

Facial animations: An often overlooked feature

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It's no secret that games are better in terms of graphical detail. Along the way we've had games which have almost perfectly rendered the human face, and others which had faces that looked like badly smudged finger-paintings. As things get even better, you can't help but wonder how far the level of detail can go.

Back in the day, facial expressions were nonexistent. Characters were given a couple of different emotional states ranging from happy to angry; sometimes even sad, if the animators were giving the character extra depth. With time, games had more facial detail in cutscenes. The Uncharted series did a lot to make Nathan Drake feel like a real person, and through cutscenes they reinforced his personality. You know you're doing a good job when your character can pull off a coy smile while delivering one-liners. One common theme between older games with good facial expressions is that the main advances were limited to cutscenes. Even though some cutscenes required you to interact, like the ones in Resident Evil 4, they were still separate portions from the main gameplay.

This is also somewhat true for more recent titles featuring gorgeous expression tracking. Games like Hellblade, MGSV and even Injustice 2 have cutscenes so realistic they're borderline creepy. Of

course, they are just cutscenes.

Thankfully, many other developers have incorporated the use of hi-res facial expressions into the gameplay, and very organically too. The Mass Effect trilogy is a great example of this. Being an RPG, it had much more to gain from having realistic expressions during dialogue. Even better was L.A. Noire, where you play as a detective. As such, it makes perfect sense for you to pay attention to character's expressions during questioning. Some of those expressions were incredible because of how the characters could emote with only slight changes in facial expression. Maybe it would be a slight grimace for half a second. Or the perps' eyes would follow the camera nervously in a way that bespoke of guilt. This game made the perfect blend of action gameplay and cinematic detail. It wasn't perfect, but it was a huge step forward.

Fast forward to today, and some developers have taken this even further. They have maintained such a high level of accuracy in transposing realistic movements to games, the end result is practically a movie. Games like Detroit: Become Human, Until Dawn, The Walking Dead, Life is Strange and Quantum Break have pioneered this genre of cinematic games.

These studios paint extremely detailed worlds, filled with real people who have real emotion and depth. Characters in



these games are not just well animated, but they are also well acted. Yes, most of these games have real actors in motion capture suits to get the animations just right. Because of this, all of these games play out like an entire cutscene from start to finish. To realise we've reached a point in time when we have the technology to maintain that level of detail in 20-hour-plus games is ridiculous. However, many people are discontent with these games, saying that they're for "casuals". Since they play out like a movie, they argue that there's very little gameplay for the player.

In that sense, it isn't even a game but a glorified movie.

While elitists may feel slightly threatened by this change, there is no doubt that such high levels of facial detail have pushed the boundaries. Who knows, maybe the next big development will be to have that much detail in every AAA game. Only time will tell, and for now the best we can do is enjoy the ride.

With a heart of ash and a PC of potato, Wasique Hasan could use some help. Send help: fb.com/hasique.wasan

Post Steam Summer Sale Thoughts



NUHAN B. ABID

Another year, another summer sale on Steam where our PC gaming overlord Gabe Newell promises us discounts on discounts with our wallets bleeding cash harder than if the economy crashes. Every year, people keep spending a decent amount of cash to get those discounts, and usually end up with some great games, and some regrets. This sale, I've got a few thoughts I'd like to share.

THE NEW DISCOUNT PRICING

In case you missed it, South Asia's Steam region got a major update that was particularly notable this sale, as most games updated their prices to more reasonable levels to adjust for South Asian purchasing power.

It's a lot more apparent when the sales come through, the same discounts are significantly greater for us than they are for other regions. Indie games particularly get the best benefit, what with already being relatively cheaper compared to AAA titles on sale, and being the most common type of game to receive a regional price update, some great titles like Hollow Knight, Cuphead, Ori and the Blind Forest etc are all significantly cheaper and you can pick up many of them on a relatively low budget.

Bundles are also a lot cheaper, so getting games with a lot of DLC became a virtual steal. For example, you can get Sid Meier's Civilization V's complete edition for just under \$10 and that's an abysmally low

amount for the hours you can put into it. The Valve Complete Pack went from \$17 on sale to \$7 after the region update, and with pricing like that it's almost tempting to splurge a lot more.

SALES FEEL RELATIVELY LIFELESS

NOW, BUT AN ATTEMPT WAS MADE

Ever since flash sales disappeared, it's just been fixed discounts for a few weeks, you finish your shopping and that's it. Doesn't feel like a fun event, but Steam this time around tried to introduce more engagement by releasing a browser game called Saliens, which you could play in and enter yourself to win a few games by playing. While the game is really grindy and pretty annoying, it's still some kind of engagement, can't fault them there.

SAVING YOUR SHOPPING FOR THE LAST MINUTE IS A BAD IDEA

Steam gift cards sell out fast during sales. Most stores were sold out within a week, and if you didn't get codes in time, chances are you could miss the entire sale. Going in advance with a few codes saved up from before and some games in mind to get would help you budget better, and probably save you some bucks so you can get some other games on whim purchases.

Nuhan B. Abid is someone who actually thinks puns and sarcasm are top class forms of humour. Tell him that 'sar-chasm' is TOTALLY the best thing ever at nuhanbabid@hotmail.com