

A Game Narrative Review

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Game Title: Deltarune

Platform: PC

Genre: RPG

Release Date: 10/31/18 (Chapter One), 9/17/21 (Chapter Two)

Developer: Toby Fox

Publisher: Toby Fox

Game Writer/Creative Director/Narrative Designer: Toby Fox

Overview

Deltarune is the pseudo-sequel to 2015's Undertale created, published, composed and written by Toby Fox. It's an RPG with a goofier approach to its narrative and atmosphere, which pushes messages of compassion and love over beating the bad guy and saving the world. Like its predecessor, it's a subversion of the genre that aims to please with its fun writing and heartfelt message.

The story mainly follows high school students Kris and Susie, who find themselves suddenly cast into the role of heroes when they stumble into a secret parallel world named the dark world. Ralsei, the dark prince, explains that both of their worlds are in great danger and the three team up to seal "the fountains" and return balance to both worlds.

"When the LIGHT is subsumed by SHADOW
When the FOUNTAINS fill the sky
All will fall into CHAOS.
The TITANS will take form from the FOUNTAINS
And envelop the land in devastation.
The surviving Darkners, crushed by the darkness
Will slowly, one by one, turn into statues...
Leaving the Lightners to fend for themselves.
Lost eternally in an endless night...
Is that your idea of paradise?"

Leaving it at that would be a disservice to the quality of Deltarune's writing, however, as the real focus of the game is taking a deep dive into the psyche of the cast, helping them

face their problems and become better people. There is also the underlying message that, unlike the previous game, the player's choices *don't matter* here.

Characters

Major Characters

- **Kris** – The player avatar; Kris is a quiet, strange, human teenager who is often seen as weird but well-meaning by their peers. Despite the fact that the player never directly hears Kris speak, it is very explicitly stated that Kris is not a silent protagonist and has opinions on events in game. There are a few notable instances where characters often react to the things Kris says or the look on their face, alluding to the fact that they are aware they are being controlled (and might not be a huge fan of that fact).

As of chapter two, it is heavily implied that Kris is The Knight, a dangerous villain the game name drops a few times. The Knight is one largely responsible for opening fountains between the light and dark worlds which could result in the collapse of both if they are not dealt with.

We see Kris explicitly open a fountain inside their house at the end of chapter two, and it is also implied that Kris is responsible for the previous fountain in the computer lab based on the cliffhanger from chapter one. This theory is also supported by the appearance Kris takes in the dark world, this of course being a knight

- **Susie** – The reluctant hero. Susie is the school bully. She's rude, she's a big purple dinosaur, and she'll threaten to eat your face if you look at her funny. For the majority of chapter one, she actively attempts to heed your progress (with the assistance of her new friend and minion, Lancer), failing miserably at every turn. Deep down, Susie doesn't really want to hurt anyone. She threatens violence, but never actually acts on it. When she realizes she's made a legitimate friend in Lancer through being honest with herself, she opens herself up more to those around her. Susie turns over a new leaf, going from violent psychopath to charismatic smartass.

Susie takes a bit more of a backseat in chapter two, however, she still gets a few very important moments in the story to show off just how much she's already grown over the course of the first two chapters. This can be seen when she returns Noelle feelings, having a heart to heart and openly talking about her feelings, something she would previously never do.

- **Ralsei** – The dark prince. He's a friendly, optimistic, goat boy who is always willing to help others, even at risk to his own wellbeing. Ralsei never fails to see the good in everyone, which is simultaneously his best feature and most critical flaw. He is often reluctant to violence, suggesting Kris try to find alternative means of progression and acts as a bit of a moral compass for the group. He also

bears a striking resemblance to Kris' older brother Asriel, in both appearance and in fact that both names are anagrams of each other.

Despite his noble goals and kind-hearted demeanor, Ralsei may also be hiding some form of ulterior motive, being the only character aware of the Roaring (the event that would cause the end of both worlds) as well as seemingly dismissing Kris' cry for help after the Spamton fight.

- **Noelle** – A kind, but meek childhood friend of Kris. She's a studious reindeer who never speaks out of line. She has feelings for Susie yet lacks the courage to act on them. She is also too afraid to stand up for herself, causing those around her to use her as a footstool, albeit unknowingly in most cases. Because of this, she finds herself constantly stressed out, trapped in an endless cycle where the only reprieve she has is through visiting her father in the hospital.

Over the course of chapter two, Noelle gradually learns to say no to her oppressors and learns to speak her mind and confront her fears. This comes at the shock of Berdly and Queen, who learn that their relationships with Noelle had been causing more harm than good and change for the better as a result.

- **The King** – The terrifying ruler of the card kingdom. He rules over those below him with contempt for the outside world, citing the lightners as the source of evil in his eyes. He's ruthless and cruel, quickly threatening extreme violence towards anyone who stands against him, even his son. Despite this, he seems to cherish his incompetent subordinates, implying that his threats are mostly an act. With this perspective, it can be surmised that the king simply is averse to revealing his feelings, mirroring Susie's character arc, further supported by their shared love for Lancer. This makes him an excellent first antagonist
- **Queen** – The well-meaning, but morally reprehensible ruler of the cyberworld. She's a computer with a very vague sense of morality. She seemingly holds a genuine love for everyone, even her enemies, yet Queen also demonstrates a lack of understanding of genuine happiness. Because of her overwhelming love, Queen thinks it would be best if she simply controlled the lives of all she holds close, through her mind controlling plugs. She has a special fondness for Noelle, desiring to go beyond even mind control and turning Noelle into a robot outright for her own good. It is only when it is made abundantly clear that her approach to love is wrong, does she begin to turn over a new leaf.

Breakdown

The game begins within a void. A voice speaks out to the player, asking them to make a vessel. As the player creates this avatar, the voice asks them questions, some simple, others strange: "What is your favourite blood type?", "What is its favourite colour?", "How do you feel about your creation (it will not hear)?" before disregarding everything the player had said, explaining that their choices do not matter.

The overarching story of Deltarune is nothing deep or complex, just a typical save the world plot with a twist of a persona-like dark world. Because of this, much of what happens in the light world is fairly inconsequential to the plot of the game, at least within the first two chapters. The real meat of the game lies within the dark world, which I will cover in two main sections: How the card kingdom relates to Susie, and how the cybervverse relates to Noelle.

The player takes control of a teenager name Kris, who seemingly acts as a stand-in for the previous game's "frisk." The player plays through their morning routine on the way to school, and even a bit of what their school life is like. Kris is a quiet kid, generally well liked by their peers but not enough to have someone they could call a friend. This is where Susie makes her introduction. Right from the moment she walks in, it's clear that there is an air of intimidation around her as even the teacher is nervous about speaking with her directly. Perhaps it's no surprise then, that when the teacher asks Kris and Susie to go get some more chalk from the supply closet, Susie immediately picks a fight with Kris as they spot her eating some when no one is looking. Right before anything serious happens, however, Susie backs off, using Kris' family as an excuse to not continue.

As the two make their way to the supply closet they stumble directly into a portal to the dark world hidden within. For a brief moment, Susie drops her tough guy act, being relieved that Kris is okay upon landing. It's not for very long, however, as she immediately returns to being stoic and cold before they press forward. The two soon run into Ralsei, who introduces himself as the prince of darkness, and ally to the two. He explains an ancient prophecy he's been tasked to fulfill:

"Once upon a time, a LEGEND was whispered among shadows.
It was a LEGEND of HOPE.
It was a LEGEND of DREAMS.
It was a LEGEND of LIGHT.
It was a LEGEND of DARK.
This is the legend of DELTA RUNE
For millennia, LIGHT and DARK have lived in balance,
Bringing peace to the WORLD.
But if this harmony were to shatter...
a terrible calamity would occur.
The sky will run black with terror
And the land will crack with fear.
Then, her heart pounding...
The EARTH will draw her final breath.
Only then, shining with hope...
Three HEROES appear at WORLDS' edge.
A HUMAN,
A MONSTER,
And a PRINCE FROM THE DARK.
Only they can seal the fountains
And banish the ANGEL'S HEAVEN.

Only then will balance be restored,
And the WORLD saved from destruction.
Today, the FOUNTAIN OF DARKNESS-
The geyser that gives this landform-
Stands tall at the center of the kingdom.
But recently, another fountain has appeared on the horizon...
And with it, the balance of LIGHT and DARK begins to shift.”

He explains that the three must team up to prevent the end of the world, but Susie disregards his pleas, insisting that she's no hero. This claim is proven true when son of the King, Lancer busts in the room and demands a fight. This is the player's first experience using Susie in a fight. Unlike most RPG party members, Susie doesn't follow the orders of the player, instead, she will constantly attack the top enemy whenever it is her turn. While this may be fine in most other RPGs, Deltarune, as well as Undertale are games advertised as friendly RPGs where “no one has to die,” challenging the player to find a way to end fights peacefully. The player must warn Lancer of Susie's upcoming attacks, so they know to dodge when it's her turn. This is a central mechanic for most of chapter one, warning monsters of Susie's attack in order to keep everyone unharmed.

After the fight is over, Lancer retreats and Susie leaves the group to find her own way out, once again ignoring Ralsei's request to join forces. With that Kris and Ralsei continue further into the dark world to put a seal to this fountain of darkness. They soon run into Lancer trying and failing to stop the heroes. Susie, similarly, hasn't been doing much better on her own, stuck at the very next puzzle.

As the chapter progresses, Susie and Lancer realize they have a lot in common and split off from the group to go be evil together, a task which Lancer was more effective doing alone. This is the first example of Susie getting along with someone, as the two share each other's love of mischief. This is a pivotal moment for both Lancer and Susie. To Lancer, Susie is living proof that the stories he had heard about lightners are made up and that they aren't any different from him. To Susie, Lancer is her first real friend she's had. He's the first person to stop and seriously listen to what she had to say, and not judge her for it. It only makes sense then that when the two try to fight Kris and Ralsei as a team, they wind up convinced by Kris and Ralsei's friendship and both reluctantly agree to help by joining the player's party.

Soon after the four start to get along, the unavoidable truth hits Lancer. He realizes that his new friends and his dad will inevitably meet and try to kill each other. Without explaining, he runs off, with the group following close behind. He manages to lock them in the dungeon, where he ensures they'll be safe and happy. Susie, hurt by this sudden betrayal breaks out and fights Lancer for real, nearly killing him. Right before she starts doing serious damage though, she buckles, admitting that she doesn't want to kill him. He explains why did betrayed them, and Susie promises that the King and her group will talk it out, and that they won't kill each other. Lancer isn't entirely convinced, but goes along with her plan anyways

At this point in the story, Susie begins to realize that her violent approach won't get her much farther and admits that she'd be more open to the idea of following Kris' orders in order to spare enemies. It's a rocky start, but it works, and Susie is shown firsthand yet again that she too can solve things diplomatically. Before long the trio reach the King who is having none of it, convinced that his son had betrayed him and that lighters are a plague to the world. Up until this point, none of the monsters have really wanted to fight the player, and so sparing them was just a matter of appealing to their more reasonable side. Here, it's different. The King is pissed and wants nothing more than the trio dead at his feet. Despite Susie's promise, there's nothing she can do here but fight. And yet despite this, it doesn't shake her resolve. Instead of immediately regressing back into her older self, she embraces the possibility that she can use her strength to pacify the king, even if it means trading a few blows.

The strength of the trio isn't good enough though, as right as the King is about to defeat the heroes, the monsters the player had encountered until now storm the castle and overthrow the King himself. Lancer states that he explained what was happening to them and they came running in an attempt to help the trio. For once in the entire game, the actions the group took had a positive consequence on the world around them, and this sticks with Susie especially. She's a hero now.

The thing I would like to bring focus to, is the King's similarity to Susie. While the two aren't physically the same characters, Susie sees herself as this big brute, capable of violence and intimidation, the exact approach the King uses to rule. Both characters also have a very hard time expressing themselves, often outright disregarding or denying any attempts to appeal to reason. Because of this, both characters are also seen as unapproachable by their peers. Lancer, however, sees through both of them, giving each of them a second chance. While the King threatens Lancer's life, it's revealed later that it was a bluff to get the heroes to surrender and that he didn't actually plan on hurting him. To Susie, Lancer is the person she most needed in her life and served as the catalyst for change and so seeing the King hold Lancer in a similar light really drives home this comparison.

Afterwards, the chapter ends on a positive, but unremarkable note. The fountain is sealed, Ralsei says goodbye, and Susie and Kris go home, now friends after their adventure. While chapter one ends on a cliffhanger, it is revealed to be a fake out at the start of chapter two.

Chapter two begins when the nearby library computer lab becomes yet another fountain for the cast to reseal. The main issue this time, stems from the fact that Kris and Susie's classmates, Noelle and Berdly have now also trapped in this new dark world. It's a high-tech metropolitan city run by this eccentric computer called Queen who is set on controlling the minds of all her citizens and has her sights set specifically on Noelle.

Quite early on, the dynamic of this chapter is established with a cat and mouse game between Noelle, a (reluctant) team of Queen and Berdly, and the playable trio. Noelle takes the role of the central character this time around, with the entire chapter revolving

around her safety and standing up to Queen. She even joins Kris' party temporarily around the halfway point of the chapter after Susie and Ralsei split off from Kris to cover more ground. She functions as a support character, like Ralsei, being able to heal, as well as ACT (something important to note in this chapter is that all party members can do this now and not just Kris, albeit Kris still ACTs the best), alongside Kris to keep things peaceful. While with Kris, she tends to follow along in their shadow as they solve puzzles and explore the city.

While trying to find their way back to the group, the two run into Berdley, who has switched sides and is working for Queen, insisting that Kris has kidnapped Noelle. He proudly proclaims that she's not of right mind and that he will defeat them and save his friend. Noelle tries to talk sense into him, but, like her previous attempts at reason, she's disregarded and spoken over. What's interesting about the ensuing fight, however, is that Noelle (unknowingly) decides to do something about her helplessness for once. While in the fight, Noelle will still listen to Kris' actions as opposed to sitting in the backline and refusing to fight. It's not even something any characters call mention to, but it is the first pivotal moment in Noelle's character arc.

Not soon after, another problem makes itself known, Queen. Despite her comically evil ambitions, Queen seems rather pleasant to be around, often cracking jokes and trying to make sure everyone stays in a good mood. She even forms a one-sided alliance with Kris in order to find Noelle when the trio splits up out of pity that Kris' friends had abandoned them as well. Without a doubt queen is the antagonist of the chapter, however, her actions and personality seem to indicate that she's not really a bad person, rather a misunderstanding one. This upcoming interaction further proves that.

Queen meets up with Kris' once more, with Noelle quickly disguising herself. Queen insists that the three of them take a car ride together and things quickly devolve into wackiness. As the chaos settles, however, Noelle asks Queen why she's so desperate to find her. Queen, completely fooled by Noelle's crude disguise, reveals that she it's because she believes Noelle is strong and that she wants her to realize that strength. The heartfelt moment is cut short by Queen's car spontaneously exploding and she once again splits up to cover more ground, but Noelle is left to ponder this question.

Before long, the group meets back up together and the four catch up on what they all missed. It's not long before they are once again arriving at the doorstep to the second fountain, this time located in Queen's castle. Before they can enter, however, the four fall right into Queen's trap and she separates them once again, locking Kris', Susie, and Ralsei in the dungeon and taking Noelle away yet again (exactly like the third act of chapter one).

The three rejoin and begin to work their way through the castle, with Susie breaking off to go save Noelle while Kris and Ralsei head for the fountain. Susie finds Noelle in her own personal room and the two have a serious conversation. Noelle believes the events she had been experiencing up until this point were part of some weird dream, not believing the fact that Susie would even give her the time of day. Susie, having now been

a changed person since the events of chapter one, tries to be there for her, and lets it be known that she reciprocates Noelle's feelings for her.

Even beyond the progression of their relationship, this scene is extremely important to both characters, as it's the first time the player really gets an explicit deep dive into either of their characters. Susie, now being a person much more open with her feelings, plus also being able to speak under the guise that what she was saying was a dream, confesses that she likes Noelle because when they first met, she offered her a pencil. It's an admittedly small and silly reason, but it shows that Susie is someone who remembers the finer details. She's sentimental, and she remembers these little things others wouldn't. It raises the question that maybe Susie was only ever a bully because of what others said about her, with their comments gradually weighing more and more about her self-confidence. It would explain why she spirals off the rails at the beginning of chapter one and almost fights Kris, despite them not saying anything to aggravate her. It also gives extra weight to her relationship with Lancer, who turns her negative traits into something positive. He doesn't think she's a scary bully, he thinks she's an absolute badass.

For Noelle, though, this scene is so much more. Noelle's infatuation with Susie is known as early as one of the first conversations in chapter one and it's once again foreshadowed by some optional dialogue at the end of the same chapter where she asks Kris what Susie is like as a person. Therefore, it's maybe no surprise that her immediate reaction to being alone with Susie makes her nervous, even if she had slowly been working up more and more self-confidence. Despite her nervousness though, she takes Susie's offer to deepen their relationship. Even if this is all a dream, the Noelle from the beginning of chapter two would have immediately fled this scene. Instead, she continues to open up. She talks about how she finds comfort in things that others would be traditionally scary, and even connects it to part of the reason why she likes Susie. She claims that her "scary" nature is what makes her cool, like she's not afraid to go against the grain. Noelle wishes she could "do something crazy" like her, still oblivious to the fact that she had been doing just that the entire time. This shows that Noelle sees herself as considerably less of a person than her peers, despite being what most would consider a role model.

As their time together comes to a close and Susie must regroup with her friends, she entrusts Noelle's safety to the now allied Berdley. This is a mistake, as the trio soon reach the fountain, only to find that Queen has captured the two and is using Berdley as a weapon with her brainwashing plugs. With the help of Berdley's resistance to Queen's mind control, the four manage to send her retreating. Queen isn't done yet as she climbs into a giant mech suit, stating that her plan has now evolved passed turning Noelle into a robot and now onto world domination. Despite the trio's own efforts, even with the help of the other characters encountered along the way, they are no match for Queen's mech. As Queen tells Noelle to realize her potential and start using her ability to create fountains, Noelle finally snaps. She yells at Queen, demanding her to leave her and her friends alone, telling her that she'd never be happy if she was controlled all the time and that Queen just doesn't understand people.

Queen, surprisingly, just listens to her. The moment Noelle finally stands up for herself and her friends, Queen decides to reconsider her approach and wonders if what she's doing would be considered to extreme. Like mentioned before, Queen isn't really an evil person, despite her actions. Most of her actions seem to come from a place of genuine care for those around her. She loves and wants to protect them, so she believes they would be safest and happiest if they were always under her control. This is why she constantly traps and tries to brainwash the group. Even the rooms in the castle she locks Kris and the gang up in aren't prison cells, they're rooms decorated by things related to their search history. She's trying her hardest to understand them as a computer. Therefore, it makes sense that she makes such huge leaps in logic. Her decisions must be made in absolutes. This even extends to her very over the top nature.

In a way, this parallels Noelle's own mother, the town mayor. The player never encounters her over the course of either chapters; however, she is mentioned by others, including Noelle's father, Rudy. It is heavily implied that she is very controlling and overall disliked by the residents of the town. It's also implied that Noelle has a rough relationship with her through her father when he expresses concern that he's not at home to fulfill his role at the "fun parent" and notices that she's been spending more time with him at the hospital. From this it can be reasonably surmised that, like Susie and the King, Noelle's mother and Queen are somewhat stand-ins for each other.

On that note, however, Deltarune chapter two hits its conclusion. The fountain is sealed, the new characters met along the way move into Ralsei's castle town, Queen is ready to start anew, and Berdley and Noelle are safe and sound, but not after some much needed self-reflection. Just before things come to a close, however, Susie is invited to stay the night at Kris' place. As the night progresses, and everyone begins to fall asleep, Kris wakes up. Getting up off the couch, they rip out their soul and stab the floor, opening up a brand-new fountain, with the screen fading to black.

I would love to dissect Kris as a character as I feel they are exceptionally deep for what most would see as a silent protagonist, but I feel that, as the player, we simply yet don't have enough context for their actions. Perhaps my above theory is right and they are the true villain all along, perhaps they're just someone really into the idea of being a hero. Regardless, we don't know and we only have the very limited bits of foreshadowing drip fed from the game, disallowing us from making a solid breakdown of their character at this time. Regardless I am more than excited to see how this story continues.

Strongest Element

Overall, I think the strongest element of the game is how the dark world relates to the characters of Deltarune. As I mentioned in the breakdown, I think it's effective at handling character arcs through placing these characters face to face with situations most effective to them. With Susie, it's fighting against someone who the world sees as a monster and who prides themselves as such. With Noelle, it's standing up to someone who means well, but is extremely overbearing and toxic to her health. With Kris, though, we've yet to see this full arc unfold, but we are left with a few pieces of the puzzle. I surmise that Kris is simply lonely with their brother, Asriel gone to college. We also have

Jevil and Spamton, characters I haven't mentioned up until this point but are two side characters who draw direct parallels to Kris. Both run with ambitions of being free and being great, dreams which Kris seems to share. I believe it also says something about Kris' mental state that the characters they most directly relate to are in absolute shambles, with Jevil being insane and Spamton being desperate to the point of incoherence.

Unsuccessful Element

At risk of getting a bit meta, I feel like Deltarune's biggest problem is the time between chapters. Chapter one ended on a cliff hanger way back in 2018 and it took players nearly three years before that cliff hanger was answered, and many most likely weren't very satisfied with the payoff.

I personally don't have any issues with waiting years for something, but I totally understand that three years is a very long time just to experience the second chapter of a seven-chapter game. It certainly doesn't help that both chapters can easily be completed in around one or two sittings. At that rate, chapter seven would take 21 years to release, and that's insane to think about.

At first glance, the cliffhanger to chapter one was a false alarm, with Kris meandering out of bed, ripping their soul out of their body, locking it away, and turning to the camera with a knife. It's unsettling and unlike anything the rest of the game had to offer up until this point. I can understand the frustrations in players when this was revealed to be a fake out for a joke. In reality, it's much more likely that Kris' snuck out to open the fountain in the computer lab at the end of chapter one, given the events of chapter two.

Sadly, this is mostly me projecting my thoughts, as there is little evidence to actually support this theory, at least until more chapters are released. I suppose that's the real issue here, this isn't a complete story.

It's not all doom and gloom though, as it has been confirmed that the next three chapters will be released as one big package and will be out much sooner than the break between chapter one and chapter two, even if there is no news on chapters six and seven quite yet.

Highlight

I think the strongest element from both chapters of Deltarune is something completely optional, I'm referring to the character of Spamton. While his initial fight is unavoidable, the player can choose to completely ignore his quest line, assuming he was just a one-off gag character. If the player chooses to pursue further interaction though, things get very interesting.

For starters, Spamton lives in a creepy backroom in the junkyard, with glitched textures on the wall and weird, offbeat music stopping and staring randomly. He speaks using a mix of salesman lingo and with lines you would see from advertisements on shady websites. While it's really quite funny, there's a very unsettling nature to him and the way he speaks.

He sends you on a mission to “free himself” by transferring his body into a puppet. From there he insists that the last thing he needs to truly be free is Kris’ soul and attempts to kill them. After the ensuing boss fight, though, he gives up, and accepts that freedom is something he simply can’t obtain, turning to Kris, stating that they can obtain true freedom. The most interesting part of this entire side quest is the reaction Kris shows after the fight. Susie notices Kris is acting strange and asks them if they’re okay. The player is prompted to either confirm or deny Kris’ mental state but regardless of what they choose, both Susie and Ralsei are extremely unnerved at the delivery of their response.

This is such a strange scene, since it’s never brought up again and is treated as something completely serious in this otherwise funny game. What this scene spells out for the player though, is that it completely reinvents the player’s perspective of Kris’ in this moment. Something Spamton said about freedom and not wanting to be puppeteered really reached out to Kris’ and it makes the player feel like a monster, even if just for a brief moment.

Critical Reception

When looking for reviews of Deltarune, the waters tend to get a bit muddy. Deltarune has only released two of the seven planned chapters of the game and there is no set release quite yet. This makes reviewing Deltarune tricky since, anything someone says, criticism or otherwise, could very well change when the next chapter releases. Despite this, Deltarune’s fame really doesn’t need an explanation, especially not in gaming circles.

Undertale’s release back in 2015 launched Toby Fox’s career forward to a point where he now has composed music for a mainline pokemon game and even has representation for his characters in super smash brothers. Deltarune is no exception to this. At the release of chapter two, there were more than 100, 000 concurrent players. For reference that is even more than Undertale, being the 96th highest ranked game on the stream database for all-time player peak. That’s larger than games like Portal 2, Borderlands 3, Metal Gear Solid V, and Devil May Cry 5.

And that’s before mentioning the booming community on social media sites like youtube or twitter, with endless amounts of speculations, theories, video essays, and even entirely original fan animations, art or games using the same characters and world that Toby Fox created. And the best thing? Deltarune isn’t even a very complex game. That’s not to say the gameplay is boring or bad, rather, that the writing and presentation is what really pushes Deltarune above everything else. People love this game for its characters, its jokes, and it’s very delicate handling of important topics. It’s clear that when you go on twitter and search “Spamton” only to be greeted with hundreds of tweets made in the past hour relating to just this one character, you have some great writing on your hands.

Lessons

- Tragedy and Comedy go hand in hand – When people think of Deltarune or Undertale, their mind most likely immediately goes to its comedy. In fact, it's rather hard to avoid either games comedy as many lines of dialogue or scenarios have found themselves very deeply knit into our modern, online, society. Despite this, there are a surprising number of hard-hitting moments in both games. The biggest example would be the alternate routes. In Undertale, there is the genocide ending. This involves the player killing every character they meet, and it is never once played for laughs. Deltarune, made the very bold claim that the player's choices "do not matter," and yet, chapter two features an arguably more disturbing alternate route where the player manipulates Noelle into freezing characters to death. Many of these scenes would easily push the game into an M rating, despite otherwise being very child friendly otherwise.

It's perhaps, bizarre to some, that these games can balance these very serious and disturbing moments, while still being widely remembered as a fun, jovial time. Toby Fox, is a very talented writer in this regard, using the juxtaposing nature of tragedy and comedy to work with, rather than against each other while not coming across as too heavy. I find it very important to strike a fine balance between these two, as to not overwhelm your players. Too much comedy and players will undermine any meaningful messages a game might have. Too much tragedy, and a player will start rolling their eyes at the plot entirely.

- Show don't tell – This lesson is as old as time yet; many seem to forget its importance. Each chapter of Deltarune only lasts about four hours each, maybe one more if the player goes for the optional secret boss in each chapter. In terms of game length, this is typically seen as quite short in comparison to most games, which have a 6-8 hour opening, followed by an additional 12 hours of gameplay. Despite this, Deltarune knows what to say and how to say it in order to best convey its message. There aren't pages and pages of dialogue to go through in this game, rather, the player is asked to read the between the lines and pick up on implications naturally, through clever use of hints in the environments, character portraits, sprite work, and even music. For example, the secret bosses from chapter one and two share a leitmotif, and so the player may identify Spamton as the second secret boss long before the fight without even realizing why. This is a simple but effective message. If a character's dialogue starts going off screen, maybe cut it back a bit.
- Being progressive isn't that hard – Many games are afraid to have representation in them without making the entire story about it. The purpose of this statement isn't to knock those games, rather to point out that Deltarune covers many of the same topics a lot of these games do, yet it also doesn't receive even half of the backlash. Susie, and Noelle are homosexual, Kris is nonbinary, even Mettaton from the first game was an allegory for a transexual person, yet none of these were shoved in the players face. Instead, these are just things the game expects the player to pick up on and respectfully uses these elements to better the story. Susie

and Noelle's relationship is extremely sweet and isn't handled as something strange or taboo, rather two friends simply growing closer. The game treats these elements as they should be treated, perfectly normal. I think this method of delicately, yet casually handling these big important topics in games is much more effective than any long-winded explanation or big dramatic moments. These are still the characters you love; they aren't treated any differently now that you know these things. It's a much better way at encouraging acceptance.

Summation

Truthfully, I could easily write ten papers on the genius of the narrative and writing in Deltarune but I must keep things concise. I believe Deltarune is a truly remarkable game, all while being made by someone who could very well be considered the definition of an "indie game developer." It weaves truly outstanding humor, an interesting narrative hook, and believable characters who feel like real people (despite the fact that they're monsters) into a simple, concise package. There really isn't anyone I wouldn't recommend Deltarune to since just about anyone would take something equally meaningful and different from the experience, and I'm absolutely floored that a game only two chapters in can make me feel that way.