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Visual Novel Protagonists



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A Call for Dynamic Protagonists

Ah, protagonists. One of the main movers and shakers of all stories ever made in this world. Many a reader has been fascinated by their exploits, and some of them go so far as to put themselves into their shoes in order to comprehend their thoughts and deeds.

In interactive stories (especially games and visual novels), the immersion factor is one of the vital ingredients needed for the reader to fully appreciate them. There are many approaches to improving immersion. One is to make the protagonist silent. Another - prevalent in visual novels - is to make him faceless. Or perhaps a blank slate is shown to the player in the form of a "tabula rasa" protagonist. There are also "generic harem male lead" protagonists, indecisive protagonists, "pervert in gentleman's clothing" protagonists, etc. With all those protagonist templates that frequently appear in most of the entertainment we fans consume, it's not surprising that this sense of immersion is lost, especially for experienced fans.

The "hammer effect" mentioned in the editorial of BTW number 4 rears its ugly head, and protagonists aren't 100% safe from that hammer. Their "builders", when using rigid approaches to construct their protagonists and other characters, only think of this: their perceived audience members are soulless people without any sense of imagination; thus, they can be easily manipulated into forcing their faces, their voices, or their overall selves onto the stereotypically blank templates - all for immersion's sake. And as the cliché goes -- you win some, you lose some. In exchange for immersion into a shallow world in which you perceive to be the story's deep

world, your true identification and sympathy for the protagonist is diminished.

Immersion into a shallow world is one of the major escapes from reality that an obsessive otaku wants and, sadly, always gets. And as long as protagonists are continually built to be stereotypical, generic, and shallow, many more people will fall into the trap of inescapable fantasy and delusion, never to escape.

And that is why there is a need for protagonists of story-driven games to be dynamic and somehow based on reality. If most people can relate to someone who has a unique, distinct personality, why can't we visual novel fans and creators do the same?

Give that protagonist a voice so that he can speak his mind. Give that protagonist a face, especially in event CG's, so that the other characters can sense his outer facades and inner feelings. Give that protagonist a personality that reflects a real person's attributes while maintaining consistency in interaction (i.e. he doesn't switch personalities on and off when meeting a shy girl, a tsundere girl, etc.), so that he can be true to himself and to others.

One example of a dynamic protagonist is the protagonist in the Japanese freeware VN "The Letter." His dynamism stemmed from the experiences with his family, the effects the environs he lived in on him, and most importantly, his growth into the man he is now. Such dynamism will move mountains even though his experiences aren't exactly the same as yours.

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To All VN Readers

by lordcloudx

Over the past few weeks, I've been bitten by the visual novel reading bug. It has been quite a few years since I'd seriously contemplated using visual novels as one of my primary sources of entertainment. The last Japanese visual novel I'd finished was Soremata from Insani's Altogether 2005 line-up. (I also finished Crimsoness but I don't really count that one.) It's not that I had a deep aversion for visual novels in general, but rather, because I had chosen to become a creator of visual novels instead of a connoisseur. Now for some people, these two occupations - if you will excuse the term - are not necessarily incompatible. In my case, it has always been a strong policy of mine to receive as little outside interference as possible when I am engaged in writing a story. Also, I feel that it would be insulting to the authors if I read a story not for the primary purpose of reading and enjoying it, but rather to scrutinize it and take it apart piece by piece - from its music, to its story, to its programmers and developers - in an attempt to replicate the formula for whatever relative success it had achieved.

But now, I have grown detached from the creators' community, and slowly, I've been trying to recapture the consumer's mindset with which I had enjoyed older, and in my honest opinion, cruder titles such as May Club, Fatal Relations, Nocturnal Illusions and basically, most mid-nineties Eroge. Recently though, in no particular order, I have had the pleasure of reading through the following titles:

- The Letter
- Planetarian
- Saya no Uta
- Bible Black
- One: To The Radiant Season
- Cross Channel

Each piece was memorable in its own right, I'm happy to say. Although for reasons that I'd like to leave to your imagination, Bible Black was the least likeable among all these titles. Now as I began writing this article, I was struggling to find a common ground as to why I liked these stories. Alas, my efforts proved fruitless. After all, the characters, settings, and gen-

eral focus of each of these titles are so far detached from each other that the only real commonality I can see in all of them is that they were originally Japanese. Still, as I began reviewing these pieces individually, the common link that made these pieces aesthetically appealing - or at least intriguing - began to emerge.

Bible Black

This is the game that I enjoyed the least. That aside, it was still quite intriguing, especially the parts about Black Magic and grimoires. I ended up downloading an e-book of The Greater Key of Solomon after playing through all the paths in the game. There was something sadistically satisfying about the "White Room" ending that I got on my initial playthrough. I thought the protagonist Taki Minase was a weak character who seemed to have no strong identifiable traits except for being a weakling and a pervert.

Saya no Uta

This game was a love-hate thing for me. I have to admit that part of the reason for my detached attitude concerning this game was that I could not truly relate with Fuminari, even given his strange affliction. I ended up with the Kouji ending on my first playthrough, which is generally considered to be the bad ending by many. It left me disgusted and totally dissatisfied. However, the true ending was strangely satisfying. It left me feeling empty in the way a typical Alan Moore ending does. Suffice it to say, it left quite an impression on me.

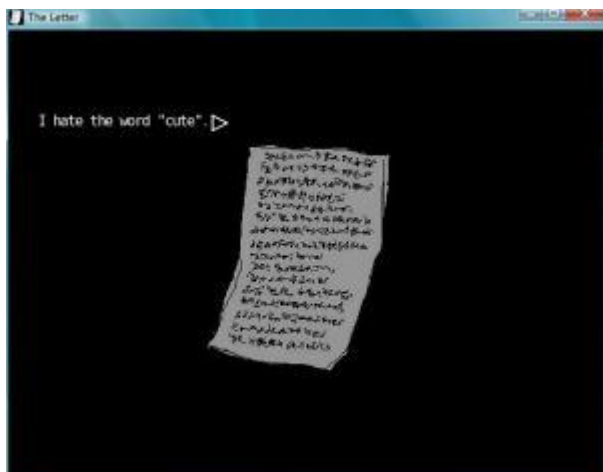
ONE: To the Radiant Season

Now this was a visual novel that I just could not hate. The girls are extremely cute and the stories in each path are fun and light-hearted. Kouhei's sarcastic behavior towards the girls borders on sexual harassment at times, but as the story develops, it becomes clear that this is just a façade and that deep down, he really does care for them in his own way. My only complaint with this game is that the ero scenes feel extremely out of place except for Akane's. There is also an air of chauvinism surrounding this entire piece which is exemplified in a certain scene in Nagamori's route that just didn't agree with

me.

Planetarian: The Reverie of a Little Planet

I cannot complain about any part of this game at all. It was brilliant from start to finish. The opening lines captured my attention and my heart from the moment I heard the sweet, music box-like intro. It was short, sweet and just felt complete in every aspect. The protagonist seemed almost invisible at first, and this is accentuated by the fact that you never actually see him on-screen. But as the story progresses, I realized that he was, in fact, the only real character in the game. It's easy to fall in love with Reverie given her cute design and little mannerisms that make her seem almost, but never human. However, once you get past the initial enchantment, it becomes clear that anything about her that seems even the least bit human can be attributed to the way the protagonist slowly develops some form of vague affection for her, within his battle-hardened soldier's heart. After all, the reader is only seeing her through the protagonist's eyes.



The Letter

And here I thought that after reading Planetarian, no other VN could topple its satisfaction level for me in a long time. Yet, after reading "The Letter," I immediately knew that this was by far the most emotionally-involving visual novel that I'd read in years. At a glance, there is nothing particularly striking about this piece. It is quite short and clocks in at about an hour's worth of reading. It uses filtered photographs, simple line drawings, and stock background music. The plot is linear and follows the story of a youth who visits his hometown after years of absence, meets with his mother, pays his respects to his dead father, and then experiences a magical twist that makes him come to many realizations. The Letter features a clean, simple and somewhat familiar story that speaks directly to the heart. I read it over three times within a week and it has never failed to make me cry. The emotional impact, in fact, seems more pronounced on subsequent

replays.

Cross Channel

This is a visual novel that really made me think. It was also a game that I almost dropped out of sheer frustration at the confusing literary style. In a nutshell, Cross Channel is (Haruhi Season 2 fiasco) Endless Eight with a twist. But, that's just the outer layer. This is one of the deepest stories that I've ever read. While the production values for this game are certainly top-notch, the characters and the plot itself leave little to be desired. It features lines of repeated text, constant plot holes, and a protagonist who cracks a perverted joke every three sentences. It doesn't matter if the scene is serious, suspenseful, or even erotic; Taichi Kurosu simply makes a perverted joke out of everything.

It was a roller-coaster ride going through this VN. As I was playing through the different routes which the game forces you to finish in order to get CC's one single ending, my feelings for the protagonist shifted in leaps and bounds. In weeks 1-2, I hated him for being a confusing idiot who couldn't concentrate long enough on a single subject matter for the story to make any sense. In weeks 3-4, I hated him for being a serial killer putting on a faux personality. Yet, in the final parts of the game, though I could not say that I liked him in particular, I felt that many of his actions were justified and that he had somehow vindicated himself. He might have done it for his own reasons, but the fact is that his actions in the final moments of Cross Channel were nothing short of selfless.

Cross Channel is the last VN that I played out of all these titles. I felt that it was a good thing, because it made me think and appreciate these stories all the more. It was a game that I really wanted to hate but ended up liking in the end. In analyzing the factors that contributed to my enjoyment of these games, one common element comes strongly to mind. It is, of course, the protagonist. Although the protagonists vary greatly across these unique titles, there is one thing common about all of them: the reader experiences the story through their eyes. The way Kouhei excessively teases Nanase and thinks nothing of it afterwards; the way Fuminori sees humans as nothing more than lumps of meat; the way the junker slowly develops emotional attachments for a broken robot in the shape of a girl; the way Taichi gradually develops his views of himself and his relationships with the people around him - the reader sees the world through their eyes, and in doing so, gets to know the person's perceptions of the world and the people around him.

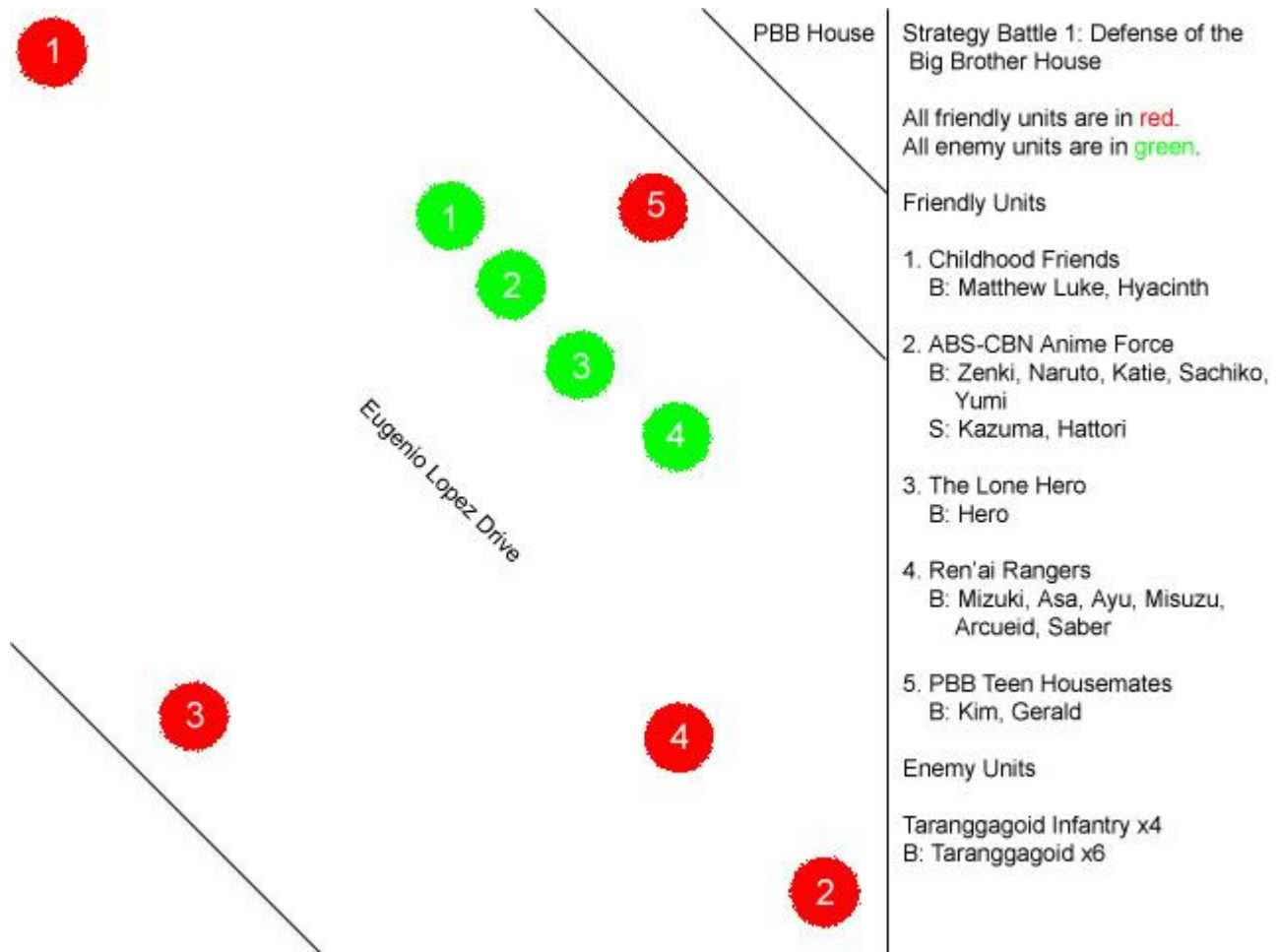
The importance of the narrator-protagonist is then made quite clear to this particular reviewer - the amount of emotional investment that a reader is willing to place into a story is directly proportional to the impression that the protagonist makes in his mind.

PlayStation 2



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Episode 5: First Strategy Battle! The Defense of the Big Brother House



RULES ON STRATEGY BATTLES

1. Strategy battles are turn-based. There are player and enemy turns.

2. The composition of a unit is six (6) battle (B) members maximum and four (4) support (S) members maximum. Each member of a unit, whether B or S, may possess abilities (e.g. can cast magic, provide healing, strengthen the unit's attack/defense, or weaken enemy units).

3. Units can move; and then can attack, defend, or do a special. There are certain ranges for these actions, so think carefully.

4. If you finish the battle with little to no damage, you score a Major Victory. If you finish the battle with a considerable amount of damage, you score a Victory. If all of your friendly units are gone, it's Game Over. There are also special conditions to be met in some strategy battles.

Strategy Battle 1: Defense of the Big Brother House

Matthew Luke and Hyacinth were just casually walking down Eugenio Lopez Drive when they witness the attack of the Big Brother House.

Matthew Luke: Huh? There's someone invading the Big Brother House?

Hyacinth: My eyes aren't deceiving me!

Matthew Luke: And there are also defenders of the house! C'mon, let's help them!

Hyacinth: No! We'll be put in danger!

Matthew Luke: We'll be put in even greater danger if we just stand around and do nothing! And also, we don't want our fighting skills to rust, no?

Hyacinth: OK. As long as we guide each other. Our friendship still has a long way to go, no?

Matthew Luke: Bingo.

On another corner of the road (at the same time)...

Katie: Because I returned Ma'am K's hairbrush back to her, she gave me another assignment. And that is to discipline you two.

Mirmo: Aren't you ashamed at what you did at Claudine and Raymart's wedding?

Zenki: Yes, I am. I was sermoned by Chiaki. Then she instructed me to find the seeds of Karuma here in the Philippines as penance. Those seeds were being smuggled by his minions.

Naruto: I'm ashamed too. So as penance, I'll find an equally-capable female ninja. Believe it.

Katie: I'll keep an eye on you two. Because we're instructed by Sir Gabby to fight the invaders of the Big Brother House.

Mirmo: So don't you falter. All clear?

Zenki & Naruto: Yes!

Katie: And we also have Yumi and Sachiko with us, as well as Kazuma and Hattori.

Yumi: Hello! Nice to meet you all!

Sachiko: Let us all cooperate.

Kazuma: If you're feeling weak, feel free to eat the bread I'm carrying. They pump you up!

Hattori: But nothing beats a doctor when it comes to healing your wounds.

On yet another corner (at the same time)...

Hero: Huh? Where am I?

Henry (from afar): We're near the camp of our enemies!

Hero: What enemies are you talking about?

Henry: Do you need to memorize it?

Hero: Grr! How dare you speak lotsa vices! But no matter, we'll go separate ways! I want to go back to ABS! I want to be with Sandy again!

Henry: All of these will not happen. You will never defeat me.

Hero: You're wrong. There's a swordsman named Pritong Kandule who helped me bring out my own strength to defeat you!

Henry: Ha ha ha! Even if you're helped by all the freaking people in the world, you still cannot defeat me!

Hero: Well then, this is for you! B****! B****! LET'S PVP!

Henry: Grrr! You're making me mad! Taranggagoids, attack!

A horde of Taranggagoids appear.

Hero: How...?

When the Taranggagoids appeared, in a place several meters away from where Zenki's group stands...

Saber: I didn't know he had goons.

Asa: Of course. What villain doesn't have underlings who serve him?

Ayu: Uguu! We musn't lose hope!

Misuzu: Nihaha! We need to be strong. We need to unite. Gao!

Arcueid: Yes. If we win, our chances of being accepted by ABS-CBN will increase!

Mizuki: This is the time of attacking. CHARGE!

At the same time, at the front gate of the PBB house...

Kim: We're instructed by Big Brother to defend the house in the name of our housemates.

Gerald: Yes. They expect us. Good thing I'm a Knight.

Kim: And I learned some of my attacks from Chun Li.

Kim & Gerald: (singing bravely) PINOY AKO! PINOY TAYO!

Upon seeing the teams...

Henry: What the--? Intruders? Hmph. Let's see what you're made of. Especially you, my brother.

Hero: Yes! LET'S START THE PVP!

Victory Condition: Defeat all enemy units.

Loss Condition: All friendly units are defeated.

STRATEGY BATTLE START!

Player Turn 1

Friendly Unit 1 decides to move halfway the distance between its original position and Enemy Unit 1, and then defends.

Friendly Unit 2 decides to move very near Friendly Unit 4, and then defends.

Friendly Unit 3 decides to move near the center of the map, and then defends.

Friendly Unit 4 decides to move very near Enemy Unit 4, and then attacks that unit. All members of Enemy Unit 4 suffer damage equivalent to 25% of their max HP.

Friendly Unit 5 decides to move very near Friendly Unit 1's new position, and then defends.

Enemy Turn 1

Enemy Unit 1 decides to move towards Friendly Unit 5's new position, and then attacks that unit. All members of Friendly Unit 5 suffer damage equivalent to 25% of their max HP.

Enemy Unit 2 decides to stay in its current position, and then defends.

Enemy Unit 3 decides to stay in its current position, and then defends.

Enemy Unit 4 decides to stay in its current position, and then attacks Friendly Unit 4. All members of Friendly Unit 4 suffer damage equivalent to 25% of their max HP.

Player Turn 2

Friendly Unit 1 decides to move very near Enemy Unit 1, and then attacks that unit. All members of Enemy Unit 1 suffer damage equivalent to 25% of their max HP.

Friendly Unit 2 decides to move very near Friendly Unit 4, and then does a special on that unit: Healing. All members of Friendly Unit 4 recover an equivalent of 25% of their max HP.

Friendly Unit 3 decides to stay in its current position, and then does a special: Summon Pritong Kandule.

P. Kandule: You summoned me, Hero.

Hero: Because I don't wanna fight alone.

P. Kandule: Ha ha! Glad you said it, because this has a permanent effect! Kill all those b****es! PVP!

Friendly Unit 3's name changes to Two Swordsmen.

Friendly Unit 4 decides to stay in its current position, and then attacks Enemy Unit 4. All members of Enemy Unit 4 suffer damage equivalent to 25% of their max HP.

Friendly Unit 5 decides to move towards the northwest corner of the map, and then defends.

Enemy Turn 2

Enemy Unit 1 decides to stay in its current position, and then attacks Friendly Unit 1. All members of Friendly Unit 1 suffer damage equivalent to 25% of their max HP.

Enemy Unit 2 decides to follow Enemy Unit 1, and then defends.

Enemy Unit 3 decides to follow Enemy Unit 1, and then defends.

Enemy Unit 4 decides to follow Enemy Unit 1, and then defends.

Player Turn 3

Four Friendly Units appear, namely the Freedom Gundam, the Aegis Gundam, Raijin-Oh, and Voltes V.

Kira: Sorry, we're late.

Athrun: Because we had to prepare the necessary equipment. We don't want to damage the Big Brother House.

Raijin-Oh Team: We are invincible; we guarantee it!

Sandara: I'm wondering. Why is the Raijin-Oh team complete, while ours is composed of only two?

Joseph: Because-- (spots Hero) Huh? Hero? The worthless hero?

Hero: Glad you showed up, Mr. Bitangcol! Sandy will be back in my arms!

Sandara: That won't happen, you dirt-laden worm!

Hero: Huh--? Dirt... laden... worm...?

Hero becomes demoralized, so Pritong Kandule takes his place. Meanwhile, at the northwest corner of the map...

Kim & Gerald: We're cornered!

Matthew Luke & Hyacinth: We're really, really cornered!

Katie: We need to help them!

Mizuki: Ms. Katie Minami!

Katie: Huh? How do you know my name?

Mizuki: We need to join forces! My name's Mizuki Takase, by the way.

Mirmo: Enough with the introduction. We'll do it later once the enemies are pulverized.

Mizuki: OK!

Friendly Units 2 and 4 together approach towards the northwest corner of the map.

All Enemy Units soon follow them.

Kira: OK, target locked-in.

Athrun: We're sure our allies won't be hit if we use homing missiles.

Kira: Alright! All mecha units, fire homing missiles!

Kira, Athrun, Raijin-Oh Team, Sandara, Joseph: FIRE!

The Friendly Mecha Units decide to do a special on all Enemy Units: Homing Missiles. All members of all Enemy Units suffer damage equivalent to 100% of their max HP, rendering those units defeated.

Kim, Gerald, Matthew Luke, Hyacinth: Whew!

Katie, Mizuki: Glad we weren't caught in the crossfire.

Hero: ...

P. Kandule: Hey, Hero! Those b****es are defeated! Why are you stiff, huh? HEY!

STRATEGY BATTLE ENDS IN A MAJOR VICTORY!

Kira: Good work, everyone!

Athrun: We've shown our might!

Henry: But Hero is still demoralized, so you don't have anything to celebrate! Ha ha ha ha~! Due to the mind alteration I put on Sandara and Joseph, they will still be sane but they'll only be repressive to him!

Raijin-Oh Team: You bastard! (fires a beam at Henry, but Henry disappears instantly)

Henry's voice: I'll come back for you all! I'll make slaves out of all of you, not just Hero! Ha ha ha ha!

Kira: We'll still defeat him in the future. (faces the five teams) So, how is it? Mission accomplished. We can now head back to base (i.e. ELJCC). Everyone, prepare to withdraw!

Just then, the mind alteration effect on Sandara and Joseph wears off.

Sandara & Joseph: Uhh... Y-Yes, Sir Kira!

The mecha units immediately leave the PBB House. As for the five teams...

Kim: Thank you for defending our house.

Gerald: Even though we won't reward you, our heartfelt thanks is enough.

Mizuki: It's OK. We weren't expecting a reward, anyway.

Katie: I'm sure we'll meet again!

Mirmo: Promise!

Hattori: Wait! That swordsman, Hero Angeles... his depression must be healed!

Hyacinth: All of you, stand back!

When everyone followed Hyacinth's instruction, Hero miraculously recovers from his depression.

Hero: Ugh... What happened? Where are Sandy and Joseph?

Matthew Luke: They just left a while ago.

Hero: But... why did they have to swear at me?

P. Kandule: B****, mind--

Out of nowhere, Marvujoli, a fused monster comprising of Marvin Agustin and Jolina Magdangal, shows up.

Marvujoli: Rarr! I am Marvujoli! I serve Elder Gozon! And my only task is to finish off the pesky Kapamilyas! Ha ha ha!

Saber: Not a monster again?

Zenki: Are you of any relation to Henry Angeles?

Marvujoli: I've never heard of any Henry Angeles, but I'm trying to put Hero Angeles in GMA's yard!

Hero: Over my dead body!
 Marvujoli: Even though you are many, I will crush you all to ground pepper!
 Matthew Luke: Alright! One group composing of six members will fight the monster! The rest will defend the house! All clear?
 Everyone else: Yes!



A BOSS BATTLE COMMENCES!

Allies: Anyone from Matthew Luke, Hyacinth, Zenki, Naruto, Katie, Sachiko, Yumi, Hero, Pritong Kandule, Mizuki, Asa, Ayu, Misuzu, Arcueid, Saber, Kim, Gerald (maximum party size of 6)
 Enemy: Marvujoli (HP: 1,548)

Starting line-up: Matthew Luke, Hyacinth, Ayu, Naruto, Yumi, Sachiko

Matthew Luke chooses to do a cooperative attack with Hyacinth named "Osananajimi". That attack deals 10 hits and 553 damage to Marvujoli.
 Ayu chooses to cast Angel's Arrow on Marvujoli. That attack deals 95 damage to Marvujoli. Marvujoli's attribute defenses are dispelled.
 Naruto chooses to attack Marvujoli. He deals 148 damage to Marvujoli.
 Yumi chooses to do a cooperative attack with Sachiko named "Yuri-Filled Arrows". That attack deals 15 hits and 253 damage to Marvujoli.
 Marvujoli chooses to cast I LUV NY Attack on all allies. That attack deals 50 damage to each ally.
 Matthew Luke chooses to use a Gatorade on Ayu. Ayu's HP is restored to full.
 Hyacinth chooses to use a Gatorade on Yumi. Yumi's HP is restored to full.
 Ayu chooses to attack Marvujoli. She deals 15 damage to Marvujoli.
 Naruto chooses to cast Sexy no Jutsu on Marvujoli. But nothing happened!
 Yumi chooses to attack Marvujoli. She deals 158 damage to Marvujoli.
 Sachiko chooses to attack Marvujoli. She deals 138 damage to Marvujoli.

FINISH HIM! (a la Mortal Kombat)

Mizuki: Time to bring out our hidden powers!
 Matthew Luke: OK, we'll stand back! It's now their time!
 Marvujoli: Rarr? (weakened) What kind of gimmick--?
 Mizuki: Ready?
 Asa, Ayu, Misuzu, Arcueid, Saber: Ready!
 Mizuki, Asa, Ayu, Misuzu, Arcueid, Saber: Ren'ai Rangers, power up! Ha!

With that chant, plus a transformation pose, the six girls all enter a transformation sequence.

Mizuki: Mizuki Takase, Comipa Ranger!
 Asa: Asa Shigure, Shuffle Ranger!
 Ayu: Ayu Tsukimiya, Uguu Ranger!
 Misuzu: Misuzu Kamio, Gao Ranger!
 Arcueid: Arcueid Brunestud, Vampire Ranger!
 Saber: Saber, Fate Ranger!

The other allies watch in amusement.

Hyacinth: Are they Power Rangers, too?
 Matthew Luke: Dunno. We both watched all versions of Power Rangers.
 Kim: Amazing.
 Katie: Good going!
 Mirmo: We might produce a brand-new sentai series with the title "Power Rangers: Warriors of Love"! We'll tell this to Ma'am K!
 Hero: Good luck, Ren'ai Rangers.
 P. Kandule: Ha ha ha! That b**** will be pulverized at last!

The Ren'ai Rangers then do a formation.

Marvujoli: I won't be fazed by that!
 Mizuki, Asa, Ayu, Misuzu, Arcueid, Saber: Combine powers! Romantic Love Blaster! FIRE!

A powerful beam tears through Marvujoli.

Marvujoli: You fools! AAAAAHHHHH----! (explodes)

BATTLE WON! --- FATALITY

Marvin: Huh? Where are we, Jolens?
 Jolina: Aha! We're in ABS, right?
 Mizuki, Asa, Ayu, Misuzu, Arcueid, Saber: Power down! (They return to their original forms, and then approach the two. The rest follow.)
 Asa: Do you remember something?
 Marvin: I-I dunno.
 Jolina: The only thing we remembered is when we were tied up by Elder Gozon. Then he placed something on us. Afterwards, we remembered no more.
 Zenki: Hm? (notices something on the ground) It's a seed of Karuma. Probably he placed this in both of you, hence your transformation into a monster. (eats the seed of Karuma) Mmm... delicious!
 Gerald: If that is really Mr. Gozon's doing, then don't ever come back to GMA. They're too aggressive in the ratings game, thus something like this happens.
 Hero: Then please go back to the Kapamilya Network! I also wanted to come back if not for my blasted brother.
 Marvin & Jolina: Anyway, thank you! We'll leave now!

Buh-bye~! (leaves)

Out of nowhere... a figure of a woman appears.

Matthew Luke: A monster again?

Robed woman: I am not a monster. I will introduce myself. My name is Leknaat, the overseer of destiny. You two, Matthew Luke Laonglaan at Hyacinth Monterola...

Hyacinth: How'd you know us?

Leknaat: You two will form the 108 Stars of Destiny. Those stars will serve as defenders of unity of the people in the country named the Philippines.

Matthew Luke: Stars of Destiny... both of us have encountered the term before. But us?

Leknaat: Absolutely. Because the force that divided the Philippines several times threatens to come back. It is... the Trapo Rune.

Hero: Trapo Rune? I know! That's the thing Melficio Victorialuna used to put the entire country under his control!

Leknaat: So make haste, because the power of the Trapo Rune is coming back. Eliminate that threat... (disappears)

The group gathers in front of the gate of the PBB House.

Matthew Luke: What she said was really destined for us.

Hyacinth: Because I dreamt of something last night. We were together with 106 other people of differing characteristics, which will form a strong army.

Hero: I understand what you said. I once defeated the bearer of the Trapo Rune. And my allies were Sandara, John Pratts, Heart Evangelista, and our Japanese friends. With the power of unity, we were able to vanquish Melficio Victorialuna, the bearer.

Mizuki: I don't know why we came to the Philippines, but we believe that we're destined to join with you two.

Katie: Same with us.

The members of the group introduce themselves.

Kim: Now that we're all friends, we ensure that the 108 Stars of Destiny that Leknaat said will be formed.

Mirmo: We'll tell this to Kira and co., too!

Gerald: Gotta go. We're now being called by Big Brother. We don't want to be evicted due to not following rules, anyway. Alright. See you later!

Kim & Gerald leave, heading towards the PBB House to resume the run of PBB Teen Edition.

Yumi: OK! We must go back to the ELJCC!

Asa: Ah! Our applications!

Sachiko: Don't sweat it. You'll just be introduced to Sir Gabby, and it's instant promotion!

Misuzu: Gao Gao Stegosaurus!

Kazuma: I'll bake hot pan de sal for you all!

Hattori: Hmm... I'll go back to "Salamat, Dok".

While they walk back to ELJCC, something sinister is in the works.

At Mr. Gozon's office in the GMA HQ...

Mr. Gozon: My plan to topple the other side using that monster has failed! But it won't be long until they're toppled, like what I did with MariMite! With the combined

powers of Orochimaru and Karuma! Hahahaha!!!

Meanwhile, at the offices of ABS-CBN's top brass...

Shady character 1: Because that pest Hero interfered...

Shady character 2: ...and because his blabbermouth brother invaded the Big Brother house...

Shady character 3: ...we have no choice but to place the banning of Hero's return to the Kapamilya Network into our own hands!

The shady characters are none other than...

Mr. Lopez: Ms. Kris Aquino!

Ms. Charo: Ms. Cristy Fermin!

Rest of the top brass: Mr. Alfie Lorenzo!

Mr. Lopez: How may we serve you?

Kris, Cristy, Alfie: THIS!

The three release a hallucinating gas. The top brass cough and choke for a while, and afterwards...

Mr. Lopez: There will be a new rule. No Hero Angeleses allowed within the premises of ABS-CBN.

Ms. Charo: It will be enforced right now.

Rest of the top brass: (sings the "Fushigi Song" from Shaider)

Kris, Cristy, Alfie: BWAHAHAHA!!! Excellent! We made you follow us!

Stars Introduced So Far

Tenyuu - Star of Heroic Ferocity
(Lin Chong, the Leopard Headed)
Joseph Bitangcol

Tenmou - Star of Swift Courage
(Qin Ming, the Fire in the Thunderclap)
Sandara Park

Tenhei - Leveled Star
(Zhang Heng, the Boatman)
Kim Chiu

Tenson - the Broken Star
(Zhang Shun, Dances in the Waves)
Gerald Anderson

Chitan - Short Star
(Zou Yuan, Dragon Out of the Woods)
Yumi Fukuzawa (Maria-sama ga Miteru)

Super Networks Wars continues in BTW #8



A Manifesto for Well-developed Protagonists

by Hime

I will go straight to the point: the generic, dull protagonists often seen in both Japanese and English Visual Novels are a bad choice for both the writer and the reader. Many try to justify these lame, effortless attempts at main characters with increased immersion, branched story or other excuses, but honestly, what harm can giving your protagonist a personality can do? None, as far as I can see, except maybe a small headache in the development phase. On the other hand, such protagonists can greatly enhance the story experience for the reasons listed below.

1. Good character design is a must

If other characters have to be special, why not the main character? Make him or her an interesting person with both good and bad sides and a history behind the person he or she is now. Paper-flat characters should be a no-no regardless of the character's position in the story.

2. The story is viewed through the protagonist's eyes

An obvious fact we tend to forget. Do you not think your interesting story would suffer if you showed it through the eyes of the most boring person on Earth? Because it will.

3. Generic protagonist can result in predictability and shallowness

If the main character is your everyday John Smith, I highly doubt his thoughts and choices will be exceptional. On the other hand, they will actually be easy to guess and barely offer anything new to the reader. Who wants to write that kind of stuff, anyway?

4. Distinction is attractive

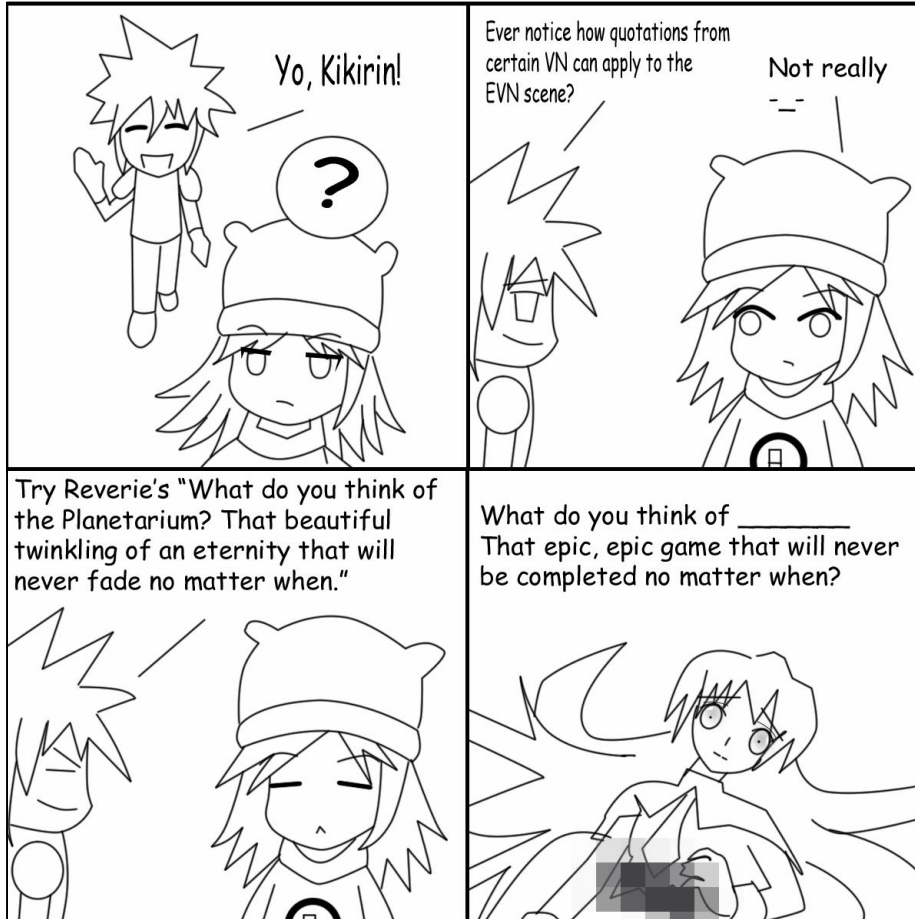
This applies both in-game and outside of it, especially if your game has several heroes or heroines that you can romance. Why would they find the main character appealing if he was just like everyone else? It tends to be the oddities in each other's personalities that we fall in love with. It also applies to the readers, most of whom will not like the protagonist if there is no reason to.

5. A well developed protagonist can increase immersion

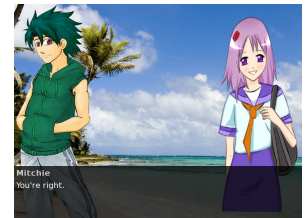
And a generic one will not. The fact is you cannot get deep into the story through a shallow main character. The principle is "no pain, no gain": if the reader does not have to make any effort to understand the protagonist, you cannot win over the reader's heart either.

Thus, all I can say is invest time and love in your protagonists! Make them special, humane, and consistent. Your care for them will not be wasted, and it will enhance the experience your visual novel will provide – both as a game for your reader and as a project for you.

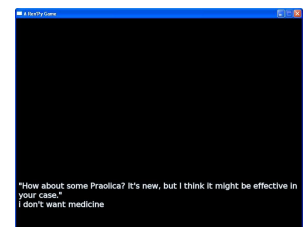
BTW COMICS



Fading Hearts
by Sakura River Interactive



This Saturday
by Valio YOLOVSKI



Template
by JinzouTamashii



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