

Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic
Narrative analysis

Flow of exploration controlled by which planets you can travel to. Initially there is a single planet you can explore with your primary objective of getting off of the planet. Multiple routes open up after you complete your Jedi training on Dantooine, at which point you are free to choose what order you explore them in. The order of exploration **does** matter from a narrative standpoint because various narrative points are revealed at the completion of the major objective while on the planet that is not always tied to the planet. For example, I decided to go to the Sith home world of Korriban last, and by that point I had found out that I was in fact the former Dark Lord. This influenced my decisions both in terms of what things I could say and do in game, but also how I thought I wanted to play my character.

The other narrative modifier that comes into play are the characters in your 'party.' There are nine different members that can join your group, but only a maximum two of them travel with you at any given point in time. Different characters react to different narrative situations differently, giving interjections and context to the events that are unfolding. Also, certain narrative arcs can only be completed if you have the correct set of characters with you.

Beyond the basic choices of path and party composition, KotOR gives players a decent range of roleplaying options. The developers were generally good about not just giving polar 'light side' and 'dark side' responses to questions, but also one to three middle ground options for those that want to play a subtler character. The net result is that while players might traverse the same 'physical' path through the game but come out with a very different result because of the conversation options that they selected. For example, I decided to play the 'light side' of things, in which I managed to retain my entire party of characters. However, after talking with one of my friends that had played the 'dark side,' I found out that members of your party would mutiny if you decide to go down that path. The real mind bender was where you had obliged one particular character into a 'life debt' (and so would not mutiny), and you could actually command him to hunt down the friend that had just mutinied, an experience that was profoundly different, if a bit more perverse, than the one I had gone through.

Overall the playing time totaled around 40 hours for me, on a single play through, stopping to 'smell all the roses' (i.e. doing all the side plots that I found).

It was overall an immersive experience because of the high level of involvement I had in the character development. On a technical note, KotOR was a standout because it actually did the entire dialog in voice acting, which heightened the realism of the universe.

The game space had a very direct relation to the narrative space, because the 'game attributes' of the character directly influenced what conversation options and tactics one

could employ. On a simple level, if the main character had the ability to use the Force to persuade the person he was conversing with, a whole new range of narrative possibilities opened up. On a slightly more complex level, if a character was more geared towards engaging in combat than negotiation or stealth, it would limit my conversation options, but I would still be able to get myself out of most situations, if in an inelegant manner.

The pleasure of this game stemmed partially from the game mechanics themselves (which were based out of the tried and true d20 system), but largely [for me] came from the relative depth of narrative exploration. I don't often 'replay' games because I usually am able to figure out the mechanics by the end of the game, but I often give thought to playing through KotOR again because of the array of different narrative possibilities that I could explore with a second play through.

Tatooine

Dantooine

Kashyyyk

Taris

Manaam

Korriban

Leviathan

The Unknown Planet

The Star Forge