The scholarly hunter: A textual analysis of the ways in which Bloodborne's narrative and environment invites player involvement and initiates critical debate

By

Devin Lampani Payne

Canterbury Christ Church University

Thesis submitted
For the degree of Masters by Research

2023

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

This thesis discusses Bloodborne's narrative and its ability to make players invested in its narrative through its genres, environmental storytelling, high-intensity gameplay, and the open-ended nature of the narrative. The thesis uses Henry Jenkin's narrative architecture as a structure to present current academic findings on Bloodborne while also delving into the roles of environmental storytelling, game mechanics, and the action horror genre in relation to player investment and agency. Further on, paratextual narrative co-construction is examined, and this concept carries us into the final chapter of the thesis.

Before looking into the co-authoring of a narrative between players and game developers, this thesis will first break down Bloodborne's narrative in its first chapter. In the second chapter, I explore the gameplay and difficulty of Bloodborne in relation to the horror genre and its ability to evoke strong emotions. Finally, the third chapter investigates my claim that Bloodborne's narrative and cryptic storytelling style have created a lore-hunting culture and community that inspires players to co-construct the narrative and solve unanswered questions. Suggesting that the developer of Bloodborne intentionally creates narratives and worlds in such a way as to sow the seeds for critical debate and discussion surrounding the narrative.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, FromSoftware released the dark fantasy action RPG(role playing game) Bloodborne. At this time, many fans of the Dark Souls franchise, including myself, had their attention turned to this mysterious, gritty, and violent new world. The thematic shift away from dark fantasy to Victorian horror was seemingly welcomed by fans, and the changes could be felt in the gameplay and the narrative. Bloodborne is more overtly a horror game than Dark Soul's franchise, and because of this, the combat needed to feel faster and fluid, and the environments needed to portray these elements of horror and tension. Most importantly, though, Bloodborne's narrative needed to adhere to the different genre aspects while remaining open-ended and vague, which fans of FromSoftware titles have come to expect. This style of storytelling has laid the foundations for widespread critical and casual discussion surrounding many elements of Bloodborne's lore. For future reference, when I speak of lore or when mentioned by others within the game studies field, they mean the overall culture, knowledge and traditions held by a group on a particular subject *(Zuzanna Wolek,2022)*. With regards to this thesis specifically, the subject is Bloodborne.

While this thesis will illustrate how video games can offer a unique approach to storytelling, Felix Schniz highlights the 'problematic position' within critical theory thinking that video games inhibit due in part to their roots in entertainment. Emerging in the 1990s as projects of curiosity and eventually growing into a lucrative enterprise, the negative impact of such a cultural industry and the standardisation of mass-manufactured cultural goods have deprived games of their spirit, which has been a core topic in critical theory according to Schniz. Hence, some limit the role of video games to entertainment or leisure rather than forms of thought-provoking or revolutionary artwork. Nevertheless, more contemporary theorists like Henry Jenkins have acknowledged the impact of video game narratives on player communities. It has also been stated by Schniz that video games, if utilised in the right ways, can express ideological worlds, and these worlds, under certain conditions, can express a 'critical ideology' and immerse their players in what Schniz calls a narrative of 'resistance'.

As such, I believe this gives us the initial footing to construct an argument surrounding the value of critical discussion in Bloodborne's ludonarrative. This thesis, therefore, argues that Bloodborne's narrative and environment are designed in ways that initiate critical discussion. This type of discussion relies heavily on the player's own agency and investment in this fictional world, and it can result in players co-authoring narratives alongside the game developers. More specifically, however, the thesis states that Hidetaki Miyazaki, the creative director of Bloodborne, intentionally crafts the narrative and the game space in the hopes that players will be inspired to seek a greater understanding of the narrative and come up with their own interpretations of the lore, which will then be shared amongst the community.

The gap in Bloodborne and narrative-related research is highlighted in the literature review, as through my research, I have found the focus to be on individual aspects of Bloodborne, such as the difficulty, the themes that inspire the game, or the cryptic storytelling style. I claim there are certain connections between these elements and the player, resulting in players becoming more invested in the narrative and attempting to co-author the story outside of the game on community forums and YouTube.

In the literature review, the thesis will cover current literature on Bloodborne as well as a look into what makes Bloodborne a horror game, the consistent use of environmental storytelling, and a phenomenon known as paratextual narrative co-construction. The literature review begins with a look into key terms like narrative and story, using Monika Fludernik's definition of narrative as a starting point, followed by an examination of telegenic narratives, a term coined by John Paley that consequently describes a kind of ludonarrative where there are many interlinking stories that make up the wider narrative. Another term defined early on is genre, where Rick Altman claims there are three key roles that genre plays in a consumer-based product like a videogame. Through understanding these roles, this thesis can then delve into why elements like the genre and the themes that inspire a narrative can be associated with player investment. To do this, Henry Jenkins's studies on narrative architecture are utilised as a structure for the literature review. This is where the review will explore the four types of narrative in video games as illustrated by Jenkins in different sections of the review. Additionally, there will be examples where Jenkins's theory can be applied to Bloodborne within each section to explain why much of Jenkin's work has been used to format the review.

In the analysis section of the thesis, I start by exploring the storytelling techniques and methods used by FromSoftware and progress into how game design and narrative can work synonymously with each other to create interest in the narrative. This takes us into the second chapter, which explores Bloodborne's gameplay, system rules, and difficulty. Furthermore, this chapter will explore how game developers use a term coined by David Freeman (2004) known as emotioneering, which aims to add emotional breadth and depth to a game. This is where the aforementioned research into the horror genre comes into play, as I claim that heightened emotional states, depth of characters and worldbuilding as well as agency techniques create opportunities for players to learn, adapt, immerse themselves in the role of the player and/or look elsewhere for help outside of the actual game, such as on community forums. This is the focus of the final chapter and is also where I use information gathered from previous sections and the literature reviews section on paratextual narrative co-construction to reinforce the argument put forward by this thesis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bloodborne (2015, From Software) is a unique example of the ways in which player communities develop their own interpretations of video game narratives, which are essentially written or spoken accounts of a series of connected events that form the story in a game. Therefore, Bloodborne is a good case study for discussing how game designers handle narrative in a variety of different ways according to genre and other considerations. Existing work on video game narrative involves a variety of foci. Some academic literature, such as Espen Aarseth's *Cybertext* (1997), looks at what makes interactive media unique by linking video games back to other forms, including tarot and nonlinear poetry. Other literature seeks to produce a taxonomical classification of the different ways in which a videogame might present its story; for example, Henry Jenkins's *Videogames as Narrative Architecture* (1994) will be used to form the structure of this review, and his work further breaks videogame storytelling methods down into multiple categories that aim to explain the role of different types of narrative and what outcomes they produce. Additionally, Clara Fernandez-Vara's (2011) work on indexical storytelling focuses primarily on environmental storytelling, but we will see that this topic can translate into other topics such as Jenkins's embedded narratives, for example, which are narratives that rely on the player's interaction with the environment. Before jumping ahead to a brief explanation of Jenkins's narrative archetypes, this thesis will address its foundational terms, which are narrative and story. The execution and effectiveness of both of these can be interpreted differently depending on the medium, but for the sake of the thesis's focus being games, that will be the medium to which we relate these terms too. However, that's not to say we won't compare and contrast ludonarratives to other narratives, as that is where we can highlight the important differences that make game storytelling what it is.

At their most concise, narratives are based on cause-and-effect relationships that are applied to sequences of events. These events are the stories, and so the telling or narration of those stories is the narrative. *"Narrative provides us with a fundamental epistemological structure that helps us to make sense of the confusing diversity and multiplicity of events and to produce explanatory patterns for them."* (Fludernik,2009). Game narratives play out in the same way, with stories and events that draw the player into the overall narrative.

However, narrative and story are terms that, on the surface, may sound like they represent similar concepts, and although finding a precise distinction between the two amongst current literature is an obscure task itself, John Paley's *Narrative Machinery (2009)* attempts to break down their intrinsic differences. Paley proclaims that without events, there is no narrative, and these events tell the story. Paley then goes on to explain a type of narrative known as telegenic. *"The idea of a telegenic plot reflects the conviction, shared by numerous critics, that 'the end writes the beginning and shapes the middle'"* (Brooks, 1985: 22). He suggests that a teleogenic plot is given its shape by the author's awareness of how a story ends, or, in the case of open-ended narratives, what sort of message or

themes rise to the surface multiple times as the reader proceeds through the story.

Therefore, by recognising that stories have a telegenic structure, the reader, while unaware of what the climax will be, is *"nevertheless confident that there will be one and that it will throw retrospective significance on what has preceded it" (Paley,2009)*. Here, Paley argues that the story threshold is the point at which a narrative becomes telegenic, and because of this, the reader will be able to look back on previous events with *'anticipation of retrospection' (Brooks, 1985: 23).* In simple terms, this essentially means these types of narratives contain multiple events or stories that interlink in ways orchestrated by the author or game designer with the intent of grabbing the interest of players or readers. Many videogames with complex interlinking narratives could therefore be argued to be what Paley describes as teleogenic narratives because they gradually unravel different stories and events, which give the ludonarrative its structure.

In addition to the key terms narrative and story, the genre is also worth defining early on, as we will examine the worldbuilding and narrative elements that are synonyms with popular troupes such as the gothic Victorian horror genre that Bloodborne is influenced by. Rick Altman's studies on genre claim that there are three key roles that genre plays. Production, distribution, and consumption in production, *"the generic concept provides a template for production decisions" (Altman, 1996),* meaning the concept allows producers to begin worldbuilding from an already established template. In distribution, *"the generic concept offers a fundamental method of product differentiation and promotion" (Altman, 1996),* suggesting that certain genres or generic concepts can have different levels of involvement or interest depending on the genre. Now that the key terms are briefly outlined, we can move on to the literature review structure.

Due to the participatory nature of video games, the way the narrative is told is different from that of a novel or movie, as the player, more often than not, has control over the pace of the story, and in Bloodborne's case, what elements of that story come to fruition before others. For this to happen, ludonarratives involve a combination of elements, including not only player agency, environmental storytelling, co-construction of narratives, and how a narrative is presented, but also, in some cases, how player communities can formulate a more complete understanding of an incomplete or nonsensical narrative. This can result in unique moments where a game's lore is widely discussed, critiqued, and theorised to the point that it could be implied that the lore has both rhetorical and academic value. Bloodborne provides us with a case where these elements overlap and interact in interesting ways. To be able to discuss each of these elements in a structured way, I will introduce and then follow the categories laid out in Jenkins's theory of video games as narrative architecture, interweaving and comparing other theories where and when appropriate.

Henry Jenkins's four narrative archetypes, known as evoked, enacted, emergent, and embedded narratives, are the pseudo-titles of the sections and help frame the overall discussion as the nature of the archetypes is flexible and interchanging.(*Jenkins, 2004)* Here I will explain each of the archetypes in more detail as well as offer an example of each archetype that can be found in Bloodborne to help explain why this framework is beneficial. Think of the archetypes as lenses to be used for the

evaluation of immersive experience design with regard to storytelling in games.

Evoked narratives state that spatial design can enhance our sense of immersion in a familiar world or communicate a fresh perspective on a story through the altering of established details. Jenkin uses the video game *Alice (2000)* by McGee as an example, noting that players will already have an established mental map of the game spaces, characters, and backstory associated with Carroll's fictional universe *Alice in Wonderland (1865)*. FromSoftware expects players to be aware of these genres and elements before playing, which in turn tailors their expectations of the narrative in a certain direction. Consequently, Bloodborne depicts a plethora of well-known gothic-inspired Victorian horror tropes, which are reflected in the environment, characters, and narrative.

Enacted narratives are spatial stories structured around the character's movement through space, and the features of the environment may slow down or accelerate the plot trajectory. Jenkins states,

"Spatial stories are held together by broadly defined goals and conflicts and pushed forward by the character's movement across the map. Their resolution often hinges on the player reaching his or her final destination" (Jenkins, 2004).

Spatial stories are vital in the telling of a narrative to a player and the framework of the narrative archetypes as they can evoke pre-existing narrative associations, provide a staging ground where narrative events are enacted, embed narrative information within the environment, or provide resources for emergent narratives to appear. Essentially, they are the foundation on which narratives can be formed, as, without a setting or spatial plane for all these elements that make a narrative to build upon, it could be argued that there would be no narrative. Bloodborne includes many examples of enacted narratives occurring, but one good example would be when the player enters Old Yharnam and kills Djura, an enemy hunter who acts as a kind of environmental hazard, gunning down the player with a mounted turret whenever he gets you in his line of sight. The enacted narrative here is the player responding to the environmental hazard by manoeuvring through the level in an attempt to avoid the gunfire and eventually killing him, therefore removing that obstacle from the level and continuing their journey.

Emergent narratives are, as Jenkins explains, *"not pre-structured or pre-programmed" (Jenkins,* 2004). The game spaces are designed with rich narrative potential, enabling the story-constructing activity of players. In this case, game designers are less storytellers and more like narrative architects. As an example, a game like The Sims, which has less of an authored story and is more of a simulation or sandbox experience, is far likelier to produce emergent narratives because the characters in the game are free to interact with each other and the environment in many unpredictable ways. Bloodborne, on the other hand, has fewer examples of this in action as the game is formulated in a way that promotes specific game systems and player behaviour.

However, the invading mechanic could be an argument for an emergent narrative in Bloodborne. Being invaded in Bloodborne means getting attacked by another player from another world. The invader is immune to the attacks of enemies and is usually focused on killing you. I argue this to be a kind of emergent narrative as it takes place without the player's involvement and can create situations that may have been intended by the game designer if the other player decided not to invade.

Finally, embedded narratives rely on participants exploring a designed environment and uncovering the in-game texts as they go. The game space becomes a memory palace whose contents must be deciphered as the player attempts to reconstruct the plot. *"Viewers assemble and make hypotheses about likely narrative developments on the basis of information drawn from textual cues and clues" (Jenkins, 2004).* Embedded narratives can be compared to the job of a writer in a games team, in which something is explicitly included to tell a story, such as a piece of text, a cutscene between levels, or the details in the environment, such as blood trails or corpses. This archetype is more relevant to Bloodborne as a great deal of the storytelling takes place through environmental clues, item descriptions, and NPC dialogue. An example would be the antidote item found in Bloodborne, and the description of the item states that it was *"used to treat ashen blood, the baffling sickness that ravaged Old Yharnam long ago." (Bloodborne Wiki, 2015).* The item is first found in Old Yharnam and gives the player a subtle warning that some enemies in the area may have poisonous attacks; consequently, the boss of the area uses vicious poisonous attacks, which make the encounter a lot harder if the player is not aware of the antidote or takes the time to read into the lore of the area and the item.

This is one example of the ways in which the embedded narrative elements of Bloodborne hint at key game mechanics without explicitly telling the player how the mechanic works or how significant they may be at that point in time. Now that we have a brief understanding of the four narrative archetypes, it is worth highlighting that Jenkins himself has stated,

"These four architectures are not mutually exclusive nor are they necessarily in conflict with one another; experience designers may mix and match them as they wish and should mix and match them as they wish" (Jenkins, 2004).

There is already proof of this when discussing spatial stories, as they enable the narrative archetypes to perform within a narrative. The flexible nature of this structure will allow for a more developed and intricate review of the ways in which Bloodborne's narrative and environment invite player involvement and build into a community of discussion and debate.

Existing academic research on Bloodborne varies in its focus but tends to highlight the horror element of the game, how it inspires the narrative and other elements, as well as how the narrative reveals itself to the player and what the player's role is in the game. The issue here is the concentration on individual aspects of the game while overlooking the fact that there may be certain connections between player involvement and the design of a narrative and the tales it reveals, which can produce player motivation and satisfaction. For many players, the lore, which is essentially bits of knowledge about a diegetic fictional world, is important because it can allow the player to understand their goals and purpose in the game world while offering them pieces of the metaphorical puzzle in the hopes that they are interested enough to engage with the text and piece them together.

Further on, I will be discussing in detail how players co-construct the narrative from these 'bits', and arguing how some game designers intentionally promote narrative co-construction by leaving stories open-ended or vague. Primarily, I argue that FromSoftware games give clear signs they are not created just for entertainment but also to deliberately create opportunities for collaborative player analysis outside of the game. The combination of these elements may be a motivating factor in wanting to understand more about the narrative from a personal perspective, and this driving force seemingly occurs subconsciously for the player and their community.

WHAT MAKES BLOODBORNE A HORROR GAME?

First and foremost, Bloodborne is a third-person action role-playing game. The horror in Bloodborne resides in its narrative, worldbuilding, setting, and characters, which will be fully addressed in the first chapter of the analysis, as well as some brief examples in the review. As such, it could be argued that Bloodborne is not scary in the same way classic horror survival titles are, like the *Resident Evil (1996)* series or *Silent Hill (1999).* This is because traditional horrors take away agency and power from the player, adding to a feeling of hopelessness and fear towards enemy encounters. Casper S. Boonen and Daniel Mieritz delve into the concept of player agency in horror games in their book *Paralysing Fear (2018)* and how, by having their own goals in place for the game, the intentions players have become the formal cause of activity can affect the thoughts, language, and actions of their avatar. However, due to the nature of a video game, the material and formal constraints of the plot will hinder the player's actions. By inhibiting the actions of the player in certain ways and balancing the formal and material constraints, Casper explains that *"the player will experience agency" (Boonen and Mieritz, 2018).* This is due to the player's understanding of what they can and cannot do after experiencing the constraints of material resources such as health consumables or ammo and the formal constraints of the plot, like having to sneak around because the enemy hunting them down is too dangerous to tackle head-on.

Moreover, this paper includes another interpretation of player agency presented by Harrell and Zhu, where they suggest*,*

"agency should be perceived as an expressive resource that can be manipulated through multiple dimensions to achieve meaningful and aesthetic effects in interactive narratives" (Harrell and Zhu, 2009 in Boonen and Mieritz, 2018).

This argument is exemplified by Harrel and Zhu as they explain how limiting or temporarily removing player agency intentionally can convey feelings such as helplessness and confinement, both of which are relevant to the horror genre. It is worth noting at this stage that there is an agreement amongst game scholars such as Perron (2012) and Krzywinska *(2002)* that player agency, or a lack thereof, has significance in horror games. However, the exact details of what elements can be manipulated remain unmapped and yet to be seen, which opens the discussion on how game developers can innovate and evolve these elements in the genre to evoke emotional responses in new and creative ways.

Bloodborne sits within the action-horror genre, where the player usually experiences more agency than in traditional horrors. An example of an action-horror title like Bloodborne would be *Dead Space (2011),* which was presented by Boonen & Mieritzl with the intention of explaining material and player parameters. These parameters can limit the degree of player agency, which in turn creates certain emotional responses. For example, in Dead Space, managing weapons and ammunition results in the player oscillating between empowerment and disempowerment, both affording and constraining player agency.

This is how they explain material parameters. *"The material parameters that a horror game can use to influence and manipulate the player's agency are derived from the materiality of the game-world"* *(Boonen and Mieritz, 2018)* Player parameters, on the other hand, challenge the player's skill through combat and action elements; here, the emphasis is on mastering controls and tools to overcome the difficulty posed by the game. *"Difficulty is a natural part of the gameplay—and, in fact, part of what creates the game's horror" (Boonen and Mieritz, 2018).* The constraints produced by these parameters can halt progress. Although arguably an intended, expressive element of the game.

The player in these titles is supposed to feel challenged, which results in pressure, fright, and terror. In some scenarios, the player may have the tools or materials necessary to deal with the challenges, so the constraint in this sense is the player's failure or inability to execute the tasks required of them to progress the narrative. This aspect is key to Bloodborne, as a large part of the gaming community believes the difficulty of mastering the movement and tools gatekeep the game from more casual or less mechanical players. *"It's challenging, for sure, but don't let that deter you from trying the title out. It's never unfair" (Barker, Pushsquare, 2018).* As such, it is fair to say that some of Bloodborne's 'horror' aspects are found in its environment design, but more so in the tension produced when attempting to survive encounters and mastering the control of their avatar. An example of this would be the general approach players are expected to have towards groups of enemies; throughout areas, they are given finite amounts of pebbles (a material resource). *"Small pebbles are found throughout Yharnam. Can be thrown at foes" (Bloodborne wiki, 2015)*. Here is the player throwing the pebble at enemies to aggro (enemies prioritising whoever aggravated it), which leads them away from the group, thereby thinning the ranks of the enemy and gaining a combat advantage, which in turn gives the player agency over the game through their actions.

Bernard Perron's (2004) work on the effects of warning systems in survival horror games, i.e., the events that have taken place before, highlights another commonly used game design device to elicit player agency. At times, a game will *"give players some information about their surroundings while leaving a lot out" (Perron,2004).* Despite the fact that Bloodborne is more suitably described as an action-horror than a survival horror, Perron's observation can still be applied, as, at their essence, warning systems are designed "to *elicit gameplay emotions. That is to say, fear, fright, or dread that arise from the gamer's actions in the game-world and the consequent reactions of this world" (Perron, 2004).* These 'warnings' can be implied as subtle clues that are expressed through either gameplay, narrative, or the mood of the game space. The emphasis here is on the game spaces' storytelling abilities. In a general sense, a protagonist in the horror genre will investigate a hostile environment where they will be forced into situations such as saving a loved one or being trapped in a dangerous environment to uncover the cause of a horrible event. To survive, the player must be observant of their environment and face impure, disgusting, and creepy enemies with whatever weapons they have. Therefore, this supports the notion that an observational and keen player will take note of their environment and any clues placed by developers, whether that's through visual cues or gameplay.

Throughout the thesis, the horror aspect of the game is noted to play heavily into the narrative structure, the themes that inspire said narrative, the environmental storytelling, and arguably the motivation behind players in their pursuit to overcome challenges. Such challenges are created through aspects like warning systems and overcome by observational and resourceful players. As such, the next section will examine the importance of environmental storytelling in games, with more focus on the horror genre. In addition, a term used by Clara Fernandez-Vara known as indexical storytelling is significant to cover next as it describes the process mentioned previously, where stories shape the game space and navigation of that space forms the narrative sequence.

ENVIRONMENTAL STORYTELLING IN VIDEOGAMES

In the very first few moments of the game, players will find themselves awakening in an empty clinic. Surrounding them are strange vials, operation tables, and bloodstains—lots of them. By moving their character, a piercing creak of the floorboards breaks the silence of the room, ensuring that the player's attention hangs on every sound and movement. This is one of the very first examples of environmental storytelling that can be found in Bloodborne. Environmental storytelling is a term used in both academia and fan media and is widely utilised alongside the process of deciphering environmental clues and themes, which in turn contribute to the narrative. Bloodborne is no exception, and in fact, the game intentionally limits the expository information that is offered to the player through cut scenes and embedded text, utilising environmental storytelling as a narrative technique, which is one of the foci for Chapter 1.

Fernandez-Vara's paper on game spaces and indexical storytelling *Game Spaces Speak Volumes: Indexical storytelling* delves into the rich concept of environmental storytelling. She posits that it provides narrative context and creates player identity, usually involving a variety of strategies and narrative phenomena. The spine of environmental storytelling, as illustrated by Fernandez-Vara, is:

1. The narrative shapes the space and navigating it constructs the narrative sequence.
2. The player must piece the story together, interpreting the objects and events in the space.

Environmental storytelling is the practice of arranging a selection of the objects available in a game world so that they suggest a story to the player who sees them. Some game titles use the environment to add to the main narrative, and in other examples, it's the main design element used to drip-feed the narrative to the player. Several techniques are required to successfully tell a story in a game space. Firstly, there must be a clear idea of what has happened in the world in each location. This can be illustrated through design techniques such as controlling navigation, puzzle design, distributing resources with narrative significance, and the option to revisit a space. From this, the player can learn about the world while playing.

This process, therefore, classifies video games as examples of something called ergodic literature, which is defined in *Espen J. Aarseth's* book *Cybertext.* Aarseth defines ergodic literature as *"literature that relies on or requires the active engagement of a readership (Dani Spinosa).* These narrative texts require *"non-trivial effort on the part of the user to traverse" (Aarseth, 1997).* If ergodic literature is to make sense as a concept, there must also be non-ergodic literature, where the effort to traverse the text is trivial, like watching a movie, for example. In Aarseth's book, he explains cybertexts as the organisation of text in order to analyse the influence of the medium; they are a type of ergodic literature.

So, in short, we can say that cybertexts are a form of ergodic literature. Much of the work done in the paratextual narrative co-construction section will draw from the definitions Aarseth underlines in his book. A key feature of this review is the significance of player involvement, which goes hand in hand with the idea of non-trivial work allowing for more meaningful experiences of a text.

Therefore, Aarseth's theory defines non-linear narratives as ergodic and linear narratives as non-ergodic. In a general sense, non-linear narratives are interactive and allow their users to,

"create or influence a dramatic storyline through actions, either by assuming the role of a character in a fictional virtual world, issuing commands to computer-controlled characters, or directly manipulating the fictional world state" (Aarseth, 1997).

They combine aspects of ergodic literature such as non-trivial work and indexical storytelling, which involves players navigating through a game space and creating meaning from their experiences through both their spatial movement and the decisions they make along the way. The effort and involvement in the narrative required on the player's part are what make the experience of playing a videogame like Bloodborne ergodic, and this points to the idea that a linear representation of the same content that could normally be found in a book or film would be fundamentally different or perhaps lacking as a reader is merely an observer of the narrative, not an integral part of it like a player is.

Es (environmental storytelling) allows embedded narrative information to be conveyed to the player via the game space and produces enacted actions, which in turn can affect the interpretation and development of the narrative, although the limitation here is that Es can never tell the whole story. ES is only part of the wider process of storytelling; hence, few games make exclusive use of it as a primary way of telling a story. A good example of a game that does, however, would be Bioshock *(2K Games,2011),* which, under the guise of an action FPS (first-person shooter), uses the unique setting of an underwater city to convey the horrors of a utopian society crumbling down due to violence and greed. Despite this, there are some agreements to note concerning academic research on Bloodborne. The cryptic narrative that utilises environmental storytelling and the resulting narrative co-construction are usually the agreed themes that find themselves appearing throughout the academic field *(Madelon Hoedt; Oliver Langmead; Felix Schniz).* These sources will be explored in more detail later on, but for now, Brenden Laurels *Computers as Theatre* (2013) highlights the connection between an interface/game designer and a theatrical scene designer.

Henry Jenkins *Game design as narrative architecture (2004)* also contains a useful comparison between the design process of a game world and the design of a theme park attraction, much like Brendan Laurel states, which states that theme park designers build upon stories or genre traditions already well-known to visitors and allow them to physically enter into spaces they have visited before in their fantasies, much like the digital space of a video game.

"Many games contain moments of revelation or artefacts that shed light on past actions. Carson (2000) suggests that part of the art of game design is finding artful ways of embedding narrative information into the environment without destroying its immersiveness" (Jenkins, 1994).

 Here, Jenkins includes a claim by Carson that game designers embed information in their game worlds and count on the visitor or player to do the rest by observing and investigating the spatial dimension. Additionally, Fernandez-Vara states, *"Spatiality is also one of the defining qualities of digital environments (Murray, 2001) and, by extension, of video games" (Fernandez-Vara, 2011).*

Primarily, Fernandez-Vara's game spaces illustrate how digital environments can tell stories that *"take place in a spatial dimension, which contains the existents (characters and setting) that give way to the organised series of events that make up the story" (Chatman, 1980)*. Here she identifies the unique qualities of digital environments as they allow stories to be told in ways that have not been done to this extent in the past with more conventional forms of media. This arguably allows concepts like Jenkins's narrative archetypes to work, as the types of narratives he describes couldn't play out without an interactable game space. This game space, inspired by pre-existing narrative competencies, gives players the foundation to enact their own narratives, find embedded narrative clues, and play a part in the narratives that emerge from these game spaces.

EMBEDDED NARRATIVES

A key feature of Bloodborne is its chosen stance on storytelling. On the surface, the player will understand their main goal and the events that have taken place by simply playing the game. However, on closer inspection of all the narrative elements in the game, the level of depth here is worth discussing. For example, item descriptions in many other titles may consist purely of flavour text, which suits the purpose of being there mainly for the sake of an item having one, such as *Divinity: Original Sin 2's (2017)* description of a crossbow: *"A crossbow framed with more metal than wood and boasting more than a little farhangite in its construction" (Divinity: Original Sin 2, Larian Studios,2017)*. In other titles the item description may be used for comedic value depending on the title, as seen in the backhanded compliment gun from *Destiny (Activision 2014), "You look good in red" Destiny (Activision,2014)* Contrasting to that, in Bloodborne, the item descriptions feature important lore snippets at times, which help construct a clearer picture of past events as well as hinting towards narrative paths the player may not have considered yet. The cosmic eye watcher badge, for instance, hints at the cosmic horror aspect of the narrative that is kept hidden during the early stages of the game: *"The choir stumbled upon an epiphany, very suddenly and quite by accident. Here we stand, feet planted in the earth, but might the cosmos be very near us, only just above our heads?" (Bloodborne wiki, 2015)*

In addition to item descriptions, the NPC dialogue from key characters, as well as the more hidden-away characters, contain interesting embedded lore information that the player may not experience unless they were fully immersing themselves and interacting with the experience. Think back to ergodic literature requiring non-trivial work to understand the content. One example would be the player's experience with the suspicious beggar NPC. On the first encounter hidden at the top of a tower, the beggar is seen eating people, but he does not attack the player and will ask to seek refuge in the cathedral ward church. After some time, the beggar will plead ignorance to killing the other NPC's at the church. If the player chooses to confront the beggar, he will transform into a powerful beast and shout these lines at the player:

"Have you got a screw loose? Or is it your animal intuition? Oh, it doesn't even matter. You hunters've got more blood on your hands! Oh, you are a sick puppy! You drank the blood of half the town, and now this! And you talk of beasts? You hunters are the real killers!", "Die! Die, die! Hunters are killers, nothing less! You call me a beast. A beast? What would you know? I didn't ask for this! You're no different than me. Rancid beasts, every last one of us... " (Suspicious Beggar, Bloodborne, 2015)

Here, the suspicious beggar, a side character with little importance to the main narrative, will offer a polarising perspective on the role of the player and all their actions before this encounter, and in a harder-hitting way than other NPCs have, such as the previously mentioned Djura. The player in this scenario is imposed with this moral ambiguity through exploring and investigating the embedded side narratives that could have been missed entirely depending on their decisions.

Another example of embedded narratives can be found in Felix Schniz's paper, *'Sceptical Hunter(s): A Critical Approach to the Cryptic Ludonarrative of Bloodborne and Its Player Community' (2016)* Schniz, which expresses the idea that the environmental storytelling in Bloodborne takes on the form of a kind of investigation.

"BLOODBORNE turns environmental storytelling into an investigative challenge. In the tradition of other FromSoftware games, it operates like an open-ended jigsaw puzzle: no frame of narrative security is provided in favour of intentionally obfuscating information snippets, and some parts of the whole are simply missing, leaving narrative blank spots" (Schniz, 2016).

The opening scene, for example, prepares players for the secret-laden tone of the game, as the reason for the player starting there as well as what the main objective might be is a mystery at that point in time. Therefore, the player must rely on the NPC dialogue, item descriptions, and the audio/visual design of the world itself.

"BLOODBORNE's spiritual predecessor, DARK SOULS, one must rely on three kinds of clues from this moment on: "the dialogue spoken by non-player characters, descriptions of the items found strewn across the world, and the visual design of the world itself"(Battey 2014).

The dependency on these clues emphasises how prone to obscurity the player leaves themselves as it comes down to their agency, which, as previously stated, leads to more discussion and debate in the community as there is no definite answer to some of these mysteries. Oliver Langmead's paper supports Schniz's statement that playing through Bloodborne can be described as an investigative process that can challenge the main narrative. Langmead states that *"Bloodborne has a storyline deliberately difficult to follow" (Langmead, 2017)*, which pushes the player to unravel the mysteries themselves and is the key method of discerning more about the world's background. *"The means of piecing together Bloodborne's story is by listening to snippets of conversation given by friendly characters and by reading pieces of equipment in order to build up a bigger picture" (Schniz,2016).* Later on, Schniz mentions the game's secret third ending, which is a direct result of the player's ability to investigate the embedded lore and carry out the deciphering of the memory space in response to their findings. *"It provides an overcoming of the game's ideological superstructure, achieved only by players who carefully enact the necessary steps" (Schniz,2016).*

Here we see an example of Bloodborne rewarding players for their curiosity, but even then, the ending offers more perplexing ideas as to what the player has actually achieved or what impact they have had on the narrative. Schniz argues that this is the very nature of Bloodborne and what makes it special. *"The question is how one is supposed to find out about it, which ultimately leads us to the importance of Bloom's rich and independent metaculture" (Schniz,2016)* What Schniz believes is important here is not the truth about what occurs in the third ending, but more so the process of investigating an embedded narrative and being rewarded with access to the ending that makes Bloodborne unique.

Bloodborne additionally uses game mechanics to reward investigative players; the 'insight' mechanic underlined by Sjølie and Langmead in both of their papers rewards players through exploration and gameplay, which results in the player gaining a type of resource called insight, which in one way is a play on words, as a running theme through Bloodborne is the attempt at divine transcendence through inserting 'eyes on the inside'. In another way, however, this mechanic *"creates the representation that the character now has more knowledge of the game world, through audiovisual means, by showing hidden horrors, unique sounds, and more difficult enemies" (Langmead, 2017).* As Langmead puts it, *"Bloodborne essentially features a tool that measures how insane the player character is" (Langmead, 2017).* In the first chapter, I touch on how the themes and ludonarrative are conveyed to the player through changes in the environment, and as highlighted by Langmead, with more insight come subtle changes to the game world. This can be observed both through gameplay and the environment; enemies become more aggressive, and the environment reveals the cosmic horror aspect to the player via their decision to consume insight. I argue that these elements are crucial for gaining player investment and engagement, alongside many other factors discussed in chapters two and three. For now, though, understanding that Bloodborne employs these narrative systems is beneficial moving forward.

Further examples of embedded narratives being discovered by players are pointed out by Madelon Hoedt in his paper *Narrative Design and Authorship in Bloodborne: An Analysis of the Horror Video Game,* who suggests that environmental storytelling and worldbuilding play an important role in understanding and experiencing Bloodborne's lore. Additional stories can be experienced through what Hoedt calls "environments"—"outliners *of Yharnam" (109), the places dislocated from the main narrative but providing additional insights on the story."* which can only be discovered if the player makes the effort to seek out these additional insights. We have already given some examples of these, such as the suspicious beggar or the cosmic eye watcher badge, both of which can't just be found through casual exploration but inevitably offer important perspectives on the lore.

This approach to storytelling creates a strong bond between gameplay and its intentions. It is implied that the narrative of Bloodborne is able to hold players' attention long enough, even after a few playthroughs, and establishes an urge between players in the community to clarify their understanding with others. Schniz states that knowledge equates to performance in games, and like the players themselves, the player character is a stranger to the world of Bloodborne and is left to make sense of it all, seemingly alone at first.

"The fact that a single player cannot unveil every mystery of the game, moreover, turns into an ultimate reason to discuss findings in a player community: "It doesn't matter that these people will likely never uncover the truth of these details; it's their very absence that will keep the game alive in discussion forums long after the majority of players have moved on" (Battey 2014: n.p.) (Schniz, 2016).

It's important to note that a single player could not uncover every secret and story beat there is

by themselves, which results in players seeking out a community where they can discuss their findings. The incomplete nature of Bloodborne's narrative brings us back to H.P. Lovecraft and Nicholas Foster, who mention some of his Bloodborne-specific methods of explaining his belief that Bloodborne is a writerly text through comparisons to Lovecraftian fiction, where the complexity of storytelling and the unknown are themes in both works. In addition, Foster highlights the way the story is conveyed to the player through a formless narrative still within the constraints and laws of the game world. Foster later includes a non-academic lore analysis of Bloodborne by an anonymous author named Redgrave and mentions that Bloodborne's lore-hunting community realises the futility of trying to find a true meaning to the story. *"Bloodborne is a book where half of the words can't be understood, and the reader must fill in the blanks on their own" (Reddit, 2016).* In spite of this, players continue to theory-craft and discuss actions that are supported by the narratives that are enacted by them.

<u>ENACTING STORIES</u>

What does it mean to be a hunter in Bloodborne? On the surface, it appears to be a task or job given to certain individuals. The task was to slay beasts and cleanse the streets of Yharnam of the beast scourge. The player will enact this simple layer of narrative both on the level of localised incidents and also in terms of more broadly defined conflicts or goals, such as uncovering their purpose in the narrative through the secret of the hunter's dream and by killing the key figures in the narrative, the 'great ones'. Regardless of whether the player involves themselves in the NPC dialogues and item descriptions, the player will at least be aware of these levels of narrative. Jenkins offers some other researcher claims regarding narratives, stating that *"a story is a controlled experience; the author consciously crafts it, choosing certain events precisely, in a certain order, to create a story with maximum impact" (Costikyan 2000),* whereas Adams (1999) believes that *"a good story hangs together the way a good jigsaw puzzle hangs together. When you pick it up, every piece is locked tightly in place next to its neighbours."* Jenkins himself posits that most media have an accordion-like structure. *"Certain plot points are fixed, whereas other moments can be expanded or contracted in response to audience feedback without serious consequences to the overall plot" (Jenkins, 1994).* This suggests that Jenkins and Adams share a similar view on narrative. Furthermore, with regards to game designers, Jenkins expresses how it is a 'balancing act' but one that, through *"becoming better at shaping narrative experiences" (Jenkins, 2002)* the game designer can limit the constraints placed upon 'improvisation' within the game without sacrificing the core structure.

At this point, we can return to *Bloodborne as a writerly text: Lovecraftian Lineage, Convoluted Narrative, and Difficulty* by Nicholas Foster, as he emphasises the importance of engagement and player agency, which correspond to the freedom of the player's actions in the game, which, as Jenkins states, is the enacted narrative. One of the thesis's main arguments is that Bloodborne is a writerly text under the disguise of a consumer text.

"Bloodborne operates under the guise of a consumer text, but it is much more. Deeper looks into the influences of the game's style and cyclical content reveal that it is not the consumer good it appears to be. In fact, I argue that Bloodborne functions as a writerly text or a text that requires the player to work to understand the content" (Foster,2020).

Foster believes that viewing Bloodborne as a consumer text does not accurately depict its nature, and this is where Roland Barthes theory of readerly and writerly texts can be applied. According to Barthes, writerly texts involve the reader and require them to engage with the content to fully understand the presented ideas.He reinforces this point by stating that the overall goal of literary work should be to make the reader a producer of the text, not just a consumer. Foster includes a quote by Barthes that explains his reasoning in more detail: *Instead of functioning himself, instead of gaining access to the magic of the signifier, to the pleasure of writing, he is left with no more the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text" (4) (Foster, 2020).*

It highlights that through engagement with content, the reader or player can have an influence

on the text, as opposed to merely accepting or rejecting the text. This way, the reader gains access to the true pleasure of writing. Barthes posits that readerly texts ask nothing of the reader, whereas writerly texts offer the opportunity to produce and think about a text. Without this ability to engage, any critical thought becomes just a question of taste. As such, Foster argues that Bloodborne functions as a writerly text. For the player to feel like their actions make a difference within a game world, the space itself must be malleable and open for individual interpretation. Jenkins refers to these spaces as evocative, hence why the next section will cover the aforementioned 'evocative spaces' and how they too support player engagement.

EVOCATIVE SPACES

At a certain point of no return in Bloodborne's story, the player's actions will permanently change how the game space appears; this includes all future areas as well as previously explored areas. Slaying a boss named *Rom, the Vacuous Spider* progresses the night into its next stage. The inhabitants and strength of enemies change with huge incomprehensible alien creatures called amygdalas residing in the background of areas, previously invisible to the player but always there, although more importantly, here the atmosphere changes drastically as the moon is soaked in a blood-red that carpets the city of Yharnam and an eerie background chant can be heard. This atmospheric shift was used in tandem with the narrative veering away from gothic horror to the cosmic horror that was inspired by H.P. Lovecraft. This is relevant because Jenkins has stated that evocative spaces *"do not so much tell self-contained stories as draw upon our previously existing narrative competencies. They can paint their worlds in fairly broad outlines and count on the visitor or player to do the rest" (Jenkins,* 1994). In this case, the pre-existing narrative competencies here are the works of H.P. Lovecraft in addition to other Victorian horror tropes that Bloodborne is inspired by, not to mention the plethora of previous horror narratives and ludonarratives.

Someone who plays Bloodborne will know vaguely what to expect in terms of environment and enemy design based on previously designed worlds. As Jenkins proclaims in reference to American *McGee's Alice (Rogue Entertainment, 2000), "players start the game with a pretty well-developed mental map of the spaces, characters, and situations associated with Carroll's fictional universe" (Jenkins, 1994). Likewise*, players who are aware of Bloodborne's gothic/cosmic Victorian horror setting will know to expect certain similarities and will reference *"images against the background of mental images formed from previous encounters" (Jenkins,1994).* Previous encounters, meaning previously read or observed fictional worlds. Before delving into the applications of Jenkin's evocative spaces to Bloodborne, however, I will first explain H.P. Lovecraft's work and how it has inspired Bloodborne in terms of narrative but also in the design of the atmosphere.

This perspective that Bloodborne is inspired by H.P. Lovecraft is not revolutionary; the links have been made before and the research is out there; however, there is an intriguing argument made by Foster that states that the nature of both Bloodborne and Lovecraftian fiction is unknowable. *"The reason there are countless articles, blog posts, and forum threads about Bloodborne is because, as a Lovecraftian work, "it cannot reveal the solution to the secret of the unsayable" (McCormack 20).* While this sounds defeating, it actually invites more thoughtfulness and analysis. If the answers are given in the text, then there is no need to think about the text. The lack of a definitive narrative makes what exists more important *(Foster,2020).*

In Michael Saler's book 'As If', he supports the notion that fantasy worlds have their share of

invested followers who *"spend a great deal of time residing in imaginary worlds, heightening their emotional investment in them by participating in collective exercises of world-building" (Micheal Saler, 2012),* and as McCormack suggests, the collective exercises of worldbuilding are brought about through unknowable aspects of the fantasy world, inviting what Saler describes as *"ex post facto collaborators with the author, using references from the original text to reconcile its contradictions, fill in gaps, extrapolate possibilities, and imagine prequels and sequels" (Micheal Saler,2012).*

Part of the reason why H.P. Lovecraft's work has been discussed and examined for many years is due to the different interpretations and understandings there are with regards to his stories. In a similar light, the Bloodborne narrative is discussed and examined throughout the community as there is a lack of a complete narrative. Meaning the players have a platform to fill in the gaps if they choose to do so. An example Foster gives is a dialogue between an NPC and the player near the start of the game. *"This town is cursed. Whatever your reasons might be, you should plan a swift exit. Whatever can be gained from this place, it will do more harm than good" (Bloodborne, Foster, 2020).* Foster claims that the game hints to the player to not think too deeply about the text and to just take each encounter as it comes. Seeking to understand a text has value, but in a work like Bloodborne, the text will not provide complete transparency.

We have stated the similarities in the overall ideologies of both the game and Lovecraft's fiction, but the comparisons don't stop there. However, it would be beneficial to the discussion if we explored briefly the history of H.P. Lovecraft and his shift away from belief into the realms of the cosmic, which has heavily inspired Miyazaki's work. Hidetaka Miyazaki, the Japanese director of Bloodborne, had a keen interest in the works of American author H.P. Lovecraft, whose stories created a whole subgenre of horror called Lovecraftian horror. These stories had strong links to Western religion in the sense that religion pushed Lovecraft away from belief and into scepticism and the cosmic. Lovecraft, as we know him today, was an atheist.

His viewpoints on religion are outlined in his 1922 essay *"A Confession of Unfaith"*. In this essay, he describes his shift away from the Protestantism of his parents to the atheism of his adulthood. He was introduced to the Bible when he was two. However, his first moment of scepticism occurred very early in his life, when he questioned if God was a myth after learning that Santa Claus was not real just before he turned 5. In 1902, Lovecraft was introduced to space and later described this event as the most poignant in his life. In response to this discovery, Lovecraft took to studying astronomy. This conceptual shift away from belief and religion to the unknown realms of the cosmos and all its mysteries is the central theme of Bloodborne. At the start of the game, the main adversaries are the Healing Church and the beasts they have created. However, later on in the game, as more truths about the game world are discovered, the supernatural cosmic horror aspect of the game reveals itself, essentially redirecting the story and overall ambiance down a new path.

An additional example of atmosphere-changing in-game would be the descent into madness

that the NPC's (non-player character) experience. In the game's secondary hub-like area, the Cathedral Ward, three NPCs that the player can invite to seek refuge begin to make less and less sense in their dialogue; furthermore, the body language and tone also change once the player progresses into the night. The following dialogue can be noted in Bloodborne from an NPC called Arianna: *"Oh, hello, dear. You weren't lying; this is a safe place. Thank you. I am in your debt."* Upon killing Rom and advancing the night, this is what she says: *"Oh, hello there. Forgive me; I'm a bit out of sorts. So, no blood today, okay?".* Finally, in one of the player's final conversations with her, she expresses her discomfort: "Oh, there's *something wrong with me." [moans].* In this example, we can see that during the transition towards cosmic horror, the inhabitants of Yharnam are contributing to the change in tone of the game.

This transformation of themes is covered by Langmead: *"Bloodborne's monsters change from traditionally recognisable hybrid beasts and werewolves to grotesque alien monsters more closely associated with Lovecraft's weird tales" (Langmead, 2017).* Langmead mainly focuses on Bloodborne's gothic inspiration; he does, however, describe the journey of the player's investigation into supernatural horror as a tour of the gothic horror genre, much like how Henry Jenkins paralleled the exploration of a game space to the experience of a theme park ride. *"It feels as if the game is letting players experience yet another version of gothic, continuing to take the player on a tour of the genre." (Jenkins,1994)* Likewise, Brendan Laurel explains that the *"shaping of the emotional experience is critical to the development of dramatic experience, whether in a theatre or through computer-mediated interaction" (Laurel, 2014).* This suggests that researchers believe game designers like Hidetaki Miyazaki create *"representations of objects and environments that provide a context for action." (Laurel,2014)* The 'action' in this context is the player's descent into the pre-disposed supernatural horror narrative competencies of Bloodborne.

Cosmic horror can be argued as a more niche twist on the horror genre, especially with regards to horror games, but there are some overlapping themes that can be explored in more detail. *Horror Video Games: Essays on the Fusion of Fear and Play* by Perron suggests that horror games provoke feelings of fear and tension greater than a movie or TV programme would. *"Games provoke these better than other media because there is actually something at stake for the player" (Perron,2014).* In non-interactive media, the audience can only feel emotion and tension through the characters and their empathy towards them, whereas in games, the player projects himself into the experience. With immersion, feelings of fear and tension are intensified, and certain mechanics in the game can play into these feelings, such as dying. *"Death means the player will have to replay a section of the game in order to keep progress, giving death real stakes, unlike a movie, where the plot will keep going no matter who dies" (Perron,2014).*

Jenkins states that video games are a series of evocative spaces that don't always tell a story, but they do play a part in telling the story through established narrative competencies. Therefore, it can be said

that Bloodborne, like many other games, contains relevant examples of using evocative spaces to create narratives by utilising pre-existing worlds and stories, which are known to elicit emotional responses and actions that are commonly found in horror titles. Because of this, it is worth discussing what narratives emerge from these game spaces with limited constraints.

EMERGENT NARRATIVES

Typically, emergent narratives find themselves more commonly in open-world sandbox-type games. An example of an emergent narrative in Minecraft (2011), for instance, would be the player stumbling across a group of enemies in a cave. One enemy type, the skeleton, shoots at the player with an arrow but accidentally hits a creeper that is also pursuing the player. The creeper then switches its target to the skeleton and infamously explodes, creating a hole in the cave, which leads to another cave that could have a monster spawner, chest, etc. The key feature of games like these is the near-endless possibilities and scenarios that can occur without direct intervention from the game system or the player, which in turn creates the emergent narratives that Jenkins has described: *"Some kinds of space lend themselves more readily to narratively memorable or emotionally meaningful experiences than others" (Jenkins, 1994).* This section is albeit shorter than the previous ones; however, I will attempt to argue an example of an emergent for Bloodborne. At the beginning of this review, I gave examples of each of Jenkin's narrative archetypes that could be found in Bloodborne; one example involved Bloodborne's PVP invading system. Firstly, explaining how the system works in detail will benefit discussion on whether it could be argued as an example of an emergent narrative.

To be 'invaded' in Bloodborne and any of the other titles by From Software essentially means another player is entering your game world with the usual intention of killing you. Certain conditions are also placed on the invader. For example, the invading player cannot attack NPCs and has their health cut by a certain percentage; furthermore, the player can summon friendly players from other worlds to help defeat the invader but also help them beat an area or boss. So far, this example doesn't really explain how Jenkins describes his emergent narratives, as the system requires some form of intervention from both the player and the invading player. However, if we narrow the scope down to moment-by-moment scenarios, we can offer a good case for an emergent narrative in Bloodborne.

Let's say the player gets invaded without any friendly player summons to protect them. The invader has isolated his target and has full use of the area and its enemies to achieve their goal. In this example, the player is simply trying to progress through the area, but the invader can use traps and hide behind powerful enemies in the hopes that the player accidentally attacks them, or the invader can use items to temporarily stop healing, just to name a few. The thing in common with these examples is that the agency is with the invader and how they utilise the level. These moments and scenarios would have turned out very differently if the player had never been invaded in the first place. Therefore, I argue that although there is a somewhat weak connection to Jenkins's emergent narrative, it still holds that these narratives emerge from the game system rather than the player instigating any of them.

Another aspect of emergent narratives that differentiates them from other types of narrative is

that the *"weight of a narrative application is shared by the author and players rather than being imposed upon the players by the author" (Louchart, 2008). This* was an observation given by Sandy Louchart et al. in their paper *Authoring emergent narrative-based games,* which highlights how these narratives can affect the player and the game designer in similar ways as they have not been pre-scripted in the system for the player to experience. Louchart's stance on emergent narratives in interactive media is that designers of game worlds must *"consider the different general actions that could be performed by the characters and users and consider their implications for each potentially concerned character of the party" (Louchart et al, 2008).* What this means is that game designers build a system that can respond and adapt to a variety of different scenarios and interactions, which in turn gives the system flexibility to produce non-scripted narratives in a natural way. Hence, games like Sandbox games are good platforms for emergent narratives as the game designers develop these scenarios *"specifically on the basis of system simulations with regards to possible user action selections" (Louchart et al, 2008).*

It may also be worth noting the bloodborne messaging system, which plays out via physical interaction with the world. The player is given an item called the notebook, which uses the mysterious powers of creatures called messengers to leave notes for other players or read notes from other players as well as rate them, which, interestingly, will heal the creator of the note to full health in real-time. "*Messengers are inhabitants of the dream who revere the brave hunters. Use them to send messages to other worlds" (Bloodborne wiki,2015)*. This system allows for more connectivity between players in the community, and this element will be discussed in the next section. However, for now, we can argue that actions taken by players in response to other players' messages are examples of the shared weight of narrative application by the game designer and the player. In some cases, the messaging system will give players knowledge of a boss, but in the same light, the messaging system will offer entirely pointless information, and in some rare cases, the player may be mid-combat and be saved by a heal given to them by another player rating their message. Granted, this is a loose example of emergent narrative simply because Jenkins archetypes do not seem to leave enough room for discussion surrounding what players contribute as part of the game's whole narrative. Consequently, that is a key part of the thesis argument and the focus of the analysis's third section.

PARATEXTUAL NARRATIVE CO-CONSTRUCTION

In Bloodborne and my overall analysis of the game narrative, the discussion and debate that takes place outside of the text is a key part of my argument that game narrative can motivate audiences to engage with the text even when they are not physically interacting with it, and this can contribute to a game's incomplete narrative. Furthermore, as Jenkins's narrative archetypes primarily focus on the nuances of the game narratives, it is important that we briefly tackle the narrative discussion that occurs outside of the game in this part of the review before moving to the analysis section.

Consalvo (2009) defines paratext as something that helps "shape the reader's experience of a text" but also helps "give meaning to the act of reading" *(Consalvo, 2009)*. What Consalvo means here is that in the current gaming industry and culture, players have a plethora of opportunities to learn about the game they play long before they boot it up for the first time. Fans can post blog updates, chat on forums, and share things they have noticed in trailers and screenshots. On the industry side, trailers, promotional videos, interviews with developers, and preorder offers can all help shape our experience and expectations of a game. Bloodborne is no exception; in fact, FromSoftware titles thrive on the paratextual narrative co-construction that takes place before, during, and long after the game's release.

Pearce's (2011) *Communities of Play* gives us insight into communities that emerge from fans of any given media. The key aspect this book discusses is the level of connection game communities can form and what sort of discussion and development that leads to. *"Networked games have created a kind of participatory 'global playground' where people can interact dynamically in real-time and build new and increasingly complex play communities" (Pearce, 2011).* In this digital era, game communities can become influential and large very rapidly. As such, if that community has a debate culture surrounding their common interests, it can develop the community's understanding of something. We have seen examples of this where MMO players *"play a part in actually shaping the world", (Pearce, 2011)* through creating their own player-run economies and empires in games like *Black Desert Online (2018)* and *World of Warcraft (2001),* and in Bloodborne's case, the community conjures up their own interpretations of the lore and character motivations as the game has intentionally left out key parts of the picture, meaning the players have had to investigate and decipher embedded clues together to arrive at their own ideas.

Pearce states that virtual worlds share a set of conventions proven to enhance player experiences. *"They reinforce what Murray calls the 'active creation of belief'" (Pearce, 2011)* Because virtual worlds are by definition social constructions, Pearce further characterises this concept as the *"collective creation of belief"*. This implies that a collective effort to immerse oneself in a virtual world can enhance the player's experience of that world, but it also creates a "virtual community" that players want to be a part of.

This phenomenon can be noted in Bloodborne's community, as the players have been drawn in by the cryptic embedded lore, and their actions are motivated by emotional responses formed by the environment and gameplay. In this sense, the players shaping of Bloodborne's world is how they interpret the lore as a community.

Some examples of the community shaping their experience of a text can be found in Bloodborne's lore community. A figurehead of this community would be VaatiVidya, who specialises in explaining the lore in FromSoftware games in an unusually compelling format. In the third chapter, I look at Vaatividya, amongst other lore enthusiasts, in more detail, who are examples of Pearce's *"creation of belief",* where the community has banded together to enhance their understanding and experience of a game world. In addition, this ties in with previous discussion that has determined Bloodborne as an example of ergodic literature but also a writerly text that rewards and motivates its players to understand the text. The 'work' here in terms of community is the large following dedicated lore YouTube channels have. For example, Vaatividya, one of the most popular in the field, has 1.94 million subscribers, and Regraves lore analysis has earned itself 1.2k upvotes and a comment section in the hundreds.

These are just a few examples, but from this, it can be implied that the narrative of Bloodborne has enough depth and nuance to gain a following that is dedicated to not just the mechanics or how 'fun' the game is, but also the lore. Schniz has also mentioned how the role of the player in the narrative can play into this community of debate.

"Focusing on the game's ideological world, the role of the player avatar within it, and the game's endings, the paper shows how the game encourages player communication in a culture of critical debate and knowledge sharing" (Schniz, 2016).

We can see that Schniz believes there is something special about the way Bloodborne's cryptic ludonarrative is told to the player, and this is why there is a debate culture to be found in the game's player community. Furthermore, as stated at the start of this section, I believe the formation of debate cultures in gaming is a vital part of keeping a game's life cycle alive for longer periods of time as well as making the game's narrative feel more meaningful and impactful to the player.

REVIEW CONCLUSION

By this point, we have examined the literature and research surrounding Bloodborne's narrative and the ways in which the narrative works alongside the game design as well as environmental design. I wish to further explore the paratextual narrative co-construction that takes place outside of the game as well. The key aspects to note are the emphasis on player agency as well as its relationship with environmental storytelling and audio thematic design. Furthermore, we have discussed the importance of understanding what influences the lore of a game and how game developers portray these influences through gameplay mechanics, most of which are not forced aspects of game design but a choice given to players as a reward for exploration and discovery. A running theme throughout each piece of research is the idea that Bloodborne requires non-trivial work to fully appreciate. As such, it can be said that Bloodborne is a writerly text and a cybertext that rewards its players in subtle or optional ways, which in turn invites player involvement in ways that give Bloodborne the rhetoric value I was seeking to find. The debate culture surrounding Bloodborne is a result of the cryptic, incomplete narrative that finds its inspiration not only from the stories of H.P. Lovecraft but also by utilising the interactive elements of a videogame that are rarely found in other forms of media. In terms of player involvement and agency, delving into the nuances of the horror genre as well as how games use environments to tell stories has allowed me to identify why Bloodborne's communities have been drawn in by these pre-existing narrative competencies.

Coming back to the motivation behind this thesis, I previously stated that current literature has highlighted the depth of Bloodborne's narrative and the intricacies of the game mechanics, but current studies still seek to explore the connection between these aspects, which I believe motivates the player to play through the game against usually overwhelming odds and challenges. Therefore, the aim of this thesis will be to uncover the connections between narrative, gameplay, and environment design in Bloodborne and will focus on the narrative phenomenon of players co-constructing the narrative alongside a community that is motivated by more than just one aspect of the game. Although we have seen that the narrative and the player have a kind of symbiotic relationship, what seems to be missing are the parallels between the actions of the player community inside and outside the game and what certain organisations and characters have done in the lore. Currently, there are implications from both of these aspects that Hidetaka Miyazaki has intentionally placed the player in the role of a hunter, with the aim to unravel the layers of the lore, and from this, we can note an association with gameplay and the narrative, with the lore hunting culture of the player community. Discussing this idea will be the main focus of the thesis going forward, as well as returning to various themes such as player agency and game design with the intent of formulating a compelling discussion.

CHAPTER 1: NARRATIVE INVESTMENT

In this section, I will explore the argument that Bloodborne's narrative, world design, and themes and how these are conveyed to the player result in higher levels of investment from players inside and

outside the game. Investment in this case means the amount and depth of critical debate that occurs on forum posts and YouTube channels throughout the Bloodborne community. During this chapter, we will learn how games can implement creative ways of portraying the narrative and themes to the player through gameplay mechanics, environmental storytelling, and dialogue. In Bloodborne's case as well as other From Software titles, the methods of unfolding the narrative are usually indirect and cryptic, which I argue is an integral part of what makes Bloodborne's narrative a platform for discussion, as well as contributing to the unknowable nature of the narrative, which inspires player agency and sparks community debate.

What stands out about FromSoftware titles in particular is their methods of explaining and portraying their narrative. The first and one of the few cutscenes in the game inserts the player into Bloodborne's gothic horror world. Strapped onto an operating table, inside a ruinous laboratory, the player is greeted by a mysterious man in a wheelchair. His educated tone and seemingly open demeanour speak of a kind of intrigue towards the player, explaining that *"Yharnam is the home of blood ministration; you need only unravel its mystery. But where's an outsider like you to begin?"* *(Bloodborne, 2015).* Already, the player character and the player have come up against various mysteries and questions. Why did the player travel to Yharnam? What mysteries lie waiting to be discovered, and who is the man in the wheelchair? In addition, the game asks where an 'outsider' like us should begin. This question is, of course, in reference to the player character; however, in conjunction with the player character, the player themselves is also an outsider to the world of Bloodborne. At this stage in the game, Bloodborne is already beckoning its player base to try and unravel the mysteries of Yharnam. It is interesting to see how Bloodborne already addresses the mystery-laden tone of the narrative and invites its players in-game and outside of the game to seek a greater understanding of the player's purpose and their relation to the game world.

With regards to this overarching theme of mystery in Bloodborne's narrative, the game takes a show, don't tell approach. While gathering information for the literature review, it was noted by current researchers that Bloodborne tells aspects of its narrative through item descriptions and environmental storytelling. The few cutscenes in the game aid the player very little in their search for answers, so they must rely on the objects and interactions in the game world to paint a clearer picture, but this can only be achieved if there is player agency.

Madelon Hoedt states that Bloodborne specifically stands out from other FromSoftware titles not only from a thematic standpoint but also through its defining themes. *"Thematically, Bloodborne is a very different beast. If Dark Souls was about dying, Bloodborne is about killing" (Hoedt,2019)* Hoedt believes Bloodborne is more of a horror game than previous titles by FromSoftware, and the game

illustrates this change in tone from its predecessor titles through pre-established themes, its setting, and its atmosphere. Bloodborne itself draws a great deal of inspiration from gothic horror tropes; some examples would be the overall tone of mystery, the design of the environment, and the enemies, characters, and tools the player will encounter. This ties us back to Salen and Zimmerman's observation that games take place within a representational universe that contains 'objects' (enemies, items, environments) that the player can use to construct an understanding of the game world they reside in.

Hoedt makes an additional observation involving Bloodborne's cryptic narrative, stating that Bloodborne moves away *"from more traditional, linear models; the game's narrative is instead dispersed" (Hoedt, 2019).* The key point to note here is the term 'dispersed' and later on the term 'scattered'. Coincidentally, these words could be used to describe something like pieces of a puzzle, where the pieces are at first scattered across the table before someone takes the time to note the details of the pieces and eventually construct a clear picture. Bloodborne disperses its narrative across multiple representational mediums, such as item descriptions, visual details in the environment, and interaction with NPC's (non-player characters), and through discovering these pieces, the player can eventually form a clearer understanding of the cryptic and mysterious narrative as well as begin to construct meaning. Something Hoedt notes when talking about Dark Souls as an especially interesting aspect of the story is that

"it could only be told through a video game, making it almost unique. It tells us very little through the mediums of text or film and vast amounts through context, exploration, and environmental storytelling". (Hoedt,2019)

Although Hoedt is referencing dark souls, the same observation can be made about Bloodborne, which adopts a very similar method of storytelling.

An example of a 'story' being told through context and exploration is the torch and hunters torch items, which appear to be subpar alternatives to the standard array of weaponry offered to the player. However, when taking a look at the item description, it reads, "*Designed to incinerate beasts and victims touched by the scourge. Its fire damage is highly effective against beasts" (Bloodborne, 2015).* From this, the player first learns of a tool at their disposal that can combat the enemies they are fighting against. Secondly, a common trope in gothic horror fiction is that beasts or werewolves are afraid of fire, and Bloodborne plays on this already well-established trope not only through the narrative but also through gameplay, where fire damage is clearly stated as a weakness in beast-like enemies.

This is also an example of game mechanics synergizing with the narrative and can be noted in the Quicksilver material as well. material used to produce quicksilver bullets. The description reads, "*Special bullets are used with hunter firearms. Ordinary bullets have no effect on beasts, and so Quicksilver Bullets, fused with the wielder's own blood, must be employed" (Bloodborne wiki,2015).*

From this description, the player learns that this blood-infused material can affect beasts, demonstrating an awareness on the developer's part of a known trope that beasts such as vampires

can be killed with silver. In addition, the last line in the descriptions hints more directly at the gameplay implications that Quicksilver can have. "*The strength of Quicksilver Bullets depends greatly upon the wielder's bloodthirst" (Bloodborne wiki,2015).* In short, bloodtinge is a stat the player can raise that increases the damage from weapons and tools that use quicksilver, and the description states that quicksilver is infused with an individual person's blood. From these examples, we can say that games can tell stories in different ways than other media, such as films or books, due to their participatory nature, and Bloodborne is no exception. Through their own agency, the player will learn the systems in place and additionally gain a greater understanding of how narrative elements affect the game world and how they play into the themes that Bloodborne is inspired by. Furthermore, in these examples, we can see the player learning about key gameplay mechanics like the beast's weakness to fire and the potency of quicksilver bullets, how they can explore these mechanics, and what the narrative implications are. Once again, Bloodborne is adapting pre-established gothic horror tropes to create gameplay that the player can quickly grasp. However, a vital aspect of this interaction between player and game developer is the player's own agency to do their research and consider pre-established tropes that they are familiar with to give them the upper hand.

Unlike a TV show or movie, the player learns about these aspects through their own agency, failures, exploration, and victories rather than being simply told information through a cutscene or NPC. In this sense, videogames offer a more engaging experience for the player because, along with mastering the gameplay, the player also learns more aspects of the narrative as the exploration becomes more open and free due to the player being able to progress past challenging areas and bosses. We have discussed in the literature review how vital player agency is in FromSoftware titles where the game will usually thrust the player straight into the horrors of the game world, and this is where the agency to learn and understand the game's narrative and systems can benefit the player. As such, director Hideaki Miyazaki's approach to game design puts heavy emphasis on player agency. Hoedt makes a similar observation, stating that *"Although Soulsbourne titles do use dialogue and cutscenes, these moments are often brief and delivered without much context, leaving it to the player to connect the dots" (Hoedt, 2019).* Although these sequences are the primary means of conveying the story to the player, the actual narrative is contained within the game's formal structure, therefore rewarding the player through exploration of not just the game world but also the mechanics, making for a compelling interaction between the player and their navigation of the cryptic game world.

In the same way Bloodborne innovates and adapts upon well-established tropes, the game also explores the ideology of religion and how the game hybridizes Gothic architecture with Catholicism and mirrors this combination of themes alongside the game mechanics and environment, expressing the idea that the player is an outsider to the game and its society. The world of Bloodborne is ruled by a theocracy; the healing church and their authoritarian dominance can be observed in the gothic architecture and the interactions with Yharnam's inhabitants. Many of the structures are defined by dark church-like frame constructions, and some enemy types consist of "*militant priests" (Schniz, 2016).* that

will roam the labyrinth streets, attacking beasts and the player on sight. *"These enemy church members, in particular, being about twice the size of the player character, emphasise Yharnam as a place of strict class divisions" (Schniz,2016).* The information the player can gather from this amalgamation of tropes and themes speaks of a society that worships the healing church, and their power has influenced the environment, people's attitudes, and societal hierarchy, as the common townspeople will be seen wearing sweaty old clothes, for example, "*Common Yharnam clothing. Well-worn and damp with sweat"* *(Bloodborne wiki,2015).*

Langmead highlights a connection between the inspiration behind the design of Yharnam and Fred Botting's thoughts on late eighteenth-century Gothic locations:

"the modern city combined the natural and architectural components of Gothic grandeur and wildness, its dark labyrinthine streets suggesting the violence and menace of Gothic castle and forest" (Botting, 1996, p. 2) (Langmead, 2017).

In this example, Bloodborne is leaning heavily into the gothic horror trope and depicts the menace and violence of these settings through the design of enemies and townsfolk. Schniz also speaks of a type of class divide in the city of Yharnam, and when considering the player characters' position as 'outsiders', the player is then made to feel like an intruder to this town, as they are outside of the city's class divide. Interestingly, the original set of clothes the player will start with is appropriately titled the 'Foreign set' and the description informs us of the player's potential actions before waking on the operating table. "*Perhaps its wearer had to stay out of sight and travel by cover of darkness" (Bloodborne wiki,2015).* This reinforces the point that the player is a foreign entity in this hostile land, and Bloodborne makes this statement through various aspects like the architecture, clothing, item descriptions, setting, and tone.

On the subject of setting and tone, an observation I made in the literature review highlighted a change in Bloodborne's tone both from a narrative viewpoint and also through various gameplay elements. For more context, once the player reaches a certain area known as Byrgenwerth and defeats the area boss, the environment and atmosphere take a turn away from gothic horror into the realms of cosmic horror, creating this intriguing hybrid genre inspired by the works of H.P. Lovecraft. The Bloodborne Wiki informs us of the history of Byrgenwerth: *"Beyond the Forbidden Woods, past the Forbidden Grave, stands Byrgenwerth College, a research building of older times, from times pre-dating the Healing Church's existence and political power" (Bloodborne, 2015).*

In this instance, the player learns of a period before the domineering powers of the healing church, which will come as quite a surprise when you consider that in all of the past environments, enemies, and dialogue, they mainly involve the immense influence of the healing church and the devastating outcome of the beast plague. Byrgenwerth is *"a place of higher learning, of teachings most obscure that delve into the mysterious secrets of the Chalice Labyrinths, the Arcane knowledge of the Cosmos and*

the Great Ones that inhabit it *(Bloodborne, 2015),* and as such, it makes sense from a narrative viewpoint for the game to execute the tonal and environmental shift into a hybrid of cosmic and gothic horror after the player reaches and clears this area. So how does Bloodborne achieve this?

Langmead mentions the change in enemy types, where

"Bloodborne's monsters change from traditionally recognisable hybrid beasts and werewolves to grotesque, alien monsters more closely associated with Lovecraft's weird tales; it feels almost as if the game is letting the player experience yet another version of the Gothic, continuing to take the player on a tour of the genre" (Langemead,2017).

An example of this would be the Amygdala enemies, which appear as huge, grotesque alien entities with spider-like limbs and tentacles pouring out from their supposed heads. An interesting subtle detail to note is that the name of these enemies is a reference to a *"region of the brain primarily associated with emotional processes," and* has historically been associated with feelings of fear *"and other emotions related to aversive (unpleasant) stimuli". (Bloodborne, 2015)* The Amygdala enemy will not appear unless the player has reached Byrgenwerth and defeated the boss or they reach a certain number of 'insight', which is a resource gained through exploration, items, and killing certain special enemies and bosses." *(Bloodborne, 2015) In a sense, through the mechanic of 'insight' and the results of its accumulation, Bloodborne is simulating a kind of weirdness for the player" (Langmead, 2017).* The observation being made here is that these cosmic entities make their appearance once the player reaches certain gameplay and narrative milestones, or, put simply, has gained enough knowledge and understanding of the 'weird'.

Langmead also calls attention to the behaviour of these creatures and why they have appeared.

"For the time being, they remain non-aggressive, and indeed, their purpose is unclear. The only clear thing is the realisation that the player has gained enough maddening eldritch knowledge to see what has been hidden from the sane; Yharnam has been overrun not only by beasts but by completely inhuman creatures from other cosmic realms" (Langmead, 2017).

It is safe to say from this example that Bloodborne is playing into the Lovecraftian trope that there are incomprehensible cosmic entities that, through discovery, will turn a person insane, as seen with the amygdala that watches over the player patiently, seemingly without malice, for now. We briefly mentioned the 'insight' mechanic, which on the surface appears to be just another resource that the player can obtain through exploration and killing enemies, similarly to 'Blood Echos' Bloodborne's currency system. However, upon further inspection, the insight mechanic has plenty of narrative implications as well as making subtle changes to enemies and the environment.

Firstly, the Bloodborne Wiki tells us, *"The insight stat represents the depth of inhuman knowledge (Bloodborne Wiki, 2015)* therefore, with higher quantities of insight, the player will experience more 'inhuman' events. For example, at 1 insight, the player can access the messenger baths, which act as shops, and an NPC known as the Doll will come to life and allow the player to level up their character. At higher amounts, such as 15+, certain enemies like the 'church doctors' will be able to now fire projectiles out of a lantern they carry, and some variants with weapons will have a ghostly fire effect. At 40+ insight, the hunter's dream theme track will change, and a disturbing cry of a baby can be heard faintly in the distance of any area aside from the hunter's dream. Langmead has stated that "*Bloodborne essentially features a tool that measures how insane the player character is" (Langmead, 2017).* And in each of these examples, we see how with more inhuman knowledge the player gathers, the 'weirder' the tone and atmosphere become, and the player steadily becomes more 'insane'.

So, with these in-game examples in mind, how does insight fit into Bloodborne's narrative? To find out how, we must first look at two of Bloodborne's most influential human characters, Provost Willem and Laurance, the first vicar. In another cutscene, the player will access an old memory where Willem and Laurance are having a disagreement, which spirals into the creation and founding of the healing church. In this conversation, Willem, Laurence's mentor, warns Laurance of the dangers of the old blood: *"We are born of the blood, made men by the blood, undone by the blood. Our eyes are yet to open. Fear the old blood." (Provost Willem,Bloodborne).* The line "our eyes are yet to open" is what's important here, as it highlights the core difference in belief between Willem and Laurence. Laurence believes that the mysterious old blood with its powerful healing properties is the key to elevating humanity, whereas Willem believes the old blood will be humanity's downfall and that they have yet to understand or see the full picture. To Willem, knowledge of the arcane and cosmic is where humanity will take their next step, and as such, Willem takes his beliefs to the extreme and literally starts planting eyes on the inside of his head, hence the term 'in-sight'. Furthermore, in the Byrgenwerth area, where Willem resides, the remaining students appear to have been transformed into hideous multi-eyed creatures, showing their dedication and faith in Willem's ideology.

There are many examples of this theme of eyes on the inside to be found in Bloodborne; for example, the accursed brew item reads, *"Skull of a local from the violated fishing village. The inside of the skull was forcibly searched for eyes, as evidenced by innumerable scratches and indentations (Bloodborne, 2015). Here* we see how the pursuit of greater arcane knowledge led certain people to forcibly hunt down people in search of more eyes. In addition, a key item for unlocking the game's secret ending known as the umbilical cord mentions the phrase 'eyes on the inside', "great *relic, also known as the Cord of the Eye. Every infant has this precursor to the umbilical cord. Use to gain insight and, so they say, eyes on the inside, although no one remembers what that truly entails (Bloodborne, 2015).* In

this example, we see how insight plays a part in unravelling a secret ending, which some argue to be Bloodborne's 'true ending'.

Another umbilical cord description reads, *"Provost Willem sought the cord in order to elevate his being and thoughts to those of a great one by lining his brain with eyes. The only choice, he knew, if man were to ever match their greatness" (Bloodborne,2015).* As previously mentioned by Langmead, insight measures the insanity of the player, and from these item descriptions, we can infer that many people, in pursuit of arcane knowledge, eventually succumbed to madness or horrific transformations, again in reference to H.P. Lovecraft's works, where his stories usually involve humans not having the mental capacity to comprehend the truths and horrors of the cosmic.

In Bloodborne's case, the incomprehensible cosmic entities are known as 'great ones', and the game follows similar processes to what we've discussed before to convey information about the great ones to the player. The item known as the Great One's Wisdom is a more potent version of the madman's knowledge consumable, which gives the player one insight. With regards to the Great One's wisdom, which expectedly gives more insight, the description reads, "*Fragments of the lost wisdom of the Great Ones, beings that might be described as gods" (Bloodborne Wiki, 2015),* which informs the player of the game world's limited understanding of these great ones, as their true nature is unknown but they are still 'described' as gods. Further on in the item description, it states that "*At Byrgenwerth, Master Willem had an epiphany: "We are thinking on the basis of planes. What we need are more eyes."* *(Bloodborne, 2015),* further illustrating the lengths scholars like Willem were prepared to go to to elevate themselves from the basest of planes and into a higher state of mind.

What's interesting here is Bloodborne's interpretation of H.P. Lovecraft's cosmic horror entities and the existence of great ones in the ludonarrative. At a base level, they follow similar themes, such as being incomprehensible to the human mind, all-powerful and very influential behind the scenes, or as Burleson Donald R. says in Vivian Ralickas's essay titled *Cosmic Horror and the Fetishizing Gaze in the Fiction of H. P. Lovecraft,* the overarching themes in H. P. Lovecraft's work *provide a potential for expression of the one major idea that always emerges: [...] self-knowledge, or discovery of one's own position in the real fabric of the universe, is psychically ruinous" (Burleson, 137; Ralickas, 2008).* Examples of this psychological ruin can be noted in a fair few of the Bloodborne NPC's, but one of the more significant ones would be Gherman the First Hunter.

Gherman acts as the player's mentor, offering the services of the Hunters Dream to the player in the hopes that they will continue his work in his stead; furthermore, Gherman advises the player early on not to *"think too hard about all of this. Just go out and kill a few beasts. It's for your own good. You know, it's just what hunters do! You'll get used to it" (Gherman, Bloodborne).* At first, this line of dialogue seems fairly matter of fact; however, as the player progresses and converses with Gherman on a few more occasions, the player will learn that Gherman was protecting the player from the horrors he has been exposed to; in this instance, ignorance is certainly bliss. *"Oh, Laurence... Master Willem... Somebody help me... Unshackle me, please, anybody... I've had enough of this dream... The night blocks all sight... Oh, somebody, please" (Gherman, Bloodborne).*

The player learns that Gherman is a prisoner of the Hunter's Dream, and a great one is the force keeping Gherman shackled to the prison. Gherman yearns for someone to free him; he calls out to Willem and Laurance, thought to be his allies during his younger years, or perhaps even friends. How the player learns this is through the umbilical cord items, of which the player needs to obtain and consume three. *"Every great one loses its child and then yearns for a surrogate. The Third Umbilical Cord precipitated the encounter with the pale moon, which beckoned the hunters and conceived the hunter's dream" (Bloodborne,2015).*

Through consuming three umbilical cords, the player unlocks the secret true ending, where they are met with the great one called Moon Presence after defeating Gherman. Interestingly and unsurprisingly, there are many hints and references to the Moon's presence throughout the game. The Moon's presence is thought to be the manifestation of the 'Blood Moon', which, as illustrated in the literature review, is another example of the environmental shift into the cosmic after defeating the boss in Byrgenwerth. *"When the red moon hangs low, the line between man and beast is blurred. and when the Great Ones descend, a womb will be blessed with a child" - Byrgenwerth* (*Bloodborne*, 2015). More references can be found in an area known as the lecture hall, which was originally a location in the real world; however, through rituals, "*The nameless moon presence beckoned by Laurence and his associates (Bloodborne, 2015)* and the power of the great ones, *"Three third cords." (Bloodborne, 2015)*, it was transported into a separate dimension, or, as some call it, a nightmare.

Considering all of this information regarding the great ones and their presence in the game world, what kind of implications does this have for the player from a gameplay and narrative standpoint? From a gameplay standpoint, once the player understands the layers of lore and observes the subtle hints towards many of the important narrative elements, they will start to ask themselves what other aspects or sides of the narrative they missed during an average first or even second playthrough, motivating them to explore and unravel more mysteries. This will be covered later on in this analysis, where I will show the immense and detailed detective work of Bloodborne's community. On the narrative side, the player character begins to understand their purpose and influence in the game world.

Once they consume the three umbilical cords, they are given three choices. Allow Gherman to end your time in the nightmare and return to the waking world. Slay Gherman and take his place as prisoner and pawn of the Moon Presence, or finally, slay the great one in question and transcend to a higher level of being, the goal of many that came before you.At this stage, the thesis has analysed the overarching themes of gothic/cosmic horror and mystery in Bloodborne, as well as the tropes that inspired Miyazaki during the production of the game. In addition, we have discussed the ludonarrative and how Bloodborne makes the effort to integrate aspects of the narrative into the game mechanics and environment. The synergy of both narrative and gameplay seemingly draws players in as they learn about their character's purpose in the narrative through their own actions, choices, and, most importantly, agency. Remember, Bloodborne and videogames alike are examples of ergodic texts requiring work to traverse. As such, the following section will explore in more detail the gameplay side

of Bloodborne or the 'work' players need to put in to achieve goals within the game. The foci are as follows: the depth and breadth players emotional states, influenced by the emotioneering of the text; the infamous debate surrounding the game's difficulty, which I argue is another driving force behind the player's interest in and loyalty to FromSoftware titles; and lastly, how the previously mentioned elements may cause players to look elsewhere for help or support outside of the game.

CHAPTER 2: SUCCESS IS NO ACCIDENT

In addition to FromSoftware's unique approach to storytelling, games offer new ways of telling stories that other mediums can't, due to their participatory nature. "*Observing the growth and expansion of stories in video games reveals a shared interest among designers in seeing the medium as an innovative platform for telling stories" (Marcello ,Arnaldo Picucci,2014).* FromSoftware has arguably played a part in innovating the game narrative scene with its heavy emphasis on player agency and being used as a means of unravelling the intricate layers of narrative that are usually missed or remain a mystery many years after the release of their titles. And of course, Bloodborne is no exception. At this stage, we have discussed how elements of the ludonarrative are integrated into core game mechanics as well as how the game relies on the player's detective work to be fully appreciated. For this reason,

we will now delve into the unique qualities of a ludonarrative, why mechanics that reflect elements of the narrative are significant, how games used emotioneering to add depth and finally how the difficulty aspect of Bloodborne, as well as the gravity of in-game scenarios, can affect player motivation and interest.

The initial question that comes to mind is why emotion in games is significant. Already we have expressed how players being invested in characters and the world can improve their own sense of agency. However, I believe we can find out more by first dissecting David Freemans view on why there should be emotion in games. In Freemans book titled, Creating Emotion in games: The craft and Art of Emotioneering, he lists a fair few reasons why but for the purpose of this discussion around FromSoftware style storytelling and Bloodborne, we will be looking into reasons more applicable to Bloodborne. Freeman starts with two benefits of adding emotion in games, one being for better 'buzz' "*A more involving game experience leads to better word-of-mouth or "buzz." The game business depends on buzz just as much as the movie business does.*"(David Freeman,2004) and the other being the ability for a game to expand its demographics. "*Many will never be lured into playing games until games begin to offer the emotional range and depth of the entertainment these people are used to enjoying.*"(David Freeman,2004). The words used such as 'buzz' and 'lure' are significant here as they allow us to potentially understand how FromSoftware as a developer has reached the acclaim and heights of today. The buzz around discovering secrets within old or new FromSoftware titles is a good example of the paratextual narrative co-construction that was discussed earlier where players attempt to co-author the narrative. And as a result, the games become hot topics on community forums such as Reddit and video platforms such as YouTube.

For now its important we highlight how more deliberate and thought out emotional depth within a game can allow it to expand its demographics over time. An easy example to give would be Dark souls 1's 553,000 sales in the first year compared to a later title by FromSoftware known as Elden ring which happened to be voted game of the year in 2022 and accumulate a staggering 20,000,000 in its first year *(Video games sales wiki).* The next reason Freeman gives is how emotioneering can inspire creative teams as they believe what they are producing has *"depth, meaning and impact" (Freeman,2004).* This further supports the idea that FromSoftware cares about the games they make, and that they put considerable effort into designing and crafting the world around the player with a level of passion that may not be found elsewhere in games that perhaps lack emotional complexity and fun gameplay *(Freeman,2004).* In support of this claim, lets take a look at a game released back in 2010 (one year before Dark Souls 1) which most likely intended on riding on the coattails of its movie and

book success, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 1(2010)*. In short, the game was met with primarily bad reviews slating its *"boring gameplay" (Murphy, 2023)* amongst other technical issues. More interestingly though, this game is an example that following a already well received narrative and putting the player in a popular franchises world is not enough to succeed. The gameplay, alongside the narrative and the deliverance of both these elements is clearly important to some degree otherwise the game might had succeeded.

This takes us to the difficulty of FromSoftware titles, a fairly controversial topic amongst the gaming community as many die hard fans pledge allegiance to the "get gud" culture that emerged from Dark Souls 1 *(2011),* much to the dismay of game reviewers pleading for an easy mode to be included. But why the divide in opinion?*.* When someone plays a game, their usual goal is to win or achieve something in the game. Therefore, people enjoy winning and don't enjoy losing, most of the time. In actuality, players want to lose occasionally as this makes them appreciate when they win more, *"The simplest theory of failure states that failing serves as a contrast to winning, that failure thereby makes winning all the more enjoyable" (Juul,2013).* Bloodborne, like all FromSoftware titles, is designed in such a way that failure will be a very familiar feeling to the player, however, players only enjoy failure when they feel like they have learnt something from the failure or the failure was entirely down to them. *"Players clearly prefer feeling responsible for failing in a game; not feeling responsible is tied to a negative perception of a game" (Juul,2013).* Despite Bloodborne's infamous difficulty, players tend to continue beating their heads against the metaphorical wall in the hopes that every mistake, wrong decision or death will bring them one step closer to their goal. The feeling of beating a challenging boss is extremely satisfying in FromSoftware titles as the player feels as if they have agency over their own improvement and mechanical development.

As well as this, Bloodborne difficulty also plays a part in motivating the player to explore the game world and its secrets.

"Bloodborne's difficulty means that death is inevitable in the majority of gameplay situations. In order to see the world, read the lore notes, and understand the story, the player has to work hard and trudge through areas multiple times" (Foster,2020).

The 'trudging' in this case essentially comes down to practice through multiple attempts, which in turn improves the player from both a gameplay standpoint but also through developing their understanding of enemy types, environmental hazards and the tools at their disposal. For example, let's imagine the player reaches the first boss the cleric beast. Unsurprisingly, the Cleric beast kills the player through its seemingly chaotic moveset and relentless aggression. On a few more attempts the player

will adapt to the boss's moves and get closer to beating it, at the same time, the player may have realised that the boss is weak to fire through their exploration of the level previously, which contains various beastlike enemies like the crows, dogs and werewolves. In addition, molotovs and oil urns are placed throughout the level and are easy to come by. A quick read of the molotovs description informs the player of some background history and of its applications in combat, *"Since the tragedy that struck Old Yharnam, fire has become a staple in beast hunts, and is thought to cleanse impurity. Certain types of beasts have an abnormal fear of flame" (Bloodborne,2015).* This point is further reinforced by the developers as the werewolf enemies we mentioned earlier will hesitate to attack the player if they are holding a torch, therefore making them easier to kill.

With regards to the oil urn, the description states that when thrown, the target is *"drenched in oil, and made extremely flammable" (Bloodborne,2015),* in addition, the player also learns *"Fire is commonplace on the hunt, and oil urns accentuate its effect" (Bloodborne,2015).* With all of these hints and tools in mind, the player now has additional means of defeating the boss. When a molotov hits the oil-soaked Cleric Beast, a large portion of its health bar will disappear, and the boss will recoil in pain, giving the player more windows of opportunity to either reposition, attack or heal. In this scenario, we can see that the game gives players ample opportunity to make mistakes, learn from these mistakes and use any and all tools given to the player. *"Each death brings new knowledge to the player, who, with proper execution, should be able to get further with each death" (Foster,2020).* Bloodborne requires players to adapt their playstyle and learn from failure, and I argue the difficulty in FromSoftware games is used as a means to ignite this gameplay loop. If the boss was too easy for the player, they may miss the usefulness of certain items and reinforce unhealthy gameplay habits due to not being punished enough for their mistakes. Moreover, the player is also gaining a greater understanding of the game world through the difficulty as it pushes them to look for other means of progressing, whether they take a different route through a level and discover a better angle to tackle a group of enemies, change their weapon and tools to better suit the enemy type they are facing or read through the games Wiki and help forums for tips and tricks shared by other players.

In the literature review, we briefly touched on horror games and the feelings and emotions they evoke respectively. We also categorised Bloodborne as an action-horror title rather than a classic horror title like say, *Resident Evil Biohazard (2017)* for example, which places the player in vulnerable situations with the intent of making them feel helpless, evoking feelings of fear and dread. Bloodborne, unlike other horror titles, places emphasis on mastering the mechanics and the player's reaction time, instead of expecting the player's ability to master their own fears like in Resident Evil, *"Survival horror games earned their genre title because of their use of horror elements and because of their gameplay emphasis on surviving instead of thriving" (Perron, 2014).*

This distinction is important as although we have argued in favour of Bloodborne being a horror title, it doesn't share all of the elements that make it a horror game, Bloodborne plays like a fast-paced third-person action title but with an ominous horror setting and tone. This doesn't mean, however, that

Bloodborne cannot draw out similar feelings of fear and dread, it just executes it in different ways, and I believe these said emotions can play a part in motivating players to push onwards, learn, adapt and improve. Fear itself is typically perceived as a negative emotion, it is associated with many feelings like anxiety, dread, uneasiness etc, despite this, it is also common knowledge in extreme, physical and performance-based sports that fear can be used in a positive manner. A research study by Eric Brymer and Robert Schweitzer states that *"The most commonly associated emotion with extreme sports is fear which in turn is one of the great unmentionable aspects to being human"* (Brymer, Schweitzer, 2012). Being fearful in extreme scenarios is a natural part of being human and plays a large part in the decision-making processes we do as well. However, what the study discovered was that with more experience in a certain situation, fear becomes easier to control.

"I think that the ability to relax and stay focused and have a good clarity and good judgment in a situation of extreme danger comes down to experience to a certain degree. I think panic is the reaction of a person who has limited experience in an extreme situation" (Brymer, Schweitzer, Participant G,2012).

By embracing the fear and continuing to submit themselves to dangerous situations, individuals can learn to make good decisions with clarity despite the circumstances, and in turn, can end up positively benefiting the person's thought processes.

"Participation in the face of the fear offers considerable benefits as participants note how the experience changes their life. Participants equated the feelings of fear as instigating deep positive feelings and changes in behaviour" (Brymer, Schweitzer,2012).

In addition to extreme sports, the same revelation can be noted (to a lesser degree) in high-intensity videogames as players who embrace the adrenaline and fear they have of potentially dying and having to replay areas or lose progress could actually be motivated to improve and continue pushing through the content. Perron has previously mentioned how game designers can elicit desired emotional responses through the use of game mechanics, one of which is a mechanic players in Bloodborne will be all too familiar with, death. *"Death means the player will have to replay a section of the game in order to progress, giving death real stakes"* (Perron, 2014). The fear that arises from dying in Bloodborne is intentional on the developer's part as the game will consistently remind the player how fragile they are, whether through ambushes, traps or powerful enemies, all of which deal immense damage to the player regardless of their progression. But more importantly, I believe the fear of death and loss of progress is used alongside the design of certain enemies as devices used for inciting adrenaline and motivation.

My reasoning is as follows. Let's imagine a scenario where the player is fighting Ludwig the accursed, a boss battle famous for its music score, background lore and intensity. Before we even discuss the fight itself, its worth mentioning the visual and audio design of Ludwig's boss battle. He is an incredibly complex character model which features hundred of eyes, multiple limbs and more disturbingly so, body parts of a horse, all of which are fused together in this incomprehensible horrific amalgamation of flesh and rage. His piercing screams are a consistent reminder to the player that they are fighting an abomination, more so than anything they have faced before. *"his face, apparently blind from the right eye, is a melted visage of wrinkled skin and crooked teeth, stretched over an elongated head vaguely resembling that of a horse" (Bloodborne wiki,2015).* In terms of the actual fight, the Bloodborne wiki informs us of the aggressive nature of Ludwig, which says a lot when we consider the aggressive kill or be killed nature of Bloodborne's combat. *"He's easily one of the most violent bosses in the game, leaving little to no space for you to breathe, which means most of the fight will consist of you crazily dodging him" (Bloodborne wiki,2015).* So, in this scenario, the player is pitted against an overly aggressive, grafted, beast-like enemy that pushes their skills to the limit. In this sense, I would argue that the thematic and gameplay design of the boss is enough to draw out fear and dread, more so than boss's in other titles. That is not to say other bosses cannot be intimidating but usually, this is through the difficulty of the boss or certain attacks players can't adjust to. In Bloodborne, as well as the combat, the setting, music, tone and visual design of a boss can be enough to get players invested in the situation.

The next way players can feel fear and tension is through the gameplay itself. As we mentioned earlier, players in Bloodborne will be familiar with death, and there will be many occasions where the player will die and the boss has only one or two more hits left in them.

"*The last bit of a health bar in a Souls game can still be very challenging to deplete. Often a player tends to lose concentration, or the tension is so high that more mistakes can happen when you play too risky or even too safe" (Zwack,2018).*

These moments are the bread and butter of Bloodborne and Souls titles in general. They have a *"strong focus on difficult encounters with high payoff, where the core gameplay skills need to be mastered in order to proceed" (Zwack,2018),* and because of this relationship between 'high payoff' bringing about adrenaline and 'difficult encounters' inciting fear, Bloodborne can offer an enticing experience that in one sense, motivates players to push themselves against more difficult encounters, but also emotionally invests the players in the world. Bloodborne's boss battles are engaging both on a visual and conceptual level whilst also having background context and lore which allows the game to be emotionally deep to the player, resulting in players becoming invested in the experience.

However, intense emotional responses and player skill can only take one so far in Bloodborne. The games lack of hand-holding so to speak has resulted in the formation of a community that aims to unravel both the mysteries of the ludonarrative and aid fellow players who have found themselves struggling during their playthroughs. Indeed this is where chapter three delves into the actions Bloodborne's community has taken outside of the game. In addition, I will examine a suggested comparison between an in game group of characters and the player community, as well as what implications this has to the overall discussion.

CHAPTER 3: COMPELLED BY COMMUNITY

Currently, we have discussed how Bloodborne compels its community to invest themselves in the game's narrative through methods such as the cryptic and scattered storytelling, the hybrid tone and environments of gothic and cosmic horror, and the emotional investment in characters and their own avatars through difficulty and agency over their self-improvement. Now, it is worth examining what actions Bloodborne's community has taken to shape their interpretation of the lore, in addition to the contributions they have made in this seemingly endless journey to unravel the mysteries of Yharnam. In the literature review, I highlighted the term 'paratextual narrative co-construction, which essentially describes a process where a community makes attempts at contributing to the narrative of a game outside of the actual game itself. Or, as Mia Consalvo puts it, paratexts "shape the reader's experience of a text" while giving "meaning to the act of reading" (Consalvo, 2017). The shaping of a player's experience and giving meaning to the action of playing is vital to understanding why communities become invested in a text altogether. Initially, the text, or in this case, Bloodborne, must draw players in and make them care; otherwise, dedicated communities like Bloodborne's may not exist to the degree that they do.

As such, this section will highlight some key figures in Bloodborne's community that have guided and taught the average player the lore of FromSoftware titles for many years, in addition, this paper will discuss what effects these figures have had on the overall consensus players have of Bloodborne's ludonarrative as well as what kind of emergent narratives are produced through this interaction between developer and player and finally, I would like to underline a comparison I have made between a certain group of characters in Bloodborne's world known as the Tomb Prospectors, who I interpret as Hidetaka Miyazaki's attempt at mirroring the actions of the player community and insinuating the possible dangers of pursuing forbidden eldritch knowledge as well as implying the excitement of discovery that comes alongside it.

In the literature review, I gave some examples of embedded narratives discovered through player interaction with the world and its lore, both inside and outside Bloodborne. We also noted that the embedded narratives found in Bloodborne are a result of keen detective work and narrative co-construction that takes place between the community and Miyazaki himself, the lead creative director for Fromsoftware. which results in content being interpreted in various ways, some of which shall be explained further on. *"Players become explorers as they try to make links and construct a story alongside Miyazaki, and it allows those who delve into the depths of the lore to become more involved with the game world" (Hoedt, 2019).* So, what sort of examples of embedded narratives can we spot in Bloodborne as a result of players co-constructing the narrative? In fact, there are countless examples, but for the sake of not listing hundreds of theories regarding Bloodborne's narrative, we shall discuss two of the more popular ones.

The first theory or embedded narrative suggests that the NPC known as the doll who resides in Bloodborne's hub area is a great one. As is often the case with FromSoftware titles, there is no solid evidence to suggest this is true; however, the theory has some legs to stand on if we note some aspects of the doll. Her complexion, for example, is noticeably pale when compared to other NPCs, which suggests she may have some connection to a great one at the very least. Other entities with such pale complexions are the Pthumerians, which will be covered in more detail later on, but for now, you just need to know that they are an extinct race that communed directly with the Great Ones and are thought to have discovered eldritch knowledge. The next argument in favour of this theory uses the insight mechanic as a way of proving she is more than just a doll. Insight is a consumable item that allows various in-game activities and can be used as currency. To gain insight, the player must use said consumables, as well as kill powerful enemies. Furthermore, to see the Amygdalas or hear the ominous cries of the infant child (a manifestation of the birth of a Great One's surrogate child), you need a certain level of insight. Consequently, to turn the doll from a lifeless shell into an interactable NPC, the player needs at least one insight. Now you could argue that this interaction was intentionally done to stop players from accessing the level-up feature from the get-go, but regardless, the embedded narrative revealed through the investigation of the Great Ones and their influence on other characters led players to believe the doll is more than just a level-up mechanic.

The second theory comes from observations made by the community in Bloodborne's DLC, *The Old Hunters (2015).* After defeating two fan favourites and one less, the player will reach the astral clocktower, which doubles as a boss room. At the back of the boss room are Caryll runes inscribed around the inside of the clock. Players noticed how these runes were the very same runes that they could use to give their characters certain buffs, consisting of, but not limited to, extra blood vials (health) and quicksilver bullets, faster stamina regeneration, and elemental damage reduction. Each of these runes also comes with a visual representation of the rune. For a bit of background information, the Bloodborne wiki informs us that

"*Caryll Runes are uttered words of the Great Ones, which are incomprehensible through human speech. They are metaphorical concepts elevated to an inhuman state, which can only be transcribed into symbols*" (Bloodborne wiki, 2015).

So, where the theory comes into play is when we look at the astral clock and the runes inscribed into it. Previously thought to be merely random symbols and patterns, the community created diagrams to show how each rune on the clock matched the Caryll runes that the player had been using throughout the base game and the DLC; however, there is one rune known as the level three guidance rune, which to this date has not been found by the community. The process of finding higher-level Caryll runes mainly involves exploration of the chalice dungeons, a procedurally-generated labyrinth with randomised items and enemy placements. The issue here is that every other level 3 version of a Caryll rune has been found, which has led some players to believe that there are layers to the randomised chalice dungeons that are yet to be discovered and mapped, seven years later. This resulted in years of chalice dungeon clearing and plenty of debate on Reddit forums.

Perhaps the fact the only rune the community cannot get their hands on is ironically titled 'guidance', is intentional on Miyazaki's part, as we will discuss further how Miyazaki enjoys playing minor pranks and tricks on the community when developing his titles. Nevertheless, we have noted two examples of embedded narratives that can be found in Bloodborne, as these theories rely on the community to investigate layers of embedded lore as well as discuss their findings outside of the game, whether that involves creating diagrams or referencing information and clues in discussions and debates on YouTube comments or Reddit forums. Or when individuals create their own videos, motivating the community around them to continue pursuing their shared goals.

One prominent and influential individual in the FromSoftware community, Michael Samuels, who goes by the username 'VaatiVidya', was, for many years, my and many others' reliable and eye-opening source of lore information. Vaatividya started many years ago, in March 2012, and his first videos gave the community a better understanding of some of their favourite Dark Souls bosses. The considerable success Vaati has experienced seems, at first glance, due to the fact that he just started making decent-quality videos with passion at the right time in the FromSoftware timeline. But it seems more logical when considering the community's impulse towards understanding everything in the lore of FromSoftware titles, and Vaati noticed a gap in current YouTube content for these people in the community. Furthermore, when viewing it from an entrepreneurial perspective, the most basic requirement of launching a successful business, after all, involves identifying said gap or need in the market and then producing a low-cost but high-quality solution that fills this gap. Vaati's work spun emotionally powerful stories presented in an artful and entertaining manner that fleshed out the lore of Dark Souls for players who noticed potentially rich lore but required assistance piecing it all together. And of course, staying true to his channel's focus, Vaatividya eventually started making similar videos as well as cut-content videos about Bloodborne.

Some of which have become the most popular on his channel, boasting millions of views, one, in particular, having a staggering ten million views, and consequently, that video is titled 'Bloodborne's story explained!'. What's interesting here is that despite the countless other pieces of content Vaati has produced across all the FromSoftware titles, it's the video about Bloodborne's narrative as a whole that has gained the most attention from the community. As stated previously, perhaps one reason why Bloodborne's narrative stands out from its predecessor titles is due in part to the tonal shift away from dark fantasy but also because of the many adjusted and overlapping themes in the gameplay and atmosphere, which make for an experience that draws in a variety of players with different interests.

Vaatividya is just one of many examples of a community figure that takes part in paratextual narrative co-construction while encouraging others to do the same. Some lesser-known but still significant figures in the overall discussion on FromSoftware lore would be Alex, the Silver Mont, who started his channel a bit after Vaati in February 2013, and Zullie, the Witch, who made their first video much later in 2016, one year after the release of Bloodborne, which speaks to the long-lasting impression FromSoftware titles can have on the community.

Zullie takes an interesting approach to lore hunting, as their brief but incredibly informative videos garner hundreds of thousands of views and can range from boss design analysis all the way to uncovering masked NPCs through cheat codes in the game system. In fact, a majority of Zullies' content is based on delving into the game's code and discovering aspects of FromSoftware games that many players would never have found themselves. One example that contributed to the community's understanding of Bloodborne's characters would be her video on an enemy type known as the Winter Lanterns, which, upon Zullies inspection of the character model, revealed that this enemy type shared the same clothing as the doll in the Hunter's Dream as well as the messengers, who are usually friendly assistants to the player, but in this example, they are seen bundled up in a contorted horrific mess, perhaps to mess with the player's familiarity with these NPC's. Through some background research, Zullie also discovered the meaning behind their name and attributed it to a Japanese plant known as Hozuki, which is traditionally used as an offering to guide the souls of the dead as well as being used as a sedative. Consequently, the Winter Lanterns cause a status effect known as frenzy, which builds up over time and causes massive damage to the player. Ironically, the player must use an item called sedatives to alleviate the buildup of frenzy. "*Those who delve into the arcane fall all-too-easily to madness, and thick human blood serves to calm the frayed nerves of these inquisitive minds"* (*Bloodborne wiki, 2015*). Furthermore, we can note more examples of collective community contributions here as Zullies' discoveries make up many submissions across Vaatividya's cut content videos.

In the case of Silver Mont, his channel is largely based on lore discussion and debate, frequently asking the community in the comment section of his videos their thoughts and opinions on his character analyses. As well as lore content, Silver Mont also produces boss guide content and detailed lets plays, which essentially involve him playing through the game like anyone else, giving advice on each encounter as if he were a guidebook, all while discussing level design, character design, and lore. From these examples alone, we can assume, at the very least, that there is a level of passion to be found in Bloodborne's community surrounding the narrative, as well as the intricacies of certain boss fights or mechanics.

Celia Pearce brings attention to the importance of play communities and what effects they can have on the player and the game itself. In this case, we will look at how devoted play communities have affected players shaping of Bloodborne's lore. Pearce includes a statement made by Johan Huizinga, who defines play as a free activity standing outside ordinary life while "at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly" (Pearce, 2017). He goes on to bring attention to the "formation of social groupings (Pearce, 2017) that can occur through the actions of individual players who care about these fictional game worlds. These social groups are vital to players as they feel a sense of contribution to certain goals whilst also allowing people to connect in ways they couldn't before. Think back to the cut content videos and the debate platforms found in SilverMonts comment sections. However, this requires participation from every side of the community.

Vaatividya is an example of what Mia Consalvo believes moves players along "pathways, through individuals as well as industry professionals" (Consalvo, 2017). In this example, the pathway in question would be the path to unravelling the mysteries of Bloodborne's lore. The individuals are the players, but also pseudo-detectors like Zullie the witch, and although Vaatividya wouldn't be considered an 'industry professional', his influence certainly matches one, as his videos promote certain lore hunting activities and different types of nuanced gameplay that the average player may not partake in on a regular playthrough. For example, we stated previously that the average player could detect the depth of Bloodborne's lore; however, by themselves, it may be too arduous of a task. Therefore, Bloodborne's community required figures like Vaati, Silver Mont, and Zullie to prompt the involvement of the average player towards the overall goal of understanding the lore. This can be noted in his cut content videos and 'x things you may have missed in Bloodborne' series, where the majority of the content is detective work done by the community, which is then brought to influential community figures like Vaati, who can bring these discoveries to a larger platform, followed by community debate.

At this stage, we can now explore some of the similarities between the paratextual detective work of the community and the many warnings and hints against such actions that are noted in Bloodborne. In the first section of this thesis, we considered many comparisons to Lovecraft's stories in Bloodborne's lore as well as how Bloodborne has adapted such themes to create a game world with many intriguing aspects to discuss within the community. One central theme in H.P. Lovecraft's work is the idea that pursuing and eventually comprehending eldritch knowledge or enlightenment results in a meteoric descent into madness. If we remind ourselves of certain characters in Bloodborne, such as Provost Willem and Laurence the First Vicar, we can of course note comparisons to said theme where Willem, through his pursuit of a greater understanding of the 'Great ones' and enlightenment, eventually becomes a lifeless, feeble husk of his former self, residing in his home of Byergenwurth, unable to speak or move much of his body, consequently close to the truths he sought as a failed experiment known as Rom the vacuous spider, remains in the lake before him, a harrowing reminder that *"evolution without courage will be the ruin of our race" (Bloodborne, 2015).*

A note found in Bygernwurth reads, *"The spider hides all manner of rituals, certain to reveal nothing, for true enlightenment need not be shared" (Bloodborne, 2015).* In fact, Rom is another result of pursuing enlightenment, as, through a ritual involving the consumption of three umbilical cords, Rom's perverse ascension meant its consciousness was nonfunctional and the ritual was a failure. Hence, the note mentions the spider hiding all rituals. In this form, Rom cannot communicate with anyone, and this makes Willem exceedingly envious of Rom's knowledge, which explains why he beckons the player upon meeting him to plunge themselves into the lake and slay Rom, revealing the eldritch secrets it hides. Now let's turn our attention to Laurence, the first vicar and student of Provost Willem, who founded the healing church against Willem's advice, alongside other defectors of the Byergenwurth school.

Amongst these defectors was a group known as the Tomb Prospectors, who explored the old labyrinths located underneath Yharnam on behalf of the healing church in the hopes of discovering the secrets of those that came before them. These labyrinths were created by an ancient race known as the Pthumerians, a superhuman race *"said to have unlocked the wisdom of the eldritch truth. "The old labyrinth carved out by them is known to be a place in which inquiry into the cosmos started (Bloodborne Wiki, 2015)* furthermore*,* the Pthumerians were also guardians of the 'Great Ones. "*Their strange, almost "undead-like" appearance stems from being marked by the Eldritch Truth when they came in contact with the Great Ones (Bloodborne Wiki, 2015),* which again speaks to the negative side effects of pursuing the eldritch knowledge of the Great Ones. The Tomb Prospectors, aware of the dark history of the Pthumerians, navigated the labyrinths until they eventually discovered a left-behind great one known as Ebrietas.

Ebrietas became the healing church's source of power, and she willingly allowed the members of the healing church to commune with her in the Upper Cathedral Ward, guiding the highest-ranking members of the healing church in the ways of blood ministration. The reasons why Ebritas cooperated are unknown, but the key turning point in Bloodborne's history began with the Tomb Prospectors' discovery of Ebrietas and the Old Blood. At first, the church members were astounded by the *"great potent healing properties (Bloodborne wiki, 2015)* as well as realising its potential to evolve mankind. However, this discovery was met with opposition from Provost Willem. The wiki informs us that *"the first experiment must have had mixed results as Master Willem, provost of the school, feared it and took the phrase "Fear the Old Blood" as his mantra"* (Bloodborne wiki,2015).

The rebellious Laurence ignored his master's warnings and decided for himself that the Old Bloods properties could benefit Yharnam. As such, the Healing Church distributed the blood to the citizens of Yharnam with the promise of curing any and all diseases. What Laurence didn't foresee, however, was that overuse of the Old Blood would result in terrifying consequences—the scourge of the beasts. The significant events that take place in Bloodborne's timeline all follow a similar pattern, that being the Lovecraftian-inspired theme of dire consequences through the pursuit of a higher knowledge that humanity was evidently not prepared for, or as Provost Willem puts it, evolution without courage. Throughout this thesis, we have underlined and examined countless examples of this through item and armour set descriptions, character dialogue, and cutscenes.

This brings us to my final and perhaps most intriguing observation on Bloodborne's lore and its interaction with the community, that is, how Miyazaki, the director of Bloodborne, has used the Tomb Prospectors as a medium for reflecting the detective work he knew the FromSoftware community would partake in before the game had even been released. Before the game even had a community to begin with. And although we have stated Fromsoftware titles encourage detective work on the community's part, in Bloodborne, there is evidence to suggest that maybe humans aren't meant to know everything that's out there.

To support this argument, let's harken back to Dark Souls 1, where a deceptive item was placed within the game with the intent to ignite the community's debate culture. The infamous item known simply as the 'Pendant' was an optional starting gift. Compared to the other far more useful starting gifts, such as the master key, which could be used to bypass entire areas, or the black firebombs, which deal devastating damage to any enemy for the first quarter of the game, the pendant seemed fairly useless. The description reads, "*A simple pendant with no effect. Even so, pleasant memories are crucial to survival on arduous journeys" (Dark Souls),* and Miyazaki himself stated in an interview a few years after Dark Soul's release that *"When it comes to the pendant, I actually had a little bit of an intention to play a prank" (Dark Souls Wiki, 2011).* From this statement alone, we can assume that Miyazaki enjoys playing tricks on the community because he knows the lengths they will go to uncover any mysteries in his games.

Some examples of the community's attempt at theorising the mysteries of the pendant are as follows: Some believed the pendant had ties to the game's PVP covenant system known as the Forest Hunters. This is because players would be rewarded with the pendant item upon defeating another player in combat, which then led players to Reddit to discuss their ideas. In one detailed and comprehensive post by an anonymous user, they laid out a timeline with updates every couple of days or weeks explaining the investigative process.

*"**UPDATE 1:** I think the reason you get pendant drops from human intruders is if they themselves chose the pendant as a starting gift. Which leads me to think it may be a dead-end trail" (Reddit,2011)*

*"**UPDATE 3: I think I'm on to something!** I tried to pray in the location where Rhea is found in the parish, but nothing happened. But I did notice some clues" (Reddit,2011).*

Some users, including our resident lore expert Vaatividya*,* tried dropping the item in front of various statues and walls in the hopes of revealing a hidden path or chest. The video features Vaati smashing away at walls and various shots where he is dropping the item in different places across Lordran (the game world) in the hopes that performing certain actions with the pendant in possession would trigger an event or cutscene. This also coincides with the previous Reddit post where the anonymous user attempted similar approaches to Vaati.

*"**UPDATE 7:** God damn Sen's Fortress... Anyway, my next plan is to lay down the pendant on the dais where you make your offerings of ears to Gwyndolin. I'm seeing how far the connection between this and getting an ear off Snuggly goes" (Reddit,2011).*

Eventually, some players translated the Japanese description of the pendant and learned of a saying similar to that of *"water off a duck's back,"* essentially meaning the pendant was useless, or perhaps water resistant, but this belief was most likely reserved for the more optimistic players in the community. From this, it is safe to suggest that Miyazaki was correct in his assumption that his community would go to arguably ridiculous lengths to uncover secrets in his games. Hoedt also notes how Dark Soul's vision and complexity owe themselves almost entirely to Miyazaki: *"Simply put, without Miyazaki, there would be no dark souls at all!" (Hoedt, 2019),* which only solidifies the argument that FromSoftware titles are largely personal projects on Miyazaki's part, hence why things like the effect on the community through the pendant in Dark Souls 1 and the Tomb prospectors causing many of the events in Bloodborne are more than just coincidences noticed by the community. Instead, they are clever methods for creating interaction between the developer and the player. Some in the community still believe the pendant holds a secret to this day, but nevertheless, this amusing turn of events reinforces my argument that Miyazaki understands his community and occasionally makes design decisions based on what community reactions Miyazaki desires.

Returning now to Bloodborne with a stronger supporting argument through the pendant item, we can now discuss the parallels between the Tomb Prospectors and the player community. The Tomb Prospectors had a keen desire for discovering secrets; they were also former students at the Byrgenwurth school, which speaks to their inquisitive nature; furthermore, their allegiance to Laurence over Willem reveals their rebellious intentions, as they ignore the warnings of their former mentor about pursuing the Eldtritch secrets that lay within the labyrinths of the Chalice dungeons. Similarly, Miyazaki has used subtle as well as fairly clear methods to portray the dangers of the eldritch knowledge and the Great Ones, such as the beast scourge that was a direct consequence of the Tomb Prospector's actions, but also through NPC interactions and the environment. As we have previously discussed, Miyazaki has also played pranks on speculative players through the pendant item in Dark Souls 1, so it is safe to assume that there have been enough hints and evidence throughout the Fromsoftware franchise to suggest a potential mirroring of actions between the Tomb prospectors and the player community.

In case this observation is still not convincing to you, we shall now look into more of H.P. Lovecraft's works to see if we can find more evidence or themes that support the argument. A quote directly from Lovecraft himself warns of the negative side of new discoveries in science:

"*The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. (The Call of Cthulhu, 1928)*

He begins by expressing the inadequacy of the human mind and its limitations, believing that we are perhaps not equipped to comprehend future discoveries that are too abstract for the mind. *"The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little (The Call of Cthulhu, 1928). Here*, Lovecraft admits that the knowledge we have gained so far has not resulted in catastrophic consequences yet, and like in Bloodborne, the game encourages players to discover things and come up with their own conclusions. However, Lovecraft does warn that there may be a limit to what humans can handle:

 "*some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality and of our frightful position therein that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age. (The Call of Cthulhu, 1928).*

It makes sense that a person with such views would write stories that perfectly illustrate his fears. The Call of Cthulhu specifically involves a professor who discovers a dark cult containing members seemingly struck by severe mania *(The Call of Cthulhu, 1928),* and eventually, the professor, his party, and the professor's nephew Francis Wayland Thurston, who narrates the short story, either die, go insane, or fear that they will be next as "Thurston *realises he's now a possible target, thinking, "I know too much, and the cult still lives" (The Call of Cthulhu, 1928).* Once again, this theme of 'knowing' too much comes up again, and I believe that from all of the evident Lovecraft inspiration in Bloodborne, we can assume that Miyazaki wanted to convey similar themes in his own world through the Tomb Prospectors, who evidently discovered too much in the way of Eldtritch knowledge and power.

In this chapter, we arguably covered the more significant aspects of my argument, such as how Bloodborne's narrative and the themes it is inspired by motivate the community to co-construct the narrative alongside the game's narrative. Key figures such as Vaatividya, who has been a staple in the games community since 2013, inspire and support other creators like Zullie the Witch, The Silver Mont, and the average player to contribute towards a common goal of understanding and interpreting the lore in the best possible way with the information and evidence discovered by the community. In addition, we covered Miyazaki's mischievous nature as well as his artistic direction, which is heavily inspired by the cosmic horror works of H.P. Lovecraft, and this inspiration can be noted in many facets of the game. Along with this, we also covered my observation regarding the similarities between the detective work of the player community and the daring Tomb Prospectors who gave in to their desire to seek answers, as although the game motivates players to co-construct the narrative and seek out the answers to open-ended mysteries, it also foreshadows the consequences that this path can lead humanity down. Despite the fact that there is no concrete evidence to suggest Miyazaki intended for these similarities, unlike the pendant situation in Dark Souls 1, where he explicitly says he wanted to play a prank on the community, knowing the reaction he would get from them, in Bloodborne, there is no such mention from him regarding the community's detective work, so we can only assume based on the themes, inspirations, and Miyazaki's passionate disposition that the player community actually plays a far larger role in the design of FromSoftware narratives, allowing for an open platform for discussion and debate that stays that way many years after the release of these games.

CONCLUSION

At this stage, I believe it can be sufficiently argued that Bloodborne's interpretative and enigmatic narrative works alongside its gameplay mechanics and environment design to inspire players investment in the game world. This investment shows itself through YouTube channels dedicated to unravelling Bloodborne lore and forums filled with abundant amounts of discussion and critical debate surrounding the subliminal messages within Bloodborne's narrative. Another key argument involved the Bloodborne genre; this is where the thesis examined the tropes and themes that Bloodborne had been inspired by, which reflected themselves in the gothic/cosmic horror tone and setting of the game world. Furthermore, by narrowing down the type of horror game Bloodborne early on in the literature review, I found that game developers can evoke powerful emotions through high-intensity situations where players feel like something is at stake. As I explored Bloodborne's infamous difficulty in the second chapter, I noted many occasions where emotions like fear and dread can arise, and this is where the player's agency is tested. The first chapter looked at how Bloodborne gives players a platform to experiment and learn if they put in the effort to do so. Two examples are the Hunters Torch item, which gives players an advantage over beasts due to their fear of fire, or the Quicksilver bullet mechanic, which plays upon previously established tropes that suggest supernatural entities are debilitated by silver.

Despite this, many players will experience a metaphorical wall when trying to progress through

Bloodborne or when trying to piece together the fragmented essence of the narrative. This is where chapter three explored alternative solutions that players came up with outside of the game itself, as well as my observation that Bloodbornes creative director Hidetaki Miyazaki intentionally crafts the narrative and gameplay in a way that pushes players to share their troubles or successes amongst the community.

I mentioned at the start of the thesis that current literature on bloodborne focuses on individual aspects while overlooking connections between them as well as the outcomes that derive from these elements working in cohesion. The main argument of this thesis was that players are encouraged by the narrative and gameplay to debate and discuss amongst the community, and for this to happen, various elements of Bloodborne have to synergize in a way that makes players feel like they are contributing something to the game and its community. If I were to focus heavily on Bloodborne's gameplay, for example, perhaps I would have missed the fact that the gameplay and difficulty that arise from it are overcome not just through sheer willpower and gaming prowess but also through understanding the game world and sharing advice throughout the community.

Essentially, I argued that Bloodborne creates opportunities for collaborative player analysis outside of the game through the open-ended narrative and the harsh learning curve that pushes players to seek answers they may not come to themselves but instead through community collaboration. This is significant because it illustrates how multiple aspects of Bloodborne have been utilised for the purpose of bringing players together and allowing them the freedom to explore both the game world and the unknowable narrative. Bloodborne is therefore a good example of how game developers can create something that is more than just entertainment; it shows that games can promote creativity, foster collective teamwork, and spark critical or academic debate. Going forward, I hope to see more game companies allow their players to feel like they are contributing towards their passion. Whether that contribution manifests itself in narrative debate, fan theories, or gameplay guides, the main takeaway is that Bloodborne and videogames as a whole have the potential to be enticing entertainment and a great deal more.

Bibliography

Aarseth, E. (1997) *Cybertext perspectives on ergodic literature*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Altman, R, (1996), *Cinema and Genre*, 1st ed, Bloomsbury Publishing, The Oxford history of world cinema.

Alex, (2013) Silver Mont. *YouTube*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/c/SilverMont

Anon*,* (2015) *Bloodborne Wiki*. Available at: <https://bloodborne.wiki.fextralife.com/Bloodborne+Wiki>.(Accessed 1/10/22)

Anon, (2012), *Dark Souls Wiki*, Available at: <https://darksouls.wiki.fextralife.com/Dark+Souls+Wiki> (Accessed 10/10/22)

Anon, (2011) *R/darksouls - favorite pendant theory? reddit*. Available at: https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls/comments/10a147/favorite_pendant_theory/ (Accessed September 22, 2022).

Barker, S. (2018) *Soapbox:Don't Dismiss Bloodborne Because of Its Difficulty.* Pushsquare*.*

Available at:

https://www.pushsquare.com/news/2018/03/soapbox_dont_dismiss_bloodborne_because_o
f_its_difficulty. (Accessed: 15 January 2023)

Boonen, C. and Mientz, D. (2018) *Paralysing fear: Player agency parameters in horror
games*, *Digra*. Available at: <http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-
library/DiGRA_Nordic_2018_paper_19.pdf>(Accessed: 28 October 2022).

Brymer, E. & Schweitzer, R. (2012) *Extreme sports are good for your health: A
phenomenological understanding of fear and anxiety in extreme sport*, *Journal of health
psychology*. Available at: https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22689592/ (Accessed: 20
November 2022).

Consalvo, M. (2017) *When paratexts become texts:* De-centering the game-as-text -
Researchgate. Available at:
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315895156_When_paratexts_become_texts_de-
centering_the_game-as-text> (Accessed: 22 August 2022)

Fernández-Vara, C., (2011). *Game Spaces Speak Volumes: Indexical Storytelling*. 1st ed.
[ebook] Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Available at:
<https://dspace.mit.edu/bitstream/handle/1721.1/100274/Game-Spaces-Speak-
Volumes.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>. (Accessed 17/09/22)

Fludernik, M, (2009), *An introduction to narratology*, London: Routledge.

Freeman, D. (2004) *[pdf] creating emotion in games: The craft and art of emotioneering ...*
Available at: https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Creating-emotion-in-games%3A-the-
craft-and-art-of-Freeman/e75c49f58343b585cddd7538d98ce724a7288f3e (Accessed: 04
August 2023).

Hoedt, M. (2019) *Narrative design and authorship in Bloodborne: An analysis of the horror
videogame*, University of Huddersfield Research Portal. Available at:
<https://pure.hud.ac.uk/en/publications/narrative-design-and-authorship-in-bloodborne-an-
analysis-of-the-> (Accessed: 18 November 2022).

Jenkins, H., (2004), Games as Narrative Architecture. *First Person*.

Juul, J. (1970) *The Art of Failure : An Essay on the pain of playing video games : Juul,
Jesper, 1970- : Free Download, borrow, and streaming*, *Internet Archive*. Available at:
https://archive.org/details/artoffailureessa0000juul (Accessed: 23 November 2022).

Laurel, B. (2013) *Computers as theatre*, Google Books. Available at: <https://books.google.com/books/about/Computers_as_Theatre.html?id=kfEEAQAAQBAJ> (Accessed: 14 December 2022).

Langmead, O. (2017) *'Grant us eyes, grant us eyes! plant eyes on our brains, to cleanse our beastly idiocy!': Fromsoftware's bloodborne, and the New Frontier of the gothic*, *Press Start.* Available at: <https://press-start.gla.ac.uk/index.php/press-start/article/view/76> (Accessed: 28 November 2022).

Lovecraft, H.P. (2023) *The call of cthulhu*, *Wikipedia*. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Call_of_Cthulhu (Accessed: 28 November 2023).

Louchart, S. (2008) *Authoring emergent narrative-based games,* semantic scholar,. Available at: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Authoring-Emergent-Narrative-based-Games-Louchart-Kriegel/263976dc83c9ae5fa6c11193fd807c6abc2fbf60> (Accessed: 11 January 2023).

Nicholas, F. (2019) *Bloodborne as a writerly text*, *Medium*. Available at: https://medium.com/@thiccnickgames/bloodborne-as-a-writerly-text-932932f34562 (Accessed: 12 January 2023).

Noreiga, L.N. and Chandler, C. (2005) *Do games tell stories or do stories play games? the narratological analysis of computer games*. Available at: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Do-games-tell-stories-or-do-stories-play-games-the-Noriega-Chandler/6fc12bcd09d07f56886d5474091e83de7402836c> (Accessed: 13 September 2022).

Paley, J, (2009) *Narrative Machinery*, (online) ResearchGate.Net. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/John-Paley/publication/265565760_Narrative_machinery/links/56697d1c08ae62b05f02439c/Narrative-machinery.pdf> (Accessed 22/09/22)

Pearce, C. (2017) *Communities of play: Emergent cultures in multiplayer games and Virtual Worlds:* Guide Books: ACM Digital Library, Guide books. Available at: <https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.5555/1655830> (Accessed: 20 August 2023).

Perron, B. (2014) *Horror video games: Essays on the fusion of fear and play*, Google Books. Available at: https://books.google.com/books/about/Horror_Video_Games.html?id=pNaQLQC9XhEC

(Accessed: 12 September 2022).

Perron, B. (2004) *Sign of a threat: The effects of warning systems in survival horror games*. Available at: <http://www.cosignconference.org/downloads/papers/perron_cosign_2004.pdf> (Accessed: 28 February 2023).

Picucci, A. & Marcelo (2014) *When video games tell stories: A model of video game narrative ...* Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286392413_When_Video_Games_Tell_Stories_A _Model_of_Video_Game_Narrative_Architectures> (Accessed: 09 July 2022).

Ralickas, V. (2008) *Art, cosmic horror, and the fetishizing gaze in - proquest*, *Proquest*. Available at: <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/art-cosmic-horror-fetishizing-gaze-fiction-h-p/docview/231115282/se-2> (Accessed: 11 June 2022).

Samuels, M.(2012) Vaatividya. *YouTube*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/c/VaatiVidya

Schniz, F. (2016) *Skeptical Hunter (s) : A critical approach to the cryptic ...*, *In The Philosophy of Computer Games Conference.* Available at: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Skeptical-Hunter-%28-s-%29-%3A-A-Critical-Approach-to-the-Schniz/2dc9b43db082c23fbe43c04d9bb620dd60cfcaae> (Accessed: 05 june 2022)

Wolek, Z. (2022) *Lore exposition in video games - theseus*. Available at: https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/746225/Lore%20exposition%20in%20video% 20games.%20How%20to%20effectively%20convey%20an%20in-game%20world%20to%20the%20player.pdf?sequence=2 (Accessed: 01 November 2023).

Zwack, J. (2018) *A programming model for boss encounters in 2D action games*. Available at: https://ojs.aaai.org/index.php/AIIDE/article/download/12891/12739/16408 (Accessed: 28 February 2023).

Ludography

Bloodborne(2015), PS4 [Video Game], FromSoftware

Bloodborne The Old Hunters(2015)

Dead Space(2008), PC [Video Game], Motive Studio

Resident Evil(2002), PlayStation [Video Game], Capcom

Resident Evil Biohazard(2017), PC Xbox One PS4 Xbox Series S PS5, Nintendo Switch [Video Game], Capcom

Silent Hill(1999), Playstation [Video Game], Konami

Dark Souls(2011), PC   Xbox 360   PS3 [Video Game], Fromsoftware

Call Of Duty(2003-2022), PC   Xbox 360   PS3   Xbox One   PS4   Xbox Series X   PS5 [Video Game], Activision, Infinity Ward, Treyarch

Bioshock(2007), PC   Xbox 360   PS3 [Video Game], 2K Games

Destiny(2014), PC Xbox 360   PS3   Xbox One   PS4 [Video Game], Bungie

Divinity: Original Sin 2(2017), PC Xbox One PS4[Video Game], Larian Studios

Alice(2000), PC   Xbox 360   PS3 [Video Game], Rogue Entertainment

*Minecraft(*2011), PC [Video Game], Mojang

Black Desert Online(2014), PC [Video Game], Pearl Abyss

World Of Warcraft(2004), PC [Video Game], Blizzard