

Narrative Essay

Emma Gamble

Old Dominion University

IDS 493: Electronic Portfolio Project

Professor Carin Andrews

September 7th 2024

About Me

I grew up in a small town outside Seattle, WA. When I wasn't exploring the forests around me I was indoors playing video games. My desire to travel and to help others eventually led me to join the Coast Guard. Now I live with my husband and two daughters in Portsmouth, VA. My military service has given me skills and knowledge to follow through with my goals. My passion for playing video games has always interested me in the behind-the-scenes work that goes into making the games that I love. It has led me to the start of my career in game development. I'm currently a senior at Old Dominion University and I will soon graduate with a degree in game studies and design.

My Journey

It has taken several years for me to find my true calling as a game developer. The path wasn't always straightforward but every stop along the way added to my understanding and appreciation for creating a narrative and experience through video games. I've always had a passion for the arts. I always considered drawing, photography and writing to be hobbies of mine. When it came time to find a career path I was unsure of how to proceed. I felt I had to choose between a stable but boring career, or an unpredictable career in the arts. Like many young people unsure about their future and desperate to make a difference in the world I joined the military. When the recruiter told me I qualified for any of the Coast Guard's jobs I chose Electronics Technician. It was a job that offered a signing bonus, but it also interested me to learn about radios and navigation equipment. After basic training I reported to Petaluma, CA to start a nine month training program to become an Electronics Technician. The military instilled in me work ethic and confidence in my abilities. Another skill it allowed me to develop was

working as a team and gaining leadership experience. The military truly does drive home the importance of camaraderie and effective communication. This was a valuable experience for developing interpersonal skills in the workplace.

After leaving active duty I began working on my bachelor's degree at Old Dominion University. I had a few college credits from pursuing a degree in graphic design. I really enjoyed working creatively and designing things. I knew my ultimate dream job was to work on video games. I decided I wanted to make this my main focus and I needed to find a way to go about achieving this goal. I switched my degree to Computer Science because I had always taken an interest in programming and computers. I thought I would learn to build a video game from scratch with code. While it was interesting learning how computer languages work, I still missed working creatively in the arts. I was really curious to learn more about the design aspect of game development. What made a game's story memorable? How do you design interesting characters and a world for a game? What gameplay mechanics work together to make a game challenging and still fun? These questions kept rattling in my mind. Then I learned about the relatively new degree program at Old Dominion University for game studies and design. I decided to go about pursuing game development with this specialized degree.

While it might seem like I wasted time trying to find the right path, I choose to look at it differently. Smith (2017), says that it is important for one to take control of the stories we tell about our life, "These stories allow individuals to craft a positive identity: they are in control of their lives, they are loved, they are progressing through life and whatever obstacles they have encountered have been redeemed by good outcomes." I believe everything I have learned up to this point has been helpful in setting me on the right path.

Why Game Development?

It has taken me several years through my professional and academic journey to reach this point. Although even before all of that I knew I always loved games. At 10 years old I got a Nintendo DS and loved games like Animal Crossing and Pokemon. Shortly After that I got a Playstation 2 and a Nintendo Switch. My favorite games were Spyro and The Legend of Zelda. I kept enjoying games throughout my adolescence and spent countless hours playing Skyrim, Bioshock and Fallout: New Vegas. I was drawn to games with a strong story or large open world. Video games were able to capture my attention like nothing else and were a wonderful escape into another world. I want to create beautiful and captivating worlds for others.

Education

Old Dominion University has an amazing program for game studies. My professors have challenged me to think critically about gameplay and narrative. Video games are unlike any other medium for narrative. They allow for narrative elements through the gameplay, known as procedural rhetoric. They can be fully immersive and allow the player to take control of the story. A game with emergent gameplay lets players have freedom to complete an objective in different ways. This is something I really admire about newer games and want to incorporate in the games I create.

I've created two short video games so far. Both of them I made using Unreal Engine 5.4. One game was a 2D platformer and the other was a small open world melee combat game. I mostly used premade assets for the character skins, objects and textures. In the future I aim to create games using almost entirely my own assets. For the past year I've been learning to use Blender for 3D modeling. I feel confident enough now to import my own 3D models into Unreal

Engine and use these for my next game. It is very satisfying to see my vision come to life in a 3D model. I'm eager to add even more life to these models through story and gameplay.

References

Smith, E.E. (January 12, 2017). *The two kinds of stories we tell about ourselves*. TED Conferences, <https://ideas.ted.com/the-two-kinds-of-stories-we-tell-about-ourselves/>