

The gamification interactive narrative and theme expression of the suspense online drama *The Reset*

Liu Yanchang

Tianjin Polytechnic University, Tianjin, 300387, China

Abstract: *The suspense drama "The Reset" creates a "suspense + emotion" domestic high score word-of-mouth drama. Using the narrative structure of time loop as a variant, the work integrates the interactive narrative of gamification into the system, forming a narrative space of "film and game combination". The multi-angle low-level group narrative unfolds the plot, and the realistic context integrates the surreal virtual cycle of time and space variables. The protagonist explores the various aspects of life gathered by ordinary people on the way to solve puzzles and chase after the murderer, extensively involving the real world's difficulties and hardships, creating a realistic theme expression outside the game.*

Keywords: "The Reset"; Gamified narrative; Interactive narrative; Theme expression

1. Introduction

The Reset is a suspenseful and speculative online short play, adapted from the novel of the same name by Prayer Jun in Jinjiang Literature City. The story follows Xiao Heyun, a game architect, and Li Shiqing, a college student, as they go through a time loop in their efforts to stop the incident and finally find the truth after being hit by a bus explosion. As the first Chinese suspense and mystery TV series set in a time loop, its gamified narration of film and game brings highly recognizable creative characteristics, broadening the creative path of surrealist and realistic works.

2. Gamified Interactive Narration Under the Integration of Film and Game

Jean-michel Froton, a French scholar in the Handbook of Cinema, summarized the relationship between film and video game into four forms: "commentary, adaptation, quotation and combination".^[1] He believed that combining them together is the key to achieve the integration of film and game. Chen Xuguang believes that "film adaptation of game IP, or film integration of game elements and game characteristics into the film will become a major trend".^[2]

At present, the integration of TV series and games still remains in a relatively primary and shallow industrial translation, that is, the relationship between the two can be separated from each other, only based on the commonality of some content. "A smile is very beautiful", "Dear, love", "You are my glory" and other idol dramas, although presented in the form of games, but in fact, they are more through the "play the game" such as the game background, to depict the love story between the hero and heroine.^[3] *The Reset* is not based on the original work of "Playing the game", nor does it provide the plot and specific scenes of "playing the game", but it takes the decryption game of "Bomb Disposal Mission" as the main line, supplemented by the game experience of "restart the game, master the destiny", and tells the story in a cyclic way, making the story of "playing the game" more vivid and rich. By blending story and game elements together to create a unique "combination".

2.1. Interactive Plot Setting for Puzzle-Style Story Games

The story of *The Reset* is a challenging adventure game, the protagonist must find valuable items and clues in the prescribed time, in order to successfully enter the next level. The ultimate goal of the game is to stop the bomb from going off. Every time a suspect is searched for, it is a challenge in the game. If the bomb goes off on time, the protagonist will fail and will have to start over. It cleverly borrows elements of a "time loop" to allow the hero to save himself in a crisis. The plot of the drama progresses layer by layer, creating a sense of realistic urgency through the repeated cycles between solving puzzles, searching for murderers and saving people, satisfying the audience's inner needs to

participate in reasoning, and enhancing the real experience of the drama's game interaction.

The interactive form of *The Reset* is mainly reflected between the player and the game. The player here includes the protagonist and the audience in front of the screen. Li Shiqing and Xiao Heyun, as players, must successfully complete quests in order to break the infinite loop. In the story, this means that they will uncover the truth, defuse the bomb, and break free from the loop. As players, the audience is also involved in the process of finding the murderer, and Li Shiqing and Xiao Heyun are also made into a pair of characters in the game, and carry out exploration missions on behalf of the audience in the series. They combine the fragmented clues together and present the audience with the game process of solving the crime, thus creating an interactive connection outside the story. This not only allows the story to connect emotionally with the audience involved in the crime, but also indirectly allows them to connect with other audience members who are also players. Through the bullet screen, they can transmit their thoughts and insights in real time, so as to realize communication and interaction. As a result, the audience, who have the identity of both participants and viewers, experience great fun when exploring the series together, bringing a strong interactive viewing enjoyment.

2.2. Multi-Perspective Narration Creates Side Exploration of the Game

According to David Bordwell, "Narrative is the process by which a film prompts the viewer to build a story that continues to form on the basis of narrative organization and stylizing." [4] In this process of artistic creation, there are a variety of narrative techniques. The characters and plot details in *The Reset* are influenced by a multi-point narrative, an approach that provides an important basis for gamified side quests. As a story that continues on an infinite loop, *The Reset* is unique in that it does not use secondary characters other than the main character as "backdrops" and "props", but rather has their own logic of action. In their interaction with the protagonists, they sketch out a story full of humanity and reality, and have an important impact on the whole story. When the player enters the world of the NPC, it is like opening the side copy quest, and they are challenged to find important clues, which can lead to additional achievements.

Through the detailed description of the underclass, the puzzle reasoning and social reality are closely integrated in more than two dozen time and space transitions, forming a complete system. The infinite cycle dominates the vertical time development of the story, and the horizontal spatial expansion of the ordinary character story expands the narrative capacity of the plot. The characters in the play are ordinary little people in all social strata, but the story writing makes their images fresh and clear, showing their mental world of being strong or struggling in the face of difficulties. Among these people, there are anchors who are subjected to network violence and are used as traffic tools by the company; those released from prison who have lost their family ties, have difficulty integrating into society, and still care about their wives and children; the poorly educated construction workers who are struggling in cities and want their daughters to continue their education; urban youth with controlling parents and intergenerational tensions struggling to establish an identity. With its vivid brushstrokes, *The Reset* vividly shows the sufferings and struggles of ordinary people, allowing the audience to deeply appreciate the strong artistic charm contained in it, and the "life of all" in the drama reflects real Chinese society.

3. Value Guidance from the Perspective of Realism

3.1. Realistic Observation Reflects Moral Concern

Excellent works of art come from the real situation of society, they have profound historical significance and rich practical connotation. [5] With its unique low-level narrative style and strong realism, *The Reset* successfully focuses on the little people, showing the diversity of the world. In the portrayal of the lower-level characters, it not only reveals the shining points of their humanity, but also reveals the social environment they live in, as well as their selfish and indifferent attitude at critical moments. For example, when the two protagonists finally find Tao Yinghong, who is armed with explosives, and struggle to prevent her from detonating the bomb and involving themselves, their lives are on the line, no one comes forward to help them, and the protagonists have doubts about the necessity of risking their lives to save others. In this plot setting, we can see the characters being brought into daily life, the instinctive fear of ordinary people in the face of extreme situations, as well as the cold and distant reaction in the face of others' plight. As a result, the human fragility makes the

characters more ordinary and real, and the audience's emotional projection is no longer isolated. At the same time, the issue of "helping" also exposes the general lack of vested interests of vulnerable groups, which triggers the audience to think about personal gains and losses and social morality.

The use of reality observation and exploration, excavating the nature of human nature, and gradually revealing the suspense to let the audience have a deeper moral feeling is one of the reasons for the series to be widely recognized. With the exposure of social issues such as online violence, sexual harassment and family of origin, the series has been linked to the real world, thus inspiring viewers to reflect. The series portrays the lives of various classes in China and deeply reveals the good and dark sides of human beings, which makes the whole work even better. The social class and personality traits revealed by these passengers enable us to have a deeper understanding of the moral structure behind the case, and use conscious or unconscious actions to conform to the moral code, so as to join the team of upholding justice. Based on the identities, backgrounds and unique personalities of the passengers in the drama, the theme of the series is closer to the current social situation and expresses sincere concern for today's world in a way that transcends the norm.

3.2. Hot Issues Resonate with the Public

Drama *The Reset* is closely related to current social hot issues, and profoundly reflects the complexity and diversity of society. The bus in the drama detonates on a bridge, reminiscent of a deadly bus accident in real life. The author of the novel, Prayer Jun, once said that the novel was based on the Wuhan Yazhou bus case. In the original case, the suspect caused the Feb. 14 bus bombing due to misanthrope and cynicism. For a long time after the accident, the case remained a hot topic in society. Combining the current hot issues with the story plot, using the film to reveal the tragic events and tragic problems in society, so as to urge the audience to reflect and assume social responsibility, is the social reality reflected in the drama.

When the bus bombing in the drama revealed the truth, people began to think deeply about the reasons that led to the tragedy, and turned their attention to social hot spots such as sexual assault, Internet violence and social indifference. At first, Wang Xingde and Tao Yinghong's beloved daughter suffered unfair treatment and died without a fair trial. As the families of the victims, they suffered a great deal of grievance. However, since they chose to target innocent people to vent their anger, the levers of justice could no longer be tilted in their favor. The actions of Wang Xingde and Tao Yinghong have gone far beyond the scope of personal vendetta and seriously threatened the stability of society. The way the plot is handled by arranging for the two to go to jail has allowed the series to make greater progress in exploring the themes of justice and truth, and the emotional content has become richer and deeper, which can arouse the audience's deep thinking more than other dramas of the same genre.

The emphasis on aesthetic education, as well as its stimulating role in society, is crucial to the development of the TV series and has far-reaching social significance.^[6] The values and spiritual core conveyed by *The Reset* are deeply integrated with the audience's thoughts. Through the presentation of the upright behavior of the little people, the audience imperceptibly perceives morality. And the punishment of those who commit crimes indirectly guides us to make the right choices, cultivate good moral character, and always keep an enterprising attitude.

3.3. The True Emotional Expression Based on the Nature of Human Nature

The Reset focuses on revealing the truth behind social problems and expands the theme to the human level. It examines the bus bombing in a new light, delving into the complex relationships underlying social networks and the struggle between human instincts and interests. In the face of a terrifying explosion and the cycle of the unknown, the protagonists first demonstrate fear and the ability to protect themselves. Here, Xiao Heyun, the main character, undergoes a process of constant growth and change inside. At first he is opinionated, putting his personal safety in the first place, when facing the interrogation of the police, he cares about him, just want to make himself out as soon as possible. As the time cycle continues to develop, Xiao Heyun's inner heart also changes greatly. He is affected by Li Shiqing's sincerity and kindness, puts down his prejudice against others, and begins to seriously examine whether the violent aesthetics he has been pursuing are meaningful. In the process, he bravely challenges himself, overcomes selfishness and cowardice, and finally makes a physical and mental leap forward.

At the same time, the portrayal of the characters in this play is not to place them in the position of lofty saints and heroic heroes. People's seven emotions and six desires, greed, anger and delusion have

their corresponding foothold. It is not difficult to see this point through Li Shiqing's confession: "In fact, I also want to live, I am also human and I am afraid of death. In fact, every time before I want to get off the bus, I also secretly thought that I can take advantage of the opportunity of the cycle to do something out of the ordinary and free myself." [7] In the subsequent plot arrangement, on the one hand, in order to ease the tense and exciting chase rhythm and pave the way for the plot, on the other hand, in order to show the characters in a more comprehensive way, the two young people came to a high-end restaurant to eat, in order to satisfy their appetite. This kind of behavior of human nature makes the plot structure more grounded, and deeply explores the psychological changes of individuals from the micro level. The real social status quo is shown, the anxiety and fear in the depths of human heart are insight, and the real and low-lying aspects of human nature are revealed, which further Narrows the sense of distance between the audience and the characters. Although the plot of the drama adopts a surreal approach, the social problems and daily lives of ordinary people depicted in it are more realistic, and their coldness, anxiety, struggle and helplessness all reflect the real face of today's society. Under the "strong hypothetical narrative" setting of the time loop, it faces the healthy appeal of how to achieve sincere justice and establish a sound social order.

4. Conclusions

In general, as the "The Reset work" of domestic unlimited flow theme, *The Reset* is still a bright pearl in terms of theme thought and narrative arrangement. Based on the initial setting of "strong assumption narrative" of infinite circulation, the plot opens up a relatively novel gamified interactive narrative strategy under the vision of film and game integration, bringing the audience an immersive interactive experience. In the reference to the established scale of foreign films and television works on time loops, the original science-fiction-oriented content is localized adapted and created, which organically integrates suspense, emotion and reality, breaks the barriers of linear narrative structure, broadens the time and space limits of the story, enriches the content, and at the same time, it is supplemented by the guidance of values, ethics and social justice. It has taken on the responsibility of making the public enjoy and educate aesthetics through entertainment works. In addition, after such creative works, how to overcome the homogenization of content, and do a good job of balancing narrative and gamified experience, [8] is still the direction that creators need to explore.

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