

Perhaps a step back.

Following the success of 2010's breakthrough interactive drama, *Heavy Rain*, developer Quantic Dream strove to push the limits of the genre with *Beyond: Two Souls*. The game heavily advertised its use of motion capture technology, presenting the actor's faces in tandem with their voices. Almost as though you're watching a real movie.

Starting off, you meet protagonist Jodie Holmes (Ellen Page) and are deftly thrust into a nonlinear sequence of events that occur over the course of her life. She's 'special' because a psychic entity, Aiden, is attached to her soul. While there are admittedly a few tearjerker moments, Jodie spends the majority of her time flip-flopping between (marginally sexist) sobbing and sociopathic behaviors. Especially when her pseudo-father Dr. Nathan Hawthorne (Willem Dafoe) is present. Nathan studies Aiden for the government and seems pleasant enough.

While overall, the character development is satisfying, it is regrettably easy to miss major aspects of the plot completely, many of which can influence Jodie's actions. She can live with the baggage of a rape attempt, or never experience it to begin with. Due to the lack of chronology the tone of the narrative is highly irregular. Some scenes are very mundane and feel like they will never end. There is literally no reason to spend an hour cleaning, and cooking before Jodie's big date. But, as the sheer monotony lulls you into apathy, the following scene loses all significance. The impact of Nathan's family dying (and his resulting insanity) is ruined for laundry and stir-fry.

The gameplay itself leaves much to be desired. Jodie's maneuverability is adequate as long as you follow the constant tutorial perfectly. That being said, when she's wanted for treason and must run through a poorly lit forest to escape the cops; a lack of

vision results in numerous tree branches hitting her in the face. Similarly, due to an early stealth tutorial as Jodie enters the CIA, you may be fooled into momentarily believing that such controls would persist and enrich the plot. Wrong. The aforementioned stealth is used once. Aiden's supernatural powers can also be controlled to some extent. They lack the freedom that his character implies, because of restrictions that stop any morbid experimentation. Aiden must only be used to propel the plot. Finally, the game simply isn't challenging, any feeling of danger vanishes when you realize that you won't die. Even during the homeless chapter (steal money, deliver baby), you're given the option to kill yourself but if you do it there's a "gotcha" moment where you must continue playing instead.

With such a unique plot at its core, *Beyond: Two Souls* should have been one of the most enjoyable and immersive gaming events of 2013. However, the jarringly inconsistent graphics, convulsing narrative tone, and sluggish controls turn the game into a mere conductor for boredom. The trouble with interactive drama games in general is how it is entirely possible to recreate the same exact experience by watching any movie and pausing it every 30 seconds.