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## Historical Discourses Through Multi-perspective Narratives in Video Games: When the Many Are Used to Represent Only One Past

Juan F. Belmonte

University of Murcia

This paper studies the impact of multi-perspective narratives—collective stories told from multiple points of view—on the capacity video games have to reproduce historical national discourses. Games such *Live a Live* (Square 1994; Square Enix 2022) or *13 Sentinels: Aegis Rim* (Vanillaware 2020), which I am considering symptomatic of a tendency found in many other games, use a wide cast of characters to tell choral stories that take place across centuries, decades, and sometimes, many countries. In *Live a Live* each of the initial seven chapters players can choose to play offers the unique point of view of seven different male protagonists living during seven points in history, such as Medieval Europe, the American Far West of the 19th century, Edo Japan, or Imperial China. None of the points of view from each of the characters are seemingly connected to the other six until a final—and secret—eighth chapter is unlocked at the end of the game. *13 Sentinels*, on the other hand, tells a choral narrative through the point of view of thirteen teenagers who seemingly come from different decades of the 20th century in Japan as well as the near and distant future. In this game, the perspective of each protagonist is essential in order to piece together a communal narrative. Unlike the approach implemented by *Live a Live*, where each chapter and protagonist feels initially isolated from the rest, *13 Sentinels* forces players to change the teenagers they are controlling frequently to ensure that the flow of perspectives is continuous and the collective narrative works as a unit that is portrayed by many voices. Regardless of their approach, however, a central story is told through a constellation of smaller ones in both games.

The diversity of voices present in multi-perspective narratives in games could be seen as an opportunity for many discourses about history to co-exist—or for many histories to rhizomatically coalesce—within a single text. The diversity in age, gender, class, national origin or temporal origin found in each of the voices of a multi-perspective narrative could be used as a catalyst to portray different sensibilities and, derived from them, distinct forms of looking at the past. Is this always the case, though? This paper will look at the work of scholars such as Napier (2005), Shamoan (2008) or Mukherjee (2017), who all discuss the way gender, sexuality and class relate to historical discourses embedded in popular culture, to answer the following two questions: Do multi-perspective narratives in games offer more nuanced, and similarly multi-perspective, historical accounts? Or, do they, instead, use the plurality of voices they represent as a deafening tool to silence true diversity and then reproduce unitary visions of history?

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## Playing with Wisdom Tree: Christian Games in the Early 1990s

Frank G. Bosman  
Tilburg University

In the 1980s and 1990s, a video game developer called Color Dreams, re-invented itself as Wisdom Tree and dedicated its efforts exclusively to the production of (unlicensed) Christian games like *Bible Adventures* (1991), *Spiritual Warfare* (1992), and *Sunday Funday* (1995) for the NES or *Super Noah's Ark 3D* (1994) for SNES. Some of these games were refurbished version of Color Dream's earlier 'secular' releases like *Menace Beach* (1990) or *Crystal Cave* (1989), while others were mere rip-offs of existing commercial games like *Super Mario Bros. 2* (1988) and – quite interestingly – *Wolfenstein 3D* (1992).

The games from the Wisdom Tree library are exemplary for the genre of Christian games. Christian games are commercially released video games explicitly appropriating the (Western) Christian tradition, including the Bible and its reception, usually (but not exclusively) for the purpose of providing faith-appropriate content for children and young adults, and/or proselytizing non-believers. The study of this genre provides knowledge and insight about a new stage in the contemporary appropriation of the Bible, the development of (parts of) Christendom that want to integrate the possibilities of the new medium, while negotiating its (supposed) problematic characteristics, and the general history of video games as an emerging medium.

In this presentation, I will introduce the often unknown world of the Christian game genre from a historical and a religion study perspective, using short case studies from the Wisdom tree library as illustrations, to provide the audience with new insights on this fascinating track within the history of video gaming.

## Government Funding and Developing Entertaining Games Based on Political History

Rüdiger Brandis

Achtung Autobahn Studios | Flying Sheep Studios | University of Göttingen

Achtung Autobahn Studios was founded in Cologne, Germany, to produce historical entertainment games with a focus on social-realistic and political themes, with special interest in contemporary and 20th century European history. To reflect this, our first project, *Berlin Maniacs*, is based on the 1968 student movements throughout the Western World, their various left-leaning political agendas and their further development in the years following. The game is set in West Berlin, therefore our early concepts dove deep into increasingly violent clashes between student protesters and the German police, as well as the development of terrorist organisations like the Red Army Faction.

Lining our company like this meant three things: first, we were basing our design heavily on academic historical research, while still aiming to create an entertainment game foremost. This meant, second, that in order to make the game attractive to publishers, we thus had to work around the fact that our topic is not widely known within the gaming community. And thirdly, as we didn't have any private funds to start the development we were relying on German government funding.

In this talk, I will dive into the contradictions this company profile created for us and the different stakeholders that we were trying and had to accommodate: our own political interest in the student movement, the mass-appeal to publishers and gamers that might have never heard of it and, finally, a State entity that will not fund games that might be critical of its practices outside established norms and narratives.

## Playing the Most Ancient Games: AI and the Archaeological Record of Play

Walter Crist & Cameron Browne  
Maastricht University

Digital methods are at the forefront of a renaissance of scientific research on ancient games. The Digital Ludeme Project has pioneered the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to study ancient games, developing the use of AI playouts to answer archaeological research questions. While the focus of the project covers traditional board games from 3500 BCE until the present day, this paper focuses on the project's methodological accomplishments with regard to AI approaches to the material culture of ancient gaming.

The Ludii General Game System is the basis for this research. It allows for the implementation of any board game, and can use various AI agents to generate playout experiments, where agents play the games against each other and generate gameplay metrics that can be analyzed. These playout experiments can be tailored to address specific questions presented by the archaeological evidence for games. We discuss some examples of this methodology, including the examination of the reported rules of *Ludus Latruncularum* can be played on all of the boards archaeologists have identified as belonging to this game, finding rules that mirror the use-wear on a possible game board from Roman Limburg, and identifying rules that can be played on all boards for the game 58 Holes from the ancient southwest Asia. This research is framed in the context of games as intangible cultural heritage, and will discuss the limits and opportunities of AI playouts with regard to reconstructing ancient practices.

## A Virtual Memorial for the Lack of Physical Ones: The Development of *13 Rosas*, a Game about the Horrors of Fascism and the Spanish Civil War

Casilda de Zulueta  
Gat de Soia

*13 Rosas* is a horror adventure game about the characteristics and mechanisms of fascism in general and the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) in particular. On the 5th of August, 2022, a public demo was released (available on: <https://gatdesoia.itch.io/13-rosas>). In this talk, I would like to focus on the specifics of this game's development as well as on the sociopolitical context in which it is being made. Some considerations being concerns about fetishisation of fascist paraphernalia, the balance between designing an engaging although serious piece of media or how we have managed thus far the exposure and reach of this project while ensuring our personal safety. I will also get into the creation processes and the technical and economical constraints of the prototype development and the goals and general picture of what the game will be in its full release.

## “It’s NOT in the Game”: Commerce and Commemoration in EA Sports FIFA Franchise

Iain Donald

Edinburgh Napier University

This year sees a seismic shift in the world of virtual football as the licensing agreement between EA Sports and FIFA (the governing body of football) that has existed since 1993 comes to an end and going forward *FIFA* (the game) will be known as *EA Sports FC* (BBC, 2022). The franchise and the ecosystem that has built up around it will now morph and evolve separate and distinct from the governing body but remain representative of the sport that body represents. The video games themselves become historical artefacts that represent both a record and an interpretation of successes and failures of football teams and players from each year past. The complex licensing agreements that underpin the game – currently the franchise boasts more than 300 agreements in place with Leagues, Clubs, Player Organisations, Players and Ex-Players, and Stadiums – remain. This talk will consider how those agreements reflect changes in the real-world. From players changing teams and nationalities, clubs re-developing or moving Stadiums, Players and Ex-players being added or removed for a variety of reasons, the game has had to reflect the intricacies of the real world with a measured approach to an avid fanbase of game players and football fans. The result is that each release of the game and the data associated become both historical and ahistorical records. Data that can tell stories that both reflect the real-world winners and losers but can present a fiction that creates new myths and new histories.

## Professional Wrestling Fans and the Use of Video Games to Challenge Official Narratives

Aris Emmanouloudis

University of Amsterdam | SAE Institute Amsterdam

Professional wrestling video games are known to be released with an “expiration date” in mind, so to be replaced by next year’s release (akin to the FIFA or NBA games). However, the labour produced by fans of the games, especially through community engagement on its various creation modes, sustain those “outdated” games, on a metagame level that sometimes not even the developers expect.

Even more interesting is the fact that fans enjoy using said create modes to maintain the memory of wrestlers that for various reasons, WWE, the world’s premiere wrestling company, has tried to erase from its archives. In this research, I will conduct a small-scale observational ethnography and archival research to examine how user-generated content functions as paratextual material of an “actual memory” challenging thus the “manufactured” memory that the company tries to enforce on its followers.

This paper also expands on the attempt to combine the realms of video game studies and professional wrestling studies, an effort that has been currently under development.

## Affects of Cool: Japanese Past-play in Recent Video Game Representations

Laurence Herfs  
Leiden University

Japanese history and heritage hold a complicated space within the global social imaginary. Over the last twenty year, the Japanese government has used its culture industries for the diplomatic purpose of popularizing particular ideas about 'Japan' and 'Japaneseness' under the banner of 'Cool Japan' (Kaneva 2011). Through these efforts, the cultural perception has indeed shifted from that of the slightly strange (Wagenaar 2016, Galbraith 2019) or even perverted (Kinsella 2006, DeWinter 2016), to that of admiration. This is exemplified through the popularization of Japanese pop culture, cuisine and minimalist aesthetics. It can also be perceived from the increasing use of Japan as the gamespace for many major game productions - both recent (*Persona V*, *Yakuza*, *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice*, *Ghost of Tsushima*, *Ghostwire: Tokyo*) and upcoming (*Assassin's Creed Red*, *Silent Hill: f*). Behind the affects of Cool lie governmental strategies that have explicitly worked to produce the *neo-Japanesque brand* through which glittering contemporary modernity is tied to traditional Japanese heritage (Daliot-Bul 2009, Herfs 2020). Within these nation branding efforts, it is not only Japan's present that is being strategically re-presented - it is also the tensions that derive from her complex and double history as both a colonizing and colonized nation (Iwabuchi 2011, Miyake 2015, Hutchinson 2019) and historical anxieties around national identity *vis-à-vis* the Asian and Western continents (Morris-Suzuki 1998, Oguma 2002, Hutchinson 2019). In this paper, I will explore the mechanics of a set of contemporary Japanese videogames in order to determine how they do and do not allow us to past-play with Japanese heritage and history. I will explore how the positioning of signifiers of Japanese history and cultural memory negotiates underlying unresolved tensions regarding their contested history, drawing upon both Japanese self-representations in *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* and *Persona V*, as well as through comparative representations of Japan from a Westerncentric gaze in *Ghost of Tsushima*.

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## A Digital Hajj: Developing an Educational Game Presenting the Ottoman Pilgrimage to Mecca

Tyler Kynn

Central Connecticut State University

This on-site presentation at TIPC3 will present my current work on *The Hajj Trail* ([www.hajjtrail.com/game](http://www.hajjtrail.com/game)), a digital teaching tool produced through Twine which aims to present the cultural history of the early modern Ottoman World through an interactive and accessible historical simulation. The project aims to bring the experiences found in early modern pilgrimage narratives to students through an interactive digital platform. The format of *The Hajj Trail* simulation builds off the style of the 1970s educational simulation '*The Oregon Trail*' that generations of American public-school students played during their elementary education. *The Hajj Trail* expands on the concepts of that older educational tool and repurposes it for an educational introduction to the cultural history of the early modern Islamic World – and in particular the Ottoman Empire. The simulation takes students along the Ottoman caravan route from Istanbul to Mecca where they encounter the beauty and difficulty of traveling in the early modern world as sourced from early modern travel and pilgrimage narratives themselves.

The presentation will discuss design choices and balancing the student/player experience with the educational goals of the project.

### Replaying Early Videogame History: The Channel F

Matthew Michaud,<sup>1</sup> Shankar Ganesh,<sup>1</sup> John Aycock<sup>1</sup>, Katie Biittner<sup>2</sup> & Carl Therrien<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Calgary

<sup>2</sup> MacEwan University

<sup>3</sup> Université de Montréal

Companies like Atari and Nintendo dominate the discourse of early video game consoles, but in fact there were entrants in the home console market which preceded them. Here we focus on the Fairchild Channel F, a 1976 console that had the usual faux woodgrain, unusual hand controllers, and introduced game cartridges in the modern sense. Another notable aspect of the Channel F for the time was that the engineer overseeing the project, the late Jerry Lawson, was Black.

Less than thirty games were published for the system during the narrow window of time when the Channel F and its derivatives were sold. We look at console and game production from a behind-the-scenes perspective, drawing on material from Lawson's archived papers, as well as a technical analysis of selected games from the corpus. The latter makes use of an AI-driven system we have built which automatically plays games to exercise their code as we gather data from them.

What we find is that the necessary knowledge to bring the Channel F and its games to fruition was not restricted to one area. Programming expertise was required, but also an understanding of engineering, both mechanical and electrical. Console game design itself was evolving rapidly at the time, influenced by arcade games as well as electromechanical and traditional physical games. Our own view of the Channel F is not restricted to one area either, and through archaeology, computer science, and game history we place the lesser-known Channel F in a richer context.

## Using the Tools of the Present to Explore the Past through Digital Interactive Narrative Design

Sahar Mirhadi,<sup>1</sup> Callum Deery,<sup>1</sup> Florence Smith Nicholls,<sup>2</sup> Sunny Thaicharoen<sup>2</sup> & Amy Smith<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of York

<sup>2</sup>Queen Mary University of London

Agony Haunt is an interactive narrative game which aims to explore the Victorian approach to the mystical practice of divination. The game was built as part of the Intelligent Games and Game Intelligence (IGGI) game jam in January 2023. As part of the design process, we used a number of AI tools, such as Midjourney and ChatGPT, to create artistic assets and to aid in writing narrative segments. Through doing so, we investigated how generative AI can help inspire and create an artistic expression of the past through game design. We plan for our contribution to the conference to orient around sharing our experiences using these modern-day tools to explore, and be inspired by, the mid-Victorian era and the occult practices of mystics at that time. This is a visually rich game that captures in multiple mediums an essence of that period in history, where science and spirituality were considered to be in close accord. We will discuss the benefits, and also the difficulties, of using these technologies in a game development project with heavy time restraints, as we feel that those wishing to engage with the past via this medium can benefit from a deeper understanding of the new challenges and benefits that the rise of generative AI can bring to this domain.

The game can be found here: <https://smirhadi.itch.io/agony-haunt>

## Putting Games In a Museum In a Game

Johnnemann Nordhagen

Dim Bulb Games

After working on a project where I needed to collect many examples of a particular mechanic in games, I thought it would be useful to curate game mechanics in one place. At the same time, I saw a tweet referencing "A Museum of Fishing Mechanics", and thus the first entry in a (hopeful) series was born: The Museum of Mechanics: Lockpicking. This is a playable collection of lockpicking minigames from many different games and genres, looked at through the eye of a game designer, for the purpose of documenting these mechanics for other designers. I went through a process of finding appropriate minigames, tracking down the games themselves or captures of the gameplay, and reimplemented what I considered the important parts in the Museum. This started as an Itch project, and was released as a commercial version on Steam in early 2022. The source code was also released for free on Github. From the launch release: "The game presents a collection of minigames in a museum environment that the player can explore, in which each minigame is an exhibit. Each is accompanied by illuminating written commentary from Nordhagen, covering historical background and context, a description of the mechanics, and some design analysis of how successful the mechanic is in the context of the game."

I'd love to talk about the project, the process of building and curation, and how this might differ from normal game curation (and normal design analysis!).

## On Wings of History: Playing with the Past in *Microsoft Flight Simulator*

John-Alan Pascoe

Many games are explicitly presented as being about the past. This includes games set in the past (e.g. *Assassin's Creed*, *Plague Tale*), games in which the play controls the course of history (e.g. *Civilization*, *Old World*, *Europa Universalis*) and games set in the present, but which are about uncovering the past (e.g. *Uncharted*, *Tomb Raider*). However, games which are not explicitly about the past also offer opportunities for playful interactions with the past. This contribution will examine the opportunities for such interactions in *Microsoft's Flight Simulator* (MSFS) franchise.

Despite its focus usually lying on contemporary aviation, MSFS allows players to interact with both aviation history and non-aviation history. For aviation history, MSFS offers the possibility to interact with material culture (i.e. historical aircraft), to relive historical events, and to practice historical skills. For non-aviation history, MSFS allows players to examine the geographical context of famous buildings and landmarks. It also allows the recreation of historical voyages or the examination of borders or other geographic relationships between places. While the latter could also be done via applications such as Google Earth, the acts of navigation required within MSFS, create a more active cognitive involvement with the geography and landscape.

This presentation will discuss these different ways of interacting with the past within MSFS, as well as how they are participated in and enhanced by the wider ecosystem of official marketing and DLCs, third party freeware and payware mod developers, and streamers and YouTubers.

## The Archaeology Awakens: Archaeogaming as a New Learning Tool

Amanda Daltro de Viveiros Pina

University of Sao Paulo | Leiden University

This presentation aims to discuss concepts and applications of digital archaeology, focusing on the step by step of making an archaeogaming named "Heritage Under Attack!". This work is part of a Ph.D. project in development at the University of Sao Paulo (Brazil) in partnership with Leiden University (The Netherlands). It is a proof-of-concept project, and the goal is to create an archaeogaming based on heritage and archaeology concepts to teach teenagers between the last years of middle school. It will be presented the step-by-step creation of the game "Heritage Under Attack!" and the obstacles for an archaeologist to make a game that can be used as a learning tool in daily classrooms. Methodologically, the practical step will be subdivided into modeling the three-dimensional objects, texturing and creating scenarios, and programming the interactive environment. The modeling software chosen was Blender, a free and open-source program, and the programming software chosen was Unity 3D. To conclude, possible reflections about the role of archaeogaming in education will be pointed out.

## “Tribunal Révolutionnaire”: Depicting Oppression and Upheaval in *We. The Revolution*

Andrew Reid  
Abertay University

*We. The Revolution* is a narrative-driven crime-adventure game set in Paris in 1790, during the early period of the French Revolution. The player adopts the role of Alexis Fidèle, a judge within the fragile Parisian justice system at the height of the French Revolution in the late-eighteenth century. The game’s narrative climaxes are spread across a multitude of different backdrops to the French Revolution: the courtroom, where the player oversees criminal prosecutions where decisions affect Fidèle’s public image to both commoners and revolutionaries; at home, where players choose how to spend evenings with family in order to maintain or repair tumultuous relationships with family members and their competing political interests; and in the streets, where players assert Fidèle’s dominance and influence over important figures as they navigate the delicate power structures in society. The result is a multi-faceted simulation that is loosely reflective of the Revolutionary Tribunal – a court established in 1792 to process politically-driven crimes – and the political and social complexities of French oppression and upheaval on the role of Fidèle as the reflection of the judiciary system. This paper explores this reflection through the prism of the 3A Framework, a theoretical and conceptual model for analysing games-as-text through a historical lens. The paper will present a case study analysis of *We. The Revolution* that will explore the account, accuracy, and authenticity of the game’s depiction of the French Revolution, and the significance of its contribution to the knowledge, understanding, and collective memory surrounding historical periods and events.

## Playing Dress-Up in the Past: Using Digital Dress-up Dolls to Display Historical Textile Collections Online

Alexandra Rive  
University of Dundee

Online dress-up doll games are often dismissed as simple and casual games for tween girls. They occupy a smaller portion of scholarly research than other 'serious' games, despite their popularity with players. Research on historically themed games, in particular, has often focused on combat or strategy. Yet clothing and avatar creation are often crucial in how we establish and embody the past we are playing, whether that's at the beginning of entering the game-world or as play in its own right.

This presentation will discuss the findings of my Digital Heritage MSc research exploring existing dress-up games representing clothing in the past. It considered the potential for this style of gaming to be used to display museum textile collections online in a way that is engaging, interactive and more closely represents the experience of getting dressed in the past.

The research included the creation of a fully playable 'Late Victorian' dress-up game using freely available software in order to establish the feasibility of small organisations utilising these styles of games. By making the game, I was able to consider some of the practical and conceptual challenges involved in the process. Alongside practical challenges like silhouettes, fabric textures, and poor-quality photography, the process also raised wider questions about identity and diversity in the past.

## “This Is the Will of Allah!”: Simulating the Crusades and Political Ideology in *Ancestors Legacy* (2018)

Juan Manuel Rubio Arévalo  
Central European University

*Ancestors Legacy* is a real-time strategy videogame set in the Middle Ages and developed by Polish Studio Destructive Creations. In *Ancestor's Legacy*, the player can choose one of five civilizations: Vikings, Anglo-Saxons, Teutons, Slavs and Saracens (this the last one was added post-release as part of a DLC) which corresponds to the civilizations depicted in the game's single-player campaigns. These campaigns are narrative-driven and follow the exploits of specific individual characters such as Rurik I, Harold II Godwinson, and Boleslav I, which fits within the game's "Great Men" understanding of history. Of these, two are set in crusading scenarios: the Teutonic Knights actions in the Baltic in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and Saladin's battles against the Kingdom of Jerusalem in 1187.

The way in which the developers at Destructive Creations portray medieval history and the crusades in *Ancestors Legacy* cannot be understood without considering other games developed by the studio. As the German website [keinenpixel.de](http://keinenpixel.de) has noted, some of the developers at Destructive Creations are sympathetic to extreme-right wing ideologies (if not openly neo-fascist) which can be seen in some of their games, with *IS Defender* being possibly the most flagrant example. This turret-survival game asks the player (who embodies a NATO soldier) to defend Europe from ISIS terrorists who arrive to European coasts in dingy boats, shout in Arabic and wear turbans and headscarves. Even some of this game's achievements color the gaming experience in explicit right-wing tones, with the achievement "Crusader" being rewarded for completing the game.

This paper analyses how Destructive Creations simulate the crusades and what is the political ideology guiding its representation while keeping in mind the studios problematic record with right-wing ideologies. The paper argues that *Ancestors Legacy*, despite offering a mostly accurate portrayal of many of the events, frames them in a way that equates medieval crusading to contemporary religious and ethnic tensions, favoring a right-wing understanding of history around the "clash of civilizations" narrative. In order to do this, the game offers a ludonarrative approach in which the narrative of the game is compared to its gameplay-mechanics, objectives and aesthetics to argue its thesis.

## Archaeogaming: Twine as Medium for Communicating Archaeological Research to the Public

Despoina V. Sampatakou  
University of York

This paper is a short presentation of my current research as a PhD student at the University of York, where I am looking into different media and techniques of communicating archaeological research. The aim of my study is to examine whether and to what degree an archaeologist can communicate their research to the wider public and stakeholders without employing professionals, undergoing long training, or using huge funds, as well as to explore different media that would fit this purpose.

For this reason, I have created and evaluated three different forms of archaeological storytelling: a textual narrative, an interactive narrative using Twine, and a VR experience, all based on the same story. Twine is an open-source authoring tool for telling interactive, non-linear stories. Authoring tools, software that helps non experts in coding to develop interactive digital narrative (IDN) artefacts, are a common tool used by archaeologists and historians to communicate their work, as they could contribute to contextualising cultural heritage hence turn it into meaningful information to the wider public.

All three methods have positive and negative attributes as tools for communicating archaeological research to the public, but the main focus of the paper will be the Twine version of the story, discussing the advantages and disadvantages of the tool compared to the other two forms that are commonly used for education purposes in heritage.

## *Valiant Hearts 2's Coming Home to Netflix Mobile Games: WW1-era Video Games' Next 'Big Thing'?*

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After funding the first-ever German remake of WW1 classic *All Quiet on the Western Front* (2022), the media production push of Netflix into this era continues with the sequel to *Valiant Hearts* (Ubisoft Montpellier, 2014), which normalized WW1 as a setting for mainstream video games. *Valiant Hearts: Coming Home* (Ubisoft / Old Skull Games) is to be released shortly after being announced as a Netflix Game exclusive to mobile devices on 31st January 2023, marking it arguably as the current flagship of this new and developing gaming platform. It will be curious to analyze what reception to this sequel will be, considering the platform exclusivity, the doubling down on representation of black characters, which caused controversy in *Battlefield 1's* (EA DICE, 2016) portrayal of WW1, and the fact that the game comes out in a time when the Russian' invasion of Ukraine, the most significant and the bloodiest military conflict in Europe since 1945, is taking place. What does the most significant global audience oriented mobile video game representation of WW1 after the period of centenary look like? What will be the initial reaction and reception of a sequel on a subscription-only platform like Netflix Games (a potentially controversial step) to a fan-beloved *Valiant Hearts*?

## This is the Way: Memory and Ancient Geography in *The Forgotten City*

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Geography is what we use to understand our place in the world. We drive around from memory, map distances in our head, and attach personal memories to places. Without realizing it, we are embedded in geography. Geography is an innovation connected to what we know and understand because we have anchored ourselves overtime by memorizing familiar landscapes. While most video games employ standard maps, *The Forgotten City* (2021) does not offer a city map. Instead, it is a memory-making game. Just as we remember our ways around our home city, so too must we as the main character embed ourselves in the ancient past and memorize the streets of antiquity.

*The Forgotten City*, which appears to be based on a Roman city at first glance, is representative of past places. *The Forgotten City* has integrated archaeological and textual sources of the past in order to build a multi-perspective work. Quite, in its literal meaning, *The Forgotten City* is a video game that offers a playground that intersects with the past. Thus, memorizing geography within this game is of the utmost importance as one must know that 'this is the way' back to the portal in order to survive. This idea of geographical memory within the game is extracted from primary sources relating to ancient city grids. Thus, the connection between memory-making in games and geographical memory through representation of past places will be explored—specifically, between the city layout in *The Forgotten City* and the city of Alexandria, Egypt.

## The Girl and The Fox: Past-play and Identification in *Never Alone*

Keerthi Sridharan

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Recent work in critical game studies has illustrated the need to take sociocultural context into account when examining the role of games and play in society. Games can function as moderating spaces that reshape players' relationships to culture, history, and community, as demonstrated by studies on "past-play". To explore these considerations using a multi-modal, multi-scalar, formal, and interdisciplinary approach, this pilot study explores player responses to the video game *Never Alone* (Kisima Ingitchunga), examining how the past is re-created and experienced through play, how this differs across the various components of gameplay in the game, and how the experience of play shapes personal heritages and histories in the present. Using an analytical framework borne out of MDA-informed review analysis, participants (N=7) were led through initial experience playtests, an online questionnaire, and interviews and retroactive think-aloud procedures. This work presents preliminary conclusions regarding the experience of *Never Alone*, the portrayal of Indigenous culture in gameplay contexts, and the affective and reflexive processes taking place after play, as well as methodological considerations relating to the role of identification in studying and designing past-play.

## Spatiality of Violence as Seen in the Digital Representation of Ancient Greek World (5th c. BCE): *Assassin's Creed Odyssey*

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Leiden University

This paper investigates how different virtual topographies of violence are represented and experienced in the 2018 *Assassin's Creed: Odyssey*. How does this popular action role-playing video game, with its premise of retrieving oneself through a violent world, portray such violence and its spatiality in the historical setting of the ancient Greek world (5<sup>th</sup> century BCE)? To explore this question, the paper analyses three different virtual spaces of violence that feature prominently in the game: 1) the Aegean Sea, a space of actual and threatening violence, that triggers the player to a form of experienced territoriality and a sense of anxiety for unpredictable attacks; 2) Thermopylae, where the violence of its battle is memorialised and produces a virtual *lieux de mémoire* (Nora 1989); and lastly, 3) Delos, the sacred island where violence was strictly forbidden, evoking questions about normativity and norm transgression in the virtual world. Besides this spatial exploration, the paper also addresses the temporal, transformative character of violence and its consequences as the game proceeds, as the bodily and moral implications of violence decrease through the *odyssey* of the character. Through a critical analysis of these virtual places of violence - differentiating between its experience, memory and normativity - the paper ultimately attempts to reflect on an understudied aspect of the *spatial turn* (Bourdieu 1980; Bachmann-Medick 2016), integrating the dialectics of space and violence (Foucault 1967; Riess & Fagan 2016) in the realm of historic video games (Gunzel 2019).

# “As You Write Your Odyssey...”: An Empirical Study of Classics Students’ Play Interests and Ergodic Characterization in Historical Video Games

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Although historical game studies is around twenty years old, empirical research into how audiences play historical games remains scarce (Chapman et al. 2017: 365). Previous scholarship has examined audience perceptions of ‘accuracy’ (Burgess & Jones 2022; Copplestone 2017), students’ assessments of history in games (Hatlen 2012), senses of empathy (Gilbert 2019), or informal learning (Beavers 2019), but research into actual play processes is lacking. This paper discusses the results of a game experiment performed at Ghent University (Belgium) and the University of Bristol (United Kingdom). Over the course of eight weeks, two cohorts of Classics students (of different genders, education programs, and prior game experience) played *Assassin’s Creed Odyssey* (2018, Ubisoft Quebec) and reported on their experiences with the game’s protagonist, Alexios/Kassandra. Building on game character theory (e.g., Vella 2015), characterization theory (Vandewalle & Malliet 2020), play motivations (e.g., Fernández-Vara 2019: 31-33) and previous analyses of Alexios/Kassandra (Cole 2022), we investigated how players constructed their in-game presence. We found that different interests collided in players’ characterization processes, including (but not limited to) historical motivations, or playing the character as an authentic hero of Greek mythology. This paper addresses how players handled specific decisions such as character selection, narrative choices, side-quests, or customization, and the role (if any) that (perceptions of) history and authenticity played in these decisions. We also explore how this experiment lays the groundwork for future explorations of player experience in historical video games, and how empirical evidence nuances theoretical discussions of historical games more broadly.

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## Mapping Empires in *Victoria 3*

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This contribution will argue that the world map in Paradox Interactive's latest grand strategy game *Victoria 3* (2022) draws inspiration from historical maps and that the imperial gaze of "Western" nations at the world is thereby reproduced, despite claims by the developers that they have critically engaged the problem. This contribution will focus on the visualization of gameplay processes on the world map presented in the game. *Victoria 3* puts the player in control of Western-typed nation states, during the 19th and early 20th century. In contrast, players are disabled from playing as indigenous governmental structures differing from the Western-typed state model. In this context, the game enables players to partake in the imperialistic/colonial endeavours of European and, more generally, Western-typed nations. By using mapping techniques prominent in imperial/colonial maps of the time period e.g., the use of colour coding for "civilized nations" and representing indigenous governmental structures as blank spaces on the map, the game evokes concepts of national/colonial territoriality, the narrative of cultural superiority of "Western" nations, and the imagination of indigenous peoples as passive subjects to colonialization via its visual design. This contribution will thus build on Adam Chapman's recent argument of the relationship between game space and power in historical strategy games. Adapting Ted Friedman's argument of "spatial stories" in historical strategy games, it will argue that the player's relationship with space in the game is visualized as a Western-typed imperialist one in its world map.