

[Staff Interviews about the 2006 Atlus video game *Rule of Rose*; original URL: <http://www.atlus.com/ruleofrose/> which loaded the archived Flash file https://web.archive.org/web/20150525191447if_/http://www.atlus.com/ruleofrose/fla/sta2.swf; cf. https://www.atlus.com/prpdf/AtlusUSA_091506a.pdf.

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{The following is an excerpt from an article in the [Japanese?] February 2006 issue of *Hyper PlayStation 2* (published by Sony Magazine on December 28th). This article is presented, courtesy of *Hyper PlayStation 2 Magazine*.}

Rule of Rose Staff Interview

Darkness loomed over everything.

Fear stirred with foreboding. The satisfaction of unraveling a mystery or solving a difficult dilemma.

~~A disturbing tale of a dark, shadowy society formed by a group of young girls... Who envisioned this psychological adventure and its shocking themes? How did their creative vision take form? We spoke to key members of Punchline, the developers, Shirogami, the visual effects supervisors, and SCE, the producers, for answers.~~

A deepening sense of fear fueled by unnatural circumstances.

—First of all, would you tell us how you came up with the idea of a world of isolated children?

Ishikawa: “It began when SCE [Sony Computer Entertainment] asked us if we could create a horror game. We discussed this within Punchline and agreed on the type of game we wanted to make. If we were going to work on anything, we wanted to do something that was new and different for us—something that would make an impact on people. So we simply asked, what kind of game would command a presence in the horror genre? What kind of game had not been done before? This led naturally to the theme of darkness in children, from an adult perspective.”

Hanafusa: “Yeah. We put aside all complicated reasoning and thought very simply. An innocent child doing cruel things—what a scary picture that paints. We also paid attention to the cruelty that exists in fairy tales—‘Little Red Riding Hood’, for instance. When the Wolf’s stomach is cut open, the aunt who was eaten climbs out, and they ultimately put stones in the wolf’s stomach and drown it in the river. Fairy tales can be horridly graphic. This, I thought, would fit well with the dark side of innocent children. From there, the planning proceeded to take shape.”

—I cannot easily express what this game is like in just a few words. It’s more about the sensation you experience while playing it. The creepiness gradually



Figure 1: Portrait: Shuji Ishikawa, Punchline LLC



Figure 2: Portrait: Makoto Hanafusa, Shirogumi Co., Ltd.

builds and the fear heightens. The story as a whole is pretty serious and dark. . .

Ishikawa: “It ended up going in that direction. The results illustrate our attention to how children can sometimes appear scary to an adult. The story was gradually conceived through trial and error, as we investigated ways of generating fear. You see, things we don’t understand tend to frighten us, don’t they? Not just in children, but also in the opposite sex. We made a conscious effort to create gameplay that takes advantage of our inherent fear of things we don’t understand.”

–I see. Most of the children in the game are girls. Was this also a design choice related to that theme?

Ishikawa: “During childhood, boys see girls as sweet and admirable, but they are in fact mysterious and misunderstood, aren’t they? Maybe they are more like adults than boys, mentally. Furthermore, I think the relationships between girls are totally different from those between boys. This is something that men cannot really understand. They’re in a world of their own.”

Takayama: “On the other hand, boys are pretty simple. I think even if they fight, they forget about it quickly and then get along without carrying a grudge. The boys who appear in this game are also simple compared to the girls. You’ll see them having sword fights or playing with toys. The boys even willingly run errands for the girls. I hope that the relationships between boys and girls depicted in this game ring true when people think back to their childhoods.”



Figure 3: Portrait: Yuya Takayama, Sony Computer Entertainment Japan

Hanafusa: “By producing the game with a focus on the mysterious nature of girls, we thought we could create a world that was baffling and unpredictable for the player. If we stuck to just the themes of fairy tales and children, then we could not have made a game that has this much impact. By adding the unsettling element of the girl’s aristocracy, we were able to produce the game we had aimed for—a game with a powerful atmosphere never experienced before.

The game, I believe, is a psychological mystery that provides plenty of thrills and chills.”



All of the characters and visual effects of the game embody doubt and fear.

–Besides children, a few adults appear in the game. What role do they play?

Ishikawa: “They also represent something beyond our understanding, as the young girls do. When you were a child, didn’t you ever have a strange feeling about an older person in your neighborhood, as if they existed in a different world? To children, these people can be very frightening, even if it’s just in their imaginations. They may even start rumors that are untrue. In short, the adults are like the young girls: they exist as objects of fear for both the player and Jennifer.”

Takayama: “Children, adults, imps, and even the main character, Jennifer, is a bit unsettling. Nearly every character who appears in the game will make you feel uneasy, as if something’s not quite right. They awaken hidden fears within us that disturb our sensibilities.”

–What about the dog, Brown, Jennifer’s only friend?

Ishikawa: “Actually, Brown did not exist at the beginning of the project. But as Jennifer’s character was solidified, we realized that the game wasn’t interesting enough with Jennifer alone. Since she was so helpless and unhappy, we decided to give her a partner.”

–Then, does that mean Brown is present simply to serve as her guide?

Ishikawa: “Well, of course he serves as a guide, but he also has a role in terrifying the player, like the other characters. He’s her only friend among all the characters, and he’s sweet and reliable. But, he’s not a human being; he’s a dog. The Bucket Knight is also friendly towards her, but he’s an inanimate object.”



The satisfaction of unraveling a mystery or solving a difficult dilemma.

After playing the game, I wondered if some of the mysteries were a little too difficult to solve...

Ishikawa: “It is indeed difficult to proceed in the game if you don’t carefully connect all of the fragmented hints, but to some degree that is what we intended. Many games these days are designed to be played easily without thinking all the way through. But when I was a kid, there used to be lots of games that you couldn’t solve unless you really used your brain. It was fun to solve things after trying really hard to figure them out, and it felt really good afterwards. That’s why I wanted to make this game require some thinking. The game itself is simple, but you cannot advance without thinking and making your own interpretations. Only bits and pieces of hints and images are offered, not the answers. My hope is that players pay attention to these hints and use their imaginations.”

Takayama: “Players may be able to progress relatively easily if they rely on the dog, Brown. But, I want players to think on their own. There is a limit to how far away Brown can smell something, so if Brown isn’t able to use his nose, you’ll have to think about where to look for an item, and then use the ‘Find’ command. You can also stumble onto hints if you use the ‘Find’ command in different locations. It’s even possible to discover other stories which are not related to the game’s main plot.”

Ishikawa: “We believe the game will appeal to a varied audience: from hardcore gamers to those who enjoy French and independent films. We featured many different elements throughout the game, and we’re proud of what we’ve accomplished. We hope you’ll have fun with the game and experience fear like you’ve never felt before, whether you’re a fan of horror games or are looking for something new and different.”

{BACK TO STAFF PAGE}





