

Life is Strange, a coming-of-age tale with a unique twist?

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In recent times, Telltale Games has emerged as the king of episodic content – that special breed of game where the content is released bit by bit over a period of months.

Telltale has proved that episodic content based on The Walking Dead, A Wolf Among Us and more recently Game of Thrones is a hit with gamers keen to play their games in more manageable chunks.

Other developers are starting to jump on board the episodic content train and that can only be a good thing. Developers like France's Dontnod, which has created Life is Strange (SquareEnix, various formats), a five-part episodic content game that reveals the story every six weeks or so.



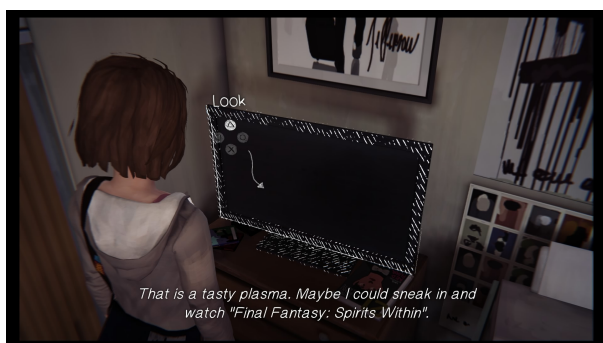
The main character in the game is Max Caulfield, a young teenager who after five years living in Seattle has returned to Arcadia Bay, Oregon, the small seaside town she grew up in. As well as having to solve the mystery of a missing young woman also has to deal with the fact that she can rewind time. Oh, and she's also having visions of a menacing storm that is set to destroy the town sometime in the future.



Rewinding time was something that Dontnod explored in its fun (but flawed) game Remember Me, which had a protagonist who could get into people's heads and rewind specific memories, altering events. I liked Remember Me, though many people didn't, but I think part of the reason was the ability to alter memories, changing what happens.

Using the rewind ability to change events in Life is Strange that have already been happening, thereby changing the future, is at the forefront of Life is Strange and it's a mechanic that DontNod has integrated well into the story.

The time rewind ability means that Max can re-play situations and bring a better outcome or more positive result, such as giving the right question to an answer so she can leave class early to prevent a disastrous event or give herself enough time to avoid a rolling pile of logs during a storm. And if you're not happy with what's happened – the game will often question whether you've made the right choice – you can just rewind and do something else.



While the story shows promise in its premis and I was intrigued enough to finish the first episode, it just has a

few rough edges that will hopefully be ironed out in future episodes.

Firstly, the dialogue is cringeworthy at times. I mean seriously cringeworthy. Someone needs to tell the writers that teenagers don't use the word "hella" all that often. At least not the ones I know. Or say things like "Are you cereal?" instead of "Are you serious?". It's as if the adult writers wrote what they thought teenagers talked like.



The first episode is also quite pedestrian, too, with the first few moments guiding Max through a high school hallway and in a photography class, or later parts having to search for a pen drive in a dormitory, but I'm OK with that: It's setting the scene with what is to come so it's understandable that time will be spent introducing key characters and future events.

The game promises that decisions you make in one situation could impact on future situations so it'll be interesting to see whether this really happens or it's just hype to draw the player in.

Life is Strange will live or die on how well Dontnod can deliver the story using an interesting gameplay mechanic. If done right, Life is Strange could be a compelling coming-of-age tale with a unique twist. If handled badly, it could just become another cliché-riddled teenage drama that gamers will soon forget. Life is Strange has four more episodes to convince us it's the former.



What are your thoughts on episodic content games where the game is broken up into more easily digestible chunks and released in instalments? Are you all for them or do you hate them with a passion? Leave your thoughts below.

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