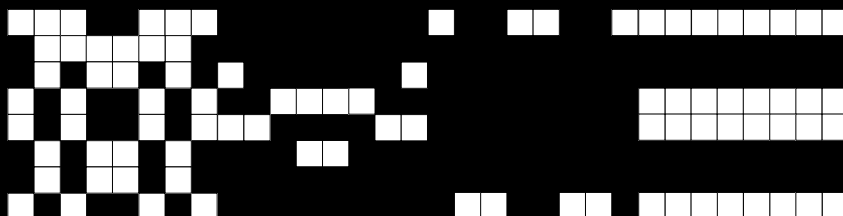


## 3rd International Conference of Video Game Studies — SVI 2024

### Artificial Game

#### ■ Book of Abstracts



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## An Early Reconnaissance Into the Capabilities and Limits of AI Tools in Digital Worldbuilding

### Abstract:

This paper seeks to reconnoitre the value and limitation of AI as applied to worldbuilding, i.e. inventing an imaginary world, and presenting it in a virtualised form, with a particular focus on RPG games. While no examples of AI-assisted worldbuilding can yet be identified in already-published games, the author explores the way RPG games, both digital and pen & paper, have used procedural generation to construct worlds and to dynamise their contents. Examples can also be found of pen & paper RPG players using ChatGPT to develop quests, campaigns or settings for their games, and likewise AI tools have been injected in the form of third-party mods into previously published digital games, such as *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (2011) to provide dynamic non-player character dialogues, demonstrating some plausible use cases for future titles. The author then introduces literature from the area of fantasy worldbuilding to argue that procedural generation is inherently opposed to quality in worldbuilding by virtue of depriving the resulting world of any deep themes or meaning. The past use of procedural generation, and present early examples of AI tool application, leave little doubt that AI will significantly impact the process of procedural generation and world dynamisation during play in future titles, with some interesting cases of games and AI middleware already in development. However, considering existing literature on worldbuilding, it is this question of deeper meaning that raises most questions, in particular whether AI-based worldbuilding, while more promising than its procedural equivalent, can have sufficient depth compared to man-made worlds. Given the nature of the topic, this paper is speculative, examining the topic more through analogy than direct application.

### Keywords:

worldbuilding, procedural generation, ChatGPT, *Skyrim*, role-playing games



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## Gaming Consumables: Creatine–Guanidinoacetic Acid Improves Esports Performance in Young Men

### Abstract:

Creatine is among leading ergogenic aids proven effective in enhancing various performance tasks including cognitive aspects. Administration of creatine and guanidinoacetic acid (GAA)—its direct precursor—ought to be superior in increasing cerebral creatine levels than creatine itself, presenting a particular interest in the realm of esports, where cognitive performance is an essential component of success.

A total of ten healthy experienced esports players (age  $28.4 \pm 4$  years, BMI  $24.9 \pm 4.4$  kg/m<sup>2</sup>,  $16.1 \pm 5.6$  years of playing, all males) consented to this open quasi-experimental pilot study. A primary objective was to investigate the effects of a 4 week supplementation with creatine–GAA blend (3g/day, CreGAAatine™, Carnomed, Novi Sad, Serbia) on in-game performance (KDA ratio) in a best-of-three Dota 2™ games format followed by neuropsychological outcomes (Attention Network Test, Stroop Color and Word Test). Baseline and follow-up values were compared using the paired t-test for normally distributed data, otherwise the Wilcoxon test was applied.

The total Dota 2™ scores for the first two games showed a non-significant increase after the intervention ( $P < 0.25$ ). However, the mean scores obtained after the final game significantly improved by 30.1% (95% CI, -17.3 to 77.5;  $P = 0.048$ ). A significantly lower control reaction time was observed post-supplementation ( $P = 0.02$ ), with a mean reduction of 19.2% (95% CI, 2.2 to -40.6), incongruent and control reaction times tended to decrease ( $P < 0.15$ ). Further, incongruent and overall accuracy significantly improved post-intervention ( $P \leq 0.05$ ). On average, incongruent accuracy increased by 10.2% (95% CI, -1.2 to 21.7), as overall accuracy improved by 4.4% (95% CI, -0.9 to 9.7). Lastly, executive control improved after the intervention ( $P = 0.01$ ), with reaction times 16.2% faster on average (95% CI, from -3.4 to -29.0).

These preliminary findings suggest that the blend may serve as an effective performance-enhancing intervention in esports.

### Keywords:

esports, supplementation, reaction time, creatine, guanidinoacetic acid



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## The Design of Lucid Dream Induction as a Game Mechanic

### **Abstract:**

Studies have shown gamers develop certain cognitive abilities which trigger lucid dreams. Attention, presence, absorption, and flow, are all integral skills to the development of consciousness. This opens a gateway to expanded states and communication with our unconscious.

*It Began with the Whales* is the first video game designed with the idea to implement specific techniques to support triggering lucid dreams in real life. It intentionally integrates practices used by lucid dreamers, such as performing reality checks, delivering subliminal messages, and keeping the player in a meditative state.

The game creates a fantastic world of lucid dreams, where you travel on a flying whale between floating islands. Each island evokes the feeling of a different dream, reflecting our perception of the dream world as it is portrayed in various mediums, while incorporating influences from surrealism and psychedelics—both using themes of dreams and unconscious. All the elements within the game are designed for the same purpose. The audio is calm and relaxing, while offering cues about the dream state. The graphics are colorful and vibrant. The mechanics include surreal objectives, such as grabbing a piece of a roof and building it midair, or picking up chairs from trees.

While video games help with the practice in general, there have not been any video games designed specifically for this. The thesis proposes to research the effects of a video game which implements specific practices to induce lucid dreams.

### **Keywords:**

lucid dreams, serious games, consciousness, surrealism, emergent technologies

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## Serpent in the Machine: Technology and Humanism in Croteam's *The Talos Principle*

**Abstract:**

*The Talos Principle* (2014) marked a departure from Croteam's established game design philosophy. After three entries in their remarkable series of first-person shooters, *The Talos Principle*—which began as a tech demo for *Serious Sam 4*—emerged as a narrative puzzle game, devoid of accentuated action and with a more emphasized storyline. The player assumes the role of an unnamed android, navigating a labyrinthine environment of classical ruins and solving a series of spatial challenges, guided by a mysterious divine presence that calls itself Elohim. Beyond these puzzles, the game invites players to unravel the mysteries of both the strange world and their own identity by piecing together textual and sound fragments scattered throughout the environment.

In this paper, we will explore the transhumanist elements of *The Talos Principle*'s narrative and analyze the game's themes related to consciousness, personhood, humanity, and artificial intelligence. We will interpret these questions by examining the game's narrative, which draws on diverse cultural and artistic sources (Greek mythology and philosophy, Judeo-Christian belief systems, hermeticism, science fiction, contemporary transhumanist thought), and by analyzing its gameplay mechanics, level design, and music/sound design. Additionally, we will investigate the game's implied commentary on its own origins as an open-world technical demo.

**Keywords:**

*The Talos Principle*, transhumanism, technology, humanism, artificial intelligence





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## Fanmade Universes: Emergent Narratives in Video Game Streaming

### **Abstract:**

In a world where classical narrative structures seem to require daily renovation, video games have found a powerful ally in emergent narratives to transition to total interactivity. Along with streaming, this trend appears to be a new phenomenon that attracts new audiences to this medium. The integration of these emergent narratives has opened up new avenues for storytelling, allowing players to have a more immersive and personalized experience. This shift only enhances player engagement but also expands the boundaries of what video games can achieve as a form of interactive entertainment.

This study aims to provide an exploratory approach to emergent narratives as integrating dynamics in online communities. By examining how these narratives develop and evolve within gaming environments, we can better understand their impact on both the gaming experience and the broader cultural landscape. Using the case study method, the research employs user-generated content analysis as a methodological tool. Games in the study range from the strict, story-driven "Firewatch" (Campo Santo, 2016) to the variety of possible runs in a fanmade Pokémon ROM. This approach allows for a detailed examination of how players contribute to and shape narratives, providing valuable insights into their creative processes and community interactions.

The items in the sample show a relationship between these emergent narratives and content creators' engagement on other platforms, as well as a correlation between online community interaction and streamers' popularity. This suggests that the influence of emergent narratives extends beyond the games themselves, affecting how content is shared and consumed across various social media platforms. Furthermore, the popularity of streamers and their ability to engage with their audience can significantly impact the development and dissemination of these narratives, highlighting the symbiotic relationship between game developers, creators, and the gaming community.

### **Keywords:**

emergent narratives, videogame narrative, streaming, user-generated content, online communities



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## **Link Between Manuscript and Interactivity: A Case Study of *Pentiment* and *Inkulinati***

### **Abstract:**

This paper will try to examine the role of medieval manuscript culture in the video games *Pentiment* and *Inkulinati*, i.e., the way in which they transpose the inherent interactivity of manuscript culture through the media affordances of video games. While a book in the form of a medieval codex, whether it is decorative or interactive, is often used in (neo)medievalist video games to contribute to the impression of an authentic representation of the Middle Ages, the attention of this paper will be focused on two games presented as if they took place on the pages of a manuscript or on parchment. While *Pentiment* (Obsidian Entertainment, 2022) presents a murder–mystery narrative adventure game with mild RPG elements, inspired by high literature and focused on the historical reconstruction of chosen aspects of the 15th century, *Inkulinati* (Yaza Games, 2022) presents a turn-based strategy closer to the fantastic and carnivalesque elements of the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, both construct their (neo)medievalism drawing from the style of medieval miniatures, either from individual manuscripts or the internet vernacular. The closeness of their style and approach to the Middle Ages is supported by the fact that the latest update of *Inkulinati* contains the protagonist from *Pentiment*, precisely as an illuminator. The atmosphere built by the *Inkulinati* is to some extent present in the *Pentiment*, inside the scriptorium, for instance, or in the different relations to the creative act among the scribes and illuminators. We will seek to examine the ways in which games of both genres represent, interpret, and construct the medieval manuscript and the role it plays in these types of interactivity. Our attention will be focused on the use of different types of medieval textuality, manuscript margins, and elements of manuscript production and reception.

### **Keywords:**

medievalism, manuscript, parchment, *Pentiment*, *Inkulinati*



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## **Raiding the Vaults of Perception: Feminine Stereotypes and Body Representation in the *Tomb Raider* Saga**

### **Abstract:**

Video games and virtual environments are the fields in which the primacy of the body is often present, thus also calling into question the imaginaries and stereotypes produced and reproduced by it. In order to grasp potential future perspectives, it is worth trying to retrace the evolutions that the construction of imaginaries has undergone in these media, examining an emblematic case. Of all bodies, female bodies are particularly subject to these dynamics, and have been for a long time. The *Tomb Raider* franchise is one of the most iconic in the video game industry: proceeding in a didactic manner, we define here a brief chronological overview of the main stages of the *Tomb Raider* franchise, with the aim of highlighting some enduring dynamics that are still present today and others that have changed. Continuing through various passages, the title has come from the 90s to the present day, remaining centered on Lara Croft, a character that has in turn changed and evolved over the years. In this specific circumstance we witness a process of multi-directional influence, from media to object, from video game imagery to bodies and clothes, in a complex circle. This paper, through an analysis of the official visual content produced for the saga video games, aims to trace a historical evolution of how imaginaries change with and for the media over time, in a manner that agrees or contrasts with contemporary social and cultural instances. Finally, the example of '*Tomb Raider*' and its franchise allows us to highlight certain phenomena of convergence and hybridisation between the body and the digital, showing how a strong physical, material component persists even in multimedia video game imaginaries.

### **Keywords:**

femininity, body representation, imaginaries, game studies, visual methods



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## Exploring the Impact of Lookalike Avatars on Player Enjoyment, Performance and Trust: A Pilot Study

### Abstract:

The advancement of technology has, among other things, led to improvements in video games, resulting in more engaging methods for character creation. Previous literature suggests that adverse identification effects, such as stereotype threat, can impact women's in-game performance (Ratan & Sah, 2015). This paper is part of a series of studies that present results from a pilot experiment on a custom-made game employed to examine the effects of lookalike avatars on players, both male and female, as well as users' readiness to accept the currently available technology. The game utilized the Ready Player Me SDK to implement lookalike character creation. Furthermore, the experiment design followed a 2x2 matrix, presented in Kerac et al. (2024). Participants were divided into two groups: one that played with a generic avatar and the other that played with a lookalike avatar. In this paper, the following research questions are addressed:

RQ1: Does a lookalike avatar impact player performance and satisfaction?

RQ2: Do players who played with the lookalike avatar perceive lookalike avatars as similar to themselves?

RQ3: Did players enjoy the process of creating a lookalike avatar, and would they prefer this feature in other interactive media?

RQ4: Do players have privacy concerns related to lookalike avatar creation?

The results indicate no statistically significant impact of lookalike avatars on player performance or enjoyment. However, there was a significant correlation between players' ( $N=33$ ) avatar group and the avatar they created [ $r = .688, n = 33, p < .001$ ]. This correlation indicates that players who played with lookalike avatars reported that their avatars looked like them. Players also expressed a positive attitude toward the avatar creation tool, rating it with a mean value of 3.39 ( $SD = .899$ ) on a scale from 0 to 4, where 0 indicated extreme dislike, and 4 indicated extreme liking. Somewhat similar results were found regarding the tool's potential implementation in other media, with a mean value of 2.97 ( $SD = 1.159$ ). Finally, players showed low privacy concerns, with a mean value of 1.45 ( $SD = 1.453$ ) on a scale of 0 to 4, where 0 indicated no concern and 4 indicated extreme privacy concerns. Future research should investigate the long-term effects of lookalike avatars on player behavior, as well as explore how these tools might be adapted to different game genres and interactive experiences. Moreover, addressing potential privacy concerns with more experienced gamers would be beneficial for ensuring ethical and user-friendly avatar creation systems.

### Keywords:

lookalike avatars, player experience, video games, character creation, players trust



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## **The Timex Sinclair, Timex Computer and EFTA: A Micro–History Case Study in the Early 1980s Portuguese Computer Game History**

### **Abstract:**

The Timex Sinclair and Timex (TMX) Computer story highlights how EFTA foreign investment, initially unrelated to the computer game industry, influenced Portuguese game development in the 20th century. It begins with the establishment of TMX Portugal in the 1960s as a branch of the Timex Corporation, part of broader international agreements like the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) following World War II. This paper provides a detailed microhistorical analysis of the 1980s period when TMX Portugal produced microcomputers, starting with official replicas of Sinclair Research systems such as the ZX81 and ZX Spectrum. During this period, Timex systems disrupted Portuguese game development, emerging during economic and cultural turmoil. Despite this, mainstream historical accounts often label these platforms as failures, relegating them to research footnotes. This work raises questions about how failure is defined and for whom. Did these systems fail the early 1980s audience, Timex shareholders, or local workers and developers? Alternatively, could they be successful based on their role in fostering local game development and computer literacy? Though often seen as minor platforms, Timex systems offer a compelling case study of how narratives are constructed and why they should be re-examined. Acknowledging their contribution to the growth of the local computer game industry and the broader impact of EFTA's foreign investment in smaller countries, this paper aims to provide a better understanding of European, and specifically, Portuguese game development in the 1980s.

### **Keywords:**

Timex computer, platform studies, microhistory, game studies, national game studies



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## **Artificial Experiences in Video Games and Their Impact on Moral Education**

### **Abstract:**

Video games sometimes give players an opportunity to shape the virtual world they are in, be it a decision with a small impact or a decision that can affect the life of an entire civilization. These kinds of decisions are an integral part of Role Playing Games, yet regardless of the genre, the player is often presented with a moral dilemma. Sometimes the player has to make a decision that impacts the virtual world in the video game. Other times the character controlled by the player makes certain decisions without the input of the player. No matter the case, the player is left facing the consequences and what these situations entail. This kind of an experience presents itself as a learning opportunity for the player in which they can learn the consequences of said actions and, in a way, practice by “playing” with moral decisions. This is a kind of “artificial experience”. This paper aims to present how video games can serve as a tool for moral education. This is achieved by presenting and analyzing research papers that have studied these moral dilemmas in video games, as well as by presenting a number of examples in which video games present these dilemmas. The video games analyzed include *Spec Ops: The Line*, *Mass Effect (2 and 3)*, *Fallout 3*, *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*, *Syphon Filter 3* and *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*. A short review of behaviourist, cognitivist and constructivist theories of learning is presented as a foundation for these claims. The paper presents findings that demonstrate how knowledge from video games is used in the real world and asserts that video games can be used as a tool for moral education. The research indicates that video games can have positive and negative effects on moral education.

### **Keywords:**

moral education, artificial experience, theories of learning.



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## **AI-Enhanced Crowdfunding as an Alternative to the Traditional Publisher – Studio Business Model in the Video Game Industry**

### **Abstract:**

This study aims to describe crowdfunding benefits beyond financial aspects and propose an outline for utilizing it in a more sustainable, efficient and more effective business model. AAA video games, as complex and expensive projects developed by large studios with significant budgets, are often subject to publisher influence, limiting team members' creative freedom. In contrast, indie video games are produced by small, independent studios, with smaller budgets and greater creative autonomy. Indie studios manage their production independently, utilizing digital platforms and development tools, allowing them to distribute their games directly, without the need for publishers. It can be argued that traditional and crowdfunding models represent different approaches to video game development. In the traditional model, the publisher assumes the role of project promoter, while in the crowdfunding model the team members carry the entire project, retaining control and decision-making authority. In the traditional model, the player is a passive consumer, whereas in crowdfunding, players become prosumers, co-creators, and investors. Additionally, genres in the traditional model are standardized and limited, while crowdfunding allows for greater openness to innovation and a broader range of genres. The methodological approach to this research is based on literature analysis and multiple case studies. In the future research, a controlled experiment can be applied, by developing two separate crowdfunding platforms—one which will engage customers to prosumer role, use AI to process the structured input, and another, which will classically rely mostly on financial contribution and unstructured inputs.

Indie game development sector often relies on the ability to finance game development through crowdfunding platforms, but does not explore player contribution much beyond that. Crowdfunding platforms have become essential digital tools for supporting video game development, enabling creators to raise funds from a wider audience. Their key functions include providing infrastructure, organizing information, enabling communication, and balancing supply and demand. In addition to financial support, crowdfunding platforms act as marketing tools, allowing creators to gauge market interest and reduce production risks through player feedback. By leveraging social media and digital channels, they streamline project promotion, increase visibility, and harness the collective preferences of the community to shape decision-making. AI revolutionizes crowdfunding by offering powerful tools that enhance campaign creation, management, and success rates. Some crowdfunding platforms utilize AI for predictive analytics, campaign optimization, and personalized recommendations. Some focus on niche-specific features like blockchain project evaluation and health-related data analysis. AI could help platforms boost backer engagement and investor matching, ultimately streamlining operations and improving outcomes.

### **Keywords:**

crowdfunding, video game industry, business model, AI, AAA games, indie games



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## **(Re)Creating RPG Worlds Using AI Tools: A Case Study of the Video Game *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim***

### **Abstract:**

This study explores the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on the role-playing game (RPG) industry, with a particular focus on the role of generative language models in enhancing narrative and interactive elements. RPGs encompass a wide range from traditional tabletop formats (analog RPGs) to modern digital open-world titles, relying on rich, interactive stories and player decisions. In analog RPGs, narrative flexibility has traditionally depended on a human guide (Dungeon Master), whereas digital versions utilize scripted interactions. Generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, have the potential to automate and personalize dialogue in both forms of RPGs, allowing for greater contextual awareness of characters and dynamic storytelling.

The case study focuses on the integration of ChatGPT in the mods of the video game *Skyrim*, where AI enables non-player characters (NPCs) to engage in realistic and adaptable dialogues with players. This system uses a combination of ChatGPT, xVASynth, and Whisper to simulate memory of past conversations and generate contextually relevant responses, thus significantly enhancing immersion. A similar potential exists in analog RPGs, where AI can facilitate storytelling and interactions in real-time, replacing or supporting the role of the game master.

The results of this research indicate that generative AI tools not only improve dialogue dynamics, but can also transform the way stories are created and experienced in both forms of RPGs. The conclusions of this study address the challenges and opportunities of integrating AI technology into RPGs as well as the broader trend of shifting from professionally generated content (PGC) to user-generated content (UGC), with a particular focus on the future of this genre.

### **Keywords:**

role-playing games, artificial intelligence, generative language models, immersion, non-player characters, *Skyrim*





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## Implications of GenAI for NPCs in Video Games: An Ethical Examination

### **Abstract:**

AI systems are currently changing every aspect of our lives, and video gaming is certainly no exception. While game AI has thus far relied for the most part on synthetic AI (Thompson, 2024), recent advances in machine learning and the widespread availability of powerful text and image generators hold considerable potential for video game character design. As ChatGPT and other systems show, conversations with artificial systems are becoming more and more seamless and could soon enable highly individualized conversations between players and NPCs (Gallotta et al., 2024; Sweetser, 2024), while image generators facilitate the design of characters' visual aesthetics. GenAI, in short, has become very good at generating artificial people.

However, it is important to keep in mind that, by adopting these technologies for video game development in general and NPC design in particular, game designers and players not only stand to benefit from the considerable potential of GenAI but will also need to confront its risks and ethical implications. Systematic discriminatory biases, in particular, have caused a stir in recent years (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018; Mehrabi et al., 2021), and with good reason since these biases have the potential to cement unjust epistemic hierarchies and perpetuate racial, gendered, or ableist stereotypes (Barocas et al., 2023; Gautam et al., 2024; Loh, 2024). To properly understand the opportunities and risks of using GenAI to create video game NPCs, we therefore need to consider the complexity of the AI system and its training process in conjunction with the medium-specific complexity of video games as fictional worlds, ludic systems, and cultural artifacts. This paper aims to meet that challenge by combining close game analysis (Consalvo and Dutton, 2006; Fernández-Vara, 2019; Schröter & Thon, 2014) and AI-ethics (Hagendorff, 2020). The outcome is a set of guidelines, which we aim to further refine in dialogue with professionals in the gaming industry.

### **Keywords:**

genAI, NPCs, ethics, bias, diversity



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## **Harnessing Confusion: Collisions of Technologies in 'No More Heroes III'**

### **Abstract:**

Representations of technologies in works of popular culture typically contribute to the grounding of the narrative and world-building by establishing a sense of time and place, giving an idea if the events happen in the past, present or future whether in the “real” world or a fictionalized one. These boundaries are never fixed of course as demonstrated by studies of “new media” which emphasize notions of remediation and intermediality where media technologies constantly overlap and are readapted to changing social realities. Video games have proven a particularly fruitful terrain to consider these questions as a medium that blurs such lines of differentiation.

This paper examines the intertextual mix (or one could perhaps call it a mess) of aesthetic styles and gameplay mechanics of *No More Heroes III* (2021) in relation to its representations of technologies. More specifically, I argue that the game engages in a purposeful temporal disorientation by experimenting with narrative, world-building, and gameplay that are fundamentally reflective of games' intermediality and mix of technologies old and new while simultaneously re-establishing its temporal setting through direct references to “real-world” figures. I begin by considering representations of technologies in games within the framework of intermediality and remediation. I then situate *No More Heroes III* within this context as well as the franchise's and Suda51's own history of experimentations. Finally, I dissect the game's approach to incorporating extreme representations of past, present, and future technologies as a collision of influences creating a visual and narrative chaos that is re-grounded in “reality” through segments discussing the famous Japanese film director Takashi Miike yet resulting in an even more confused understanding of the temporal setting of the game.

### **Keywords:**

representations of technology, intermediality, intertextuality, confusion, time



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## Enhancing Game Responsiveness Through Process Mining of Player Behavior

### **Abstract:**

This article explores how Process Mining can be used to understand and model player behavior in Real-Time Strategy (RTS) games. Process Mining, often used in business processes, is essentially an AI technique. It helps us analyze the data generated when people play games. By examining the sequence of actions players take, Process Mining creates models that reveal their strategies and behavior patterns.

Unlike basic data analysis, Process Mining goes further by automatically discovering how players navigate a game and comparing their behavior to expected patterns. When combined with AI methods like machine learning, Process Mining can predict what players might do next, classify them into different types, and even adjust the game in real-time to keep it engaging. The data used for this analysis typically includes in-game player actions, interactions, and navigation patterns, which are collected through game logs or tracking systems embedded in the game environment. The data can be analyzed at different tiers: some of it can be processed in batch mode, allowing for aggregation and pattern detection across a large player base, while more immediate player actions may be analyzed on the player's device in real-time to dynamically adapt game elements. This dual approach ensures a balance between large-scale behavior insights and personalized real-time adjustments.

Using Process Mining in this way is particularly beneficial in real-time strategy games. For instance, the approach can focus on analyzing player decision-making patterns and resource management strategies. However, this approach can also be applied to other genres. In first-person shooters (FPS), for example, the data might highlight movement patterns, reaction times, and combat choices, allowing for real-time adjustments to difficulty or enemy behavior. Casual games, on the other hand, may rely on tracking simpler interaction patterns like tap frequency or completion rates, using Process Mining to fine-tune game difficulty and pacing. This means we can create gaming experiences that are more challenging and personalized, keeping players engaged across different types of games.

### **Keywords:**

Process Mining, RTS, player behavior, game analytics



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## **Playing the Harbour: Twine as a Transdisciplinary Coastal Policy Tool**

### **Abstract:**

This presentation details the use of the open-source tool Twine to create live immersive performance video games as part of the United Kingdom Sustainable Management of Marine Resources (SMMR) project. The SMMR project, which sought to better incorporate diverse community values into the management of the UK coastline, utilised arts-based methods including digital storytelling and immersive theatre as transdisciplinary tools for collaboration across epistemological boundaries. In autumn 2022, Twine was successfully used as a platform for participants from a range of fields including coastal management, marine biology, and environmental policy to co-create experiential micro-performances around the Bristol Harbour and M Shed Museum in Bristol, England that explored participants' personal relationships to the liminal space where water and land meet. The interconnected Twine performances also served as a provocation, seeking to make visible the voices of those in the community who had heretofore not been a part of the management of the coast. In this presentation I will discuss the creation, facilitation, and outcomes of using Twine as a guide to transforming a known environment into something seen with fresh eyes. I will aim to illustrate how, in this project, the real value of Twine lies in its use as a tool of excavation and negotiation during the transdisciplinary co-creation process. Building on the work of Salter and Mouthrop (2021), May et al (2022), and Kong (2024), this presentation seeks to show new potentials for Twine gaming at the intersection of co-creation, environmental policy, and community engagement.

### **Keywords:**

twine, marine, environment, performance, co-creation



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## Mutual Ground for HOPA Video Games and Cultural Heritage: Cabinet of Curiosities

### **Abstract:**

The relationship between cultural heritage and video games is a growing area of interdisciplinary research, while still un-exploring the full potential of Hidden Object Puzzle Adventure (HOPA) games. These games often feature settings and narratives that evoke the concept of the *cabinet of curiosities*—an early modern collection practice where objects of cultural, historical, ecological and scientific significance were collected and displayed in ways that defied modern classification systems. HOPA games can be used as a platform for digital reconstructions of these cabinets, where players interact with artefacts and environments. These virtual spaces provide a dynamic and participatory form of engagement with the past, offering players a unique way to experience the beginnings of museology and heritology while battling with time in search and exploration of cultural objects. Furthermore, the way HOPA games present cultural objects within fantastical and mysterious settings blurs the line between historical fact and fiction, encouraging players to engage with heritage in imaginative and subjective ways. By doing so, HOPA games serve as a medium for cultural storytelling, fostering a complex dialogue between past and present, reality and imagination. 3D technology has taken over the archaeological and museum practice. Usually far away from the public eye those models stay within hard drives and servers in museums, not fully exploring the playful possibilities and public use of endless 3D object models.

By leveraging HOPA games, we can create new experiences that not only engage players with cultural heritage but also illuminate the historical evolution of museology and the practices of collecting knowledge.

### **Keywords:**

HOPA video games, heritage with gameplay, cabinet of curiosities, museology, 3D models of archaeological finds



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## Three Moments of Fascination With AI in Video Games: Indifference, Hope and Fear

**Abstract:**

The theoretical basis for this paper might seem an unlikely one for examining the role of AI NPCs in video games. Inspired by W. J. T. Mitchell's essay "Ekphrasis and the Other" (1992), we talk about three moments of fascination with AI: indifference, hope and fear. Our topic, however, has less to do with the dialectics of word and image as Mitchell's does, and more to do with the interrelationship between human and artificial intelligence. Still, we show how the two relations are not as different as they might appear since the concept of otherness underlies them both. To complement Mitchell's idea of the image as a feminine entity, we focus on games that portray AI appearing as female. Our example of indifference toward AI is that of *Portal 2*, given that GLaDOS can pose no real threat to the player character when she is in her potato form. Hope for peaceful coexistence as well as romance with AI is shown in *Mass Effect 3* and we point to how it was made possible by giving EDI a body, which provided an opportunity for sexualisation. Lastly, the *System Shock* series is a par-excellence instance of the fear of AI, with SHODAN being represented as Medusa, the very example Mitchell uses in his analysis of the issue. We hope to show that video games could contribute to "Critical AI Studies" because they point to the present and future of people's possible psychological responses to AI.

**Keywords:**

AI NPCs, otherness, *Portal 2*, *Mass Effect 3*, *System Shock*



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## **Collegiate Esports as an Employer Branding Tool: A Case Study in Croatia**

### **Abstract:**

Financing collegiate esports initiatives presents distinct challenges, reflecting the dynamic intersection of higher education and competitive gaming. Unlike traditional collegiate sports, which benefit from established infrastructure and widespread acceptance, collegiate esports are still in their early stages, often lacking the alumni support and stable funding structures seen in conventional sports programs. Traditional sports have benefited from institutional backing over decades, while esports must overcome initial obstacles, such as building a fan base and fostering institutional support in environments that may be unfamiliar with or skeptical of its value. Additionally, the technological demands of esports—ranging from high-performance gaming equipment to specialized facilities and advanced network infrastructure—require substantial initial investment. While sponsorships and partnerships with gaming companies offer potential funding avenues, navigating these commercial relationships can be complex. Striking a balance between the interests of educational institutions and commercial entities, while preserving the academic and competitive integrity of collegiate esports, is a key challenge.

This paper explores the Student Esports Tournament, a collegiate esports initiative launched in Croatia, that secured initial funding through employer branding-based partnerships. The paper examines different facets of employer branding tools that were used and the differences in approach between companies that were partners with the tournament. The paper also evaluates the impact of the tournament on Croatia's educational landscape and assesses its potential as a framework for incorporating collegiate esports to bridge the gap between industry and education in other countries.

### **Keywords:**

esports, employer branding, collegiate



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## The Evolution of Level Design: From Classical Methods to Modern Approaches in Video Games

### Abstract:

This paper analyzes the evolution of level design in video games, exploring the differences between classical approaches from the past and modern techniques. In past decades, level design often relied on static and linear structures, where levels had predefined routes and limited gameplay possibilities. Classic games, such as those on 8-bit and 16-bit consoles, frequently used simple graphics and limited interactions, emphasizing the precise placement of obstacles and challenges in linear-level designs. On the other hand, modern-level design shows a significant shift toward open and dynamic structures. Modern designers utilize advanced technologies such as procedural level generation and algorithmic methods to create complex and variable environments. These techniques allow for dynamic changes in level design that adapt to the player's behavior and choices, providing a richer and more interactive experience. Contemporary approaches include popular design types such as open worlds, sandbox games, and games with procedurally generated levels. Games like *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* and *Minecraft* use these techniques to create vast, dynamic worlds with ample exploration and interaction opportunities. In contrast, classic games like *Super Mario Bros.* and *The Legend of Zelda* from 1986, which were limited by the technology of their time, offer the opposite experience, with clearly defined challenges and linear structures. This paper will thoroughly examine how these changes in level design have influenced gameplay mechanics, aesthetics, and player experience, highlighting how modern approaches have enabled greater freedom and creativity in game design. The analysis will cover how technological advancement, along with changes in player preferences, shapes contemporary level design and will deepen the understanding of these key transformations in the video game industry.

### Keywords:

level design, AI, procedural level design





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## **Use of Machine Learning in the Design of Systems Generating Personalized RPG: A Case Study of AWSG**

### **Abstract:**

The development of artificial intelligence in recent decades impacts the video games industry so significantly that it has become a key factor shaping the gameplay (Filipović, 2023). This paper describes a case study of the Automatic World and Story Generator (AWSG)—a product from Viabo Games that uses machine learning for personalization of gameplay according to the player's preferences and playstyle. The basic research goal was to create an engine that produces personalized content, generated uniquely each time during a gameplay based on the player's previous choices, while avoiding a high rate of repeatability to provide each user with an individual experience resulting with an increasing immersion level.

The personalization may impact the content, for instance the narrative, NPCs' behaviour or events, and it depends on the Motivation Group—based on Gamer Motivation Model from Quantic Foundry (2022)—assigned to the player by the Research Tool that feeds the engine. The author presents an approach based on four ML algorithms tested for assigning a Motivation Group based on the decisions made by the player during the simulated gameplay by using the dictionary method—the keywords and phrases were related to specific Motivation Groups. The Gameplay Repeatability Parameter was assessed to keep the reoccurrence of the generated content at an acceptable level.

The validation of algorithms' results was carried out through comparison with questionnaires and the evaluation by competent judges. Even though AWSG has greatly surpassed the core expectations, both the cost and time of its manual implementation into each new game are inadequate to make use of it as a primary technology. The study results indicate that the product in a current shape should be treated as an alternative to the dictionary method; by the time of writing this paper, the owner has already started to work on a fast method of automated implementation in a form of a plug-in for Unreal Engine.

### **Keywords:**

machine learning, artificial intelligence, gameplay, personalization, motivation



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## Traces of the Machine: Différance, Authorship and Meaning in *No Man's Sky*

### Abstract:

This paper employs Derrida's concepts of *différance*, *trace*, and *supplement* to examine how meaning emerges in the spaces between human design, algorithmic generation, and player interpretation in Hello Games' *No Man's Sky*. Rather than attempting to locate meaning in either designer intent or procedural output, this analysis focuses on understanding how the game's generative systems create a complex web of signification where meaning emerges through the interplay of supposedly opposed elements: human/artificial, designed/generated, intended/emergent. By examining *No Man's Sky's* creature and planet generation systems, their in-game uses and external interpretation, the paper explores how meaning operates through *différance*, in the space between design and procedure. Game elements like creatures derive their significance not from pure presence but through their relationship to multiple systems of meaning-making – a complex interaction of cultural recognition, algorithmic surprise, and player contextualization. Finally, this paper sketches a possible pathway to reaching a theoretical framework for understanding meaning-making in hybrid human–AI creative systems. As AI tools become increasingly sophisticated in game development—from procedural generation to narrative design—the conventional understanding of human creative authority versus computational assistance becomes increasingly unstable. The implications extend beyond Game Studies to broader questions about how meaning emerges in spaces where human creativity and artificial intelligence intersect, suggesting that traditional understandings of authorship, auctorial intent, and meaning need to be reconsidered in an increasingly hybridized game creation process, as these systems gain wider adoption in creative endeavours.

### Keywords:

deconstruction, *No Man's Sky*, *différance*, procedural generation, hybrid authorship;



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## Leveraging Generative AI for Enhanced Game Design Document Creation: A Case Study with the Brazilian Video Game Stygma

### **Abstract:**

The advent of generative artificial intelligence (AI) has revolutionized various fields, including game development. This paper explores the potential of generative AI for text and images in the context of creating a Game Design Document (GDD). By leveraging AI's capabilities, game designers can enhance the comprehensiveness, creativity, and efficiency of the GDD creation process. We present a case study of Abysstrakt Games Studio named *STYGMA*—a narrative-driven horror puzzle game—to demonstrate the practical application of generative AI in GDD creation. Utilizing Google's Gemini (for texts) and Leonardo.ai (for images), we effectively generated detailed text descriptions of game mechanics, narrative elements, and character profiles, while also creating concept art, character designs, and environmental elements. Our findings highlight significant benefits of employing generative AI for a GDD creation. AI-generated content enhanced the comprehensiveness of the GDD, sparked creative ideas, and streamlined the development process. This approach proved particularly valuable for an intricate narrative-driven game like *STYGMA*, where rich descriptions and evocative visuals were crucial. The integration of generative AI into game design workflows holds immense potential for the future of game development. By embracing AI's capabilities, game designers can create more comprehensive, creative, and efficient GDDs, ultimately leading to the development of more immersive and engaging gaming experiences.

### **Keywords:**

generative AI, game design document, game design, Brazil, digital game



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## **Navigating Social Dynamics in Gaming: The Role of Virtual Identities in Online Gaming Communities**

### **Abstract:**

Membership of gaming communities in and around Massively Multiplayer Online Role-playing Games (MMORPGs) and Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs) has been well-known to play a vital role in shaping social connections and fostering social capital. As technological advancements continue to redefine how individuals engage with and express themselves on digital platforms and virtual spaces, understanding the complex role of virtual identities in gaming communities becomes imperative. This systematic review explored the role of interacting virtual identities in shaping the relationship between membership in gaming communities and social capital as an outcome. Online databases of Scopus, APA PsycNet, Web of Science, DiGRA Digital Library, and ACM Digital Library were screened (1st January 2000–23rd October 2023). After applying inclusion and exclusion criteria and after quality assessment, 33 studies were finalized for inclusion from an initial pool of 5720 studies. Results highlight that interacting identities affect players' experiences of social support and social capital. The extent to which positive social interactions were experienced and social capital was accumulated depended on (a) the number of interacting salient identities and (b) the degree to which salient identities were marginalized in the respective gaming community. For instance, female players who were also women of color experienced linguistic profiling, sexism, and racism, and consequently compounded negative social experiences which contributed to poor social capital in communities where being a female and a woman of color were marginalized. This review also mapped prevalent identities studied in different social contexts (online gaming communities, specific MMOGs/MMORPGs, and non-virtual world) and how these identities overlapped.

### **Keywords:**

online gaming communities, social capital, online social network, MMORPG, virtual identity



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## **Simulated Lives: Semiotics of *The Sims***

### **Abstract:**

This paper explores the building blocks of existence as designed in *The Sims* series. Video games often try to simulate many aspects of the real world, which is very apparent in one of the most common titles of the simulation genre—*The Sims* series. In our paper, we would like to research the simulacra of meaning in the world created in these games. To do so, we will use the theory of simulation by Jean Baudrillard and the methodology of semiotics to specify signs not only in the form of text, but also in game mechanics, and uncover meanings that they represent. We primarily focus on the systems of needs (sleep, hygiene, comfort, etc.) and lifetime aspirations. Apart from showing how the former was inspired by Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, we reflect on consumerist tendencies implied in this structure, since the creator of *The Sims*, Will Wright, wanted to make it a satire of consumerist culture. On the other hand, we delve into the analysis of aspirations as a game system designed to give a purpose to life and show what a simulated person's goal ("sim") should be. By doing so, we aim to offer insights into the interplay between virtual and real-world values in this "artificialization" of life.

### **Keywords:**

*The Sims*, semiotics, needs, aspirations, consumerism



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## Players, States, Procedures, and Actions: A (Possibly) Game-Agnostic Ontology for Tracking Player Actions

### Abstract:

The field of video game studies currently emphasizes theoretical frameworks for representing player knowledge and actions but lacks empirical tools for tracking and annotating player behaviors. This gap limits research on player performance, particularly in distinguishing skilled from unskilled players and understanding how their actions interact with gameplay events.

The paper proposes a three-tiered ontology—comprising states, procedures, and actions—that accounts for player performance in any first-person shooter (FPS) game. In this ontology: States are constants affected by actions and gameplay events, such as health, armor, and ammunition; Procedures are initiated by player actions, enable specific actions, and interact with states (e.g. switching weapons allows the use of that weapon, impacting ammo levels); and Actions are behaviors performed by players, either independently or as part of procedures.

The ontology was implemented using a Python script that includes a keylogger with a timeline builder, an ontology parser, and an event parser interacting with the game's API. We applied this implementation to the E1M3 level of *Doom* to capture comprehensive player action data.

The findings indicate significant differences between skilled and unskilled players, defined by their experience levels (captured as the cumulative time spent playing FPS games on their Steam accounts. The sample consisted of 44 players (Mean age = 22.32, SD = 1.32, 22 female, sample of convenience). Key results include:

- **Movement Patterns:** Skilled players moved in single directions for shorter durations (Mean = 1.45 s, SD = 0.67) compared to unskilled players (Mean = 3.02 s, SD = 0.56). ( $p = 0.042$ )
- **Weapon Switching:** Skilled players switched weapons more frequently than unskilled players. ( $p = 0.031$ )
- **Ammo Conservation:** Skilled players were more effective at conserving ammunition, with statistical significance observed ( $p = 0.012$ ).

These results demonstrate the ontology's effectiveness in capturing nuanced player behaviors and performance differences. The tool provides a valuable resource for researchers and game developers, enabling deeper insights into player actions across various FPS games. It contributes to enhancements in game design and player experience by offering a foundation for analyzing and understanding skill development. Closing comments provide a possible extension to the framework to cover multi-control games (such as RTS and RPG games) as well as multiplayer games.

### Keywords:

*ludology, empirical ludology, action logger, game ontology*



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## **Reception of Movies With a Theme From Video Games**

### **Abstract:**

Research into movies or TV series based on video games reveals a complex interplay between storytelling, audience engagement, and the adaptation process. These productions often aim to capture the essence of beloved gaming franchises while navigating the challenges of translating interactive experiences into a linear cinematic format. Themes frequently explored in these adaptations include heroism, identity, and the consequences of technology, reflecting the narratives of the source material.

Moreover, the success of these movies often hinges on their ability to resonate with both gamers and non-gamers alike, balancing nostalgia with accessible storytelling. Key trends in this genre include the increasing focus on transmedial experience on the atmosphere from the game world into the movie, also a reason for filming the narrative from the game plot.

The text will present the results of a survey conducted in 2023 among members of the video game community, movie fans and students about some of the most popular films inspired by video games. The assumption is that the results can be useful for planning future researches on wider sampling and for planning future productions based on interactive narrative translated into traditional cinematic storytelling.

### **Keywords:**

video games, movies, narrative, transmedial adaptation, reception



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## Sound Synthesizer Imagined: AI-Driven Procedural Audio Generation for Video Games

### **Abstract:**

This paper analyzes sound effects creation and design methods currently used in the interactive media industry, with an emphasis on video games, for the reason that they have the most potential to take advantage of the technological possibilities that AI brings with it. Traditional sound design methods, which typically rely on pre-recorded sound effect libraries, often fail to create dynamic soundscapes that respond to player interactions and environmental changes.

In this paper, new methods for creating sound effects will be proposed, through AI-Driven Procedural Audio Generation. This system includes advanced machine learning methods, specifically Generative Adversarial Networks (GAN) and Variational Autoencoders (VAE), which are able to automatically generate sound effects adapted to specific gaming contexts. The methodology encompasses several stages, including data collection, feature extraction, model training, sound generation, and integration into game development environments. This system allows sound designers to specify parameters such as mood, intensity, and context, enabling the creation of an expansive array of adaptive sounds that enhance player immersion. In addition, this system allows fine-tuning of the base model, which enables its adaptation to very specific needs. Such methods of using machine learning are widely present in the audio visual arts, but they have not yet found their place in the gaming industry, nor have they used the potential that machine learning brings with it. This work aims to contribute to the field of audio engineering in interactive media, offering a novel toolset for enhancing audio creativity, efficiency, and player experience in video games.

### **Keywords:**

procedural audio, AI, synthesizing audio, GAN





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## **A Narratological Perspective on Application of AI in Video Games**

### **Abstract:**

This analysis aims to explore different dimensions of the application of artificial intelligence (AI) various forms in the storytelling field in video games, first and foremost referring to the capabilities of generative AI and machine learning in this domain. The utilization of AI is not a new feature in this context (e.g. controlling NPCs behavior); in some forms and functions, it has been implemented for decades. This research situates itself at the intersection of classical and post-classical narratology, video game storytelling, and AI. This includes exploring influence of AI application on aspects such as genre, the roles of narrator and focalizer, character development (both playable and non-playable characters), story creation and presentation, the shaping and representation of storyworlds, and the implications of branching narratives, particularly in relation to environmental generation within games. I will also examine the concepts of dynamic storytelling and story generation, which emerge at the convergence of these categories and the capabilities provided by AI. In other words, the aim is to map contemporary theoretical considerations within this field, emphasizing the contributions that AI offers to video games as a narrative medium (having in mind tools and other story generators such as Storyteller, AI Dungeon, DeepStory, Fable Studio's AI storytelling tools etc.).

### **Keywords:**

video games, narratology, artificial intelligence, storytelling



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## **Incomplete Spaces: How Narrative Designers Use Holarchic Storytelling to Expand Their Storyworlds— A Critical Review**

### **Abstract:**

With the recent advancements in video game technology, both in hardware and software, narrative designers have been able to co-create vast autopoietic storyworlds for players. In these worlds, the story becomes a possibility to be explored autonomously. Unlike conventional methods of storytelling, such as cutscenes and scripted events, narrative and game designers now rely on randomness, eventness, and various engaging media in video games to narrate their stories and micronarratives.

By analysing the current literature and observing the current pattern in video game narrative design, this study has developed the concept of Holarchic Storytelling. This concept pinpoints a condition in which narrative designers rely on a variety of media channels, from films and audio to text, to achieve two primary outcomes: expanding the storyworld for a stronger effect of telepresence or opening new possibilities for game design choices. Regardless of the outcome, this approach requires players to employ cognitive skills, such as problem-solving, decision-making, and logical reasoning, thereby enhancing the player's engagement and the overall gaming experience.

Through this critical review, a hypothesis was formed: there is no reliable guideline or framework for utilising holarchic storytelling in video games. This gap in the field means that the vast majority of designers use these media channels in a non-optimal way that can negatively affect the player's overall experience. The study's findings highlight the ever-increasing need to form a descriptive guideline to enable designers to create an optimal holarchic narrative structure, which not only enhances the overall experience but also has the potential to impact the field of video game narrative design significantly.

### **Keywords:**

holarchic storytelling, autopoietic storyworld, narrative design, optimal experience.



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## **Real-Time Game Development: Game Mechanics and Level Design Strategies with Unreal Editor for 'Fortnite'**

### **Abstract:**

This paper presents the development process of a racing video game using Unreal Editor for Fortnite (UEFN). The primary objective is to integrate game mechanics, level design, and optimization techniques leveraging Fortnite's existing physics and gameplay framework. Unique challenges were addressed in balancing player control, terrain interaction and dynamic obstacles while the level design process involved optimizing for performance in real-time multiplayer settings, ensuring responsiveness across dynamic tracks. The final result is the project "Neon rush: Race to the stars", a racing game developed as a part of Epic Games World Building Fellowship, an educational program that explores the fundamental principles of real-time visual content production. This program emphasizes techniques related to the conceptualization, visualization, and construction of new environments, settings, and complete scenes within imaginary worlds, which enhance both the storytelling and gameplay.

This paper demonstrates UEFN's versatile toolset for creating engaging experiences in non-traditional game genres, highlighting the potential for real-time engines to adapt to diverse gameplay scenarios. The development process included a thorough block-out phase, utilizing assets from different libraries while advanced materials, landscape design, visual effects and lighting techniques contributed to the creation of immersive, interactive environments. Ultimately, this research provides insights into crafting richer and more immersive experiences that respond to player behaviour and choices, reinforcing the relevance of environmental design principles in digital game worlds.

### **Keywords:**

video games, level design, game development



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## **Fragging Dark Patterns: Towards Ethical Game Design**

### **Abstract:**

“Dark patterns” represent manipulative techniques in interface design that deliberately mislead users into actions they would not typically take. Their usage became recognizable in the early 2000s, with Brignull (2011) coming up with the term “dark patterns” to describe how certain interfaces intentionally deceive users. Today, these techniques are pervasive, especially in the video game industry, where they have faced widespread criticism for negatively impacting players and potentially unethical company behavior (Zagal, Björk, & Lewis, 2013).

Dark patterns include encouraging players to overspend through microtransactions, exploiting the FOMO effect, blurring the lines between the game and reality with illusory rewards and goals, and imposing time limits or artificial waits to drive additional purchases. Zagal et al. (2013) analyzed how games use these tactics to obscure the boundaries between entertainment and financial transactions, creating rewards that push players towards increased spending. Concealing real costs within games is another critical aspect of these manipulative strategies. Numerous studies have highlighted the negative psychological effects of these practices (King, Delfabbro, & Griffiths, 2019). These studies emphasize that dark patterns not only influence players’ immediate decisions but can also have long-term consequences on their mental health, leading to increased stress, frustration, and even addiction.

The video game industry’s responses range from ignoring criticism to occasional attempts at implementing ethical reforms. This research aims to offer recommendations and guidelines for ethical video game design through case studies of Star Wars Battlefront II and Rocket League, content analysis of game design elements, surveys of player experiences, and expert interviews. It advocates for cost transparency, reducing the exploitation of psychological tricks, and limiting microtransactions, balancing company profitability with a positive user experience while protecting players from manipulative practices.

### **Keywords:**

ethical game design, dark patterns, manipulation in games



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## Werewolves in *The Beast Within: A Gabriel Knight Mystery,* *The Quarry* and *The Wolf Among Us*

### Abstract:

In European folklore, werewolves typically referred to humans who transformed into wolves at night, craving human and/or animal flesh until they resumed their human form at dawn. The nature of their shapeshifting may vary—some are said to be able to change at will, while others are compelled to transform by a full moon (Sconduto 2014; Stypczynski 2013). This paper draws on insights from critical heritage (Winter and Waterton 2013), culture (Freeman and Proctor 2018), and video game studies (Wolf and Perron 2023), as well as from political economy (Hardy 2010), to explore the role of werewolves in several story-driven games: *The Beast Within: A Gabriel Knight Mystery*, *The Quarry*, and *The Wolf Among Us*. *The Beast Within: A Gabriel Knight Mystery* is a point-and-click adventure game released by Sierra On-Line and designed by Jane Jensen, featuring a “shadow hunter” who investigates a series of killings around Munich. *The Quarry* is an interactive drama horror game in which player choices significantly influence the game. Players control nine teenagers who must survive the night at Hackett’s Quarry summer camp. *The Wolf Among Us* is an episodic mystery/drama adventure game based on Bill Willingham’s *Fables* comic series, focusing on the investigation of a series of mysterious deaths in a hometown comprised of creatures from fairy tales. This study explores the ways in which transformation, as a key aspect of werewolf lore, operates in each of these games, and how that connects to the particular ways these three games—one point-and-click adventure, one interactive drama, and one episodic narrative—are designed. This exploration of one such manifestation of shapeshifter figures in video games invites us to interrogate the ways that shapeshifting figures in video games may be connected to their function(s) in cultural heritage—or not—more generally.

### Keywords:

video games and cultural heritage; cultural representation in games; adaptation and video games; monsters in video games; video game and heritage studies



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# **A Case Study on *World of Warcraft* (WoW): A Cultural Exploration of Classic vs. Retail Debate**

## **Abstract:**

This presentation examines nostalgia, power dynamics, game design, and player motivation in the WoW community's debate over Classic and Retail versions, as well as the broader debate on remakes, sequels, and reimaginings. WoW Retail features the latest expansions and updates, while WoW Classic comes up with older expansions released in their original sequence, and WoW Classic Era provides the original game without expansions. A thematic analysis of online discussions, coded using MAXQDA software, focused on key themes from literature, exploring factors influencing player preferences, emotional and psychological drivers, and the impact of interactions and cultural norms, compared to broader gaming trends. Player preferences are not straightforward—old players favoring Classic and new players opting for Retail. Key themes like nostalgia, game design, community dynamics, and in-game/end-game content were linked to gaming profiles: achievers, socializers, explorers, and killers, revealing which aspects of the game are appreciated and valued by each profile. Findings showed Classic players valued immersion and slower leveling for exploration and belonging, while Retail players prioritized efficiency, streamlined design, and modern features. Classic players emphasized strong community bonds and cooperative gameplay, likened to close-knit friendships (*gemeinschaft*) fostering collaboration. Some acknowledged nostalgia, while others denied or criticized it. Retail players appreciated automated group formation and accessibility, though some saw these features as transactional and shallow (*gesellschaft*) and viewed the Classic community as elitist. Retail's advancements, like visual enhancements, were praised for improving the experience but criticized for diminishing the game's essence, raising concerns about dungeon queues, NPC usage, and AI's impact. Power dynamics between players and Blizzard were evident, with Blizzard forums favoring Retail, while Reddit and YouTube showed a growing preference for both. Tensions arose over the game's direction, updates, monetization, and integrity. This analysis highlights how WoW Classic and Retail preferences are shaped by immersion, community ties, and design strategies, with nostalgia and power dynamics as key factors. The findings offer insights into video games as cultural artifacts and political spaces, with implications for developers, community managers, and scholars, shedding light on player engagement complexities and the future of MMORPGs.

## **Keywords:**

*World of Warcraft*, Classics, Retail, Player preferences, Community engagement



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## **Magic as a Metaphor of Hubris: Parallels Between Gale From *Baldur's Gate 3* And Ged From Ursula Le Guin's *Earthsea***

### **Abstract:**

The aim of this paper is to explore the narrative parallels between the wizard Gale from Larian's video game *Baldur's Gate 3* and the wizard Ged from Ursula Le Guin's fantasy saga *Earthsea*.

In both works, magic can be read as a metaphor for power, and both characters experience similar crises due to their own hubris. Both are exceptionally talented spellcasters, whose own great power intoxicates and corrupts them, causing them to become a danger to themselves and others, and leaving physical marks on their own bodies. Both characters undergo a narrative arc that teaches them humility (though in Gale's case this becomes relative—due to the nature of video games as media, his story can be read both as a deconstruction of this kind of a story arc, or it can be more straightforward). For both characters, their relationships with others (especially with the figure of a distant and cold woman, who is significant in both narratives) become pivotal for establishing psychological balance and recovery. In the stories of both characters, the theme of solitude emerges as particularly important. Finally, both characters deal with the catastrophic consequences of their actions in a similar way—they become more or less self-destructive, even suicidal, before they eventually manage to confront what they have done.

### **Keywords:**

hubris, Ursula Le Guin, *Earthsea*, *Baldur's Gate 3*



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## Between Interactivity and Activism: Identity Tourism and the 'Playful Translations' of (Radical) Resistance

### **Abstract:**

Video games with Black protagonists that simulate realities of racism—like *Mafia III* or *WATCH\_DOGS 2*—allow players to interactively experience systemic and interpersonal forms of discrimination in open-world environments. By making you interactively 'inhabit' the body of a Black person, these games tell the implied white player that they not only look Black to those simulated people in this digital environment, but that they 'are' Black within this context. In doing so, they create a unique discourse in the dialectic space between the perceivable Blackness of the protagonist and the assumed whiteness of the player.

This is, in effect, a specifically abstracted idea of a 'Black experience' translated into the language of ludic interactivity for an intended audience predominantly unaffected by or even unaware of systemic racism. In 'playfully translating' forms of discrimination and resistance for a limited and controllable amount of time, this mechanically manufactured and encouraged 'experiential racism' then takes the form of 'identity tourism': Players are not only provided a 'safe' experience of systemic oppression, but also systematic tools to fight back without having to worry about any potential consequences of such cathartic violence.

In my proposed presentation, I will illustrate how the opportunities and limitations inherent in this form of 'identity tourism' are facilitated, shaped, and delimited by the representative choices of video games like *Mafia III*. Specifically, I will illustrate how they use their interactivity to 'translate' political forms of being and resisting, which creates 'empathic gateways' to such identities and political positions. In doing so, they engage not only with a 'Black' power fantasy, but a 'Black Power' fantasy.

### **Keywords:**

identity tourism, racism, political resistance, implied player



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