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Every Game Should Let You Pat The Dog

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10 MINUTES OF INFINITE WEALTH'S ANIMAL CROSSING-INSPIRED MODE

For almost as long as video games have been around, games have often had dogs, cats and other animals in them. Sometimes they are integral to the game, sometimes they are no more than a few pixels strung together. Whichever one we encounter in video games, one question remains the same. Can we pet that dog?

When I pass a dog or cat on the street, I'll usually look at the pet and see if I can pay it. It's not just an emotional need: science has proven that patting a dog causes the body to release feel good chemicals such as serotonin, prolactin and oxytocin, while reducing the stress hormone Cortisol.

In short, patting a dog, cat or animal of your choice makes you feel good. So why don't more games afford us something that can be so simple to implement, and yet bring such unexpected joy to the player?

When I played *Breath of the Wild* recently, I remember being disappointed that I could not pat the dogs. They looked amazing. They were friendly. They chased their tails and had the personality of a derpy herding dog. I wanted nothing more than for Link to reach out his hand and pet the soft fur.

"Why would Nintendo not add this?" I thought. This seems like such an oversight in a game where everything else had been considered. Monsters chuck a tantrum if you steal their weapons. Lightning is attracted to metal. Rain makes everything slippery. But you can't pat the dog. The only real interactivity is feeding the dogs and it's not really the same. For me, it ruined a little of the game's lustre.

Okami's one game that got it right. Feeding the animals plays the same static cutscene and only gives the player some praise, but it still felt good to give some seeds to the squirrels, the birds, the dogs and cats. Seeking out more animals to feed became part of the fun, watching them eat the food and react with happiness.

It's natural for most humans to want to feed, pat or play with the animals we encounter. Of course, there will be those who avoid contact altogether — or worse. There's a story that when the dog was first added to *Fable II*, the first thing QA testers did was throw the ball over the side of cliffs to see if the dog would follow.

Naturally, the dog followed. It's something real dogs do -- one of my friend's dogs ran off a cliff after a ball. Luckily, it was a small cliff and she was mostly unharmed. Her other dog ran into a metal pylon while chasing the ball. She was also fine. The *Fable II* dog had great interactions and great character, but games don't need that much detail. Just allowing the player to be able to pat or treat random dogs, cats and other domesticated animals in their worlds is sufficient.

It seems like a small thing, insignificant really, to be able to interact with the animals in-game as players would like in real life. But it's a small thing that deepens the player's connection with the world. That emotional, human response is part of what brings a world to life. It's much like when you saw wet clothes darken for the first time in a game, or wet hair become flat and shiny.

But as the dog and cat trend continues, hopefully more developers will spend time allowing for more animal interactions. All we want to do is pat all the good bois and girls! (Especially in *Breath of the Wild 2* and *Link's Awakening*, Nintendo.)

Scree is a long-time member of the Kotaku Australia community, having previously helped everyone fix a broken JoyCon.

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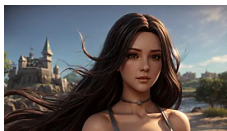
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