

## **Play! Critical Response 4**

### **“Her Story” & “The Stanley Parable”**

#### *My Play! Experience*

##### **Her Story**

The game “Her Story” provided a very unique experience to players by using unconventional rules and gameplay to tell a linear story in a non-linear way. You begin investigating into the murder of Simon Smith using a video database containing interview clips of his wife, Hannah Smith. I found this game to be a perfect candidate for defining video games as an art form for its excellent narrative. As previously mentioned, it tells a story, like a book, in a non-linear way. The player is given little guidance, being encouraged to search for key words of their own thoughts to find information in the form of more video clips in order to solve the mystery. There is a very clear linearity to the clips as each one contains a date of when the interview was conducted. The player co-authors the story as the story is told at the players own pace. One player may search a keyword leading to specific interviews while another may go another direction. This kind of interactive story telling combines the artistry of books and movies and incorporates interactivity. So in a sense, would that not be video games as an art as well? The story progresses in a way unique to the mindset of the player. For example the player may focus on the twin aspect of the character Hannah and look for all relative information to Eve. Following this path may lead the player to a final conclusion based on jealousy between the twins, making the drama fairly player driven. I felt that this game really brought a unique perspective to narrative in video games. It kept me invested throughout, and every interaction felt meaningful and progressive.

##### **The Stanley Parable**

Every once in a while a game will come along that tries to turn players’ perceptions of a game upside down. “The Stanley Parable” is one of those games. It uses audio, character, and level design to challenge the player into either obeying or disobeying the rules of the Narrator, a character specifically designed to impose rules on the player. The Narrator is a form of meta-communication, essentially conveying the rules of the game as a person rather than innately through visual or interactional queues. It’s main charm is the ability to do what you want, when you want. If you don’t feel like listening the Narrator direct you anymore, you can do the opposite. You can even take it to such an extent as jumping off the expected map into new areas. I found the game to be a story about interactivity. Its entire purpose was to bring to light how we as players interact with video games, telling a narrative based on how we choose to interact based on the rules provided to us or how we choose to explore disregarding the rules. There is something for everyone in this game as it almost captures every type of play style and provides a response. For example those like myself who love to explore will find reactions to every attempt at looking around at different objects in the world. Those who like a straight forward story can follow the Narrator and take the given paths. The freedom “The Stanley Parable” provides is what makes this game so enjoyable and its narration style lends this game to be analyzed for how to better improve all genres of games through its psychological interpretation of the mind of a gamer.

*1. What kind of gameplay experiences do so-called classic games provide modern players?*

These games provide an insight into the potential story telling has in video games as a whole. Both “Her Story” and “The Stanley Parable” are both more to the side of paid. They represent a piece of all games, the narrative. They present the concept of player driven stories, or rather, players as a co-author, where the player determines the direction the story goes. These games both show that it is possible to create stories that are so versatile that the player can be given the freedom to choose their own fate. Games such as the *Mario* or *Call of Duty* franchises could both be improved by adding features presented in these games. While the exact gameplay style of “Her Story” doesn’t make any sense in a Mario game, the concept of players choosing their own direction based on what information they wish to pursue does. This lends to the replayability and thus more value from a single game as they will get multiple enjoyable play-throughs of a single title to get the whole story. From a player’s perspective, these games teach us that you don’t need a massive grandeur linear story to have good narrative. In fact, “Her Story” and “The Stanley Parable” both teach that a short story with many different paths can be just as enjoyable. Each run of “The Stanley Parable” can be completely in up to a half hour, but the time spent discovering these endings for yourself can be much greater and the experience and satisfaction gained by finding them is far greater than walking through any linear story. Due to the multiple paths available in both these games, you get to see different character developments. In “Her Story,” you see Hannah start the game as nothing. Your normal everyday person. A blank slate. Depending on the information you pursue, you can see her take responsibility for the actions of her sister or complete her own goal of removing Simon as she becomes more and more seemingly disturbed. In the end, you never truly know the events with Hannah. It’s left to the player to decide how they believe Hannah developed, or if she developed at all and her sister, Eve, was real.

*2. Are old games only worth historical analysis, or do they fascinate & hold staying power?*

Both “Her Story” and “The Stanley Parable” hold staying power and I believe they will continue to do so going forward. These games are built on systems that ignore the typical aging process of video games. Generally a game will age due to poor controls or graphical style. “Her Story” uses a realistic graphical style combined with real world video content and a simple type-to-search interface, which does not age due to its placement in reality. “The Stanley Parable” is a play on the “gamer condition,” which makes it both worth historical analysis and holds staying power. No matter how far in the future we go, people will want different things out of the games they play, and “The Stanley Parable” aims to show all these different types of people by providing paths that represent each type of gamer. With a cartoon graphics style, the game will hold regardless of who plays it or when they do. Both games are driven by their narrative, which makes them hold all the more staying power. A good story will always persist. The video game is simply the medium by which the story is conveyed to the player. Because of this, both “Her Story” and “The Stanley Parable” will persist into the future for historical analysis on what makes a good narrative and hold staying power for the general enjoyment of the games.