Establishing Literary Merit in
Metal Gear Solid

A close critical reading

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Why Metal Gear Solid?
- Acclaimed for its depth of narrative quality

Mission:
- Explicate the Literary Merit of Metal Gear Solid

How can we analyze “Literary Merit?”
- Critical discussions of the following points:

1. Cinematic Cutscenes
2. Suspension of Disbelief
Background of *MGS*

- Released by Konami in 1998
- 3rd installment
- Sony Playstation

- Protagonist: “Solid Snake”
- Mission: Prevent deployment of super weapon “Metal Gear”

- 14-year legacy evidenced by continuation of franchise and related media
Purpose

Find MGS's literary merit

Analyze specific literary devices

What is “Literary Merit?”

Discuss the observations
Definition: “Literary Merit”

The presence of deeper meaning

If deeper meanings elevate the work to a more meaningful level

Are there any deeper meanings in *MGS*? If so, do these meanings constitute the synergistic effect of raising *MGS* to being more than just a game?
1. Prose and Cinema of *MGS* (1)

- *MGS* Narrative Landscape is characterized by very long cutscenes.
- Common criticism: more time spent watching instead of playing
1. Prose and Cinema of *MGS* (2)

Skipping a Cutscene

- Erases narrative context
- Potentially prevents advancement

Use of the Cutscenes emphasizes the thematic elements of the game narrative
2. Suspension of Disbelief (1)

Hideo Kojima: “If the player isn’t tricked into believing that the world is real, then there’s no point in making the game.” (IGN, 1998)

Necessary for preventing the reader from potentially questioning and thereby doubting fantastic occurrences within any given story (Coleridge, 1817)
2. Suspension of Disbelief (2)

“Metal Gear”

“Psycho Mantis”

“Cyborg Ninja”
2. Suspension of Disbelief (3)

Nuclear Proliferation

Nuclear Accountability

Threat of Rogue Entities

Non-Fiction Elements

**START TREATIES**

- Started 1991 (Russia/USA)
- Re-ratified 2010
- Significant reduction of Nuclear weapons
Using a START as an example, the game has the potential to conjecture:

- How effective is START in the first place?
- Is there a loophole in START that can be taken advantage of?
- Is there anything better than START?
3. Nature vs. Nurture (1)

- The *MGS* narrative emphasizes dichotomies

Liquid vs. Solid

Nature vs. Nurture

Fate vs. Free Will

- Liquid Snake & Solid Snake are manifestations of the debate
3. Nature vs. Nurture (2)

- “The FoxDie conundrum”:

FoxDie: genetically-engineered retrovirus which selectively kills according to a programmable target list

- FoxDie will kill Liquid Snake.
- Liquid Snake and Solid Snake are twins.
- FoxDie will kill Solid Snake.
3. Nature vs. Nurture (3)

- Ultimately, Solid Snake does NOT succumb to FoxDie

**DNA governs a person’s potential strengths/destinies.**

- Game’s Conclusion: BOTH Nature and Nurture have influence, but ultimately it’s up to the individual
Conclusion

- Metal Gear Solid does a fine job at
  - Prioritizing its story elements (Cinematic Cutscenes)
  - Presenting its fiction in an effectively plausible way (Suspension of Disbelief in Historical Fiction)
  - Serving as an impetus for further discussion even after gameplay has concluded (Inclusion of complex themes)

- Where do we go from here?
  - Apply such analyses and practices to other games
  - Work towards the creation of a “Canon of Classic Video Games”