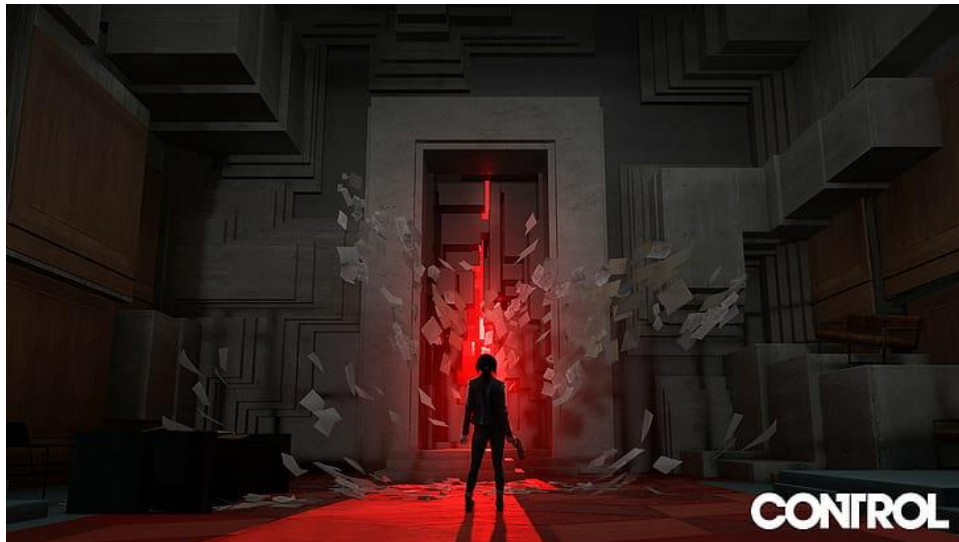# Detailed Game Breakdown

Control

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MS504 Research Paper 4: Detailed Game Breakdown

Introduction

Control is an action-adventure game from Remedy Entertainment. It follows the adventure of Jesse Faden into the fictional Federal Bureau of Control (FBC) in an effort to find her brother contained inside. The setting of Control is heavily inspired by the works and lore of the SCP Foundation community.

Who or what are the conversational partners? What histories and complexities do they bring to the encounter?

Like most games, the two conversational partners in Control are the player and the game itself. The player brings with them their skills and historical knowledge of games and common gameplay mechanics. Players that have more history with third person action gameplay mechanics will find themselves more comfortable engaging with the game, but the game is by no means exclusionary to those with less experience in this type of game.

Control is made in Finland by Remedy Entertainment and published by 505 Games in Italy, making the design and gameplay choices very western-centric. It shares common mechanics and visual language with many other popular third person action games, as well as the location and type of controls and UI elements. Control brings with it its own historical baggage of standing on the shoulders of the hundreds of games that have come before it in the genre.

The protagonist, Jesse Faden, more-or-less begins the game as a normal woman with no supernatural abilities or skills other than an endless drive to find her brother inside the Federal Bureau of Control. Jesse, like the player, is a relative newcomer to this world of fantastical and science fiction oddities but, like most players, is not too taken aback or startled by the revelations encountered.

How does syntax work? What are the basic units and how are they combined?

One aspect of the syntax of Control is the UI and interface. The heads-up-display for the game shows Jesse's current health, ammo, energy, and current objective and its sub-objectives. The meters for Jesse's condition only appear on screen when she is under threat (for health) or has less than the maximum amount (ammo/energy), making the HUD minimally invasive throughout the game. None of the UI elements make the game more challenging or complex, existing on screen near to where the player would already be looking by taking the corresponding actions.

Control takes place in a semi-realistic modern world, so the second major aspect of the syntax of the game are common, realistic office and industrial settings and their content. Common items found in these settings, such as office chairs, desks, printers, construction equipment, and the like an integral component of the game's syntax as they become components of Jesse's arsenal once she becomes capable of using telekinesis.

The last element of syntax in Control are the fantastical elements overlayed onto the semi-realistic setting of the Bureau of Control. Objects of Power (OOPs) are seemingly mundane items that hold powers and can sometimes convey them onto their users. The most important OOP to Control is the Service Weapon, an ancient shapeshifting weapon used by the leader of the Bureau of Control and its predecessor organizations throughout history, which Jesse takes possession of at the start of the game and becomes her primary weapon throughout the game.

How does semantics work?

What universe of discourse is involved?

The universe of discourse for Control is composed of a normal human with an unstoppable drive to find and rescue her brother, a seemingly normal office environment, the fantastical world of OOPs and the Bureau of Control's operations, the employees and board members of the FBC, as well as an extra-dimensional incursion by entities known as the Hiss.

How was the universe of discourse determined?

The universe of discourse for Control is set in a mostly-realistic world, but the addition of extra-dimensional elements such as the Hiss and OOPs give the universe a fantastical and science fiction edge. These elements are common among stories and games in the New Weird genre that Control shares.

How are meanings assigned from the universe of discourse?

Most objects in the world of Control maintain their standard real-world meaning, such as the desks, chairs, and cabinets around the building. Standard objects are also given the additional meaning of "weapons" once Jesse gains the ability to perform telekinesis from an OOP. In standard video game fashion, certain items such as fire extinguishers and red barrels are given the additional meaning of "explosive to shoot". Once Jesse unlocks the ability to dash through the air, gaps between surfaces are given the extra meaning of "places to air dash across".

What is the avatar?

How does the avatar function as an identity?

Jesse Faden can act as a functional player-surrogate easily because she is also new to the world of the Federal Bureau of Control, but she also comes with a small history in the abnormal (like any

player who has absorbed much media). She, like the player, is driven forward into the FBC regardless of the dangers because she also wants to 'complete' the game (by rescuing her brother). Jesse is not emotionless, but generally does not react emotionally to the dangers and roadblocks she encounters, as she is prepared to do anything to get her brother back from the FBC.

How does the avatar function as a surrogate body?

Jesse is, physiologically, a normal human being within the game's world. She has no outstanding strengths or weaknesses as a surrogate body that provide any special meaning. Jesse is in mental contact with an extra-dimensional being from the start of the game which gives her the one ability she has from the start, a resistance to infection and control by the Hiss.

How does the avatar function as a toolkit?

Jesse can move around the environment capably by sprinting, jumping, and climbing, from the start of the game. As the player progresses, Jesse gains the Service Weapon which allows her to defeat Hiss-infected enemies. Players can unlock additional modes for the Service Weapon through gameplay, such as a shotgun mode, a full-auto mode, and a sniper mode, giving the player many more options when it comes to combat. Additionally, as the player cleanses Hiss-infected Objects of Power around the FBC, they gain access to more tools such a telekinetic throw, a shield, and a dash.

How are affordances and effective abilities aligned?

The player must look for affordances that align with Jesse's current toolkit in order to succeed in Control. As players begin the game with no weapon, they must use the affordances of unlocked doors and interactable items to proceed deeper into the FBC and learn more of the lore. As Jesse gains the Service Weapon and her various telekinetic powers, players must find the affordances in using the gun and everyday items as weapons, and in using telekinetic powers to solve simple puzzles.

How does X-ray vision function?

What are the relevant details for aligning affordances and effective abilities?

Many details are relevant for aligning affordances and abilities in Control. The first encountered of which is the color of keypads near closed doors withing the FBC office. Keypads lit green denote doors that Jesse can walk through, red denote doors which Jesse will eventually be able to walk through, and unlit denote doors which are otherwise permanently closed. The size of objects is also relevant for how they change whether Jesse can telekinetically hurl them or not, and how much damage they do to enemies.

What tools are being used to supplement "seeing" and interaction?

There are many tools within Control that supplement the player's ability to see and interact with the game's world. The map is used as an analog for Jesse's spatial awareness and memory of the layout of the FBC. The on-screen HUD as an analog Jesse's tactile senses and ability to know whether she's feeling okay or not. Various on-screen overlays such as outlines and indicators provide an analog for Jesse's ability to gauge the size, weight, and type of objects in the world. All of these, and more, are used to supplement the player's senses with the in-world senses of Jesse.

How is meaning being situated? How are situated meanings created?

What is the context? How is it being construed and constructed?

The context is a fictional government organization, the Federal Bureau of Control, which is currently under attack by an extra-dimensional force known as the Hiss, the various employees of the FBC who need the protagonist's help, and the various Objects of Power which need to be cleansed of Hiss-infection. The context is construed from the point of view of a woman with an extra-dimensional being in her head, a grudge against the FBC, and a bottomless drive to find her brother.

What are the relevant aspects of the context and how is relevance being determined?

The relevant aspects of the context are the parts of the FBC which have been taken over by the Hiss, as they are generally the locations which Jesse needs to travel in order to find her brother. Also relevant are any Objects of Power that Jesse encounters, as early on it is instilled in the player that not only are these OOPs dangerous in the hands of the Hiss, but also in Jesse's too.

How is "packaging" helping to create situated meaning? What were alternatives ways things could have been packaged? What does it mean that these alternatives were not used?

Jesse starts the game with no means of combat, she enters the FBC unarmed and happens upon the Hiss incursion. As the player cleanses more Objects of Power, defeats Hiss-infected enemies, and ventures farther into the FBC, they are rewarded with new powers, new ways of using existing powers, and points to upgrade the Service Weapon. Jesse beginning the game with weapons and powers would have drastically changed both the gameplay and the narrative, 'entering a federal building unarmed searching for your brother' and 'entering a federal building fully ready to kill' are very different.

How does the sequence and flow of sentences, utterances, or activities work to help create situated meanings?

The combat in Control is extremely free form and open to player-driven interactions. Jesse has the ability to telekinetically push, lift, and throw enemies and objects, a pseudo-magical gun with unlimited ammo and the ability to reconfigure itself into different modes on the fly, as well as the ability to run, jump, and air dash across the battlefield. The customizability of the player's playstyle, and the differing environments and enemies within the game, make each combat encounter have a different meaning potential. Some players may see a balcony as a good position to take cover and use Jesse's

Service Weapon in sniper mode to take out enemies from afar, where other players may see a balcony as a good position to leap over and adopt a much more aggressive style using Jesse's telekinetic shove and the Service Weapon's shotgun mode. The meaning of actions and locations in Control vary a great deal based on the current playstyle of the player.

What is the role of story; cultural, social, scientific, or other sorts of theories, models, schemas, or frames; and beliefs, values, and ideologies?

The story of Control sees Jesse Faden venture into the Federal Bureau of Control, a fictional government agency with sweeping authority tasked with procuring and containing objects and entities with supernatural powers. Jesse sets off on this journey to find her brother Dylan, who she believes may be kept prisoner inside the FBC. The story of Control relies heavily on the player's interest in the paranormal aspects that the game brings to the table, much like the role of story in SCP Foundation articles and the Men in Black series. Additionally, the simple narrative of Jesse attempting to locate and rescue her long lost brother Dylan is classically compelling from a storytelling perspective.

How is a "player's story" being constructed by the choices, decisions, actions, interactions, successes and failures the "player" experiences as he or she talks, acts, and plays?

The player story of Control is different depending on how they engage with the deeper lore and mysteries of the Federal Bureau of Control. If the players stick strictly to the mandatory missions required to find Jesse's brother, they will experience a great top-down story as it was designed. On the other hand, if the player explores each nook and cranny of the FBC, encounters all the OOPs contained

within, and interacts with the various side characters who work there, they will experience a much

deeper, lore-filled journey. If players do side missions and search the FBC on their own, they will be

greeted with new abilities and extra points to upgrade their character, as well as unique encounters

with the Hiss as the extra-dimensional force spawns enemies into the FBC for Jesse to defeat.