Mass Effect 3 and Uniting the Galaxy in the Face of Total Destruction

ENGL 199 Research Report
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Abstract—**Video games are often blamed for many social problems, from laziness and lack of motivation to accomplish anything, to pent up aggression that gets released as acts of violence in the real world. Although the gameplay in the Mass Effect Series contains violence, by allowing the player to develop his/her own character, the narrative of the game causes players to think about societal issues such as inter-alien racism, and to resolve these issues in a civil manner.**

Conflicts to talk about:

- Krogans and Salarians - Genophage
- working with the council against Cerberus. Cerberus is basically a pro human hate group analagous to white supremists today
- Quarians and geth - is synthetic life important?

-reapers- exterminate all organic life in a cycle every 50,000 years

Statistics:

1) 92% of players cured the genophage
2) 64.5% chose the paragon(good) options and 35.5% the more mean shepard - can be the 'no' part of the qualified argument for paragraph 1
3) 27% choose to save the quarians, 37% the geth, and 36% both

-over 88.3 hours played in single player campaign

Outline:

- Introduction:
  - general statement (importance of the topic)
  - thesis sentence (opinons and why, make a qualified argument)
- Body paragraphs: Start with the concession , then continue with arguments supporting your opinion
  1) No
  2) Yes
  3) Yes

...with over 88.3 million hours spent by players in the single player campaign.[1]...

The narrative takes place in the future, where humans are no longer concerned about racism amonsgt themselves but rather societal tensions are between alien races. (If anything there are ideological tensions ie. with cerberus and the alliance but these tensions are not a result of racism amonsgt humans, but rather different ideological views of what is the best interest for the human race. (cerberus believes in using any methods (even illegal and terrorist like) for furthuring the human race.) both organizations goals are to ultimately do what they believe is best for the entire human race). Rather, racial tensions are observed betweeen different alien races.

k, report actually begins below:

I. INTRODUCTION

Although video games are commonly criticized for promoting aggression, and desensitising indivuduals, Mass Effect touches on some very important societal issues today, and makes the player think about political views, and what stance they should pick. One of the prevalent issues in the world today is racism. In Mass Effect 3, the issue of racism is portrayed through alien characters, and tensions between them. The narrative takes place in the future, where humans are no longer concerned about racism amonsgt themselves. The ultimate goal of the game is to make (sometimes difficult) decisions as a representative for humanity which resolve tensions and unite the races against a common threat -the Reapers.

The Reapers are advanced synthetic life forms, which perform a purge of all intelligent organic life every 50,000 years, which is known as a 'harvest'. They were made to preserve organic life, since (within the Mass Effect universe), intelligent lifeforms, once advanced enough to develop technological advancements ultimately make synthetic lifeforms which rebel and destroy against their organic creators. Ironically, the solution to this problem for the Reapers is to harvest the genetic makeup of the galaxy, and allow new civilizations to grow and be harvested in a continuous cycle. The goal is to unite the intelligent races in the Milky Way Galaxy against the Reapers, and break the cycle. However, the races must work together to do so, and previous history tells that every previous cycle was unsuccessful due to unresolved conflicts between the intelligent races. The game puts the player in the position of Commander Shepard (male or female),who is tasked with making important decisions as a leader to unite the races through diplomacy, and to ultimately be the saviour of all organic life in the Milky Way Galaxy.

II. HUMAN CONFLICT - CERBERUS TERRORIST ORGANIZATION

Although the primary goal in Mass Effect 3 is to unite the alien races, some extremist views are presented, which the player can choose to side with ideologically to some extent. Cerberus, led by the Illusive Man is a xenophobic prohuman paramilitary group [2][3] who believe that earth's government, the Systems Alliance is too worried about law, and public

opinion to stand up to other Citadel races. The Citadel is a United Nations like coalition of the intelligent races in the Milky Way. Cerberus believes that "any methods of advancing humanity's ascension are entirely justified, including illegal or dangerous experimentation, terrorist activities, sabotage and assassination."[3] Cerberus's claim that it promotes the rights of humans, despite being essentially a hate group for other aliens is strikingly similar to extremists today, who also engage in illegal activities to promote their agendas. Opportunities are presented to the player to agree with some of the Illusive Man's actions. One of Cerberus's main goals is to control Reaper technology to gain a technological advantage for humans. However, the means for doing so are widely regarded as unacceptable. At one point in the narrative, it is found that Cerberus had been running a "Sanctuary", when in reality the people within, seeking shelter from the Reapers were actually being used as human test subjects subject to torture and premature death. Commander Shepard is given the opportunity to agree with the Illusive Man that the Reapers should be controlled, but if the player so chooses, the Illusive Man denies. It can be noted that the wrecklessness of the experiments run by Cerberus seem to be about on par with the type of human experimentation run in Nazi Germany, having to do with amputations, physical and mental trauma, and mutations.

Although the player is given the option to agree that Reapers should be controlled instead of destroyed with the Illusive Man, Commander Shepard does not join sides with Cerberus, since his goal is to save life. Therefore, while the player is exposed to extremist views in the game, it is made abundantly clear through storytelling that the actions taken by Cerberus are morally wrong, and that the end does not necessarily justify the means, even if the player goes with the Renegade playing style.

III. RENEGADE AND PARAGON

SHould the Renegade-paragon system be its own section? Then I would have to leave out the section about the Quarians and the geth. the above section seems long enough already (and depressing yikes).
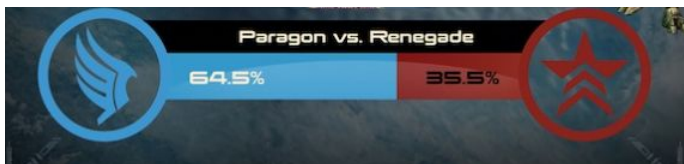

Fig. 1. Most players choose on their own accord to be a kind leader as opposed to a ruthless one who gets the job done. [1]

however, it should be noted that even if the player chooses to be a ruthless leader, the intentions are still for the greater good of the universe - to save all life from the threat of reapers.

IV. TENSIONS BETWEEN THE KROGAN AND THE SALARIANS

these alien races distrust each other because one developed a virus to wipe the other out. A staggering 92% of the
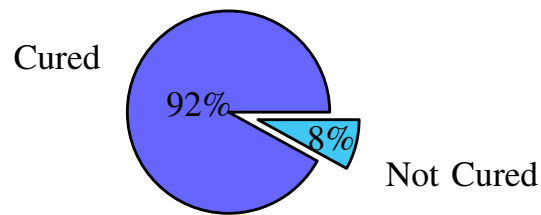

Fig. 2. Most players chose to cure the genophage [1], an important diplomatic step for gaining military support of the Krogan, to the disappointment of the Salarians.
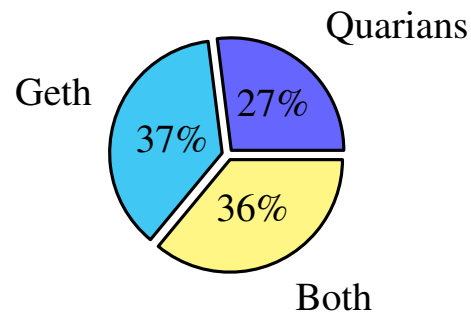

Fig. 3. Players appear to place as much value in synthetic life as in organic life. [1]

players choose to cure the genophage, which eases diplomatic tensions, and is considered the good option. -and also, only 3.8% shot Mordin, a   which is generally considered the "good" thing to do, since the Krogan have suffered due to this disease brought on them by the Salarians. ...this means that even a large portion of the 35.5% who chose to be a ruthless leader still found value in the diplomatic implications of righting a wrong from the past, even if the mistake was not a cause of the human race. Furthurmore, in an emotional moment where the Commander is presented with the choice to shoot Mordin, a young scientist who is dedicated to fixing the Genophage, only 4% actually shot Mordin, even though shooting him would gain the military support of the Salarians. Even for the ruthless players, most of them could not justify shooting such an admirable character.

V. ARE A.I. AS IMPORTANT AS ORGANIC LIFE?

The Quarians, who developed machines called the geth to do work made these machines more advanced, and in violation of the Citadel's rules these machines become a fully blown self-aware Artificial intelligence. The Quarians attempt to wipe them out, but the geth retaliate, and the Quarians lose millions of people, and are now nomads, and lose representation on the Citadel. The player chooses between saving the Quarians, or gaining the military support of the geth, who have free will.

Ultimately, at the end of the game, the player chooses between destorying all synthetic life, taking control of it, or merging organic and synthetic life, thus reaching the "pinnacle of evolution"[4]

VI. Conclusion

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References

[1] BioWare, Electronic Arts, "Statistics," [Image], 2013.

[2] C. B. Patterson, "Role-Playing the Multiculturalist Umpire: Loyalty and War in BioWares Mass Effect Series," *Games and Culture*, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 207–228, 2015. [Online]. Available: https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412014551050

[3] Fandom, "Mass Effect Wiki." [Online]. Available: http://masseffect.wikia.com
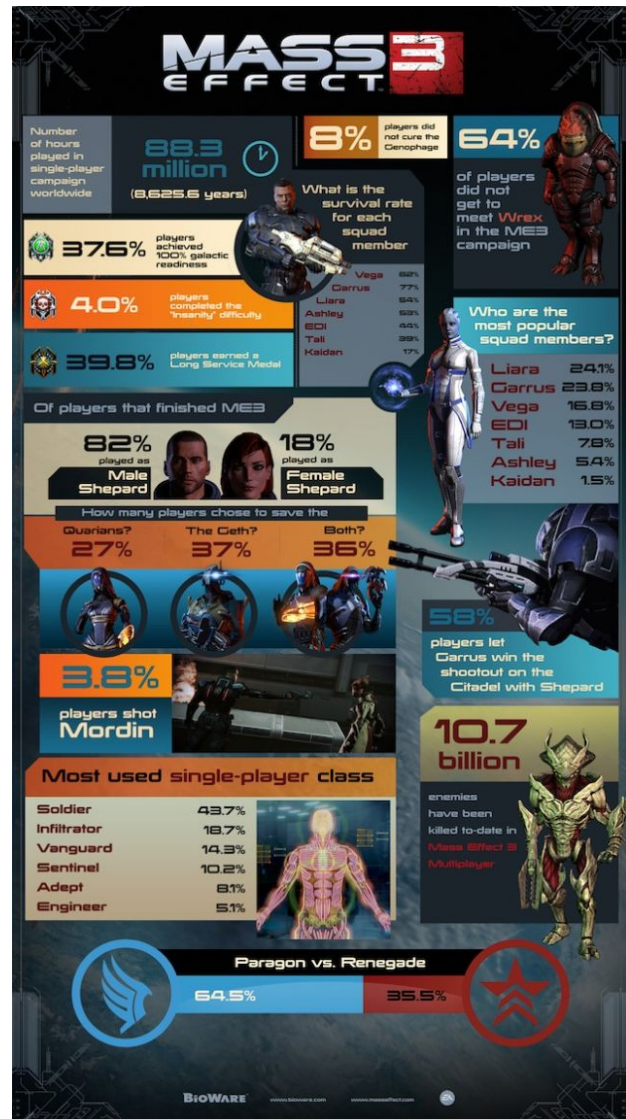
[4] BioWare, Electronic Arts, "Mass effect 3," [Video Game], 2012.

Fig. 4. Image referenced [1]