

A Walk through

PORTAL

an Act of Video Game Analysis

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Analysis

- * Close Reading of the video game, Portal
 - * Analogous to Literary and Film Criticism
- * Unit Operations
- * Learning Principles



Portal

- * Narbacular Drop - DigiPen
- * Valve hired student team
- * Portal - Orange Box
- * Award winning game
- * Great success story



The Game

- * Learning Units
- * Themes
- * Chapters and Test Chambers
- * Spoiler Alert!



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- * Introduction
- * See yourself in Space
- * Static in dialogue
- * Test chambers & Backstage
- * Puzzle with instructions



Analysis

- * Narrative Development & Game Design
- * Literacy and Mastery of Gameplay
- * Learning Units - Flow
- * Themes

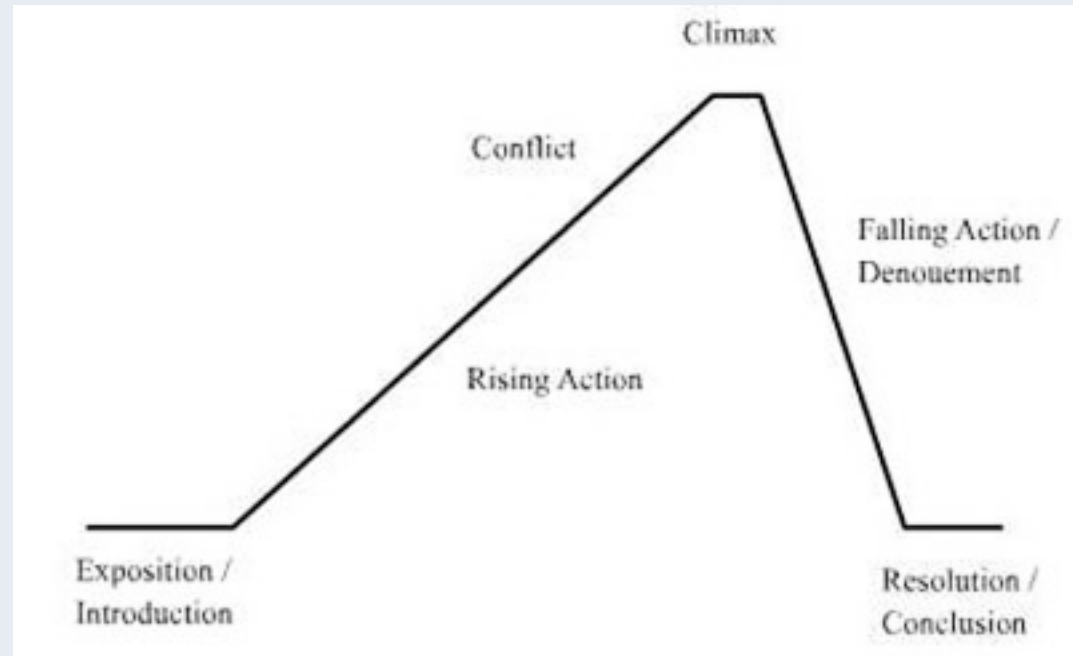


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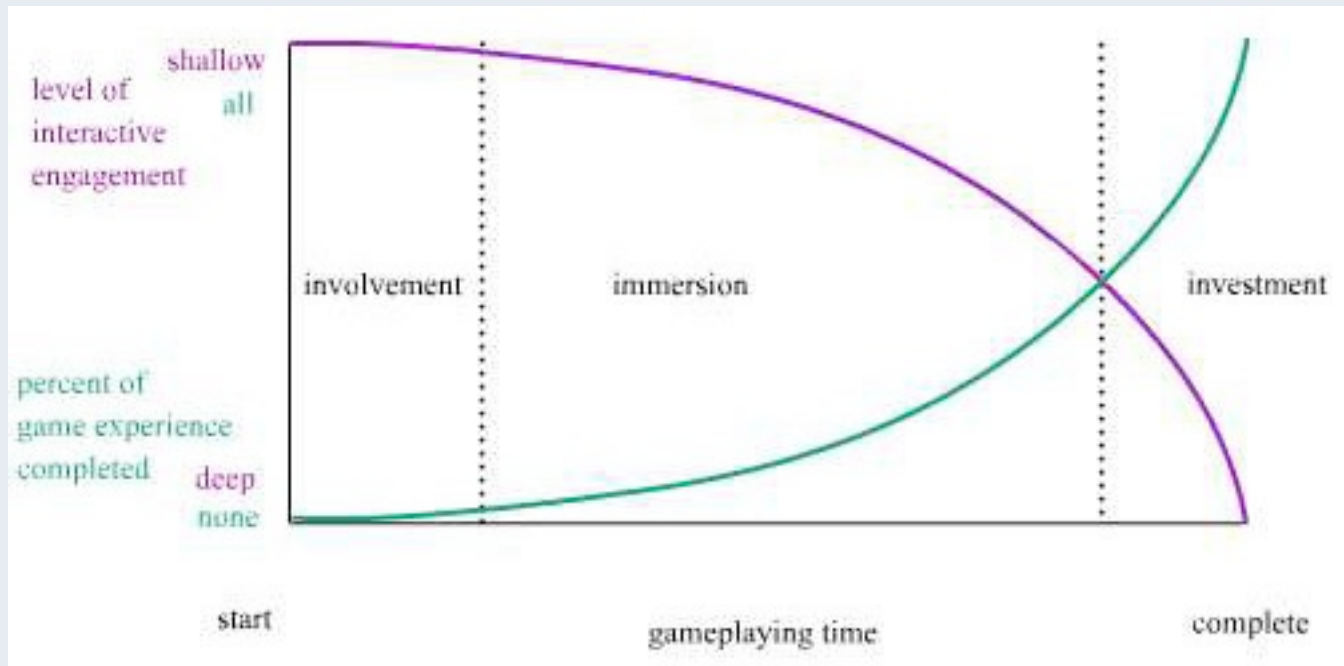
- * Portals and Spaces
- * Short little Tutorials
- * Panopticon (cameras, observation rooms)
- * Visual Cues



Narrative



Gameplay



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- * Test Chamber signs
- * Get the Gun!
- * Clean Environments



Most People Underestimate Their Capacity to Withstand Pain

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- * “Mind the gap”
- * Portals go both ways
 - * Developer Commentary
- * You feel alone



Most People Underestimate Their Capacity to Withstand Pain

Full Disclosure

- * Played through game at least 9+ times
 - * + many individual test chambers
- * About 2-4 hours of gameplay
- * Xbox 360
- * Some GameFAQs & the Web
- * Listened to Dev Commentary



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- * Can die (!!)
- * More complex puzzles
- * Recursive view



Most People Underestimate Their Capacity to Withstand Pain

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- * GLaDOS - trustworthy?
- * Audio and Visuals
- * Elevator - backstage?



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- * First Fling
- * GLaDOS explains momentum
- * Orient through Space
- * Variations (Learning Units)



Experiential Themes

- * Experiment - many levels of
- * Space - associations through and with
- * Escape - making the choice to





- * Get the other half of the Gun
- * Circle around
- * Finally (!) get full Gameplay
- * Timed Puzzles



Experiment

- * Chell is in an experiment
- * Player has to experiment within space
 - * Aperture Science
- * Development was an experiment



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- * Both portals, Multiple spaces
- * Test Chambers more complex
 - * Puzzles across rooms
- * 2 steps forward, 1 step back



Space

- * Players have to reorient through space
- * Reorient actions, indirect connections
- * Portal reorients FPS genre



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- * Live Fire (!!)
- * Where you can't be (through portals)
- * A Lair - "cake is a lie"
- * Backstage and Subversion
- * GLaDOS - broken? lying? dysfunctional?



Escape

- * Literal - must get out
- * Figurative - subvert GLaDOS
- * Existential - who you are



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- * Weighted Companion Cube!
- * Indirect Storytelling
- * Complex Gameplay combos
- * Love & Guilt



Literacy & Mastery

- * Flow across Learning Units
- * Gradual Gameplay Mechanics
- * Layered Thematics
- * Practice and Variations
- * Explore and Improvise



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- * Cake!
- * Backstage - Backstory
- * Short, linear game
 - * Painted Clues
 - * Guided Training through Level Design
- * Where you shouldn't be



Ludic Narrans

* Homo Ludens

* +

* Homo Narrans

* =

* Ludic Narrans



And so...

- * Interpret / Analyze
- * Narrative, Gameplay, Learning Units
- * Meaning, Themes, Literacy and Mastery
- * Well Played
 - * ETC Press
 - * etc.cmu.edu/etcpres

