



# Unité de passage

structure

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From the very moment that French writer/director David Cage appears in-game to explain his unique control system, it's evident that the 'interactive drama' *Fahrenheit* is going to be a completely different experience—not to mention a monumental gamble. // This is not your usual action/adventure game. In fact, forget almost everything you know about the genre. Quite literally, this supernatural thriller rewrites it all; from the stylised context-sensitive control system and 'MultiView' split screen techniques, to the way in which social and psychological behaviour impacts on gameplay. But the most impressive achievement of Cage's *Fahrenheit* is the one that underpins it all: its narrative. Developing a technique of his own—one he calls 'bending stories'—Cage has successfully created a game where narrative is not only a primary component of gameplay, but the emotional and relational drug that will have players bound to their virtual counterparts. // Is narrative the new gameplay revolution? David Cage thinks so.

**JumpButton:** *Fahrenheit* is both a fantastic story and a truly great game to play. Why do you think people are attracted to the art of storytelling? And how does *Fahrenheit* fit within this framework?

**David Cage:** Telling stories is one of the oldest human activities. Each time man created a new media, he used it to tell stories: paintings in grottoes, writing, theatre, cinema, television. Human beings love to feel emotions, and stories are a great way to feel many different and intense emotions without having to leave your chair.

Videogames are just following the same path. After having focused on primitive emotions like fear, anger, power, frustration or competition, games are now ready to move to more evolved and interesting emotions. Storytelling is a great way to do this. But there are two issues: 1) there is no established language for interactive storytelling; and 2) the videogame industry has to understand what storytelling can do for it.

*Fahrenheit* is my attempt to create a narrative language able to generate emotions. It mainly tried to solve one key issue: how can story and interactivity work together?

Most games offer a disruptive narrative, similar to what you'd find in porn movies. You get a couple of minutes of story to set the context, the set and the characters, then an action sequence; then another bit of story to set the context for the next scene, to prepare the next action sequence, and so on.

No one cares about the story because it is not perceived as a key component of the experience. In games, like in porn movies, the user is there for the 'action', not the story. But most of all, the story and the action do not progress together but turn by turn (Story/Action/Story/Action).

In *Fahrenheit*, I tried to make the story progress through the player's actions, NOT through cut scenes. To me, this is the most innovative aspect of the game, although it is definitely not the most spectacular. In fact, I am pretty sure that most gamers won't even notice this fact. This is a good thing, though, because that's exactly what I'm looking for—seamless, interactive storytelling.

**JBTN:** Describe your 'bending stories' writing technique.

**DC:** Writing an interactive story is usually considered very difficult, because a story is linear by essence. Opening an infinite number of tree branches is definitely not a solution.

The 'bending stories' idea is to consider the story like a rubber band. By his actions, the player can stretch the rubber band or deform it. He can make the scene longer or shorter and play it in many different ways. But whatever the player does, the rubber band is always there, which means that the structure and the quality of the story is protected. The player has a real influence on the way the story is told, but he can never break the rubber band. The story is not totally different each time. The idea is more to play with variations of the storyline; but they can be quite significant for the player, especially because they can see some parts of the variation and not others. It means that two players playing the same game may have two very different experiences.

Where rubber band stories become interesting is when a rubber band stretches another rubber band which will in turn affect another rubber band. Anyone can try to write with this technique, and I truly hope that other people will experiment with it.

**JBTN:** How did you develop the technique, and at what point did you begin to believe it could work as a gameplay concept?

**DC:** I was thinking about this theory during the last months of development on *Omikron*. I was looking for a solution that would allow me to write a good story without sacrificing interactivity. I felt there had to be a way to blend interactivity and storytelling in a different way to what had been explored so far. And I was also looking for a narrative language where the story would be at the heart of the experience, but I could still protect the pacing of the narrative.

In *Omikron*, I was frustrated to have no control over the pacing of the experience. The player could spend days wandering around the city without playing the scenario. It was great in the context of *Omikron*, but telling a good story without a notion of pacing was impossible. In *Fahrenheit*, time