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ATCM 4377 Game Production Lab II

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Genre Analysis: Exploration Mystery

Friday is a mystery adventure game; you play as a detective whose coworker has been murdered and you must solve the mystery by exploring your surrounding and interviewing characters that could have information about the situation. It’s an adventure because the core gameplay is to assess and explore the locations and find information by actions the player choses to do. Personally, I do not have much experience with the genre apparent from a few mainstream titles. Although I’ve only played a few titles in the genre the few I have played have been excellent games, primarily the Telltale game *The Wolf Among Us*. I’ve run multiple playthroughs of this game and every experience has been different, like most Telltale games the game focuses on narrative and choice in situations that has an impact later. It succeeds in creating a gripping narrative with ethical choices and well written characters. I haven’t delved into the mystery genre in other medias as well so being apart of this project I have learned and expanded my horizons.

*Myst* does a good job by creating an explorable world that is both expansive and minimalistic in the same regard. The visuals are easy to understand and with enough thinking the puzzles that the players must complete are challenging and cryptic but not arbitrary or extremely difficult to solve. *Myst* also excelled in creating a world with ethical choices, the player must decide on which brother to free if any and why. This provokes thought and strengthens the validity of the world, forcing the player to explore their surrounding and deduce their own opinions through the information they find about the backstory about the island and the brothers. The visuals for the time were also considered excellent. For most games that focuses on narrative the visuals had been lacking, often only text-adventures or shallow storyline driven animations. To make the world and atmosphere even more immersive they implemented fully 3D graphics, although they were still-prerendered images they still included depth and were close to photorealism. In comparison to tabletop RPGs this was a large stride in a new direction. The developers went further to develop their visuals and story by including FMV of the characters to gain exposition. Although *Myst* excelled in many aspects by making a game that was visually realistic, had simple but challenging gameplay that made the game approachable and accessible to a larger audience, it did have some flaws. The limitation of the movement forced the player into a slower pace that could stagnate and if the player had to return to a location because they had missed something important it would feel like a chore to make a trip back.

*Outerwilds* is a large and expansive adventure game where you must use information gained from what you discover to solve your current situation. In many aspects *Outerwilds* continues and expands on previous steppingstones of the mystery adventure genre. The game places the players character in an unknown world, like most game in the genre, and quickly introduces new systems likes space exploration and frequency readings to find new ways to collect information. The adventure aspect of the game is much more straight forward than other titles, the player is literally and space explorer and pilot, and because the explorer already has all their tools and skills at the beginning the player only needs to focus on finding new information making the game more clear and accessible. The timed gameplay can also seem stressful at first but the game, but they overcome this by making this the core mechanic of the game, regardless the time loop will start over, this is more forgiving than punishing. Since the sun supernovas in a predetermined amount of time, the player must solve the mystery by trial and error, exploring new areas and discovering clues. The most successful element of the game is the use of the ships log, it allows the player to collect all the information they come across on their adventures and even if the sun supernovas they keep everything they’ve learned thus far. The inclusion of the log strengthens the games adventure and detective aspect.

The largest difference between the titles is the graphical and technical differences. *Myst* was released during the era that having realistic stills was vastly impressive and since its release the genre, and games have made multiple strides in both areas the game had boasted about at the time. Unlike *Outerwilds* vast and expansive, explorable 3d world or galaxy, *Mysts* world was very condensed although considered large at the time. It consists of still images of a pre-rendered 3D environment. The movement of the player is limited to point and click player controls. They must click in the direction they would like to go or what objects they want to investigate. There is no real time movement and limited animation, cutscenes consist of FMV of real actors. *Outerwilds* does the opposite of this, the player is given much more freedom, the environments are completely explorable with multiple NPCs and interactable. *Myst* feels like the foundation of the genre outer wilds expands upon, *Myst* had one of the first large branching storylines in games with visuals. Outer wilds does dialogue but instead focuses more on environmental storytelling and hints through NPCs the player come across, planets, and alien artifacts the player finds, leaving a mass of information that the player must find by interacting with their environment solve the mystery of their predicament, unlike *Myst* which the main source of information for the player was written notes and information left by the other characters. This isn’t necessarily a loss but a different way for players to assess and experience information differently, although *Myst* feels more controlled because of its technical constraints but the player can often get confused, unaware of what needs to be done. *Outerwilds* can leave the player can feel overwhelmed by everything they are able to interact and explore. The overall feel of the environments is also very different both are considered large but *Myst* feels lonely, desolate, this was what the developers where going for but the lack of a large soundtrack with minimal sound effects coupled with few if any NPCs makes the world feel completely uninhabited and gripping. *Outerwilds* improves up this by using a dynamic soundtrack to help flesh out the world.