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A Thousand Tiny Tales: Emergent Storytelling in Slime Rancher

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UBM

A Thousand Tiny Tales: Emergent Storytelling in Slime Rancher

Slime Rancher

Who I am

- ⭐ Co-founder, CEO Monomi Park

- ⭐ Game Designer of Slime Rancher, Spiral Knights

- ⭐ @nickpopovich

Why I'm Giving This Talk

⭐ Very valuable for indies: this stuff generates content

⭐ Not enough games have emergent gameplay (and I think they should)

⭐ Games should be surprising!

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What is Slime Rancher?

⭐ First-person farming/ranching slimes

⭐ Heavy physics simulation, chaotic

⭐ World emphasizes exploration and discovery, non-linear

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Slime Rancher

Woo! Success!

- ⭐ 95%+ aggregate review score

- ⭐ ~700k units sold so far

- ⭐ Top 100 Steam game of 2016

Full Disclosure

I'm not an expert on emergent storytelling, nor does Slime Rancher execute on it particularly well.

...but that's the whole point.

My Definition

When game systems tell a story, often through gameplay, that wasn't scripted. It is also called emergent gameplay, emergent narrative, and emergent behaviors. But it's all pretty much the same thing.

It's all stories.

Slime Rancher

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About These Stories...

- Can be only seconds long

- Just need a beginning, middle, end

- Player only needs to witness part of it

- Driven by 'And then...?'

Examples:

Creation or base-building games

Examples:

Multiplayer-focused games

Examples:
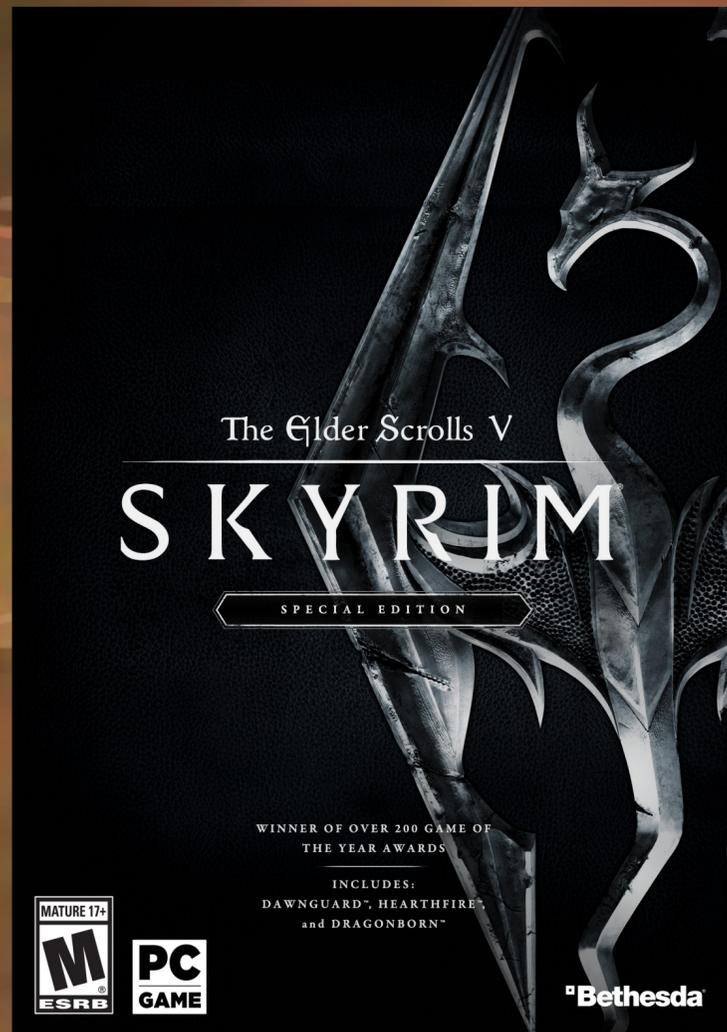
Sandbox and non-linear games

Examples:

Sandbox and non-linear games

How it Fits in a Game

The capacity for emergent storytelling in a game is often linked to how much control the designer is willing to give up.

But even a little goes a long way!

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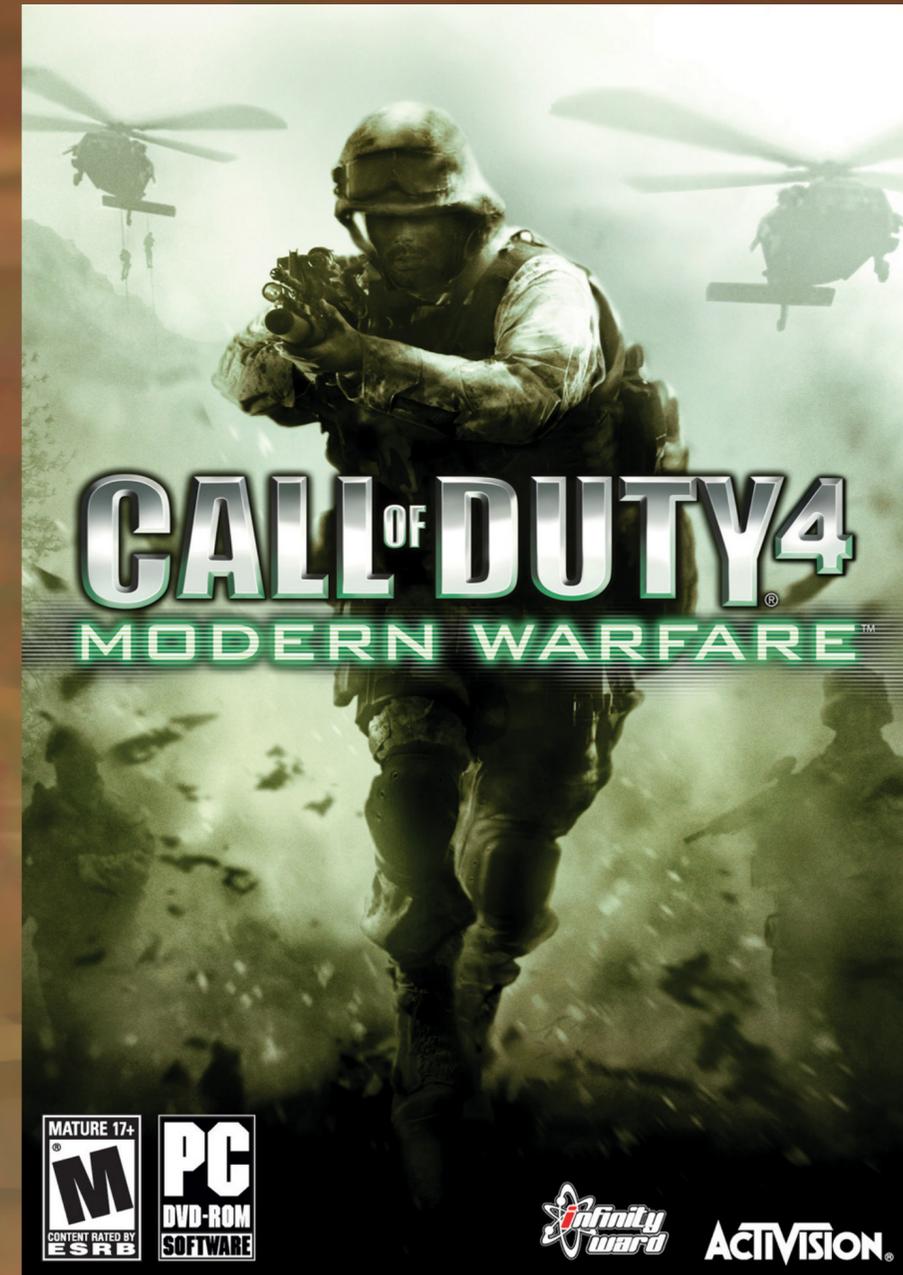
How is Emergent Storytelling Used in Slime Rancher?

Slime Rancher

The Golden Rule

Emergent storytelling is a collision of wants and needs. Wants should always inform needs (positively or negatively).

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Slime Rancher

Slime Needs

- ⭐ Eat food when hungry

- ⭐ Escape danger

- ⭐ They sometimes need to go somewhere for no reason (hidden)

Slime Rancher

About Needs...

The more needs you introduce, the harder your system becomes for you AND the player to manage.

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Slime Rancher

Slime Wants
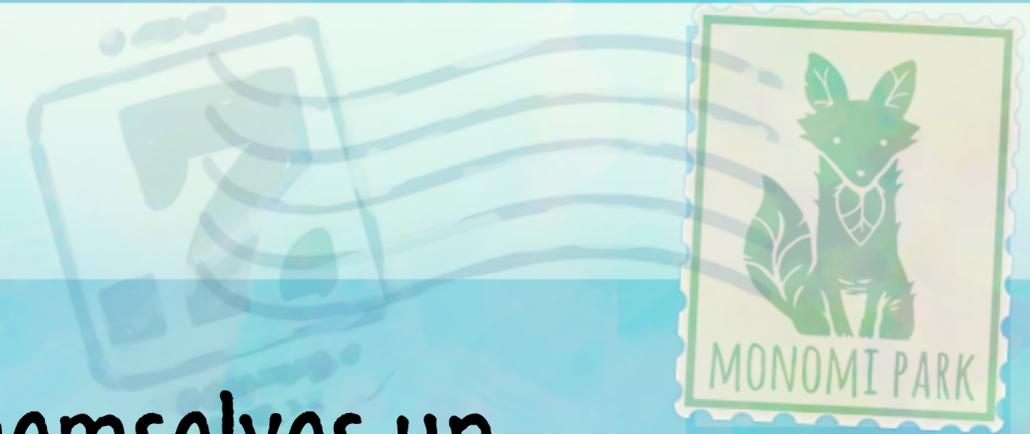
- Stacking themselves
- Flying
- Stealing
- Eating plorts
- Nose boops

- Blowing themselves up
- Jumping just because its fun
- Rolling around
- Teleporting
- ...and more

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About Wants...

Wants can be hidden, or inconsistently executed, but the player should be able to learn them in time.

Wants make dealing with needs interesting.

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Day 2
08:35

Pink Slime
Diet: Everything

96

100

93

1   2   Hen Hen
x 2   3   4   Pogofruit
x 3

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Stacking

⭐ When slimes are close together, they may attempt to stack

⭐ Can spawn pre-stacked

⭐ In the wild, players perceive this as playing, but on the ranch...

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Escaping?

⭐ Escaping slimes are simply stacking in a confined space

⭐ There is no logic telling them to make an elaborate prison break

⭐ This is a happy accident we discovered just like...

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Flying/Rescuing

⭐ Phosphor slimes can fly

⭐ If they were stacked at the time, they're instead 'rescuing'

⭐ Again, a happy accident that became part of the game design

Slime Rancher

Stealing

- ⭐ Tabby slimes will steal food they can't eat and move it to a new place

- ⭐ Can be innocuous, or chaotic

- ⭐ Very subtle, often discovered late into player experience

Slime Rancher

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Explosions

- Seems like a standard hazard

- Entire purpose is to scatter stuff around the environment

- And conversely...

BOOM

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The Vacpack

The primary player action in Slime Rancher causes slimes, food, etc to come together and interact, further encouraging emergent behaviors!

Slime Rancher

Final Thoughts on Emergent Storytelling

Slime Rancher

Only Half the Story Matters

Players need not observe the entire emergent sequence to appreciate it.

In learning systems, they will figure it out later.

Players are in on the Joke

Emergent behaviors can disrupt the experience, but it rarely breaks immersion.

In fact, they are often the MOST memorable part of the experience.

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Slime Rancher

The Takeaway

Your game will be more memorable, more interesting, and have more variety if you add even a little capacity for emergent storytelling.

It is one of the few ways games can still truly surprise.

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Thank You!

(now time for some Q & A)