

# **Avatars in *A Plague Tale: Innocence***

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## **Introduction**

Avatars, as an essential component in a videogame, plays an important role in storytelling and is the medium of human-computer interactivity. This essay aims at discussing the videogame *A Plague Tale: Innocence* by applying two concepts mentioned in Ryan's book *Avatars of Story: textual architecture and types of interactivity*. After discussion, this essay will suggest some ways to complicate the game's choices for players while maintaining the overall story structure.

Before analysis, a short game summary is provided as follow. The story has the background of Hundred Years' War in Middle Age Europe between Kingdom of England and Kingdom of France, when Black Death was happening simultaneously. The French noble girl Amicia attempts to protect her brother Hugo from the plague and the hunt-down of English troops.

## **Discussion - Narrativity**

This part of essay attempts to analyze videogame *A Plague Tale: Innocence* (hereafter referred to as "*Plague*") in the aspect of textual architecture.

Firstly, to define the textual architecture in interactive storytelling, it means the structure of plot and interactivity. In the book *Avatars of Story* (Ryan, 2009), it mainly discussed 4 types of plot: state-transition diagram, interplay of actual and virtual events, interwoven destiny lines, and travel in story world.

For *Plague*, it is obvious that it uses the simplest plot structure: state-transition. In the game, substories happen one after another, just like normal storytelling without interactive elements. The reasons are as follow: 1) There is no transition of perspective—players always see the game world through Amicia's perspective. 2) Everything players can experience is part of the reality in game, no virtual event exists. This is partly due to the use of historical background, which are already part of fact, thus leaving minimal space for virtual events. 3) Although there are geographical transitions, it is not a game that allows players choose to be at a certain location whenever they want. Rather, the main character's moving in the game world must abide with the storyline. For example, At the beginning of the story, Amicia, her father, and her hound are in the forest hunting for a boar. After her hound's unexplained death, she and her father go back to their manor house in fear. Upon English army's incursion into the manor and her father's death, Amicia has to run away with her brother Hugo to find their mother. These transitions of location follow the storyline and are not based on players' will.

## **Discussion – Interactivity**

This part of essay is going to analyze *Plague's* interactivity.

Interactivity in a videogame means the human-computer interaction elements, which enhance digital storytelling experience. In Ryan's discussion about types of interactivity (Ryan, 2009), she categorizes interactivity into 4 kinds: external-exploratory, internal-exploratory, external-

ontological, and internal-ontological.

To determine whether an interactivity is external or internal, what most essential is whether players can match themselves in the game in the form of an avatar. To determine whether an interactivity is exploratory or ontological, the criterium is whether players' actions (if any) will affect the storyline or the environment of the virtual world.

Upon analysis of *Plague*, it can be concluded that it is an internal-ontological interactive videogame. It is internal because players think themselves as Amicia at the same time and space while playing, and her missions are exactly players' missions. Moreover, it is ontological. Although players' actions cannot really change the environment, they can change the avatars' fate. In the game *Plague*, Hundred Years' War and Black Death are always ongoing anyway, but Amicia's actions decided by players can determine Amicia and Hugo's fate (survive or die). Therefore, the interactivity level is considered relatively high.

### **Alternative**

In the scene from 8'54'' to 15'09'' (MKIceAndFire, 2019), players are in the process of getting to know about the world and the situation. However, this part could have more interactive elements. In the game, minor characters speak when Amicia approaches them. However, it can be design in the way that Amicia approaches the minor character, minor character speaks, and players get to choose what questions Amicia asks or what lines she speaks. This can make the game even more interactive since the information players gather from the conversations can affect their actions taken later and change avatars' fate.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, *Plague* is a videogame that emphasizes narrativity rather than interactivity. It applies state-transition plot structure and internal-ontological type of interactivity. This kind of combination is suitable for this game because state-transition plot structure makes sure that what players experience is the real history, while internal-ontological interactivity mode gives players a chance to experience a person's struggle in Middle Age's shadow.

As many other videogames, by taking actions in the *Plague* game world via the avatar Amicia, players can gain instant feedback from the game, which is one typical feature of interactivity. To make the game more interactive, more choices can be provided during conversations between/among avatars, such that players are more engaged in the game via strategic questioning and answering.

To conclude, *A Plague Tale: Innocence* is a typical videogame with a credible background and high level of interactivity. It fits in the models suggested by Ryan (Ryan, 2009), but can be improved further by leaving more choices to players in conversation with other avatars to gain an even higher interactivity.

## References

MKIceAndFire. (2019). *A PLAGUE TALE INNOCENCE Gameplay Walkthrough Part 1 FULL GAME [1080p HD 60FPS PC] - No Commentary* [Video]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fmd6nSo7FJc>

Ryan, M. (2009). *Avatars of story*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Univ. of Minnesota Press.