do so. He as a cocky, almost hotheaded member of the squad is a contrast to Sev who is pure in militaristic tendencies and discipline. Garza is killed partway through the game and his death is what fuels Sev's final efforts.

**Master Sergeant Rico Velasquez** is the brute of the Alpha squad. He is angry, impatient, and has a rather boolean view of the world. His hatred for the Helghast drive him throughout the game. He is pushed by the need to avenge his last squad that was killed by the Helghast and this often ends up with making the situation worse. He is fiercely loyal to his squad mates and would defend them with his life. He is Alpha Squad's gunner and this is reflected in his penchant for violence.

**Colonel Mael Radec** is the leader of the Helghast army and the primary villain of the game. He is perhaps the most feared soldier in the entire army due to his unnatural fighting abilities, his tactical brilliance, and his outright ruthlessness. He is a pure soldier and knows nothing else. He has drowned out anything in his personality that could get in the way of his duties. He has the near perfect ability to command an army in a battle and to fight viciously alongside him. He has a sense of honor, but chooses not to follow it blindly. He knows what needs to get done and will not compromise to do so. In the end, having been defeated by Sev and remaining true to his Helghast loyalties, Radec commits suicide rather than be held captive by the ISA

### **Highlight**

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Easily the narrative highlight has to be the end of the game. Sev, Rico and the rest of the ISA had just stormed the enemy capital, participating in several escalating in size fights, moving all the way towards the enemy leader's stronghold. There, after another exciting and heartbouncing battle, Sev and Rico finally confront the Helghast leader: Scolar Visari. He tells Sev and Rico that despite their current victory the war wasn't close to being over. If they were to capture him, Visari would become a martyr in the eyes of the rest of the Helghast and they would fight with more passion and resolve than ever.

Sev contemplates this idea, but still decides it is best that Visari is captured. Rico, however, wants none of this and assassinates the enemy leader for all the death and destruction he has caused. As Visari dies he mutters his final words: "The madness...begins." This bone chilling moment is quickly explained - as Sev leaves the palace he sees a massive Helghast fleet destroying his allies and quickly understands what the Visari meant by "madness."

This scene was pure genius. The player is suddenly forced to see the consequences of the actions taken throughout the game and that the heroes were not perfect. A mistake had been made, the plan even though executed perfectly did not work, and now the ISA were going to pay for it. While many might argue that the bleak hopeless ending may have been in poor taste (especially since it was clearly set up as sequel bait), I found that it fit in perfectly within the theme of the game. War is destructive and violent and no matter how well a plan plays out in the end nobody wins and somebody is going to die.

### **Strongest Element**

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The strongest narrative element is easily the moment when the primary antagonist of the game, Colonel Mael Radek, shows his true colors by assassinating Captain Jan Templar and scientist Evelyn Batton. Radek confronts them, strolling into the room calmly. His entrance is met with shock - both Templar and Batton know they will not make it out of this situation alive. His swift brutality is clearly well known.

Radek initiates small talk with Templar, showing his disappointment at the situation. He had hoped the two could have fought "like soldiers." This comment alone made Radek a character I loved. He was a villain of honor, but he did not follow that honor blindly. He did what needed to be done. In this scene he kills two important characters and did so with little effort. He became a hated character for the actions he committed but a loved character for how he committed them.

Radek's cool, articulate demeanor and his sly, sharp tone of voice gave him an air of villainous intelligence and a menacingly calm presence. In one swift moment, Radek proved himself as the antagonist of the game and as a character to be feared. His ruthlessness was executed perfectly, his calm attitude chilling. I knew that I would have to face him myself in the future and that was an encounter that, because of this scene, I both dreaded and looked forward to.

### **Weakest Element**

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The weakest element is probably the death of the Alpha squad member Garza and the main character's reaction to it. Before his death, Garza had been given little characterization and while he was generally with the main character throughout the game, we weren't given much in regards to their relationship. Once he dies, however, we are expected to accept the main character's angry and brash reactions in response. Without proper characterization the player is expected to feel for Sev's loss and to sympathize with his anger towards the enemy. It seems like it was hoped that Garza's death would have created a link between Sev and the player and

that the emotions Sev had regarding his death would have also affected the player. This, had it been executed well, would have given the final efforts of the game much more of an impact.

Considering how much time the player spends with Garza throughout the game, he could have easily been given a better developed character. Something as simple as having him converse with Sev about his feelings regarding whatever situation they were in would have gone a long way. More backstory would have helped as well. I understood that Sev and Garza were soldiers together, but why did Garza's death affect Sev so much? If the game had developed their relationship through dialog or perhaps flashbacks, then it would have been easier to empathize with Sev's loss.

Overall, however, I think Garza needed something that separated him from every other soldier you fought alongside of. He needed some kind of trait or quirk. For example, if he had constantly performed outwardly heroic actions or perhaps if he saw the war as some kind of game then it would have made his loss have meaning. The player would lose that trait or quirk, it would be something that was now quantifiably missing from the game.

## **Breakdown**

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The story of Killzone 2 follows a fairly common structure. It is broken into multiple chapters with each one generally having its own setting and overall goal. The player starts a chapter with an objective and then by the end of the chapter the objective is completed - in some form or another. The chapters are generally also interspersed with cutscenes to tell the story. They do a good job of letting the player know what is going on and what they should be doing.

The game makes an interesting choice when it comes to the protagonist. Sev never speaks while in player control. Other characters still interact with him, but he never responds. Only during cutscenes does Sev speak and the game did a really poor job at making that clear. Since the game starts with the player in control (and since the game is in a first person perspective), by the time the first cutscene occurred I had no idea who Sev was. I knew that I was Sev, but I had no idea that this new guy who appeared in the cutscene was the same character that I was controlling. It was a jarring experience that I got over, but it was still an odd narrative choice by the developers. Perhaps it was to make the player feel more like he/she *was* actually Sev while he/she was playing.

While the game may have had some shortcomings when it came to characterization, it made up for it with its setting. The game showed the horrors of war and did it well. Battles are gritty and chaotic with soldiers from both sides screaming and fighting one another. Explosions light the background, the harsh weather tears apart the horizon, and destruction can be seen with every step. This visual way of telling the story does remarkable things when it comes to drawing the player in. It sucks the player into the world, it makes him/her feel like he/she is a part of the struggle fighting along side those who share the same cause.

Building off that, the Helghast are the embodiment of a villain. They symbolize evil and

corruption and fight with a devastating fury. Each Helghast soldier wears a gas mask with glowing red eyes and that feature cements everything about the Helghast as the enemy. They are given a defined feature, one to hate - they are given an inhuman appearance. The Helghast appear like creatures rather than just mutant-humans. Their red eyes tear away any humanity they may have had left which makes them impossible to sympathize with. They are the enemy and they must be stopped.

### **Critical Reception**

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Killzone 2 was met with almost unanimous critical acclaim garnering a 91% and a 90% on the aggregate review sites Metacritic and Game Rankings respectively. Unfortunately most of the praise went to the game's graphics, multiplayer, and online play. Gaming magazine Edge gave the game a 7/10 claiming its had a "weak storyline and characters." Gamespot reviewer Kevin VanOrd gave the game a 9/10, but said that the story and characters were "forgettable." Most reviews followed similarly: they praised the game itself but hounded on the plot and characters. In the game's defense however, much of the reviews that panned the story seemed to ignore some of the more intricate and interesting ways the story was *told* and focused far too much on the plot of the game.

### **Lessons**

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-The best lesson learned from this game is the important affect that visual storytelling can have on a game. The developers knew that they had a rich and interesting world and they utilized that to the fullest. They told the story through the environments, through the war and battles the player participates in. They showed emotion with colors and animation. Killzone 2 is proof that a game doesn't need lengthy and often hamfisted exposition to tell a good story.

By building a world and filling it with characters that fit and then designing the game in such a way that the player is consistently drawn in, I think storytelling as a whole can be improved. Simply put, Killzone 2 did war right and this helped the story. It created a war between fictional races, on a fictional planet and still made me care. I felt like a member of the ISA, I felt hatred towards the Helghast, and the game did this even when in the greater view of things there was little for me to relate to. Since the game drew me into the world, I cared about the story when I normally wouldn't and that is the perfect way to tell a story.

-The game also taught me that using nonstandard ways of character development may not always work out for the best. Having Sev not speak when the player was in control was a novel idea, but in the end it didn't work out. The gap between player controlled Sev and cutscene Sev was too jarring and it only served to detract from the experience. It would have been better had the developers chosen one path or the other - either have Sev never speak or have had him speak even when players were in control.

### **Summation**

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Killzone 2 deserves analysis because of its profound use of visual storytelling. It may not have the best dialog, characters, or plot but it managed to tell a story and give life to a world through brilliant visuals. It's rare that a game succeeds at such a non-standard way of telling a story and it is because of this that game developers should look to Killzone 2 for future developments.