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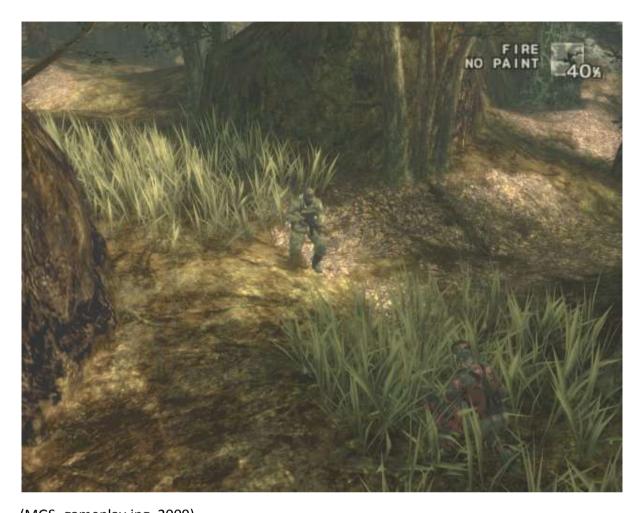# Analysis of Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater

Section 1

1.1. Game Description and Background

Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater is a tactical-espionage stealth action-adventure game for the Playstation 2 designed by Hideo Kojima and published by Konami. You play as Naked Snake, a special operations soldier deployed somewhere in the Soviet-Union during the cold war. Your mission is to rescue a weapons developer, sabotage an experimental superweapon and, assassinate your former, now defected, boss.

Throughout the game, the player will switch between third- and first-person perspectives to best utilize the different stealthy techniques. The game uses many of the consoles mechanics to give the player a unique experience.

1.2. Screenshots

(MGS_gameplay.jpg, 2009)

Snake stalking an enemy using the environment and camouflage to his advantage.

(Mgs3.jpg, 2006)

One of the many different possibilities in the game. Ever wanted to hang one-hand from a tree while firing a gun? Here is your chance.

(Hi my name is snake and this is my fursona, 2015)

The player can use the fact that there are crocodiles in the swamp to his advantage.

1.3. Why I Like the Game

MGS: Snake Eater was the first game I saw that gave the player the chance to utilize a big array of equipment, weapons, and camouflage. I was given the freedom to choose how I would like to approach almost every challenge the game threw at me. At any point in the game you could remove your silencer and go in guns blazing or stick to a more pacifistic route and only use your tranquilizer darts. The game also rewards the player for being creative in many different ways. You could take out the food and ammunition supply of a bigger area to weaken your enemies. They would run out of ammunition or leap at the poisonous food you threw in front of them, this gave me the opportunity to strategically plan my approach. If I was low on ammunition I could sneak past the starving, weakened enemies and not have to engage them. Being a Japanese game, the boss fights and story telling is very good and packed with a lot of flavour and backstory. The game is also scattered with easter eggs and secrets which makes every area different from the others.

1.4. Information Resources

The Metal Gear Wiki (Metal Gear Wiki, *Metal Gear Wiki*, 2005)

The wiki contains information about everything in all of the games in the MGS series. It is a good resource to check what you missed in the different locations of the games. It also has a lot of strategic advice on bosses, challenges, and easter eggs.

Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater - Official Guide (Hartwig, 2005)

When I first played the game, using Google to find information was not a thing. So I bought the Piggyback MGS3 Official Guide. It is a 234 page book containing a step-by-step walkthrough, boss advice, easter eggs, and much more. I remember reading every last page of it and trying out every approach. It gave me the help I needed to complete the game at 100% completion. I played through the game a total of 25 times. That fact alone should testify that the game is packed to the brim with content.

1.5. History and Context

Snake Eater is the original intellectual property of lead designer and writer Hideo Kojima (Metal Gear Wiki, *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*, 2005). It is part of a video game series known for their heavy focus on the narrative and is often called an "interactive movie" rather than a game. When Snake Eater came out, it felt very original. Not only was it different from most other games, it also stuck out from the previous games in the series. MGS3 introduced camouflage and face paint, letting the player use the environment to his advantage. Having to find or hunt to get food so you could stay focused, represented by a stamina bar, was also a new mechanic. The game also used the console clock to implement some clever workings where food would go bad if you did not play the game for some time (Metal Gear Wiki, *Food (Metal Gear Solid 3)*, 2005). This gave the player a sense of urgentness and heightened the level of immersion.

Section 2

2.1. Analysis of Rules and Strategies

Ludologist Jesper Juul describes a game using this simple description.
A game is a rule-based formal system with a variable and quantifiable outcome, where different outcomes are assigned different values, the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, the player feels attached to the outcome, and the consequences of the activity are optional and negotiable. (Juul, 2003)
Considering this I will try to define the games explicit and implicit rules.

The player is introduced to the basic mechanics of the game through a series of conversations made through Snake's radio. These are the explicit rules of how to control Snake throughout the game, and therefore binding in some ways. There are also tooltips on the different item menus in the game. Even though the basic rules are set in stone, the player can call up different members of the team using Snake's radio and learn about secret tricks he can deploy throughout the game.

Your actions in the game are very much quantifiable in that the game keeps track of all the alarms you have caused, people you have killed/tranquilized, plants/animals you have collected, and much more. Upon completion of the game you are given a rank based on your actions and possibly a reward depending on how well you did according to the games standards. This, in effect, gives the player a feeling of valor and feedback creating a reason for playing through the game multiple times. As you keep going through, you pick up new skills and tactics which in turn betters your rank and unlocks better equipment for your next playthrough.

In the MGS series, players are expected to challenge themselves by going for different achievements. You could do a run where you kill every enemy you encounter. This will have an effect on the environment by making sure the enemies do not get back and demoralize the other enemy soldiers. In the next run you could do a no-kill run or no-alarm run. The difficulty will be upped, but the player also receives greater rewards at the end of the game. By challenging yourself and the challenges getting acknowledged by the game, it attaches you, the player, to the outcome. The game has recorded your specific victory with your specific statistics. This also makes for somewhat negotiable consequences since a "win" or "loss" can be defined by the player himself. There is of course the fact that Snake can die during the playthrough and give you a game over screen. This is not negotiable. A death is a death. Except for in a few cases where dying can actually grant you an early win, the fight against The Sorrow comes to mind.

2.2 Game Theory

Since MGS3 is a single player game, I would argue that it is a non-zero-sum game. Considering the fact that you take the role as a super soldier going into enemy territory alone equipped with only a few weapons and your cigar. You reap the benefits or hindrances your actions cause, but the narrative will always push you towards beneficial positions. It does however reward repeated gameplay by being a game of imperfect

information. The player is introduced to the game without any knowledge about the enemies and how they will react to your actions. Information is acquired through listening in on guard conversations and calling your team members.

The main strategy of the game is the stealthy approach. With that said, it is possible to complete the game by charging into every situation, but by doing so, you miss out on both in game rewards and the feeling of stalking your enemy with grace. There are situations where you can benefit from not being seen, but there is also situations where killing everyone do not have any repercussions.

Section 3

3.1. Traditional Story Elements

We meet the protagonist on a plane as he is getting briefed for the mission he is about to embark upon. As far as back story goes, it is not required to know anything in particular to play the game. However, due to the heavy focus on the narrative element of the game, a understanding of the bigger picture could be beneficial to the player. Throughout the game the player is presented with many different names of groups and persons of interest. Many of them function to spike an interest for investigating every area and item you come across which in turn also teaches the player about the different approaches available to them.

The setting of the game is cold-war era Soviet-Union and the game designers has done a great job in portraying the gritty feeling one has come to expect. Every area is created in a tundra style which really lets the camouflage mechanic and the enemy AI shine.

3.2. The Characters

The characters in MGS3 are very iconic and flavourful. By that I mean that every character has a, to some extent, fully developed backstory and well defined character traits.

Throughout the game the player gets familiarized with most of the characters intents and motivations, all though some do a very good job to hide their real intentions.

3.2.1. Cobra Unit

MGS3 really shines when it comes to boss battles. Every boss has a history that ties them together. This is especially true for the Cobra Unit.

The Cobra Unit was a group of superhuman soldiers working for a group called the Philosophers (Metal Gear Wiki, *Cobra Unit*, 2005). They fought together under World War II and are all loyal to their leader. The unit is composed of six members all named after their speciality or the emotion they convey while on the battlefield. The Pain - because of his ability to receive large amounts of adrenaline in response to pain. The Fear - because of the terror he instilled in others. The End - because of his increased lifespan. The Fury - because of the boundless and unrelenting rage towards the world and everything he is fighting. The Sorrow - was able to communicate with dead soldiers and felt sorrow on the battlefield. The Joy (the Boss) - Because of the joy she felt whilst on the battlefield.

Every encounter with the bosses has heavy use of cutscenes revealing a lot of their backstory. This, I feel, is very typical of japanese character design. They always tend to go into detailed explanation about what they are doing, why they are doing it, and how they accomplish doing it.

3.3. Interactivity

Advancement in MGS3 is mostly done by moving to the next area or overcoming some challenge. As stated earlier it is very linear. However, the nature of the story and the style of the narrative does a good job to hide the feeling of a typical linear adventure. Some of the bosses can be beat in different ways. The End, for example, is foreshadowed in a cutscene early in the game. The cutscene shows him sleeping in a wheelchair and getting rolled from a building to another. If you skip the cutscene, The End will not be rolled all the way into the safety of the other building and you can take a shot at him with your sniper rifle. He can also be beat by turning the console clock 10 real world days forward when you encounter his

boss battle. He will have died of old age when you find him. This brings me to another point, the use of real time in the game. The game's night and day cycles are scripted and every point in the game has a set time of the day. However, Snake will get hungry if you let too much real time go by and food will spoil. It gives a slightly heightened sense of immersion, but serves more as a cool feature of the game.

Section 4

4.1. Core Activities

In the game you take the role as a special operations soldier codenamed Naked Snake. You control him using a Playstation 2 controller. The game utilizes both first- and third-person angles to give you a unique type of control over Snake. Whenever you take aim with a gun, you have the choice to run around in third-person or take careful aim in first-person using the gun's sights, there are no crosshairs. A less known fact of the Playstation 2 is that the buttons on the controller are pressure sensitive. MGS3 makes use of this in the gun controls. By holding the fire button down hard and releasing it fast, you let of a round. If you was going to take a shot but regret your decision, letting go of the button slowly will make Snake holster the gun without taking a shot.

The simulation of sneaking and taking out enemies feels very realistic and satisfying. The environment looks and functions like you would expect it to function in the real world. If you see tall grass or a hollow tree trunk, you are most likely able to hide in it. Because of the game's area design you rarely get the chance to roam outside of the predetermined path. There are always an unclimbable wall or fence in your way, but the portrayal of Snake as a man on a mission and the sense of urgency hanging over you makes for little drive towards trying to climb every wall or fence.

Section 5

5.1. A Short Comparison to MGS4

Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots was the long awaited successor to maybe the best game so far in the series, MGS3. It was announced as one of Playstation 3's release titles. Sadly it did not meet up to the expectations created by the previous installation of the series. MGS3 had introduced a depth in the game that was lacking in MGS4. Even though both games are linear, MGS3 managed to give a feeling of real urgency and a good reason to follow the games predetermined path. By having to make decisions about which camouflage to use in different situations and how to ration your food and stamina, the player was presented with challenges that felt real to Snake and his surroundings. MGS4 fell into the trap of streamlining a lot of what made the previous game so good. Instead of being a upgrade on the former, it felt as the game did not trust the player to make intelligent decisions.

5.2. What Could Make It a Better Game?

There is very little, I feel, that could make MGS3 better other than listening to the community and implementing bug fixes and new features. This was actually done when they in 2006 released Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence (Metal Gear Wiki, *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence*, 2005). It introduced a new, very sought after, camera angle and the first incarnation of the now discontinued Metal Gear Online (Metal Gear Wiki, *Metal Gear Online,* 2005). I would say that if someone were to make a revision of the game for PC and open for modding and community made extensions to the game, it would be great. The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim is a perfect example of how powerful the community's influence can be if they are allowed to mod the game. MGS3 with the possibility of player made content would give the game a new lifetime and therefore be a great addition to maybe one of the best games ever created.

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