Shu Yun ys2976@nyu.edu

Unlike any other game genres, in FPS, which stands for first-person shooter, players do not see the character they are controlling as they do in Fortnite or the Witcher III, and they only know who they are playing by getting clues from the moving camera as they move their mice and the rest of the character’s body as they look down. It seems a lot simpler and less misleading in third-person games, which sets a camera behind an avatar to indicate who players control, than FPS games. However, with its irreplaceable immersive gameplay, FPS has gained massive loyal players, yet game developers still must deal with how to make FPS less confusing to players who get used to third-person games, and the secret lies in clarifying the identity of the protagonist in FPS games.

In most FPS games today, in-game cameras are carefully positioned to simulate a first-person perspective just like how we see through our own eyes. To be more specific, the height of a playable character in an FPS game can be inferred by comparing the character’s eye level, which is the height of the camera, to an object in the virtual environment like a desk or a tree as a reference; even in some very graphically detailed games, such as Battlefield III, mirrors and water surfaces in the games reflect the character’s appearance, providing players with a direct view. There are also more and more games allowing players to switch from first-person perspective to third person perspective, helping them to adjust. Besides imagining the physical appearance of the character in FPS games, players are also able to know what kind of person the character is. In almost every Call of Duty game, cutscene is one of the commonly used techniques, and through the cutscenes, players can easily infer the personality and emotions of the character they control through conversations he or she has with other characters or the soliloquy of the character. For example, Ronald “Red” Daniels, who is the protagonist of Call of Duty: WWII, thought with fear: “We thought we knew what war would be like, but nothing prepared us for this.” And, in the first mission D-Day, Daniels and three other boys are playing five finger fillets on the warship and towards the frontline, but their voices are shaking when they are talking, and they also pray for themselves sometimes. Thus, players can easily infer that Daniels and his brothers are very afraid of what they are going to confront.

If playing a third-person single-player game is like watching a movie about the protagonist’s story, then playing an FPS single-player game would be having the protagonist’s unique memory that I can impossibly have in my normal daily life; that is to say, the identity of the protagonist is extremely important in an FPS game, because I am the protagonist when I am playing an FPS game, so I should know very well about the protagonist, or should I say “myself”. For example, in my favorite FPS, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare II, there is a skippable mission called “No Russian”, though this mission receives worldwide criticisms for its bloody and inhuman nature. In the mission, players control Joseph Allen, who is an American undercover agent in the Ultranationalist Terrorist Cell led under Vladimir R. Makarov, and walks in a Russian airport with Makarov and two other terrorists, shooting innocent people. If I have no idea who I am and what is the purpose of the mission and how does it push the story forward, I would be so confused and sad of why I am one of the massacre enforcers with a m249 in my hands. Pretty often, players are playing more than one characters in FPS to understand the story better from different perspectives, which makes understanding who players are playing even more important.

The Call of Duty series is famous for its compelling stories in single player campaigns, but sadly Activision didn’t include it in the new COD: BO4 this year. The mainstream of multiplayer has brought a lot of changes in the FPS genre, and story mode has been playing a less important role in the recent years. While playing a few rounds of deathmatches with friends is a lot of fun, I miss more of the time when there is a name to be remembered and a different and affecting story behind each character, unlike a bunch of soulless avatars I can create within a minute in PlayerUnkown’s Battleground.