

1



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Writer/director
David Cage.



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Screenshots from
the 'interactive
drama' Fahrenheit.

is a very important element that I tried to manage differently, putting more pressure on the player throughout the story.

I really was aware that this idea would work when I played the entire game for the first time. The main reason I was so confident was that the game looked to me incredibly fluid. The storytelling is always very natural whatever you do. It was nothing spectacular; it just gave the feeling that it was right because you never thought about storytelling while you were playing. You were just focused on the story. For me, this was the sign that bending stories would work.

JBTN: I understand the script for *Fahrenheit* is 2,000 pages long and it took you a year to write. How did you approach the writing of the script and what were some of the extraordinary challenges you faced?

DC: Writing *Fahrenheit* has been a very challenging exercise. I had to face several issues. The first one was to find a story that would be compelling enough to be 'the heart' of the experience. If I wanted the story to be the real engine of the game, I had to find a story with enough depth, twists, turns and diversity to keep the player passionate about it all through the game. I also wanted to write a story with mature topics; a story about emotion, relationships, love, choices. The kind of topics not often considered in games.

The other issue I had to face was more technical. In the writing I had to find ways of allowing the player to really play with the story—let their actions have real consequences on the plot—while maintaining its quality and pacing.

It may sound like a very simple thing to do, but very few games have succeeded in doing this in the past. I was looking for existing writing techniques, but couldn't find any that were satisfying for what I wanted to achieve. This is how I started working on the bending stories technique.

JBTN: What are the ways in which you feel you've expanded the 'language' of gaming, and what do you think are some of the words you've contributed to the vocabulary?

DC: The most important techniques I used had nothing to do with storytelling. Tons of books have been written on this subject for movies, and a lot of people more talented than I am know how to write a good story.

The main issue came from interface. When you have a hero only able to do 10 actions, it is difficult to tell a good story. This is why most games use cut scenes when they need to tell a bit of story. In a cut scene, the hero can do whatever they want, which is not the case in-game.

So my first design decision was to go for a contextual interface. There would be no predefined action assigned to buttons, but rather contextual actions depending on where you are and when. It sounds like a simple decision to make, but it really opens up a lot of possibilities regarding storytelling.

The other important decision was to create context as much as possible for moral choices; not the 'black or white' decisions, but the cases where the choice is really not obvious. 'What would I do if I was in his shoes?' is the question I want players to ask themselves. It is a good way to involve them emotionally.

Regarding the language, I think there are many different emotions in *Fahrenheit*, much more than in most games, which is still far from cinema or literature. You can smile, you can feel anger, empathy, irony, fear, hope, love, sadness. Now that the format shows there are solutions, I hope that many designers will explore this direction and will tell their own stories.

JBTN: What styles of narrative influenced the writing of the script?

DC: Movies were definitely a great influence in writing the script, although I was very careful not to try to copy the movie language. Games are not movies, although there are definitely some common rules in the writing techniques. But games need their own language. I tried to have the mature topics, the complex emotions and narrative arcs from movies, while integrating them into a real interactive experience.

TV series were also very influential, because *Fahrenheit* was supposed to be episodic when I started working on it. So I started to write very complex parallel stories. Each character had a real intimate life, their own issues, etc. When the game went from episodic content to a regular game, I kept some of the leads I had written because I felt they added an interesting dimension to the characters. By inviting the player into their intimate lives, we made them more real.

JBTN: Noir films, David Fincher thrillers and the more progressive television mini-series, such as *24*, are obviously some of the influences you allude to. But, for you, what was the most significant inspiration?

DC: Hitchcock, probably. I think that *Fahrenheit* is a very Hitchcockian game in many ways, especially the idea that the audience knows more than the characters.

It is always difficult to know exactly where influences come from. It is generally a blend of all cultural backgrounds, which in my case includes people like Orson Welles, Stanley Kubrick and M. Knight Shyamalan.

JBTN: What attracted you to the idea of making *Fahrenheit* a supernatural thriller? And what are your own thoughts on the spiritual realm?

DC: I am naturally very attracted to the paranormal and mysticism, although I am totally atheistic myself. I am sure that there is much more than what is apparent to the eye, but I believe in scientific explanations more than esoteric ones.

Fahrenheit is about our reality, about the idea that we are all manipulated, that we all have a role that is predefined. We have very little freedom, in fact; we only do what we are supposed to do. This is what I tried to tell through the story of Lucas Kane, a guy who 'was just a pawn living his pawn life'. Even when he thinks he makes decisions, he just does what was expected of him.

If there is one media that could ask clever questions about choice and consequences, it is definitely interactivity. Like the hero of *Fahrenheit*, I think we do have very few choices in our lives. We do what everyone expects us to do most of the time. In a certain way, life is a videogame.

I read that some respected physicians recently considered very seriously the possibility that our reality is just a simulation created by more advanced beings. They said the CPU necessary to simulate a universe like ours should be at reach in a couple of centuries and that if such a simulation exists, there are good chances that the creatures living in this simulation have no idea that they are not real.

This theory sounds unlikely to me, but it is definitely an interesting idea... I definitely want to continue to explore these questions about choices, consequences and determinism in future games.

Regarding the idea of a supernatural thriller, I wanted to blend the dark atmosphere of a movie like *Seven* with some supernatural events. I felt this kind of merge has been rarely done, and it was really the genre I felt most comfortable with to try to create this new narrative experience—a real world and real characters we can easily empathise with, but with strange events that excite our curiosity. My goal was to take the world we know,

and show its hidden face.
JBTN: Having a visual representation of a character's psychological state was a master stroke. Pick up a paper and read about your murderous activities and you become more depressed; phone your girlfriend while you're out investigating a case and you're rewarded for being thoughtful. Where did you get the idea for this? And are you pleased with how this concept comes into play?

DC: This idea was not present in the original design. It was there, because all the actions affecting your mental health were in the script, but they had no tangible representation for the player. I initially thought that the player would feel and share these changes in the moral state of his character, but when I started playing the game, I realised that having a more concrete visual representation would help create this feeling. This is how we came up with this idea of a gauge and the fact that animations are affected by the character's mental health.

I am quite satisfied with the result, although (like many concepts in *Fahrenheit*), I have the feeling that I have not used 10% of its potential. There are so many things to do with this system.

JBTN: Easily, one of the successes of *Fahrenheit* is its ability to cause gamers to care for the characters they're playing. Have gamers become too dissociated with the games they play? And, to this end, were you particularly mindful of the maturity of the content included in *Fahrenheit* and the way the player controls the action?

DC: Making you care for your character was my main focus in the design. Anything I could do that would continue to make the player feel like their character was interesting to me. I've played so many games where the controller is just a remote control to move a bunch of pixels on screen. Yes, it can be entertaining, but the minute you turn off the console, you have forgotten the experience. There is a kind of distance with the experience when you are absolutely not emotionally involved. You are just playing a videogame.

When you are emotionally involved in an experience, it becomes a thousand times stronger; you are scared, you laugh, you love with your character. And when you have completed the game, it will leave a trace in you that will become a part of yourself and your personal culture, like any movie or books you loved. This is how I felt when I finished *ICO*. This is what I was aiming for with *Fahrenheit*.

JBTN: Everybody keeps talking about next-gen consoles and technology, when it's conceivable that narrative, thematic and innovation are the key areas through which gaming will mature and evolve. What are your thoughts on this?

DC: I cannot agree more. Technology is just a tool to create the experience, it is not the experience. Once this industry has done 200 more sports games and World War II shooters, what will they do next?

It becomes more and more obvious that what this industry needs most is innovation. We cannot continue to make the same games over and over again, just adding more polygons and new shaders. If games want to go to the next stage and convince a wider audience, we need to learn and offer new types of experiences.

We are just at the beginning of this media; all we need to do is to open our minds and experiment with new possibilities. I hope publishers will understand that it is also in their interest. Although innovation has the reputation of being bad sellers, we need to remember that *The Sims* or *GTA* were original concepts at the start.

From a personal point of view, my goal is to use the power of next-gen consoles with real next-gen concepts. I want to push the boundaries and continue to explore this new language called interactivity.

6
writing