

## Project Statement and Goals

I wanted to make a game because I am an aspiring game designer and want to tell a story that can use the medium's interactivity to communicate information that would not be otherwise possible in other forms. The goal of the game is to be accessible to a wide variety of audiences in its low difficulty as well as its narrative themes. To do this, there were some guidelines that behind the game's overall design:

- Easy gameplay that still provided a challenge and switched up the pace of the game to keep it interesting
- Narrative that was independent of time period and geographical location
- Narrative that is easy to understand and follow
- Narrative that is interesting and engaging to follow

Some of the initial questions that motivated my work include:

- How does a powerful party of people (in this case humans) affect the lifestyle and physical surroundings of those that are less powerful (in this case animals)?
- How does the absence of this powerful party and the things it leaves behind affect the less powerful party?
- How can we find parallels in the narratives of two seemingly unrelated parties?

## Contextual Review

The same type of similar somber mood and mysterious world building has been done before in successful projects, namely *Shadow of the Colossus*. However, work like that is intended for more mature audiences and thus carries a limitation of what types of people can access those narratives, whether it be through the gameplay itself or through the narrative's nuance or depth. Games like *Pokemon Mystery Dungeon* do a good job of balancing the accessibility of the narrative while keeping it very engaging through its relatively easy-to-follow structure and constantly changing the pace of the narrative. However, games like *Mystery Dungeon* lack the societal context that can bind people to narrative experience.

One of the articles I read was Ben Whaley's "Who Will Play Terebi Gemu When No Japanese Children Remain? Distanced Engagement in Atlus' Catherine." The article uses Japan's dwindling population and the speculation behind it to contextualize Atlus's Catherine in Japan's society. Whaley uses the term "distanced engagement" to illustrate the idea that players would constantly be reminded that they are playing a game rather than being fully immersed, and a lot of the social implications of a game like Catherine is through the players' distant engagement and how they contextualize it in their own lives, whether it be through setting or narrative scenarios. The article takes pieces of Catherine and shows how it can be recontextualized in Japanese culture today. Rather than a traditional conclusion to the paper, Whaley instead presents his information as a launchpad for new questions and ideas. He noted two types of masculinity in Japanese culture that would most correspond to the extremes of the game's romantic endings, but also poses the question of how Japanese players would identify with the freedom endings and the type of masculinity presented there.

## Creative Methodology

A lot of the devices in *Downstairs* comes from the parallels that exist in modern human culture, such as religion. The primary feature of any game is how it uses its element of interactivity to support the work, and in this case is used to highlight the potential differences between the player-controlled character and the players themselves as well as draw a parallel between the players and the unnamed child whose diary entries they find scattered throughout the house. The goal of the spider's character is to be made as undesirable as possible to emphasize how alone it is from the other animals in the house. Players should be driven by the desire to find out more about the mysterious child and would want to chase after the narrative conclusion of the child's story through the lens of something undesirable like the spider.

A theme of the project is how things in the world are scaled up massively, and that includes the narrative themes within the world. The animals worship the humans like gods when they are in fact people that aren't as well off, and the overall structure of the story is meant to mirror that of *Inferno* and the works it inspires in that the main character dives deeper and deeper into chaos in search of something.

## Tools and Technologies

*Downstairs* is built in Gamemaker Studio 2 and written in its native language, GML. A shader for the glitch effect is used called BktGlitch.

## Bibliography

Whaley, B. (2015). Who Will Play Terebi Gemu When No Japanese Children Remain?

Distanced Engagement in Atlus' Catherine. Games and Culture, 92-114.