

Tutorial Breakdown (Mechanics + Narrative)

I'll be explaining the mechanics behind tutorials, alongside a study of other games. Can skip through, don't gotta read the whole thing. I'll bold the separate sections. Also please take everything I say with a grain of salt, I'm still learning 😊

TUTORIAL STORY IDEAS ARE AT THE END.

Overall Goal: Keep the player playing. (Tutorial Narrative **Mechanics** Section)

Methodology:

- What is **FTUE**, and why it matters.
- Introduce gameplay, narrative, and characters quickly enough to hook the player → **keeps them playing**.
- **No narrative, dialogue, or story should ever be without some gameplay component** → this is especially true in **mobile games**.

1. What is **FTUE**, and why it matters:

FTUE stands for **First Time User Experience**, and is paramount to game design. The reason I'm mentioning FTUE here is because **narrative plays a big part in the FTUE** in ways that typically aren't apparent from the get-go. For games, FTUE includes all below and then some:

1. Finding the game on the App Store
 - a. What are the **hooks**? The **game's synopsis on the App Store**, its genre and tags, etc. These are all things that the narrative team should consider.
2. Downloading and Opening the game
 - a. What does the **first-time player's screen** look like compared to a **returning player**?
 - b. Does the game get right to the gameplay, or is there a starting screen, etc.
 - c. What's displayed on the starting screen?
3. Tutorial / Gameplay Intro
 - a. What **gameplay is introduced**, how is the **story interwoven into the gameplay**?
 - b. **How many and what characters are shown** here?
 - c. How many extra characters can the player acquire for tutorial purposes? Etc. etc.
 - d. What story points are introduced?
 - e. Any allusions to the rest of the story? After the tutorial, how do we continue the story?

Why does FTUE matter?

1. The most important part of any player's experience is the first 10 minutes. If you lose the player any time during their "FTUE", you most likely lose a player for life. It's incredibly important to capture the player's attention during this time and hook them.

How does FTUE pertain to writers?

1. Regardless of if you're a writer or narrative designer, **narrative consistency across all parts of the game is important** (and our job). Considering that the beginning of the game is the most important (from a business perspective) it's something that needs to be crafted carefully and with a lot of attention—all aspects of the FTUE has something that the narrative team needs to deal with: writing the game synopsis for the App Store, storyboarding the cinematic sequence, how the cinematic sequence is narrated + what characters appear, how the characters are designed + what that conveys to the player, what characters appear in their introduction and what is their purpose?, how does the introduction seamlessly lead to regular gameplay and then continued story, etc. etc.

Two things I'll be mentioning repeatedly in this overview and some explanation:

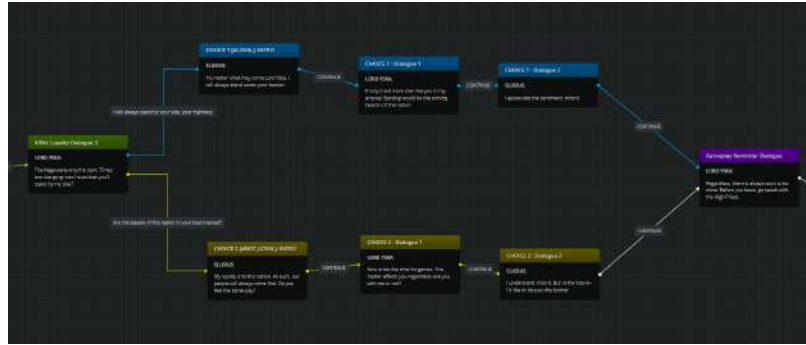
1. Player Taps:

- a. How many times the player literally has to tap the screen. This is typically in regards to dialogue, so two taps is two dialogue entries. i.e:

CHARACTER	DIALOGUE	FACIAL EXPRESSIONS
BAKARI HASSANI (PC)	My good man Zoan! How've you been?	HAPPY
ZOAN	Bounty Hunter Bakari, it has been approximately 7 hours, 34 minutes, and 12 seconds since you asked this question.	STOIC

In an excel format, this is what two player taps would look like.

- b. We want to refrain from overloading the player with dialogue, especially with mobile games. Even the most exposition-heavy games should have at most 12-15 player taps, and even that's generous. If there's a time where the player is continually tapping through dialogue for some serious story moment, put in "choice" dialogue to create some respite from the continual reading (the choice doesn't even need to matter or have literally any impact, it's about engaging the player in some way).
- c. How this "fake player choice" would look in a dialogue system:



Same starting point, player makes a choice that deviates the conversation, **but the end point is the same regardless**. Truthfully, you wouldn't even need to deviate the conversation if you write either the player choices or response accordingly.

2. ALWAYS LEAD TO GAMEPLAY:

- a. **all dialogue in MOBILE GAMES especially should lead to gameplay**. What does this mean? Here are three examples:

WINDCALLER	No more talk: you've sought death! Men, to arms!	ANGRY
ELUSIUS (PC)	To battle, then!	ANGRY GAMEPLAY: Battle
LEI CHENGXI	 Brother Hao was right, this is serious. Forget what I said. For a mission like this, though, we should visit the forge. It's good to stay on top of those type of things.	STOIC
HAO YUN (PC)	Brother Lei is wise and speaks the truth. Please, lead the way.	HAPPY GAMEPLAY: Upgrading Weapons
BAKARI HASSANI (PC)	As much as I would love to indulge the fantasy that this is some new, undiscovered alien race—I highly doubt it.	HAPPY
RUHI CHANDA	Bakari, frankly—I don't care what you think. It's a part of the job to investigate these things. Come on, get suited up and look over you weapons. Let's leave by 17:00.	ANGRY GAMEPLAY: Introduce Armor Upgrade Mechanics

It's important to state **what kind of gameplay is following the dialogue**. In literally all of the game introductions I studied below, they followed this format. Dialogue → Gameplay. Dialogue → Gameplay. There is no in-between.

- b. Gameplay in this sense means that the player is doing something. Building a base? Combat? Dialogue with another character? A cinematic? Etc.
- c. Later on in the game I can understand there being dialogue with no DIRECT gameplay following, but by then the player has already established their own "gameplay".
- d. For special events, like Lunar New Year or Christmas, gameplay could be considered special event minigames, or even clicking on free rewards.

Gameplay is just something the player is doing that isn't just reading dialogue + actively engaging with the game and/or mechanics.

I could go on, but this is a brief overview. I studied some of the games John mentioned to see how their tutorial played out.

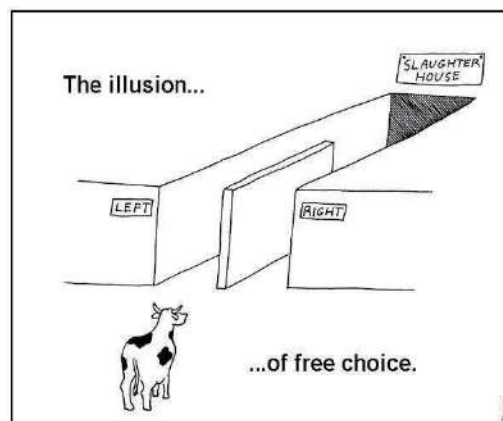
Mars Survivors: Marsaction: Infinite Ambition Gameplay - Part 1

1. Starts with a **small cinematic introductory sequence**, which then leads right to gameplay (the player “deciding” to land their base at a certain location). Small = less than 30 seconds.



Some things to note here:

1. Intro cinematic is at best **20-30 seconds**, not any longer. **Quickly gets to gameplay** by making the player **interact** and **“choose” a base location**. It's obvious though that the choice the player makes doesn't actually matter at all, but the fact they're given a choice at all is what's important.
2. This brings up an important point about mobile game narratives, which is summed up by this picture:



3. Pretty much a majority of mobile games (and indie, AA, AAA) use this system of providing player “choice” that actually leads to the same result regardless. Not only does this make the player happy because they were given a choice in their first place (and it's

a good 'selling point'), it also makes it easier on the writers! All "branching" dialogue leads to one destination, instead of hundreds. We want simplicity and brevity!

2. Upon landing at the chosen spot, dialogue immediately starts.



Notes:

1. **IMPORTANT!!** This dialogue introduces three new characters, and we immediately can get a feel of what kind of people they are without even introducing them. **Their tone and way of speaking + their designs speak for themselves (plus their name showing up in the dialogue box helps).**
2. **ANOTHER IMPORTANT!!** The player only has to **tap three times** before the gameplay starts. Keeping in mind **length of dialogue + player engagement in the dialogue is incredibly important** as a writer. We don't want any sentences where the player must tap multiple times to read the entire thing. BIG NO! If possible, keep all dialogue between characters within the limits of the UI box. Player taps must be kept as low as possible. Naturally we should create a story that's engaging, fun, and creative—but nobody is coming to Clash of Clans looking for Shakespeare's magnum opus. Say what needs to be said in as little lines as possible, AND **ALWAYS LEAD TO GAMEPLAY!**
3. Like mentioned earlier, right after this bout of dialogue, the player is immediately shown how to place a building down:



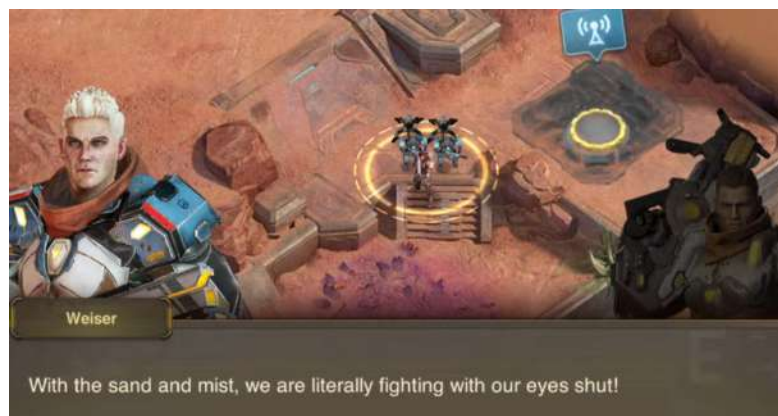
3. After the placement of the building, more dialogue is had:



There are literally only **two player taps** between “dragging the mecha” gameplay and the “kill the bugs” gameplay. **The two dialogue lines between these two actions are enough to give the player an idea of what they’re doing.**



Another bout of dialogue: **2 player taps.**



Leads to gameplay:



I'm going to stop there, because I think the idea has been made clear. Little bursts of short dialogue in between KEY INTRODUCTORY gameplay. Only **two minutes of gameplay** is

shown here, and yet the player already has a **brief introduction into the world, characters, and gameplay mechanics.**

State of Survival: State of Survival - Gameplay Part 1 (Android,IOS) - YouTube

I'll be doing the same thing here as I did with Mars Action, but instead will keep the explanation brief, only showing the key points.

Small Introductory Sequence:



1. Important to note: the sequence here directly shows the gameplay—we can clearly see **this is a base-building game where we build bases to defend against zombies.** Shown within the first 7 seconds of the trailer.



2. Another key part of the introductory sequence: **we see people clearly fighting back against the zombies.** We can also probably assume some of these characters will be characters we can acquire in the game. The dialogue at the bottom just reaffirms what has now been established: we are building bases to fight zombies. 14 seconds.



One player tap of dialogue (displaying character design and personality) before **gameplay mechanic introduced**:



A small sequence is shown, then a companion is recruited. **Two dialogue taps** here:



Combat gameplay introduced 50 seconds in. Gameplay mechanics are also repeatedly shown throughout this sequence:



Immediately after introductory combat gameplay, the player is immediately thrown into base building mechanics. There are some small bursts of dialogue in between, **limited to three player taps maximum**. Two new characters, Becca and Willy are immediately introduced, and their backstories, personalities, and designs are clear and to the point:



Some more dialogue in between before base-building gameplay begins:



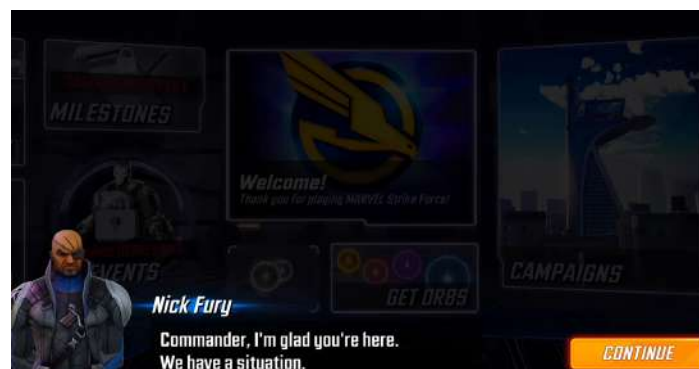
Once again, it took **two minutes** for the game to explain fundamental mechanics and characters to the player.

Marvel Strike Force: MARVEL Strike Force - Gameplay Walkthrough Part 1 (iOS, Android)

Marvel Strike Force is a bit unique in that its gameplay is a bit different, but the same philosophies apply because it's a mobile game.



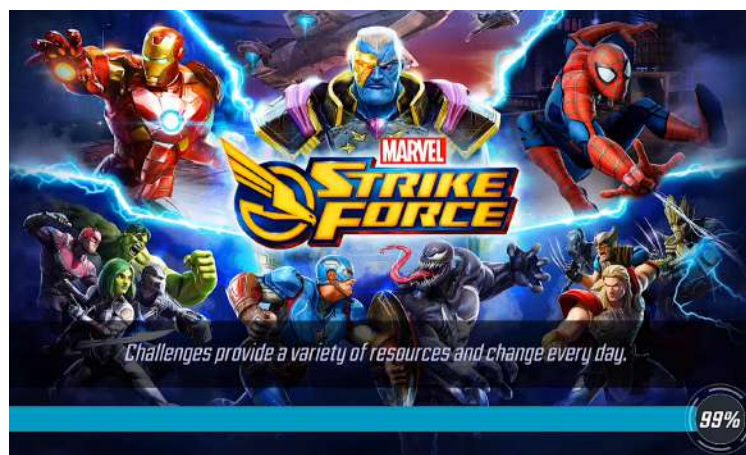
Short Intro cinematic. Just moving pictures with subtitles, not voice-acted. 30 seconds.



Introductory dialogue which gives the player a better idea of what they're doing. **4 player taps** before introducing 2 “heroes”. Character’s name, abilities, and background are all presented here briefly:



Another brief dialogue intermission (**2 taps**) before actual gameplay starts, however, important to note here:



There are two loading screens within the introductory sequence. **Loading screens should be avoided this early on in the gameplay, since every minute is crucial to engage the player.** However, sometimes loading screens are necessary for the game to process all the models,

textures, etc. If it's entirely unavoidable, little blurbs for the player to read like “tips” are a good way to distract the player in the meantime.

Tutorial Ideas Section (Tutorial **Story** Section)

I looked over everyone else's pitches because I wanted to get an idea of where we're at. I'm not too confident on some of the characters' personalities yet, so my ideas may not align with their design perfectly.

1. Short cinematic introduction – 30-45 seconds maximum.
 - a. Key narrative ideas that the cinematic should introduce:
 - i. How things were
 - ii. What happened
 - iii. How things are now (current time in the gameplay).

Following what others have said, I believe maybe the introductory cinematic could cover:

1. How the world was:
 - a. Brief background on the world prior to Aegis.
2. What happened?
 - a. Brief story about who Aegis is, and how they came about and impacted the world.
3. How things are now:
 - a. Brief background about how PRISM came about in retaliation to Aegis
 - b. This is where we introduce Starbright and then lead to gameplay.
 - c. Cinematic doesn't need to literally translate right into gameplay. Both Marvel Strike Force and State of Survival have an intro cinematic that doesn't lead to direct in-game gameplay, but instead gives a preview of the world and/or game.

2. Introduction Sequence

- a. Introduction starts with Starbright running around the city with her Third Rail Gang members before a combat sequence.
 - i. Small dialogue between Starbright and her cohort (or between Starbright and the enemy) before starting combat.
 1. This could be a good time to introduce other factions.
 - ii. Combat mechanic explanation.
 - iii. Post-Combat Dialogue.
- b. Reaching the Base
 - i. This could be a result of 2 things

1. Either the original base is destroyed, thus causing Starbright to be on the run with the third rail gang → new base needs to be constructed
 2. OR, third rail gang never had a base, but after consistently being confronted by other gangs / ascended / aegis → need to build a new base
- ii. Short dialogue to introduce either of these possibilities
- iii. Base building mechanic
- iv. Short dialogue to further base building mechanics OR introduce new characters
- v. Either base Building mechanic, OR companion / party management tutorial here.