

Game Narrative Review

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Game Title: Genshin Impact
Platform: Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 4, PlayStation 5, iOS, Android, set for release on Nintendo Switch (date yet to be announced)
Genre: Action, Adventure, Anime Role Playing Game
Release Date: September 28, 2020
Developer: Previously known as MiHoYo, rebranded to Hoyoverse in 2022.
Publisher: Previously known as MiHoYo, now Cognosphere.
Game Writer/Creative Director/Narrative Designer: Unknown/Uncertain

Overview

Genshin Impact (Genshin) draws from various time periods and real-world cultures (namely European, Chinese, Japanese and most recently Middle Eastern and South Asian) to construct the fantastical world of Teyvat, where deities live alongside denizens and vision-holders (the in-game term for magic/elemental power users) are a banal fact of life. Genshin offers a wide variety of characters to play as, a robust elemental-reaction combat system to master, and beautiful and memorable environments to explore: each mechanics' appeal bolstered by the game's overarching narrative of traveling through each region of Teyvat in search of the protagonist's twin sibling. The game's narrative can be interacted with in various ways, but the core story resides within the "archon quests" and optional story content comes in the form of "world quests", "story quests", "character hangouts" and limited-event narratives.

A typical Genshin log-in experience is entirely dependant on the timing a player has in relation to the game's ongoing development; for a player just setting foot into the first main region (Mondstadt), they can expect to have anywhere from 45 to 127 hours of main story alone to parse through depending on how quickly they want to complete the game's permanent content (and upwards of 2,174 hours for the slowest rate of full completion).¹ For players who have been consistent since Genshin's initial release in Fall 2020 (or those who are caught up with all latest version content), an everyday gaming experience may look vastly different than a newcomers: long-time or "end-game" players generally complete daily commissions for in-game gacha

¹ Davis, Ziff. "HowLongToBeat" Ziff Davis Company, <https://howlongtobeat.com/game/68133>. Accessed 26 November 2022.

currency, defeat bosses and domains for character ascension material, explore areas which potentially still host chests sequestered in hard-to-find locations or behind unsolved puzzles, and, if they are up for the challenge, take on the “Spiral Abyss”—the game’s hardest combat content redesigned and refreshed every two weeks.

Characters

Genshin Impact currently boasts 59 playable characters to choose from, with two more characters (the highly anticipated Wanderer and newcomer Faruzan) confirmed to be on the way in version update 3.3 scheduled for December 7th, 2022. Genshin originally had 22 playable characters (if you were to categorize the Traveler’s ability to resonate with multiple elements as constituting one character) in release version 1.0 and has only continued to add onto their roster as new “chapters” and regional locations are unlocked for the player base.

There are several characters hinted to be playable already present and prominent in the game’s narrative: specific examples can be found in the most recent nation of Sumeru (characters Dehya, Kaveh, and Al Haitham are all thought to be nearly playable in upcoming version updates) and in an older region (Liyue) certain playable characters have “About X Playable Character” dialogue mentioning someone who goes by the name Yao-Yao (leading people to believe this character may become playable in the future as well). A rather old yet currently unplayable vision holder introduced to the game’s story over a year ago (Baizhu) is also rumored to be potentially playable (however without any particular date set for release, this belief only stems from community speculation). The anticipation of fan-favorite or dialogue-hinted characters becoming playable is yet another fun-factor many players derive from Genshin’s impact’s storytelling.

Arguably Genshin’s most recognizable and defining marketing strategy, the game utilizes its characters visual designs, personalities, unique gameplay features, and story involvements/personal backgrounds to entice new players to join in the game as well as incentivize long-time players to collect new additions. For each playable character in the game, Hoyoverse creates a “character demo” and “collected miscellany” video which feature original music, artwork, and professional voice acting in 4 languages (English, Chinese, Japanese and Korean) which all serve to thematize and “sell” (quite literally via the gacha system) the distinctness of each character.

As describing all of the note-worthy characters within Genshin would become quite a page-turning pantheon of playables to peruse, it is reasonable for the purposes of this review to separate each character into general categories of narrative involvement. The categories elected to be used are as follows: The Traveler(s) and Paimon, Playable 5 Stars, Playable 4 Stars, Regional Governance/Important Organizations, and Archons.

- **The Traveler(s) Lumine/Aether and Companion Paimon** - The Travelers are the two twin protagonists that players must choose between at the very beginning of their journey into Teyvat. Aether/Lumine serves as the entryway into the world of Genshin as well as the usual starting off point towards learning Genshin’s combat system and overall gameplay mechanics. Before making this choice, very little is known about the Twins

besides their genders as brother and sister (Aether and Lumine respectively). The Traveler's are accompanied by a floating companion named Paimon who they rescued through narrative flashback from drowning (the physics of a floating being almost drowning clearly evoking one's suspension of disbelief early into the narrative).

- The Travelers play into the archetype of the “silent protagonist” while they are on screen during the majority of the game's dialogue portions and cutscenes. However, unlike another notable silent protagonist from Genshin's known source of inspiration, Link from Breath of the Wild (BoTW), the Traveler's are not incapable of speech and much like the rest of the playable cast will utter battlecries and (albeit rarely) say one to two words or a small sentence aloud in certain cutscenes. The Travelers, though not voice-acted for most if not all dialogue-driven choice scenes, have the largest quantity of voice-acted “character profile” lines in the game, with more lines continuously added as players progress through the story, causing the Traveler to in turn remark on certain places, people, and customs of Teyvat. These easy-to-miss characterizations of the Traveler (as someone with a keen sense of humor, who is quite curious about Teyvat yet wary nonetheless of its' secrets, and who sees Paimon as an indispensable friend) are signaled by the dialogue options for the character but only given the space to explore their personality in-depth through the voluntary search in character profile sections. By electing to present the Travelers personalities in this way, Hoyoverse has both reinforced and subverted the “silent protagonist” trope of its' many action RPGs predecessors.
- **Playable 5 Stars** - There are currently 30 playable 5 stars within Genshin Impact, the Traveler being included into this category. 5 star characters typically are more difficult to procure onto one's account as they need 90 Intertwined Fates (the game's gacha currency) in order to appear guaranteed (and even with 90 pulls players may lose the gacha 50/50 and receive a standard 5 star rather than the featured/limited 5 star). 5 stars typically have heavier involvement within the story's narrative and every nation's archon is a 5 star character. “Story Quests” are a rather exclusive narrative perk awarded almost solely to 5 star characters (outliers being the 4 star Amber, the Traveler, and Aloy from Horizon Zero Dawn, the only current 5 star crossover character). Story Quests can be one part or two part stories (two part stories as of now only afforded to archons) which typically last from an hour and a half to four hours depending on the character.
- **Playable 4 Stars** - There are currently 29 playable 4 stars within Genshin Impact. These characters have been a “mixed bag” in terms of plot relevancy and gameplay style appeal; in terms of narrative importance, rather than the movie-length personal “Story Quests” crafted for 5 stars, a select number of 4 stars (currently 13 of the 29) have “Hangouts” for players to learn more about them. “Hangouts” are currently exclusive to 4 star characters and consist of choice-making slice-of-life style branching paths which can be as mundane as recruiting students for a housekeeping class (one of the 4 star Thoma's Hangout paths) or entail catching the culprits of a complex caper with 4 star detective Shikanoin Heizou. However, though some 4 star characters may have hangouts which mimic the attention and care given to 5 star characterization, Hoyoverse has struggled to meaningfully introduce much of its available playable cast into the early game setting. 4 star characters such as Noelle (Two hangouts available), Xinyan (one of the 4 darker skin characters in the currently playable cast, no current hangout) Chongyun (one hangout available) and

Fischl (no current hangout available) all come to mind as characters Hoyoverse has added “pop-up profile descriptions” to upon their arrival in certain story quests and limited events. The purpose of these pop-ups (to inform players who may have no prior interaction with these characters about who they are and why they appear in the narrative) can actually detract from player immersion rather than build it. Apparent in Fischl’s and Xinyan’s cases is that the time of entry a player has to starting Genshin contributes to the issue of “pop-up” introductions being necessary to include to begin with (as Fischl was featured and introduced in the Unreconciled Stars version 1.1 limited event and Xinyan likewise in the Labyrinth Warriors limited event of version 2.2, events which any players who join(ed) after their debut will never have in-game access to). Similar to the exclusivity of certain in-game items that the nature of limited events creates, limited event plot lines in which 4 stars first canonically appear have the potential to alienate newcomers from enjoying “natural introductions” to old characters: rather than item exclusivity, it becomes immersion exclusivity.

- Both 4 and 5 stars have the narrative immersion issue of being available to obtain, play as, and raise friendship levels with incredibly “early” in relation to Genshin’s linear narrative. It is entirely possible for a player to have reached a high level of “friendship” with a character (unlocking special voice lines and in-depth character lore) prior to ever meeting the character in the plot, and this opportunity to access featured 5 and 4 stars during their gacha banner duration comes at the cost of narrative immersion. As the exploration boundaries of Genshin are also incredibly linear in parallel with the main story, the gameplay immersion suffers as well with players not having the choice to explore regions when desired despite having already acquired characters who hail from these places narratively.
- **Regional Governance/Important Organizations** - Mondstadt’s Knights of Favonius, The Liyue Qixing, The Inazuman Shogunate and Tri-Commissions (especially the Kamisato Clan), The Akademiya of Sumeru, The Fatui and Harbingers, The Abyss Order, and Celestia. All of these listed factions are the most notable organizations within the game, each serving as a governing body for their respective regions. Save for the Abyss Order and Celestia, there currently is at least one playable character who hails from (or even leads) one of each of the organizations. Character examples for each organization include Jean (5 Star), Ningguang (4 Star), Raiden Shogun/Ei (5 Star Archon) and Kamisato Ayato (5 Star), Cyno (5 Star), and Ajax/Tartaglia/Childe (5 Star Harbinger) respectively.
 - The idea of playable characters also serving as important figures within the game’s regional management is quite an engaging premise; having leaders and notable organization members of Teyvat adds another layer of importance to players who have a character(s) with narrative significance and “prestige”.
- **Archons** - Continuing the line of argument in regards to certain characters within Genshin having more “prestige” than others, Archons (the gods, goddesses and deities of Teyvat) each represent one of the seven major nations and are highly sought after units to obtain through the game’s gacha system. As Genshin is known to take real-world inspiration for its fictional worldbuilding, the archons for each region are also (to an extent) an interpretation of what a “leader” of a real-world culture would look like and behave like in a fictional setting. With this added responsibility in terms of positive

cultural representation, Archon's have often been the most controversial characters to be released within Genshin.

- Examples of Archon controversies include the characters Zhongli, the Archon of Liyue (based on China, where the development team for Genshin is primarily from) and more recently Nahida, the Archon of Sumeru (based on a variety of cultures, namely the Middle East and South Asia).
- Zhongli was poorly received by players on both Hoyoverse's domestic and international fronts; while international players were primarily concerned with the character's relative "weakness" compared to other 5 stars, the domestic player base in China expressed disappointment that the Archon's (aka fictional figurehead of a Chinese-inspired nation's) gameplay was not only weak, but a poor representation of the actual nation of China where Hoyoverse based his character from. Dissatisfaction towards Zhongli's gameplay kit (compounded by how his Archon status confers the added difficulty of representing a real-world inspired culture) by the Chinese player base is what many in the Genshin community point to as the primary reason why Zhongli received a swift and direct rework to his gameplay capabilities (unprecedented before and ever since it was first resolved).
- In recent developments, the character archon Nahida of Sumeru was speculated by many international fans prior to her official art being released as an addition to the currently small selection of skin-tone diversity within Genshin Impact, especially considering as she was to represent Middle Eastern and South Asian cultures where demographically people have much wider ranges of skin color to choose from. When Nahida's official artwork was debuted, there was outlash from the international community that Hoyoverse had missed a great opportunity to create an Archon who was not pale-skinned as the real-world inspiration for Nahida's in-game region would perfectly play into this character design choice. Yet unlike the Zhongli gameplay rework, Nahida's character design remained unaddressed by Hoyoverse to the dismay of many international players who had been excited for more skin tone variation as in the almost 2 years of the game's ongoing development prior to Cyno and Candace's character releases, only 2 characters (Kaeya and Xinyan) had a tan or darker skin tone in comparison to the entire rest of the playable roster. The special status given to Archons as playable characters is both a highly marketable feature of their character design as well as a volatile one.

Breakdown

Genshin is a story-driven adventure game which, unlike its closest comparison in terms of genre BoTW, has a linearly driven story progression. In some regards, especially the interlude between Mondstadt's story and Liyue's, Genshin's own environmental design conveys a sense of straight-forward linearity; as you leave the tree at Windrise, for instance, players can easily begin to follow a downwardly sprawling line towards Liyue Harbor in order to continue the story as intended (even though neighboring nations such as Sumeru are now ripe for exploration nearby). Unlike BoTW, where players are able to head to any of the four major civilizations upon exiting

the Great Plateau (beginners area), Genshin curtails and entrenches each of its players along the exact same narrative journey. Much of Teyvat is deliberately made inaccessible until players reach a certain “Adventure Rank” (AR) level and have completed all relevant prerequisite quests. The most infamous example of “region gating” within Genshin can be seen in the challenge many new-coming players face in gaining access to the island nation of Inazuma. In order to unlock later-stage nations such as Inazuma (released July 2021) and to participate in certain limited time events such as the Summertime Odyssey event (July 2022), players must have (or must have had as in the latter case of the limited time event) their AR raised to either 30 or 32 respectively as well as finished Archon Quests and Story Quests before being able to participate in the latest content the game has to offer. Region-gating has been partially addressed with the latest release of Sumeru as players are able to enter the nation and access materials for new Sumeru characters (though this ability to enter comes with the trade-off of missing the more ceremonious welcome cutscene offered by following the narrative structure). It remains to be seen which avenue of regional accessibility will become the outlier (or new norm) to Genshin’s formula: perhaps the other nations of Teyvat will allow for Sumeru’s “work-around” entryway, giving players who have not caught up to the most recent story developments more agency at the cost of narrative immersion. It is also possible that Inazuma’s story-locked accessibility will be the mainstay for nations farther down the game’s release roadmap. Regardless of which standard of regional accessibility Hoyoverse chooses to pursue, these two case studies demonstrate that these current structures come at the expense of both player immersion and/or agency.

This time-gated game development approach is where the issues of conflict between Genshin’s narrative and actual gameplay philosophies begin to emerge most distinctly. Genshin is not only a story-driven narrative (of a Traveler trying to find their lost sibling in a strange world) but for many intents and purposes a character-driven plot as well. Several of the game’s limited events are fashioned specifically to delve further into a given character’s background, and most factions within the game all feature playable characters within them who star as driving forces for the plot. Thus, while there certainly exists a portion of the playerbase solely invested in the Traveler’s journey, Genshin heavily markets their unique characters and gameplay styles in concurrence to their overarching adventure story. With this dual narrative focus (of crafting compelling playable characters which the game is able to monetize off of and creating enticing settings and story to involve said characters into), Genshin struggles to justify its linear structure. New players are able to interact with the game’s gacha mechanic and obtain rare characters from regions such as Sumeru and Inazuma as early as AR 5, but their good fortune may quickly turn into frustration as they may feel pressure to rush the required narrative content in order to collect regionally gated materials for raising the level and skill talent of their characters, or feel compelled to quickly skim past worldbuilding and lore to participate in events which reward limited time weapons and/or character “constellations” (upgrades and additions to a character’s fundamental gameplay kit). The existence of limited events inherently dissuades newcomers from entering into the game, as they may feel they have “missed out” on too many resources for characters or have fallen perpetually behind as newer content continues to be released. The most well-known community example of this “feeling of missing out” can be seen in the 5 star character Albedo’s signature weapon (a.k.a the best in slot weapon for the majority of combat as well as for visual design aesthetic) being tied to a limited event, Shadows Amidst Snowstorms, which was released in December 2021. Many community content creators warned newcomers wanting to “wish” on Albedo’s re-run gacha banner (released October 2022) that if they had

missed out on the event almost a full year prior it was recommended to not use limited free “wishes” as his combat potential would never be fully unlocked.

Hoyoverse has yet to re-run any limited event weapons as of the initial release of Genshin, and although the game is still projected to span several more years to reach the narrative end of the traveler’s journey (and thus any patterns observed in the present and past are subject to change), the mere uncertainty of whether limited-time exclusives *will or won’t* be re-run is an extremely effective tactic that compels pre-existing and prospective players alike: either by getting them to stay with the game for fear of missing out, or, perhaps unintentionally, ever beginning to play Genshin at all.

Is this sentiment of time-gated exclusivity an intentional effect of Genshin’s story structure—a meta-journey which mimics how long the Traveler must traverse Teyvat before finding their sibling? Or is it a pitfall of Genshin’s narrative dichotomy? On one hand, Genshin’s gameplay emphasizes the appeal of character building and refining combat prowess (both of which beckon for a non-linear framework to more easily obtain these goals) while conversely and simultaneously the game forces players to spend time on the linear narrative (with no dialogue skip options currently within Genshin).

This is not to say that Genshin’s main storyline is “easily skippable” (yet for some of the game’s player base, who are only interested in the combat mechanics or exploration of the world, it would certainly qualify this description); however the lack of a skip option should not be seen as definite proof of narrative “perfection”. The Traveler’s journey is rather formulaic; after reaching halfway through the second region’s (Liyue’s) Archon Quest most players will be able to compare the plot development to the previous story in Mondstadt and understand where the plot is likely to head. A typical Genshin Archon Quest plotline is as follows: the Traveler arrives and is introduced to a region through a helpful guide, a crisis occurs which only the Traveler is deemed capable of solving, the Traveler meets with other characters of the region to gain more perspective on this issue (both playable and NPCs), the Traveler meets with the region’s archon before the issue is fully solved, an epic battle ensues, a cutscene plays, and after the climax of the action the region’s archon or archon’s assistant directs the Traveler towards the next region to help save (under the pretenses of learning the whereabouts of their sibling).

Strongest Element

The strongest element that Genshin offers narratively is the fact that it is incredibly difficult to exhaust all the available story content within the game. Players usually have world quests yet to be completed, hidden lore yet to be uncovered, character friendship dialogue yet to be unlocked, and so on and so on within each of the games wide variety of player-engagement options. Genshin being an experience which consistently sees itself added onto through version updates lends itself to this perception of narrative inexhaustibility as there is always something new in the world of Teyvat to look forward to. The game being an ongoing story with a wide cast of characters and lore timelines also lends itself well to transmedia adaptations: Genshin currently

has both a manga and upcoming anime partnership with Ufotable which is projected to release in 2024.²

Unsuccessful Element

Genshin has received critiques of employing misogynistic tropes when writing its playable women characters and continuously “recycling” (re-enforcing) these messages without subverting them in any way. Although Genshin does offer representation of woman in powerful and influential positions (such as Jean from Mondstadt, Keqing and Ganyu from Liyue, and Sangonomiya Kokomi along with Raiden Shogun from Inazuma) many of the women are portrayed as “overly industrious and career focused”, incapable of striking a healthy work-life balance, or having their emotions overwhelm their ability to effectively lead their respective factions. While there are examples of well-written and multi-faceted younger and older women within Genshin (Fischl, Yoimiya, Mona, Shenhe, Yae Miko and Collei all come to mind for the playable roster, and Dunyarzad and Kazari for NPCs), the wide audience and sphere of influence the game has achieved through its commercial success places a level of responsibility onto its characterization process to avoid disseminating and perpetuating stereotypes of oppressed social groups such as women (and furthermore, any other discriminated groups).

Genshin is also notorious for having “non-options” when choosing dialogue responses throughout story quests: it is incredibly rare to have dialogue decisions “matter” in terms of how the story progresses and it is common to have two dialogue choices bleed into each other and essentially form one sentence, entirely shattering the illusion of agency. Certain areas of Genshin where the story is more self contained (such as in character hangouts and limited events) will often have more variety in terms of how choices influence the reactions of those listening, however with Genshin’s main story (delivered in Archon Quests and Story Quests) being linear without any true possibilities for failure nor alternate endings/paths, player choices seem to be offered arbitrarily.

It is exactly because the game has shown itself to be capable of giving meaningful decisions to players when crafting smaller-scale stories that the overall rarity of impactful decisions in the main storyline serves as a constant reminder of what could have been and what could potentially be (if Hoyoverse were to change their main storytelling style in newer regions). However as it stands now, Genshin suffers from its overarching narrative being structured with vacuous replies and having player dialogue be akin to clicking “continue”, rather than actively participating and shaping the world around them.

² Llewellyn, Tom. “Genshin Impact Fans Could Be Waiting a Long Time for Anime Release Date News.” HITC, 17 Sept. 2022, Accessed 30 November 2022.

Highlight

One of the narrative highlights of Genshin Impact is its various cutscenes; while a common critique of cutscenes is that they deprive players of agency during gameplay, as expressed in the unsuccessful element section, Genshin already struggles with maintaining this illusion to begin with. As the main story (Archon Quests and Story Quests) already flows very linearly without much room given for player choice expression, Genshin's cutscenes (which typically come towards the very end of an event or right before it's conclusion) feel like making it to the end of a movie where the directors have portioned the majority of the budget to pull out "all the stops" on a viewer's final impression of their work.

Many cutscenes from each of Genshin's Archon/Story Quests and limited events could doubly serve as stand-alone pieces of art with the sheer impact of their production quality. The highly praised artistic and technical qualities only amplify Genshin's cutscenes' impact as storytelling mediums: often, cutscenes will showcase the featured character of the version update and/or familiar playable character faces performing feats of strength, saving the Traveler from a situation of dire peril, tying together loose ends, introducing major boss fights, and sometimes all of these factors combined. Two cutscenes that stand out for following this recipe exactly and diverging from it both appear in the same Archon Quest, The Crane Returns on the Wind (Version 2.3, January 2022).

The first cutscene (known either as Beisht Boss or Jade Chamber Rebuilt) has 6 playable characters (and a host of military NPCs) working together to fight a boss when the Traveler is injured during the fight. The featured character Shenhe saves the Traveler from further injury and, summoning her strength, proceeds to freeze an entire tsunami. It's an epic display of both the extent of her power as well as the newfound care she has for the Traveler and for the entire nation threatened by the boss actions. The cutscene serves as an answer to a question some players may have had throughout the quest, "Why is the Jade Chamber being rebuilt?" to which the answer is for a covert operation to provoke and defeat the boss Beisht. Although in some aspects memorable and enjoyable, this cutscene is emblematic of the same formula many Archon and Story quests cutscenes follow. Perhaps due to the predictable nature the first cutscene "The Crane Returns on the Wind" had, the second felt even more distinct in its juxtaposition.

"The Divine Damsel of Devastation", the highest viewed Genshin story cutscene to date, sits at over 7.8 million views on their official YouTube channel alone (and now 7.9 as I go back to review my review). This cutscene was a community favorite for many reasons: for one, it was stylized to be a Beijing opera song, a perfectly timed choice as the event and story quest it resided in was based in Liyue, the game's China inspired region, throughout January 2022, which is when the Chinese Lunar New Year is celebrated. It was also a cutscene that was a "meta-performance" given by the newly released (at the time) 4-star character Yun Jin, a professional opera singer who was searching for inspiration and decided to sing about the life-story of Shenhe (the featured 5 star) who she and players learned about in tandem through participating in the story quest.

Unlike the Beisht Boss and other cutscenes which can be found in Genshin like it, “The Divine Damsel” stands out with its use of stirring music, beautiful artwork, individual character-focused storytelling, and direct method of showing how the Traveler (player character) had influenced Shenhe and Yun Jin’s character developments over the course of the quest (with the cutscene showing how Shenhe had grown to feel more comfortable with her uncommon personality differences after working alongside the Traveler, and Yun Jin finding a story which resonated with her goals as a performer by accompanying the Traveler and Shenhe).

Although there is no current way to re-watch cutscenes in-game (most likely due to the limitations of Genshin being multi-platform and marketed as mobile-friendly), it is undeniable how many players within the community search for cutscenes on the game’s official video channels to reflect and reminisce on these high-budget artistic projects which intricately recount the emotion of events and story quests. As the story continues to develop over the next several years, the ability of cutscenes to serve as time-capsules of the game’s progression will likely strengthen and perhaps even act as a point of easy nostalgia over the game’s narrative journey for the playerbase.

Critical Reception

Genshin Impact has been awarded various times since its initial release in September 2020: from “iPhone Game of the Year” in the App Store Best of 2020, the 2021 Apple Design Awards for Visuals and Graphics, Google Play’s “Best Game of 2020”, TapTap Game Awards “Game of the Year” in 2020 and Best Mobile Game at The Game Awards in 2021. Across all platforms (including mobile, console and computer platforms), Genshin is estimated to have grossed nearly \$3.7 billion in its first year by September 2021, the highest ever first-year launch revenue for any video game.³ The incredibly large amount players are willing to spend on Genshin speaks volumes to how compelling its characterization tactics are and how involved players feel within the world of Teyvat.

Genshin’s main flaws as reviewed by critics are its stereotypical “anime” story tropes, use of cliches, and obviously heavy inspiration from Nintendo’s Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild.⁴ Ana Diaz from Polygon spoke to how the game’s balancing act between character building and combat oriented goals can feel at odds with the vast amount of story content regularly added into Genshin with each new version—“With so many tasks and regular, polished updates, the question is not whether Genshin is a good game. (It is.) Rather, the question has become ‘Can I even keep up with it?’ With so much game, it’s no wonder that the fandom constantly brings up the language of burnout when it comes to Genshin. It feels like I’m plugged into a never-ending cycle of content goals.”⁵

³ Tyler, Joshua Edward. “Genshin Impact's estimated revenue of nearly \$3.7 billion in its first year is reported to be the highest ever for a game in its first year”. Screen Rant. November 3, 2021. Accessed 19 November 2022.

⁴ Northup, Travis. “Genshin Impact Review.” IGN, 13 Oct. 2020, <https://www.ign.com/articles/genshin-impact-review>. Accessed 30 November 2022.

⁵ Diaz, Ana. “Yes, Genshin Impact Controls My Life, but It's Consensual.” Polygon, Polygon, 7 Oct. 2022, <https://www.polygon.com/reviews/23389752/genshin-impact-2022-review-hoyoverse-mihoyo-anniversary-sumeru>. Accessed 30 November 2022.

Lessons

- Lesson 1 - Having an international audience who also finances the game means that it's important to appreciate every player's feedback and suggestions in a game with a semi-flexible developmental process. Listening to player feedback must also not be only relegated to just the domestic player base in China as opposed to the international player bases concerns (such as in the case of the Zhongli and Nahida controversies).
- Lesson 2 - Genshin has incredibly strong individual characterization, even if each character's involvement in the mainline story is not always felt equally. From the aesthetic design, stellar voice acting, marketing material, and engaging gameplay mechanics unique to each playable character, Genshin's roster serves as a great template and launchpad for creating one's own original character designs. Genshin fleshes out each of its playable characters in intricate fashion: from having their own iconic combat lines, favorite and least favorite foods, feelings about other playable characters, unlockable personal histories, "namecards" and in-game profile pictures that players can display to others to show who they enjoy the most, Hoyoverse's holistic character design philosophy puts in an incredible amount of work towards creating an endearing (and always expanding) playable character roster for its' massive player base.
- Lesson 3 - The wide variety of characters within Genshin, each individually compelling in their own unique way, ensures that players will be likely to find at least one character whose personality, design, gameplay, or narrative involvement resonances with them and compels them to continue playing the game to strengthen their "friendship" levels with the character(s) of choice and/or literally strengthen their character by completing domains and collecting leveling and talent (skill increasing) material. The idea of love or enjoyment for a character (or characters) creating a gameplay feedback loop is one that can be a very effective technique implemented into game design.
- Lesson 4 - As each new version update to Genshin is added, the problems addressed of a linear, time-sensitive narrative become exacerbated. It's important to consider whether the style of one's game's presentation (a finished story with true open world flexibility akin to Breath of the Wild or a linear narrative with limited time features such as Genshin) is the right course of action when developing one's own video game narratives.

Summation

Genshin is one of the most ideal case studies in how creating linear narratives and presenting a game through continuous updates as opposed to one complete purchasing experience both aids a story's appeal as a "once in a life-time exclusive adventure" as well as restricts its players agency to choose where and how they would like to interact with the game's not-so-open world.

While Genshin is a game with an extremely large player base having won several awards in its relatively short time on the market, it's also a game that's very near and dear to my heart.

Through playing Genshin, I have connected with new friends, been cheered up by exploring its enticing fantasy setting, and have felt compelled to venture forward in life alongside the game's own developmental roadmap despite a pandemic and personal mental health issues. While not without valid areas for critique, I will always appreciate the characters, beautiful environments, phenomenal music, fun multiplayer interactions, and overall enjoyable combat mechanics of Genshin which keep me coming back to Teyvat over and over again.