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Creating a non-archetypal antagonist for an adventure game

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ABSTRACT

Creating character concepts for games poses a challenge as the internal aspects of a character shape the visuals more than is apparent. This thesis investigates aspects that go into character design within the framework of the commissioner's needs for character concept art.

The goal of this thesis is to study what a non-archetypal antagonist is, showing the relevance of research and the background material that is either provided by a client or the artist themselves as well as studying the effects of character archetypes on concept art. This is achieved by studying existing theoretical material on adventure games, antagonists and character design as well as reviewing the results of a survey created for this thesis through stratified sampling.

The thesis concludes that the definition of a non-archetypal antagonist depends on current trends in popular media as an atypical antagonist is characterized by negating the traits of a typical antagonist. Another discovery is that researching the background material has an important role in character design both from the perspective of the designer as well as the player.

These findings are used in the commissioner's request for a concept on their antagonist in their upcoming title KVLТ, resulting in the concept art of the non-archetypal antagonist *Ego*. Throughout the process it is noted that studying these aspects in the thesis shows that the background material has an important role in character design.

Keywords: character design, adventure game, antagonist

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1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to explore an antagonist's role and design in adventure games, catered in this case to Dark Amber Softworks' needs. Specifically, it will focus on the visual aspects of creating such a character and how to approach this topic.

Dark Amber Softworks is a Finnish multi-disciplinary media consortium focusing on creating digital content founded in 2013. The company commissioned concept art of the character *Ego*, the main antagonist of the game, for their newest production. To achieve a satisfactory result, the thesis was catered around the game's themes and theory of character design.

The questions that this study aims to answer are:

- What is a non-archetypal antagonist?
- How to create concept art for a specific character type?
- How does the intention of the character influence the visualization?

Getting an answer to these questions can help other concept artists or designers to create memorable characters. The methods used to research these themes were a combination of analysing existing theory and reviewing the results of the survey "Antagonists in video games" through stratifying the responses.

This thesis starts with explaining what adventure games are and which features they share along with some examples of games that are similar to Dark Amber Softworks' upcoming title. This chapter is then followed by research into antagonists and their role in games and how this might affect their design. Subsequently general information about character design and what to consider when creating the visuals of the character is analysed.

To gather more information on how players experience villains and what aspects they pay attention to, a survey was created. With the data from this survey in mind, the creation of the character *Ego* could then be looked upon in another light.

After the theory, the thesis focuses on the execution of making the character *Ego* for Dark Amber Softworks. The goal is to show how the author

approached the design process while taking the research into account and how Dark Amber Softworks commented on the results.

2 ADVENTURE GAMES

One of the pioneers of adventure games is *Colossal Cave Adventure* (1977), a text-based adventure game in which the player can explore a cave system that is filled with treasures and gold (Fenlon 2016). Not only was it immensely popular at the time but it also has an impact on modern games as can be seen by how it influenced the formation of MMOs, walking simulators, RPGs, and survival horror. *Colossal Cave Adventure* (1977) laid out a base for narrative games and roleplaying games and functions as the namesake for the genre. (Reed et al. 2020.)



Figure 1. Colossal Cave Adventure on a PDP-11/34 showing the point system (Landwehr 2020)

What made *Colossal Cave Adventure* (1977) so impactful was its difference to other games from that time. According to Reed et al. (2020), most computer games in the 70s were made for first generation computer users, mostly adults, making games essentially be interactive spreadsheets. *Colossal Cave Adventure's* (1977) target audience on the other hand were its makers children, who at the time were both under 12 years old. This required the game's content to be catered to younger audiences, which for Crowther and Wood, the makers of *Colossal Cave Adventure* (1977), meant adding fantastical elements to the realistic cave exploring system as well as puzzles,

scores, rewards and enemies. This unique combination of game design elements and the possibility to play it on the computer as shown in Figure 1, made it different from the popular arcade and console games at the time. (Reed et al. 2020.)



Figure 2. Visuals of Mystery House (Retro Gamer Team 2011)

A game that took inspiration from the widely popular *Colossal Cave Adventure* (1977) was *Mystery House* (1980), shown in Figure 2. Like *Colossal Cave Adventure* (1977), *Mystery House* (1980) starts out with the player exploring the environment around them but during the course of the game it becomes evident that there's a murderer on the loose. The player then must discover who the murderer is before they become the next victim themselves. As *Mystery House* (1980) was the first adventure game with graphics, it was revolutionary in its time and ranked fourth in the magazine *Computer Gaming World* in the category of the most innovative video games. (Van Es 2005; Computer Gaming World 1996.)

The themes and mechanics that these games were known for created the hybridity that compose adventure games even in present-day. Including aspects of exploration, interactive narratives and puzzles gave developers that unique opportunity to create games that differed from the popular arcade games that generally only required coordinated movement. But before the term “adventure game” was popularized for such games, many games of the

same genre were just called “Adventures” due to their namesake *Colossal Cave Adventure* (1977) or as it is often referred to “Adventure”. Mary Ann Buckles, the author of one of the first scholarly works about *Colossal Cave Adventure* (1977), called games like these “storygames” (Buckles 1986), the creators of *Zork* (1979) on the other hand labeled the genre as “Computerized Fantasy Simulations”. These alternative labels might have characterized some of the common themes in adventure games but were too limiting to describe all games that were deemed adventures. (Reed et al. 2020.)

As stated before, *Colossal Cave Adventure* (1977) and *Mystery House* (1980) paved the way for modern adventure games with their respective successes, inspiring others to follow suit and create more interactive games with narrative, puzzle solving, and exploration. What followed was an increase in adventure games during the 1980’s until the end of the 1990’s after which the popularity of the game began to decline, due to the rise of clones that inadequately used features that had formerly characterized adventure games. However, the genre has still inspired many successors to build on top of the characteristics that the classic adventure games captured. (Reed et al. 2020.)

2.1 Descendants of adventure games

As technology and culture have evolved, adventure games have followed the trends to accommodate the new innovations. These games offered better graphics, more complex game design, the ability to accompany gameplay with sound and other features, that would have been unthinkable of when games were first popularized. (Old School Gamer 2021.)

After the huge success of *Colossal Cave Adventure* (1977) and *Mystery House* (1980), many tried to replicate the fame of these first adventure games. As games like *Zork* (1979), *King’s Quest* (1984) and *Maniac Mansion* (1987) emerged, the adventure game genre grew in popularity and hit its peak during the 90s. Trying to grow with the constant new technological spurts, adventure games ended up being cumbersome in performance and misfitting in character; resulting in a confusing and inconsistent category for all games that were story heavy. The genre’s inability to adjust to the mainstream lead to its

downfall in the 2000's, causing pioneers of the genre like LucasArts to abandon their projects. (Keeley 2021.)

Adventure games have since not reached the popularity the genre had in its infancy, but it has been revived with titles like the remastered version of *Day of the Tentacle* (2016), *Broken Age* (2014), *The Walking Dead* (2012) and many more. The resurgence of point-and-click adventures can be deferred to nostalgia factors, making game remasters and remakes gain in popularity, crowd funding opportunities – gamers being able to directly monetarily support projects that they like, no investors or publishers intervening in the creative process – and the ease of accessibility of games. Smartphones and other touch-based devices make click-and-point type of games easier to play. (Gailloreto 2021.) Other factors that make adventure games interesting for developers is the prospect of creating multifaceted storygames. Jan Mueller-Michaelis, creator of *Edna bricht aus* (2008), proposes in his interview with PCGames (2019):

“The genre’s in its childhood as a medium for telling a story. We just have thirty years of history and we don’t know most of the possibilities that interactive media offers to tell a story, to mix it with the gameplay, to tell the story during the gameplay. It really feels like we’re visiting new land here, we are just staking our claims, going deeper into this new world and finding new ways to tell the story during the puzzles or via the puzzles.”

As adventure games have attained a player base once more understanding why the genre attracts players to it, is of interest for this thesis. Examining why adventure games have persisted even as the initial popularity of the game has decreased, and which aspects have crystallized to characterize contemporary adventures, will be discussed in the following chapters.

2.2 Puzzles in adventure games

In terms of puzzles, adventure games tend to have a differentiating factor to them. Puzzles are not only part of adventure games, although often considered a key component of the genre, but show up in other genres like roguelikes as well. Adventure games’ puzzles are different from other puzzles, as they often function as a way to advance the narrative, unlike in other genres where puzzles might serve as a minigame or alternatively, a

completely other purpose. For this reason, adventure game puzzles tend to be unique instead of repeatable challenges, as they have specific purpose and might create later dependencies in the game. (Rollings et al. 2012.) The idea of narrative lead puzzles is also endorsed by Ron Gilbert, the creator of *Maniac Mansion* (1987) and *Monkey Island* (1990). In an interview with Critical Path (2023) he talks about puzzles being an integral part of the character and the narrative, as puzzles should not be arbitrary obstacles blocking the player but cohesive storytelling tools helping to define the characters wants and needs.

Depending on the type and age of the game, the types of puzzles found in adventure games vary. While puzzles in *Colossal Cave Adventure* (1977) are text based and require players to input words to the console to solve them, newer games might use pattern or information-based puzzles in their gameplay. Before delving into the different types of puzzles, it is essential to reiterate the reasoning behind the importance of puzzles in adventure games. As mentioned before, puzzles in adventure games serve as a medium to advance the narrative. Creating these kinds of puzzles can be done in a multitude of ways, some of which will be discussed in this chapter, but most relevant to this thesis are the puzzles “designed” by the antagonists GLaDOS from *Portal* (2007) and the Narrator from *The Stanley Parable* (2013). These antagonists’ actions directly affect the player, as part of their nature is to test and evaluate the main characters and players activities. They might interact with the player in different settings with different objectives, but ultimately their intention is to control the player’s behavior. If the player should not collaborate, the game does not advance as part of the narrative lies in the completion of these puzzles. (Lamerichs 2019.)

The types of puzzles in the two mentioned games can be categorized into “self-contained puzzles” and “key puzzles” as Mark Newheiser (2010) describes them. He talks about the categories of different puzzle types in his article Adventure game puzzles (2010) and explains how they are introduced and what their goal is.

According to Newheiser (2010), self-contained puzzles are games that can be solved within the instance itself. These problems are isolated challenges that

the player can take their time with and solve without having to worry about missed clues or other instances. Even if this kind of puzzle can be rewarding and grant satisfaction, it does not allow for intertwined mysteries throughout the game, as other types of puzzles may do. Self-contained puzzles can be further categorized into interaction-, mini-game and riddle puzzles. Interaction puzzles involve recognizing the usefulness of items or commands and interacting with them to solve the problem. Mini-games contrastingly request the player to rearrange pieces into particular arrangements or to complete a set of actions and riddle puzzles depend on players providing answers to questions or clues that are presented.

In contrast to self-contained puzzles, key puzzles present problems that require perseverance and external aids to solve them. According to Newheiser (2010), key puzzles are also divided into three subcategories: Inventory-, pattern-, and implicit information puzzles. Inventory puzzles require the player to obtain a specific object and add it to their inventory and to use it with another in the correct way to unlock its true purpose. Pattern puzzles depend on a specific type of information before the player can solve them. The player might have been physically able to solve them before but would not have had any means to arrive at the solution themselves. A variant of the pattern puzzle are implicit information puzzles. These require the playable character to communicate information to the player, designating the player to think about how to use information to reveal new actions.

Designing puzzles that play into the narrative or overall atmosphere of adventure games can be challenging, as noted in Ron Gilbert's blog Grumpy Gamer in the post "why adventure games suck" (2004). Gilbert (2004) talks about what mistakes he made in the design of the puzzles in *Maniac Mansion* (1987) and how they affected playability. He stresses that puzzles and generally the problems that arise for the player to solve need to be clear and understandable while also being rewarding. An example of bad puzzle design that Gilbert (2004) mentions can be found in the text of *Old Man Murray* (2002) in which the author describes a puzzle from the game *Gabriel Knight 3: Blood of the Sacred, Blood of the Damned* (1999). The solution to the puzzle is neither intuitive nor logical, but comically complex and absurd to the point that it frustrates players (Wolpaw 2000).

As discussed earlier in this chapter, adventure games lost in popularity around the time that *Gabriel Knight 3* (1999) came out. If genre's downfall was due to the ludicrous puzzles that were implemented in games during the early 2000's is debatable, but texts like the ones from Old Man Murray and research by Aaron Reed (Reed et al. 2020) imply so.

2.3 Exploration in adventure games

Walking simulators, initially a pejorative term to describe games that did not entail typical game play elements and mechanics, are games that let the player walk around and explore their environment following a fixed narrative. Games such as *Gone Home* (2013) or *What Remains of Edith Finch* (2017) give the player the opportunity to observe and contemplate, challenging gameness and ideas of interactivity. (Muriel & Crawford 2018). Using these qualities, the game gives the player the grounds to connect and empathize with the character, as the environment serves as a stand-in for exploration of character. (Reed et al. 2020.)

The previously mentioned indie success *Gone Home* (2013) is commonly known for its inclusion of LGBT themes that are discussed in the environment throughout the game. The game tells the story through letters, notes and other daily memorabilia that can be found by exploring the house and interacting with objects. One unparalleled aspect of *Gone Home* (2013) is the lack of action and intervention that the player has power over; as the player explores the house and familiarizes themselves with the story, it becomes apparent that the player is already too late to intercede. Using exploration in this manner tells a story on its own as the player must piece together the events to understand the context behind the objects found. (Leigh 2013.)

Another indie game that relies on exploration is *The Complex: Found Footage* (2022). The game is based on liminal spaces and a concept called the backrooms, which originates from a comment on an image on 4Chan (2019). The backrooms is a fictional environment that consists of "kenopsic" – abandoned and quiet locations (Koenig 2012) - places with its own lore and

fandom. This core concept was then turned into creepypastas, horror-related legends shared on the internet, and into a myriad of stories accessible online.

In *The Complex: Found Footage* (2022) the player gets to explore the environment that they find themselves in, without the game prompting the player to do anything or guiding them on how to navigate the spaces. This game and other liminal media serve the purpose of visualizing liminality, a transitional phase, and evoking the feeling of uneasiness in the viewer. As *The Complex: Found Footage* (2022) does not offer any other gameplay than exploring the area, the player is exposed to experiencing spaces devoid of purpose or function that only visually resemble human constructions.

2.4 Narrative

Interactive storytelling has long been a part of adventure games. From writing commands to interact with the game's story to dialogue trees, stories have been told in numerous ways in adventure games.

Starting with games like *Colossal Cave Adventure* (1977), interactive narratives started out with commands that influenced how the story progressed. With technological advances came graphic support, which in the beginning still favored command style interaction but later changed into using the mouse pointer for interactions. (Reed et al. 2020.) This also solved the problem of syntax guessing, the phenomenon of players not using the right terminology to interact with objects (Ashman 2007). Switching to point and click type interactions also removed the language barrier that non-English speaking people had since graphical games did not need text commands to interact with objects. Another aspect that improved the accessibility of adventure games were the advanced sound cards that allowed for more complex sounds. This permitted *King's Quest V* (1990) to have fully recorded dialogue (Reed et al. 2020).

Another method that permitted the player to communicate with other non-playable characters was the addition of "dialogue trees". These allow the player to choose an answer from a predetermined set of topics or sentences to respond to with. In some cases, these are part of puzzles, where the right

answer triggers a reaction. These can activate so called cut-scenes, animated or acted sequences that progress the story. (Reed et al. 2020; Groppo 2012.)

As argued before, generally adventure games are defined by incorporating narrative, exploration and puzzle aspects but as discussed in the book *Adventure games: Playing the Outsider* (Reed et al. 2020), not all adventure games must contain all aspects. Classic adventure games attempted to find a balance within all elements, carefully trying to find harmony in including narrative, puzzles, and exploration. This approach can result in a pleasurable experience but could potentially end up in frustrated players that were overwhelmed with the number of choices they had. Modern adventure games may choose to not include all aspects, knowingly sacrificing one aspect to elevate the two remaining ones. Games like *The Witness* (2016) where the player focuses on exploring the island and solving the puzzles located on it, removes all story aspects whereas *Firewatch* (2016) sacrifices puzzles to give the player the chance to immerse themselves in the story and the exploration of the game. (Reed et al. 2020.) How much focus lands on each aspect is dependent on what kind of game is in question, as the balance of these determines the direction.

3 ANTAGONISTS

As in any narrative focused media, the antagonist's role is deeply embedded into the fundamentals of storytelling as an opposing force to the protagonist. To gain a greater level of understanding of the antagonist's purpose, it is important to understand why they exist in the first place. Especially in narrative driven adventure games, the central conflict is fundamental to the games' design as it determines the protagonist's agency.

There are several different character types that are present in stories, but the two most important ones are the protagonist and the antagonist. The protagonist is the character who prompts the action and which the focus is on during the story. They might have a different drive from other characters which can cause conflict and therefore acts as the challenge the protagonist must overcome. This conflict can also change the protagonist since facing the conflict can cause the main character to develop and evolve as a figure.

(Corbett 2013.) Contrastingly, an antagonist is someone who contends or opposes another, fundamentally being the antonym to the protagonist (Merriam-Webster, antagonist entry. In essence they are an element of storytelling that creates the driving force behind the events of the narrative. In many cases this presents itself as the antagonist being the villain.

As the antagonist is an established element of a story and the primary goal is to interact with the protagonist, there are several ways that this could present itself during a story.

3.1 Types of antagonists

The common motif among antagonists is the structural role of impacting the protagonist. Consequently, antagonist does not need to be a human or a living being, sometimes it can be a non-human antagonistic force as well. Chelsea Hogue (2017) categorizes antagonists into villain, hero, group, non-human, and internal antagonists.

A villain antagonist is the most recurrent type of antagonist. According to Merriam-Webster (villain entry), a villain is “a character in a story or play who opposes the hero”, but with the addition that they are deliberately evil. An example of this is Michael Myers (1978), a psychopath who kills first his sister and later other people. He embodies evil and acts on it without regret.

Hero antagonists on the other hand are characters whose intentions are noble are heroic, but that for one reason or another still oppose the main character. Group antagonists usually present themselves as a collective that opposes the protagonist. This could, for example, be a country, a regime or another grouping of people.

A non-human antagonist can range from animals to disasters or even societal issues. Some examples of this trope could be *The Hunger Games (2008)*, where the protagonist Katniss Everdeen must fight the corrupt regime of Capitol City or *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button (2008)*, in which the protagonist must face him ageing backwards and what consequences this brings with it.

Internal antagonists can appear as struggles that the protagonist must face during the story. These internal obstacles make the protagonist stand in their own way, causing conflict and the opportunity to grow as the story unfolds. An example of this is in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), where the protagonist Elizabeth must face her own prejudice (Fyfe 2013).

Another character type that could be seen as an antagonist is the so-called foil. A foil is a character that exhibits opposite traits to enhance another's qualities. The significant difference to an antagonist is that a foil character contrasts another character, helping to emphasize certain themes that each character represents. An example of a foil character would be Watson from *Sherlock Holmes* (1887). Watson's predictability and dependability contrasts Sherlock Holmes, who is brilliant and unpredictable. (Fradkin 2022.)

3.2 Non-archetypal antagonists

To discuss what a non-archetypal antagonist is like, the word "archetypal" needs to be analyzed first. Merriam-Webster (archetype entry) describes an archetype to be "the original pattern or model of which all things of the same type are". Consequently, "non-archetypal" would describe something unfitting for the pattern.

As established before, at its core, an antagonist opposes the protagonist. Changing this element would change the role completely, therefore making an antagonist non-typical comes from how the antagonist acts or what their core values are. Another way to make the antagonist non-archetypal can relate to the design structure of a game.

An example of the latter option is *A way Out* (2018). It is an action-adventure coop for 2 players. At its core the game is about two convicted prisoners who must break out of prison to get back to their families. The players are encouraged to work together throughout the game to complete the missions, using the interests of the protagonists as the common ground. In the end the final act, as shown in Figure 3, is what makes this game stand out antagonist-wise. During the end of the game, it gets revealed that one of the protagonists,

Vincent, is an undercover policeman using the second protagonist, Leo, to get justice for his murdered brother. This revelation happens when both protagonists are captured by the police in a sting operation, but only Leo is captured. He proceeds to take Vincent hostage and after a fight, the two protagonists end up in the final scene of the game. The players get to fight against each other, only one being able to survive the scene. (Watanuki 2018.)

Due to the events that take place during the game, one of the protagonists is made into the opposing force; this choice being at the player's digression. Whether the "bad guy" was the undercover FBI agent that was seeking justice for his dead brother or the family father who tries to make amends with his wife is completely up to the player. (Watanuki 2018.)



Figure 3. The final scene in A Way Out (EA 2018) featuring Leo and Vincent in the two possible endings

Another similar example is from *The Last of Us Part II* (2020). A detrimental difference to *A Way Out* (2018) is that it does not offer any in-game choices that would have an impact on the progress of the main storyline. The two playable characters in this game are Ellie (Figure 4), one of the protagonists of the first game, and Abby (Figure 4), the daughter of a surgeon that Joel, Ellie's

father figure, killed in the first game. The game begins with Abby's revenge on Joel, killing him in front of Ellie's eyes after which Ellie starts hunting Abby down. The game is played from both perspectives, showing why the characters acted the way they did and why neither is completely in the right or wrong. (Wheeler 2020.) Similar to *A Way out* (2018), *The Last of Us Part II* (2020) also plays with the idea of morality being a gray area that is up to the player to judge. This moral dilemma creates a dichotomy between the protagonist and the antagonist, which leaves the interpretation of justice to the player.



Figure 4. Ellie (on the left) and Abby (on the right) from *The Last of Us Part II* (Sony Interactive Entertainment 2020)

These games display two different ways to handle conflict causing characters, especially with how the developers decided to present the interpersonal problems and their effects.

Ultimately there is no unambiguous definition for a non-archetypal antagonist much like there is not one archetypal antagonist trope. What counts towards an antagonist being non-typical depends on what the current definition of the typical antagonist is and the characters' intention in their narrative.

3.3 Types of conflicts

Conflicts are the driving force behind a story, they give meaning and purpose to the narrative's characters and events. As described by Rachel Ballon in the book *Blueprint for Screenwriting* (2004), conflicts give reason to explore the hidden self of a character, showing the different aspects of themselves. Facing and resolving conflict gives the character space to grow and evolve as well as entertaining the audience.

The challenges posed by conflicts can be divided into internal and external conflicts. With internal conflicts the main character must face struggles from within, whereas with external conflicts the opposition is some exterior force or worldview. (Edwards 2020.) Ballon (2004) lists 3 types of conflict: Man against himself, man against nature and man against man. The first, man against himself, describes a conflict where the main character must overcome themselves to resolve the struggle. Often these struggles can be flaws, mental illnesses, moral choices, or addictions that the main character is confronted with. Man against nature entails conflicts where humans have deal with a conflict caused by nature, weather, natural disasters or rogue animals as an example. The last, and most common, type is man against man, where the main character must oppose another character standing in their way.

4 CHARACTER DESIGN THEORY

Designing the visual aspects of a character poses multiple challenges that need to be examined to reach a satisfactory outcome. But why is good character design important?

According to Nadia Stefyn (2022), a well-designed character compels their audience to feel invested in the unfolding story. This is why characters that appear need to be memorable and interesting, both personality and design-wise. If these conditions are met, it can ensure that the consumers will remember the character and, in theory, will bring better sales with box office and merchandising. (Arena Animation 2020.)

Visualizing personality, purpose and story can be a challenge, but when done well, are key points to a well working entirety. A good design is not just

visually appealing, but fitting in with the story and environment, believable and unique in their own way. In the end, the visual design of the character reflects the research, background material and conceptualization that the designer has done.

As characters in fictional media are at the designer's digression, the design of a character is deliberate, giving full control to the designer. This is why it is vital to consider the first impression that the design gives. As in real life situations, the first impression tells the viewer most of what they need to know about the subject in question. Even though it is debatable if first impressions give accurate information about a person or a character, it is important to keep in mind that viewers will most likely make an assessment within a few seconds of seeing the character. (Skillshare 2021.) This is especially important as biases come into play, as they can have unwanted effects if not considered carefully. Some stereotypes and archetypes can be used to one's benefit, for example, to create familiarity or a feeling of connection in readers. Stereotypes can also be used to influence the reader to not be suspicious of a character's real intentions. (Laurinavicius 2022; Roy 2018.)

4.1 Background information

When starting to design a character it is good practice to have a creative brief that tells the designer some background information about the character. This gives the context of the character and the narrative so that there is a direction to follow. The setting, narrative, and the character's profile itself can give pointers as to which design aspects are important. One tool that can be used to narrow down a character could be to look at the 5W's (who, what, when, where, why?) and to answer each of them. (Levanier 2021.)

Another aspect when creating characters is to keep in mind who the character is designed for and what their purpose is in the medium that they appear in. A character designed for children is going to look different visually from a character that is catered to adults, because the character then serves a different purpose. Consequently, the character's visuals as well as general traits need to be adjusted to the target audience. (Comic Book Artist n.d.)

According to Creative Comic Arts blogpost (Comic Book Artist n.d.), it is best to research the target audience to get acquainted with their preferences. The term target audience includes all the potential customers that a marketing campaign wants to address. To which customers the product is limited to depends on the product. As a guideline, it is possible to look at the market in the following sections:

1. Sociodemographic aspects (Age, sex, education, etc.)
2. Behavioral (First-time buyer, recurring buyer, etc.)
3. Psychographic (Early adopter, late adopter, etc.)
4. Media appropriation (Social media, technology, etc.)

With these it is possible to build a target audience that has specific characteristics that fit the theme of the product. (Köhler 2021.)

Especially with games it is important to consider the technical limitations that exist on various platforms. A game that is released for PC might look different than a game released for the Nintendo Switch, as the controls (mouse and keyboard versus Joy-Con-Controller) can differ vastly and therefore affect movement for example. Therefore, it is important to visualize what target group the game is made for, as it can also impact the technical standards of the game. (JuegoAdmin 2022.)

4.2 Figures and shapes

The appearance of a character is a key part of character creation as it serves as a visual guideline for the player on what to expect from the character. How to form the wanted aesthetic comes down to what shapes, colors, silhouettes, and style are used throughout the medium.

One of the methods that can be used to convey the personality and type of the character is shape language. Shape language refers to a term used in art and animation to implicate meaning through shapes. Each shape can convey a specific emotion or attribute, hence the importance of paying attention to the silhouette of the character. (Naghdi 2021.)

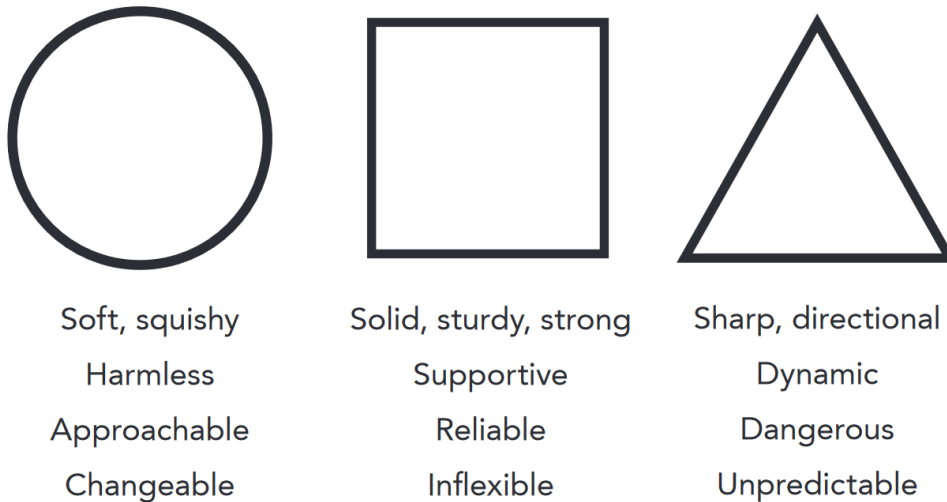


Figure 5. Tips & Techniques on shape language (Walt Disney 2020)

According to Walt Disney (2020), the shapes shown in Figure 5 can illicit specific emotional responses in the viewer. Arash Naghdi (2021) lists two more shapes in his article on shape language, these being spirals and crosses. According to him, spirals are associated with birth, death, creativity, and growth whereas crosses are associated with balance, hope, and divinity (Naghdi 2021).

How these shapes are implemented can be best seen through the examples Walt Disney provides in their education resources in Figure 6.

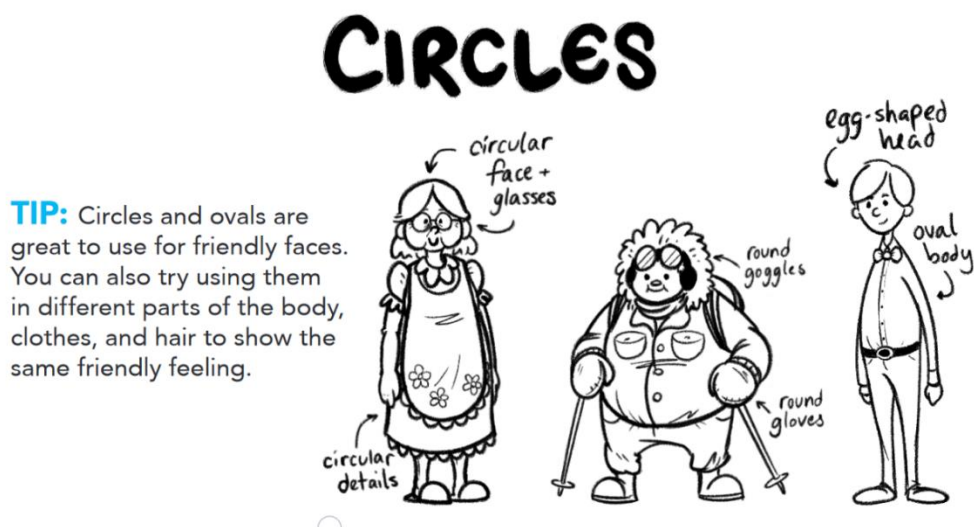


Figure 6. Circle shapes used as a base for characters (Walt Disney 2020)

According to Brookes Eggleston (2015) in his video on shape language, round shapes are associated with “young things” like babies and puppies that

humans are biologically inclined to take care of. Round shapes are associated with deep emotion, cuteness, and traditionally nurturing traits. An example of round character design is Kirby from the *Kirby Series* (1992). Kirby's round shape, as can be observed from Figure 7, could be interpreted as cute and innocent as noted in Walt Disney's guide on shape language (2020).



Figure 7. Kirby from Kirby and the forgotten Land (2022)

How Kirby's appearance changes when the base shapes are adjusted can be seen in Figure 8. The change in perception can be traced back to how the human psyche interprets shapes (Naghdi 2021).

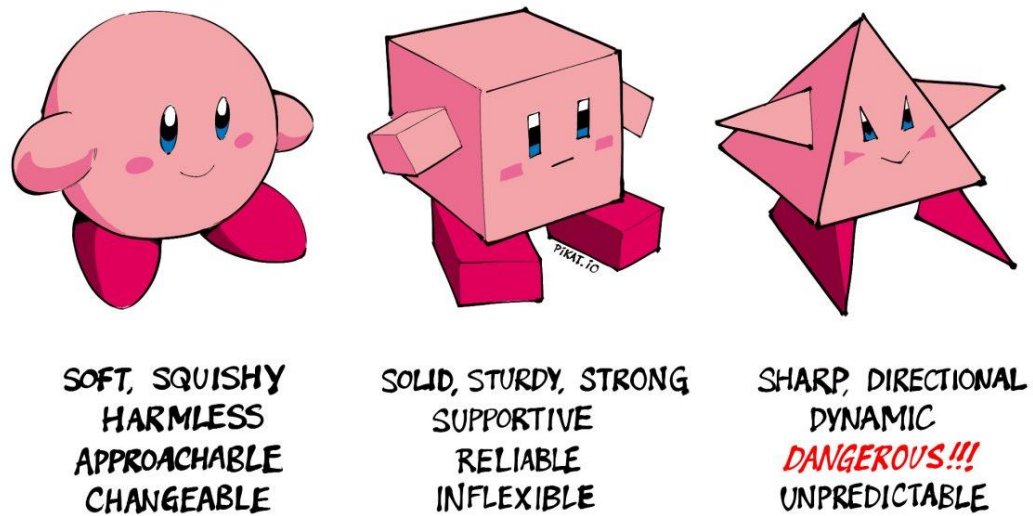


Figure 8. Changes in character perception as a result of alterations in shape language (Pikat 2021)

Other examples from Walt Disney can be seen in Figure 9, which depicts characters that are square or triangle in shape.

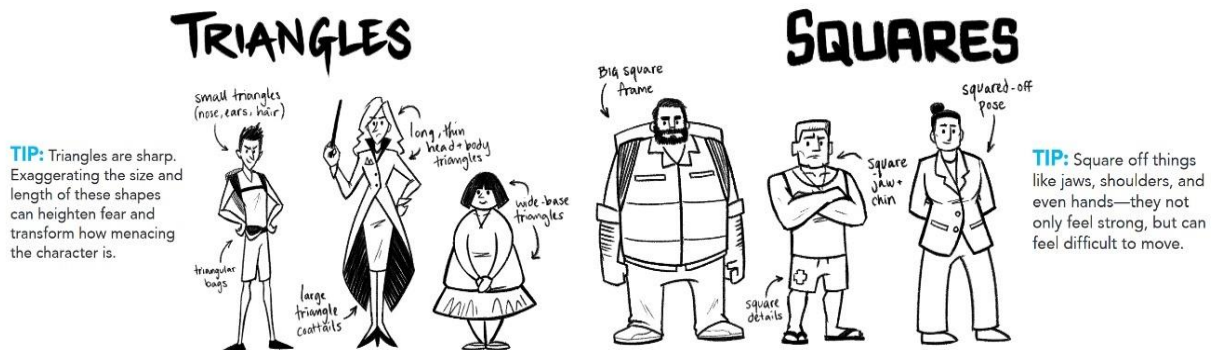


Figure 9. Triangle and square shapes used as bases for character design (Walt Disney 2020)

Another method to making more memorable character designs is thinking about the silhouette of a character. A silhouette version can help the designer identify if a design is recognizable through the shape alone when details and colors can not be seen. An example of good silhouettes is shown in Figure 10. (Stefyn 2022.)

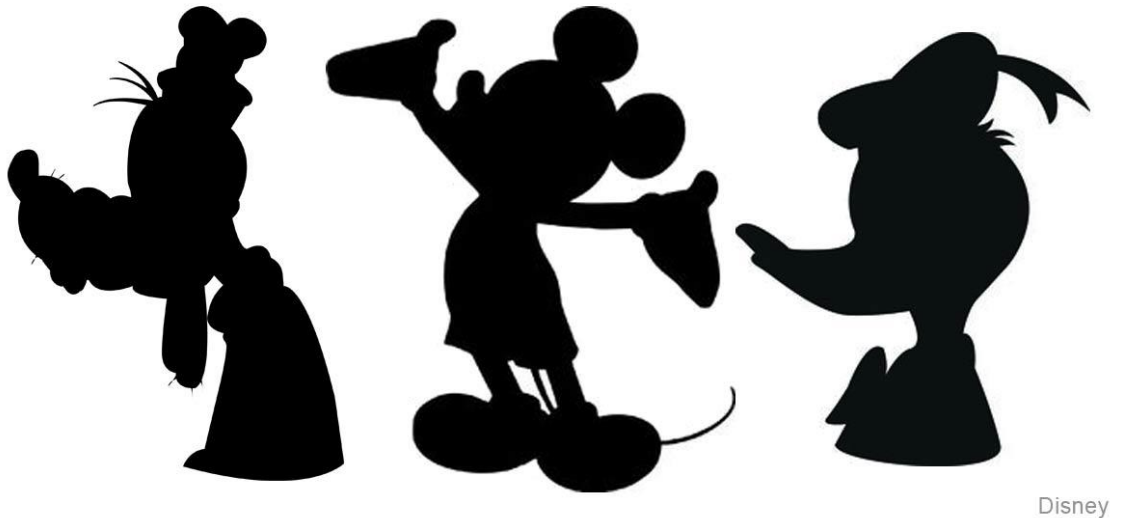


Figure 10. Goofy, Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck's silhouettes (Disney Fanatic 2015)

Another point to consider is the diversification of characters. In Anatomy for Sculptor's entry on character design (2021) the author talks about stereotypes in character design and how to avoid clichés. The article mentions that good and unique character design does not rely on ethnicity, gender, age, or stereotypes to convey a character's appearance. How to specifically avoid offensive stereotypes and what steps a designer should take to design a diverse cast an important aspect of character creation and warrants research alone on this subject. For this thesis this topic is outside the scope of the research questions, but it should be noted that this subject should be included in every designer's thought process.

4.3 Color theory and contrast

Similar to shapes, colors, light and contrast can also have an effect on how something is perceived. Colors, like shapes, also have cultural associations and can therefore vary in meaning between cultures. Therefore, it is important to be cautious when designing for a global market as a color's symbolism may not translate across cultures. (Jill Morton 1997.) Some examples mentioned in the article Corporate Design of Euro Disney Resort (Will n.d.) are the colors brown and blue. According to the article (Will n.d.) brown symbolizes stability and masculinity amongst other things but for Colombians it could "discourage sales" and can mean the color for mourning for Indians. Blue on the other

hand can mean truth or healing while in international terms it could mean immortality or be the color of Krishna. (Will n.d.)

According to Neal O'Grady and Rease Kirchner (2022), colors can be divided into two categories of warmth. Reds and yellows are considered to be warm colors whereas cool colors are blue in tone. Warm colors can appear passionate, aggressive, or bold, giving the colors more urgency. Contrarily cool colors can invoke feelings of sadness, loneliness, and fear, often less aggressive than its counterpart. This is why cool colors can also be seen as calming instead of alarming.

Crafting color palettes can be difficult as many factors play into the successfulness of a design. An example of a poor choice of color for a product could be seen in the initial design of the signs in EuroDisney. The color palette included a vast amount of purple, which in the catholic parts of Europe were associated with death and crucifixion which in consequence made visitors think that the signs were morbid. (ID Magazine 1992, 61.)

Alongside individual colors, designers can also use multiple colors in a subject. A method to create harmonious color schemes can be done by pairing color families from the color wheel. The 6 color schemes that are used are:

1. Monochrome (Based on a single base color)
2. Analogous (Three colors that lay next to each other on the color wheel)
3. Complementary (Two colors from the opposite sides of the color wheel)
4. Triadic (Colors at the endpoints of an equilateral triangle)
5. Split-Complementary (Variation of complementary, where one primary color and two colors adjacent to its complement are used)
6. Tetradic (Four Colors that are equidistant from each other on the color wheel)

As illustrated in Figure 11, these color schemes can help to choose colors for a character as they make the end result harmonious. Another element to consider is that colors should be used in relation to each other; sometimes using each color the same amount can create a busy entirety, which is why it is recommended to use rules that categorize rules in primary, secondary and

accent colors. Bethany Cartwright describes a 60%,30%,10% rule for these. (Cartwright 2022.)



Figure 11. Examples of the color schemes listed above (Modified from Maulina n.d.)

Other points to consider when using colors are the hue, value, and saturation. Hue is often used interchangeably with color, even though they do not mean the same thing. A hue is characterized by the dominant wavelength, the wavelength of monochromatic spectral light. Essentially refers to a color in its' purest form, fully saturated without white, black, or gray, as seen in Figure 12. Color in contrast is used for all wavelengths that can be seen by the human eye. (Learn n.d.)

The value refers to the perception of luminance of a color. It describes how close it is to light (tint of the hue name) or dark (shades of the hue name). (Learn n.d.) Saturation, or chroma, refers to the purity and intensity of a color. If a pure hue is mixed with other colors, the saturation is reduced as the strength of the hue is lost. (Smith 2007.)

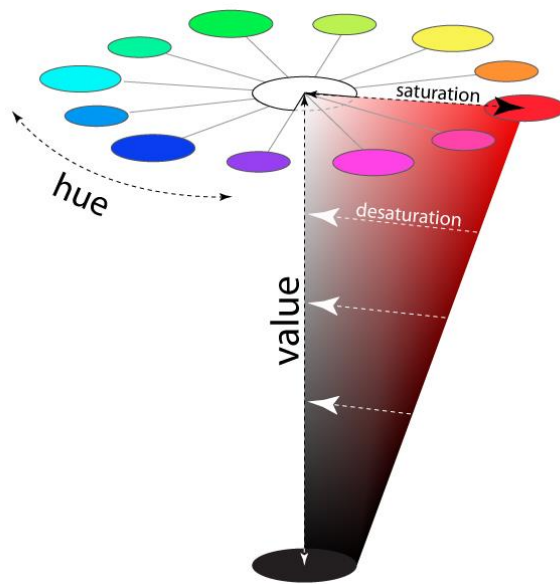


Figure 12. How hue, value, and saturation work in combination with each other (learn n.d.)

Thinking about how to use color on characters can give the designer the possibility to convey meaning to the viewer subconsciously through intricately chosen color schemes. As can be seen from the example of Maulina in Figure 13 (n.d), the differences in color schemes can affect the mood and overall feel of the image.



Figure 13. How colors affect the mood of an image (Maulina n.d.)

4.4 Nonverbal communication

In addition to color and shapes, the designer can also affect the nonverbal communication and body language of a character. These attributes characterize the inner workings of a character and can give the viewer a better perspective on them without the information being explicitly stated. (Naghdi 2021.) Nonverbal communication can include gestures, facial expressions, body movements, appearance, posture, along with physical contact (AssignZen 2022).

Facial expressions are closely connected to the emotions that are felt, as they reflect the inner world of a person, or in this case, a character. They are a way to convey to the viewer additional information that can enable empathy and relatability. (Assignzen 2022.)

What impression is caused by nonverbal communication and what kind of effects it can have can be seen in Jay S. Efran's (1967) study on effects on visual behavior. In the study it is noted that nonverbal communication and status of the individual listening to the presenter influenced visual interaction with the listener if their social rank was higher.

Body movements and gestures include the voluntary and involuntary movements that are used to convey information. Neither action is restricted to one particular area of the body but can span the entire frame of the character. These can be used to express ideas or punctuate meanings that verbally did not get communicated. Body movements contrarily can relay information on the general situation or mood, for example behavior associated with social situations (waving, hand shaking etc.) or actions during daily life (bending, cleaning etc.). (Assignzen 2022.)

As is typical in animation, these aspects are often exaggerated to create more appeal to a character or an action. Exaggeration can be added to be cartoonishly comical or incorporated with more restraint to better readability, depending on the subject at hand. (Frank & Johnston 1997.)

Appearance and posture can express much about the character's habits to the viewer. As discussed in subsection 4.2, the shapes used for the physical appearance can already influence the interpretation of said character. Additionally other aspects like makeup, clothes and posture can affect the characterization. Another aspect is physical contact, which describes how physical distance can change the mood in a setting. As intimate contact with someone suggests closeness between individuals or a character's intrusive tendencies, distance can be perceived as respectful or cold. (Spence 2020.)

To conclude this chapter, all character design choices should be deliberate decisions of the designer to reflect the background material and nature of the

character. Creating a well working synergy of elements that conduce an interesting and unique character needs research, iteration and feedback from both professionals and consumers to get to the best possible result.

5 SURVEY ON ANTAGONISTS

To understand the player's perspective on antagonists, a survey for this thesis was created. This survey was distributed through online portals such as Discord, Reddit and Facebook to get a more diverse cast of respondents. The survey had 76 respondents in total.

The survey was a mix of open and close-ended questions, in total it had 12 questions of which 11 were mandatory. The goal of this survey was to examine how players felt about antagonists, what they thought made antagonists interesting and if they considered specific characters to be non-archetypal antagonists. This information could then aid in the process of refining the character that was designed for Dark Amber Softworks.

5.1 Survey structure

At the beginning of the survey, the respondents were given an explanation as to what an antagonist is, to help them get a better idea of what kind of characters this survey wanted to examine. Further, the survey was divided into four pages. The first two questions were about the players' gaming habits, as in how often they play and what their favorite videogame genre was.

The next questions were about memorability and what characters the respondents considered in their opinion to be the most memorable antagonists. Furthermore the participants were asked which distinct qualities they associated with these characters and who their personal favorite antagonist was and why.

The last questions examined general qualities that antagonists could have and how important these qualities were to make an antagonist interesting. The final proceeded with this principle and asked for other, not already mentioned qualities that the respondent could add.

5.2 Results

Of the 76 respondents 76% reported playing games often, 23% occasionally and 1% rarely. The favorite video game genres were split between role-playing games and action-adventure games, while other genres had less favoring (Figure 14).

2. Your favorite video game genre is...

Number of respondents: 76

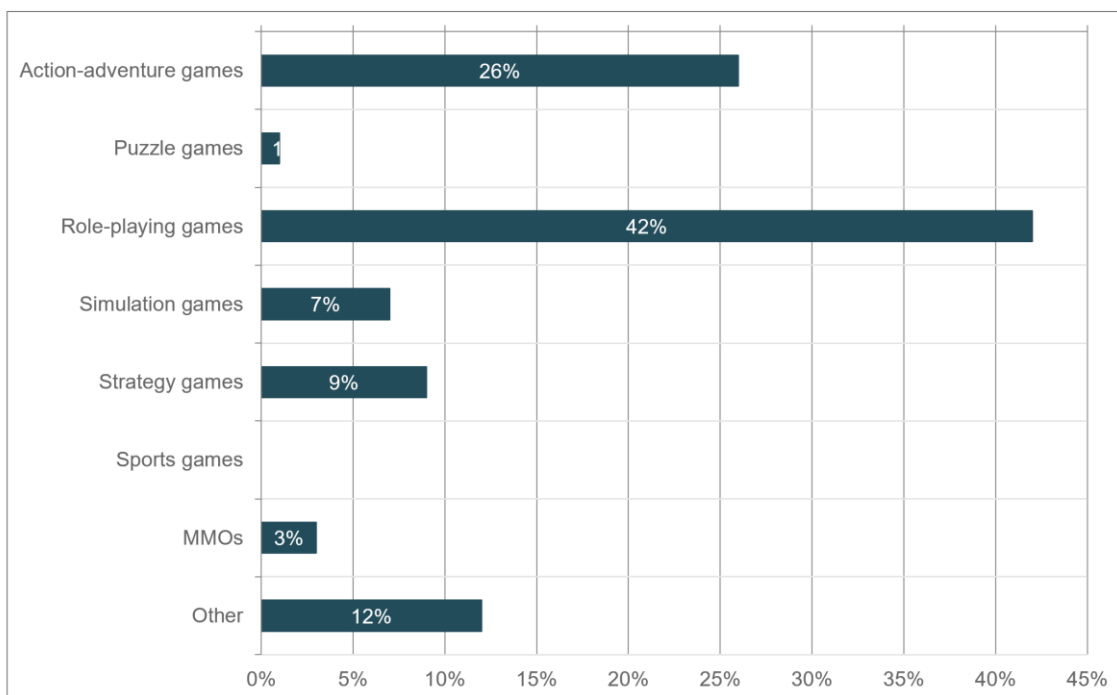


Figure 14. Distribution of favourite video game genres in the survey

The next question was about which game antagonist given in the selection grid was the most memorable to the responder. All the mentioned antagonists were from popular games that have been heavily discussed online or are otherwise prominent in the gaming scene. If not taking into account the other option, GLaDOS from *Portal* (2007) was a leading favorite with 34%, after which Sephiroth from *Final Fantasy* (1997) took second place with 15% (Figure 15).

3. Which of the following video game antagonists is the most memorable to you?

Number of respondents: 76

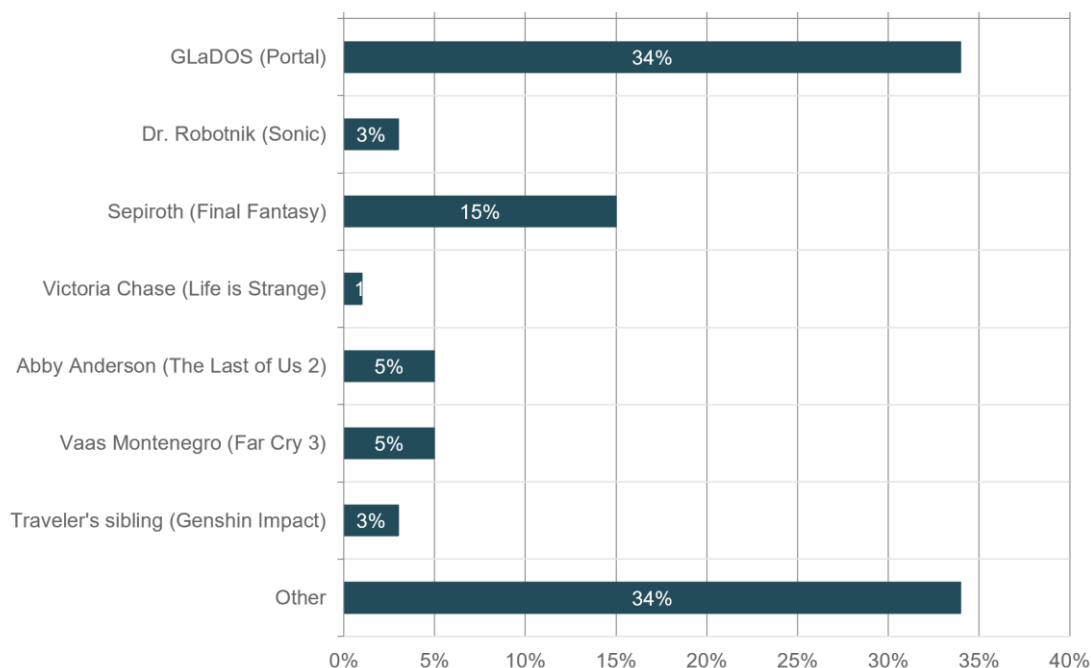


Figure 15. Division of favourite video game antagonists of question 3

26 respondents opted for the option other, with varying results on who their most memorable antagonist was. Two participants felt like they could not answer the question due to the games that they play, as in, lack of story relevant antagonists. The antagonists mentioned in this part of the survey did not have a common nominator other than them being the main antagonists in the game they are from.

Question 5 examined what qualities they found memorable about their first rated option from the previous question. As shown in Figure 16, most memorable was the personality of the character, then their visual design as well as the interactions between the protagonist and the antagonist. The precise distribution of percentages can be seen in Figure 17.

It is somewhat predictable that the visual design is one of the most memorable part of the character as video games are mostly visual productions, the same can be said about the personality and interactions with the player, since these are usually gameplaywise important. It is notable that the moral values of the antagonist also play an important part in the memorability of the character. The correlation in this case might be found in the types of games that the

respondents play. Most characters mentioned in question 3 are from games where the narrative plays a significant role in the game, in which case it would be logical that an antagonist with clear goals that are supported through their morals are more favorable than characters that are difficult to comprehend.

4. For your first rated option, you found...

Number of respondents: 76

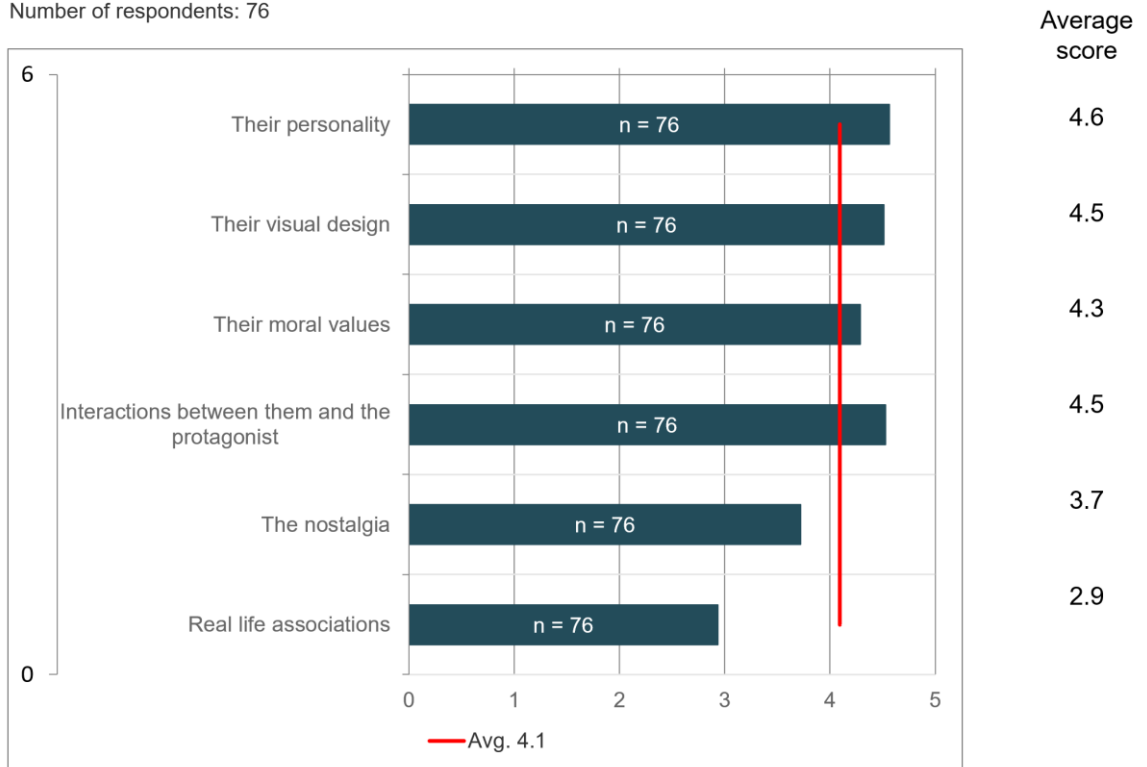


Figure 16. Chart showing which qualities the respondent considered memorable

4. For your first rated option, you found...

Number of respondents: 76

	Not memorable	Somewhat unmemorable	Neither important or unmemorable	Somewhat memorable	Memorable	Average	Median
Their personality	2.6%	2.6%	4.0%	17.1%	73.7%	4.6	5.0
Their visual design	1.3%	0.0%	11.9%	19.7%	67.1%	4.5	5.0
Their moral values	2.6%	4.0%	9.2%	30.3%	53.9%	4.3	5.0
Interactions between them and the protagonist	1.3%	1.3%	11.8%	14.5%	71.1%	4.5	5.0
The nostalgia	11.9%	11.8%	13.2%	18.4%	44.7%	3.7	4.0
Real life associations	15.8%	22.4%	30.2%	15.8%	15.8%	2.9	3.0

Figure 17. Division of how memorable respondents thought the qualities were

Question 6 examined further qualities that the respondents could come up with that would make an antagonist memorable. As this question is open-ended, it is difficult to give an accurate summary of every matter that was pointed out. To be able to communicate the collected data in some way, the

answers were divided into 8 categories, as shown in Figure 18, to inspect which topics were interesting for the results of the survey.

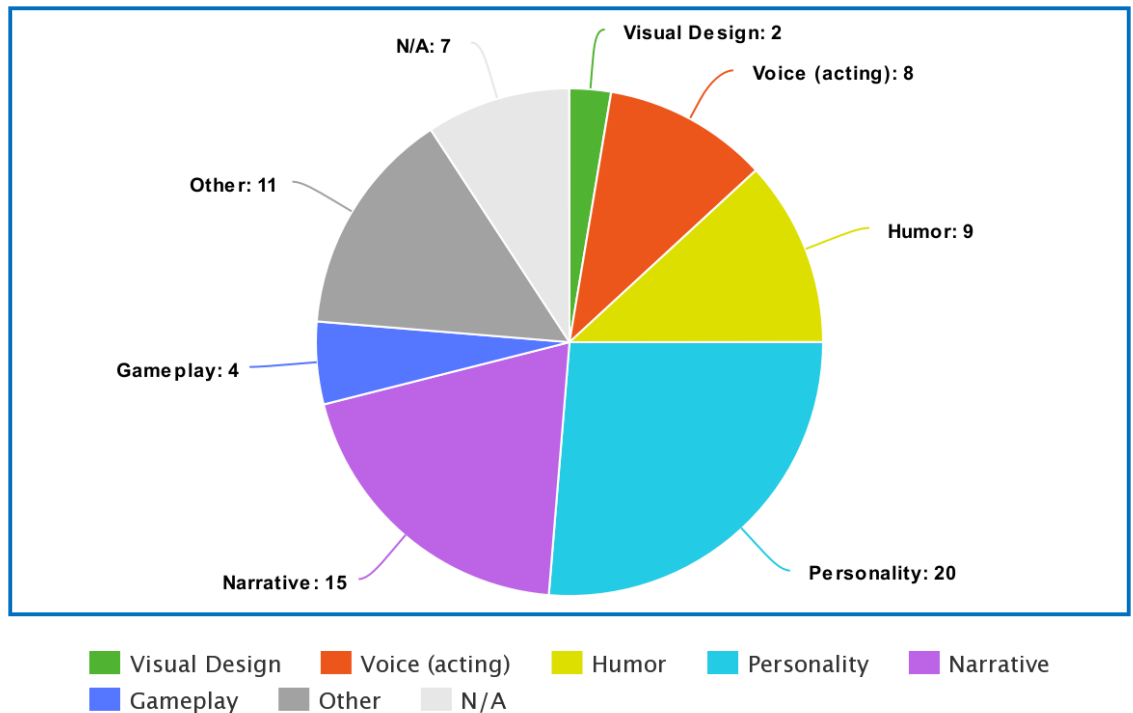


Figure 18. Open ended question divided into categories

It is notable that when respondents were able to write out the qualities themselves, the responses shifted from visuals to interpersonal qualities. One respondent described it as follows:

“Not a plain villain or psychopath. During the story, he changes from 'most evil of the evil guys who want to destroy my world' to a very complex character with well explained reason why he acts his way. In the end, he is no longer an antagonist but a friend.”

This description is about the character Emet Selch from *Final Fantasy XIV* (2013), which shows that to this particular respondent the personality and the development of the character is important to them. Other responses in this category were similar, pointing out that the described characters left an impression on them.

In the category “narrative”, respondents described that antagonists that had an interesting backstory or clear motivations that supported the story were desired qualities. The answers in this category express the need for an

emotional connection to the antagonist, whether through an empathetic connection from the player or through a logical understanding of their actions.

As observed in question 3, GLaDOS (Portal 2007) was one of the characters thought to be memorable. In the category “humor”, this character makes a reappearance. Of the 9 respondents that described humor being an important part in the character’s qualities, 8 were referencing to GLaDOS. One respondent describes it as follows:

“The most incredible Snark EVER written into a video game. It's simultaneously terrifying, hilarious, naive, childish, petulant and sometimes legitimately pitiful.”

Humor is a very divisive subject and can irritate a player completely if incorporated in a way that is not fitting. As every player has their preferences when it comes to humor, it is surprising that the game has gotten so much approval for its witty writing and dialogue.

In the category “voice (acting)” the respondents found distinctive voice design, well performed dialogue and the placement of the dialogue important. As for gameplay and visual design the mentioned qualities were about how these qualities made the game unique or memorable. For gameplay it was mentioned multiple times that a certain frustration was especially memorable, as it made the game harder to complete.

Some of the answers did not fit in any of the categories mentioned above and were too specific to warrant a category for themselves. What stood out in these responses was that symbolism was considered an important aspect of the game.

“To me, Ganon is the perfect personification of what it means to be evil in the world. He is always present in the universe no matter what; not to be contained nor eradicated. His fleeting presence and yet his seamless capacity to destroy the peace established by the main characters often proved to me that he can't really be defined by his intelligence or strength. He, is defined by evil. The developers granted Ganon the power of being unknown, and quite underdeveloped regarding his goals. To me, Ganon fits the description of, the most unassuming characters can wreak the greatest havoc.”

This response is about a character called Ganon from the Zelda series (Legend of Zelda 1986). Another respondent described it to be an interesting quality that “Hela is a manifestation of the protagonist’s mental disorder”, Hela being a goddess from the game *Hellblade: Senua’s Sacrifice* (2017).

Question 7 asks about visual aspects that the respondents found appealing. As this was also an open-ended question, the answers were split into categories: Character specific details, design, novelties, combinations, other and no answers. The distribution of these can be seen in Figure 19.

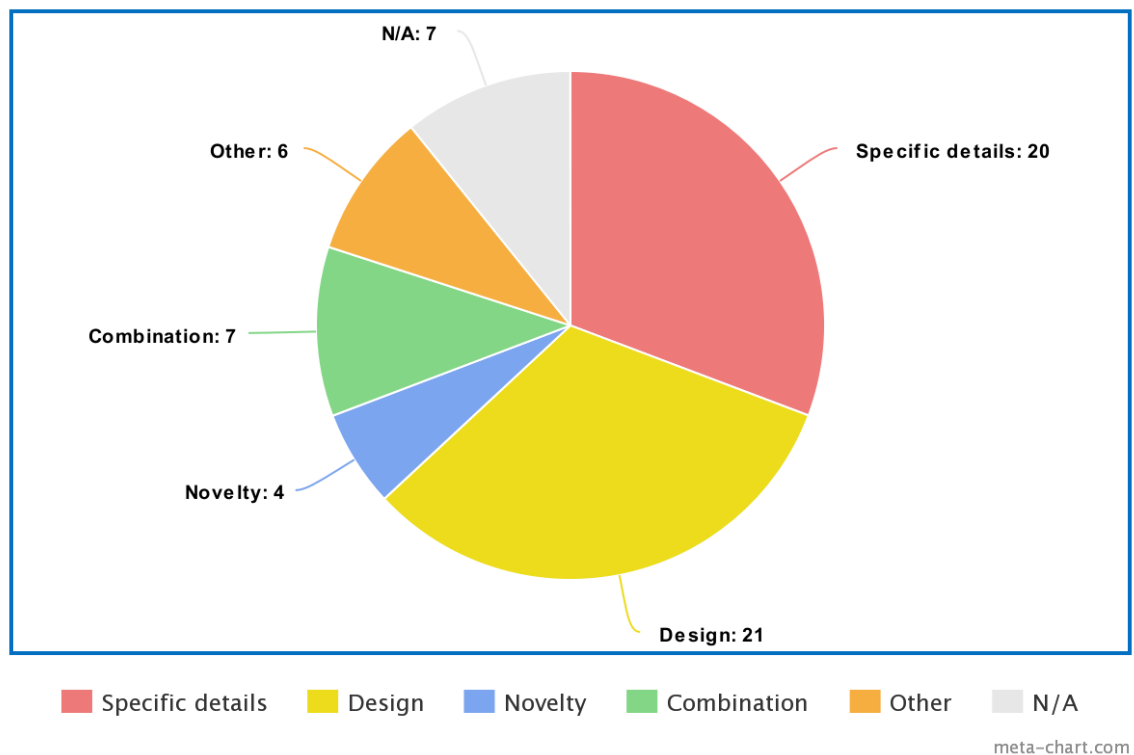


Figure 19. Distribution of answers in categories

Most answers had either to do with specific details from the characters or their design. Some of the specific details were for example a specific shade of hair, pointy features or specific clothing- or armor pieces that were memorable. As for the design outstanding silhouettes were mentioned, generally cohesive compositions or that it the design was non-human.

Another point that was prominent in the answers was that the visuals alone were not memorable, but in combination with other elements (sound, vfx etc.) made it interesting. Especially in the case of GLaDOS (*Portal* 2007) respondents answered that part of the appeal of the character was amplified by the voice.

There were also answers that called attention to non-archetypal designs for characters. One example mentioned was Abby from the *Last of Us Part II* (2020), as she is well toned unlike many other female characters in games. Another aspect that was mentioned was a unique art style and the usage of unusual colors. Answers that had to do with symbolism or with a character that mostly had voice lines, in which case the visuals of the character were not as important as other aspects of the character.

Question 8 was about the favorite video game antagonist of the respondents. This question in combination with question 9 was designed to explore the respondent's own opinion and why they chose this character. Question 9 explicitly asks why the previously named character is their favorite one. As with other open-ended questions, the data was quantified into categories to dissect the themes, as seen in Figure 20.

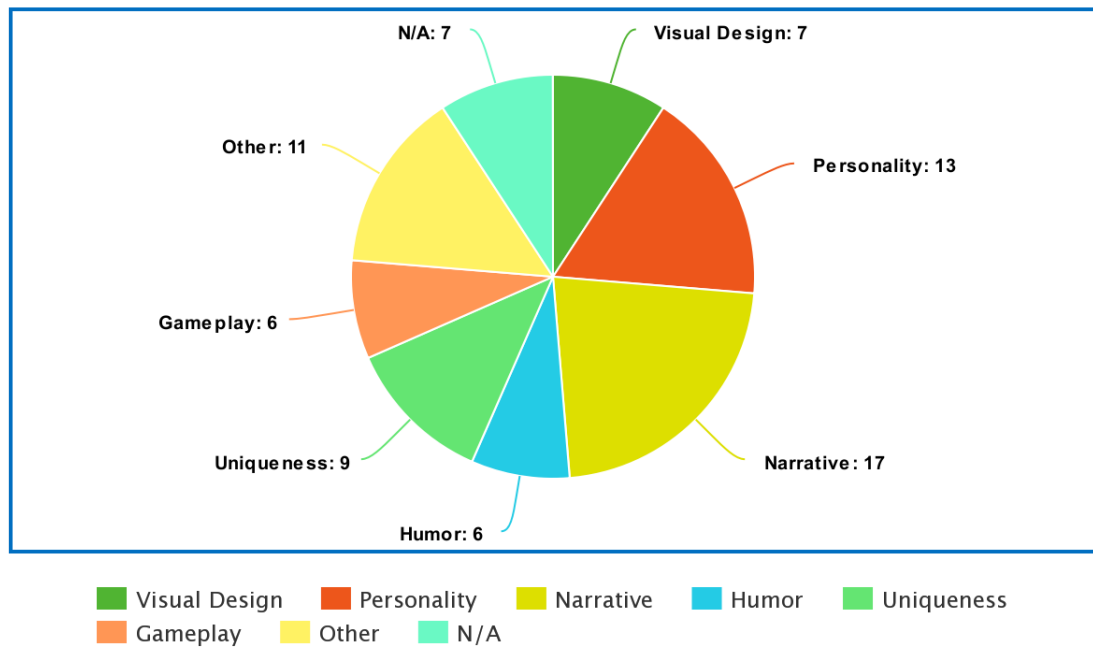
Question 9 in particular was answered with multiple traits by respondents which made categorization difficult. Respondents found multiple aspects important to mention, as they felt that the combination of traits made them extraordinary.

One respondent described their favorite character, the Lady from *Little Nightmares* (2017), as follows:

“Her design is quite simple and memorable while still being unique and complicated. Her motives and morals are interesting. The way she works as a villain is unique.”

Many of the other responses list traits in a similar manner, often commenting on the visual design especially if some part of it stands out or is otherwise unique, mentioning either the personality or the morality and often either the gameplay or another narrative aspect is acknowledged.

Character traits of the personal favourites of the respondents



meta-chart.com

Figure 20. Distribution of character traits of the personal favourite of the responder

One conspicuous aspect that stood out was that specific adjectives were mentioned in association with the categories. When analyzing visual design traits memorability was an important aspect that many mentioned, although this is to be expected when talking about impeccable designs as this will stay with the viewer for longer than a design that is dull. As for personality, the moral ambiguity of the character and the complexity played an important role for the respondents. When respondents commented on narrative aspects many mentioned the characters being relatable or that their actions could be either understood or justified. Other important aspects were the backstory of the antagonists and how they impacted the ongoing story.

Odin from the game *God of War* (2018): Ragnarök was described as follows by one of the respondents:

“He's got many unique things about him that I find interesting, but his uniqueness and his role as an antagonist are secondary to the fact that he's a well-written character- his writing is consistent, his actions make sense with everything we know about him and his goal. His flaws make sense for the sort of person he is and how he sees other people (Brok in particular, if you know what happens in the game. "You got a bargain"). It also really helps that he's in such a well written game.”

As can be seen from this answer the character has multiple aspects that were deemed important but still the narrative aspects were considered to be above everything else. As in the questions before, humor was mostly mentioned in association with GLaDOS from *Portal* (2007) or in a setting where some kind of snarky or witty commentary was made throughout the game.

Another aspect that was deemed to be important was the uniqueness of the character. Often this was in conjunction with other traits like visual design or personality, ultimately the trait of being unique was of importance as to differentiate the character from others. The minority commented on the gameplay aspects that made the character stand out in a way. This was used association with antagonists that span through multiple games and gained a status in that series.

In answers that did not fit any of the previously mentioned categories, nostalgia was one trait that was mentioned multiple times. As it bears a significance for the player but is a trait that a designer can not assign during the development off the character, it is not an aspect that is intentionally given. Which characters are ultimately deemed nostalgic, depends on the cultural implications that the game has had when it released.

Question 10 inquired who the respondent considered to be a non-typical antagonist. As shown in Figure 21, most characters mentioned were from games that were either role-playing, action adventure or action role-playing games. The reason why these genres are over represented in the chart may lie in the nature of the genres as they often allow for narrative rich games.

Genre of video game for respondents choice of non-typical antagonist

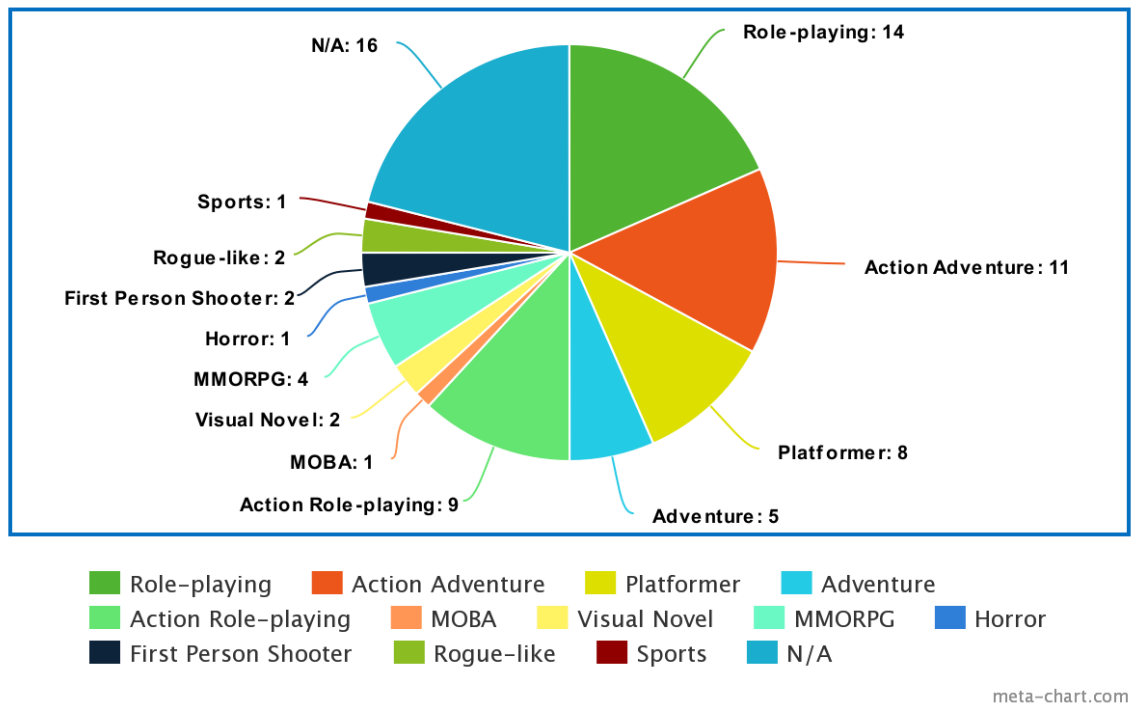


Figure 21. Division of genres of respondents' answers

What stood out in the games that were listed by the respondents was that 24% of the games were of Japanese origin. This could be due to a multitude of reasons but for this survey it might relate to the fact that games like *Final Fantasy* were mentioned multiple times or that generally games made outside of western countries are seen as more exotic and, in that way, also labeled as non-typical.

The list also entailed a lot of characters from indie games, for example something from *Omori* (2020) or Deserter from *Disco Elysium* (2019). Games from smaller studios might tackle more complex issues so the characters could be more inclined to be untypical as these games do not need to conform to shareholders' expectations.

Question 11 requested the respondents to rate different qualities in order of importance regarding antagonists.

5. What qualities make a video game antagonist interesting?

Number of respondents: 75

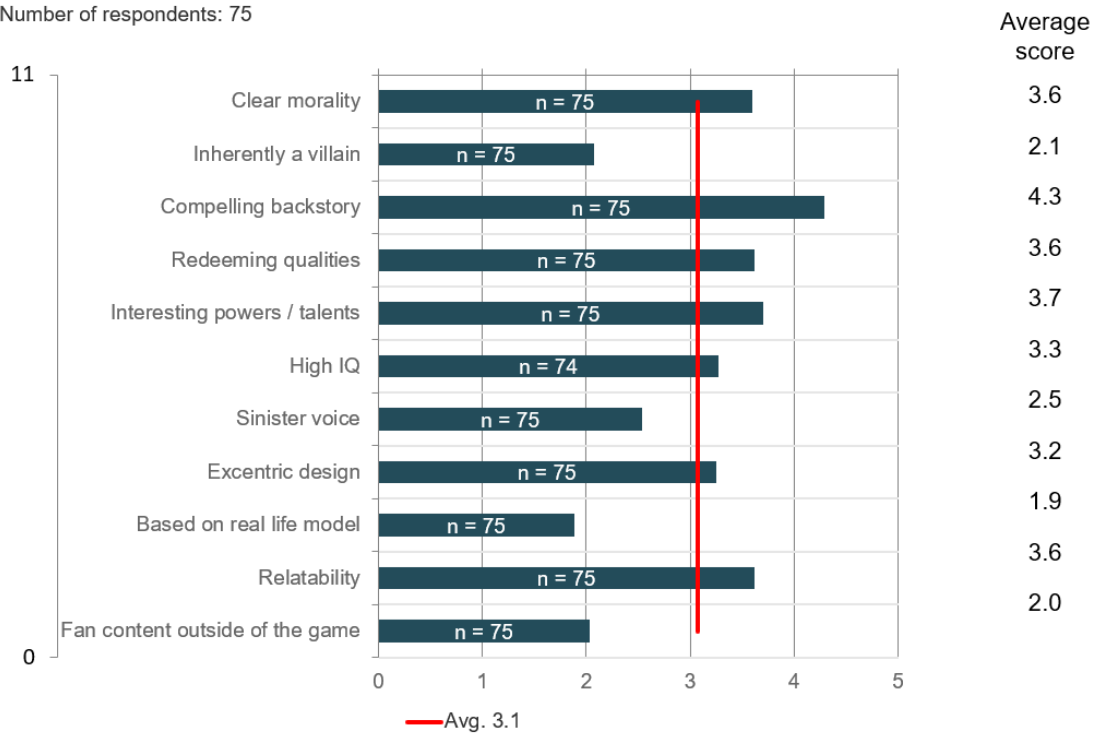


Figure 22. Question 11 respondents results on which qualities make an antagonist interesting

As shown in Figure 22, what qualities respondents thought to be most important were a compelling back story, redeeming qualities and relatability. Qualities deemed least important were the antagonist inherently being villain, them being based on a real-life model and fan content outside of the game. The precise division amongst attributes can be seen in Figure 23.

5. What qualities make a video game antagonist interesting?

Number of respondents: 75

	Not important	Somewhat unimportant	Neither important or unimportant	Somewhat important	Important	Average	Median
Clear morality	13.3%	4.0%	21.4%	33.3%	28.0%	3.6	4.0
Inherently a villain	45.3%	18.7%	21.4%	13.3%	1.3%	2.1	2.0
Compelling backstory	1.3%	6.7%	9.3%	28.0%	54.7%	4.3	5.0
Redeeming qualities	5.3%	8.0%	24.0%	45.3%	17.4%	3.6	4.0
Interesting powers / talents	2.7%	14.7%	25.3%	25.3%	32.0%	3.7	4.0
High IQ	10.8%	16.2%	24.3%	32.5%	16.2%	3.3	3.0
Sinister voice	29.3%	18.7%	28.0%	17.3%	6.7%	2.5	3.0
Excentric design	13.3%	13.3%	28.0%	26.7%	18.7%	3.2	3.0
Based on real life model	49.3%	20.0%	24.0%	6.7%	0.0%	1.9	2.0
Relatability	10.6%	10.7%	12.0%	40.0%	26.7%	3.6	4.0
Fan content outside of the game	50.7%	13.3%	21.3%	12.0%	2.7%	2.0	1.0

Figure 23. Percentages on the qualities respondents thought of as important

Many of the iconic characters mentioned earlier like lady Dimitrescu from *Resident Evil Village* (2021) or GLaDOS from *Portal* (2007) have had or still have content catered to them online, which has been a part of their success. As social media trends can accelerate the visibility of a product, it would not have been unanticipated that content outside of the game could have an impact on the interestingness of a character. In this case it most likely was not seen as a part of the character but an unimpactful extension.

The last question inquired what qualities the respondents thought would make an antagonist more interesting. This open-ended question was split into 8 categories, these being relatability, interaction, mystery, uniqueness, narrative, visual design, morality and other as seen in Figure 24.

Many of the respondents accentuated that the antagonist being relatable was important to them. Being able to understand why the antagonist does what they do creates a bond between the viewer and the character which in turn can make the viewer be more emotionally invested.

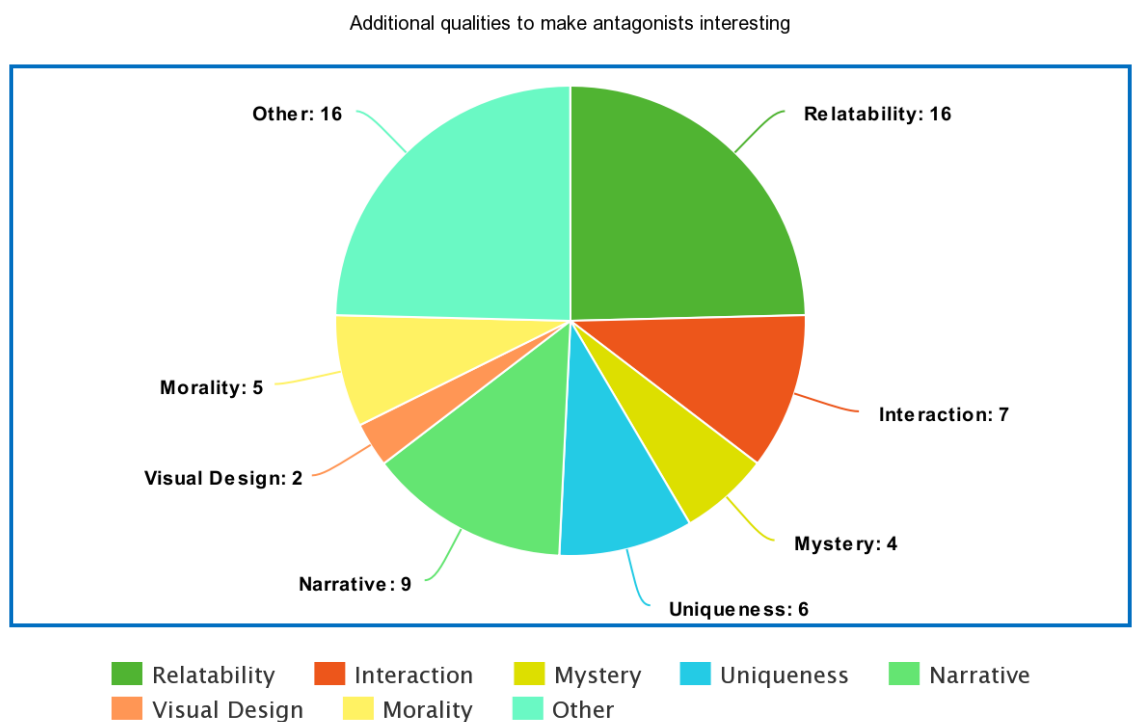


Figure 24. Distribution of categories on additional qualities that would make antagonists interesting

Some respondents also emphasized that the interactions between the main character and the antagonist were important as this could also help with establishing a relationship with the character.

Throughout the answers to question 12, respondents described a need for mystery and/or uniqueness for the antagonist. One respondent described uniqueness in a character as follows:

“For me personally, I think an antagonist really sticks out for me when there's something about them that makes them very unlike any other character present in the game (N from Pokémon or Vaas from Far Cry 3 for example). What makes them unique could be many things, be it their unvillainous villain energy in the case of N, or the complete and utter lack of any kind of remorse, as well as memorable quotes and taunts in the case of Vaas or S.H.O.D.A.N. I like seeing concepts I have never/rarely experienced before, and I value character interaction between the protagonist/other important characters and the villain highly. I think it makes the storytelling feel more impactful and intimate. Redemption arcs can be great as well when it fits the plot/character, but it's not a must and I can enjoy a relatable villain with an elaborate backstory just as much as an antagonist that feels very elusive, who is just making an impact with their twisted morals and/or crazy abilities.”

Some respondents elaborated that narrative aspects made antagonists more interesting. Especially a well written back story was mentioned multiple times. One of the answers to the question described it as follows:

“Please no more psychopaths who are just in the mood to destroy the protagonist or her world and accidentally got the super power to do it. Plain evils are so boring! Example from FFXIV: Zenos.”

Another respondent commented on the importance of understanding where an antagonist derives their actions from, as illustrated in their comment:

“I love complex antagonists with their own backstory and their own personal reasons for acting towards you that you can understand, even if they are wrong from your point of view and you cannot agree. Antagonists who show a character development during the story.”

A couple of the respondents mentioned a good visual design to be included. Others expressed that the characters' morals and motivations were important to them. In the section “other” were comments that either had very specific demands that did not fit in the categories mentioned before or general

comments on multiple subjects that the respondents wanted to explore. One respondent described it as follows:

“Out of my perspective it is not a "quality", "stat" or "feat" which makes an antagonist an antagonist. When their actions are lame, it does not matter if they got a sinister voice, are relatable or got a high IQ. I'd argue that we consider somebody an antagonist when their actions trigger strong feelings - no matter in which direction.”

5.3 Conclusion on survey results

This survey served as a collection of thoughts by gamers on how they perceive antagonists. Not only was it important to see which specific attributes contributed to better antagonists but also getting data on emotional connections that respondents had with characters. Since many of the questions in the survey were open-ended, respondents were able to express their thoughts freely which contributed to the amount of descriptive answers. Subsequently the question on how antagonists are perceived by gamers and what attributes were deemed as important or memorable was answered through this survey.

The survey was available online from the 13th of January 2023 to the 15th of February 2023. Stratified sampling was used to collect answers from respondents who played games. 76 respondents took part in the survey, of which all responded to the first 9 questions and 75 to the 10th and 11th question and only 67 to the 12th question. Some respondents may have not answered all questions and ceased taking part in the survey before the end.

Some of the key results of this survey were that no specific attribute made the antagonist favorable but more so a well composed synergy that made an antagonist stand out. Which attributes exactly to use is up to the designer but it should be kept in mind that the traits should fit the overall narrative and tone of the game and make an impact on the player through antagonist driven interactions. Another point that came up during the survey was that respondents felt the need to understand the motivations behind the antagonists actions. Even though respondents did not necessarily want to sympathize with the antagonist they wanted to be able to relate to the antagonist's actions and general state of mind.

Similar to typical antagonists, a non-archetypal antagonist's design did not consist of specific attributes. More so does an untypical antagonist strive to be unlike what typical antagonists in that time frame are. Depending on which traits are trending in the cultural frame, non-typical antagonists may differ from trends and strive to embody different goals and ideals. Some recurrent themes that were associated with untypical antagonists in the survey results were emotionally driven and narrative involved antagonists, uniqueness, and overall embodiment of uncommon traits in antagonists.

What can be concluded from this survey is that when designing antagonists or villains, is that the presence of the character should be deliberate and not arbitrary. It is at the designer's digression how to flesh out these characters, but general design guidelines, for example books on character design or writing courses, should be taken into consideration. This is why well thought-out characters with their own voice and goals are more likely to make players interested and invested in them, which in return can make the character or narrative more successful.

6 EXECUTION

The goal of this thesis was to create the concept for a character called *Ego* for Dark Amber Softworks. *Ego* is the main antagonist of their ongoing production KVLТ, which will be developed in Unreal Engine and is planned to be released primarily on PC, OSX and iPad OS and secondarily on Xbox.

It was of importance that the character's intentions and narrative path were incorporated into the visual design as the producer so wished during the development. The author worked on these concepts during an internship with Dark Amber Softworks, which is why more work on the project was completed than is within the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, the concepts that were agreed upon included the character *Ego* and the two familiars that got designed along with them.

The author of this thesis used Clip Studio Paint, Procreate and Blender for the production of the concepts and a Huion Kamvas 24 drawing monitor.

6.1 Written background material and comments from Dark Amber Softworks

Before starting work on the character, Dark Amber Softworks provided texts and demo scenes from the project to illustrate what kind of atmosphere the game was aiming for. Some of the keywords and concepts that were targeted were:

- Dealing with uncertainty
- The world is Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous
- The concept of retaining hope/optimism through uncertainty
- Building community as well as things
- Destroying things that are safe and known because they prevent you from creating something better

Other points specifically on the character *Ego* were about his personality and interactions. Dark Amber Softworks commented the following on *Ego*:

“Ego considers themselves compassionate and loving. They are certain that they are acting in everyone’s best interests and will not even entertain the idea that they are always not in the right. They never taunt or act aggressively as that would go against their self-image. Their primary tone towards the player is gentle yet condescending, however the gentleness fades away over the course of the game to be replaced by a stricter parental tone. They see themselves as knowing better than everyone else and believe it is their duty to guide the player to a “proper” understanding. Ego is not evil, merely misguided. Important to not portray them as outright villainous.”

On the interactions between *Ego* and the player Dark Amber Softworks commented this:

“Ego does not attack the player directly. They alter the environment -sometimes in very drastic ways- to halt the player’s progress. Effectively they add complications to puzzles and/or traversal that the player has just figured out. (Ex: Player needs to record a specific sound from one part of the map. When they reach that area, Ego is there and talks to them. After the dialogue, the return path has been blocked with a maze.) The added complications become more challenging as the game goes on and Ego becomes more desperate to stop the player from advancing. At the final level of the game the player overcomes Ego once and for all and forces them to face their own flaws. Ego is hurt by this realization and lashes out at the player for one last “encounter”. Once they have calmed down, they are able to recognize the mistakes they made and own up to them. They then declare

they will not give up and will rebuild everything, but in a healthier way. Ego is rehabilitated at the end, not destroyed.”

These comments also clarify why *Ego* is considered a non-archetypal antagonist. As discussed in the theoretical part of this thesis, non-archetypal antagonists are antagonists with untypical features, which in this case are *Ego*'s compassion and care for the player. Another point that makes *Ego* different from contemporary antagonists is that they consider themselves to be truly good and after they realize that they have been in the wrong, want to change themselves to be better. Nevertheless, as *Ego* actively opposes the protagonist through the game, they are still considered to be an antagonist.

In conversations with Dark Amber Softworks the visuals of the character were also discussed. As *Ego* thinks of themselves as a positive influence on the player and does not want to scare them, it was decided that *Ego* should have some seraphic or angelic features like wings and/or a halo. As *Ego* is not human either, deciding upon the gender presentation of the character fell on making them androgynous. For one as to make them more angelic and to add more mystery to the character. As for the clothing, something savior-like but elegant was wanted, so one choice was to focus on flowy robes.

Another aspect of *Ego* was the familiars that were planned, but the designs of these are not included in this thesis, but it is important to note that they are a part of *Ego*. As to why they are needed for some scenes in which *Ego*'s physical appearance could not be shown or it was not fitting, which is why an animal companion was to be designed. As the setting is fictional, the familiar was set out to be a fantasy animal with features of more than one animal.

6.2 Research and Mood boards

In the early chapters of this thesis the importance of the background work was emphasized as it was an integral part of designing a character. The first step to find the right visual direction was to review the background material on *Ego* and then to discuss the main points with Dark Amber Softworks. After exploring what ideas and expectations Dark Amber Softworks had for the

character design, the research into what kind of visuals were wanted started. As discussed in subsection on background information, *Ego* as a character was meant to be portrayed as elegant and angelic, but eerie in a way that the player was aware that something was not quite right about the intentions of the character. This meant that the references should be of characters that reflected these attributes.

As no specific aesthetic from real life influences needed to be considered, the author of this thesis could freely choose references based on the descriptions from Dark Amber Softworks. Some of the inspiration for *Ego* came from the idea of the author, who suggested that as *Ego* is not a human being, *Ego*'s face and facial features could be a creature's mimicry of human traits. This led to the idea of including either masks or another way to hide *Ego*'s "real" face.

One example in the mood boards for *Ego* were Cyndy Calisbury's works seen in Figure 25. Calisbury works on masks crafted with traditional techniques and materials of Italian mask makers and seemed fitting as references for *Ego*'s aesthetics.



Figure 25. Comedy-Tragedy proscenium mask (Calisbury 2014)

Generally, many of the influences gathered for the mood boards were of statues, masks and paintings of ancient Greek and roman cultural heritage as

it was seen as suitable for *Ego*. Other aspects considered were imagery of surreality, paintings and pictures that depicted fictional settings which had a melancholic or dreamlike atmosphere to them.

6.3 Concepts and iteration

The first concepts that approached the visuals of *Ego* were rough sketches of ideas that could embody *Ego*'s personality and goals in some way, as illustrated in Figure 26.



Figure 26. The author's first sketches on *Ego*

A sentence that stuck with the author was “Duality of the ego” which prompted the author to try giving *Ego* two faces that were conjoined in the middle, or masks that would convey the different emotions of *Ego*. Other aspects to keep the character mysterious and eerie was to make the face uncanny. Some ideas here were that either *Ego* had a hollow head so that the player would not have eyes to look at or that *Ego*'s real face was hidden behind masks (as to mask his intentions). This idea goes back to the theoretical part of this thesis where it was mentioned that a character's narrative path should be reflected through them. *Ego*'s true personality is hidden behind their caring

and nurturing front behind which is the need to control and parent the player. Consequently, hiding *Ego's* face symbolizes this aspect of them.



Figure 27. First character concepts of *Ego*

The author, based on these ideas, then drew different visuals for *Ego* trying to capture the most interesting explorations in each figure as is shown in Figure 27. Dark Amber Softworks evaluated these figures on which seemed to best fit their image of *Ego* and further additions to the design were also discussed. Based on the wishes of Dark Amber Softworks, the masks surrounding the head were chosen as a concept for the facial features for *Ego*. Later in production these would have different facial expressions to be able to show the player some of the inner workings and emotions of *Ego* while they converse with the player. Another point which encouraged the usage of multiple face fronts was the audio design that is planned for *Ego*. According to Dark Amber Softworks, the intention was that *Ego's* voice would not only

consist of one voice, but at least a female and male voice played on top of each other.



Figure 28. Concepts on the masks and halo for *Ego*

The ideas and alterations were adopted as shown in Figure 28, but this combination of masks and gears posed a technical problem as turning the gears to show the right mask could not work when all gears were facing in the same direction.

In the next phase the details of *Ego*'s design were explored. Dark Amber Softworks' wish for the character was to have flowy and seraphic clothing, which can be interpreted as for example a toga or other loose clothing that would give an angelic look to *Ego*. The idea behind the shape of the clothing piece and body was to give *Ego* a rectangular base shape to reflect reliability but to combine it with soft, roundish shapes to convey approachability.

Another element that needed more exploration was the halo and headpiece. As the headpiece so far consisted of 2-3 gears and it was not functional in its current form, the author designed four variants (Figure 29) to explore other possibilities.

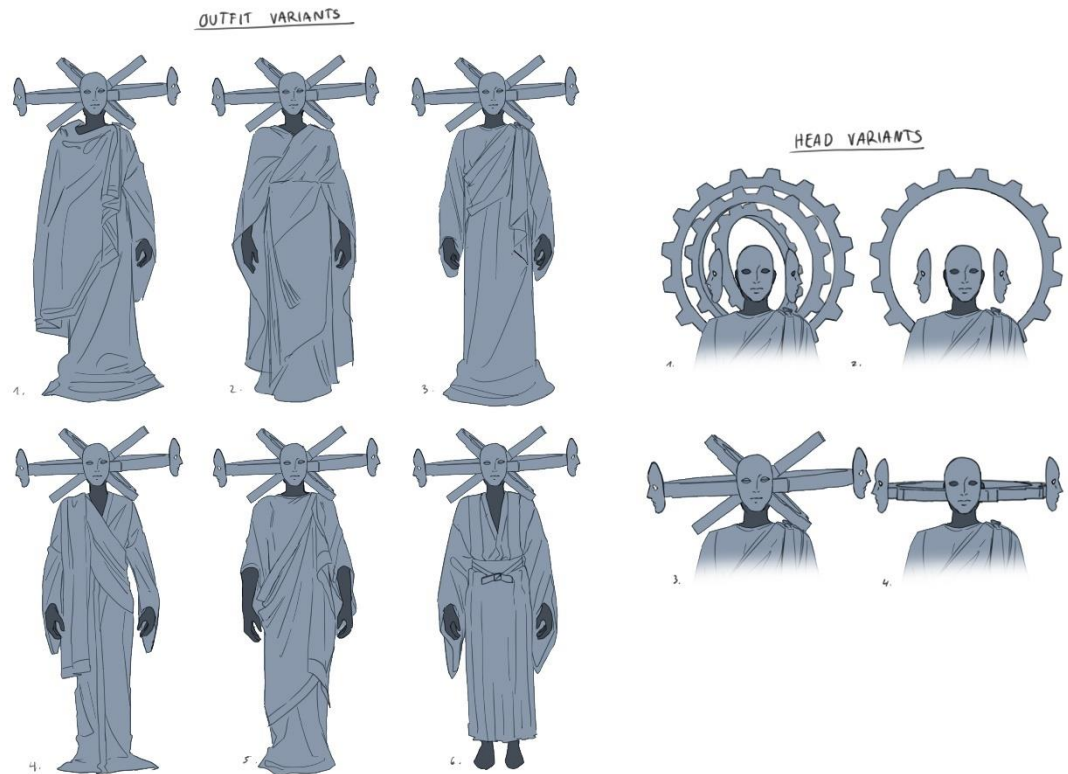


Figure 29. Exploration on *Ego's* clothing and headpiece

From the alternatives in Figure 29 initially the third outfit variant and the fourth headpiece were chosen for *Ego* as they suited Dark Amber Softworks' vision best.

6.4 Feedback and final concepts

Some of the problems with *Ego's* design were that their statue was too even, which defeated having an interesting head piece as part of the design. Even though the silhouette was recognizable, there was not enough room for the headpiece to excel, so the design had to be changed. One design that accounted for more space around the head of *Ego* was head variant 2 from Figure 29, but it was not completely to Dark Amber Softworks' wishes, so it still needed some alternations. As mentioned before, it was considered to add a halo to *Ego's* design, but it did not get implemented as the headpiece was in focus. This idea was repurposed as a solution for the headpiece by adding it behind the character as an aura.



Figure 30. *Ego* with the outfit and headpiece variants and the familiars

The change, as illustrated in Figure 30, gave the opportunity to make the gear that holds the masks less busy as well as give a light source to *Ego*. This was also symbolically a favorable choice, as light is also used in early Christian paintings as a manifestation of God or Jesus Christ (Fumić 2020) and gave *Ego* a more angelic demeanor.

As the color identity of *Ego* was still debated during preproduction, only prototypes were designed as can be seen in Figure 31. The idea was that the color of *Ego*'s clothing would change depending on the act of the game, as they symbolized different seasons of *Ego*'s narrative. Another way to emphasize *Ego*'s inner world was to use the halo's color in combination with the masks to support its meaning.



Figure 31. Potential color variations for *Ego*

Ego's design now represented the traits that Dark Amber Softworks had listed in the background materials. They were kept approachable through human like features and clothing, round shapes (gears) and generally an inviting posture. Still some aspects were kept mysterious and deceptive as to communicate to the player that the character is not just a harmless non playable character.

As seen in the final concept shown in Figure 32, *Ego's* personality was also depicted through the choice of clothes and overall demeanor. As *Ego* thinks of themselves as a savior, the angelic features (flowy clothing and halo) and extravagant elements that were added reflect these aspects.

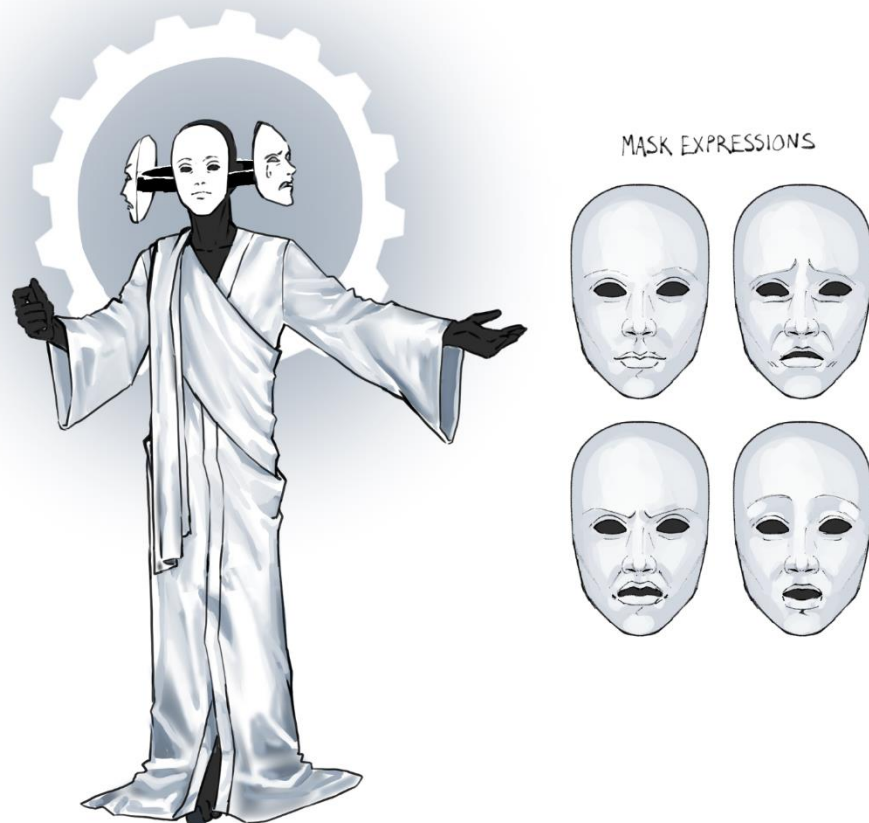


Figure 32. Final concept of *Ego*

7 CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to design the character *Ego* for Dark Amber Softworks in the framework of *Ego* being a non-archetypal antagonist. The design was created by basing it on character writing and character design theory.

Aspects that *Ego's* design needed to embody were their friendliness and approachability as well as their hidden agendas. This was achieved by composing a design that had round as well as rectangular shapes. The round shapes seen in the character's halo, gear-like headpiece, and oval-shaped masks, symbolize effeminate traits whereas the rectangular aspects, parts of the gear and cylinder-shaped body, embody sturdiness and their inflexibility. The masks surrounding *Ego's* upper body were added to illustrate the dichotomy between their intentions and actions, indicating the character's internal thoughts. These could also be used to give the character human-like traits to make them more familiar. An aspect of the character's halo was the intention of bringing a light source in to illustrate the connection between the character and their implied holiness. Another was to be able to amplify the masks significance in terms of showing *Ego's* emotions through color.

The final concept presented in this thesis was approved by Dark Amber Softworks and is going to be used as a base for 3D implementations in their game.

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Figure 3. A The final scene in Way Out (EA 2018) featuring Leo and Vincent in the two possible endings. Electronic Arts. 2018. A way Out. Video Game. California: Electronic Arts.

Figure 4. Ellie (on the left) and Abby (on the right) from The Last of Us Part II. Sony Interactive Entertainment. 2020. The Last of Us Part II. Video Game. California: Sony Interactive Entertainment.

Figure 5. Tips & Techniques on shape language. Walt Disney. 2020. Tips & Techniques Shape Language. PDF document. Available at: https://www.waltdisney.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/T%26T_ShapeLang_v9.pdf [Accessed 13.04.2023]

Figure 6. Circle shapes used as a base for characters. Walt Disney. 2020. Tips & Techniques Shape Language. PDF document. Available at: https://www.waltdisney.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/T%26T_ShapeLang_v9.pdf [Accessed 13.04.2023]

Figure 7. Kirby from Kirby and the forgotten Land. HAL Laboratory. 2022. Kirby and the Forgotten Land. Kyoto: Nintendo

Figure 8. Changes in character perception as a result of alterations in shape language. Pikatl. 01.03.2021. Tweet. Available at: <https://twitter.com/pikatl/status/1366431850487418885/photo/1> [Accessed on 08.04.2023]

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Figure 10. Goofy, Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck's silhouettes. DisneyFanatic. 2015. Can You Identify These 10 Disney Movie Animal Silhouettes? Web page. Available at: <https://www.disneyfanatic.com/can-you-identify-these-10-disney-movie-animal-silhouettes/> [Accessed 13.04.2023]

Figure 11. Examples of the color schemes listed above. Maulina, A. N.d. Guide to Creating Color Schemes. Web page. Available at: <https://www.clipstudio.net/how-to-draw/archives/156922> [Accessed 14.04.2023]

Figure 12. How hue, value, and saturation work in combination with each other. Hue, Value, Saturation. N.d. Learn. Web page. Available at: <http://learn.leighcotnoir.com/artspeak/elements-color/hue-value-saturation/> [Accessed 09.04.2023]

Figure 13. How colors affect the mood of an image. Maulina, A. N.d. Guide to Creating Color Schemes. Web page. Available at: <https://www.clipstudio.net/how-to-draw/archives/156922> [Accessed 14.04.2023]

Figure 14. Distribution of favourite video game genres in the survey. 2023.

Figure 15. Division of favourite video game antagonists of question 3. 2023.

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Figure 32. Final concept of Ego. 2023.

SURVEY RESULTS

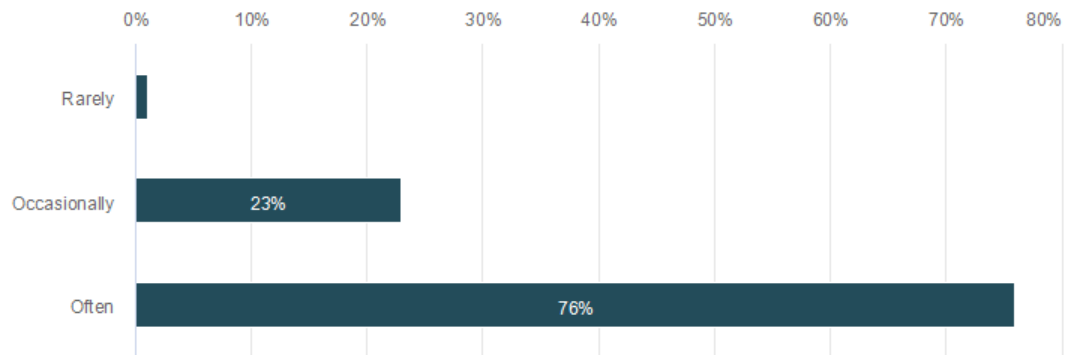
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Antagonists in video games

Total number of respondents: 76

1. You play games...

Number of respondents: 76

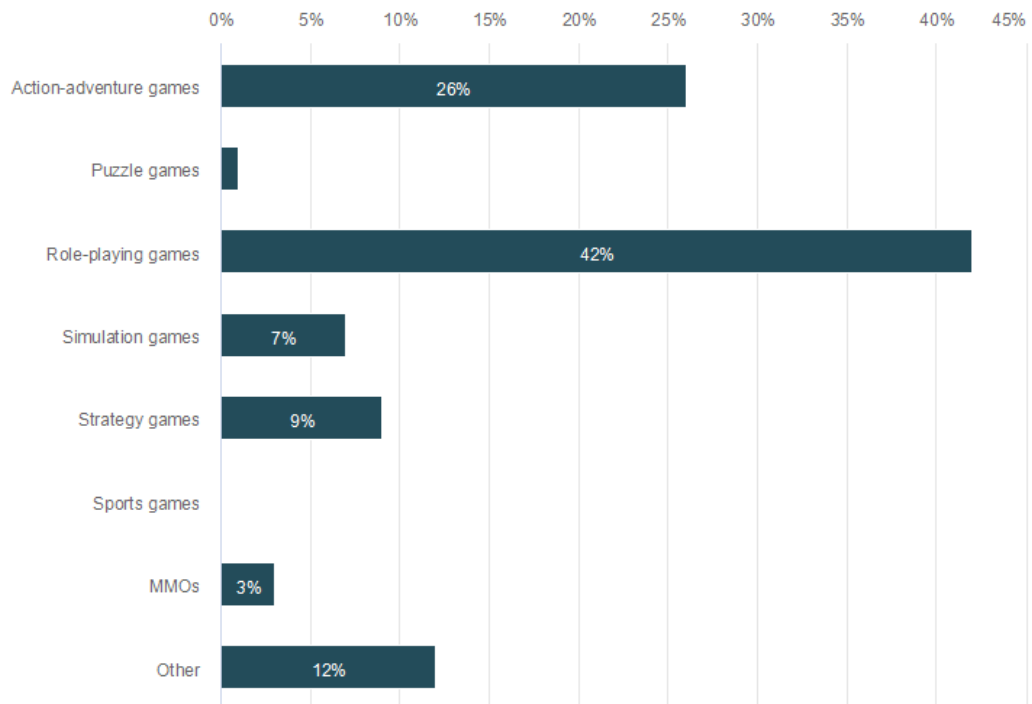


	n	Percent
Rarely	1	1.3%
Occasionally	17	22.4%
Often	58	76.3%

2. Your favorite video game genre is...

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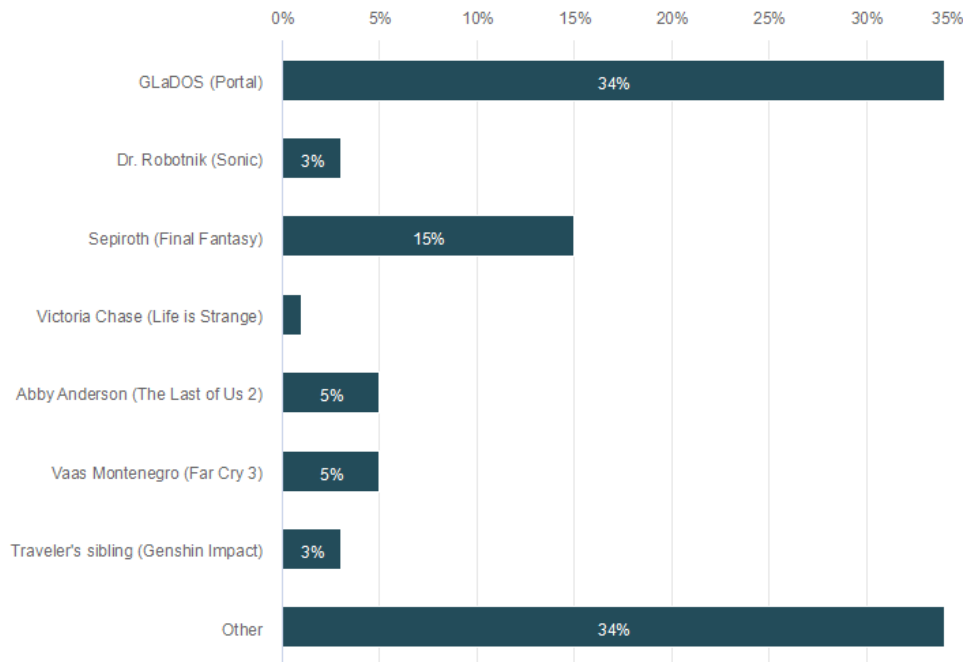
Number of respondents: 76



	n	Percent
Action-adventure games	20	26.3%
Puzzle games	1	1.3%
Role-playing games	32	42.1%
Simulation games	5	6.6%
Strategy games	7	9.2%
Sports games	0	0.0%
MMOs	2	2.6%
Other	9	11.9%

3. Which of the following video game antagonists is the most memorable to you?

Number of respondents: 76



	n	Percent
GLaDOS (Portal)	26	34.2%
Dr. Robotnik (Sonic)	2	2.6%
Sephiroth (Final Fantasy)	11	14.5%
Victoria Chase (Life is Strange)	1	1.3%
Abby Anderson (The Last of Us 2)	4	5.3%
Vaas Montenegro (Far Cry 3)	4	5.3%
Traveler's sibling (Genshin Impact)	2	2.6%
Other	26	34.2%

4. Who is the character and from which game are they?

Number of respondents: 26

Count Bleck from Super Paper Mario

Adam and Eve from Nier:Automata

Handsome Jack (Borderlands 2)

S.H.O.D.A.N. from the System Shock Franchise.

Emet Selch, Final Fantasy XIV

"The Guardian" from Ultima VII: The Black Gate

I exclusively play realistic VR flight simulators, no enemies, unless you consider a 900 pages cockpit procedures manual you have to read before playing an enemy.

Not sure I'm the right target for this survey, the only game I play is this https://store.steampowered.com/app/450540/Hot_Dogs_Horseshoes__Hand_Grenades/ and literally nothing else, so 99% of the time my "enemies" are metal targets, I did try the take & hold mode a couple years ago and the enemies were generic hot dogs acting like soldiers.

Lan Di (Shenmue 1 - 3)

Walter Sullivan in Silent Hill 4

Lusamine (Pokemon Sun and Moon)

Bowser(Mario)

Rhea/Sothis from fire emblem three houses

OMORI from OMORI

Bowser

Ganondorf

(For the following questions I view them kind of equally.)

The Architect (Dragon Age: Origins – Awakening)

Flowey from Undertale

Ganondorf-Zelda

Bowzer-Mario

Bowser, Super Mario series

Hela (Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice)

Grand Unifier Raker from Guardians of the Galaxy. Great Characterdesign and Backstory!

Vergil

Devil may cry

Silco, Arcane, series based on League of Legends.

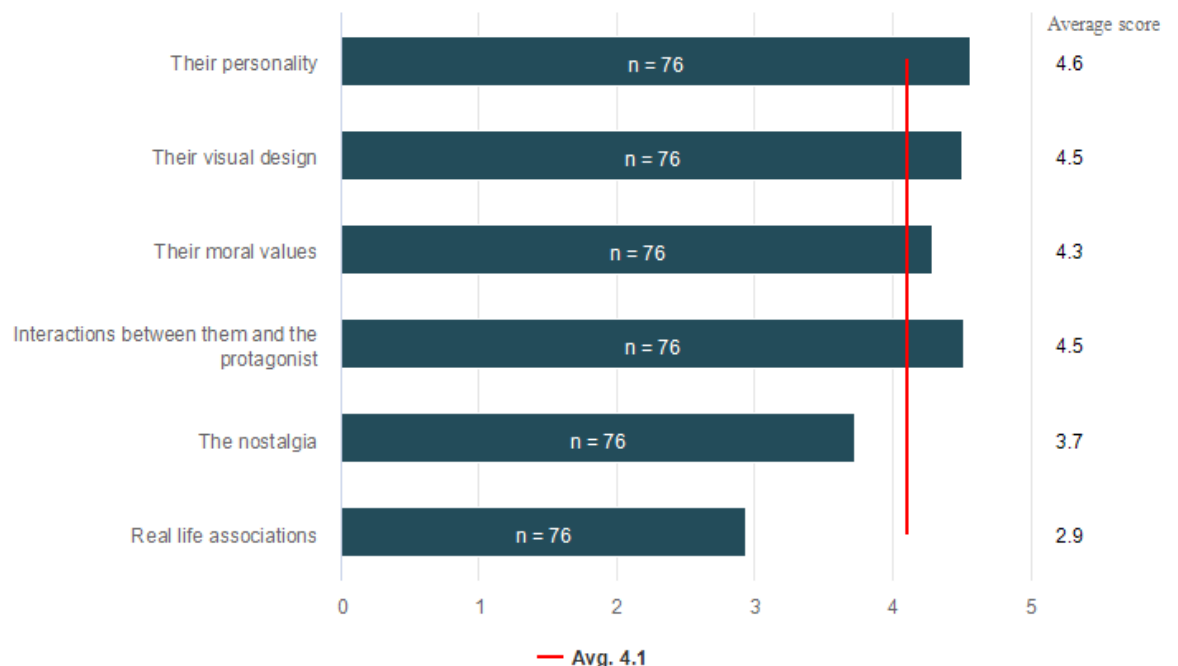
Darth Revan und Darth Malak

My most memorable is Ganondorf/Ganon from the Legend of Zelda series.

Prince Arthas Menethil aka the Lich King from Warcraft universe

5. For your first rated option, you found...

Number of respondents: 76



	Not memor able	Somewh at unmemo rable	Neither importan t or unmemo rable	Some what memor able	Memor able	Aver age	Med ian
Their person ality	2.6%	2.6%	4.0%	17.1%	73.7%	4.6	5.0
Their visual design	1.3%	0.0%	11.9%	19.7%	67.1%	4.5	5.0
Their moral values	2.6%	4.0%	9.2%	30.3%	53.9%	4.3	5.0
Interacti ons betwee n them and the protago nist	1.3%	1.3%	11.8%	14.5%	71.1%	4.5	5.0
The nostalgi a	11.9%	11.8%	13.2%	18.4%	44.7%	3.7	4.0
Real life associa tions	15.8%	22.4%	30.2%	15.8%	15.8%	2.9	3.0

6. What other qualities made them memorable?

Number of respondents: 76

Can't think of any.

the backstory of the character and their involvement in story telling

Their backstory and relationships with other characters

.

Well, I chose this character because Genshin is the only game from the list I played, but I love the idea of grey morality antagonist very attractive. My favourite type of villains is those who are not evil but have their own moral code and follow it no matter what. They don't want to destroy the world or hurt the main character for some unknown or stupid reason, they just have different understanding of what good and evil are.

Specifically the dialogue part of the interaction was the most memorable (Both what she says and how she says it)

Glados is a very memorable villain, she has distinct voice and design, memorable and funny dialogue, and interesting morals: despite being an antagonist (at least in the first game) she helps Chell and even spares her.

Their relationship with each other and clear personality differences.

Vaas is a character that always left an big impression of me.

The guy that felt really crazy and does things that you would never expect. Always going more overboard.

Gameplay made the experience unique and the gameplay experience was enriched by their presence

They are also the main goal and the driving force of the game: the main character tries to find the sibling. They basically have no personality due to the nature of the game.

Their relationship with the mc. The way the characters personality and past were studied and how it made you question how much of her is "human by the realization in the second game.

The antagonis is very memorabel because the player gets (or has) to play as her and see her side of the story.

They made sense, their situation was pretty understandable from the point of view with the level of power he had. Don't become a God of destruction to solve your identity/mommy issues though.

He had really cool set up in the story and they made him a smart villain. They mad him unique

The quality of the voice acting (and writing of their lines) for the character

a good guy gone bad and a personal connection to the main cahracter before launch of the game story S.H.O.D.A.N. is basically a rogue AI, that comments the protagonist's mission to traverse the Space Station to go hunt her down (System Shock 2). She is kind of omnipresent, taunting the player with verbal threats, as well as having the possibility to make the player's mission much harder by draining level ups for example, as well as other mechanic unseen by games of this era. I see her as the predecessor to villains like GLaDOS and who has influenced modern video game design and especially the Sci-Fi/Immersive Sim Genre greatly. I also think it's one of the most well executed stories on Man Vs Machine and AI trying to play God.

Not a plain villain or psychopath. During the story, he changes from 'most evil of the evil guys who want to destroy my world' to a very complex character with well explained reason why he acts his way. In the end, he is no longer an antagonist but a friend.

Mysterious character

Their Comments throughout the game

Can't think of any.

she is very funny

the most incredible Snark EVER written into a video game. It's simultaneously terrifying, hilarious, naive, childish, petulant and sometimes legitimately pitiful.

His voice (or better: the voice acting), his tendency to suddenly comment on the players actions/transgressions. His playful "benevolence".

-

n/a

The hot dogs? Maybe the way they talk in a comedic way, but as said I play 99% of the time in the shooting range level, so the only enemies are metal targets.

Their voice

The cake being a lie

I don't know what you mean by nostalgia an real life associations

the fact that it's not a human

(btw from the games listed I only played portal and far cry 3, so the rest of antagonists are automatically not memorable at all)

Their actions. First they killed the brother of the protagonist, who was actually the hero in the beginning. In the beginning, it seemed impossible to get your hands on Vaas, and he always managed to overtopple the PC in the most unfavourable situations. Then: he was dead. And the rest of the Game was mediocre.

the fact that many people i know liked her more than ellie at the ending of the game

Somewhat symbolizing the goal

the voice, the presentation in the game, that it constantly was there, commenting on the gameplay.

The character

Theme song, character development

It's been many years, but I remember him being somewhat likeable until the end, even though he was clearly doing bad stuff.

GLaDOS is a well written character, possibly the best written one from that selection.

different parts of his life being part of the plot (i.e. the story itself telling us who he is and how he got there).

Their passive-aggressive personality.

The fact that many people can relate to her. The fact she is a "plot twist" villain you don't see until later. Gives legitimate criticism that is meta (the whole line about how what she is doing is no different than Trainers who box their Pokemon in the PC).

The many times you tried to beat him and failed

I liked her moral ambiguity. Like I could see why she did the evil things she did (tried to revive her dead mother by putting her soul into a baby's body) but it was still evil. and i guess also it's kind of sad that she went to such lengths to get her mother back

What the character represents, as he isn't exactly real.

His goals are somewhat similar to yours

He has a menacing presence

He's a person

You fight him, specifically, at the end

I don't know another video game villain who appears as boar. Even though I don't care about the Mario franchise at all, Bowser is very iconic, colorful and unique.

their uniqueness

The animations

She was deterrent

Their storyline and the way it pieces together as you complete the story. The visuals and fourth wall breaking nature of their final battle.

The humour and the background story they added in Portal 2.

Their voice is extremely memorable. Also they are a robot or ai that acts on a whim and reacts to disappointments and stuff which makes them very human and memorable.

Their types of anger, playing the battles against them over and over, when they ruin something in the game you worked on as the protagonist

The way the character is portrayed. Interesting character with good dialogue

The complexity of her story and her acts

.

Not always being strictly evil

He was crazy and you were imprisoned by him multiple times so you could not avoid him.

The possibility that Hela is a manifestation of the protagonist's mental disorder

The way he was introduced in the original game

Their motivations for their actions throughout the story.

funny, serious, does not see herself as bad, her own motives, was bound by its own rules

Their ties to the main character

Very witty, cake

He is portrayed as the villain, still you can't help but rooting for him. You know you should be against him, but you can't help but feel sympathetic for him the more and more you get to know him. Nobody believes they're doing the bad thing, they all believe their beliefs are the right things to do.

Extreme funny interaction

They are epic and they are the protagonists, so that answer shouldn't be taken into consideration

None

Former hero and legend. His evil grin.

Die ganze Idee eines "bösen" supercomputers

Funny sarcasm and smart

Outstanding personality

Sarcasm

To me, Ganon is the perfect personification of what it means to be evil in the world. He is always present in the universe no matter what; not to be contained nor eradicated. His fleeting presence and yet his seamless capacity to destroy the peace established by the main characters often proved to me that he can't really be defined by his intelligence or strength. He, is defined by evil. The developers granted Ganon the power of being unknown, and quite underdeveloped regarding his goals. To me, Ganon fits the description of, the most unassuming characters can wreak the greatest havoc.

The tragic story of a family and a kingdom that has been devastated by the mind-control of the Lich King.

Being utterly insane

7. Are there any aspects of their visual design that were especially appealing?

Number of respondents: 76

Round body but pointy features like nose and mustache

none

Void cape, monocle, mouth

.

Well, all Genshin characters are kinda memorable. But what I personally like, the antagonist in Genshin was technically meant to be the main character if the player made different choice so their appearance is neutral which really suits their grey morality personality.

No

I like that she's not humanoid at all, and that her design isn't "feminized".

They are brothers so their visual designs aren't too different at first or just by quickly looking. But once the story progresses both of them are very different and their designs match their personalities while still looking like almost identical brothers.

I do have to admit that although it is very memorable, it is because of his character why its memorable. I think it would be possible to do various different things to his design and would also work.

The head shape especially

They can be also the playable character depending on which sibling you choose.

Her shape and movements. The head is immediately recognizable, the same way HAL 9000 is. Her design is made even more interesting when you notice her more humanlike shapes and how they depict her in connection to her story.

Most memorable is, that abby is very buffed out in comparison to other girls in the game or even in reality.

Best edgelord design. Big sword is big. The soundtrack associated really enhances the interactions. He stands out against the other characters. His silver hair in contrast with his all black outfit is amazing. It's pretty used concept but still it works way too well. His one wing is probably the most prominent thing I noticed.

The un-naturalness of wearing a face-shaped/textured mask over their face

one wing, leather, long hair, pretty boy

Being an AI, her visual design does not really play a bit role and she only ever received a proper "face-up" in the second game, where she can sometimes be seen staring at the player from big screens with a woman-like face with green tentacle-like appendages and glowing eyes. I think it suffices for what it wants to do, but seeing as she doesn't exactly have an actual body, it's not a strong feature about her character.

It's a typical FFXIV character design. He is quite appealing. Most people like his hairs with the one white streak and that he always looks as if you just have said something very stupid.

Long katana, fighting style

glados visual design made clear, that you were fully under their control, since it was comparable to the testing room and the portalgun and so on

Character is visually appealing (read: attractive) and he has interesting tension with the protagonist.

No

Appendix 1/9

from just her silhouette, you could mistake her for a human prisoner, lashed to the ceiling as some sort of bizarre mad science torture. And that's actually exactly what she really is, underneath all the mechanics and programming.

Google him! The answer's right there! Okay, his stony red face, the yellow glowing eyes, the broken stone teeth.

-

n/a

no

Visuals didn't really matter, since you only hear them for most of the game

I guess the fact that it wasn't even antropomorphic design helps in memorability, but I'd remember glados even if there was nothing to look at, just a voice

Actually not..

Its not the "typical" women

Actually not really

That it was hanging from the ceiling, its size

No

long white hair, black clothing.

I hate the long katana tho.

Unrealistically long and thin blade.

Very long, silver hair.

(A single black wing, always seemed kind of useless. But now that I'm thinking about it, it does seem to have left an impression)

Idk I never really thought about it

His child form

No.

I'm not into woman, but many people like her MILF-ness. Her hair is really big and long, and her battle intro has her step with high heels with a loud accompanying sound effect that's memorable and appealing. Also when she gets her crazy demented smile on.

Nothing in particular. But his whole appearance wa very unique that big ass head piece. also she's a dragon

Yes, the majority of the game is very bright with pastel colors and purple outlines, but OMORI is pure black and white. Every other main character is smiling when they are neutral, but OMORI just has a blank expression on his face. Every other character has a cutesy weapon such as a plushie or a beach ball, but OMORI uses a knife. He doesn't look like he blends into the cute, childish environment at all which makes him stand out.

He's a beautiful man

For Ganondorf I dig the wild hair, the outfit ornaments and the boar symbolism. Boars are also a personal fave, badass and have a fitting reputation of shredding people to pieces.

Bowser works for reasons from answer 6.

Both villains also work well via size and communicated body weight.

the simplicity

The "beauty of the grotesque". I like how he is both elegant and warped, that's my favourite kind of aesthetic.

No

The colors/unusual art style during their final battle and the form changes were so striking and memorable.

Audio-visually yes, the way she speaks is just a great reminder that she is just an AI. When we finally meet her in the game, nice reminder that yes, she is an AI.

The visuals are clean and fit the theme really well, but it's not the main part of the charm. The potato form is especially appealing.

reactions to losing

N/A

Her arms

.

They're very memorable since they're not designed to look like a person, rather a unique species

His crazyness was supported by his style:

Iro Haircut with tank top (may be prejudice but that is what has been utilized)

The size/scale

I really liked his silver hair and brightly coloured eyes, and the contrast between them.

The super cool gold-metalcrystal-robot-arm-thingies.

The intro scene is unforgettable

That they are the exact opposite of the main character, designwise

Nope, maybe that it's a "cold"

His eye and way of moving.

It was an AI

They had Masks and other traits, that made them look martial yet mysterious and powerfull

Blonde hair, clothes

His long white hair and his snakelike mako eyes.

Glados hat ziemliche ähnlichkeit mit einer gefesselten frau was sehr gut zum lore gepasst hat

Cool robot design

No

Not really

Ganon's evolution regarding visual design has been quite amazing. His towering stature, his heavy armour, his enticing yet deathly stare; all this combined created a truly formidable opponent. My most favourite rendition of Ganon came from Twilight Princess. His all-black attire matched with the darker tone of this particular game entry almost made Ganon seem a bit like Darth Vader. As for Ganondorf, despite the greater range of colours and his sometimes unflattering appearance, there's always something quite unsettling and maniacal about how that form would eventually transform into Ganon.

The icy VFX of the eyes/helmet and the overall look of the armor and the famous runeblade "Frostmourne".

The shapes!

8. Who is your personal favorite video game antagonist? (Name of the character and video game)

Number of respondents: 76

Kerrigan-Starcraft

1) Andrew Ryan - Bioshock

Count Bleck

.

Celestia Ludenberg and Enoshima Junko from Danganronpa 1.

Emet-Selch from FF14

I have multiple. For example, Flowey from Undertale,

The Lady, Little Nightmares

Julianna Blake, from the game Deathloop.

Julianna Blake is tasked with hunting you down throughout the game. Since it is a game about timeloops Julianna always ends up in your timeloop trying to stop you in your tracks.

Handsome Jack from Borderlands

Ardyn from Final Fantasy XV.

Saryn - Mass effect

I personally can't think of any but my boyfriend says "pagan min" in far cry 4.

Marika from Elden Ring.

I'd say Sephiroth from final fantasy :)

Anton (Professor Layton & the Diabolical Box)

grigori form dragons dogma, he's an actual dragon

I'll stay with S.H.O.D.A.N. for this one.

As you asked for the most memorable, Emet Selch FFXIV also is my most favourite.

Maybe also Glados from Portal.

Baldur (God of War 2018)

Portal GLaDOS

Lady Dimitrescu, Resident Evil 8

Baddelin from Celeste

glados will do, i'll just leave the others here blank

The Guardian from Ultima VII: The Black Gate

-

n/a

no characters since as said I only play this firearms sandbox called h3vr

GladOS

radiance + hollow knight from hollow knight

Tommy Vercetti (GTA Vice City)

Silence- Horizon Zero Dawn

I can't really name a single one just like I can't name just one favorite game. It all changes and shifts periodically. But top of the list are the bosses from Super Metroid, Dr. Wiley (Mega Man) and Calamity Ganon

Kerrigan (StarCraft 2)

Shadowlord (NieR Gestalt/Replicant)

Xehanort from Kingdom hearts (all games)

Ganon from The Legend of Zelda

Odin from God of War Ragnarök

Either Walter Sullivan again, or Kirie in Fatal Frame 1

Shodan (System Shock)

Ganondorf (Zelda)

GLaDOS (Portal)

Lady Dimitrescu from REV

Akechi from Persona 5 Royal

Sephiroth

Cynder from the Legend of Spyro.

Void Termina Kirby Star allies

I can't choose only one.

Uncharted 4, Rafe Adler

Volo in Pokémon Legends Arceus

Shodan, System Shock 2

Doctor Neo Cortex, Chrash Bandicoot 2

Hat In Time antagonists

2

Micah Bell

Shaun

Fallout 4

Takuto Maruki, Persona 5 Royal

Joseph Seed (Far cry 5)

Slave Knight Gael (Dark Souls III)

Kefka from Final Fantasy VI.

Olgierd von Everec; The Witcher 3 Wild hunt Heart of Stones DLC

Dragons Dogmar, Grigori

Handsome Jack

Handsome Jack from Borderlands 2

Most games I've played don't really have main antagonist, so I'll cheat and say; Nasgul riders from Lord of the Rings.

Bowser from Super Mario

Darth Revan

Star Wars kotor

Scary owl from Ori and the will of the wisp

Riku, Kingdom Hearts 1

Rodrigo borgia assassin creed 2

Glados

The illusive man - Mass Effect 3

Kerrigan from Starcraft 2

Vladimir Makarov, from Call of Duty.

Prince Arthas Menethil aka the Lich King from Warcraft universe

Hades

9. Why are they your favorite antagonist?

Number of respondents: 76

I didn't view what they were doing necessarily evil. Thought they had purpose.

He was initially portrayed as the villain, but turned out to be just an antagonist. He believed in his opinions strongly, that in the end they were his undoing. But while he was stubborn and extremist, his goal was also partially relatable.

They have reason behind their evil. Their goal is to destroy the universe to build a better one without hate and stuff

.

To be fair, all early Danganronpa's antagonists are good and neither good nor evil but these two are my favourite.

I love Celestia because she has a really memorable appearance and personality (and I love her dream of living in the Gothic castle). She is also the best killer from all of the Danganronpa 1 characters with the biggest number of victims.

Enoshima Junko gives me Joker's vibes. They're so alike that I just could say that I love Joker.

How he acts in general is great and after knowing his whole story he becomes very relatable.

Memorable dialogue, interesting design (especially omega Flowey), unexpected and tragic backstory.

Her design is quite simple and memorable while still being unique and complicated. Her motives and morals are interesting. The way she works as a villain is unique.

The beauty of her is that she knows everything about you. but the maincharacter and the player does not know who he himself is. And she always has these talks with the maincharacter or small messages throughout the game. So you don't really know what the connections between them are but you feel way more than just getting killed by this villain.

I love his humor and made encounters with him really enjoyable, fun and memorable.

Because his motivation in helping the main characters is shrouded in mystery for most of the game. His background wasn't revealed until the very end and it was expanded in a DLC in which you actually get to play as him and try out the "evil" powers. He has an agenda of his own. His design is curious with all the heavy clothing and it has a lore-wise reason of him being "allergic" to sunlight lol. Also I like his dramatic mannerisms and way of speaking. Darin de Paul did an excellent job at giving Ardyn a fitting, oily voice. And in the end, he is a villain who wins (after suffering most of his existence).

He plays on integral part of the games over arching philosophy, his morals and so his actions also makes him interesting from the very beginning.

Because he is dressed very memorable and is a total psychopath.

Because they are trying to escape their predetermined role under the Great Will, wants to have choice, but her schemes to achieve that lead to so much suffering. So essentially human.

His story is the best and they made him super unique and pure evil. His character design is pretty cool too.

Nostalgia, he was the first character I ever consciously felt a little obsessed with. Also his design is just very cool looking.

he's an actual dragon and he's also trying to escape fate/ is a victim of fate

I think I explained the most important things earlier. I just think she makes the whole experience of trying to fight your way through the space ship a lot more creepy and threatening, as she's basically the only true interpersonal connection the player has during his whole mission and she's ever present, which enhances her sheer unlimited power over the protagonist even more. She's completely remorseful, megalomaniac and truly sociopathic (maybe traits that are not even completely surprising taking into account that she's non-human), which is genuinely frightening and makes every encounter with her very memorable.

Emet Selch because of the complexity of the character that develops during game. Not a plain evil.

Glados because it is so unusual, like the whole Portal game :)

He isn't bad by nature, rather he was deceived and exploited by his father Odin and driven down a bad path. I like to believe that in different circumstances he would have grown into a gentle soul.

because i like the humour of portal 2 (including the insulting way of GLaDOS)

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I couldn't think of any antagonist that had an in-depth characterization, so I just chose a flashy and fun character. I like the cartoonishness of RE antagonists and Dimitrescu is the most fun and memorable out of them. Her appearance is striking and the interactions with her during the game are exciting since we are trying to avoid her and mostly see her while peeping. Her height is also a fun part of her characterization as it makes her more intimidating and she has to crouch when walking in and out of rooms. The social media response to her was also part of her allure since I feel that part of enjoying a piece of media nowadays is engaging with it online.

She personalizes maddelines insecurities and I think it's a really good portrayal of negative emotions. I also really like the character arc towards the end.

-

Because they are a great antagonist in an even greater game?

Also, see above. Also, the Guardian employed an interesting, non-stupid strategy to conquer and subjugate the lands of Britannia (religion in form of The Fellowship, thus perverting the Virtues etc.).

-

n/a

...

Humour and voice design

hollow knight is an antagonist, even though it's on your side, a pretty interesting concept

radiance is not even a single being, rather a collection of bugs memories, capable of spreading like a disease

it probably can't even be judged as morally bad, as it is some kind of a deity/memory/illness thing

the story in hollow knight is just told beautifully, with a lot of attention to details, but not forced on the player, one of the best narratives in the games I've played

Most likely it is nostalgia that makes this character so special to me, combined with a the best Soundtrack GTA ever provided.

Hes not really "bad" but uses aloy to his interest without her knowing

Again, not necessarily my favorite but they gave me major battles I remember

Because she brings a very human element to an alien race which makes it even scarier if you are not just getting attacked by a swarm controlled by some intelligent mind but a human.

Because they are not typically an antagonist

Xehanort has the perfect masterplan that isn't really possible to be predicted by the player. He is extremely diverse (spoiler) thanks to him creating multiple versions of himself that are all very unique and have different personalities.

Probably a bit biased, because I love those games. But Ganon has many different forms over the different games and feels like a mystery to this day. However, he doesn't have much of a personality, and is kind of repetitive.

He's got many unique things about him that I find interesting, but his uniqueness and his role as an antagonist are secondary to the fact that he's a well-written character- his writing is consistent, his actions make sense with everything we know about him and his goal. His flaws make sense for the sort of person he is and how he sees other people (Brok in particular, if you know what happens in the game. "You got a bargain"). It also really helps that he's in such a well written game.

She's tragic and very creepy, but also still likeable.

Shodan as a rogue superintelligent AI did not have just one evil masterplan but several ones, switching to the next best option after the last failed.

Ganondorf spans multiple games, as his incarnation in OOT is also the same one in Wind Waker and in Twilight Princess due to timeline split. He is powerful, and a typical villain, but also fleshed out well in some titles.

I really liked the way GLaDOS was integrated into the Levels and the way his "personality" was told through the voicelines

i liked her character design

I like how he mirrors the protagonist and how they contribute to each other's character development, along with how the game doesn't really try to redeem him. In the last part of the game, the antagonist joins the protagonist's side. Not because he's become a good person, but because he wants to stick with his own values. He doesn't care if that makes him a terrible person, and in fact, he embraces it.

The game makes you understand why he turned out the way he did, but it doesn't try to redeem him. He's a murderous psychopath who is thirsty for blood, and it just makes him REALLY stand out when he joins your side, especially when everyone else on the team is pretty much 100% a good guy. Also, his English voice actor did an amazing job and really sells the idea that he is absolutely unhinged.

See above

She's the goth girl version of a dragon. Edgy, beautiful, badass. As a kid I wanted to be a cool dragon, so she struck a chord and I somewhat wanted to be like her.

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because of how memorable the music and story of the antagonist is. "The final battle at hand, Void takes his first steps towards a new age. In place of a tyrannical rage, will he find...naptime? Gentle breezes? Treats? He may even dream again..." (that is what the game says about him)

-

Funny, but menacing

You go through the entire storyline getting to know Volo and even being helped by him. In the character's lowest moment in the game, Volo is there to help. It's only after all of that, when Volo's true intentions and true powers are revealed, that he becomes the villain. I never suspected him and he was one of my favorite side characters, so I felt a genuine sense of betrayal that quickly turned into excitement over all the new questions that brought up about his actual past.

Even 25 years later, Shodan is creepy. Player is pretty much the reason she exists in System Shock series and they really managed to make her an alien intelligence, her logic is alien, her actions are alien.

They are very unique with a quirky personality and phenomenal voice acting. The design is colorful and memorable. You cannot mistake this character for anybody else.

they were unique (goofy mafia boss, diva actors, etc) and had quirky humor

2

He is manipulative and very realistic

Story centers around finding your son, who in the end is the main antagonist.

They're not a traditional villain, and made me sympathize with them.

His behaviour (dealing drugs to his sect and brainwashing them) really triggered

They utilized the topic of church - he was a fanatic. That may have reinforced the trigger which results in the player being able to versetz sich in the player character - being the opponent.

The backstory is nicely reflected in the boss fight. Also the fight soundtrack is the best in the series.

Kefka actually manages to destroy the world, and doesn't care one rat's ass about the people who have to live in this world that he managed to destroy. Plus he's batshit insane, his theme music is brilliant.

1. The Witcher 3 ist the GOAT
2. Olgierd is a real badass
3. He has a unique fighting style
4. The story around him is very emersive

Good movement and optimally woven into the game story

Because of his personality

Very funny, yet somewhat relatable. Also he has a believable background story why he is this way.

Their whole design screams bad guys, they're ridiculously strong, but somehow still not invincible. If I could play as a character in the LotR universe I'd choose a nazgul rider.

My favorite still would be something like Silco though, as described previously.

He's not really evil. I like the Artwork. I loved Super Mario games since NES

Epic

Really scary Looks, capable, sad back story

His story throughout the first game is very appealing. You know he fights for the right thing and has a good heart but he has sided with the wrong guys. His best friend Sora (protagonist) constantly tries to get to him and help him find his way back, but his mind is more and more consumed by darkness.

Man könnte den Rache Gedanken von ezio sehr gut nachvollziehen und diese Genugtuung die Pläne "des spaniers " zu vereiteln

Makes funny offensive jokes about the protagonist

Well planned, stays hidden, and nows very well what the protagonist is capable of, doesn't underestimate him

Cunning and intelligent, not just power. Willpower. A kind of justified motivation.

This was the first video game antagonist I became acquainted with, who was evil because it was part of the job. This, is a unique kind of evil that in some capacity can be justified and we can be amazed by the level of intelligence and understanding he exerts in this context, but we still can't agree with his actions when so many lives are surrendered at the hands of one man.

Makarov feels no remorse for anything he does, because in all the pain and suffering he inflicts he knows he's one step closer to satisfying his own goals. There was something incredibly terrifying about a man who will trade blood for money, especially when resulting in the loss of millions of lives and kickstarting WWII. What's even more unsettling is that aside from his dedication towards mass murder, beyond this he's rather ambiguous. Furthermore, leaving even more to fear about his character and what he may do next.

He is irredeemable, and this is what leads him to killing off some of the most beloved characters in

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Modern Warfare. Yet, his transparency and ruthlessness and dedication to himself and his beliefs can almost be admired. Therefore, that dynamic makes you as the gamer question whether or not you are evil for appreciating the nerves of steel this man comes equipped with.

To me, he stands out as a touchstone of a well-written and truly sociopathic character in the Call of Duty series. He's not trivial, nor is he someone to not take seriously. In my eyes, for a pretty fluctuating game series, Makarov stands out as a legitimately terrifying character who, combined, has probably killed more people than any other antagonist.

Because I like the lore around the Lordaeron kingdom and the tragic downfall of the once heroic prince a lot.

Because he's a loving dad

10. Which video game character would you consider a non-typical antagonist / villain?

Number of respondents: 76

Father-fallout 4

Hades - from Hades by Supergiant

Alexander - from Divinity OS 2

Kerrigan - Starcraft

Arthas - Warcraft / World of Warcraft

Count Bleck (Imao)

.

Anton, the main character of the visual novel Tiny Bunny. Although the game is still in the development, I read the original story the game is based on so I'm sure that in one of the endings the main character turns out to be a villain.

Emet-Selch

Deserter from Disco Elysium. Often villains seem powerful and have some sort of important agenda they want to fulfill but Deserter is just a sad, lonely guy living in the past.

Handsome Jack from the Borderlands series.

This is funny enough the perfect non typical Antagonist.

Since in the game the Main character did something that the villain and everyone hates. and now you want to survive and break the timeloop while everyone on the island wants to stop you. Including Julianna she does not show real villainy but she is always on the hunt on you.

Something from Omori (huge spoiler warning if you look into this, I really really recommend playing the game or watching a let's play of it first)

The sibling in Genshin Impact

Abby from Last of us 2. But the reasons are way more on how the game treated her, rather than how the character itself was

Can't think of any either

The Colossi from Shadow of the Colossus. They are just chilling but you need to kill them for your own selfish reasons. Many lives for one, and not even that. In a certain perspective you play the bad guy.

most video games ive played have had super generic villains so i dont really know

Zero III in Virtue's Last Reward, the second game from the Zero Escape Series. Their true identity is a HUGE spoiler but they're just a very grey area villain.

grigori again cause in the end he thanks you for killing him and for releasing him from the wheels of fate and gives you well wishes to your adventures going forward

N from Pokémon Black/White. He is introduced to you as the antagonist of the game, supposedly responsible for the wrongdoings of Team Plasma. During the game, the protagonist keeps meeting this mysterious character over and over and learns more about his personality and intentions (which is friendly, respectful and a bit dreamy). He doesn't feel like it's fair for Pokémon to be stuck with humans in their Pokeballs and doesn't intend to abuse them in any way, releasing them after every single fight. At the end of the game, it's revealed that he was actually just being used by a different villain G-Cis, the actual main antagonist of the game, to awaken the ancient legendary Pokémon (since N had the ability to emotionally empathize and talk to Pokémon on a level that they would immediately trust him as well, making him an outcast ever since his childhood until the main antagonist took him in to raise him up to be his decoy.) In the second entry of the games, he actually leaves the organization to make up for his

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own wrongdoings, not wanting to support them anymore and even intervenes during the protagonist's final battle with G-Cis.

See above

Sephiroth (Final fantasy 7 remake)

the other boy from Pokémon, which also gets his starter from prof oak

I think the origami killer from Heavy Rain is an interesting one since you play as him without knowing he's the killer, while simultaneously helping other catch him. One could also dismiss this as gimmicky.

I don't know. It depends on what you consider a typical antagonist. I'd say Baddeline is pretty different because she is only an antagonist for the first chapters but later becomes your ally.

-

The Guardian, I want to say, but, honestly, almost none. Most antagonists in good(!) RPGs have some interesting backstory or some "non-typical" traits (The Master in Fallout, Jon Irenicus and Sarevok in Baldur's Gate, the Trickster/Pagans and the Mechanists/Karras in Thief I and II). But I think a genuine "non-typical" antagonist doesn't exist. If they existed, they probably would not qualify as an antagonist (in my opinion).

-

n/a

no idea, I think this is a survey for millennials/zoomers playing 2d games (not virtual reality)

I guess GladOS is non-typical

radiance and hollow knight from hollow knight are pretty atypical

Perhaps Firewatch. There is no real antagonist, but still it feels damning.

Vincent from a Way Out

You play both characters till the end and then the big plottwist happens

Mike Tyson in the original Punch-Out,

Annie (League of Legends)

Shadowlord

Theres a lot, also depends on thats typical for the reader.

Im gonna answer: Moon Presence from Blorodborne.

Having a hard time, thinking of someone right now. Sorry

Odin from God of War Ragnarök... lol

The paint brush in Chicory: A Colorful Tale.

I don't know.

Anyone who gives you an escort mission is a villain.

But to answer seriously, maybe Gruntilda from Banjo Kazooie? She's cartoonish in a way that a TV show villain might be, but she seems unique in the video game antagonist world.

The Forest maybe. You only see the antagonist in the first cutscene an after that you can only find his corpse

meg from hades

Maruki from Persona 5 Royal

Omori/Sunny and Basil; Omori (2020)

Vivec from Morrowind

Kirby Antagonists, mainly the newer ones.

Eothis (Pillars of Eternity II: Deadfire)

Don't know, there is to many games

The two I mentioned before (Flowey from Undertale and Volo from Pokemon Legends Arceus) are both non-typical in opposite ways. Flowey is set up from the beginning as an antagonist but gains a sympathetic storyline later. Volo is set up as a friend, but reveals himself as the villain very, very late in the game.

A completely different example of a great non-typical antagonist is Eric from Boyfriend Dungeon. Eric is a romantic stalker with a fantasy-racist set of ideals. That's not exactly a new concept in video games, but what is real was the intensity and realism of his character, which caused real life controversy over the game and his character. It's so unusual to see such genius writing and characterization for a villain. Revolver Ocelot from Metal Gear series. As a (at least) triple-agent, no one knows who he actually works for and he is a very different character depending on the game.

Handsome Jack from Borderlands 2

not sure

2

Joel Miller

Glados

Takuto Maruki

A Way Out - the 2nd player...

Because it is meant as a coop, resulting in the second player being the villain who got tricked by first player

The princess from Bard's Tale

Well, Kefka, actually. He doesn't strike me as a typical villain, because he doesn't really have a reason to destroy the world. He just... wants to. He has no dark history(that I remember, at least) or deep reasoning behind his actions, he does what he does simply because he CAN. And because he's insane.

I would love to give you a good answer here but I really don't have one. Sorry^^

I don't know

The cats in Battle Block Theater

Shaun, Fallout 4. Don't know if you can call him a villain, but basically everyone that you side against in Fallout 4 will be an antagonist because they stand by their beliefs which you don't share.

I can't think of one

Darth Revan

Glados from portal 2

Riku, maybe i like him because of that ;)

Darth Malgus (Star Wars the old republic)

Slenderman

Haytham Kenway - Assassin's Creed

G-man from Half Life (2)

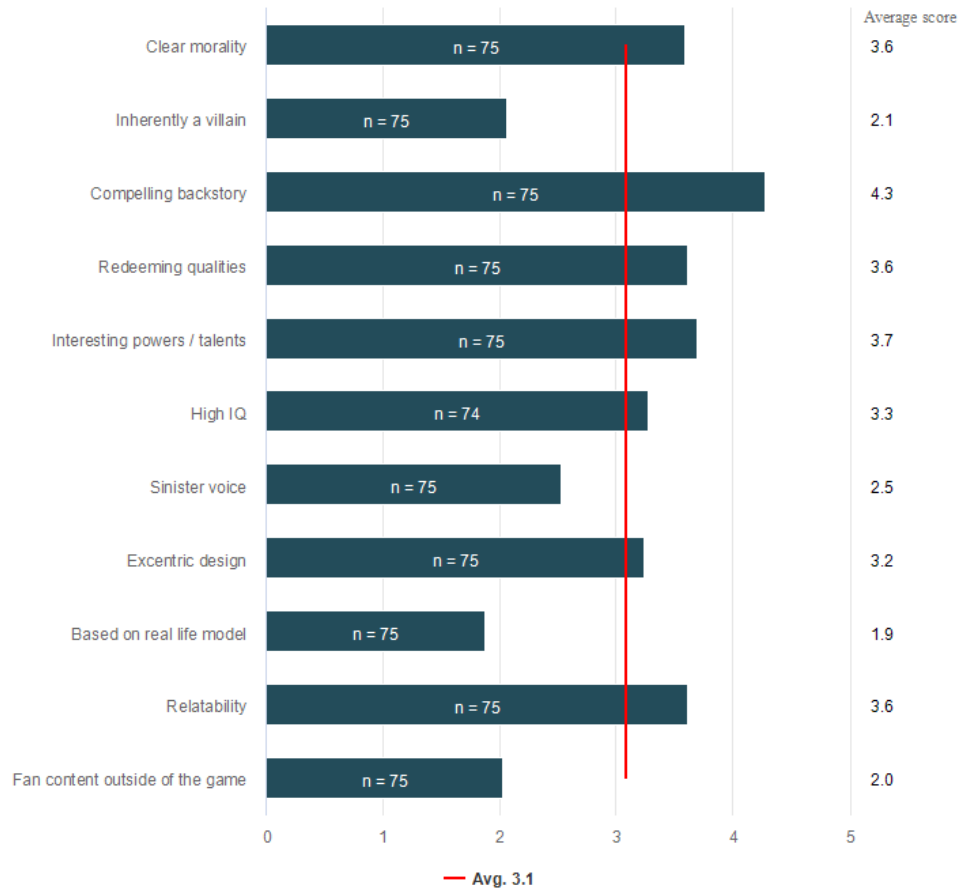
Godot, from Ace Attorney on the surface seems very antagonistic especially towards Phoenix. In the game, he's a difficult character to overcome. However, unlike other prosecutors, he shows that he really does have a flair for the law profession, and won't cheat his way through the system in order to get the opportunity to prosecute people. He attains to his role with morality, respect, and integrity which makes him a formidable 'antagonist', but far from the typical antagonist role which can be seen in the other prosecutors.

Sylvanas Windrunner (Warcraft/World of Warcraft) because at first it seems that she has good intentions, but she slowly gets mad and in the end, it is revealed that she has also been under control of foreign thoughts for all the time.

Abby

11. What qualities make a video game antagonist interesting?

Number of respondents: 75



	Not important	Somewhat unimportant	Neither important or unimportant	Somewhat important	Important	Average	Median
Clear morality	13.3%	4.0%	21.4%	33.3%	28.0%	3.6	4.0
Inherently a villain	45.3%	18.7%	21.4%	13.3%	1.3%	2.1	2.0
Compelling backstory	1.3%	6.7%	9.3%	28.0%	54.7%	4.3	5.0
Redeeming qualities	5.3%	8.0%	24.0%	45.3%	17.4%	3.6	4.0
Interesting powers / talents	2.7%	14.7%	25.3%	25.3%	32.0%	3.7	4.0
High IQ	10.8%	16.2%	24.3%	32.5%	16.2%	3.3	3.0
Sinister voice	29.3%	18.7%	28.0%	17.3%	6.7%	2.5	3.0
Excentric design	13.3%	13.3%	28.0%	26.7%	18.7%	3.2	3.0
Based on real life model	49.3%	20.0%	24.0%	6.7%	0.0%	1.9	2.0
Relatability	10.6%	10.7%	12.0%	40.0%	26.7%	3.6	4.0

Fan content outside of the game	50.7%	13.3%	21.3%	12.0%	2.7%	2.0	1.0
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12. What qualities could be added to make a video game antagonist more interesting?

Number of respondents: 67

Purpose and understanding.

Villains that are relatable are best in my opinion. Characters that you can sympathize with, even if they are going about their business with questionable means. A sad villain story in particular is one of the best kinds (example: Nox from Wakfu anime)

Make them relateable but not so much you'd rather join their side (unless the story goes that way :D)

Connection between MC and Antagonist that is more complex than just being at the same place and time

Some sort of connection to the main character.

A goodguy turned bad. Give the antagonist a tragic backstory or trauma.

Unexpectedness, I am not sure if this a term but basically. The more a villain does things you would never think of keeps things fresh and also always interesting.

Their relationship to the hero

What's their place in the world and how they fit in it (and how they feel about it)

Do they work alone or with someone -> why

Their relationship(s) with their allies/minions

An agenda of their own, preferably an ambiguous motivation that makes you guess. Just something NOT BORING and predictable lol

Depending on the game type and what you set out to explore with the game. It can go between a highly interesting character with morals that don't truly lean good or bad, ones that make you question and think about what the antagonist means in the story and what the game makers try to tell us with them, or a really entertaining personality when the game isn't meant to be thought about too deeply

Turn from protagonist into antagonist (Darth Vader)

To not respond to classic stereotypes, I think it is interesting to make an antagonist that can be seen just as an opposing force that is doing a thing that makes moral sense to the player, that is not insane or paranoid, but understands that what must be done is no easy task and it is a bitter one, but still pushes forward.

great character design makes them better. Im a very visual person if the story of the character can be told in their appearance it makes them 10 times better

Showing a descent into their villainy, be it through backstory or real-time moments during the progressing of the game.

do NOT make em uwu sad bois, thats boring, just gimmi villanous villains who wanna fuck shit up and look fabulous while doing it

For me personally, I think an antagonist really sticks out for me when there's something about them that makes them very unlike any other character present in the game (N from Pokémon or Vaas from Far Cry 3 for example). What makes them unique could be many things, be it their unvillainous villain energy in the case of N, or the complete and utter lack of any kind of remorse, as well as memorable quotes and taunts in the case of Vaas or S.H.O.D.A.N. I like seeing concepts I have never/rarely experienced before and I value character interaction between the protagonist/other important characters and the villain highly. I think it makes the storytelling feel more impactful and intimate.

Redemption arcs can be great as well when it fits the plot/character, but it's not a must and I can enjoy a relatable villain with an elaborate backstory just as much as an antagonist that feels very elusive, who is just making an impact with their twisted morals and/or crazy abilities.

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Please no more psychopaths who are just in the mood to destroy the protagonist or her world and accidentally got the super power to do it. Plain evils are so boring! Example from FFXIV: Zenos.

I love complex antagonists with their own backstory and their own personal reasons for acting towards you that you can understand, even if they are wrong from your point of view and you cannot agree. Antagonists who show a character development during the story.

A clear objective and motives, regardless if they are explained to the audience or kept as a mystery. The whole design (not just visually) must end in a good final result (which suits the game) therefore I think it's not really suitable, to give an direct and clear answer to the qualities which an antagonist should have.

I don't think a successfully interesting character is a sum of certain attributes. I think there is an elusive quality to successful writing and design that can't be pinpointed by extracting different attributes from memorable characters.

Interesting interactions with the player

their agenda. I need to understand what their goals are, understand what they're doing to accomplish them, and I have to believe that it's an effective way to accomplish their goals.

no more "destroy the world so I can become a god" schemes please, unless you're going full 50s B-movie camp.

He could win? That would be "interesting". Also, the "I am legend" move: it turns out, the real villain has been you (the hero) all along? But I think everything in this regard has been done several times in the past already. Maybe not specifically in video games, but in story-telling in general for sure.

I have no interest in antagonists, I only care about the realism of the firearms included, for example in h3 I use the same Daniel Defense Mk18 S&W I use in real life at the shooting range every weekend, using the valve index controllers' individual finger tracking I have to physically press on the paddle on the side of the receiver, like I do on the real rifle, to release the bolt carrier group assembly, thus chambering a cartridge. That is why I do not like games like Boneworks or Half Life Alyx, yes they might have more "appealing" enemies to kids (I prefer metal targets, again I play for the guns), but the firearms realism is despicable, you cannot even put the fire selector on safe for example.

The best antagonists are the ones I feel conflicted about defeating. When you it feels necessary or unavoidable, but I'm still sad about it because they have redeeming qualities and/or a tragic backstory. The Soulsborne games do this very well, making me feel sorry for the foes. Even going as far as making the player feel like they might be the real villain.

clear morality seems to make an antagonist less interesting to me

Out of my perspective it is not a "quality", "stat" or "feat" which makes an antagonist an antagonist. When their actions are lame, it does not matter if they got a sinister voice, are relatable or got a high IQ. I'd argue that we consider somebody an antagonist when their actions trigger strong feelings - no matter in which direction.

(evil) intentions

make her/him surprisingly normal, show some human qualities.

clear, comprehensible behavior of the villain so that the player might sympathize with the villain, understands her/his motives and might even question his own beliefs.

I think the most important and interesting part is that the player understands why the antagonist is doing what they are doing. I always refer back to a finding Yoko Taro made after 9.11: "You don't have to be insane to kill someone, you just have to think you are in the right to do so."

nothing else.

Being well-written. Why do they do what they do? What do they value, and why?

Just as long as no extremities are taken. Don't overdesign a villain, but don't make them super simple either. Don't make a villain SUPER relatable, but don't make them a villain "just cuz they are" either. Not every villain needs a horrific tragic backstory, and not every villain has one either.

I think the perfect secret ingredient to making antagonists good (story wise) is to make sure a villain isn't 100% to blame. Maybe there's a man behind the curtain, maybe the villain is only part of a further evil organization, maybe the villain is only a symptom of a wider problem and is a result of that problem and not the cause of said problem, etc.

As for the actual gameplay, make sure that when you face the villain, their battle is memorable. Music is important, setting and stage is important (especially if it's a final boss and not a recurring villain you face). Also you don't have to make them particularly hard, but make the battle at least memorable, maybe you have to use an item or strategy you hardly use, maybe it's a culmination of many things you've had to use over the course of the game. This is more final boss/true antagonist vibes, but nothing is more disappointing than a villain which is hardly referenced suddenly appears endgame as

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the big boss, cuz there's no emotional value especially if its a very easy final boss. At the same time, nothing is more disappointing than a game where an antagonist is referenced so many times in a game but you never get to target and battle them until the end of the game, and after all of that, it's super easy to defeat them even though text in the game make it seem like they were SO hard.

mysterious

a complex relationship with the protagonist

A lot of things. It really just depends on what kind of antagonist you want to make, and which type makes the most sense in the story. I'd say their personality is the most important thing, since personality can also determine why they made certain choices. A lot of my favorite antagonists are vastly different from each other. A character who is irredeemable and absolutely insane can make an amazing antagonist. A morally grey character can make an amazing antagonist. An antagonist who is the good guy while the protagonist is the bad guy is a refreshing change of perspective. An antagonist who makes you question your own morality is interesting. Hell, even a character who is just a giant piece of shit can be good due to how much raw hatred you have towards them can be good. It's super satisfying to kick their asses when it comes to the boss fight. But, yeah, basically, there are a lot of things that can make a character interesting. It just depends on how it's executed.

Self-awareness as villain.

An interesting personality, obviously. Or something unique like being a robot/cyborg/AI/etc. and not feeling anything at all.

Better back story?

I want to know not just was their morals and backstory are, but what their motivation are. So many great villains have a great characterization, but the game ends leaving me with questions about why.

I like villains that are genuinely scary, but in a nontraditional way.

Surprise villains or characters who you actually watch evolve and eventually become the villain are extremely interesting to me.

No one in real life is purely evil or purely good. Compelling backstory, what made them what they are now is extremely important.

Something to stand out.

Being turned on by a friend in the game, scarier or funny

2

Being a bit morally gray

The backstory of why the person is the way he/she is.

Making villains somewhat selfless, not just acting ridiculous for themselves

The antagonist having good ideas which the player supports (perhaps because those are not evil) so the player really has to think about whether he really does not like him

e.g. antagonist help many poor people but on the other hand he does not like people with diseases because they cannot have full potential

So the player has to think "well if i kill him he won't support all the poor people"

A rational reason for their behaviour

Mysteriousness, maybe. And common sense. Not every villain has to reveal their whole murder/destruction plot to the protagonist.

A deep twilight within his believes/morals and in the end liberating himself and the ones he suppressed to begin a new era.

A goal he seeks to achieve, where the evil he does seems necessary

His interactions with the protagonist

Either slowly get to know him and his reasons or leave it as a mystery for the imagination, but no bullshit reasons please

Being able to play as a servant or a little substory of the antagonist him/herself. Something to avoid is the feeling of being unable to do anything against him/her. Feeling powerless is never fun, main antagonist should be strong or smart, but still you should get that feeling that there is something more or something you can do to conquer.

The goals of the Antagonist should be relatable. I think it's more interesting if you can understand and feel why he/she is doing it.

Powers explained only at the end.

Explainable/relatable behavior.

Cool appearances (not ruined like kylo Ren).

No/less political interests

Plot twists

Character development

A little form of sympathy towards him/her

A strong will

Gut erklärte backstory, vielleicht ein mal wirklich überraschender reveal wer der echte Feind ist

Craziness, extraordinary look or behavior

Mystery

Understandable motivation

Whether or not they're the first/last person you meet in the main storyline

I suppose this relates to reliability, but your extent of empathy/sympathy for them

A complex character with an unpredictable or unstable psyche

Depends on the character...? That's a silly question.