

BROTHERS

— a Tale of Two Sons —

A NARRATIVE REVIEW BY KRISTIAN SKISTAD

MECHANICS CONVEY PERSONALITY

Something our medium can do which no other medium can is convey a story through the actions of the player. Brothers does this by giving each brother different abilities and quirks that are unique to them. The biggest example of this would be the younger brother's inability to swim due to his fear of drowning. We can achieve a greater bond with these characters because we are given the same emotional limits as them through gameplay. By playing to the strengths of the medium you are working in you can create something unique to that medium.

SHOW DON'T TELL

There are many things we know about the brothers without them speaking a single word. They define themselves through their actions and their own personal strengths. We can see this in almost every interaction in the game, as each action will be handled differently depending on the brother carrying it out. The older brother will usually be more focused on where their journey will take them next, so he'll usually ask for directions. By contrast, the younger brother will often mess with the townspeople, usually by pulling pranks on them. While dialog will always have it's place, it's through this simple mechanic that we can get a clear picture of both brothers' personalities.

THEMATIC MECHANICS

One of the greatest themes of Brothers is that loved ones are always with you. This is presented to us from the very start of the game with the passing of the brothers' mother. Though she is gone, she often appears throughout the game to guide the brothers. Brothers takes its themes a step further, however, by also applying them to its mechanics. At the end of the game, after the older brother's passing, the younger brother is able to utilize his abilities through the controls normally reserved for the older brother. This reinforces the core theme of the game through use of its core mechanic. Throughout your time developing a game you will often center visuals and stories around your theme, but your mechanics should also be a reflection of that theme.

THE METHOD OF INTERACTION IS A PART OF THE PLAYER EXPERIENCE

Though the control scheme is simple, it also plays to the game's strengths. With each side of the controller being dedicated to one brother it adds meaning to the input device. This comes to its peak at the climax of the game, when the player is able to use the older brother's action button even after his passing. This creates an emotionally touching experience for the player, as it relates directly back to the method in which they interact with the game itself. At times it's easy to forget how the controls of the game actually make the player feel, as we often look at function over form. By obfuscating the barrier of controls, and making them an essential part of the experience, Brothers manages to intertwine story and mechanics in such a way that neither could cohesively exist without the other. In doing so it achieves a narrative that could only be experienced through the medium of games.

THE ENVIROMENT IS A CHARACTER

Often times we think of world building as a separate entity to character development. Brothers shows that the world itself can be treated as a character. It grows with the brothers, revealing its own quirks and personality as time goes on. It matches their own desperation and fears and, in some cases, personifies them. Though the player begins in a bright and sunny village, they eventually find themselves in a frozen tundra where mighty giants lay dead across the wartorn lands. Wanderlust slowly turns to shock and awe as the environment weaves a grim tale and leaves the player to deal with the aftermath of it.