Life is Strange Episode 1 – Chrysalis Design Analysis

Developed by: Dontnod Entertainment
Published by: Square Enix

Life is Strange is an episodic, plot centric point and click adventure game designed with a contemporary mind-set; heavily influenced by titles such as Heavy Rain and Gone Home. It takes place in current times with the plot focusing on the character Maxine Caulfield, a budding photographer, as she discovers her ability to reverse time, and the decisions the players must make as they ripple on throughout the story.

Interaction Model and User Interface

Life is strange takes a very realistic and simplistic approach to how it incorporates the player and his/her actions to the in game world. While the user interface is kept to a minimum, player input is attained through a decision tree-esque interface that appears on screen when the player approaches something they can interact with, accompanied with white sketch marks on the object making it very clear what object the player is interacting with. This tree usually lets the player choose how they would like to question and view the game world, allowing self-defining and expressive play.

In extension, the player has another in game interface which takes the form of a smart phone. Throughout the game, the player may send and receive texts from Max's friends or family dependant on the decisions he/she makes throughout the game. This effectively helps to further define the role the player would like to take in the progressive world.

The pause menu in Life is Strange takes a scrapbook or a teenager's copybook feel to emphasise the contemporary nature of the setting and to relate to the vast audience the game is intended for, whether it be through nostalgia or teenage stereotypes. It hosts a sketched up design with creative doodles and polaroid pictures throughout the various pages.

Game Mechanics and Story

Life is strange incorporates 2 main game mechanics which mesh extremely well with the story, character progression and level progression; the ability to reverse time and making definitive choices through narrative structure and character interaction.

As the player progresses through the story, the usual convention of puzzles in the point and click genre is ignored almost completely, with the fundamental driving point being every decision the player makes will play-out and the story will adapt to the player's own progression further on down the line. This choice progression mechanic is complimented by the ability to reverse time at almost any point during the game.

As a mechanic that's introduced early on through narrative, it is used as a primary plot device to establish the narrative and story and develop context for future episodes in the series. It is then utilised as a primary game mechanic where the player may pause and reverse time during crucial plot moments and choices to re-enact the moments before.