

Game Narrative Review

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Game Title: God of War
Platform: PlayStation 4, PC
Genre: Action/Adventure
Release Date: April 20th, 2018
Developer: Santa Monica Studio
Publisher: Sony Interactive Entertainment
Creative Director: Cory Barlog

Overview

God of War is a story about family, loss, and one's true nature. The game examines the relationship between Kratos and his son Atreus as they embark on a journey to fulfill Atreus' mother Faye's final wish: for her ashes to be spread from the highest peak in all the realms. The father and son climb mountains, slay a dragon, and fight gods on their journey to fulfill Faye's wish. In the end, they finally arrive at Jotunheim and spread Faye's ashes, truly connecting as father and son.

Kratos and Atreus have very different approaches to the adventure that they are on. Kratos is blunt, harsh, pragmatic, and avoids his godly nature. On the other hand, Atreus is kind, curious, optimistic, and entirely unaware of his godly nature. The relationship between the two, and how it changes in response to the fantastical journey they embark on, is the core of the narrative.

Characters

- **Kratos** – The player character. The God of War of a distant land, and outsider in this one. Kratos is a tall, large, muscular man covered in ash and tattoos that signify his dark past. He sees the world through the lens of a soldier and a survivor; he is logistical and perceptive, he plans ahead, and he does not concern himself with anything other than his goals. In a past life, Kratos waged war on the Olympians of Greece, killing them all. He maintains a vile hatred of all gods. He then fled to Midgard, met his partner Faye, and had his son, Atreus. After Faye's death, Kratos has a clear, simple purpose: To protect his son from the dangers of the Nine Realms and fulfill Faye's dying wish for her ashes to be spread.
- **Atreus** – The player's companion, and son of Kratos. Atreus is an 11-year-old boy, with a thinner build. Unlike his father, Atreus is adventurous, curious, kind, and impulsive. He is interested in the world and loves learning more about it. He

is also talented with languages and animals. Atreus is pursuing the same mission that his father is alongside him: spread Faye's ashes at the highest peak in all the realms. However, he also desires connection with his father, as well as with other friendly individuals that he meets along the journey.

- **Baldur** – An Aesir god, child of Freya and Odin. Baldur is a powerful, violent, crazed god who does Odin's bidding. He is of average height and thin in build, but he wields incredible strength. His mother Freya put a spell on him to protect him from all dangers; as a result, he cannot die, but he also cannot feel anything. This lack of feeling drives him insane and builds a desire for vengeance against his mother. He tracks Kratos and Atreus at Odin's bidding, believing them to be Giants.
- **Freya** – A Vanir goddess living in exile in Midgard. She is kind and gentle, yet assertive. She loves wildlife and lives in a fertile grove in Midgard. She was married to Odin and is the mother of Baldur. She married Odin in an attempt to foster peace between the Aesir and Vanir, but she was manipulated and deceived by him. Odin eventually cast her out, restricting her to Midgard and depriving her of her warrior spirit. She cannot directly harm a living soul. She loves her son Baldur greatly and casts a spell to protect him from anything that could harm him. It destroyed her when the spell drove him insane and caused him to hate her with a fiery passion. She sees herself in Kratos and goes out of her way to help Kratos and Atreus. She hopes to stop their relationship from collapsing the same way that her relationship with her son did.
- **Brok** – Brok is a stout, blue-skinned Dwarf with a foul mouth. He is a blacksmith and brother of Sindri. He is sarcastic and sometimes rude, but he still helps Kratos and Atreus by upgrading their weapons and armor when they need it. He also made the Leviathan Axe (Kratos' weapon, left to him by Faye) alongside his brother. He resents his brother, saying that he "lost his talent." He has his own projects that he works on, and occasionally asks Kratos and Atreus for help finding materials that he needs for them, but mostly seeks to hone his craft.
- **Sindri** – Sindri is a thin, tightly groomed, and well-kept Dwarf. He is a blacksmith like his brother, Brok. He is cordial, uptight, and a bit of a clean freak. He likes Atreus and helps him and his father with their gear out of love for Faye, whom he knew and made the Leviathan Axe for. He dislikes Brok, resenting him for their falling out and claiming that he has no respect for a weapon's presentation. He also occasionally asks Kratos and Atreus for help with personal projects.
- **Mimir** – The secondary player companion. Mimir is the self-proclaimed "smartest man alive". He joins Kratos and Atreus well into their journey as a reanimated head and helps them by providing advice and information. He is jovial, fun, a bit vulgar, and very insightful. Despite seeking to do good and help Kratos and Atreus along their journey, Mimir has a bloody past. He served Odin as an advisor for many years, causing irreparable damage to the realms. He was eventually imprisoned and tortured by the All-Father for 109 years, before being freed by Kratos and Atreus.
- **Magni** – Aesir god, son of Thor. Magni is a large brute of a man, towering over Kratos. He is short-sighted, violent, and brutal, wielding his strength and power over lightning to do the All-Father's bidding. He enjoys the thrill of the fight and

taunts his opponents. He is the half-brother of Modi, and his towering physique over Modi shows his Jotunn heritage.

- **Modi** – Aesir god, son of Thor. Modi is a smaller god but still commands lightning, like his father. He is half-brother to Magni and son of Sif. He does not possess the same might as his brother but is clever at goading his opponents. He has a chip on his shoulder but is prone to cowardice when truly threatened.

Breakdown

God of War utilizes a wide array of narrative techniques to tell its story in a powerful and evocative way. This essay will only closely examine the three that I feel do the most to turn *God of War* (2018) into a game worthy of study for its narrative development: the game's use of literary parallels, its ability to infuse impressive amounts of player agency into a linear story, and the ways it provides wonderful narrative context for its core mechanics.

Parallelism

The most powerful literary tool that *God of War* utilizes is narrative parallels. The core themes of familial relationships, generational trauma, redemption, and grief are present at every moment of the story. The player sees the struggles of Kratos and Atreus, and reflections of their personalities and journeys, in every aspect of the game.

This is most notably done through the character foils provided in the main cast of *God of War*. Every character in the main storyline, with the exception of Jormungandr, reflects certain aspects of either Kratos or Atreus and helps the player better understand the relationship between them.

The most obvious examples are Baldur and Freya. The player finds out well into Act 3 that Baldur is Freya's son. When he was born, the Fates foretold that he would "die a needless death". This causes her to be unnaturally strict and cautious with him, going so far as to cast a spell on Baldur to grant him immunity to all forms of harm, except for mistletoe. Despite this act being born out of love and care, it ends up ruining her relationship with her son and destroying his mind when Baldur finds out that he can not feel anything. In Helheim, Baldur says this to a vision of his mother, "Feasting, drinking, women. It's all gone. Gone!"

Kratos and Atreus are playing out the same storyline themselves. Kratos is extremely cautious with Atreus and restricts things from him, most importantly the truth of his godhood, in hopes of protecting him. However, doing this only builds resentment between them, as Atreus yearns for freedom and Kratos fearfully tries to temper him. It even nearly results in Atreus' death when he falls ill as a result of not knowing his godly nature.

As a player, seeing the relationship between Baldur and Freya helps them understand the consequences of Kratos' actions with regard to his relationship with Atreus well before those consequences ever fully appear. Seeing how viscerally Baldur hates his mother helps the player understand the struggles Kratos has with raising his son.

While Baldur and Freya are the most potent examples, and the ones that present themselves the most in the main plot, the arguably more impressive examples are the ones that are not connected to the plot. *God of War* contains many side-quests (called

Favors) that the player can engage with in between segments of the main story. In most games, optional side-quests like this often do not relate to the main story. Even if they reference world events that relate to the main story, they rarely add any weight to the more intimate themes that the main story is exploring.

This is not the case in *God of War*. While these quests do offer optional mechanical benefits, they also will often add to the richness of the main focus of the story (the relationship between Kratos and Atreus). For example, when fulfilling a quest for Sindri, Kratos and his son find the body of a Reaver (villainous thugs looting the area) with a knife in his back. When they speak to the spirit, he tells them that his son stabbed him in the back because he thought it was his turn to rule the clan. When Kratos and Atreus track down the son, they find that he was also killed by the clan in a mutiny.

Another example occurs when Kratos and Atreus run into a mourning spirit. The spirit promises that if the two bring all of the bones of his wife Gullveig to him, she will be able to let them speak to Faye. When they do, it is revealed to be a trick, and Kratos and Atreus must fight the Revenant spawned from the bones.

In both of these examples, the optional content parallels the main themes of the story. In the case of the Reaver captain and his son, Kratos and Atreus are forced to explore the nature of family relationships and betrayal while they pursue the quest objectives. The relationship between the captain and his son parallels the relationship between Kratos and Atreus, which is the focus of the main story.

In the case of Gullveig, the side quest focuses on a grieving husband. It also examines the desire for one to speak with a lost loved one. This parallels the grief that Kratos and Atreus feel for Faye, and the dialogue that results as the player progresses through the quest helps to explore that grief.

The result of side-quests that thematically relate to the main themes of the story is that the player never steps away from the main themes of the story. They are continuously explored and fleshed out, even as the player engages with optional side content. Not only does the side content provide optional mechanical rewards for the player, but they also add depth to the themes of the over-arching story.

This even extends past Favors. Some world-building details are deliberately written to help the player stay invested in the themes of the main story. For example, Mimir tells the story of Thamur and his son Hrimthur when Kratos and Atreus travel to retrieve the Chisel from Thamur's Corpse. The story involves a disagreement between Thamur and Hrimthur, that eventually results in Thamur's death at the hands of Thor. It would have been functionally the same to say that Thamur was simply murdered by Thor one day. However, putting this world-building detail in the context of a short story that parallels the story of Kratos and Atreus allows the player to stay connected with the main themes of the story, even as world-building is established.

Overall, *God of War* makes wonderful use of literary parallels to better tell the story of Kratos and Atreus. Side-content and worldbuilding details do wonders to help the player connect with the narrative of the game and to allow them to immerse themselves in it even when they are not actively progressing in it.

Player Agency in Linear Narrative

One of the core challenges of narrative game design is balancing the player's desire for agency and autonomy in the space with constraints that are necessary for telling an evocative narrative. As a game with a linear narrative that can not be significantly altered by the player's input, *God of War* is set up to deny the player agency in the game. However, *God of War* takes many steps to increase the agency of players as they engage with the narrative.

For one, *God of War* features a continuous, no-cut camera. This means that the player's perspective never leaves Kratos and Atreus, even as they move between cutscenes and gameplay. This creates a sense of agency in the player. While they may not be able to control Kratos or Atreus in cutscenes, the lack of a camera cut between gameplay and cutscene allows a player to perceive the cutscene version of the protagonists, and the gameplay version of the protagonists as one and the same. Therefore, while the player is unable to actually control Kratos or Atreus in cutscenes, they feel as though they could. This increases the sense of player agency while preserving the structure of the narrative. The virtues of this creative decision will be explored more in-depth in the following "Strongest Element" section.

Additionally, *God of War* uses quick-time events during narrative-heavy moments to increase player agency during segments that are low in gameplay. This is done when Kratos re-ties the veins of Freya's magical boar, when he moves Tyr's Temple, and when he cuts out the Bridge-Keeper's Heart. All of these moments would have been easier to implement as simple cutscenes and would play out the same on screen. However, they would result in a drop in player agency to create a powerful narrative moment. Having these moments require player input in order for them to resolve allows the player to feel like they are the ones creating the cool narrative moments, even though they would have resolved the same way without the player's input.

These moments are also placed in cutscenes very deliberately. Meeting Freya for the first time, and opening up realm travel to Alfheim are both extended, narrative-heavy segments with little gameplay. In situations like these, providing the player with little bits of agency throughout helps them to stay engaged, despite a lack of combat encounters.

Narrative Context for Core Mechanics

It is often stated that one of the most important roles of narrative in games is to provide context to the mechanics. In essence, the world and the plot should create an experience where the core mechanics of the game make sense in the context of the world. *God of War* does a great job of this, in several different ways.

The main mechanic of *God of War* is the combat. Kratos and Atreus are both important components in the combat system, and the way that they participate in the combat system reflects both their personalities and their current state within their character arc. More specifically, the way Atreus engages in combat is directly tied to his growth as a person, in a way that blends seamlessly with the system design. At the start of the game, Atreus' only function in combat is to deal low amounts of damage and to draw enemy attention to him. This reflects his lack of confidence and skill at the start of the story.

However, as the game progresses and the player witnesses Kratos teach Atreus many different lessons, the ways in which Atreus engages with combat change. He begins engaging in melee attacks, which reflect his growing bravery and confidence. His growth as a person is being reflected in the mechanics. This expands further as Atreus gains access to the Light Arrow and Shock Arrow. He becomes a more detailed component in the combat system and the moment-to-moment strategies of the player. This, once again, reflects his growing combat intelligence and aptitude for working in tandem with his father.

At a certain point, Atreus will even launch off of Kratos' back during certain attacks. This combat interaction allows the player to witness the growing bond between Kratos and Atreus in real time through combat.

Even removed from the narrative, it is a good example of system design for Atreus to evolve as the game progresses. It keeps the system fresh and allows the player to regularly receive new tools with which to maximize their performance. Therefore, it is a testament to the quality of the narrative implementation that the combat system working in a mechanically satisfying way, and a narratively satisfying way, is the same. The way that the system works is the same way the player would expect it to work in the context of the narrative.

This investment in the synergy between the combat system and the narrative development pays dividends later in the game. At the moment in the game when Kratos and Atreus' relationship is as strained as it will ever be, that tension is communicated in the combat system. At a certain point, Atreus will stop responding to the Kratos' commands. The player may command Atreus to fire as much as they like, but he will not respond. The developers planted the seed of synergy between combat and narrative early in the experience and were therefore able to reap the benefits later. They used the combat system to help the player truly feel Kratos' frustrations and the collapse of his relationship with his son.

This synergy between mechanics and narrative extends to other gameplay systems as well. The relationship between Atreus and Kratos is communicated through the puzzle design, another major gameplay system in *God of War*. At the beginning of the game, most puzzles can be solved in their entirety through Kratos' actions. This reflects the current state of Kratos and Atreus; Atreus is still being entirely held up by his father and is unable to contribute significantly to their success.

However, this changes as the game progresses. After a certain point, most of the puzzles that Kratos and Atreus must complete require the combined effort of both parties. For example, Kratos may need to pick up World Tree Sap, throw it at a target, and then have Atreus shoot it with a Shock Arrow. This reflects the state of the characters at this point in the story as well. Atreus has grown and evolved and is now able to contribute significantly to his and his father's mission. Kratos has also begun to see the talent and skills of his son.

Just like with the combat system, the character arcs of Kratos and Atreus are reflected in the puzzle system. This allows the player to feel the relationship of Kratos and Atreus on a moment-to-moment basis through the actions that they take in the game.

This doesn't even stop with the combat and puzzles of the game. The gear upgrade system also exists in a narrative context through Brok and Sindri, whose

relationship reflects the relationship between Kratos and Atreus. Traversal over the space, both within levels and in the overworld, involves both Kratos and Atreus. There are certain areas that Atreus can only get to by hanging onto his father while he climbs, or being launched up to high areas. Likewise, there are certain areas that Kratos needs Atreus to reach, like small spaces in which Kratos cannot fit. The story hopes to communicate to the player that Kratos and Atreus both have strengths that they can use to cover each other's shortcomings, and the way that the player traverses the space reflects that.

Narrative designers often say that "do" is better than "show" or "tell". In this sense, *God of War* does a fantastic job of communicating its narrative through "do". The actions that the player does more than any others (combat, puzzle-solving, and traversal) are deeply infused with the narrative. They reflect the relationship between Kratos and Atreus, and the themes that the game seeks to explore through that relationship. The very essence of the narrative is apparent in almost every action that the player takes. That is the core of good narrative design.

Strongest Element

God of War's continuous no-cut camera does wonders for preserving player agency, and it is the most powerful narrative element in the game. In many "narrative" games, there is a cut between the camera used for cutscenes, and the camera used for gameplay. This can be seen in games with very good narratives, like *Spider-Man PS4*, or *The Last of Us*. Games with this split camera can tell very powerful stories, but they do introduce a disconnect between the version of the Player Character that the player controls in gameplay, and the version of the Player Character that the player watches participate in the narrative.

In *God of War*, however, the continuous camera means that there is no disconnect between the version of Kratos that the player controls as he cleaves through Draugr and the version of Kratos that desperately calls out for Freya to heal his son. The continuous camera was a very ambitious new development, but it is the most powerful factor in making *God of War's* story as evocative as it is. This is because it creates a sense of empathetic immersion, defined as a combination of absorption and empathy created by bringing a personal experience to a third-person camera.

Empathetic immersion is a state defined by Dori Arazi, a developer on *God of War*, in a GDC talk titled "Creating a Deeper Emotional Connection: The Cinematography of God of War". Arazi defines empathetic immersion as a combination of absorption and empathy used in *God of War* to bring a personal experience to a third-person camera (Arazi). Arazi talks about how the no-cut camera allowed the studio to build a truly special empathetic experience, saying, "Not cutting the camera was what allowed us to maintain a seamless transition from an emotional standpoint from our sympathetic moments to our absorbing moments and maintain that critical mass to fully achieve that sense of empathetic immersion throughout the entire game experience" (Arazi). Arazi goes on to explain how "jarring" camera cuts can be in a cinematic experience, and how utilizing a no-cut camera allowed the studio to create a more personal experience where the player truly feels involved in the scene.

The no-cut camera helps to establish player agency as described earlier, but it does more than that. It creates a sense of closeness between the player and the

protagonists in a way that a cutting camera is simply unable to do. When there are no breaks in the player's observation of Kratos and Atreus, the player truly gets to feel like they are with the heroes every step of the way, really a participant. They feel involved in the world, and the father-son relationship that the game is all about on a level that is rarely ever reached in video games. For that reason, the continuous no-cut camera is the most powerful storytelling element that God of War uses to build its story.

Unsuccessful Element

There are a few aspects of *God of War's* narrative that did not work as well. Some of the plot points, such as the nature of Atreus' illness, and the necessity of the Bridge Keeper's heart to heal him, can feel illogical and can break immersion. However, these moments do not have a ton of literary significance on the potency of Kratos and Atreus' relationship and therefore do little to ruin the experience of the story.

However, there is a moment in which the personal character arc of Atreus in particular falls short. Since this character arc is one of the main focuses of the story, it significantly impacts the player experience when it fails.

After Kratos tells Atreus that he is a god, there is a period in which Atreus becomes increasingly unkind, cocky, and belligerent toward Kratos. He lashes out at Sindri, begins ignoring Kratos' instructions in combat, and even kills Modi against his father's wishes. All of this helps to empower the narrative, as discussed earlier in the Breakdown.

However, the way that Atreus' arc resolves after this period of high tension is dissatisfying. After crashing into Helheim, Kratos scolds Atreus for his behavior, and Atreus begins acting differently, like his old self. Atreus seems to return to his former self in an instant, and with almost no evidence of recent shortcomings. When confronted with visions of himself killing Modi, he reacts by saying "That wasn't me". He seems to be entirely unaware of the way he has been acting, and therefore unable to comprehend how he needs to be different.

This causes this period of Atreus' character development to fall narratively short. The player struggles to understand what is happening, as it seems as though some kind of spell has been cast on Atreus to make him forget things that he did very recently, which creates dissonance.

On top of that dissonance, Atreus' return to his former self does not feel earned. It does not feel like Atreus did any kind of difficult introspection to improve himself. If it did, it would make the player empathize with his experience, and it would make the player experience that much more powerful. Unfortunately, the way Atreus behaves after stranding himself and his father in Helheim invalidates much of the tension that led to this moment. Atreus' return to his kind, curious self feels abrupt, dissonant, and dissatisfying as a result of the way that it is handled.

Highlight

After countless setbacks, Kratos and Atreus finally arrive in Jotunheim, at the highest peak in all the realms. Before they spread Faye's ashes, Kratos stands in the winds of Jotunheim and removes his gauntlets. He closes his eyes and allows the

wraps on his forearms to be carried off into the wind, revealing the burn marks from the Blade of Chaos beneath.

This moment is a fantastic example of how powerful literary symbolism can be. The burn marks on Kratos' forearms are quite literally scars of his past. They represent Kratos' history as a bloodthirsty, vengeful murderer; a history that he has spent almost the entire game trying to cover up and hide from. Much like his past, Kratos has covered them up and hidden his scars since the beginning of the game, when he re-tied them as they became loose.

Many of the interpersonal struggles that Kratos and Atreus have dealt with over the course of the game have been a result of Kratos attempting to hide from his past and protect Atreus from it. His unwillingness to share his pain and failures with others causes Atreus to resent him at times, and even directly causes Atreus' near-fatal illness.

When Kratos allows the wraps on his forearms to be lifted away by the wind, it shows the player that Kratos has accepted his past as a part of him. He is no longer hiding it. It is also literarily relevant that he does not pull off the wraps themselves and cast them to the ground. This could show a player that Kratos' attitude towards acknowledging his nature and past is one of stubbornness and frustration, as it has been in the past when Freya forced him to tell Atreus about his past.

Instead, he simply allows them to be removed by the wind. This is far more powerful and significant, as it symbolizes that Kratos' acceptance of his past as a natural occurrence (just like the wind), and that all he needed to do to find his peace was to let go. The moment can be seen in the image below (*God of War*).



Critical Reception

Jonathon Dornbrush on IGN – 10/10

Dornbrush begins his overwhelmingly positive review by discussing the seamlessness with which the game's pieces fit together. He continues by discussing the beauty of the simplicity of *God of War's* plot and mentions the sharpness of the dialogue. He states, "Other games have tackled parent-child relationships, but I can't remember a father-son dynamic so successfully developed and used to ground a fantastical adventure." He also comments on how much he enjoyed Atreus' implementation into combat, stating that he does not feel like a burden like other video game sidekicks.

Dornbrush also takes a note to comment on how the camera affects the experience, saying, "It's all framed by one continuous camera shot that never cuts away or takes the focus off of the heart of it all: Kratos' relationship with his young son, Atreus." Overall, the review spoke at length about how well the mechanics of the game fit into the story, and how the story felt like an honest examination of a father-son relationship.

Chris Plante on Polygon – 10/10

Plante starts his review with a comment on how the calm moments on the boat do not feel boring or tedious, and that this fact indicates a major success in the game. He elaborates on how much *God of War* strays from the original games in ways that are new and exciting.

In terms of the narrative, Plante speaks to the believability of Kratos and Atreus as characters, saying "Atreus talks like a kid, sweet and also selfish. And Kratos acts, in turn, like a father who has no clue how to be a parent..." Plante goes on to say that the game takes on a tone of almost indifference to the world. He does critique that the game mimics the iconography of George R.R. Martin and other fantasy authors. Overall, though, Plante stated that he very much enjoyed the game's narrative, and especially the continuous camera. He states, "I felt more like a participant in the world, rather than someone watching the adventure from outside it."

Lessons

- **Lesson 1: Use the actions that the player can take to help tell the story.**

God of War has many wonderful examples of using the player's actions to help tell the story, even in a game with a set narrative path. While many games do this well (it is the core of narrative design, after all), *God of War* in particular should be studied for how thoroughly it integrates narrative into the moment-to-moment gameplay that the player experiences. This is because all actions that the player takes in gameplay help to explore the narrative of the game.

When the player engages in combat, Kratos and Atreus are both characterized by the way that they behave. Kratos is aggressive and proactive, while Atreus is cautious

and reserved. Over the course of the game, however, Atreus' combat behaviors change. The evolution of Atreus' personality and confidence are directly represented in the moment-to-moment gameplay, as his move-set in combat becomes varied and more proactive. The player can see his character development in combat.

Level traversal is another example of how *God of War* thoroughly synergizes narrative and gameplay. Most levels require both Kratos and Atreus for them to be successfully progressed. While Kratos can move large obstacles and climb up sheer walls, Atreus can fit into small places, and his arrows are often needed to clear obstacles out of the player's way. Some chests even need to be opened through the combined effort of Kratos and Atreus. As characters, Kratos and Atreus have different personalities that excel in different situations; as gameplay entities, Kratos and Atreus have different abilities that allow them to succeed in different areas. The mechanics reflect the characters and the relationship between them.

All of these little things that manifest the narrative of *God of War* into the gameplay space help the player to better understand and connect with the themes of the story. They also help the player to feel like an active participant in the relationship between Kratos and Atreus, rather than a passive observer of it. Game developers should study *God of War* so that they can create games with wondrous fusions of gameplay and narrative.

- **Lesson 2: In games with a heavy emphasis on the core storyline, optional content is a fantastic way to add depth to that core storyline, instead of distracting from it.**

It is not uncommon for games that seek to tell an evocative story to have optional content. This content often offers mechanical rewards such as in-game currency or new gear. However, it is less common for games to deepen the quality of the narrative themes of the story through optional content. In actuality, side content can lessen the potency of the narrative. When players spend extended lengths of time removed from the main story, they can disconnect from the themes of the story. This doesn't happen in *God of War*. Most side-quests either parallel the main story in their themes or seek to examine the relationship between Kratos and Atreus as father and son in a different way. Side-quests include trying to bring back a loved one to speak with them once more, or involve following a son who betrayed his father; these directly relate back to the main story, even if they are entirely optional.

God of War also deepens its main story during traversal. When Kratos and Atreus, and later Mimir, travel by boat from one area to another, they speak to one another. They discuss the events of the game leading up to the current moment, they tell stories, and they connect with one another. This even happens during certain climbing segments that also serve as traversal. A significant amount of this dialogue is entirely optional, and much of it may never be experienced by the player during a normal playthrough. It is included to help fill the downtime of moving from one space to another in a game without loading screens, but the developers use every second of it to explore the personalities and relationships of Kratos, Atreus, and Mimir. Game developers should look to *God of War* as a wonderful example of using resourceful narrative design to infuse even the most mundane tasks of the player experience with rich storytelling.

- **Lesson 3: Utilize cinematographic techniques to help communicate narrative without the need for dialogue.**

God of War contains many moments in which the camera is used to tell the story through cinematographic techniques. There is a beautifully composed two-shot early in the game after Kratos and Atreus kill the deer that helps the player to really feel the rift between them. When Kratos rides the elevator to see Freya after Atreus falls deathly ill, the camera swirls around Kratos in an arc shot that helps the player understand how the world is chaotically swirling around Kratos. When Kratos tells Atreus that he is a god, the swapping of camera focus between foreground and background allows the player to feel the delicate back-and-forth of this moment.

These are just a few examples of *God of War* using traditional cinematography to better tell its story. Games with third-person cameras like this should seek to understand cinematography and use it to communicate narrative in ways that are subtle, yet powerful. That way, cutscenes, where the player loses agency, can feel more rewarding by being more interesting and better justifying the break in the action.

Summation

God of War is a wonderful experience. It uses a lot of tried-and-true methods of video game storytelling but also breaks new ground with some of its techniques. The continuous camera, as well as the complete synergy between game mechanics and narrative, make *God of War* a masterpiece of narrative development in video games. Any developer hoping to make a game that conveys a powerful narrative in a way that allows the player to feel truly involved in the story should study *God of War* and use its proven techniques.

Works Cited

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