Agenda:

- Article of the Week – *Writing in the killing field: Violence in Spec Ops The Line*
- Game Design Documents—due September 23
- Reminders
  - o GA Fall Game Jam—September 20-22
  - o SIEGECON 2013—October 4-6
  - o Membership dues
- Game Innovators Scholarship: http://www.gsn.com/scholarship/
  - o Deadline to submit application is November 1
- Questions

Article of the Week

Writing in the killing field: Violence in Spec Ops The Line *by Brandon Sheffield*

http://gamasutra.com/view/news/200329/Writing_in_the_killing_field_Violence_in_Spec_Ops_The_Line.php

Walt Williams, lead writer and narrative designer on *Spec Ops: The Line*, has an interesting problem with violence, which he outlaid in his GDC China talk. "I do not believe that violent games create violent people," he says. "I don't believe they desensitize us to violence. But I do believe that violence in games desensitizes us to violence in games."

"You're looking at a medium that is going to expand to be more emotionally meaningful, and more subversive," Williams added. "But with killing, we allow ourselves to retain some sort of emotional detachment from the reality of it."

In reality, "the act of killing a human being is dramatic. It's eventful," says Williams. "The act of taking a life with a gun is impactful, it sticks with you. But not in a video game. We've allowed it to be mundane, trivial."

When making games, sometimes this happens just because we need the game to be longer, so we just throw more enemies at the player. "I do believe part of that has to do with how we treat our genres," he says. "In books, their genres are defined by theme - comedy, romance, drama. In games, they're defined by action," such as shooters, platformers, et cetera.

"Our genre takes these actions and turns them into a tool, and when you're dealing with a tool rather than an action, it becomes easy to disassociate from it," he says. "That's why it becomes so easy for violence to

become mundane. A gun is a very efficient tool. It can shoot something or it can not. That tool defines a directive. It only does two things, so we can only assign two directives, shoot something, or not shoot something."

Unlike more nuanced narrative media, "the choices your character makes aren't coming from a circumstance, they're coming from the predefined rules of your system," says Williams. "So how do you make killing a human meaningful when the systems are pre-defined before you have even written a word?"

In *Spec Ops*, when you kill innocent civilians, they made sure it wasn't a choice. "We realized we had to take away their safety," he said. "If we were going to really make this meaningful, we had to create the illusion of causality. We had to create a story that appeared to occur because the player was using violence moment to moment."

"It boils down to the fact that no matter how you write them, no matter who they are, the main character cannot be more righteous than your core mechanic allows them to be," says Williams. In*Spec Ops*, the main character's goal, which he keeps restating, is to save people. "And he does it by killing as many of them as possible across six hours," Williams jokes.

So what do you do? "You do what we all do in that kind of situation - you make them justify what they're doing, and you do it through dialogue," he says. "At the beginning this is much easier to do, because at the beginning your characters are in a survival situation. But the longer that situation goes on, the longer they start hunting down their enemies, suddenly survival starts to ring false. It starts to sound deluded."

"You start to want other characters to call the main character out on his actions. This gives your main character a chance to justify their actions, whether it's right nor not," Williams added. "You want these situations to be more complex, so that your characters have to rationalize what they're doing. You get better drama because the hypocrisy is real."