

Game Narrative Review

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Game Title: Fatal Twelve

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Genre: Visual Novel

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Developer: aiueoKompany (Lycorys)

Publisher: SekaiProject (PC), Prototype (PS4, Nintendo Switch)

Game Writer/Creative Director/Narrative Designer: Akeo

Overview

“Welcome, my little lovely slaves to fate.”

Such is Rinka Shishimai’s first introduction to the hell that will be her next 12 weeks alive. Or, to put it more accurately, alive, but dead at the same time.

Fatal Twelve is an indie visual novel that follows the story of 12 people who have died at the same exact time, and who must also compete against each other for the chance of living life once more. This competition is dubbed “Divine Selection” by the deity named Parca, who oversees the game. The Divine Selection follows a complex sort of rules where the participants must deduce 3 pieces of information about another person in order to be given the right to eliminate them from the game, thus rendering their death cemented into fate itself. These 3 pieces of information are as follows:

- **Cause of Death**
- **Name**
- **Regret**

These 3 pieces of information manifest in the physical form of a card, and can be obtained in the real world, or in the dream world where the Divine Selection takes place every Sunday. Should a participant successfully eliminate another player, they may select one card from that player to use in a future elimination.

By nature of the game, each player has 3 cards of their own. However, this isn't the case for Rinka. In fact, Rinka only has one: Her name.

That's not all Rinka has to worry about either. Out of all the people in the world, one of the twelve happens to be one of her closest companions, Miharu Mishima.

Over the course of the 12 weeks, Rinka is forced to confront the many different and harsh realities of the world as she clashes head on with the others' desperate for another chance at life. Though it is a stark contrast to what was her idyllic life as a Japanese high school girl, Rinka never lets go of the one trait that makes her special: Her empathy.

Despite being put at odds with people she hardly even knows—save for Miharu—Rinka can't help but show her humanity to those other participants in a way most others would consider foolish. And yet, it is precisely this empathy of hers that allows her to survive through it all. She manages to grasp not only her own renewed chance to live her life, but Miharu's as well.

Fatal Twelve boils down to a story that shows how empathy for not only others, but our own selves, makes up the most critical trait of being human. This reflects in each character's narrative, even up to the ultimate antagonist of the game. Using the diversity of its character cast, along with its lack of fear in addressing traditionally societal taboo topics, Fatal Twelve breaks away from the status quo of narrative design itself.

Characters

- **Rinka Shishimai — Numeral I** — *"I could never hate you."*
 - **Cause of death:** Fire
 - **Name:** Rinka Shishimai
 - **Regret:** Unable to live her life.

Our kind-to-a-fault protagonist. Having been orphaned at a young age, she lives in a small coffee shop together with her grandmother, helping her out where she can. Though she is thought to be intimidating by her classmates at school, what lies deeper beneath her looks is just a regular teenager trying to live her life. Never holding a grudge and never thinking the worst of others, Rinka manages to create her own small, ragtag band of friends that she would consider her own family; Miharu being one of them. While the player will be making decisions in the perspective of Rinka throughout the

novel, they must be careful in understanding how Rinka herself works as a character, lest they guide her down a path that leads to her doom, and in association, Miharu's.

- **Miharu Mishima — Numeral II** — *“If given the choice between either of our lives, I’d choose yours in a heartbeat.”*
 - **Cause of death:** Suicide
 - **Name:** Miharu Hebinata
 - **Regret:** Rinka Shishimai

The Deuteragonist, as well as one of Rinka's closest friends. She is considered to be the unapproachable “queen” of their class, having not only the looks that leave one staring, but the unmatched intelligence that puts her at the top in terms of grades as well. Though she's often seen wearing a smile and cracking a sarcastic joke or two; in truth, these serve as a veneer for her to hide secrets that she keeps, even from her closest friends. This secret is that beneath her ever-present smile and calming humor, is a young woman who has already given up on life. Ostracized from society, daughter of a deadbeat alcoholic mother, and a girl with next to no wealth to her name, there is little in life that Miharu has to live for, save for one thing— or rather— person: Rinka Shishimai. As the Divine Selection marches on, Miharu makes it clear that she is adamant on ensuring Rinka's survival at the cost of hers. This leaves even Rinka herself pondering— for what reason does Miharu have to treat her life with greater care than her own?

- **Alan Scorpion — Numeral XII** — *“Surviving through this to the end and stepping off the original path may, in fact, be the one true sin.”*
 - **Cause of death:** Poison
 - **Name:** Alan Scorpion
 - **Regret:** His sister

Hailing from India, Alan Scorpion serves as one of the main antagonists of the game. He is seemingly ruthless and cruel, even going so far as to threaten children for the sake of getting information out of the other participants. As the owner of a ludicrous jewelry company, it's easy to assume that his desire to survive comes from his attachment to his company and wealth. But when Alan encounters Rinka, his ruthlessness somehow grinds to a halt. He becomes less aggressive, and more contemplative. Though Rinka is scared out of her wits at the mere sight of this man, she, too, notices his change as circumstances force her to cooperate with him.

- **Odette Malancon — Numeral XI** — *“Life's all about thrill and excitement, ain't it? You'd be better off dead if it weren't.”*

- **Cause of death:** Blood Loss
- **Name:** Odette Malancon
- **Regret:** Infertility

A towering woman from France, and captain of her own crew of pirates. Odette takes orders from no one, does whatever she pleases, whenever she pleases to. The nature of her character immediately pins her as someone to be feared the first time Rinka lays eyes on her, but despite the woman's life of crime in the dog eat dog world of piracy, even Odette has her morals that one can't help but to admire. To Odette, life was played like a game, and getting thrown into the Divine Selection only served to amp up her fighting spirit. She plays well into the trope of a pirate, where life is about thrills and chances. Beneath all her tough muscles may lie the heart of someone not without her own trauma and regret, she never once lets this be a chain on her right to live life to the fullest.

- **Federico Carminati — Numeral III —** *“People like us lived our lives the best we could. What's important is that you enjoy the ride. So don't go killing yourself again, got it?”*
 - **Cause of death:** Crushed
 - **Name:** Federico Carminati
 - **Regret:** Mother (former), Success (final)

The lanky Italian man that's usually seen glued to Odette's hip in order to mooch both her brains and her brawns off her. Though he's a bit of a thorn in Odette's side, she willingly keeps him around as a sort of lackey. The narrative of Fatal Twelve mostly takes on Rinka's point of view, but in certain scenarios, it will change to Federico's, allowing the player a more active perspective into the nitty gritty of what people are willing to do to survive. Federico as a person has very little going for him. No family, no girlfriend, and his ties with the Italian mafia leads him to running away to escape, only to die on board a pirate ship. Despite all this, Federico is adamant on stooping to any means necessary to try and make it out of the Divine Selection.

- **Sonya — Numeral X —** *“Now I know that the world is full of beautiful things like this...but my time is running out.”*
 - **Cause of death:** Illness
 - **Name:** Sofiya Priessnitz Alexeievna
 - **Regret:** Freedom to see the world

A young girl not any older than thirteen, her circumstances in both life and in the Divine Selection are fated to lead to her unfortunate death. She dons a peppy and

optimistic personality befitting of a child her age, but this demeanor hides a certain wisdom beyond her years. While her terminal illness prevented her from seeing the outside world while she was alive, she was able to explore Japan due to the Divine Selection removing her symptoms of illness over its duration. This leads to her meeting both Rinka and Miharuru, bonding with them, and eventually accepting her inevitable death.

- **Yu— Numeral IV —** *“I wanted to live a normal life, like all of you.”*
 - **Cause of death:** Fire
 - **Name:** Unknown (former), Yuu (final)
 - **Regret:** Avenging Mother (former), Living a normal life (final)

A young boy responsible for the terrorist attack on the train that took Rinka’s life. He gets amnesia during the Divine Selection and allies with another participant, Shigetsugu, an elderly Japanese man. They live quietly together while Yuu helps protect Shigetsugu from thugs and the like, coming to see the man akin to a grandfather of sorts. With his memory lost, he acts much like his age as a young and innocent boy, and even encounters Rinka whom he gains affection for as a sister figure. But when Shigetsugu is eliminated, he regains his past memories, returning to his violent ways as a terrorist. Though he attempts to resume his life as a terrorist, he is reluctant to do so now with the awareness of what its like to live a normal life.

- **Goddess Parca — N**me_RR ○○ – *“Welcome, my lovely little slaves to fate.”*
 - **Cause of death:** ?_F_d
 - **na_○:** %_a_E
 - **Re=Re_g&:** \$?

Hm? Oh, dear me, what ever is this doing here? It wouldn’t do well if my information was just out here, willy nilly for all to see, would it? Sorry you had to see that. Just keep reading along now, then. Nothing important here!

- **Other Participants— Shigetsugu (V), Keiko(VIII), Scale Jones(IX),**

While these other participants do not have as much screen time as the others, their narrative still plays important roles that cause important character developments for the others. Shigetsugu for Yu, Alan for Keiko, and Rinka and Miharuru for Scale Jones.

Breakdown

As there are various rules to the Divine Selection that are difficult to explain, this analysis serves to not necessarily cover all plot beats or character interactions within the game, but rather to deconstruct the specific key themes of the various character narratives, and how these themes can be taken as a lesson to be reflected and applied within society's reality.

The Right to Live

On what was meant to be the last day of her life, Rinka Shishimai dies on the train home protecting her friend, Naomi, from a the blast of a terrorist attack. She wakes up in her cafe, together with her two friends Mao and Naomi as if nothing had happened. Thinking that it was all a dream, Rinka continues about her daily routine, unaware that in truth, she is already a piece in the “game” that the Goddess named Parca calls “Divine Selection”.

In this Divine Selection, an elimination process is held every week, and only 1 player may win. Their reward: return to the world of the living. It follows the typical “battle royale” that is popular in contemporary media; some examples being the namesake of Battle Royale itself, DanganRonpa, Hunger Games, and the most recent popular addition, Squid Game. There is one stark contrast between the Divine Selection and these other narratives, and that is that absolutely no violence is necessary, and death of another can only be achieved by, in some sort of ironic sense, getting to know that person. In fact, by eliminating another participant, the eliminator must be subjected to experiencing that participant's last moments before death. This experience is a representation of their “trajectory of fate” being corrected back onto its original path.

When Rinka discovers the truth of her situation, she goes into something of a state of shock. She wants to ignore it, wants to believe it's still a bad dream. But with the involvement of Miharuru, she has no choice but to accept it. Accept it as she may, Rinka has one fundamental flaw that seems to all but guarantee her eventual elimination: her inability to muster the courage to eliminate others.

And really, this is expected of almost any normal teenager or person in general. While they all may be already dead in reality— in theory, the idea of destroying another person's final chance at life may just as well be the same as murder.

“They're human, too. They have a name, a family, a regret, just as I do. What gives me the right to take that chance at life away from anyone else? What is it about my own life that makes it worth more to live over someone else's?” Such is Rinka's internal

plight that stems from her inherent kindness. Funnily enough, as she comes to encounter such as Keiko, Sonya, Shigetsugu, Yu, and even the big bad Alan, it is precisely this kindness that allows her to pull through the rest of the Divine Selection on her own.

In meeting Shigetsugu and Yu, she ends up in an almost comedic situation where she's cooking, cleaning, and even fixing appliances all at the old man's requests in order to give the amnesiac young boy a sense of normalcy. Though reluctant, Rinka can't say no— not when Shigetsugu and Yu remind her of her own relationship with her only relative: her grandma. However, her involvement with the duo eventually turns on her when she gets caught up in the crossfire between Odette and Alan's race for Shigetsugu's information for the right to elect him. During Alan's invasion of Shigetsugu's home, Rinka manages to talk him down into a truce, then even a temporary alliance all for the sake of protecting Shigetsugu— a man she didn't even know until just that week. Though this admirable defense stirs something in Alan, Shigetsugu's election is inevitable. But at the very least, it comes when he is able to resolve his final regret with Yu's efforts to reunite him with his family.

Knowing that his newfound family would soon be gone, Yu asks Rinka to eliminate him along with Shigetsugu. He is afraid that his past memories will come back to haunt him, and wishes to pass on before it has a chance to. He trusts Rinka with his cards, and trusts her to eliminate him. But she doesn't. She can't.

Rinka's ambivalence soon comes to strike back at her.

The Divine Selection for the week passes, Yu regains his memories, and the truth behind his identity is finally revealed. Yu is tortured by his rediscovered past, and in a fit of rage and revenge, sets off a bomb at Rinka's school, killing her friend Naomi in the process. And thus, her inability to strip another's chance to live causes her own life and friends to be affected. She struggles with the grief and self blame of Naomi's death, even coming to think that she ought not have been alive in the first place.

"You're just smearing the memories we made together by saying that." These words from her friend Mao stir a realization within Rinka. She can grieve, and she *should* grieve. But she shouldn't blame herself, and most of all, shouldn't desire a world in which she never meets Naomi at all. In the realization that she should honor her memories and experiences with Naomi, she discovers her regret card: her daily life.

Finally, Rinka learns one of her most important lessons: Kindness from one's own self is not something that is earned, but fundamentally deserved. As a human being, she, too, has the right to be alive and have her way just as much as anyone else.

Soon after this development, Odette drops by her shop to propose an offer: Rinka's cards in exchange for Yuu's guaranteed death, which would reverse Naomi's death in turn.

The game now offers the player a choice in Rinka's actions: To accept Odette's offer, or to reject it. In accepting this offer, the player betrays Rinka's newfound character development, and eventually leads her to her death. This is the first crucial choice given to the player that can determine a bad ending. But by understanding Rinka's character and rejecting Odette, they allow her growth to be cemented into her character, and as fickle as Odette is, she helps Rinka anyway. This is one of the first instances in which the game attempts to nurture a sense of empathy in the player themselves, by making them understand that sometimes, it's not really about what they want, but what they understand that their acting character would do.

What's in a Name?

"After all, a name only represents one's hopes. It can't change their nature." - Keiko Kamebuchi

Over the course of the Divine Selection, the names of the participants becomes a key aspect in uncovering. One would expect that it would be the easiest: just match up a picture to a school or corporate roster, and voila. But in reality, it's not so simple.

A name is what one can say that carries our "identity". When someone calls our name, we respond. When we fill out forms or meet a new person, one of the first things asked is "What's your name?" A name is what a parent will bestow secondly to their child, the first being life itself. This name often carries the parents' dreams and hopes for their child, and for many of us, we die with the same name we're given the day we are born. It is something so crucial for a parent that Keiko, the participant who died during childbirth, was willing to fight just for the chance to live and name her child properly.

But in the modern day, there are many individuals who in their heart, do not accept this given name as their own. Miharu, Alan, and Yu are examples of this, and this is reflected in their name card itself. In Miharu's case, her name card contained "Miharu Hebinata". While she was forced to change her surname to her mother's during childhood, in her heart, she would always know herself to have her father's surname. Both Alan and Yu reject their birth name, and don one that they believe to encompass more wholly their identity. In Alan's case, a name he gives himself, and for Yu, a name that someone he loves gives to him. In a way, this proves that a name is not necessarily one given to us at birth, but one that our own self perception accepts as ours. "After all, a name only represents one's hopes. It can't change their nature," as Keiko says to Alan in her final words. An identity is ours and only ours to possess and determine, not anyone else's, no matter how they may deny it.

Fatal Twelve's nuanced perception of a name, also ties into its just as nuanced portrayal of family. In fact, the topic of family is one of Fatal Twelve's most prominent themes, playing a role in almost every participant's character narrative. When we hear the word "family", we tend to automatically think of a group of people that are related by blood. While society defaults to the idea of a family always being there for you, being people that you can and should rely on, love, and trust, Fatal Twelve dares to acknowledge the fact that these ideas, for many people out there, are not true at all.

In Yu's situation, he considered Shigetsugu his family despite not being related by blood. Rinka herself even admits that were it not for their physical differences, she would have easily believed they were grandfather and grandson with their dynamic. For Federico, Miharu, and Odette's family situations, theirs is one that likely reflects the stories behind closed doors that one does not so easily talk about in society.

Having been abandoned by his own mother, Federico was forced into a life of crime in the mafia in order to survive. In Odette's case, after the passing of her own mother, her father began turning to repeated sexual abuse towards her at a young age, ultimately resulting in Odette's infertility by the time she hit puberty.

And finally, for Miharu, once a daughter that held nothing but affection for her mother, would one day come to realize that her love had eventually turned to hatred in her mother's neglect. Her story is one that not even Rinka is aware of until Miharu herself manages to muster the courage to tell her the truth near the end of the Divine Selection. It's easy to understand her secrecy, as the stigma of being something of a social pariah is not something so simple to divulge to others; Yes, even to our closest friends, and even to our lover.

At a young age, Miharu's father was indirectly involved with an accidental death, and was forced to move across the country to escape social persecution. Despite their efforts, her family was not able to run away from the stains of her father's past. Unable to live with the guilt, Miharu's father commits suicide, and Miharu takes on her mother's surname. Through all the trauma, her mother still does her best to care for her daughter. They did not have much, but they were still family. Miharu still loved her mother, and her mother loved her.

But when her mother's new fiance falls for a younger woman, her mother is overcome with jealousy, uttering curses about the man she was going to marry in front of Miharu herself, and eventually resorts to alcoholism to cope. In her mother's growing neglect, Miharu turns to self-harm, slitting her wrists for just even a chance that her mother would regard her with the care she once gave her— an act that would perpetuate her ostracization with the visible scars it leaves. As Miharu enters high school, she meets

Mao, her very first friend, and the very person who tells her, “You don’t need to love her just because she’s your mother. It’s okay to hate her, even.”

This pushes Miharu to realize that she’s worth more than the care that her mother gives her; that just because her own mother no longer spares her a thought, she herself is not inherently someone undeserving of love.

Though Miharu’s backstory is complex, this complexity allows for nuance that is rarely seen in mainstream media— especially the dynamics of a mother/daughter relationship when many familial relationships portrayed in other narratives tend to be patriarchal centered.

Through these characters’ narratives, Fatal Twelve shows how family is not just the people you are born with, but the people whom you choose to have in your life. As much as we as a society like to believe family will be the people that will stick to your side no matter what, there are many instances where this idea unfortunately does not hold truth in our realities.

To Forgive One’s Self

“I’ve come to understand the inherent value of wishing for my own survival.” - Miharu Mishima

Throughout the Divine Selection, there is a little fine print that the Goddess Parca has hidden from the participants. Though the final survivor may return to their living life, they must pay a cost (or in Parca’s eyes, a nice bonus). This cost is the person’s mental real estate: The Goddess Parca will use their body as a host to store her spirit. But if the Divine Selection is caused by the death of her previous host, then who was that previous host?

The answer? Miharu herself.

It’s not very easy to “share a room” with a deity inside your head, but considering Miharu has been rooming with Parca since she was a child, you’d be bound to get used to it over time. But this tolerance meets a breaking point.

Though she may be a deity, Parca is not above messing with her hosts’ dreams and pulling on fate’s strings herself to get what she wants. Knowing all of her weaknesses, Parca shows Miharu a dream. The dream entails a scenario— One where Rinka and her friend Naomi are in a romantic relationship.

Overwhelmed with nothing but self-hatred, Miharu takes her own life. Why the drastic action, you might ask? Well the answer is simple:

Miharu is in love with Rinka.

But this dream is not the key factor in her suicide, no. Miharuru tells Rinku herself that she has confidence that she could accept it so long as Rinku was happy.

In truth, it's Miharuru's fear of the hatred she came to harbor against Naomi, and most of all, the jealousy that crept inside her heart. The same jealousy that she witnessed her mother go through when she was a child, and the same jealousy that resulted in her neglect. She needed a way to convince herself that she was not like her mother, and death was the only way to prove that. She does this knowing that she would have the chance to live again through the Divine Selection, but not knowing that she would involve the very person she loved in it as well: Rinku herself.

To Miharuru, this spelt her unfortunate doom. As Miharuru is, she inherently does not value her life or survival above Rinku's. Through every step of the way, Miharuru is striving to protect Rinku, and reassuring her that Rinku will make it out alive, even at the cost of Miharuru's life. In a way, she could be seen as putting Rinku on a pedestal. Can't really blame her, because love does that to you sometimes.

And in the end, Miharuru is a true woman of her word. While Rinku was rendered emotionally incapacitated as she grieves for Naomi, Miharuru finally steps into the fray on her own, mingling and negotiating with the other participants in order to bring Naomi back to life through Yu's death. Despite holding less than amicable sentiments towards Naomi herself, Miharuru puts herself in danger in order to bring back Rinku's smile. As the player, we can see that Miharuru is also changing to become a better woman than who she was at the beginning of the game. When Naomi comes back to life, even Miharuru shows visible relief, much to the surprise of their friend Mao.

As a person, Miharuru is not the most morally correct when compared to many others. Miharuru herself is aware of this— She knows that treating Naomi poorly in most of their encounters just out of jealousy is wrong. In fact, her character is one of the main targets of criticism among some of those who have played Fatal Twelve. But what Miharuru's character narrative intends to address is not to just be morally correct with each and every one of our words, thoughts, and actions. It's that even when we make mistakes, we have the chance to acknowledge them, grow past them, change ourselves for the better, and ultimately, learn how to forgive ourselves for our mistakes.

When Miharuru reveals her story to Rinku, Rinku does not shun or berate her. Rinku, in all her kindness, strives to ensure a way that both she and Miharuru can live together. In seeing Rinku's determination, Miharuru finally understands the inherent value of survival— of wanting to be alive.

Love and Empathy

Towards the end of the game, Miharu finally confesses her romantic love to Rinka.

As the player, we are already well aware of her affection, but Rinka must eventually give a response to Miharu, to accept, reject or alternatively, ask for more time. As the player, understanding not only Rinka as a character, but Miharu as well, is crucial to this decision, as it determines the final ending of the game. The rejection of Miharu is obvious enough in its spelling of Miharu's doom, as Miharu would trick Rinka into electing her by convincing her she would try to stalemate. However, accepting it leads to her death in the same method, albeit with a farewell scene that tugs at your heartstrings. All you wanted was for them to have a happily ever after...

And they will, but Rinka must first put her feelings on hold and learn the truth behind the Divine Selection. In understanding Miharu's ultimate goal, and Rinka's own hesitance at commitment, the player can figure that the best decision for now, is to simply keep Miharu waiting.

Through a family heirloom she found in her Grandmother's room, Rinka discovers that Parca is the manifestation of her ancestor, Diana Harrison's, will to live after having died young in a fire. Rinka is able to uncover her three cards and elect her in the final Divine Selection. While Diana's spirit has already accepted it is time to pass on, Parca, the manifestation, continues her struggle to live on, though the rules of her own game dictates that she must die. As Parca screams in her own flames, Rinka risks her own safety to calm the girl's anguish with an embrace, and finally, the Divine Selection has been put to an end.

In the months afterwards, Rinka finally has the chance to respond to Miharu's affections during a festival. Her mind is made up, and thus the player does not choose her response this time. What Rinka says is not revealed until all endings are unlocked, but as expected in the romantic scene with fireworks showering the night sky with lights, the player finally hears Rinka's long awaited "I love you" as their reward— the game's "thank you" for accompanying Rinka in all paths of her story.

Strongest Element

Fatal Twelve's storytelling through heavy character dialogue is what allows players to easily connect with all characters of the story, even the antagonists. The way it is written is to purposely make the player wary of, maybe even hate characters such as Alan or Federico. But as the story goes along, their antagonism diminishes. Rinka, and by association, us as a player, learn to see them as not people who are evil or malevolent for the sake of it, but rather, simply just people who want one more chance to live. What

separates Fatal Twelve the most from other narratives is its diverse character cast and their similarly diverse and nuanced narratives. As a Japanese visual novel, there are bound to be common tropes seen in anime and the like in it, but Fatal Twelve specifically plays on these tropes and manages to subvert them in its nuanced writing.

Weakest Element

By nature of being a visual novel, Fatal Twelve has very limited interaction between the game and the player— The most being simply selecting dialogue choices. While I do agree that the nature of this game’s story could greatly benefit from actual mechanics in a style like Phoenix Wright or DanganRonpa, the production quality of the game being done by an extremely small indie company is already significantly higher compared to other visual novels in its art quality. There are also times in which narrative and dialogue can become convoluted, making it hard for the player to follow along. and the player has no choice but to continue reading the story while still being unclear about the exact workings of the Divine Selection and its complex rules.

Highlight

The way in which Fatal Twelve handles Miharū’s same sex attraction is very respectfully and tastefully done. After almost an entirety of a game suffering from having to witness Rinka’s obliviousness to Miharū’s advances, it’s rewarding to see Miharū finally manage to make out a very sweet and charming confession, with an equally charming reaction from Rinka. What I appreciate most is that while Miharū’s love for Rinka falls into same-sex attraction by nature, Fatal Twelve does not make it out to be her entire character. They treat Miharū as just Miharū first, who happens to be attracted to another woman. In her confession, Miharū says “I love you not as a friend, but as a woman”. This felt to be one of the most validating confessions I’ve seen in media, as affection between sapphic women is often mistaken to be platonic. In online spaces, this mistake is often jokingly dubbed “Sappho and her friend”, or “gal pals”. With this confession, Miharū’s affection becomes undeniably queer, something that media both in the past and present has been afraid of committing to. Not only that, but what’s considered to be the “true ending” is one in where Miharū’s affections are reciprocated no matter what. It’s a sort of validating feeling, when many lesbians in media have suffered from the “dead lesbian” trope.

One of the flaws that other narratives tend to find themselves, both in past and in present media, is that many LGBTQ+ characters are often seen having to struggle with

the oppression that comes with being a minority, or that their narrative is entirely based on being a sexual minority. This is not an inherently negative or necessarily incorrect perception of actual LGBTQ+ people, but it is not always desirable to have to see or reexperience the trauma that the community faces in the real world, and LGBTQ+ individuals would oftentimes prefer to just see characters on screen that are a character first, who also happen to be LGBTQ+, so Miharu's character is a welcome refreshment.

Critical Reception

Source: theclick.gg

Reviewer: Chris Ranta

Score: 9.1/10

Chris Ranta gives a reasonably objective review of Fatal Twelve, highly praising it for its characters and narratives. He states, "There is not a single bad character in this game. At a bare minimum, each character acts believably in their situation and has consistent characterization throughout their scenes". Though he rates the game by subcategories, he is clear in stating that the game is very much "more than the sum of its parts". The lowest score Chris offers to Fatal Twelve is a 7.5 in its gameplay compared to its average in 9+ scores in other categories, which is expected and warranted.

Source: RPGFan.com

Reviewer: Patrick Gann

Score: 87

Patrick has similar sentiments, with praises to the visual and audio assets that accompany "the engaging plot and memorable character cast". He does acknowledge the lack of player choice within the game, with most decisions being either "no-consequence options" and "simple story branches based on one decision", but with the knowledge of this visual novel be developed by a team consisting of only 4-5 key staff, and the game also being crowdfunded to boot, the quality of story and its assets is what he compares to the likes of well renowned visual novels such as Steins;Gate, Clannad, and Phoenix Wright. Patrick also offers the criticism that he believes there were "missed opportunities" in its endings, though he does understand the reason for the developing company "drawing the line where they did" due to its expansive storyline, and does not fault them for this.

Lessons

- A game does not have to be fully interactive in order to have a good story. In developers' struggle to innovate new and original game mechanics to keep a game interesting and fun, sometimes, all you need is a good story, and good characters to keep people invested.
- A story also does not have to involve being cruel, violent, or pessimistic in order to be a good story. There are a lot of narratives involving battle royale thematics that portray a nitty gritty world in where no one can trust anyone, and the protagonist has to eventually resort to throwing their morals and standards out the window for survival. While these narratives hold their own merit, sometimes, it's good to see kindness win in the end; It's what makes us human, after all.
- It's okay if your family isn't like other families. You don't need to love someone just because they're a part of your family. Family members are just as capable of abuse and trauma just as much as anyone else. But don't forget that even if family is broken, you're not alone. Family can be the people you choose to love, too.
- No one can tell you who you are except yourself. This is a power that can never be taken from you, no matter how hard someone can try. Be proud of yourself.
- Everyone has their own story. This doesn't exempt people from their actions that harm others, but all of us are human, and all of us make mistakes, no matter where we're from or what we've done. Acknowledge the mistake, learn from it, and grow from it to be a better person than you were before.
- And finally, You are worth it. Please accept that. You deserve to live just as much as anyone else. You can forgive yourself, and you can love yourself, and you will not be wrong for doing so. Even if it seems like the world is against you, there are people who love and accept you as you are. You are a human, so please, treat yourself like one too.

Summation

Each character is as human as they get in Fatal Twelve, even down to those who are supposed to be your enemies. Themes that media is often afraid to even include in their narratives such as suicide, child neglect, and even sexual abuse are well addressed,

and with respect. This exposes players to topics that they might not encounter often or at all in their typical game narrative. Fatal Twelve gives the player ample time to get attached to almost all the characters, and does not pigeonhole any one character into a stereotype. By having us help Rinka along her journey, Fatal Twelve encourages the player themselves to nurture their own sense of empathy as they watch Rinka grow and affect others with her own.

The narrative and themes of Fatal Twelve fulfills such a niche genre that it's almost something that only an indie company could truly make; with passion, and without fear. Some themes might turn others away, and those same themes could also be the ones that attract players to it. Even I have my biases since I've related to Miharu's character more than any other character in any video game, movie, or book.

But regardless of who you are, any player going into Fatal Twelve with an open mind would surely come out of it with a new perspective on life, and might even come to treasure their friends, their family, or even their own self more than they did before.