

Glory to Humanity: A *Neir Automata* Game Narrative Review

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Game Title: *Neir: Automata*
Platform: Nintendo Switch, PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Microsoft Windows
Genre: Action role-playing game
Release Date: February 23, 2017
Developer: PlatinumGames
Publisher: Square Enix
Game Writer/Creative Director/Narrative Designer:
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Overview

Neir: Automatic takes place in a postapocalyptic future in which humans and aliens wage an ongoing proxy war against one another, utilizing the Androids on the side of the humans and the robots on the side of the aliens as soldiers. The game lives up to its other JRPG predecessors, in that it tackles heavy themes of existentialism and the nature of humanity.

What separates this game from others in its class, is the vehicle by which they choose to explore these themes: an android.

Characters

There are three playable characters in *Neir: Automata*.

- **2B** – the protagonist of the game and, generally, the focal character by which we experience the game world. She is a battle android, a soldier attached to YoRHa, fighting on behalf of humanity against the robots. She is a no-nonsense soldier who doesn't allow unnecessary distractions to deter her from her mission.
- **9S** - a recon android who is partnered with 2B. Like 2B, he is also a battle-hardened soldier although displays levels of emotions and empathy that come across as disruptive and unnecessary to 2B. He is the catalyst that sets about the chain of events that drive them both to the plot.

- **A2-** initially appearing as a boss fight during the forest kingdom story quest. She is the final protagonist the player is allowed to play as. She is on trusting of others and usually keeps to herself unless a situation demands otherwise.

Breakdown

Neir: Automata is a story about war, humanity, and finding a reason to hope.

Nier: Automata is an unexpected exploration of life and its meaning. Through thrilling swordplay, the game guides us on a journey to reflect upon our past actions, contemplate eternity's cycle of cause-and-effect and confront whether those sins can be forgiven. Its well-constructed narrative introduces themes such as what it is to be human, weaving them into its mysterious plot that reveals secrets which turn preconceived notions on their head. Although at times melancholic due to the ruined cityscape where much of the game takes place, Nier offers powerful moments that are guaranteed to tug your heartstrings. Death and its implications on life are central to Automata's obsession with classical existential philosophy.

The game does a great job introducing elements and motifs as secrets are revealed that change how the androids and machines behave. Sense of purpose, self-determination, and what it means to be human all play a big role. It's not the most uplifting tale, but Nier: Automata has a lot of memorable and emotional moments.

Strongest Element

The strongest element in *Neir: Automata* is its ability to weave narrative elements into game mechanics and its ability to make that conversion seamless. The strongest and most obvious example of this is the respawning system of 2B and 9S. The opening line of the game centers around the idea that the protagonists are trapped in a perpetual cycle.

“Everything that lives is designed to end. We are perpetually trapped in a never-ending spiral of life and death. Is this a curse?” -2B

Yet, this narrative device is subverted at the end of the game. The player is given the option to delete their entire save file of the game in order to help another player defeat the final boss, just as how the player was given aid during that segment. The "cycle" is finally broken when the player decides to symbolically sacrifice themselves for somebody else, something we consider in our culture to be the ultimate symbol of humanity, something the protagonists desired to understand.

Unsuccessful Element

At certain point in the game, lack of context and development prior to an event hinders the emotional narrative. The story tells the player what they should feel, but it does not

provide them with the tools and bridges to experience it for themselves at that critical moment.

Throughout the game, players barely got to know Devola and Popola, so their sacrifice has little emotional impact. Although knowing their condensed backstory after the event makes the story tragic, the gut punch is lost due to the lack of familiarity and understanding of the characters. Devola/Popola could have been replaced with Jackass or Anemone and it wouldn't have mattered.

Highlight

During our time with Pascal and others in his village, we come to learn about how these robots broke free from the programming to fight in that never ending war and chose to live a peaceful existence, which was sweet enough.

But what made me absolutely bawl my eyes out was the fate of the robot children that Pascal not only looked after, but also educated after an attack on their village.

After defeating the forces that attack the village, both A2 and Pascal returned to the bunker where the children were hiding. What awaited them and I was the most horrific scene I had ever witnessed in any medium.

The children had all committed suicide.

I think I cried for about 10 minutes after that. I paused the game and I just sat there, and I cried, and I cried because this wasn't the first time, I had seen something like this. This wasn't the first time that I had seen a child's life be taken because of fear. Memories of my time in the Middle East kind of resurfaced, and it was rough.

It was seriously rough. What was worse was the interaction with Pascal after the cut scene.

"I need your aid. I, I cannot live with this heartbreak inside me. I need you. I need you to delete my memories, and if not that I need you to kill me."

What he wanted was death. The weight of what he just witnessed was too much for him to bare and he wanted an end to his suffering. I know too many people that I served with wanted the exact same thing.

Hell, including myself.

Fear is an instinct that helped us survive through the course of human evolution up to this point. Oversaturation of it turns into despair and that takes over and consumes us. Destroying us and then we're just left to pick up the pieces and its wake.

So where does that leave us? Are these the only things that we could look forward to in life? Fear, loneliness, despair, weakness, tragedy. Is that all there really is to being alive? Constant cycle doomed to repeat itself forever.

Most of the endings would leave you to believe that, as most of them end with either some or everyone dying.

Hell, think about where you are at in your life right now.

Think about all the mistakes and hardships that you've been through up to this point. The broken promises, the missed opportunities, the things left unsaid. Now imagine all the suffering that you don't see from people you've never even met. All the war and disease, starvation, discrimination, and subjugation.

It seems never ending no matter where we turn and no matter where we look, there's always something horrible going on. So, what's the point? What's the point in any of this?

I didn't know what answer the game had to this. I remember just sitting there and thinking about my own past and the hell I've stood witness to.

Then I played the true ending of *Neir: Automata*, the E ending as it's called, and it gave me the closest thing I've ever had to the truth that I've ever experienced. I'm not a religious person personally, but this ending was something beyond spiritual.

Upon beating the final boss, you're given a brief cut scene and then taken to the end credits, as if that was it, that was the end. But then something happens in a fourth wall breaking kind of way.

The game becomes aware. Specifically, the pods that have been following two 2B and 9S the entire game become aware, and they decided not to allow that end. You're given the opportunity as the player to change the given ending.

The players then engage in a bullet hell mini game with the ending credits, where the enemies are the literal developers of the game. The difficulty in this portion of the games is intentionally ramped up to the point where it feels as though you are not meant to complete it.

Whenever you die and you're taken to the response screen, at least for the first few times, you're given the exact same prompt of whether you want to continue.

After a few more times, the questions begin to change. They ask questions like *Are games silly little things?* or *Is there any meaning to any of this?* They're just yes or no questions, but obviously questions that have bigger implications than what it seems at first. In the background, you see random messages, almost all of them in some different language, but they're translated to whatever your primary language is and but they're always inspirational or helpful quotes like, you can do this or don't give up.

The music is swelling, gaining momentum, and traction as a sudden realization hits you. These are other players, actual people from all around the world who have played this game and they're there supporting you, giving you words of encouragement. It's a beautiful sequence with that alone, but then the game takes it one step further after what seems like the billionth time that you've died.

You're given the prompt of accepting aid from other players and should you choose it, those players step in and help you beat the sequence. It is nothing short of an awe-inspiring moment. Never had I ever felt more connected to people that I didn't even know, and like the big baby that I am, I was bawling.

It was incredible to me that something like a simple video game had the power to make me feel such a transcendent feeling. A feeling of connectedness of community at the end of catharsis. I knew in my heart in that moment, I truly wasn't alone.

The weight that our burdens put on us is more than we are able to take on ourselves because we're not meant to do it by ourselves. We are meant to rely on one. Take care of one another, share in each other's strengths and walk in each other's footsteps. The true answer to the meaning of life is each other.

Since that moment, I have never been surer of anything else in my life. I live my life by that creed, though it isn't always easy, but it's always. After the last cut scene of 2B and 9S having survived their final encounters, the pods then directly address the player, asking them if they wish to help someone else the way that you were helped during that final sequence.

But there's a catch as is with most things in life, you would be able to help somebody, but you as the player would have to give up your entire save data of the. All the progress that you've ever made, all the upgrades, the currency, everything you have ever achieved up to this point will be deleted. The game makes it very clear that this is a permanent process and that the person you will help is probably someone you don't even know.

More than likely, it's someone you probably don't even like. You will never be thanked for your sacrifice. It's a jarring choice as a gamer, but having been through what I'd just been through, I understand what it's trying to tell me. Yes, we do have to lean on one another in order to survive and to find happiness.

The price of victory and happiness is rarely won without sacrifice, but the prize is always worth the price, even if we never get to see it ourselves. Without a second thought, I accepted and allowed the pods to delete my save data in order for me to be able to help someone else. I watched as all of my data was deleted right in front of my eyes, and weirdly enough, I felt catharsis for all my pain and misery that came from being in the military.

For the first time it finally felt as though I could let all the hurt that I bottled up inside of me for all of these years go. As I watched my save file be deleted, I also felt part of that pain be deleted as well. But more than that, it felt as though that pain wasn't just disappearing into the ether, but was actually going to help someone else. For me, that sort of closure is beyond anything that I could have ever hoped for.

For me, *Neir: Automata* told a story that I used as a vehicle to close the chapter on those painful parts of my past and light a fire that brought me hope for the future, no matter what life had in store for me. I made the choice to use the pain of my past as the foundation to make myself a stronger person.

Those experiences we have in our lives, the good and the bad, shape the person we can become, but we have to find the path where they make us better, where they make us stronger. These are the stories we should tell one another; stories that we can all understand, the ones of pain and loss but also the ones of hope and joy. More than

anything, however, the ones where *WE* can learn to forgive and overcome, to find joy even in the darkest of time.

One where we can find a path to a brighter future.

Critical Reception

- PC Gamer- 79/100
Nier Automata is a thrilling, stylish game with plenty of personality and spunk. With enemies, locations and bosses that can repeat themselves however, it may dampen the overall experience. The PC port has been met with criticism due to its technical difficulties; cutscenes are locked at 30fps which make them appear jerky while an AMD card running on one test machine caused crashes every ten minutes without explanation. Despite this qualm though, Nier Automata remains as one of the most unique action games available for PC!
- IGN- 8.9/ 10
Nier: Automata is a wild ride that melds imaginative ideas, captivating visuals and an adrenaline-pumping soundtrack into one unforgettable experience. The game may not have the deepest narrative or most compelling protagonists; however, its frenetic fight sequences will keep you entertained through every single minute!

Lessons

- Weapons aren't the only thing you need to fight- Stories often challenge us to redefine what bravery looks like. There are many ways of being courageous that don't involve physical prowess - it can be as simple as standing up for yourself or loved ones in the face of adversity.
- Innocence can also be a bad thing- Innocence, while often viewed as an endearing quality of youth, can take a sinister turn when it expands into naivete. It's almost eerie how quickly belief in the world around us can slip away and leave behind something rather creepy.
- Aristotle said, "Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom." His same sentiment applies to Hermeneutical Phenomenology – a method used by philosophers and researchers to get behind surface appearances in order to examine the deeper meanings and understandings that exist. It is through engaging with phenomenological questions and staying open to its elusive answers that we can move closer towards whether Aristotle's words are true or not. By carefully unpacking the ways we interpret phenomena, Hermeneutical Phenomenology can aid us in understanding how we make sense of our experiences, our minds, and ultimately ourselves.

Summation

Through shared stories, we can build one another up and create a stronger path. By facing life's hardships together and with resilience, we give future generations the opportunity to forge ahead into an even brighter tomorrow. Empowering each other through these tales

of courage sets us on course so that they may succeed beyond what seemed possible in the past.