Groups Project: Group 6 - Character Research and Design:

In order to create and development the main playable character for our group projects game, we first needed to establish some base concepts and ideas. However to do this I first needed to carry out some research on all the different elements and aspects, first of all would be to look into what a character stands for and what it means.

**So what is a character?**

The definition of a character is “the mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual.” From this it means that a character in any given scenario will usually possess a set of morals and personality traits and behaviour. A character can hold any personality and hold any set of morals allowing for designers to create an endless list of possible characters that can be used and created. These created characters are what bring to life most games and bring more depth to the stories told within every game.

Typically in vast spectrum of games there are two types of characters conveyed and used in video games, the hero who is seen as the good guy that is trying to save the world or something similar to such a plot. Then there is the villain, who is usually shown and seen by the player as the main bad guy. The plot of such characters are usually the reverse of the heros, for example instead of trying to save the world they are destroying it. These split types of characters can also be redefined as the protagonist and the antagonist, the protagonist being the playable character that you save the world with or go through the story of the game with and the antagonist who you fight to stop him/her from destroying the world. This can also be used in the reverse by having the player play as the antagonist and see the story and game from their point of view.

**So what makes a good character? And why are they so important?**

As well as the categorisation of good and evil there are also other factors that affect how well the character is and how much of an impact he has on the player. Characters within most games are put in there to achieve a level of connection with the player, by creating a connection between the player and the character they are playing as, it allows games designers to take control of what that connected character does. The result this has on the player can vary and can cause triggers in their emotions, for example you could have the player play as the main character for 2 hours and then simply kill him off and have them play as someone else. When you kill the character you kill the connection that the player shared emotionally with that character, this in turn creates sadness in the player as they can no longer relate and connect with the character set in the game.

Game designers use this to their absolute advantage and play with the emotions of the player because ultimately it can be a good thing for the player or it could not. It could be the fiero feeling of success that the player feels when the character has killed the main villain, or it could be sadness from when the character was brutally murdered or killed off suddenly. There are so many different emotion and feelings that the player is able to feel when playing a game, just as if they were listening to a good song or seeing a really good movie for the first time. It’s this ability and control that lies within each game's characters, story and mechanics.

To say that a character is good means that he would have to be the typical king arthur, shining knight in armour saving a princess material. However good is such a subjective term and when a character is labelled as such it can send across the wrong message or the right message to the player depending upon the game. But to make the character believable and have him have these hero like qualities designers would first need to build them up with a personality, a conscious, a moral system and a way of thinking, walking, doing, etc… Or not once again it is dependent upon the game at hand. To condense this down into some hard facts and a summary of research I looked up what makes a good hero from several perspectives to get a better idea as to the traits and personalities hero perhaps should have.

**One person's views on this was as follows:**

*“The best video game heroes are the ones with an exceptionally simplistic point of motivation.”*

This states that a good hero should ultimately have a very simplistic and singular point of motivation that he/she then follows and reaches by the game’s end. Examples of this that were given were video game heroes like Nathan Drake from the uncharted series, Link from the Zelda game series and Gordon Freeman from the Half-Life series. Each of these main protagonists share something in common they have a simple goal and a simple sense of motivation to reach said goal. But it also states that this is not the case with these games because hardly any game now has a short and simple end game and no game is very easy to reach the end of, unless it is intentional.

He expresses that “once these motivations become more complicated, gamers lose sight of why they were driving these heroes towards the end.” Which is true the player much like the character lose their sense of motivation when there's an obstacle or a set-back in the game. But in order to combat this games utilize other mechanics or other ways of storytelling that allow the player to keep going with the goal still in mind. The game pumps motivation into the player and character by giving the game other goals to reach, other objectives and things to do along the way in order to keep the player interested and motivated to keep going and not get disheartened or bored.

Another person talks more about the ethics and morality of a character, he says that “the most interesting ones, though, end up making a lot of poor decisions along the line.” Which is a more realistic way of looking at ‘Heroes’, just like super heroes not a single one is moral just and corrected because they have all done things that are not considered to be right or to be the right thing to do in that particular scenario. In a lot of games nowadays the protagonist is very rarely clean of all immoral doings and unethical decisions and actions, but that s what adds depth to the character as it shows that no one is completely good but there are those who try or try to do good to redeem themselves. To write their wrongs as it were,

By having the character morally and ethically unbalanced it allows there to be a much more visible line that the player playing that character can connect to which is when they become invested in the story of that character. It is all part of the struggle that characters can go through such as Max Payne where the character struggles and has to fight off depression and addiction throughout the game. As Greg Costikyan mentions in his report ‘I have no words and I must design’ “there needs to be game balance”. A balance between making the game and characters path difficult enough to challenge them and the player and the other hand of not making it too easy to reach and achieve to keep the player invested and challenged. This front facing challenge then incites motivation to overcome said challenge to achieve fiero.

From doing research like this I am then able to extract the smaller details of each point and summarise them to condense it down into a box of ideas as to what kind of character both I and my team want to have in our game. Our game being a space based game the character right off the bat is more than likely going to be an explorer or astronaut on board a ship with a mission of some kind. But when things go south and the ship blows up we want the character to survive through the player. We want the player to do everything they can to keep the character alive. The character in mind may not even be completely human due to the setting and time that our game is going to take place.

For the game itself we need a character with a motivation and a goal in mind from the start, which in this case will be to find survivors of the wrecked ship and to find out what happened. This of course is the challenge and problem of the character because at this point in time the character has lost all memory of what happened before. This creates this confused and lost behaviour as well as having him be a strong headed person and so he must go through puzzles and interactions to find any clue as to what happened. This combined with the limited time of possible death and the withering of oxygen inside his suit its creates a sense of desperation and tension. In turn the time and limitation of oxygen become the obstacle, one that breeds motivation and determination in the character to get the job done and to find out what happened no matter what the cost.