Video Game Review: 'Life is Strange Episode 2: Out of Time' Asks a Lot of Players

Submitted by Crush [1] on April 22, 2015 - 7:49pm

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CHICAGO – Dontnod Entertainment struck potential conceptual gold with "Life is Strange." Iterating on Telltale's point-and-click episodic narrative adventure formula, they've crafted a truly intriguing world that begs to be explored through the lens of protagonist Max Caulfield's eyes. Her mysterious and limited ability to rewind time presents a fantasy twist that turns the world on its head. The story, setting, and characters are all bound together by a decision mechanic that makes players question everything they have done many times over.

Video Game Rating: **2.5**/**5.0**

Max's life at the prestigious Blackwell Academy is, in many ways, fascinating. Teen life at an artsy academy is dramatic enough on its own, but Max's situation is elevated by a surveillance-obsessed security guard, the disappearance of an old student, a classmate who is very obviously in some deep shit, another who is needlessly bullied, the return of her best childhood friend, and, oh yeah, the ability to reverse time. The game manages all these plot points surprisingly well within its short play time—this episode was about two hours long (the first was a hair longer), and I felt more than adequately equipped to track all of the narrative arcs.

While the story is pretty manageable when Max is around to process it all, its presentation really struggles. Even on a PS4, the character models are rough and a bit blocky. Facial animations are particularly underwhelming, and environments are okay at best. The dialogue, though, is the most distracting element. The script feels like a disengaged senior citizen's idea of what teenagers sound like. The acting is strong, but not enough to counteract the writing. At the very least, the dialogue conveys tone well, but it is uninspired and inaccurate throughout.

"Life is Strange" is available now on PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 and PC.
Image credit: Dontnod Entertainment

On a pure gameplay level, "Out of Time" had a few very strong moments and one that was simply cringeworthy. On multiple occasions, I was

required to use Max's time travel to rewind a few minutes, observe my environment, and solve a puzzle to advance. One puzzle involving a train and a stressful moment of responsibility had my heart pounding and my brain scrambling. That thrilling moment provided a prime example of the game's potential. Another "puzzle," though, had me collecting five empty bottles for Max's friend Chloe. It was a tedious task that served no purpose other than to hinder the narrative progression. When a game relies so much on the story, distractions like that are unforgivable.

Thankfully, "Life is Strange" still shines when giving players a big decision to make. All of my choices from episode 1 made some impact on my choices here, which were even more difficult. "Out of Time" asks you to put the fate of multiple characters in your hands at different points, and the emotional weight of the decision is palpable every time. I spent more than five minutes contemplating one choice alone at the very end, and I'm still kicking myself for doing what I did. Placing this burden on the player is not something most developers will do, so hats off to Dontnod for that courageous implementation.

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Image credit: Dontnod Entertainment

"Life is Strange Episode 2: Out of Time" is completely okay with placing emotional responsibility on the player, asking them to invest in the world and its characters. In many ways, this works—the truly difficult decisions that I made to advance the narrative stuck with me long after I stopped playing, and I'm hooked just to see how my version of the branching story plays out. On the other hand, the game requires a lot of patience. Players must yield to the bad dialogue and technical limitations, sifting through these issues to find the hidden gem within. If you're willing to do that much, the story beneath will not disappoint.

"Life is Strange Episode 2: Out of Time" was reviewed on PlayStation 4. It is available now on PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PC, PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360. The game was released on March 24, 2015. "Life is Strange" is rated "M" (Mature 17+) for Violence, Blood, Sexual Themes, Drug Reference, Strong Language, Use of Alcohol and Tobacco.

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