

# Cutscenes of Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots

Victor Shu

*Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots* (2008, KONAMI) holds two world records for longest cutscenes in video game history: it has the longest cutscene in a video game, at 27 minutes, and the longest cutscene sequence in a video game, at 71 minutes. According to the documentary disc of the special edition, the total length of the cutscenes is about 8 hours.

As the final part of the whole story of the franchise (at least they planned to make it the last MGS), MGS4 played an essential and critical role. There are many empty holes in the story of the previous MGS games like Major Zero, EVA, G.W. AI, the Big Boss, and so on. If the developers want MGS4 to complete its mission of ending the story well, the narrative is very, very critical.

About 1/3 of the average playtime of MGS4 is cutscenes. This is very uncommon, for a game that is famous for its gameplay. Even for games which are narrative driven, like the latest *Detroit: Become Human* (2018, Sony Interactive Entertainment), there is gameplay like QTEs, choices and some movements during the cutscenes. However, in MGS4, cutscenes are just cutscenes. The player cannot do anything, except pressing the R1 button or the cross button to see some first-person view or flashbacks but sit and watch. There are also CODEC calls, which are not cutscenes but only voices, conversations with subtitles.

There are two kinds of cutscenes in MGS4. Some cutscenes are explanative, while others connect the gameplay. Explanative cutscenes explain things. There are also two kinds of explanative cutscenes. Some are about the story of the whole MGS series, and others are just about MGS4. Explanative cutscenes about the entire series did fill the holes that remained unfilled after MGS2 and MGS3, making the story self-contained. Moreover, those about MGS4 explained the elements in MGS4, like the Beauty and Beasts – boss characters of the game, in a very detailed manner.

The explanative cutscenes always happen in the gameplay cutscenes, which is a reason why the cutscenes in MGS4 are so long. When Old Snake first met with Meryl in MGS4, the cutscene talked about Meryl herself, Colonel Campbell, Meryl's team, Nanomachine that injected into her and the team. After all these explanations, a cutscene that pushes the game into the next part finally came.

Mainly all cutscenes in MGS4 follow this pattern. With so many things to explain, the cutscenes will undoubtedly become very long. Thus, it becomes important to decide which kind of the cutscenes is the most important one. Since the players are under the impression that MGS4 is the last MGS game and it completes the story, they will be disappointed when Drebin started his long speech about the B&B Corps after they defeated them. What they want is about Big Boss, about Solidus, about the old characters from the previous games.

Apparently, the developers did not find a balance. They wanted to talk about the elements that are MGS4 exclusive, but the players want to see the complete story of the series. Players – mostly MGS fans – don't care about who B&Bs are, at least I don't. The same thing also happened with *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* (2001, KONAMI), which is also criticized because of the cutscenes. After Emma Emmerich's death, there is a 10-minute cutscene about Otacon talking about his past. However, at that time, all the players want to know is if the virus they uploaded worked.

*Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* (2015, KONAMI) solved this problem in a much smarter way. In MGSV, there are only cutscenes that are necessary. All other explanative things are in the cassette tapes given to the players at a certain point. Some players may have no or less interest in who the man on fire is, so they can choose not to listen to that tape. Some players like me are interested in everything in the game, and then they can listen to the tapes after the mission. This ensures that the players can have a smooth experience of the mission without being interrupted by some not-so-important information.

Within those games with really long cutscenes I have ever played, MGS4 holds the best gameplay in its genre. *Xenosaga* (2002, Bandai Namco Entertainment) also has good gameplay, but it is a JRPG, and many JRPGs have long cutscenes/conversations, so it is not quite a problem. The *Yakuza* series has some long cutscenes, but the game itself is not so good, which gave me the impression that the *Yakuza* games are mainly about stories and building and shaping a world, which fits the lengthy cutscenes. However, the *Metal Gear Solid* series, though it has a touching story, is famous for its gameplay. The MGS4 cutscenes seem to overrule its good gameplay.

MGS4 still holds the world records for longest cutscenes, and I believe that it will take a long time before another game can break those records. Even though, MGS4 is still a great game that will be loved and remembered by many people. I can still recall the final scene of MGS4 today, and each time I did, I was moved by it. Then I started to recall the whole series, about the life of Big Boss and Solid Snake, and everything that the director wanted to pass along. MGS4 is a great game. It can be greater if the developers put a little more effort into balancing narrative and gameplay.