

Game Narrative Review

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Game Title: Disco Elysium – The Final Cut

Platform: Windows (PC)

Genre: Point and Click, Open World, RPG

Release Date: 2019 **Developer:** ZA/UM

Publisher: ZA/UM

Game Writer/Creative Director/Narrative Designer: Robert Kurvitz

Overview

“There is nothing, only warm Primordial blackness,” time drifting ever so slowly in the miasma. A single thought of the past, a lover, comes to mind in this darkness. Your ancient reptilian brain begs for forgiveness and wants nothing more than to cease existing, no? Possibly, to return to a simpler time, a dance with disco. Your Limbic System feels a great fire roar inside your skull. A Cacophony ensues.

You wake up naked, with a pounding migraine, on the floor in what could only be described as a room lost to chaos. A brief trip down the stairs finds you holed up in the “Whirling in Rags” hostel, with the task of solving “The Hanged Man” case; people don’t exactly like you for a supposed several-day bender that you can’t even remember. Luckily, you have a new partner, Kim Kitsuragi, who will help you solve the case. Now, all that’s left to answer is, “Who are you?”

Characters

Major Characters:

- **Harrier “Harry” Du Bois** – The Protagonist of the game. Harry is currently charged with solving the case of “The Hanged Man” in a fictional district “Martinaise” in the city of Revachol. Harry is a man who is very much troubled by his past, as he was once a shining example of what it meant to be a “supercop.” with over 216 closed cases but is haunted by his personal history. His personality and political views radically change depending on player input. Harry can become a man who is chronically depressed and over-apologetic, a political extremist, a

man who is unbiased to politics or leans towards centralism, or even a drug-addled party animal.

- **Kim Kitsuragi** – The Deuteragonist of the story, Kim initially views Harry with Disdain and disapproval after witnessing the aftermath of his current bender. As a character, he serves as the moral and sane counterpart to the protagonist, providing what could be described as stoic and moralist ideology, only breaking character when in the face of racist or oppressive beliefs.

Kim as a person tends to avoid any form of emotional vulnerability and leans toward keeping a calm and collected approach when in the face of others. Depending on Harry's actions, Kim may break out of his shell over time and become more approachable and carefree. If Harry is rude or continuously avoids professionalism, it would have the opposite effect. Kim is also a potential lover of Harry.

- **Klaasje Amandou** – An elusive and unreliable narrator, Klaasje serves as a The “Femme Fatale” archetype tends to act sly and dismissive, attempting to throw Harry off her scent. She is a spy fleeing from her previous job, fearing her employer may betray her. In a bout of partying, sex, and drugs, she meets a man named Ellis Kortenaer, who becomes her temporary lover before being assassinated. In the aftermath of the event, she is coerced by Ruby into covering up his death by convincing a local faction of workers, “The Hardie Boys,” to help her cover up the death and frame it as a lynching.

Klaasje will help Harry in genuine effort but will consistently subvert this expectation if it means she will be putting herself in the crossfire. This makes her a tough character to get a read on, as most of the time, Harry can't tell if she is lying. This also makes her motivation for the cover-up very hard to decipher.

Minor Characters:

- **Titus Hardie** – Leader of the Hardie boys, he is a stubborn and complicated man who takes absolutely nothing from others, he is also the prime suspect for Ellis's murder initially before being cleared, he refuses to allow any of his subordinates to speak, removing any chance of others being implicated in his false crime.

- **Evrart Claire** – Leader of the dockworker's union. He is morally corrupt and calculating in nature, having minor insights into the death of Ellis, but refusing to help unless his “back is scratched.”

- **Jean Luc Measure Head** – a dockworker of “Semenese” origin, guarding the Entrance of the dock and challenging anyone's rhetoric on critical race theory who attempts to pass. He is stoic in personality and cold in his politics; anyone who

opposes him is of the “Inferior opinion” and a “ham sandwich.”

- **(Colonel) Ellis Kortenaer “The Hanged Man”**

Ellis is a character that can only be interacted with within Harry’s mind. When the story begins, he is already dead. He is part of the Krenel, working as an independent military contractor. His team described him as a man who always used his head, leading to a “less trigger-happy” approach as their natural leader. Ellis, as a character, serves to move the story forward and isn’t given much time to shine.

Antagonists:

- **(Sergeant Major) Raul Kortenaer – Major Antagonist**

Raul is the Brother of Ellis, serving under him as second in command of the team. He is abrasive, loud and angry as a person, which only becomes amplified when he turns to the bottle to cope with the death of his brother. He seeks due revenge on the Hardie boys and considers “an eye for an eye” fair treatment.

- **Ruby, the Instigator – Secondary Antagonist**

Ruby, known as "The Instigator," is a manipulative and resourceful figure within Martinaise, operating from the shadows with a sharp instinct honed by her criminal past. Before joining the Dockworkers' Union, she worked for La Puta Madre, a crime syndicate out of Revachol West. Ruby's experience in the underworld made her invaluable to Evrart Claire, helping to run Terminal B's drug operation while trying to avoid drawing attention from her former employer. She manipulated the Hardie Boys into covering up the murder, driven by her secret attachment to Klaasje, with whom she shared a fleeting, complicated bond. Beneath her tough exterior, Ruby acted as the true leader of the Hardie Boys, using her influence to guide their actions while always one step ahead, constantly running from her past and the consequences that followed.

- **Iosef Lilian Dros “The Deserter” – Secondary Antagonist.**

The man who murdered Ellis, serving as a sniper and communist revolutionary, has rigid beliefs that no one can sway. His personality is caustic and unpleasant. Over an unknown period, he developed a hyper-fixation and predatory attraction for Klaasje, causing him to stalk her and witness the lovers in action. Enraged by this, he shoots Ellis in the mouth, killing him. When confronted over Ellis’s murder, he is unforgiving, as jealousy clouds his mind in the matter. Unbeknownst to him, the actual cause of his actions was due to being exposed to the Insulindian Phasmids pheromones. While it is mainly unexplained how this works, it was implied that the creature clouded his mind.

- **Insulindian Phasmid** – Enigma

The creature, a seemingly beautiful and awe-inspiring phenomenon, embodies the concept of something inherently genuine yet capable of catastrophic outcomes. Communicating telepathically with Harry, the Phasmid lurks in plain sight, an unsettling presence influencing those around it. Its power is subtle, creating a mental haze over the island that becomes increasingly inescapable with prolonged exposure. The Phasmid's eventual breeding and potential spread could affect the entire world—an innocent existence that, whether it intends to or not, brings great consequences. However, this being the least grounded entity within the game leans more into personal interpretation than any concrete foundation.

Major Factions:

Revachol Citizens Militia – The post-monarchy ruling government in effect at Revachol, equally as oppressive and expectant as the monarchy they ruled prior, it would brutally punish those who fell out of line with orders.

Precinct 41 – Harry's primary communication and link to the police station, the precinct seems to look down on Harry as he has fallen heavily from grace, berating him with insults and casually mocking him in most opportunities, they can. They provide feedback and minor insights into his current situation and are waiting expectantly for Harry to solve this case or make enough of a fool of himself that he gets fired.

Dockworkers Union – A group of radical socialists that seek work conditions to improve along the docks, currently on the outs with their boss, they frame Ellis's murder as a major dispute between them and the Krenel, masking his death as both the result of the dock dispute blowing up and Klaasje's supposed assault. The Hardie boys are a part of this union.

Hardie Boys – A group of the Dockworkers union, led by Titus Hardie, believing Klaasje to have been abused by Ellis and confused about the situation of his dying, agree to cover up the death of the man by hanging him in the tree behind the hotel they are staying at; as a group, they actively resist Harry and try their best to avoid Klaasje from being actively investigated in the crime.

Coalition of Nations - The Coalition of Nations is a foreign occupying force that controls Revachol. Following the failure of the revolution, it maintained power through economic and military dominance. It enforces a neoliberal order, keeping the city in a state of dependence and exploitation.

Wild Pines - Wild Pines, a global logistics conglomerate, represents corporate power in this system. It uses Krenel mercenaries and scabs to suppress labor resistance and further its interests in the fractured city.

Krenel – Krenel is a private military contractor, deeply embedded in the political fabric of Revachol. Known for their ruthless efficiency, Krenel operates on behalf of conglomerates like the Wild Pines Group, employing mercenaries to enforce capitalist interest in the region. Krenel's presence in Martinaire is palpable; their soldiers are employed to curb labor unrest at the docks and protect corporate interests amidst the chaos. Their involvement in the lynching at the harbor has made them a focal point of both fear and hatred for many citizens, as they represent the violent face of the corporate entities exploiting Revachol's fractured state. The Dockworkers Union, led by the Hardie Boys, sees them as an existential threat, their unchecked power emblematic of the larger struggle between labor and capital that defines life in Revachol.

Breakdown

Revachol:



ENCYCLOPEDIA – *Revachol is the disgraced former capital of the world, divided into zones of control under foreign occupation -- half a century after a failed world revolution. She is central to our moment in time.*

Revachol, the central setting of *Disco Elysium*, is a disgraced former capital of the world, its streets a living reminder of a failed revolution. Once the seat of global power during the Revacholian Suzerainty, the city lies fractured under foreign occupation, its ruins haunted by the ghosts of its insurgent past. The architecture, memorials, and even the people of Revachol reflect this profound loss. Monuments from the monarchy stand blown apart or defaced by communards yet remain partially restored as ironic art pieces while crumbling buildings bear the scars of the Civil War. Everything within Revachol, from the abandoned military fortifications to the makeshift homes of its impoverished citizens, speaks to the revolution's promise of liberation, followed by its crushing defeat. This failure is ever-present, etched into the city's physical and social landscape, where the Coalition of Nations now maintains control, turning Revachol into a Zone of Control (ZoC) subject to foreign powers. This pervasive sense of loss shapes the game's tone, creating an environment where the revolution's failure looms large, colouring the experiences of every character and shaping the story that unfolds.

The citizens of Revachol, much like the city itself, live in a state of post-war disillusionment. They grapple with the social, political, and economic fallout of a revolution that promised change but left them in poverty, crime, and corruption. Many Revacholians, caught between survival and the ideals of the past, embody this decay—people who once believed in a better future but are now left scraping by. Characters like

René Arnoux, a loyalist who clings to memories of the monarchy, and communards who remember the revolution with bitterness reflect the city's fractured identity. Drug addiction, mental illness, and economic hardship pervade Revachol, consequences of the city's traumatic history. The protagonist, Harry Du Bois, encounters these individuals, offering glimpses of how the failed revolution continues to define life in the city, where the physical and psychological scars of the past linger.

The political landscape of Revachol is deeply intertwined with the game's characters, each reflecting the ideological battles that still simmer beneath the surface. The Dockworkers' Union, led by Evrart Claire, claims to represent the working class, yet Claire's brand of capitalism exploits the workers he purports to protect. His control over the docks extends into illicit activities, including pushing cocaine through the drug trade in Martinaise, further corrupting the community and using addiction as a tool of control. The Scabs, hired by the global logistics conglomerate Wild Pines, are enforcers of neoliberal capitalism, sent to break the strike at Terminal B. Led by Raul Kortenaer, these strikebreakers represent the dehumanizing effects of corporate control over labour, and their presence highlights how capitalism has filled the vacuum left by the revolution's failure. The tension between the union, the scabs, and the hired mercenaries reveals how Wild Pines and other corporations exploit Revachol's fractured state, using force to uphold their dominance while pitting the working class against itself.

This ongoing labour dispute between the Dockworkers' Union and the scabs symbolizes the broader political and economic conflicts in Revachol. What begins as a clash over workers' rights becomes a representation of the city's class warfare, driven by unchecked capitalist exploitation and deep-seated poverty. The scabs and the mercenaries, acting as tools of Wild Pines, demonstrate how corporations maintain control over Revachol, prioritizing profits at the expense of the city's people. The volatile mix of labor unrest, privatized violence, and corporate dominance creates a tense atmosphere, where every conflict is charged with historical and ideological weight. Revachol is not just the setting but a reflection of the game's core themes—political decay, the lingering consequences of revolution, and the human cost of societal collapse.



YOU – "A military man -- but not a patriot?"

KLAASJE – "No, he left the National Service after they taught him to do what he did on Semenine. He wasn't the flag-waving kind. He was the *making money killing people* kind."

The Murder:

The murder of Colonel Ellis "Lely" Kortenaer is the catalyst for Disco Elysium's narrative. Still, its importance lies not in the act itself but in the symbolic weight it carries for the protagonist, Harry Du Bois. Ellis' body hanging from a tree in the middle of Martinaise is a reflection of Harry's crumbling self-worth and fragmented identity. Harry, the so-called "supercop," is tasked with solving the case, but the investigation serves as a

metaphor for his personal journey. The sight of Ellis' decomposing body is a stark reminder of Harry's own self-destruction through alcohol and failed relationships, particularly the estrangement from the woman he still loves. The murder is less about justice and more about Harry confronting his own demons, with each step of the investigation peeling away layers of his broken psyche.

Ellis Kortenaer, much like Harry, is a product of a violent and unforgiving world. Raised alongside his foster brother Raul in an abusive household, Ellis grew up to become a mercenary for Krenel, suppressing the very workers' revolution that echoes the failed uprising of Revachol. His involvement with Klaasje, a woman he meets at the Whirling-in-Rags, ultimately leads to his downfall when a deranged sniper, The Deserter, kills him out of jealousy and deep-seated ideological rage. The subsequent cover-up, orchestrated by Klaasje and the Hardie Boys, sets the stage for Harry's investigation. Yet, as Harry digs deeper into the murder, it becomes clear that the crime is just the surface of a much larger commentary on the brokenness of Revachol and its people. The murder serves as a mirror to Harry's existential crisis—solving the case is not about restoring order but about reclaiming some semblance of his own fractured identity.

This focus on personal reflection ties into *Disco Elysium's* exploration of villainy—or the lack thereof. In this world, there is no singular, clear-cut villain. Like Ellis and Harry, each character is shaped by the same historical, political, and social forces that continue to haunt Revachol. The true antagonist is not a person but the systems and circumstances that have oppressed the people for decades. The failed revolution has left deep scars on the city and its inhabitants, and the murder investigation highlights how these larger forces trap individuals in cycles of violence, bitterness, and despair. Every character is a victim of this systemic failure, and their actions, however harmful or destructive, are products of the environment they cannot escape.

Raul Kortenaer, Ellis' foster brother and a fellow mercenary, is another figure shaped by these forces. Hired by Wild Pines to suppress the Dockworkers' Union strike, Raul becomes a direct threat within the narrative, escalating tensions between the dockworkers and the scabs. His potential to kill Kim Kitsuragi during the tribunal adds urgency to the plot, yet Raul is not a villain in the traditional sense. He is a pawn in the economic war waged by corporations like Wild Pines, which uses violence to enforce its control. Raul's brutality is a consequence of his dehumanizing profession, much like Ellis before him. He serves as a reminder of how individuals are often caught in the crossfire of larger conflicts, becoming instruments of destruction in service to capital interests. Raul's role in the story exemplifies how *Disco Elysium* resists simplistic moral judgments, showing that villainy often stems from systemic exploitation rather than inherent evil.

The Deserter, Iosef Lilianovich Dros, offers a more intimate reflection of Harry Du Bois' personal struggles. Both men are haunted by their pasts—Harry by his addiction and broken relationships and the Deserter by the ideological defeat of the Revacholian revolution. Living in isolation on an islet, the Deserter has been consumed by bitterness, his mind warped by years of solitude and resentment. He remains ideologically

committed to the revolution that failed decades ago, and a mixture of jealousy and ideological zeal drives his role in the murder of Ellis. The Deserter is not a villain in the conventional sense but rather a cautionary figure for Harry, embodying what he could become if he fails to confront his traumas. Both men are relics of their former selves, trapped in cycles of guilt, regret, and addiction. The Deserter's arc parallels Harry's, illustrating how ideological fervour and personal grief can hollow out a person, leaving them disconnected from reality.

The Deserter's character also echoes the life of René Arnoux, a royalist soldier who, like the Deserter, is stuck in the past. René clings to the memory of the monarchy, just as the Deserter clings to the revolution's ideals. Both men are casualties of old wars they cannot let go of, and both are left bitter and broken by their inability to move forward. René, playing pétanque with his former rival Gaston, and the Deserter, hiding on his island, represent the stagnation when people cannot let go of the past. Their lives serve as cautionary tales of what happens when ideology and personal identity become so intertwined with historical events that progress becomes impossible. All of this still hangs on the question of who is the villain? In many ways, the closest thing to a villain in *Disco Elysium* is the Insulindian Phasmid—a mysterious creature that symbolizes both hope and delusion. Hidden on the islet where the Deserter lives, the Phasmid's presence has influenced his mind, prolonging his life and keeping him in ideological fervour. The Phasmid represents the lingering hope of revolution, the belief that something new and transformative is still possible even in the degraded world of Revachol. For the Deserter, the Phasmid is a symbol of something greater than himself, yet it also traps him in his delusions, preventing him from facing the reality of his situation. The Phasmid is a double-edged sword—offering the possibility of something extraordinary but also perpetuating a dangerous fantasy.

Much like the Deserter, the Phasmid is a relic of a world that no longer exists. Its elusiveness and mysterious nature make it a parallel to the Deserter's own isolation and ideological rigidity. Just as the Deserter clings to the belief that the revolution still matters, the Phasmid represents that life can adapt and thrive even in the most unlikely places. However, this belief can be as dangerous as it is hopeful, keeping people trapped in infinite cycles of delusion. The Phasmid's presence in the story reminds the player that while hope is necessary for survival, it can also be a form of escapism that prevents individuals from confronting the harsh realities of their world.

Ultimately, *Disco Elysium* challenges the notion of a traditional villain. The real antagonist is Revachol itself—broken systems, failed ideologies, and oppressive history. These forces shape each character in the game, and circumstances beyond their control constrain their choices. The murder of Ellis Kortenaar serves as a lens through which the game explores these more significant themes, showing how systemic failure affects everyone, from the mercenaries hired by corporations to the detectives trying to solve the case. In the end, *Disco Elysium* is less about heroism or villainy and more about the complexities of living in a world where people are constantly struggling against forces that seem insurmountable.



Dolores Dei/Dora - "This is real darkness. It's not death, or war, or child molestation. Real darkness has love for a face. The first death is in the heart, Harry."

The Lost Love:

Harry's relationship with Dora Ingerlund, or at least its shattered remains, is the heart of his personal tragedy, and this broken love defines his every action and emotional state. The idealization of Dora as Dolores Dei—the mythical figure Harry places on a pedestal—captures the essence of Harry's inability to let go of the past. Dora, the real woman, is a flawed person like Harry, but in his mind, she becomes something unattainable, divine.

Dora was not simply the source of Harry's happiness; she became the very axis on which his identity spun. Their relationship, though characterized by love, was far from healthy. Through snippets of dialogue and memories, it's clear that their time together was marked by financial struggles, emotional distance, and Harry's inability to communicate in ways Dora needed. She accuses him of being unable to talk like an average person anymore, speaking only in questions and lists, highlighting the emotional chasm that widened between them. This wasn't just about Harry's quirks as a detective; it was about how his work and the pressures of being in the RCM consumed him. In Harry's mind, he was a hero, a "supercop," solving crimes and battling the city's worst, but for Dora, he became an increasingly detached, isolated man, lost in the mechanics of his own job.



You – "Everyone gets a little down."

Dolores Dei/Dora - "A little down? You've worked there for so long you can't even talk like a normal person anymore! It's always lists with you *Questions.*"

This dissonance is embodied in how Harry fails to recognize the depth of his sadness. His attempt to brush it off with, "Everyone gets a little down," is met by Dora's exasperated correction that it's more than that—Harry's depression, his inability to find a balance between work and life, had left him emotionally unavailable. Her decision to leave him was not just breaking their relationship but Harry's final descent into despair. He spirals into alcoholism and self-destruction, and his failure to confront these issues becomes the root of his crisis. It isn't just that Dora left him; she took the possibility of redemption that Harry desperately needed. Her departure, coupled with the abortion of

their child, represents the total collapse of his personal life, a trauma he cannot process in any healthy way.

Harry's relationship with Dora and the loss of their child stands as a central wound in his life. The phone call at the boardwalk is a bitter reflection of Harry's unreliable memory and the gap between the idealized version of events he clings to and the painful reality. The child was terminated, a decision she made long ago. This revelation cuts deeply into Harry, not just as an emotional blow but as a confirmation of his worst fears: that he has lost everything, not only Dora but also the future they could have had together. Dora's sharp, bitter words about the termination drive home the finality of their relationship, underscoring the emotional abyss that Harry has fallen into.

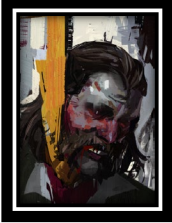
The termination is not some abstract tragedy. It is deeply personal and tied to Harry's sense of failure as a partner, potential father, and person. His inability to provide, his descent into alcoholism, and his spiral into depression all feed into this moment. Dora's decision to leave him and her choice to end the pregnancy represents more than just the end of their relationship — they symbolize the complete unravelling of Harry's identity. His self-destruction is not merely a reaction to loss but an embodiment of his inability to reckon with his past. Each encounter with the memory of Dora brings him back to this point, where his sense of inadequacy, combined with his guilt, metastasizes into a more profound emotional collapse.

The ultimate tragedy of Harry's relationship with Dora is that he conflates love with his salvation. Her departure was not just the end of a relationship but the collapse of the ideal Harry built his life around. She was the last anchor. He had a sense of meaning; without her, he is adrift, lost in the sea of his self-loathing and existential despair. The memory of her becomes *Dolores Dei*, an impossible standard that no one could live up to. This idealization allows Harry to avoid confronting the reality of their relationship and his role in its downfall. By turning Dora into an untouchable figure, he can distance himself from his failures, focusing instead on a romanticized past that never truly existed.

Dora's words in the final dream sequence, "Real darkness has a love for a face," reveal the profound emotional truth that Harry has been avoiding. His natural darkness, his real downfall, was never just his job or the pressures of being a cop; it was his inability to reconcile the love he lost with the man he became. The first death was in his heart, and every action since has been an attempt to numb that pain. Much like his investigation, his life is an endless loop of searching for answers that might allow him to make sense of the mess his life has become.

In the end, Harry's tragedy is deeply intertwined with the larger forces of the world around him. His inability to let go of Dora mirrors Revachol's inability to let go of his past. Harry and the city are haunted by what they have lost, and both are trapped in cycles of grief and disillusionment. The real villain is not just the city, the failed revolution, or even the personal mistakes that led to Dora leaving. It's the pervasive weight of the past that neither Harry nor Revachol can escape. The tragedy of Harry's lost love symbolizes how Revachol's history consumes its people, shaping their lives in

ways they cannot fully understand or control. Harry and Revachol are prisoners of their history, doomed to repeat the same cycles of despair until they can confront the truths they have avoided.



BLOATED CORPSE OF A DRUNK - “You know who I am. I am the bad day. The one where you ask her, and then later in the streets, wandering... It's the worst day of all time, Harry dear, and it's coming. She will hear about it on the phone.”

Harry Du Bois serves as the most poignant example of *Disco Elysium*'s challenge to the concept of a traditional villain. Harry is the quintessential anti-hero, a man who once was a supercop but is now a complete wreck—both professionally and personally. The game opens with Harry having spent his first week in Martinaise on a bender so intense that he pawns his gun, crashes his car into a lake, and terrorizes the citizens around him. The mirror reflects a bloated, drunken mess that echoes his crumbling self-worth, much like the hanged man suspended in the center of Martinaise. This murder case becomes a metaphor for Harry's attempt to find some form of redemption, his self-destructive tendencies mirroring the stagnant, decaying world of Revachol. As he struggles to piece together his memory, he finds himself not just solving the murder but coming face to face with the consequences of his own actions and failures.

The hanged man himself is a reflection of Harry's shattered sense of identity. The investigation of Ellis' death brings Harry back to confront his broken past, and in doing so, it mirrors Harry's own process of understanding and recontextualizing his life—a supercop turned trainwreck. Unlike a traditional protagonist facing off against a singular antagonist, Harry's fight is with the many fragments of himself. His identity is molded and reshaped not only by player choices but by the consequences of his failed relationships, personal vices, and his inability to move on from the trauma of losing Dora. There's no single villain to defeat, no ultimate antagonist to overcome—the enemy is the lingering weight of his past, of addiction, depression, and the failure to live up to an idealized version of himself.

The dialogue trees, with their fragmented, often erratic options, illustrate Harry's mental disarray. Harry cannot think in straight lines; instead, every conversation is a branching series of thoughts and impulses, as if his mind is compartmentalizing the chaos that has overtaken him. The player's choices in these moments serve as both a tool for narrative engagement and a representation of Harry's struggle to retain his sense of self. He is not a traditional hero—he is a man who can either spiral deeper into despair or fight to become someone better, someone who can earn the respect of his partner Kim Kitsuragi, who despite meeting Harry in his most chaotic form, still sees enough potential in him to declare that he would take a bullet for him.

In the end, Revachol is not inherently malicious; it is a product of its circumstances, shaped by external forces and historical failures beyond anyone's control. While it may seem like the city embodies the story's villain—a city crushed under the weight of its own broken systems, history, and failed revolutions—the true antagonist lies closer to home. Ultimately, Harry Du Bois is his own worst enemy. Harry's story is one of confronting the inescapable truth that there is no single villain to defeat, but rather, a series of failures, regrets, and traumas to navigate. The game does not provide a neat resolution, nor does it offer a redemption arc where everything is restored. Instead, Harry's struggle is emblematic of *Disco Elysium's* broader narrative—each person in Revachol is fighting their own battles, facing their own inner demons shaped by the city's shattered past. For Harry, solving the case is less about finding the killer and more about finding a way to move forward, to navigate the complex and messy reality of a life defined by failure, in the hope that he might find a small measure of peace amidst the ruins of his past.

Strongest Element

Disco Elysium's strongest element is its existential exploration, disguised beneath the trappings of a detective game. At its core, it is a story of mourning futures that never came, where characters struggle against the weight of their pasts and the shattered dreams that haunt them. The game uses its setting, characters, and narrative to reflect on lives lost to regret, disillusionment, and unfulfilled potential, revealing the true burden of existence in the city of Revachol.

Harry Du Bois, the protagonist, exemplifies this theme as he stumbles through his investigation, consumed by self-doubt, regret, and the ghosts of his own shattered past. His journey is not just about solving the murder at Martinaise but about coming to terms with who he has become. A former "supercop," Harry's fall from grace mirrors Revachol's own decline—once great, now barely held together by alcohol and nostalgia. His story is a desperate attempt to reclaim something from the wreckage to piece together both a crime and his broken identity.

The supporting characters are similarly burdened by the weight of lost futures. Lena, the cryptozoologist's wife, holds onto a hope that borders on delusion, her search for the mythical Phasmid symbolic of her need to find meaning in a life overshadowed by lost opportunities. Soona, the programmer, works tirelessly in the dilapidated church, her efforts to find meaning in her work juxtaposed against the hollow, broken space around her—a physical representation of dreams abandoned. Klaasje is another tragic figure, running from her past and attempting to manipulate her present, always with one eye cast backward at mistakes she can never undo. Even Rene, the old soldier, stands as a symbol of misplaced loyalty, his bitterness a reflection of the monarchy he once served and the revolution that tore apart his world.

Revachol itself is a character in mourning, a city haunted by the ghosts of a revolution that failed to deliver on its promise. The bombed-out apartment building and the near-empty commercial district are monuments to the futures that never materialized,

to hopes dashed against the cold, unfeeling machinery of history. The church, a sacred place now repurposed as an experimental sound lab, is another reminder of what was lost—once a beacon of faith, now an echo of a forgotten purpose. These locations are not just backdrops; they embody the despair and longing that define the game's narrative.

Disco Elysium is ultimately about the weight of existence, the mourning of possibilities that never came to pass, and the struggle to find meaning in a world that seems determined to deny it. It is this raw, unflinching portrayal of human fragility that makes the game resonate so deeply. The detective story is just a framework, a vehicle for a much deeper exploration—one that forces players to confront their own existential questions alongside Harry and the rest of Revachol's inhabitants.

Unsuccessful Element

The most frustrating element of *Disco Elysium* lies not in its gameplay mechanics but in how its systems lean too heavily into the narrative, often punishing new players to the point of frustration. While deeply tied to Harry's fragile state of being, the health and morale systems are harshly unforgiving, particularly in the game's early stages. Interactions that might initially seem comedic or inconsequential can lead to physical harm or even death, especially for players unaware of the consequences or exploring the game for the first time.

The narrative intention behind these systems is clear: to immerse players in Harry's vulnerability and make every choice, regardless of size, carry weight. However, the game's approach can be jarring for a new player unfamiliar with these mechanics. The tutorial phase does little to explain the intricacies of health and morale management. Players who opt for minimal health stats or choose the "thinker" build can die almost instantly by failing to grab their tie off a ceiling fan. While the absurdity of such an incident may seem humorous in hindsight, for a player just starting their journey, it can be a highly frustrating introduction to the game—one that may even lead them to abandon it altogether. Restarting and rebuilding stats from scratch because of an unexpected, seemingly trivial failure disrupts immersion and risks detaching the player from the story's emotional weight.

The harshness of these moments starkly contrasts the depth of the narrative, which aims to explore themes of vulnerability, failure, and redemption. To better align the mechanics with the intended narrative experience, the game could have provided players with an early supply of health and morale items and encouraged their use during minor injuries or setbacks. This could have been achieved through an emergent tutorial moment—for example, Harry cutting his hand or experiencing a debilitating migraine. Such an experience would have reinforced the narrative while also teaching players the critical importance of health and morale, easing them into the mechanics in a more forgiving manner.

Highlight

The highlight of *Disco Elysium* is undoubtedly the climax, where Harry and Kim are caught in the crossfire between the dockworkers and Krenel mercenaries. This pivotal moment culminates the player's skill investments, offering a rewarding payoff for those who have carefully developed Harry's abilities and personality. Success in the sequence depends largely on the player's chosen build, and the tension is palpable as various skill checks unfold.

The encounter is a high-stakes confrontation. Depending on Harry's attributes, the player may need agility to dodge incoming gunfire, strength to endure damage, or intellect to find a clever way to negotiate or create an opening. These skill checks create an intense experience, where each decision could mean the difference between survival or death for Harry and Kim. The game's emphasis on role-playing is highlighted here, as the player's build determines the available actions and potential outcomes, making each player's experience unique.

Regardless of Harry's actions throughout the game, Kim's unwavering loyalty and selflessness shine through as he risks his life to protect Harry. Kim's bravery is evident as he stands by Harry, even when the odds seem insurmountable. His actions are not dictated by moral alignment or previous choices but rather by his sense of duty and commitment. This makes Kim a standout character whose actions are a powerful emotional anchor for the player. If the player navigates the encounter successfully, Kim survives, underscoring the impact of the player's choices and rewarding the bond built between the two characters.

This moment also serves as a poignant reflection of the relationship between both characters. Throughout the game, the player has had numerous opportunities to interact with Kim, earning his trust, and deepening their partnership. The climax brings all of these interactions to a head, showing the depth of his loyalty regardless of Harry's flaws or failures. The player's efforts to foster camaraderie and mutual respect are rewarded in a tangible and emotionally impactful way, as Kim's fate hinges on the player's ability to make the right choices under pressure.

Ultimately, the climax of *Disco Elysium* is not just about surviving a firefight—it is about the culmination of the player's journey, the relationships they have built, and their choices. It brings together the game's core themes: the struggle for redemption, the importance of human bonds, and the consequences of one's actions. The outcome of this sequence, particularly Kim's survival, is a powerful reminder of the player's agency and the weight of their decisions, making it one of the game's most memorable and emotionally resonant moments.

Reception

IGN – Simon Cardy – 10/10: “The Final Cut elevates *Disco Elysium* from an already phenomenal RPG to a true must play masterpiece” Simon highlights that the introduction of fully voice acted lines in game elevates the player experience, “reinforcing diversity” and creating a unique and funny experience akin to an “audiobook reading”

PC Gamer – Andy Kelly – 92/100: “An irresponsibly deep detective RPG that lets you be any kind of detective you want. Even a bad one.” Andy highlights the overall narrative of the story while providing minor insights to the systems and mechanics in place and how they related to previous generations of CRPGS. To him “Martinaise” feels like a “wildly open “space that the player can explore with a world that feels like you can perpetually become immersed or “Get lost in”

Rock Paper Shotgun – Alice Bell – Recommended: “*Disco Elysium* provided roughly 60 hours of content and felt like there was still much of the world to see.” she thinks that the game is “brilliant” with “flaws that aren’t quite simple due to narrative complexity”. A highlight of the review pushes to examine the stat blocks in the game and how they impact gameplay and player choice. Leaving too much chance to the dice can feel “frustrating at times” due to skewed odds and even by dumping every point into one skill, success is never guaranteed. Even though she has criticisms of the game, it still manages to keep more than enough positives to level out her opinion

Lessons

Not Every Story Needs to be Told - The greatest strength of *Disco Elysium* lies in its visual storytelling. Murals, documents, and secrets are scattered throughout the world, making Martinaise as a setting feel more grounded. The world is portrayed as having a real history, with no piece of it out of place. Even when failing the skill checks required to obtain information, the player will feel like they have learned something new or gained an opportunity to return later in the story when they have the necessary skill. By allowing the player to fail, the game creates a much greater payoff for something that would otherwise feel mundane. This makes a connection that not only did they earn this information based on their choices but that they are now a little more connected to the setting.

Diversity Brings Growth - One of *Disco Elysium*'s greatest narrative strengths is its diversity in the cast. Characters from wildly different backgrounds and ethical perspectives critique political opinion and what it means to be human. For example, "Measurehead" is a man of colour who believes that the introduction of race theory and the end of cultural oppression have made society weak. Every character feel justified in their approach to culture and ethics and is written in ways challenging complex and controversial topics. When Harry is exposed to enough of these thoughts, he can adjust his conversation to meet the ideals he has learned throughout the game, just like people

do throughout their lives. The communication and variety of characters make the world feel grounded in reality and "alive."

Sound and the Setting - The world of *Disco Elysium* is shrouded in mystery, with echoes of the sea and a tired trumpet wailing into the void, followed by rising drums and a chorus of noise that builds up to hopeful energy. Music in the world never seems out of place; it complements the environment and makes the player feel even closer to the setting. The contrast between heavy cello use and upbeat experimental EDM gives the world a wave of vibrance that never disappoints. The soundtrack is one of the most recognizable elements of any video game. Without a strong foundation of music to complement a story, text ultimately becomes fragmented pieces of memory, but the sound of something will always be timeless.

Summation

Disco Elysium is a world with a rich history. Whether you look closely or not, the impact of past times is evident in the foreground. The cities bear the mark of time, and the people have stories to tell. The choices you make as a player will define the impact you leave on this world. It's not a story focused on intricate details like a classic Noir campaign, but rather an exploration of identity and culture. The game encourages players to question the complexities of the human condition and challenge their thinking. Combining an interactive audiobook and a living painting creates an experience that cannot be replicated in any other form. For this reason, it is worthy of analysis.

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