

**Video Game Field Note Assignment**

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## Field Notes



### Session 1: Before Playing | 15-30 minutes

#### *Answer the Questions*

*With this in mind, respond to each of the following questions:*

*What will I like / dislike about it? What will I find interesting about it/boring or tedious about it? What will I need to do in it? What will I need to learn within it? What will it be like / similar to (other games I have played)?*

- I will like the gameplay and the graphics of the game. I also think that I will enjoy the story and exploring in the open world. The sense of being able to explore openly and possibly even find hidden secrets sounds exciting.
- I will most likely dislike the control schemes as I prefer to play on an Xbox controller. I also may dislike the tutorial portion of the game if it starts too slow.
- I will hopefully find the story compelling and interesting. I also hope to enjoy the various fights and mechanics that the player needs to learn to progress through the game.
- I will most likely find the tutorial/opening section of the game boring. If there is a lot of backtracking for quests and story progression, I would also find that very tedious.
- In order to enjoy the game and give it a fair chance, I will need to first read and figure out the controls in case I would like to modify them. I then will need to force myself through the tutorial section of the game if it is not compelling. I will need to practice and take the game slowly to appreciate the story as that is the selling point of the game.
- I will need to learn and master the controls which may be difficult as I do not normally use a Playstation controller. I will also need to learn the various mechanics that the developer expects player to master in order to progress through the game. I will also need to learn more about the characters and their personal stories to appreciate the overarching stories that the developers created.
- I think it will be similar to Tomb Raider in terms of the art style and gameplay while also feeling like The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild in terms of exploration.

*I believe that I will enjoy the exploration and gameplay based on previous experiences playing other games in the same genre.*



*Aloy after defeating a mechanical snake.*

## Session 2: Solo Playthrough | 1 hour 20 minutes

### Descriptive Notes

- Started the game on Normal mode with Explorer setting (more natural exploration instead of markers)
- Watched introduction cutscene showing the world and different animals. Introduced Aloy (the main character) and the premise of the story.
- Really impressed by graphics and looks
- Question who is Elisabet (made me curious during the introductory cutscene).
- Aloy is looking for a "backup" of code before species go extinct. Aloy says it can fix the world.
- Learning involved a tutorial with the "Focus" a chip that allows you to see different objects (sort of like Augment Reality).
- Begins with having to collect berries to heal Aloy (teaches user to heal and about health).
- A lot of dialogue happens casually while playing
- Next shows the crafting system to craft arrows using wood collected from trees.
- Then shows the user to shoot an arrow by hitting a lock on a ladder so it drops down.
- First fight with a machine shows the player how to scan the machine for "weak spots" and to slow down time to aim arrows easier.
- Then the user finds a ladder naturally and is expected to know to shoot the lock to allow it to lock down like the previous ladder.
- Crouch along a path to open a door using a weapon. Teaches player to pry open doors with the weapon.
- Crafted a "pullcaster" to remove debris from a wall by pulling it out.
- Learned how to grapple to reach high places around the world
- Found a hidden bunker which progressed the story by introducing Far Zenith
- Learned how to do silent strikes to defeat machines without entering battle by sneaking up on them
- Learned how to create traps and place them in the paths of enemies to also defeat them without entering battle
- Aloy is a genetic copy of Elisabet and was made by a machine (GAIA).
- Saw two giant snake machines and have to find a way to defeat them.
- Ran out of arrows and had a hard time remember how to craft more (had to press L1)
- Had to climb up a tower to release a shuttle to crush the giant snake machines.
- Tower fell and one snake survived which led to a boss battle
- Finished by killing the snake machine by using the focus ability to find critical spots.

### Analytical Notes:

- Problems:
  - Story: Aloy is trying to restore the world by finding a backup of GAIA - a system that can heal the world and solve the rampant machines roaming the world.
  - Story: Aloy seems to have some sort of connection with Elisabet which the player must continue to explore and understand throughout the game.
  - Story: Aloy is not human and was created by GAIA as a last-resort. Aloy is struggling with her self-identity since coming to this realization.

- Gameplay: Aloy is weaker and missing abilities and tools as they were taken from her at some point prior to the game starting.
- Address Problems:
  - Story: Continue to follow Aloy through problem-solving and using her Focus ability to learn more about the world around her and find the backup of GAIA.
  - Gameplay: Continue to find new materials and resources to craft new items to strengthen Aloy's abilities.
- Gender, Class, Race, and Violence
  - Gender: Aloy is a strong female protagonist created by the team at Guerrilla Games. The studio has received positive feedback and fan reaction for creating Aloy and for her staying true to her character.
  - Race: Many diverse characters are in the game and in prominent roles (not just background characters).
  - Violence: Although the game is fictitious and involves the killing of machines, it does still invoke violence.
- Learning
  - The game's tutorial system is focused on naturally progressing the player throughout the first level instead of it being a traditional "tutorial level". The player is thrown right in to the story of Horizon and small pop-ups only explain mechanics when they are needed.
  - The game also uses shades of yellow to hint to the players that a ledge or object may be grabbable.
- Unique Features
  - The "Focus" ability of Aloy's is a unique feature as it allows her to scan her environment and enemies. When scanning the environment, it may lead her to clues of how to escape structures or progress through a path. When scanning an enemy, it shows her the weakspots, health points, path it may take if she would like to sneak up on it, and other useful information.
  - The graphics of the game are genre-defining as they are realistic and exceptional.

#### Affective Notes:

- To start the game, I was a bit confused but also excited as I learned about Aloy's story and her objectives.
- I was frustrated as I could not complete the first objective. I could not find all ten berries that would help me craft healing items and could only find nine. I gave up and progressed through the area.
- I was intrigued while learning more about Aloy's past and the realization that she was not truly human. I became much more invested in the story.
- I was frustrated as I could not find a way to stealth attack enemies and kept failing the objective. I then realized that you could only crouch in red bushes and not any bush which was causing enemies to be able to spot me.
- I enjoyed the stealth mechanic more after realizing my mistake.
- I became extremely frustrated and wasted five minutes after I ran out of arrows and could not figure out how to craft more. I searched through the menus to try to find the option and even tried to find a tutorial in the game menus but could not. Eventually I was able to figure out how to craft arrows and progress.

- I was happy and really enjoyed the section of the game that involved climbing up a structure as it encourage exploration to determine how to climb the structure.
- I became frustrated at the mechanical snake boss fight as no matter when I timed my roll or how much I would try to dodge the snakes attacks, it would always hit me. I ended up using all of my healing items and have no berries left to craft more which left me really frustrated.

*Horizon Forbidden West empowers the user to use problem-solving and exploration to uncover the story of Aloy's world. By using her Focus ability and resources scoured throughout the environment, Aloy continues her quest to find the backup of GAIA to save the world.*



*Aloy using her "Focus" ability.*

## Session 3: Video observation | 57 minutes

*FightinCowboy Let's Play (YouTube) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFGRYeMgXy4>*

### Descriptive Notes

- As FightinCowboy (FC) starts, he explains how he really enjoyed the first game and how he actually went back to play the Downloadable content for the game which is not something he normally does. Due to this comment, I am assuming he is going in to this game with a predetermined opinion that he will also enjoy it.
- Starts by watching a recap of the previous game.
- He selected "Hard" difficulty with the Explorer setting.
- Brought up how he can feel the controller vibrating throughout the cutscenes to explain to those watching the Let's Play.
- FC was quickly able to find all of the plants needed and also explained how much he loves when games have fast gathering like in Horizon.
- Realized that running over "Blight" (red stuff on ground) will make him take damage immediately after running on it. I did not realize this until much later.
- Very quick at crafting and seemed to understand where he should be going at all times.
- Instead of taking damage to the "Blight" he would jump over it and jump into safe spots instead of running through and healing (which is what I did).
- Had very good aim in the first encounter with a machine which showed his skill.
- Used a "slow-time" feature in the first encounter to aim better.
- To make sure he did not run out of arrows, he would collect every material he saw. Looking back, I missed a lot of materials.
- Used Focus a lot to scan the environment even when not hinted to.
- Tried different melee combos to see how they work with Aloy's spear.
- Really was focused on the combat aspect of the game
- Had no issues with stealth kills and very easily progressed through all of the combat scenarios.
- Rarely got hit by enemies and used mostly melee attacks
- Says that he uses the indicators on the screen to determine where to go once he is done exploring, but puts exploring as his first priority.
- Understands the story and has a good grasp of what is going on in the world. He spoke a good deal about what happened in the previous game and the character's backstories.
- Found that he could craft "frost bombs" which are useful for killing enemies. I seemed to miss the ability to craft this item.
- Used rolling a lot to go through the world compared to just walking.
- Used Focus to look through walls to do silent strikes.

### Analytical Notes:

- FC had a much easier time traversing through the game compared to myself. As he had played the previous game, he seemed to have a much better understanding
- FC seemed to have less issues with the game compared to the ones I had during my playthrough. I think due to his further exploration of areas he was better equipped with resources.

- FC crafted arrows immediately after he would use any which always allowed him to have full arrows. Since he crafted them so often, he did not run into the issue I had which was forgetting how to craft arrows.
- FC did not comment on any of the race, gender, class, or violence issues relating to this game. However, he did mention a few times that he really enjoyed the combat and how fluid it felt. Therefore, I am assuming he enjoys Horizon partially due to the violence aspect of the combat.
- While watching FC, I felt like I was able to enjoy the story more and felt a lot less frustrated compared to when I had played. While I played, I was so focused on learning the mechanics and systems that I was too frustrated to really get a good grasp of the story.

#### Affective Notes:

- Really enjoyed the fast gathering
- Thought that continuous dialogue was really cool throughout the game and it added to his experience.
- Seemed to really enjoy the Focus ability and problem-solving
- FC focused more on the scanning and exploration compared to how I focused on progression. Due to him playing the first game, he seemed to have a better idea of where to go and the overall game systems. Therefore, his immediate experience with the game seemed a lot more positive than mine.
- Due to my frustration, I missed a lot of resources that I could have collected as I focused more on finding ways out of areas instead of exploring what was in the areas.
- Really enjoyed the combat and was happy with how good it felt.
- Said that he prefers combat and the game started very story heavy so he was a bit unhappy with that.

*Horizon Forbidden West provides a very rewarding experience for those who played the previous title. It is a worthy sequel to the first game as it fine-tunes the mechanics and systems that fans loved.*



*Aloy going over her past with another character.*

### **Video Game Field Note Bridge – Horizon Forbidden West**

Horizon Forbidden West is a story-driven game that provides players an outlet for exploration and problem-solving. The game follows Aloy, the female protagonist, on her quest to find a backup of a program called GAIA to fix the world as it is deteriorating. After my initial playtime with Horizon Forbidden West as a newcomer to the franchise and after watching a seasoned veteran of the series, it is easy to see that Guerrilla Games has mastered storytelling through the “single player versus game” structure (Fullerton, 2014, p. 59).

Horizon Forbidden West falls into the action role-playing genre of gaming with the player objectives of exploration, finding solutions, and capturing an item (Fullerton, 2014, p. 68-72). Players explore the vast lands filled with puzzles while trying to find the “GAIA backup” which will restore the world to its original state. The game has different difficulty modes to challenge and engage players of all skills levels (Fullerton, 2014, p. 97). Horizon Forbidden West uses Fullerton’s ideology of resources through Aloy’s health and inventory systems (2014, p. 80-83). If Aloy’s health reaches zero while exploring the world, the player must restart from the last checkpoint and try again. The main conflict in the series is between Aloy and different organizations who have caused the world to be overrun by rampant AI machines. These machines are hostile and are Aloy’s main enemies.

Story elements in gaming are normally used to “propel adventure games along their mainly single-player campaigns”, which are evident in Horizon Forbidden West’s story progression and Aloy’s growth as a character (Fullerton, 2014, p. 113). The story allows some room for players to explore and problem-solve throughout the world instead of being on a completely linear story path. While there is only one conclusion to the game, there are several different ways to get there depending on choices made by the player.

Aloy is a very strong female protagonist who has received universal praise in the gaming industry for her characterization (Williams, 2020). Unlike other female characters like Lara Croft, Cortana, and Princess Peach, she is not a damsel in distress or a character looking for reassurance from a male character. She was not designed to emphasize her sexuality compared to the other 85.71% of female characters in gaming (Gray & Leonard, 2018). Aloy is a confident female lead who has a strong belief in herself and her abilities. Using Fullerton's research into video game characters, Aloy would be a rounded and dynamic character due to her dramatic character arc (2014, p. 110). The depth of Aloy's story and characterization also creates engagement for both players of Horizon Forbidden West and viewers of livestreams and videos. As the player journeys through the story, it is very easy for an audience to become engaged with Aloy due to her relatable characteristics such as her dealing with real emotions.

Horizon Forbidden West also combats the issue of racial bias in the gaming industry by introducing characters of all races and not just as background non-playable characters. Research done by a 2009 study analyzed that only 10.7% of characters of 150 of the most popular gaming titles were black characters (Peckham, 2020). Horizon Forbidden West's characters are not only all diverse but are also impactful to the story through their prominent roles.

As Horizon Forbidden West's combat revolves around weapons, violence is a main part of gameplay. Aloy uses weaponry such as bows, spears, and bombs to defeat the machines that roam the world. Since Aloy's main enemies are machines, there is no remorse from Aloy during combat. To the player this may seem reasonable since the violence is happening against non-living machines. However, Aloy herself is a machine. Since the player feels deeply connected with Aloy and her character, the ideology of violence against a non-living machine being acceptable is not reasonable since the player would feel emotion if Aloy was hurt or killed. This follows the conclusion that violence, regardless of

who it is against, is still prevalent and glorified in Horizon Forbidden West through objectives such as defeating machines.

One major factor to a player's enjoyment of Horizon Forbidden West is their knowledge and understanding of events that took place in the first game of the series. As Horizon Forbidden West is a sequel, players who did play the original game could have a deeper understanding of the characters and gameplay mechanics. This gives those players a large advantage and an easier path of enjoyment of the game compared to a newcomer who is learning the controls and mechanics for the first time. Although Horizon Forbidden West has an excellent non-traditional tutorial system, players who have experience with the gameplay are more likely to enjoy the game quicker. There are also small yet impactful design choices, such as making grabbable objects have a tint of yellow, that make the game more accessible. Additionally, tips and hints are accessible using Aloy's focus ability which also is used to aid new players in finding their way through the story. After watching FightinCowboy, a YouTube Content Creator, it was very evident that he began enjoying the game quicker than I due to his knowledge and understanding of the game prior to playing. Although this is not a significant barrier to entry for players, it is still noteworthy.

Horizon Forbidden West will be looked at as a golden standard of storytelling in gaming for years to come. It has created an impactful and progressive female protagonist in Aloy who will also be used as a shining beacon in the gaming industry. Horizon Forbidden West has pushed the gaming industry in the right direction by showing just how impactful a strong and non-sexualized female character can be while surrounded by a diverse cast of characters.

## References

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