

tell_me_why



GENRE	NARRATIVE ADVENTURE
RELEASE DATE	2020
STUDIO	DONTNOD ENTERTAINMENT
ANALYSIS BY	NOE ARNOLD & RAHEL GAMMA

1. GAME DESCRIPTION

Tell me Why is a narrative adventure game by Dontnod Entertainment released by Xbox Game Studios in 2020. Most of the events take place in 2015 in Alaska and the focus of the story are the twins Alyson and Tyler Ronan, who go back to their parents' house and have to deal with events from their childhood, especially Tyler.

Trailer:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4KVrL_xirEk

Walkthrough:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9vr6WYQFVc>

2. SOUND DESCRIPTION

"There is a particular atmosphere that permeates the game, both in the vast natural landscapes and the time-weary indoor spaces, that was fun to embody through the music." -Ryan Lott (composer of the music for Tell me Why)

In the story of "Tell me Why" the characters are caught in a complex psychological state, which is beautifully represented in the audio for the game. Reverberations of the past, a quest to unfold a bewildering secret, and the power and intimacy of an indescribable connection make the story full of conflicted emotions, which are captured in sound design.

2.1 ATMOSPHERIC SOUNDTRACK

The environment and movement of the characters in the game are fairly close to reality and form a well done atmosphere, which is accompanied with a soundtrack a big percentage of the time. The game captured the coldness and nature of Alaska well and builds up a great scenery with multiple environmental background noises. This harsh weather in-game can be overwhelming at certain points, for example when the character is walking outside and its hard to hear anything besides the wind, which adds credibility but takes the attention away from other sounds.

Example

Forest Atmosphere	tmw_atmosphre.wav
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2.2 ACTION

The central gameplay mechanic of “Tell me Why” involves players guiding the twins as they experience recollections and visions of what had transpired in a series of scenarios spread across three episodes. The discovery of items as well as their supernatural ability to communicate with each other and relive certain memories all trigger a sound which adds fluidity and are fitting for the theme.

2.3 COMMUNICATION WITH PLAYER

A big part of the mechanic in “Tell me Why” is the ability to relive an old memory, to discover the specific places where this action can be activated and a sound is played to lure the player in the right direction. The sound cue starts out simple and evolves into a more complex melody the closer the player gets to the right spot. Once the player is close enough the memory can be triggered by mouse click which gives the player another sound based feedback and the memory is played. It's an effective way to lead the player to the right spot and keep the immersion up. The game also gives different responses to the player, depending on what character is currently active, like their walk or internal thoughts, making it easier to differentiate the two with just audio.

Examples

Discovering Memory	tmw_memory.wav
Footsteps Alyson	tmw_alysonsteps.wav
Footsteps Tyler	tmw_tylersteps.wav

2.4 ROOM

As mentioned in part 2.1 the game “Tell me Why” found a good way to establish the setting and place that the characters are in and give a nicely done impression of the scenery. The game can give a lonely, quiet feeling to the player at times, where there are hardly any other people around, which could build up more of an atmospheric sound if there were.

2.5 NARRATION AND DRAMATURGY

Tension: The tension in the soundtrack builds up before big decisions and greater scenes where the dramaturgy intensifies. This tension in sound can also be found when rediscovering a memory, where the rest of the noises are shut out and the focus can be completely on them. Voices: In the game the two main characters can speak to each other normally or via thoughts which is distinguished by adding effects to the telepathic conversations.

Examples

Voice normal conversation	tmw_conversation.wav
Voice telepathic conversation	tmw_conversationvoice.wav

3. AESTHETIC DESCRIPTION

3.1 STYLE, GENRE

The sounds used in “Tell me Why” and the narration match the style as well as the genre and represent the story in itself. It does give the player the appropriate audible feedback of the story that they are also told with the visuals.

3.2 SOUND QUALITY

The volume mixing in the game is handled a little poorly, with some environmental sounds being too overwhelming and not blending well with the other sounds. The voice acting is also a bit one sided, it is hard to tell by their voices where the scene is currently happening and it hardly differentiates between indoors and outdoors.

4. OVERALL IMPRESSION

Impression:

The sound in “Tell me Why” isn’t its strongest component and doesn't seem to have been the focus while developing the game. The game still offers a great soundtrack and builds the appropriate setting for the cold Alaska winter. The sound holds up alright but misses some important nuances.

Comparison “Gone Home”:

Despite the games “Gone Home” and “Tell me Why” shared theme and genre, both handle the sound design quite differently and in their own way to tell their unique story. “Gone Home” has a much calmer and tied together package when you consider the sound effects, as well as the voice overs and overall theme. “Tell me Why” in comparison can come off a bit strong and has more highs and lows, both in volume and tension. The capturing of emotion and sadness are both prominent features in their design and are highlighted similarly in a constant background soundtrack as well as longer pauses or silences to let the player relax and react to what's happening. Both games also share a minor flaw with the environmental sounds that overshadow the other sounds at certain points in the game. “Tell me Why” certainly has an easier way of catching attention with the sound alone, since it has more action sounds and dialogue, where “Gone Home” could be played silently, minus the voice overs. In both games the sound is an expression of feelings and the portrayal of emotions the characters themselves are feeling.

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