

# REACTING TO VIDEOGAMES

BY AUSTIN HORNBOSTEL

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Like most school breaks, this one wasn't an exception when it came to quality shows to binge-watch and movies to see in theaters way more than once. Between movies and shows like "La La Land" or Donald Glover's "Atlanta" — both of which were excellent and you should watch right away — we all had plenty to take in. However, the media experience that impacted me the most during the last month came from a video game.

Anybody who knows me well enough can tell you I can't get enough of video games. My parents plugged in an original Playstation console in my bedroom when I was a kid and from then, I was hooked. I'm 22 now and — unashamedly — just as in love with video games as an entertainment medium as I was when I first discovered them. Much like the books I grew up reading just as avidly, video games allow me to be a part of another world and live out the adventures of dynamic characters, but with the added bonus of getting to play through a fully interactive story.

All that being said, it's only natural that my favorite Christmas gift came in the form of a new game that was first announced during 2006 — Final Fantasy XV.

The Final Fantasy series is made up of standalone roleplaying games, each with their own stories and characters. Yes, there have been 15 of these games, and no, they truly haven't gotten old yet. The last main series title released during 2009, and since then it's been a painstakingly long wait for what we finally received last November. It was a departure for a franchise that has always been very story-driven, with the newest entry in the series focusing more on gameplay and a core group of characters.

In Final Fantasy XV, the player takes control of Noctis, the crown prince of a kingdom called Lucis, as he travels across a continent with his three best friends — Prompto, Gladiolus and Ignis — to be wed to his bride-to-be, Lunafreya. And really, this is just about the only part of the plot that makes sense. While I loved this game, it's an entry in a series famous for convoluted stories, and this one takes the cake. In fact, the developers have promised they will release downloadable content that adds more in-game cutscenes to better explain the story.

But this one sentence synopsis was also the only thing in this story I truly cared about as the player. Some other weird, unexplainable things happen between the beginning of this game and its completion, but the payoff in this experience lies in the journey your characters take together as friends, not the journey itself.

Noctis and his friends drive in a car across the open world of Final Fantasy XV on what is basically a video game road trip. There are options in the game to fast travel to locations your characters have already visited but if they're traveling to a new location, the player is along for the ride as they drive in real time across the map. The friends will chat sporadically but largely just sit in silence, enjoying the ride and sometimes marveling at the scenery. You can even turn on the car radio during the drive, if you need something to listen to. They'll stop the car so Prompto can take group photos, take breaks at rest stops to refill their gas tank, and Gladiolus will even pull out a book and read during longer drives.

When they arrive at their destination, the group will get out of the car and stretch as they take in their new surroundings. If they're trekking across the varied landscapes of the game on foot they'll battle monsters together, and when night falls the player has the option to track down a campsite for the group to stay at overnight, where Ignis will cook them a meal. It's all a very raw, realistic representation of taking a road trip with a group of close friends — that is, besides the fantasy setting and combat against monsters.

This is where this game truly shines. I still don't mind much that the story didn't make sense, or that it moved a little too quickly when I wasn't focused on completing various side missions instead of advancing the plot. When I finally reached the end of the story after well over 50 hours of gameplay, I found myself openly crying because of the close-knit relationship I'd grown so attached to following. I had fallen for the dynamic of this group of friends because it felt genuine. I sunk 50 hours of my life into getting sidetracked exploring this world with them, camping out and eating new meals by the fire with them, and conquering difficult battles with them.

Noctis, Gladiolus, Prompto and Ignis ultimately taught me that sometimes, the experiences that impact us the most are the ones that remind us of ourselves. I spent my time playing this game remembering a road trip I took to Colorado with some friends a couple summers ago. I remember how sad I was as I realized it was about to end, and I was even sadder as this fictional one drew to a close. A fictional narrative that can draw that kind of response out of the player is truly a special one.

I can't say a lot more about the specifics that really pulled at my heartstrings without spoiling the game, so I'll leave you with this — look for the stories you relate to. Whether it's a movie, a TV show, a book or a video game, find an experience you resonate with that you can sink five — or 50 — hours into with no regrets. I'd do it all over again, and I probably will go on this road trip time and time again.

## Students and administration look toward tackling diversity issues

BY RACHEL STEINHOFF

Sports Text Editor

As diversity issues grab the spotlight on the national stage, colleges and universities are forced to reexamine the shape of campus environments in issues of race, ethnicity, gender and disabilities.

But as diversity awareness rises, some planned initiatives have stalled at the implementation phase at Truman State University.

In response to the highly broadcast racial issues at the University of Missouri during the second half of 2015, former University President Troy Paino implemented the University Strategic Plan for Inclusive Excellence — a recognition for a need to think more carefully, completely and urgently about issues relating to discrimination, equity and the celebration of diversity.

Jamie Ball, Truman's Title IX institutional compliance officer and co-chair of the committee to develop the plan, said the diversity issues currently acknowledged on campus were broken down into specific tactics for implementation. Many of these tactics stress curricular inclusion and opportunities for conversation.

"Dr. Paino was mindful of the fact that what was happening at [the Uni-

versity of Missouri] was a crisis point of a community that had not addressed its issues over time," Ball said. "Here at Truman, we thankfully aren't amidst a crisis, but he seized on the opportunity to be proactive and be mindful that we can't consider ourselves immune to a struggle with these kinds of problems."

Ball said the development of the plan included research on programs from other universities. In self-assessment, she said the committee found Truman to have a lot of things going on in separate corners of campus, but little had been done to unify the approach. Ball said the individual efforts were encouraging, but Truman was losing out on the potential synergy of connecting the campus efforts.

"I think we have a lot of people doing a lot of good work to address some of the tough issues," Ball said. "It's just a matter of coordinating those efforts to make them more powerful."

But how united is Truman on this issue more than one year later?

The Plan for Inclusive Excellence seems to have hit at least one standstill in its inaugural year. Marked as "in progress by student government," more than one year ago, the Truman student body has yet to see the implementation of the proposed Courageous Conversation series.

Senior Cory Hogan, Student Senate Diversity chair, said the series was originally proposed as a way to foster a safe space for talking and listening to others about controversial topics ranging from racial tensions to elections.

Hogan said the series kicked off last spring as part of Truman's diversity week

events but has since been at a standstill. Hogan said Student Senate planned the conversation as a one time event and did not think to follow up until John Gardner, Director of Truman Residence Life, started inquiring about the full-time implementation of the series.

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## Throwback Thursday: International students

Truman State University welcomed its 2017 spring class of international students last week. Students from around the world arrived on campus Jan. 11-12 for International Orientation before the rest of the student body returned. The students participated in a variety of icebreakers and activities designed to integrate them into Truman — and American — life. In honor of its new members, we look back at a time when Truman's international community participated in world history.

In 1964, international students from Kenya celebrated the first anniversary of their country's independence. The program, hosted in Kirk Auditorium — now, Kirk Gym — began with the Kenya National Anthem and the United States National Anthem, followed by congratulatory messages from then Kirksville mayor, L.P. Anesi, and legislators in Jefferson City and speeches by students from Kenya and Japan, according to a Dec. 16 Index article.

The 300 plus guests then celebrated the historic moment with song selections from their country's African highlife music and folk music. And of course, no celebration is complete without dancing.

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