

Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots

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Game Title: Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots

Platform: Playstation 3

Genre: Stealth-Action

Release Date: June 12, 2008

Developer: Kojima Productions

Publisher: Konami

Director: Hideo Kojima

By: Ben Johnson

Overview

The main character of the Metal Gear series, Solid Snake, now an old man, is called out of retirement by his former compatriots to stop his twin, Liquid Snake, from taking control of the world's military. Despite his deteriorating condition, Solid Snake returns to action because everyone knows he is the only person who can get close to his twin. Snake proceeds to follow Liquid half way around the world, along the way meeting allies and uncovering the master plan of Liquid and learning of the origin of himself and his brother, their parents, and the Patriots, who seemingly control everything from world economy to the emotions of soldiers and control of every bullet fired. It is this power that Liquid is after. Snake, along with his allies Otacon, Meryl Silverburgh, and Raiden, stop at nothing to capture Liquid and save the world, including the ultimate act of self-sacrifice: death.

A major theme in this game is self-sacrifice, which is displayed in the journey of the characters and the characters themselves. For example, when the game starts Snake looks to be in his 60s and is rapidly dying due to a disease, and yet he strikes out on one last mission in which he and his allies know full well there is no return. As well, at several points Snake must literally walk through fire, a symbol of what this mission really is: atonement for his brother's actions and his own refusal to sacrifice for others throughout his entire life. Raiden, Snake's ally and archetypal shadow, continues throughout the game to sacrifice himself to save the others, often costing him severe bodily harm and loss of limbs. Every ally of Snake's is at some point forced to choose to stay aligned with Snake's quest and face mortal harm, or to betray him. Snake's quest is about sin in essence: sins of greed, sins of negligence, and sins of betrayal.

Characters

- **Solid Snake:** Snake is the protagonist of the game. Now in his 60s and dying of a genetic disease, Snake has returned to action for one more mission. It is known to himself and his allies that he will not survive the mission, but Snake knows this mission is really a journey of atonement for his brother's sins, and for his own. Throughout his mission, Snake comes to understand himself and his origins and comes to accept this quest as a trial by fire, his final act of self sacrifice.
- **Liquid Ocelot:** The personality of Snake's twin inside the body of Snake's former enemy Revolver Ocelot. Liquid's entire ambition is to recreate the legacy of his father: to create a world of indispensable mercenaries. He holds nothing sacred and seeks total anarchy. As a twin of Snake, his sins reflect on Snake and their sins are what bind them in the end.
- **Raiden:** Raiden is a mercenary just like Snake. He is much younger and much more foolish in many regards, but he is able to sacrifice for others and is still able to feel emotion unlike Snake. Raiden is very much Snake's shadow for the two would be exactly the same except for the fact that Raiden has not shut himself off from the world. When he begins to do so, he is reminded by Snake not to give up what makes him human, only one of them need make that mistake.
- **Meryl Silverburgh:** Meryl is an ally of Snake's who, like Raiden, is much younger than Snake, but grew up idolizing men like Snake and Snake himself. She would have been a love interest of Snake's except for Snake's inability to feel for others. Part of her journey is coming to see Snake for what he is and accepting that.
- **Otacon:** Otacon is Snake's only real friend. Otacon and Snake are nothing alike, but there is a bond of being flawed men that binds them. Both are very cut off from humanity and part of their journey is healing their own wounds and attempting to come back to being a part of the world, but they both take different paths to this goal.
- **Dr. Naomi Hunter:** Naomi is the one who gave Snake the disease that is killing him. Her motives throughout the game are not clear, but many of her actions come out of revenge, fear, and pity. She

manipulates every ally she has to serve her own cause and while, even in death, her motives are not clear, she is still capable of love and sorrow, unlike the protagonist.

Breakdown

In order to understand Snake's journey of atonement, it is important to have an idea of the story. In act 1 of the game, Snake is in a Middle-Eastern war zone where Liquid had last been seen. He makes his way to Liquid's fortress, along the way meeting Meryl Silverburg, his female mercenary companion and partial love interest from the first game. Snake gets close enough to attack Liquid but is overcome by some kind of dizziness and passes out. Naomi Hunter, a scientist from the first game who is responsible for injecting Snake with FOXDIE, is there with Liquid and goes out and gives Snake a syringe to alleviate his current problem.

In act 2, Snake and his ally from the first game, Otacon, are sent an encrypted message from Naomi saying she is on a base in South America and that Liquid is there. They find the location and Snake sneaks in to find her. Once there, Naomi tells Snake that Liquid is intending to use their father's (Big Boss, from Metal Gear Solid 3) genetic material to access the core of the Patriot AI Net and take control of all the soldiers in the world. The two escape, along with another character, Raiden (Metal Gear Solid 2), who has just resurfaced and who is gravely wounded. They head to Eastern Europe to meet the current caretaker of Big Boss' remains, Big Mama.

In act 3, Snake tracks down the resistance group Paradise Lost which is controlled by Big Mama. He learns that Big Boss is still alive (despite being killed by Snake twice before in previous games) and that Big Mama is in fact EVA (Metal Gear Solid 3) who carried Liquid and Snake to term as their mother. They end up being attacked and as they escape, Big Mama is injured. They finally escape with Big Boss' remains down the sewer and out to the river where they are being waited for by Liquid. Liquid disables all the soldiers in the area using his new power over part of the AI system and incinerates Big Boss' body. Big Mama is burned terribly trying to save him and Snake's face is scarred saving her. She dies in his arms on the river there.

In act 4, Snake and Otacon discover that Liquid has gotten desperate and has decided to go back to Shadow Moses Island (the locale of the first game, Metal Gear Solid) and use Metal Gear Rex to fire a stealth nuke straight up at the satellite containing the core AI. Snake goes back to Shadow Moses to stop Liquid and finds that the Rex unit is still fine after the long years since the first game, but is then attacked by an enemy from Metal Gear Solid 2, Vamp, who cannot die. Snake fights Vamp and uses his syringe to stop the nanomachines in his body, causing him to become mortal. Raiden reappears to help fight off Vamp while Snake takes control of Rex and goes after Liquid. To atone for her own sins, Naomi uses the same syringe to halt the nanomachines in her own body that were stopping the progression of a crippling cancer which should have killed her years ago. She dies there on Shadow Moses Island. Snake fights off Liquid, who is using a newer model of Metal Gear, but ultimately defeats him, until he reveals his ultimate weapon which is a battle ship with Rex's rail gun mounted onto it. Liquid attempts to crush Snake but Snake is saved by Raiden who cuts off his own arm and who is entirely crushed by the battleship in order to save Snake.

In act 5, Snake and Meryl board the battleship Outer Haven in order to sabotage Liquid's plan. They are stopped by Screaming Mantis, a boss character who has been implanted with the personality of Psycho Mantis, a boss from the first game. After a tough fight, Snake continues on, leaving Meryl behind to hold off the army of soldiers coming after them. As Snake approaches the final destination he is ambushed by soldiers but saved again by Raiden who has now lost both arms, but is still alive. Through great exertion he finally makes it to the destination and is able to upload a virus that destroys the Patriot AI network for good. After doing so a video recording of Naomi plays back describing that the Patriots had intended to use the nanomachine personality control on the entire world and it was only through crafting this virus, FOXALIVE, that she was able to stop them and atone for her own sins.

The major themes of this story are sin, sacrifice, humanity, self-discovery and atonement. Throughout this journey we see the protagonist and each of his allies face these in themselves and in their friends. The protagonist, Solid Snake, is the prototype for all of this because it is he who is faced all of these and confronts them all.

The character of Solid Snake is well crafted in that he is presented to players in such a way as to be easy to understand (bad ass mercenary), but the brilliance is that as the game proceeds, his sheen is stripped away. We begin to see this character for what he is and through his encounters and his dialogue we come to see him as a much more faceted character: We are presented with this character's sins and his regrets, we learn of his history and see him struggle with his own humanity and the costs of his actions, and we begin to view his journey less as one mission and more as a last atonement for the sins of a twin and as an appeasement for his lack of humanity. And, for those of us who have come to see Snake as a hero, we are challenged by his weakness and his ultimate end: death.

Interestingly, the character of Solid Snake is psychologically simple. He has no regrets and he lacks humanity in general. For all intents and purposes he is a blunt instrument. But during the course

of his journey we seem him for the first time look within himself and start to struggle with who he is and why he has acted the way he has all his life. In doing this his mission becomes more than just to stop his twin, but to atone for his past. Snake knows he is dying and in facing that, he understands that he sees his own life as trivial. It is only through self sacrifice and atonement for his lost humanity he can truly be at peace with the life he has chosen.

Snake's friends all mirror different facets of snake and are all reflections of Snake's journey to atonement. Otacon is Snake's closest friend but the two are nothing alike. Otacon is very much a reflection of Snake's detachment from humanity. Both of them see the world in a very shallow light and neither interacts well with others. For Otacon, it is that much of life is viewed through a computer for him and the few human attachments he has had have all ended in death. Through seeing the trials of Snake and through a relationship with Naomi, Otacon is able to look inward at himself and start to resolve his own conflict. For him, atonement is stepping out of his own security zone and allowing himself some freedom and enjoyment away from the computer console. He realizes it is through relationships one becomes more human. Much like Snake, Otacon is also not very psychologically complex, but this makes his journey to freedom no less interesting.

Meryl Silverburgh plays an interesting role in that she is a reflection of what Snake was at his prime, but she also serves as a mirror to Snake of his own inhumanity. Meryl is a mercenary just like Snake, except she is 30 years younger than him (his physical age). She is an ally of Snakes from back in Metal Gear Solid and at that time she was something of a love interest or she would have been except for Snake's inability to disconnect from the battlefield. Now, Meryl only serves as a reminder to Snake of his own weakness. It is only through seeing his journey through to the end that Snake can make amens to her for his failure as a friend and as a human being.

Raiden, another of Snake's allies, plays an interesting role in this game. In almost every scene, Raiden is playing a self sacrificial role in order to aid Snake. Raiden serves to both shadow and stand out from snake. Both characters are mercenaries, both characters share inhuman qualities (cybernetic body in Raiden's case); both become burdened with their past sins. Interestingly, while Raiden is more physically robotic than Snake, he differs in that he is very much self-sacrificial and still maintains his humanity in the sense that he still shows emotion, still reflects on his memories, and still engages human relationships, which are things Snake is incapable of. An interesting twist comes toward the end of the game where Raiden is on the edge of death, much like Snake, and is about to forsake what makes him human when he is stopped by Snake. Snake reminds him of the value of humanity and tells him that only one of them need make that mistake. While Raiden follows Snake, while he travels in his shadow, he cannot die and he will not lose that which makes him human.

The story of this game is a dense and twisted yarn that has been weaved through 6 games. In its effort to tie this off, I think they have succeeded greatly. The sheer depth and symbolism of each character and the narrative of atonement and discovery is one that has not been matched in the Metal Gear series. Every character is some reflection of the protagonist and it is through his journey and his own self discovery that they are able to look into themselves and change. By the end of the game we as the player have learned something about every character and each of these characters has grown as an individual and has become much more real to us.

The mechanic through which this game tells the story is cut-scenes mostly. While many players find this abhorrent, I feel this strengthens the story because, while games are good at being immersive, their ability to tell stories and capture a player has yet to reach that of cinema. In cinema, we are able to sit down, suspend disbelief, and just pay attention. Since the game is communicating a dense and twisted plot, I can see no better format to ensure player immersion and understanding than cinematic. And, to its credit, many of the cinematics have interactive elements.

Strongest Element

The strongest element of Metal Gear Solid 4 is the characters. In a game with such an ostentatious story and set of characters, each character both fits the universe and stands out as a realistic character. In other words, each of these characters has a spark of the divine in which they seem to be human. Every character has their flaw, they all grow, and they are all of a caliber of a feature film. To see these characters grow since the original Metal Gear Solid has been a pleasure

Unsuccessful Element

This game, more than its predecessors, was focused heavily on the story over the gameplay. Since the game has such a large story to deliver and so many loose ends to tie up, at some points gameplay immersion is sacrificed to go to a cut-scene. It would be nicer if they had spread the game out more, made it longer so that there could be longer blocks of gameplay and an even distribution of story. Currently, there is a large chunk of gameplay in the beginning of each act and then it becomes much

shorter sections of gameplay interspersed with cut-scenes, and longer cut scenes the further into the game one is.

Highlight

The epilogue of the game is set in a grave yard at the grave of Snake's father, Big Boss. Solid Snake is here because the disease in his body is steadily mutating to a point where in a month or so, it will infect and kill anyone within proximity of him. He must make his final act of self-sacrifice to this world. He puts a pistol in his mouth, the camera pans up, and we hear a gunshot. After a cut-scene featuring other characters, we come back to the grave and Snake has not killed himself – he cannot overcome the instincts hardwired into him. And then a man speaks, "You couldn't do it eh?" The man is Big Boss, the twice dead father of Snake and his brother. Big Boss talks to his son about the Patriots, about how it is controlled and about the shadow life he has held. Big Boss does not have much longer to live. He walks over to the grave of The Boss, his mentor and surrogate mother. He lies down against the grave and tells his son to never stop living. He dies in his sons arms.

Critical Reception

Metal Gear Solid 4 is widely held to be one of the best in the series. It currently has a metacritic score of 94%, and is the #5 rated PS3 game. As of June 30, 2008, the game has shipped over 3 million copies worldwide. Most reviews praise the game for its superb stealth-action gameplay combining all the best features from the last 3 games. It has been most harshly criticized for its execution of the story via cut-scenes and their particular length, the longest of which weighing in at around 90 minutes. Besides that, most felt it was a fitting conclusion to the series and that the plot line was tied up nicely.

Lessons

1. A great narrative can only come from great characters. Without deep, faceted characters with good dialog and understandable and convincing history, it is difficult nigh impossible to craft a great narrative. One technique for creating great characters is defining attributes with regard to the protagonist. This is something Metal Gear Solid 4 did and I think it worked beautifully.
2. Cut-scenes are a fantastic tool for setting a cinematic scene and giving the player the opportunity to follow dialog and plot better, but one must be very careful with their use because, in the end, the reason people bought the game is to play, not watch. While in cases of a heavily story driven game I think it is ok to be cut-scene heavy, one must always balance time spent playing with time spent watching.
3. If you are going to have a heavily story based game and try to make the player watch and be immersed in many cut-scenes, you better have some fun gameplay to back that up. Fortunately, Metal Gear Solid 4 is an incredible game, so the high amount of cut-scenes is tolerable.

Summation

Metal Gear Solid 4 is an incredible experience, especially for someone who fell in love with the original Metal Gear Solid and has been playing ever since. To see character depicted through each game in such a rich way, to see their growth, the unraveling of a plot 6 games in the making, I could not ask for much more as a fan. The creators have shown me new facets of old characters, their growth, and, in some cases, their death. The Metal Gear games are a fantastic example of a story based game succeeding where many others have failed. While their path to this is controversial to some extent, the fact that it is a heavily acclaimed game that is able to draw players for its great gameplay and deliver an outstanding, detailed, rich story along with that is outstanding. Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots should serve as an exemplary example to anyone trying to create a great story based game.