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Beyond Bloodsport: The Slow Feeder Effect

Defining a new genealogy in conflict-heavy roleplay video games by subverting player expectations and emphasizing agency.

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A research paper submitted to the University of Dublin in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science Interactive Digital Media

2024

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude towards my advisor, Radek Przedpełski, for his detailed guidance and feedback throughout the writing and editing of this paper. His body of knowledge and unique perspective was indispensable in the completion of my work.

I would also like to extend infinite thanks to everyone who supported me during this project, particularly my wonderful partner Gilda, my incredible colleagues, draft-readers, late-night-panicked-text receivers, and everyone who allowed me to speak at length about this subject over the last four months. I would like to especially thank my friend Doreen Zhao for introducing me to games that have changed my life.

Abstract

This dissertation explores the concept of the Slow Feeder Effect in conflict-heavy roleplay video games, proposing a new approach to interactive digital narratives that subverts player expectations and emphasizes agency. Video games, as influential media, shape perceptions and behaviors of over 1.2 billion players globally. Commercially successful high-stimulation games have the ability to perpetuate desensitization to violence, harmful biases and unhealthy emotional mechanisms. However, this medium also has the ability to create uniquely immersive empathetic experiences. This research suggests the concept of Slow Feeder Games (SFGs), which prioritize slow gratification and complex narratives, fostering empathy and critical thinking.

Using *The Last of Us Part II* (2020) and *Disco Elysium* (2019) as case studies, this research demonstrates how developers can successfully integrate SFG principles without compromising mass appeal, challenging players' moral choices and deepening emotional engagement. By aligning modern gaming with twentieth-century performance art, particularly Marina Abramovic's *Rhythm 0*, the dissertation underscores the potential of interactive media to provoke introspection, problem-solving ability and empathy.

This work addresses questions about player agency, the influence of in-game actions on real-life behaviors, and the ethical responsibilities of game developers. The findings advocate for a new genealogy in video game development, emphasizing long-form, low-stimulation experiences that encourage thoughtful engagement and positive emotional outcomes. This dissertation aims to elevate the standards of interactive digital media, offering a blueprint for creating games that are not only entertaining but also enriching and reflective of the human condition.

Keywords: Roleplay video games, Player agency, Empathy, Video game development, Moral choices, Emotional engagement, Positive emotional outcomes

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Terminology and Abbreviations

Terms Defined by the Author

Slow Feeder Games (SFG): low stimulation, slow gratification, long form interactive digital media that mimics the reward and intrigue of popular high stimulation games

Jumpman: the original name for the ubiquitous NAMCO character Mario, originally in the 1983 platform game by Randy Glover. Low concept main character whose primary purpose is to give players a digital corpus. Easily projected upon, easily manipulated by developers to suit various storylines and motivations

Industry Terms

AAA/Triple A Games: high production, high budget, functionally sophisticated games made by well-funded large studios, hundreds of developers, and often played by huge audiences

Gamer: one who plays video games habitually

RPG: role playing games. Games in which the player inhabits a fully-realized character with their own story, as opposed to a 'jumpman' or blank-slate everyman

MMO: mass multiplayer online games

NPC: non-player character, a character whose actions are not controlled by the player but generated randomly by a computer or predetermined by developers

MAU: Monthly active user

FPS: first-person shooter

TLOU2: The Last of Us, The Last of Us 2

GTAV: Grand Theft Auto V

COD: Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2

Introduction

To say that video games and interactive digital media are simply “here to stay” would, at this juncture in their narrative, be a gross anachronism and a sweeping discredit to the influential capability of simulating life itself. Video games, as we know them, are a definitive influence on the thoughts and lives of the over 1.2 billion people (as of 2023) who play them.¹ They are also hewn in the same crucible that produced all great works of media, from the ancient cave paintings in Lascaux, to Shakespeare’s sprawling oeuvre, to a Scorsese masterpiece; that is, the human condition. Therefore, the discourse around video games and interactive media needs to evolve to a level of depth beyond simply whether they affect our perception of reality. The science at this point is clear; it’s not a question of if, but rather: how much?

Since their inception in the early 1970s, video games (and interactive digital media as a whole) have been made to run a gauntlet of scrutiny for their content and messaging.² Whether video games with violent content cause real-world antisocial behavior is a complicated one, fraught with conflicting research far beyond the scope of this paper. That being said, it is widely acknowledged that many games employ highly stimulating experiences that can lead to addictive patterns of behavior, particularly in titles that depend on profits from digital advertising, subscriptions, and microtransactions.³ Whether this is done with purpose or simply an unintended consequence of operating in today’s market is difficult to say. Beyond controversial functionalities, video games also have the ability to perpetuate and exacerbate real-life socio-political issues.

There is evidence suggesting that exposure to intensely violent games may desensitize or entice individuals to real-world violence, as well as cause them to develop marked indifference towards the depicted suffering of others.⁴ It’s important to recognize that video games encompass a wide spectrum of experiences beyond mere violence simulation, often reflecting and simulating various aspects of life and society in a way that can stimulate altruism, empathy and inner reflection.⁵

To better understand how video games interact with human experiences and perspectives, this paper aligns modern gaming with twentieth century performance art. While obviously lacking digital components, these performances were often some

¹ Clement, J. "Global gaming penetration Q3 2023, by age and gender" Statista. Feb 8, 2024

² Karlsen, Faltin. "Analyzing Game Controversies: A Historical Approach to Moral Panics and Digital Games." In *The Dark Side of Game Play*, 1st ed., 18. Routledge, 2015. eBook ISBN 9781315738680.

³ Zdravkova, Ana, and Katerina Zdravkova. "Are Video Games Designed to be Addictive?" Paper presented at ETHICOMP 2018, Polish-Japanese Academy of Information Technology (PJAiT) and SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities Tricity, Sopot, Poland, September 24-26, 2018.

⁴ Carnagey, Nicholas L., Craig A. Anderson, and Brad J. Bushman. "The Effect of Video Game Violence on Physiological Desensitization to Real-Life Violence." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 43, no. 3 (2007): 489-496. Available online July 17, 2006.

⁵ Greitemeyer, Tobias, Silvia Osswald, and Markus Brauer. "Playing prosocial video games increases empathy and decreases schadenfreude." *Emotion* 10, no. 6 (2010): 796.

of the first forms of interactive media. Particularly, Marina Abramovic's *Rhythm 0* (1974) is an example of how human beings interact with an environment created by an artist (or developer) as well as any props or symbols within that environment. This example is particularly interesting and applicable to a gaming parallel due to the passive nature of the artist and the work's active communal audience interaction.

The ability of a game, or piece of interactive digital media, to impact the real life and actions of an individual player is well documented; the Tetris effect, which describes how players occasionally 'see' Tetris blocks in real life after playing for an extended period. In a less literal sense, developers can harness the immersive, emotional experience of an interactive narrative to counteract desensitization to violence, subvert expectations in areas like conflict resolution, and build human empathy. This analog idea of universal *philia* can be achieved in a digital context by redesigning the way we conceptualize interactive digital narratives.

It is imperative to consider how to leverage this medium for positive human development, such as fostering critical thinking, promoting non-violent conflict resolution, and encouraging emotional regulation, especially in relation to portraying societal "others" or in-game enemies. This idea is not dissimilar to Joan Ganz Cooney's original conception for the children's television program, *Sesame Street*; Cooney and her production team sought to "master the addictive qualities of television and do something good with them"⁶. To "go with the grain" of a problem in order to alleviate its most destructive capabilities is a form of mitigating negative impact in this case; the *Sesame Street* team knew children were watching hours of television daily, and instead of advocating for abstaining from the medium altogether, they designed something worth watching. The central thesis of this paper is the idea that we, as interactive digital media developers, can design something worth playing.

Video game developers have the opportunity to mitigate negative impacts of their games by creating games that are not just entertaining, but also enriching. This can, theoretically, be achieved by offering long-form, low-stimulation experiences with slow gratification. The caveat here is that these games must be as alluring, engaging and fun as their violent, high-stimulation competitors, not only to players in general but particularly adults who expect and enjoy mature media. This paper uses two case studies of AAA games: *The Last of Us 2* (2020) and *Disco Elysium* (2019). Both were developed with huge budgets, development teams, and player audiences, despite this, they managed to employ the aforementioned features without compromising mass appeal and success.

Games can, and perhaps even should, still feature bloodshed, sex, crimes, and debauchery. Condemning all games that feature violence or physical conflict as 'bad',

⁶ Davis, M. (2008). *Street Gang: The Complete History of Sesame Street*. Viking Press.

morally wrong, or harmful is both unrealistic and unproductive. The goal of this paper is, simply put, to raise the standards of video game development to make players think more. Confront players with the consequences of their actions, make difficult decisions, and outsmart situations that could, in another universe, be remedied by emptying a machine gun clip.

Developers owe it to their players to not assume they hold an uncomplicated view of the world. Subverting their expectations means that gamers are less likely to associate predetermined standards, like a gory boss defeat and swooning damsel reward, with progress and success. In this framework, it becomes easier to draw parallels between the digital and material impact this subversion would have.

Despite the complicated perception and lineage of FPS and violence-heavy video games, it must be said: these games are fun. They're popular for a reason, people want to play them, and they shouldn't be taken off the market. Gamers should have access to high-quality, research-backed conflict-heavy interactive narratives that interest and challenge them; to create those games, we must depart from traditional narrative structure, disavow decades-old media biases and start fresh.

This paper proposes the establishment of a new genealogy in interactive digital media: the Slow Feeder Game. These are interactive stories that confront players with challenging issues and mechanics, prompting not only tactical but also emotional and ethical experiences, problem-solving skills, and creative engagement. Additionally central to this concept is the idea of subverting players' expectations of video games in order to provoke reflection and introspection.

Crucial research questions include: how much does what we do and see in games bleed into real life? Do players feel responsibility for their actions in-game? How does pre-establish knowledge of industry standard video game mechanics influence player decision-making? How does agency influence player decision making and responsibility? What is the worth of feeling responsible for the actions we take in-game? Is it responsible to have purely recreational media centered around actions that cause real-life harm?

This paper aims to reimagine the narrative structure of conflict-heavy role-playing video games by introducing the principles of the Slow Feeder Game (SFG). This work's primary research goal is to investigate how subverting player expectations in interactive narratives and emphasizing player agency can foster deeper engagement and positive emotional outcomes. Chapters I-III describe current development failures and pitfalls within the gaming industry and identify how SFG principles can be effectively integrated into AAA games. Chapter IV discusses how increased player agency has an effect on empathy and decision-making skills. This idea is situated

within the research of Wendy Chun, Marina Abramovic's *Rhythm 0* and the *No Russian* mission from *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* (2009), which serves as a case study of a somewhat successful application of SFG principles. Chapters V and VI will analyze *Disco Elysium* (2019) and *The Last of Us 2* (2020) as a successful implementation of these principles, particularly their subversion of player expectations while still including classic narrative components and serious violence.

ChatGPT 3.5 was used in this paper to format and print citations for both in-text citations and the bibliography, as well as serving as a proofreader and grammar correction tool throughout. See appendix for details.

Rationale: A Note from the Author

Playing video games as a non-male person has allowed me to view them from an outsider's perspective. A lack of seeing my lived experience represented in a meaningful way since early childhood (although less so than people of color, as while only 15% of video games characters are female⁷, only about 13% of all video game characters are non-white⁸) has made pushing games to raise their standards a lifelong passion of mine. Having a deep love for this medium and understanding how life-changing a game can be, for better or worse, necessitates holding it to a higher standard of criticism.

Video games, particularly RPGs, can (often inadvertently) be a crucial vehicle for exploring gender identity and sexuality in a digital space⁹, as well as provide a sandbox for conflict resolution¹⁰, problem-solving¹¹ and interpersonal relationship building¹². While this paper is not necessarily geared towards children and teen-specific game development, I understand that the (nonexhaustive list of) role-playing games mentioned here have the ability to create a space for self exploration and a sense of true belonging and value. This paper is dedicated especially to queer, neurodivergent and otherwise diverse youth in communities that don't support or understand them. My goal with this paper, and all my work, is to create the ideological and ontological infrastructure for a game that serves and honors the depth of this medium and the minds of the people who engage with it.

⁷ Heeter, Carrie. (2014). Femininity and Video Games.

⁸ Williams, Dmitri & Martins, Nicole & Consalvo, Mia & Ivory, James. (2009). The virtual census: Representations of gender, race and age in video games. *New Media & Society - NEW MEDIA SOC.* 11. 815-834. 10.1177/1461444809105354.

⁹ Danielle Nielsen. 2015. Identity performance in role playing games. *Computers and Composition* 38, (2015), 45–56

¹⁰ Gonzalez, C., Saner, L. D., & Eisenberg, L. Z. (2013). Learning to Stand in the Other's Shoes: A Computer Video Game Experience of the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict. *Social Science Computer Review*, 31(2), 236-243.

¹¹ Adachi, P.J.C., Willoughby, T. More Than Just Fun and Games: The Longitudinal Relationships Between Strategic Video Games, Self-Reported Problem Solving Skills, and Academic Grades. *J Youth Adolescence* 42, 1041–1052 (2013).

¹² Garcia, Manuel B., et al. "Promoting Social Relationships Using a Couch Cooperative Video Game: An Empirical Experiment With Unacquainted Players," *International Journal of Gaming and Computer-Mediated Simulations (IJGCMS)* 14, no.1: 1-18.

Chapter I: Taking Inventory

The gaming industry is an attractive jewel in the global economy's crown. Revenue generated worldwide by the gaming industry totaled \$184.4 billion in 2022, more than the music and movie industries combined.¹³ This staggering number presents two key points to consider: firstly, that video game developers have a duty to the vast body of consumers so willing to spend money and time on their work. Secondly, an industry that is so profitable will undoubtedly attract investors and corporate bodies who have a vested interest in prioritizing capital gains over— not just well written thought-out narratives— but players' physical and mental welfare.

This chapter will begin by examining the popularity and financial success of major games like *Fortnite* and *Grand Theft Auto V*, highlighting their impact on the gaming community and industry practices. It will explore the gameplay mechanics and design choices that contribute to their widespread appeal and the potential issues they present. The chapter will further propose a critical overview of the most popular games of 2023 as a foundation for understanding the need for a thematic, narrative, and functionality overhaul in the industry.

Across all consoles, *Fortnite* had the most MAU (monthly active users) of all video games in 2022, with around 221 million users per month.¹⁴ *Grand Theft Auto V* (2013) took fifth place with 30.8 million users per month.¹⁵

Fortnite, first released in 2017 by Epic Games, brought in \$20 billion in revenue in 2022 alone, climbing dramatically from \$5.8 billion in 2021.¹⁶ Globally, 70% of *Fortnite* players typically clock in at between zero and ten hours of play per week, but 30% play from eleven to twenty-one hours per week. *Grand Theft Auto* is a remarkable example of successful game development, generating over \$8 billion in income and maintaining a high MAU count despite having been released in 2013.¹⁷

In *Fortnite*, players drop into an arena and hunt each other until only the winner remains. Plot and lore in this game are scant and unnecessary to understanding the gameplay itself, and gamers can enter round after round of battling strangers virtually infinitely. The graphics are bright and comical, with childlike colors and silly playable character 'skins' like Chewbacca from *Star Wars* and an anthropomorphic banana, and the game itself lacks the on-screen blood and guts you'd expect from a game centered around mowing other players down with a carousel of automatic weapons.

¹³ Arora, Krishan. "The Gaming Industry: A Behemoth With Unprecedented Global Reach." *Forbes*, November 17, 2023.

¹⁴ Tom Wijman, *The PC & Console Gaming Report 2024* (presentation, Newzoo, 2024), PDF file.

¹⁵ Clement, J. "Grand Theft Auto V MAU on PC and Console 2023," Statista, February 27, 2024

¹⁶ Clement, J. "Fortnite Annual Revenue 2018-2022." Statista. January 9, 2024.

¹⁷ Take-Two Interactive Software, Inc., "Take-Two Interactive Software, Inc. Reports Results for Fiscal Third Quarter 2024," news release, February 8, 2024, <https://take2games.com/ir>.

The issue with *Fortnite* isn't with the violence central to its gameplay, but its functionality; the fact that users can play game after game with little meaningful progress (players can 'level up' their equipment and abilities, but there is no major narrative) or interaction with other players. This problem isn't unique to *Fortnite*, but this title's staggering popularity makes it an intriguing case study. The infinite loop of playable rounds means that gamers can sink hours, even days, into playing this title without interruption. The typical *Fortnite* player is reported to be between 18 and 24 years old, though the average is likely lower due to children misreporting their ages in an attempt to circumvent safety features.¹⁸

In *Grand Theft Auto V*, players are presented with a vast open-world style urban sprawl where they can either engage with the central plot, follow short side quests, or essentially loot and pillage their way through a fictional version of Los Angeles. Players take on control of three main characters over the course of the game, each with their own type of preferred debauchery: Michael, the alcoholic; Trevor, the wild card; and the impressionable Franklin.

The player typically spends their time in this world committing crimes, cavorting with the seedy underbelly of society, and avoiding police confrontation. Some salacious highlights include waterboarding, carjacking, battery, murder and more. Critics often take issue with the game's portrayal of women, with journalist Dave Cook of gaming industry magazine *vg247* noting that they are "either there to be rescued, shouted at, fucked, to be seen fucking...killed, heard prattling away like dullards on their mobile phones or shopping".¹⁹

There has been much research, discussion and hand-wringing on the subject of whether these types of games (high stimulation, violence-centric) are addictive and malicious, often from the same school of thought that once demonized youth culture like skate parks and Marilyn Manson. The fact of the matter is that these games are being made, and people, particularly children, are spending an incredible amount of time and money on them; it is past time to accept that reality and build upon it in a progressive way.

¹⁸ Rohit Shewale, "Fortnite Statistics 2024 (Active Players, Revenue)," Demand Sage, March 21, 2024

¹⁹ Cook, Dave. "GTA 5: Misogyny, Teeth-pulling and Subjectivity." *VG247*, September 20, 2013.

Chapter II: The Jumpman Effect

The problem with *GTA:V* is not that the game allows or encourages violence. Critics' consensus is that Rockstar North, the developer of this game, means to use these controversial scenes to highlight the comedy and irony of nonsensical violence in the real world. One review of IGN notes that a character in-game can be seen "shouting sexual threats at people on a headset whilst playing a first-person shooter ironically called *Righteous Slaughter*".²⁰

The issue in both *GTA* and *Fortnite* is a lack of context, a lack of opportunity to create subversive events by making narrative choices, and majorly, a failure by the games' developers in their duty to their players to create something worth spending an astounding amount of time on. While the developers of *Grand Theft Auto* might have had subversive intentions in depicting an interactive digital Sodom and Gomorrah, it is doubtful that their audience reflected upon these events in the way the creators supposedly intended.

This is hardly the fault of the players themselves and by no means a reflection of their intellect or analytical ability; if a piece of media is presented as a 'game', a means of recreation, what is the likelihood that a player will treat it with the same analytical caution as a Dostoevsky novel?

Again, the intent of this paper is not to clutch ethical pearls, but to harness existing popular narrative structures for a more productive purpose. In *Gamer Trouble*, author Amanda Phillips notes the difficulty and irony of scholarly discourse around violent games, specifically *GTA*, with this quote from the journal *Game Studies*:

"Putting aside the moral questions involved [regarding the murder of a sex worker to get one's money back], the implications of emergence for allowing the player greater freedom, and thus more interesting and challenging situations, are only just beginning."²¹

Phillips' additions in brackets truly denote the slight absurdity of this discussion; to refer to the murder of a sex worker over petty cash as a 'moral question' is ridiculously euphemistic, she argues. The idea that egregious recreational violence (often likely to be inflicted upon women and Brown men in contemporary games²²) is the price we pay for better video games is, even with a generous read, untrue and likely lampshading. Phillips emphasizes this point by mentioning that assigning the ability to

²⁰ MacDonald, Keza. "Grand Theft Auto V Review." IGN, September 16, 2013. Updated October 5, 2021.

²¹ Phillips, A. (2020). *Gamer Trouble: Feminist Confrontations in Digital Culture* (p. 57). NYU Press.

²² Dill-Shackleford, Karen, Douglas Gentile, William Richter, and Jody Dill. 2005. "Violence, Sex, Race, and Age in Popular Video Games: A Content Analysis." In *Handbook of Children, Culture, and Violence*, edited by Nancy E. Dowd, Dorothy G. Singer, and Robin Fretwell Wilson, 155-178. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

gamify sex-based violence to a random, algorithmic or twist-of-fate mechanic “consequently absolves both the game designer and the gamer of any responsibility for the gendered violence that results.”²³

Whether what we do in video games affects how we perceive reality is no longer a matter of “if” but rather a matter of “to what extent”. In *Violence, Sex, Race, and Age in Popular Video Games: A Content Analysis*, social psychologist Karen Dill notes the human ability to both understand that the media in front of them is not real, yet still walk away from that media with an altered perception of reality:

“...it would be an error to assume that those who understand what they see in the media is not real are invulnerable to the messages being presented... human beings, as social creatures, learn lessons from depictions of human social interactions, even if these interactions are not portrayed as real.”²⁴

Amanda Phillips' seminal work *Gamer Trouble* essentially serves as a manifesto affirming this point. A particularly crucial argument she makes is how game design can fundamentally alter our interpretation of human appearance and behavior, and consequently, how the way we design protagonists, antagonists, and narratives has a direct impact on “offline” perception.

The Jumpman

The concept of “jumpman,” which borrows the name of the ubiquitous NAMCO character Mario, represents a low-concept main character whose primary purpose is to give players a digital corpus. This ‘superman’ character type is easily projected upon and manipulated by developers to suit various storylines and motivations. Unlike fully-realized (or fully customizable) characters in role-playing games (RPGs), who come with their own backstories and personalities, Jumpmen are designed to be blank slates. This allows players to insert themselves into the character's role without any predefined narrative constraints. The jumpman is, above all else, a symptom of a game in need of the characteristics Slow Feeder games employ.

The jumpman essentially serves as an extension of the developer's will within the game world while creating a simulation of agency and personification for the player. He provides a straightforward and unobtrusive vessel for gameplay mechanics and narrative progression without requiring the player to develop an inner world or identity for him. Occasionally, the jumpman exhibits features the development team might imagine the player to admire; typically a stoicism or the Gary Cooper “strong and silent” type.

²³ Phillips, A. (2020). *Gamer Trouble: Feminist Confrontations in Digital Culture* (p. 57). NYU Press.

²⁴ Ibid.

By minimizing complexity and depth in character development, the jumpman facilitates a focus on gameplay and interaction over character-driven storytelling. This approach contrasts with more narrative-heavy games where character development and player choices significantly influence the game's outcome, reflecting a broader range of human experiences and emotions.

The jumpman is typically built to have the perceived largest range of appeal to players, which usually amounts to a white cisgender man, typically handsome and heterosexual although often stoically abstinent or sexually distant from women, almost always able-bodied. They typically display some clear motivation (typically a murdered female relative, usually a wife or child), occasionally have various forms of relationships with other characters (usually a scrappy protégé, a sexy will-they-won't-they female sidekick, or arch nemesis), and sometimes have short and simple lore. Some examples of notable jumpmen in AAA games include Captain John Price in the *Call of Duty* franchise, Link from the *Legend of Zelda* series, Master Chief from *Halo*, and Gordon Freeman of *Half Life*.

To explore this archetype more deeply, take the example of Captain Price. Price is a white, cisgender male with a road-worn but handsome visage whose sole purpose in life appears to be fulfilling military objectives. Activision's gaming blog yields little in the way of lore for this figure:

John Price joined the infantry at the age of sixteen and has served in the British Army for eighteen years. One of the youngest cadets to ever graduate the Royal Military Academy as a commissioned officer, he completed Special Service Commando selection and was 'badged' a member of the SAS, proving his worth on countless covert operations over multiple deployments in the Middle East. Promoted to Captain in 2011, call sign 'Bravo Six', Price is the officer in charge of a highly effective unit, tasked with anti-hijacking counter-terrorism, specializing in Close Quarter Battle (CQB), sniper techniques and hostage rescue. He is unofficially missioned to capture or kill high value targets (HVTs).²⁵

With such an interchangeably general biography, it is interesting to note that this description could be ascribed to an object of advanced weaponry without much editing. Price is a utilitarian character in a literal sense. Price's biography also states that "Price always fights for what's right but he knows what's right isn't always what you're fighting for."²⁶ This broad statement is malleable enough to make Price a suitable hero for a wide range of factions, governments and missions; he can be loyal

²⁵ Activision. "Modern Warfare Campaign: Biographies of the Story's Major Players, Part 1." Call of Duty Blog. Last modified September 2019.

²⁶ Ibid.

to (and, in the eyes of players who respect him, ascribe moral value to) any ideology the game developers choose for him. Price has an archetypical protégé in Soap MacTavish, whose personality brings a slight, youthful lightheartedness to the game until he falls in battle, hardening Price's character. Price is likely what developers imagine every *Call of Duty* player thinks of as the perfect soldier; loyal, strong, and just blank enough to allow players to engage in intense, high-stakes scenarios without requiring deep emotional or ethical engagement.



Fig 1. Captain Price

The 2017 study "The Influence of Empathy and Morality of Violent Video Game Characters on Gamers' Aggression"²⁷ by Gao and colleagues found that players are more likely to experience a lack of empathy towards enemies and an approval of violence perpetrated by a protagonist if they felt their in-game character was "justified" in their actions. Those who played characters with justified roles (e.g., killing for moral reasons) exhibited higher levels of implicit aggression compared to those playing unjustified roles (e.g., killing for immoral reasons). High empathy did not always act as a protective factor against aggression; its effect was moderated by the moral features of the game characters.

This study highlights the ethical quagmire that a jumpman character must traverse; while empathy could reduce aggression in unjustified roles, it could enhance aggression in "justified" roles. A simple character with simple motivations can be used to manipulate players into empathizing with questionable acts of aggression, regardless of the implications.

²⁷Gao, Xuemei, Lei Weng, Yuhong Zhou, and Hongling Yu. "The Influence of Empathy and Morality of Violent Video Game Characters on Gamers' Aggression." *Frontiers in Psychology* 8 (2017).

It's not impossible to create a jumpman and an anti-jumpman in the same world; one compelling example is Joel Miller from *The Last of Us* series, which will serve as a case study later in this paper. Joel, despite being a beloved character with a tragic backstory, is a jumpman. He has a stoically tortured energy, a dead daughter, a female friend with whom he has uncomfortable sexual chemistry (Tess, who of course dies early in the game so that Joel can complete his quest), a scrappy protégé by his side (Ellie), and of course, a supermodel jawline with rugged salt-and-pepper stubble.

The game is predicated on Joel taking a job to transport the young Ellie across the nation. The goal of this journey is to reach a hospital trying to find a cure for the zombie-creating virus that has shattered their world, using some aspect of Ellie's immunity to create a vaccine. By the end of the game, Joel develops protective, fatherly feelings for Ellie, mirroring his relationship with his deceased daughter, Sarah. When Joel learns that creating the cure will require Ellie's death, he not only commits a mass shooting in a hospital to save her, but also condemns humanity by preventing the cure's creation.

A game which spends the entire narrative building a strong bond between an orphan and a man who lost his child is the ultimate test of how far the jumpman effect can go. By the end of the game, Joel and Ellie have saved each other from numerous life or death situations and are essentially trauma-bonded. Based on the Gao study, the majority of players would excuse, if not support, Joel's actions in the hospital scene.

The jumpman is not inherently evil or morally compromised, but introduces interesting ethical implications into the process of game development. Principally, the generic nature of a jumpman presents the possibility of a player being able to distance themselves from the action of that character, despite being an active participant in it (during gameplay and cutscenes both). This detachment can make it easier for players to perform violent actions without fully engaging with the moral consequences, as the character's lack of depth and personal story reduces emotional involvement.

Chapter III: Eyes on the Enemy

The technology currently available to game developers allows games to feature striking visuals of not only landscapes, motion, and bloodshed, but also nearly photorealistic renderings of human bodies and faces. It should be said that not all games that depict conflict and violence utilize photorealistic graphics. This is particularly true for games created by indie developers, as building with this level of detail is costly. While calculating total studio spending figures for server storage, paying artists and developers, and other costs can only give us a ballpark idea of what the total price tag was, it is reasonable to assume this figure comes close to CGI-heavy blockbuster films. Games that depict this level of realism often do so by employing advanced graphics engines like Unreal Engine (*Fortnite*), Havok (*The Last of Us 2*, *Starfield*) Unity, and other frameworks that allow developers to build lifelike graphics with realistic physics and environments.



Fig 2. *Baldur's Gate 3* (2023) Larian Studios



Fig 3. *Death Stranding* (2019) Kojima Productions



Fig 4. *The Last of Us 2* (2020) Naughty Dog Studios

Wendy Hui Kyong Chun's work, "Race and/as Technology,"²⁸ explores how race can become a mechanism that both shapes and is shaped by social and media practices. Technology—video games in this case—then become a vehicle for real-life power dynamics to be depicted, enacted, and experimented with. Depictions of race (and

²⁸ Chun, Wendy Hui Kyong. "Introduction: Race and/as Technology; or, How to Do Things to Race." *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 24, no. 1 (2009): 7-35.

theoretically other forms of human social structure) in video games are not only based in the material world, but also have a direct effect upon it. Chun's analysis continues to flesh out how racialized human depictions in fiction often reflect and reinforce societal biases. Media, including video games, use visual cues and narrative tropes to embed racial stereotypes which can influence players' perceptions of real-world race and identity.

Examples of real-life racial biases making their way into video games and digital media are especially plentiful when we focus on the appearance and behaviors of villains. A YouTube video, first posted in August 2023 by a user called ESO with 2.26 million subscribers, features a *Baldur's Gate 3* player trying to create "the most evil character possible" in-game²⁹. The video, which as of May 2024 has over 1.2 million views, features the creator mostly focusing on in-game ability building and behaviors to create a sense of his character's evil motivations.

However, the physical appearance this creator chooses for his diabolical character is compelling as a case study on the intersection of real world racial stereotypes and video games. This is especially due to the lusciously detailed and hyper-customizable character creation engine in *Baldur's Gate 3*.

ESO, the video's creator, selects an origin character called The Dark Urge, which is a physically customizable character with a set backstory. They experience supernatural proclivity towards antisocial behavior, specifically especially bloody and theatrical murders. For his character's race, ESO selects what he calls a "mean, evil half orc". The game's on-screen description of the race lacks any mention of having an inherent love of evil, and in fact reads:

Creatures of intense emotion, half-orcs are inclined to act than contemplate - whether the rage burning their bodies compels them to fight, or the love filling their hearts inspires acts of incredible kindness.

ESO, who appears to be a white British man, adds other features to his character, including a neck tattoo and dreadlocks (which he describes as the only selectable hairstyle that "fit with our character"). The final product is an orc with wide-set nostrils, full lips and a protective hairstyle. Based on Chun's theories, it is reasonable to deduce that ESO is associating stereotypically Black physiognomy, phenotypes and styles with evil and criminality.

²⁹ ESO. "Baldur's Gate 3 Walkthrough Part 1 - EVIL Gameplay Character Customisation D&D Paladin Build!" *YouTube Video*. August 5, 2023. 1:19:13. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vtlw5PHunKc&list=PLI_Xou7GtCi4nM4PMayEPXCdRJM9P64o0.

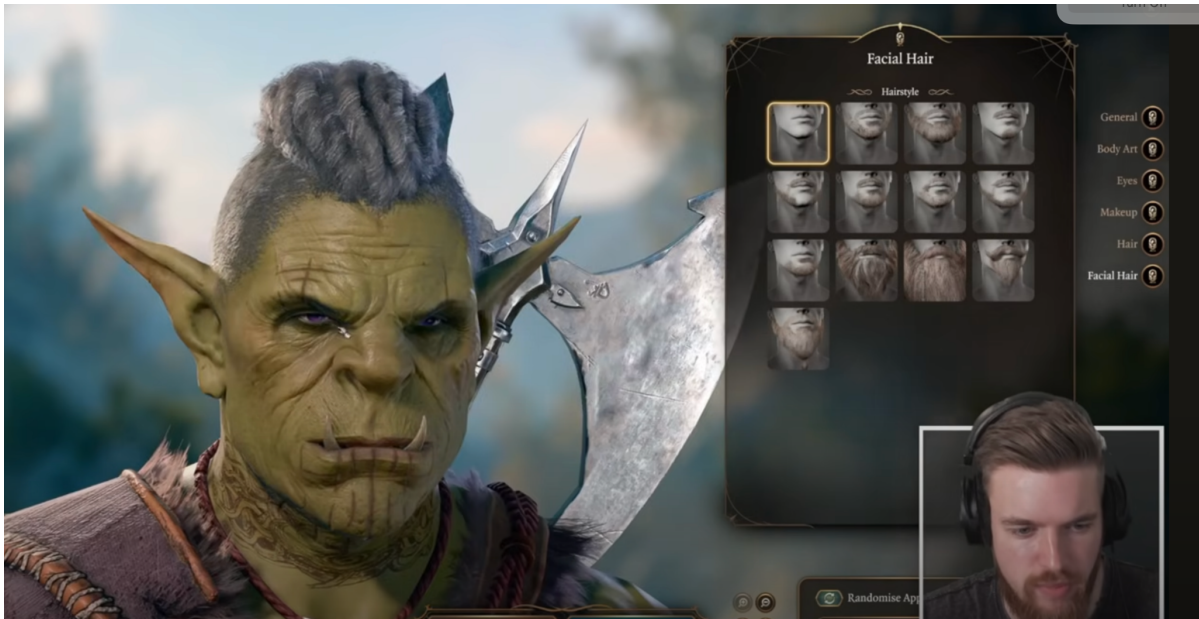
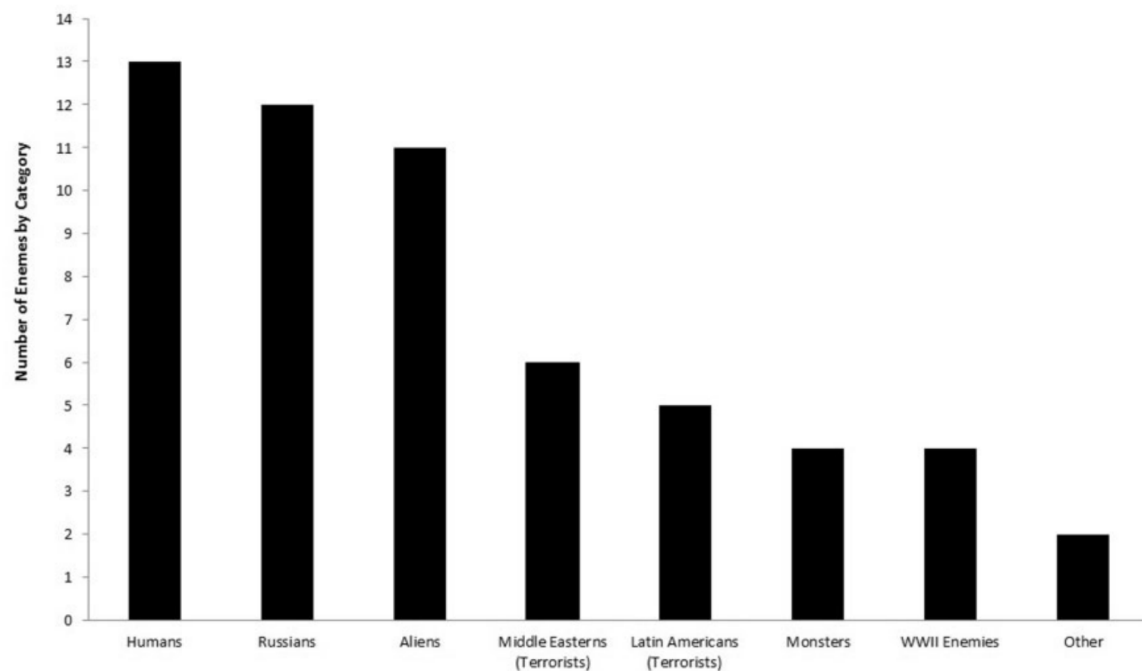


Fig 5. ESO's half-orc character.

Players have the ability to recreate real life racism in video games, especially when certain themes or mechanics are baked into the game. In *Baldur's Gate 3*, the hyper-customizable character creation area and the existence of race in the game's narrative world create opportunities for players to experiment with and replicate real biases. For example, in *Baldur's Gate 3*, a player can choose to embody one of eleven races with thirty-one subraces in total, each with their own special abilities and in-game stereotypes. Playing as a race considered to be 'bad' by the citizens of BG3, like a Drow elf, results in the player getting racially-motivated negative comments from NPCs. By recognizing and working with this concept, developers can move towards creating games that still depict real-life conflict but actively subvert decades-old media biases.

In their analysis of first-person shooter games, Valeriano and Habel (2016) highlight the representation of various races and nationalities of "enemies" in video games with the following graphic labeled Figure 6. Valeriano and Habel analyzed fifty-seven games published between 2001 and 2013, focusing on titles with sales figures totaling over \$1 million, in order to focus on titles with a significant cultural footprint.

The largest group in this study was "humans", which Valeriano and Habel describe as a catch-all for any biologically human enemies with no specific race or nationality. The rest of the data displays an interesting trend; the most onscreen human enemies are Russian, followed by "Middle Easterns" and "Latin Americans".



³⁰ Fig 6.

All three of the largest human populations in this figure are non-Western bodies that the United States has had conflict with within the last century. It is difficult to say with scholarly certainty whether this demographic lineup exists because making in-game enemies familiar to Western audiences is good for mass marketing, or suits a certain agenda. Regardless, the effect is clear: in the world of gaming, Russians, Arabs and Latin Americans are the bad guys.

A large-scale analysis of the United States Department of Defense's frequent overlap with the gaming industry is beyond the scope of this paper, but its existence should be noted for the purposes of expanding this argument. In a 2020 interview with media news outlet *Vice*, Col. Megan Stallings, who serves as the U.S. Marketing and Engagement Brigade commander, spoke about the Pentagon's use of the hugely popular gameplay streaming platform Twitch and gaming conventions for the purpose of recruitment: "At some of our conventions we've done exit surveys. Over 95 percent of the respondents said that they had a positive view of the Army as a result of having visited the U.S. Army esports booth."³¹

Digitally mapping the physiognomy, physicality or nationality of 'enemy' and 'evil' populations onto in-game villains has a well-researched effect on offline, real-world interactions. A 2014 study found that simply playing violent games as a Black

³⁰ Races/Nationalities of 'Enemies' in First Person Shooter Games. Valeriano, B., & Habel, P. (2016). *Who Are the Enemies? The Visual Framing of Enemies in Digital Games*. *International Studies Review*, 18(3), 462–486. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viv007>

³¹ VICE. "RESET: The Unauthorized Guide to Video Game Episode 2." YouTube video, 24:30. June 15, 2020.

character led players to act more aggressively in-game and “increased White participants’ implicit attitudes that Blacks are violent”³². The same can be said for gamers’ opinion on and treatment of women during and after games featuring gender-based violence, as studied by Dill and colleagues³³. Based on this research, it is reasonable to assume that when a gamer who has played most AAA game titles in the last twenty-or-so years (and is not a member of the races or cultures depicted as enemies) encounters an in-game character with non-white or non-Western features, they will expect that character to be an enemy. It is then reasonable to ask whether the gamer will feel that same association upon encountering these types of people in the real world.

The creation of both heroes and villains in video games does not happen in a vacuum, but instead exists within the context of our society’s full history and concept of race, gender and nationality. It should then be treated as such: a complicated subject, one with direct impact on the thoughts, perceptions, and material actions of the players.

It should also be noted that while video games can glamorize violence and dissidence, the existence of that issue makes the inverse effect a real possibility. A 2012 study³⁴ of a game that simulated the surrounding causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict found that individuals engaging with their ideological opposites’ perspectives in an interactive game was associated with a reduction in personal biases. Players, acting as either the Israeli prime minister or Palestinian president, showed improved game scores and reduced correlations between their religious and political affiliations and game performance. This study demonstrates how gamified diplomacy can foster empathy and reduce the impact of pre-existing biases in conflict resolution.

³² Yang, G. S., Gibson, B., Lueke, A. K., Huesmann, L. R., & Bushman, B. J. (2014). Effects of Avatar Race in Violent Video Games on Racial Attitudes and Aggression. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 5(6), 698-704.

³³ Dill K. E., Brown B. P., Collins M. A. (2008). Effects of exposure to sex-stereotyped video game characters on tolerance of sexual harassment. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 44, 1402–1408.

³⁴ Gonzalez, C., Saner, L. D., & Eisenberg, L. Z. (2013). Learning to Stand in the Other’s Shoes: A Computer Video Game Experience of the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict. *Social Science Computer Review*, 31(2), 236-243.

Chapter IV: The Slow Feeder Game

Taking the background and history of this industry into context, it becomes clear that the most effective way to better reimagine the games we know and love is to establish a completely new narrative genealogy. The paper presents the concept of 'slow feeder games', an interactive narrative philosophy that emphasizes low stimulation and high engagement gameplay with thoughtfully delayed gratification. The 'slow feeder' effect should ultimately result in a more satisfying experience and ideally have a positive effect on the player's capacity for empathy, decision-making, and conflict resolution skills.

The term 'slow feeder' is borrowed from a type of pet food bowl specifically designed to keep animals from consuming their food at an unsafe speed. These devices not only prevent choking, bloating, and digestive issues in animals, but also result in a more stimulating and satisfying experience. Interestingly, Company of Animals, a business that developed the Green Slow Feeder, seems to conceptualize this product from a gamification standpoint; their website describes their product as a "revolutionary way to turn a dog's meal into a challenging time-consuming game."³⁵

This author acknowledges that comparing the interplay between a human mind with billions of firing synapses and highly complicated immersive video games with a device designed to stop dogs from finishing their food too quickly may seem facetious. However, the principles align. Slow feeder games (SFGs) are designed to be more complex and challenging, requiring more cognitive effort and less reliance on not only muscle memory, but also the players' preconceived notions on game functionality.

SFGs could potentially reduce what we consider to be addictive gaming behavior; higher levels of mental engagement and more difficult narrative advancement may allow players to portion their time more effectively both in and out of the game. SFGs prioritize thoughtful engagement over immediate gratification, fostering deeper emotional and intellectual connections between the player and the events they both see and participate in on-screen. An SFG should ultimately be slower, more difficult to consume, and more complicated than most games currently available.

The most fundamental takeaway from all the aforementioned research in the paper is that video games are not only built upon real life, but also stay with players once they turn off their devices. The enemies, heroes and events in these games exist in the context of our true, material society, and engaging with interactive content that mirrors those societal components has a measurable, personal effect on gamers.

³⁵ GREEN Slow Dog Feeder, Company of Animals, 2016

Essential Components

The essential components of a Slow Feeder Game are as follows:

1. Complicated characters

The central characters in SFGs are not Jumpmen. They are well-developed, with nuanced personalities and backgrounds that affect their perspective on the in-game world's events. These perspectives play a role in how they react to, interact with, and reflect on game content. For example, an alcoholic character like Harrier Dubois in *Disco Elysium* tends to have a difficult time speaking to women due to a past messy romantic separation referenced in in-game flashbacks.

2. Honest violence

Physical violence, hatred, violent ideologies and bigotry can exist in an SFG sphere, but they must serve a purpose. Acts of violence should have a marked effect on the character, provoking the player to consider whether the use of violence outweighs its effect on their character's performance. Violent acts that feel 'justified' to a player should take an emotional toll on the character and be noted by the player. For example, in *TLOU2*, Ellie slaughters dozens of people (few of whom had anything to do with Joel's death) in pursuit of her father figure's killer; Ellie's clarity of mind and original character begins to deteriorate throughout the course of the game until she begins to exhibit symptoms of PTSD.

3. Actions have consequences

In SFGs, a portion of the actions players take should have an effect on their gameplay. Choice and consequences in games can have a direct impact on players' conceptualization of morality. In a 2012 study, Dr. Daniel M. Shafer of Baylor University found that players who made morally good choices in-game were more likely to be 'morally activated'³⁶, while those who made evil choices tended to use moral disengagement mechanisms, such as justifying their actions as "just a game."³⁷ An example of moral choices with consequences in AAA games today can be found in *Red Dead Redemption 2* (2018), which features an 'honor' meter to measure the player's notoriety and reputation.

4. Long form, low stimulation gameplay

³⁶ Shafer borrows the definition of 'morally activated' from Bandura, A. (1999). "Moral disengagement in the perpetration of inhumanities." *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 3, 193-209.

³⁷ Shafer, D. M. (2012). *Moral Choice in Video Games: An Exploratory Study*. *Media Psychology Review*. Vol. 5(1)

Evidence suggests that games which simply take longer to complete and have slower pacing can prevent negative psychological impacts.³⁸ Longer interactive periods avoid creating high expectations for players that lead to negative psychological outcomes if those expectations are not met³⁹. An example of the inverse can be found in fast-paced *Fortnite* rounds, where according to a crowdsourced data collection project, players win around 1 out of 100 matches they play.⁴⁰ A game with slower pacing and delayed gratification (tasks take longer to complete, narratives exist and are engaging) help maintain a more stable emotional state, reducing the likelihood of burnout and resistance.

SFGs are, crucially, not necessarily a sanitized, overly policed or inherently 'politically correct' vision for video games. The SFG upholds the idea that video games should be as complicated and nuanced as any other media and, even, the real world. The conditions necessary to facilitate such a realistic simulation of true-to-life situations have nothing to do with \$80 million graphics budgets, immersive haptic feedback or high-definition blood spatters. The central tenet of creating a meaningful and effective SFG is instead player agency.

The Slow Feeder Game in Literature

To dissect and reveal the effectiveness of agency in the gaming sphere, it is helpful to consider pre-digital interactive media. Situationist theory suggests that the actions of an individual are heavily influenced by their environment and context, as well as social and cultural influence⁴¹. In *Situationism and Agency*, Mele and Shepherd suggest that while "features of situations drive our behavior even when we remain unaware of these features or their influence... knowledge about situational influences can improve human agents' prospects for dealing rationally with them"⁴². Imagine this principle in a gaming environment: an RPG player enters a dungeon after cutting through three floors of henchmen and encounters a swashbuckling, burly barbarian and a fair-haired princess.

The player will likely use their knowledge of not only other video games, but also decades of cultural references to make a decision. The player knows that video games typically have a scary and formidable 'boss' fight that they must win in order to progress to the next region. They also know that that boss is typically, if not always, physically large, male and unrealistically intimidating in some way; based on Chun's

³⁸ Zhou, Fei, Youhai Lin, Jian Mou, Jason Cohen, and Sihua Chen. "Understanding the Dark Side of Gamified Interactions on Short-Form Video Platforms: Through a Lens of Expectations Violations Theory." *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 186 (2022): 122150. Available online November 10, 2022.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Fortnite Stats. "Average." Total Wins in Solo Stats. <https://fortnitestats.com/stats/average>.

⁴¹ Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "situationism,"

⁴² Mele, Alfred R. and Shepherd, Joshua, *Situationism and Agency* (June 1, 2013). *Journal of Practical Ethics*, Vol.1(1),

research mentioned in Chapter III (as well as the last millennia of European folk-tales that serve as the foundation for much of Western fiction), they might also infer that the enemy has features typically associated with real non-white human races. They assume that once the boss barbarian is dead, they will receive not only passage to the next part of the game, but also sexual or romantic ownership of the princess and perhaps even some kind of golden boon.

The interactive party's opinions and previous media experience influence their in-game decision-making, but so does the entirety of global culture. Consider the setup and effect of Serbian artist Marina Abramovic's performance art piece *Rhythm 0*, performed in 1974 in Naples, Italy. Abramovic's six-hour ordeal consisted of the artist standing in place near a table where 72 objects had been placed including a rose, feather, perfume, honey, bread, grapes, wine, scissors, a scalpel, nails, a metal bar, a gun, and a bullet.⁴³ Audience members, without the restriction of a stage or barrier, were invited "to do whatever they wanted to her".⁴⁴



Fig 7. Abramovic during the performance of *Rhythm 0*. 1974.

Abramovic provided instructions to her audience, not unlike a video game's opening tutorial addressed to players:

"Instructions:

There are 72 objects on the table that one can use on me as desired.

Performance.

⁴³ "Marina Abramovic on *Rhythm 0* (1974)", Marina Abramovic Institute, 2014, c. 01:00 mins.

⁴⁴ Spector, N. (n.d.). *Marina Abramovic: Rhythm 0*. The Guggenheim Museums and Foundation. <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/5177>

I am the object...
During this period I take full responsibility.
Duration: 6 hours (8 pm – 2 am).⁴⁵

What followed was a study in agency and accountability. American art critic Thomas McEvilley described the event as a slow-burning chaos:

It began tamely. Someone turned her around. Someone thrust her arm into the air. Someone touched her somewhat intimately...In the third hour all her clothes were cut from her with razor blades...When a loaded gun was thrust to Marina's head and her own finger was being worked around the trigger, a fight broke out between the audience factions.⁴⁶

Eventually, Abramovic moved from her stationary position towards the participatory audience, who fled the room.⁴⁷ This is an extremely compelling case study for the efficacy of subverting 'player' expectations in an interactive setting. Abramovic announces in the 'instructions' that she is 'the object', but never declares that she will face the audience at the end of this work.

It is clear by the crowd's course of action throughout this piece that the severity of the harm inflicted onto Abramovic was lessened if not alleviated completely by her passiveness and even objectification. This point is demonstrated further by the visceral retreat of the audience once Abramovic began to display unexpected behavior; the reality of their action set in.

The audience was at first intimidated by the rules laid out by Abramovic, and unsure about how to proceed with the piece given their strata of ingrained social expectations. There was, presumably, not much procedure in polite society at that time for what to do once you are face-to-face with a defenseless woman, much less what to do with the gun and razors she has provided you with.

Therefore, the only way to measure what is appropriate in that scenario is to monitor and mirror the actions of the crowd. Once the crowd's willingness to participate in using the items on Abramovic has been established, an individual then begins to believe that willingness is a social norm that they can operate within. Abramovic's movement toward the audience demonstrates the existence of an expectation, then creates a collapse of that expectation to an upsetting degree.

Applying the methodology of this piece to an SFG context, we can imagine that changing the outcome of a well-established precedent in game functionality would have a similarly profound effect on players. Breaking narrative expectations breaks a great socio-cerebral cast in the player, turning a controversial form of entertainment into an opportunity for reflection, empathy, and cross-cultural exchange.

⁴⁵ Abramovic, "Solo Performances, 1969–1976," 69.

⁴⁶ Ward, Frazer. *No Innocent Bystanders: Performance Art and Audience*. Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2012.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

No Russian

To understand the effect of applying SFG characteristics to an existing game with anti-SFG characteristics, take the example of the infamous *Call of Duty* mission, *No Russian* from *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* (2009). Oddly for this franchise, this scene demonstrated subversive narrative features. *No Russian* generated major controversy at the time of its release.

In this sequence, players embody an undercover CIA operative embedded in the personal guard of a Russian terrorist called Makarov, who serves as the game's antagonist. The undercover player must participate in Makarov's terrorist attack on an airport in order to maintain his false identity.⁴⁸ The scene is grueling; the sprint mechanic is disabled, so the player walks at an unusually slow speed throughout the terminal, surrounded by dead or dying civilians murdered by the small group of shooters.



Fig 8. Makarov briefs you in the first seconds of *No Russian*

The average player would assume that in order to maintain their cover and advance to the next part of the game, they would have to take part in this massacre of innocents; failing to shoot civilians could cost them their position and their life. While other *Call of Duty* missions might be kicked off with a horrible event like this, they would typically evolve into a classic strategy mission within a few minutes. *No Russian* is different; the shooters face no resistance until the operation is nearly completed, making the sheer

⁴⁸ Purslow, Matt. "How 'No Russian' Became Call of Duty's Most Memorable Mission - Art of the Level." IGN, October 24, 2023.

scale of slaughter more overwhelming than missions with combative enemies. The painstakingly slow pace of the attack also gives the player time, if they choose to take it, to absorb the severity of the act and view the results of the slaughter from various vantage points.

The lead developer of this particular level, Mohammad Alavi, designed it to give players an insider's view of Makarov, allowing them to witness his capacity for evil and slaughter in the first person. In a 2023 interview with Imagine Games Network, Alavi said:

*I'm about to say something terrible, but that level wasn't about gameplay... It wasn't about solving puzzles. It wasn't about learning a new weapon or a new feature or anything like that. It was really about selling this moment and living in that moment.*⁴⁹

Early pre-release play tests of *No Russian* gleaned intriguing results. Alavi continues in the IGN interview:

*"We do something called Kleenex testing," Alavi reveals, referring to one-off playtests conducted with random players (they're 'one and done', hence the tissue monniker). "And I knew I had something special when I would say 50% of the people that we Kleenex tested didn't shoot."*⁵⁰

While the game doesn't necessarily reward players who choose not to shoot in this scene, it does allow them to progress. You can technically refuse to fire any fatal shots and still complete the mission. This development choice demonstrates an interesting use of some aspects in the Slow Feeder philosophy. This twist in traditional *Call of Duty* narrative mechanics does evidently evoke an emotional response in players by subverting their expectations.

*"I was like, 'I want to get people to actually maybe not pull that trigger,'" says Alavi. "Maybe don't pull that trigger, just hesitate for a moment. I don't care if they pull the trigger later, but if I even get them to just stop for a second and be like, 'What am I doing?' I felt like I had accomplished something."*⁵¹

It may be the first point in the series where a player, armed to the teeth, enters a room of 'enemies' and can decide whether to kill them. However, Alavi's mechanics ultimately deprive players of true agency, but not necessarily in a way that prevents the SFG effect. Even if you choose not to shoot, you are still a part of and witness to this act. You cannot choose to *not* be complicit, you can only choose whether to get blood on *your* hands.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

This is a stunning subversion of FPS mechanics and mirrors some of the subversive violence functionalities in *TLOU:2. No Russian*, despite its inelegant execution and muddy legacy, (Julie Muncy of *Wired* described it as “crass” and “stupid” in 2020⁵²) pushes a crucial question into its audience's hands. If the player performs some action in-game, but has no ability to decide whether that action will occur, no choice to initiate or stop it, do they feel responsible for it?

If a player can abstain from perpetrating some wretched act, but not prevent it from happening, do they feel better or worse about the act itself? The idea of the SFG is not to directly answer these questions, but to facilitate the examination of them within the mind of the player; to give them cause to examine how simulated atrocities make them feel.

Eventually, the slaughter ends and Makarov's team is approached by a police squadron in riot gear. Makarov confronts the player character, exposes him as a double agent, and fatally shoots him on the tarmac to create an escape opportunity for the rest of the group. The futility of the player character's sacrifice hangs in the air as the scene ends. This pointless mission gives room for the player to reflect on everything from the horror of terrorism, to American foreign policy, to what it means (and how it feels) to die an American 'hero'.

If this game were to be fully calibrated to fit the SFG framework, the developers might have included hidden opportunities to try something different. What if the player could fire on Makarov or a member of the group (all *COD* missions fail if you commit friendly fire)? What if the player could drop a sidearm and slide it towards a civilian? Any of these alternate tactics would break the player's assumption and acceptance that they must follow whichever direction the proverbial narrative bit leads them in.

It would be important to nestle these options organically, but not obviously, within the gameplay area. Tooltips and quest markers that guide decision-making can interfere with the SFG idea of true agency and self-determination. Based on the research of Chun, Gao and Phillips, it's possible that exploring multiple conflict resolution options in-game, or at least having the initiative to look for them, might lead players to conduct themselves differently in real life as well.

Ultimately, the controversy created by *No Russian* has a more pervasive legacy than the thought behind it. Releasing a mass shooting scene without much context in a famously violent video game just two years after the Virginia Tech (2007) school shooting and ten years after *Columbine* (1999) was clumsy, if not completely tone-deaf.

Eventually, *COD* development studio Infinity Ward integrated a content warning screen before the mission and made its completion optional. Without the inclusion of genuine choices that allow players to influence the narrative, the mission ultimately reinforces

⁵² Muncy, Julie (May 9, 2020). "Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 Is Still an Infuriating Relic". *Wired*.

the idea that video games are a vehicle for the passive positive consumption of violence rather than a change to encourage thoughtful engagement.

Chapter V: Killing Darlings in *The Last of Us 2* (2020)

The Last of Us 2 was, and continues to be, both a monumental piece of video game history and a case study in what happens when AAA games with enormous audiences experiment thematically. This sequel builds on its predecessor's narrative by complicating existing character relationships, altering memory and blurring motivations; all interesting functionalities that played well amongst critics and most fans, but made an intensely negative impact upon others. The game also subverts the classic avenger trope, creating a space where players must grapple with weighing the consequences of their beloved character's actions and against the emotional baggage players brought from the first game.

A particularly interesting aspect of this game is in the initial player response upon its 2020 release; a controversial narrative choice in the game's opening spurned immense uproar that led to real-world bigotry and threats towards the game's developers and actors. *TLOU2* demonstrates aspects of Slow Feeder Game theory in its functionality and thematic choices, but also in its ability to elicit a serious emotional response from its players. This chapter will explore how *TLOU2* functions differently from traditional games by redefining players' established feelings towards characters, forcing players to embody an enemy, and confronting them with brutal, often senseless scenes of violence.

Players meet Ellie in this sequel after knowing her character for ten years, since her debut as a deuteragonist in the 2013 original game. The Ellie we knew before 2020 was a clever, brave tween who loved puns and would do anything to keep Joel, her adoptive father figure, alive and beside her. In the first six hours of the sequel, Joel is brutally killed as an act of revenge by Abby, the daughter of a surgeon Joel fatally shot during the first game's hospital scene. In an interview with GQ, executive producer Neil Druckmann explained that this choice came from a desire "to take some of the things that people hold sacred and just... dismantle it."⁵³

Complicated Combat

The Last of Us 2 introduced a compelling mechanic into its combat functionality, alongside stunningly realistic graphics and immersive audio. In this game, when enemy NPCs are wounded in combat, they react somewhat realistically⁵⁴. If an NPC is shot, but the wound isn't immediately fatal, they might cry out or make guttural noises

⁵³ White, Sam. "The Last of Us Part II: How Naughty Dog Made a Classic Amidst Catastrophe." GQ, June 9, 2020.

⁵⁴

until they eventually perish. The result is a shockingly gruesome and emotionally impactful combat experience that truly emphasizes the humanity and suffering behind every fight. Even more upsetting is a feature that makes NPCs call out the name of comrades (including dogs) killed by player characters; occasionally these NPCs will mourn their fallen friends and become more aggressive. Players are forced to digest the idea that the camps or buildings full of enemies they're 'clearing' to advance to the next level have the potential to be as socially complex and emotional as the characters they're embodying.

This mechanic is a hint as to how *TLOU2* aptly handles warping the classic 'avenger' trope, but no aspect of the game drives this angle home more than Ellie's descent into brutality. Witnessing the brutal murder of Joel at Abby's hand prompts Ellie to embark on a long and bloody revenge quest; while Joel's death was gruesome and personal, Ellie's actions along the way to finding Abby begin to eclipse whatever justice she hoped to find. In true SFG fashion, Ellie's quest to kill Abby in Joel's name is not noble, justified, or satisfying, and does not follow the archetypical ideal of a revenge fantasy that players might expect from a AAA game

Ellie's downfall begins when Dina, her girlfriend who joins her on this mission, reveals she is pregnant; Ellie reacts negatively but refuses to abandon the mission for her sake. This is a marked departure from the Ellie of *TLOU* (2013), whose main motivation was cultivating and protecting what little found family she had. Her descent is further demonstrated by a handful of particularly brutal killings that do little to advance her search, but much to display the dissolution of her character as empathy and pain are turned into bloodlust. She tortures and bludgeons Abby's friend Nora, then kills a pregnant character and an innocent man for information. When Ellie finally finds Abby during a grueling solo mission, they grapple in a long, difficult-to-watch scene before Ellie finally relents and lets her live. Not only does she not avenge Joel, but Ellie returns to her home to find her house empty and her girlfriend long gone.

This aspect of the game is a masterclass in contextual media; the reason why this ending was so devastating, despite being a natural conclusion of Ellie's arc, is that AAA games typically have a rewarding, if not bittersweet, payoff. In *Red Dead Redemption 2*, Arthur Morgan perishes, but John Marston escapes with his family. In *Mass Effect 3*, Commander Shepherd sacrifices himself, but does so for the greater peace of the universe. The ending of *TLOU2* leaves players with more questions than answers, and despite the backlash that decision incurred, it prompts players to imagine what kind of life plays out after a revenge fantasy is over.

Ellie, Alone

The immense commercial success and cultural footprint of *The Last of Us* (2013) created a unique opportunity for the game's sequel; players' emotional attachment to the first game's characters became a narrative mechanic. Joel and Ellie, an unlikely pairing of a sad older man with a scrappy younger girl, mirror a beloved media trope that can be traced back to Charlie Chaplin's *The Kid* (1921). It's difficult to quantify the sheer extent to which players admired and cared for Joel as a character, but we can observe the popular reaction to his death in *TLOU2*.

At other points in the game, Ellie develops a romantic relationship with Dina, who lives in the same apocalypse-sanctuary settlement as her and Joel. They have a fairly explicitly lesbian sex scene within the first few hours of play, just before Joel's murder. The first teaser for this title featured Ellie and Dina kissing during a dance at a town-wide celebration. Dina is also a Jewish character, and the game includes cutscenes of her and Ellie exploring an abandoned synagogue in the ruins of Seattle. Later on in the narrative, the player encounters a transgender character named Lev, who, along with his sister, escapes from a religious cult with the help of Abby. *TLOU2* also spends nearly half the game with players embodying Abby, walking through her life, the murder of her father, and the lead-up to Joel's death in order to humanize her and display the similarities between both girls' motivations.



Fig 9. Ellie and Dina.

All of these details serve to increase the immersive feel and depth that makes this game so intense to experience. However, each of these plot points generated an intensely negative response from a group of die-hard fans online, to the point where

Naughty Dog (*TLOU*'s production studio) released a statement regarding the safety of their staff.⁵⁵

Despite having a 93/100 rating on Metacritic and reaching 'Must-Play' status, *TLOU2* has a 5.8/10 user score,⁵⁶ largely due to what Forbes writer Paul Tassi called a 'review bombing'⁵⁷ campaign that took place around the game's release. Review bombing is a concentrated effort to flood a product or business with negative reviews, usually typically aimed at works that support the interests of LGBTQIA people, women, and people of color.⁵⁸ The following graphic from a 2021 study by Cantone, Tomaselli and Mazzeo shows the initial negative review 'bomb' giving way to organic positive reviews between June 3 and July 28th, 2020.⁵⁹

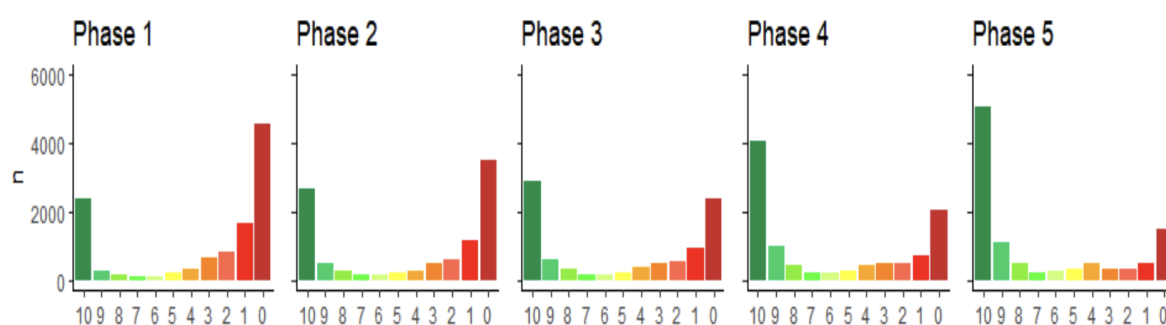


Fig 10. Review bombing; green represents positive reviews, red represents negative with a gradient scale between

The visceral response elicited from players, whether through the controversial death of Joel or the brutal realism of combat, underscores the emotional and ethical complexities embedded in the game's design. By rejecting the conventional payoff of a revenge fantasy, *TLOU2* exemplifies the potential of Slow Feeder Games to elevate interactive digital media. This game challenges players to reconsider the impact of their in-game decisions and interrogate where their consciousness ends and interactive media begins, ultimately creating a more reflective and engaged form of gameplay that resonates beyond the screen. This approach not only enhances the depth and significance of the gaming experience but also aligns with a broader vision of interactive media as a tool for personal and societal growth.

⁵⁵ Naughty Dog (@Naughty_Dog). Twitter, July 5, 2020. https://x.com/Naughty_Dog/status/1279822404219363329.

⁵⁶ "User Reviews for The Last of Us Part II." Metacritic. Accessed April 12, 2024.

⁵⁷ Tassi, Paul. "'The Last of Us Part 2' Is Getting Predictably User Score Bombed on Metacritic." Forbes, June 21, 2020.

⁵⁸ Merriam-Webster. "Review Bombing." Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary.

⁵⁹ Cantone, Giulio Giacomo, Venera Tomaselli, and Valeria Mazzeo. "Ideology-driven polarisation in online ratings: the review bombing of The Last of Us Part II." arXiv preprint arXiv:2104.01140 (2021).

Chapter VI: Finding Another Way through *Disco Elysium* (2019)

Disco Elysium is an unassuming revolution; at its core, this is the story of a late-stage alcoholic policeman stumbling his way through a murder investigation. It is, at first glance, an unlikely candidate for representing the subversive facets of Slow Feeder Theory. However, the way the developers and writers at ZA/UM studios unravel, dissolve, and bare the inner selves of not only each character but also the setting itself is a balm to the road rash of fast-paced unexamined FPS games. Much like Abramovic's *Rhythm 0*, *Disco* gives players all the familiar tools of violent RPGs, but challenges them to seek something more.

This section will unpack the game's mechanics and features, as well as trace its forked narrative. Additionally, an in depth character analysis will uncover the innovative ideology and thought behind small-scale in-game details. This analysis will demonstrate how a game that is both commercially successful and packed with conflict can achieve the disruptive narrative experience the Slow Feeder game attempts to perpetuate.

What Kind of Cop Are You?

Note: All dialogue snippets in this chapter are from FAYDE Playback Experiment: On-Air, a Disco Elysium dialogue transcript digitization project by Morgan Dorian Trias available at <http://fayde.co.uk/>.

In many ways, the characters and plot of *Disco Elysium* mirror some aspects of the games this paper appears to disavow. Harrier (Harry) duBois, the player character, displays multiple jumpman characteristics. Like Joel Miller in Chapter II, Harry has a stoically tortured energy and a sidekick in Lieutenant Kim Kitsuragi. He is a policeman with a 'rogue operative' energy about him, not unlike the notable jumpman Captain Price from *Call of Duty*. Unlike Joel Miller, Harry DuBois is pathetic and broken; *Disco Elysium* is a recovery mission for what pieces of Harry remain.



Fig 11. Disco's opening scene.

The ways in which *Disco Elysium* fulfills most, if not all, of the criteria outlined for a true Slow Feeder Game, become evident when parallels between the SFG theory and *Disco's* components and characters title are drawn. The game's first playable scene immediately establishes that Harrier DuBois does not fulfill the criteria of a jumpman; it begins with Harry nearly naked, wretchedly hungover, and face down in a destroyed hotel room.

The player could ascribe some kind of post-party coolness to this situation, but not without stretching the mind somewhat– the room looks depressingly tattered, not the type of destruction that comes with revelry. Most of all, he is utterly alone in his suffering. He has almost no memory of who or where he is, as well as what he is supposed to be doing. Harry's internal monologue in this scene, which serves as a crucial part of not only the narrative but also the game's central functionality, reveals that he has amnesia.

If the jumpman is classically 'strong and silent', Harry is more of a 'weak and whiny' type. The first NPC interaction players experience with Harry is typically a conversation with a character labeled "Oranje⁶⁰ Disco Dancer" (later revealed to be named Klaasje Amandou, or Katarzine Alasije, depending on what you believe), a woman standing outside his hotel room smoking a cigarette. The game's dialogue describes her as "a striking young woman in a silver body-suit smok[ing] in the hostel hallway."⁶¹ In any other game, this might be an opening for the rugged but tortured main man to smoothly chat up a svelte maiden, just because he can.

⁶⁰ An in-game city capital.

⁶¹ Trias, Morgan Dorian. "FAYDE Playback Experiment: On-Air a *Disco Elysium* Dialogue Transcription." *FAYDE*. <http://fayde.co.uk/>.

Alternatively, it could be an early introduction to a will-they-won't-they romance that carries on throughout the game and is resolved in an endgame scene. However, Klaasje and Harry are both aware of his sickening, oily appearance and energy; if the player successfully attempts to swoon her,⁶² Harry stops himself from externalizing the advance:

YOU⁶³ - *Try *The Expression* on her -- let her know you want her. Physically.*

SUGGESTION⁶⁴ - **Try The Expression*? C'mon, why are you still doing this?*

YOU - *"I'm at death's door, bloated, a goner. And still..." (Sigh.) "Does the longing ever stop?"*

This particular line is also an early example of how this game seems to provide players with ample agency, but tugs the narrative in certain directions at points that are difficult to predict; this point will be analyzed further in later text. Players encounter another subversion of both tropes and established narrative expectations as Harry encounters Lieutenant Kim Kitsuragi in the downstairs lobby of Whirling-in-Rags, the hostel where they are boarding during the investigation. Encountering Kim provides the player with a bit of insight on what exactly the game will be about, which may be helpful in contextualizing this game for this paper's audiences:

NARRATOR - *Downstairs Ltn. Kim Kitsuragi - precinct 57th's finest - is waiting to solve THE HANGED MAN with you as an inter-district co-op. It would appear Precinct 41 sent you to investigate the lynching of a "Whitewater mercenary" in "Martinaise". And that you are indeed a police officer. Kim briefs you on the case and your relationship begins - likely on the wrong foot, but not necessarily.*

Kim would appear to be Harry's built-in sidekick or protégé, as would be typical of a jumpman; for example, in the case of *Call of Duty*, Soap Mactavish is the protégé of jumpman Captain Price. Kim, however, immediately finds Harry's condition to be unprofessional, feeble, and shocking due to his personal commitment to the seriousness of his office.

KIM KITSURAGI - *"Have you removed the dead body from the tree?"*

YOU - *"I haven't."*

⁶² *Disco* operates with a Dungeons-and-Dragons type dice roll mechanics for actions that require a certain degree of skill or luck. Players can better their odds by increasing certain social, mental and physical skills as they level up.

⁶³ 'You' refers to Harry, the player character.

⁶⁴ SUGGESTION is one of the many 'characters' that speaks in Harry's internal monologue.

KIM KITSURAGI - *"So, the body is still in the tree..."*

EMPATHY - *This is the first time you detect a weariness in the lieutenant's voice. It is obvious he would have preferred for the body to no longer be in the tree.*

- *passive check (requires approx. 2 in Empathy)*

Initial investigation tasks alongside Kim, bogged down by Harry's increasingly evident personal and psychological issues, reveal that Harry is hardly the hard-boiled criminal investigator an average player might imagine as main-character material. Harry DuBois is also notably ugly, and believes himself to be so. Trying to look at your own reflection during the first 'day' in game (the narrative takes place over ten playable days) is almost impossible due to Harry's self-hatred. Trying to do so can lead to players losing a health point and even dying in-game, if their stats are distributed in a certain way.

Harry's inner struggles also diverge from the jumpman archetype. While investigating the courtyard around the hanging corpse, players can locate a ledger they eventually realize belongs to Harry. Within the ledger are notes about the case and Harry's identity, but also some of Harry's personal effects, including a letter from his estranged ex-wife. In an emotionally intense situation, a character like Joel from *The Last of Us* might regard the object tied to a painful memory and stuff it into his pocket, sighing deeply. Upon reading this letter, or even getting a whiff of the apricot gum wrapper that once belonged to his wife, Harry takes morale damage and can even die of a heart attack. You can also die from sitting in an extremely uncomfortable chair, trying to retrieve your tie from a ceiling fan, and hearing your ex-wife's voice through a payphone receiver. Leading men, across genres and mediums (especially cops), do not typically die of broken hearts. Perhaps they should.

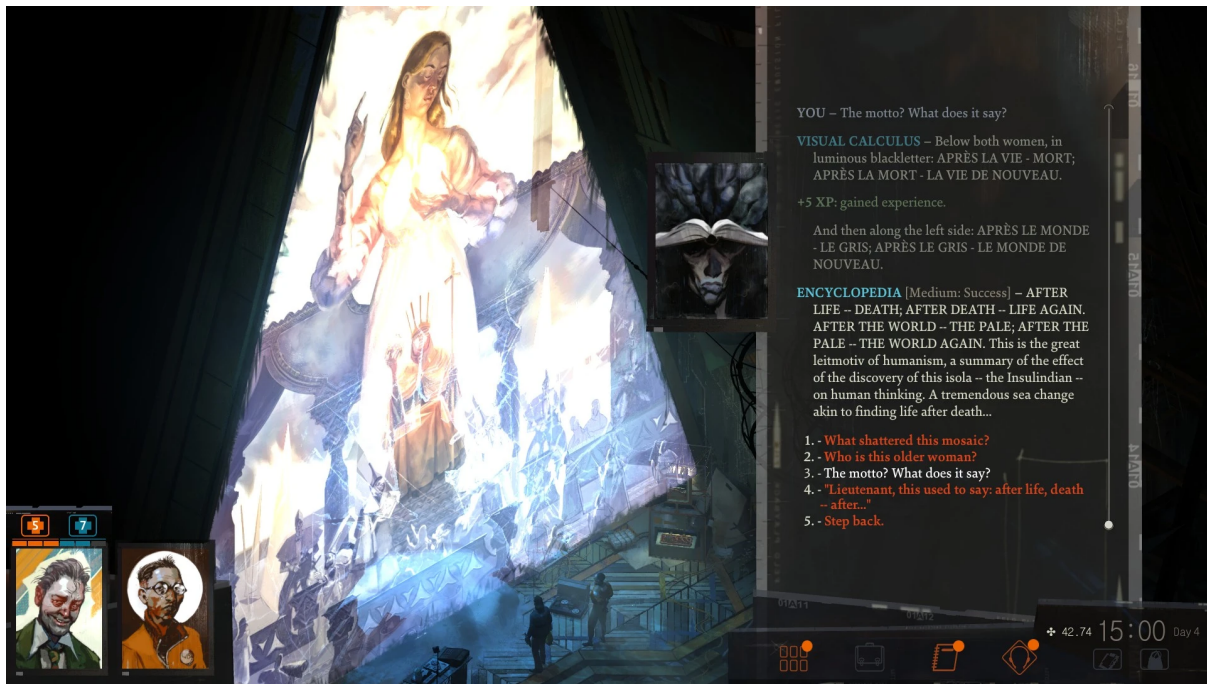


Fig 12. Example of inner dialogue characters. Harry and Kim regard a painting of Dolores Dei.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of this game is also the one that defies expectation the most profoundly; Harry's internal dialogue. Complex, poetic, absurd and terrifying thoughts emerge from within Harry and deeply enrich his character during conversations with NPCs and interaction with the environment. Harry's 'inner voices' are divided into separate 'characters' like volition, esprit de corps, inland empire, physical instrument, empathy and encyclopedia, each with their own tone and perspectives. Being able to understand Harry on such a personal level makes him a profoundly empathetic character, especially with his amnesia setting us on a somewhat equal footing in terms of self-understanding.

Put it all together. Solve the world. One conversation at a time.

Disco Elysium demonstrates the principles of a Slow Feeder Game most pertinently through its incredible subversion of expectation. From the central narrative, to its use of side quests, to characters, to player agency, to fate; this game handles emotion, development and play in an astoundingly novel manner. One example of this innovation can be found in Kim Kitsuragi. Kim's disappointment in Harry's slovenly state at the game's start not only distinguishes him from the typical sidekick archetype aligned with Jumpmen, but also creates a compelling implicit narrative mechanic: the desire to impress Kim.

The player does have the ability to bully or exploit Kim throughout the game, treating him as an underling and Harry as a "superstar cop". However, Kim's initial respect, at

least for the superior police status, Harry holds as a lieutenant double-yefreitor⁶⁵, is one of the few semblances of kindness shown towards Harry for most of the narrative. Impressing Kim and building a relationship with him turns that respect into kindness and admiration becomes an intangible ability score improvement. This eventually has a material effect at a crucial point in-game; the player can add a +1 bonus to a critical dice roll if “Kim trusts you”.

An SFG-esque twist of expectations also occurs during an encounter with a character called Measurehead. This character is a gigantic, muscular man with a posse of followers who guards a bridge you must pass through in order to complete a central mission. The optics of this are reminiscent of classic dungeon-crawlers (as described in chapter IV); an average player sees a familiar ‘boss’ phenotype and assumes they must overcome it with force or manipulation.

Measurehead is obsessed with categorizing the dozens of in-game races and described himself as ‘a racist’; the two clear paths to overcoming him are internalizing his rhetoric and agreeing with him, or attempting to use brute force. As physical force seems far-fetched given Measurehead’s size, players might assume that they can parrot his rhetoric without consequence and move on; however, this decision hurts your relationship with Kim, who is of mixed race. A third, not immediately obvious option, exists for players who can figure out a back-alley route through an unassuming in-game section.

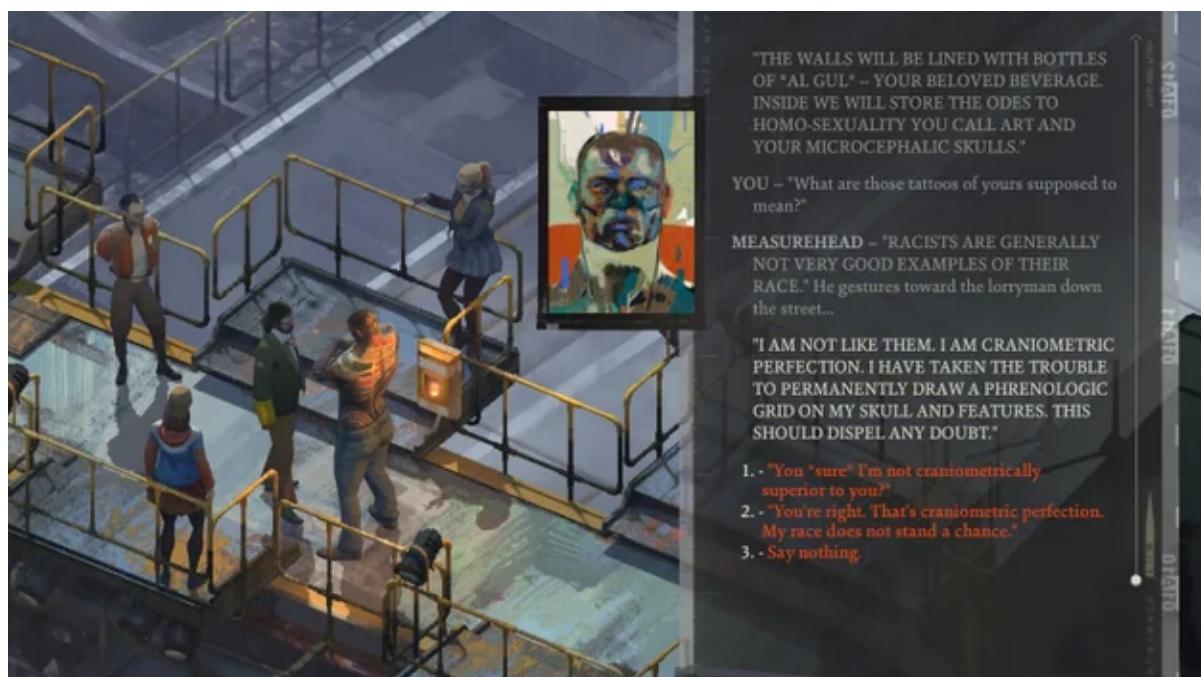


Fig 13. Measurehead.

⁶⁵ Lieutenant Double-Yefreitor is defined, in game, to mean that Harry refused two promotions in order to not surpass his superiors out of respect.

In *Disco Elysium*, there is almost always more than one way to accomplish something. You can choose to muscle your way through the plot, to bully Kim and joke shallowly, to ogle Klaasje and abuse stimulants, and still complete the game. However, *Disco* rewards empathy and curiosity, it encourages depth and care implicitly, and its true brilliance shines when players embrace that ideology. The game implicitly encourages depth and care, rewarding players who explore its rich, inter-class, and complex racial dialogues. These elements, rarely addressed in other mainstream games, combined with meaningful character diversity, exemplify the potential of a Slow Feeder Game. *Disco Elysium* sets a clear example for the development of thoughtful, powerful games that handle difficult themes with the humility (and occasional absurdity) they require.

Chapter VII: Conclusions

While the Slow Feeder Game may be a productive way to reimagine the way we play violent RPGs, there are several practical barriers that prevent them from being widely produced. One is demonstrated by the sheer scale of backlash generated by *The Last of Us 2*; experimental themes in mass-consumed media are evidently a huge risk for studios and developers alike. That being said, many other complicated issues also stand in the way, most of them financial.

Video games like *TLOU2*, *Disco Elysium* and others are extremely difficult and painstaking to produce. As much as this industry is currently worth, AAA game production teams are reporting production costs up to \$1 billion as of 2023 for console games.⁶⁶ It's also an arduous and time-consuming process, with most AAA titles taking between three and seven years to complete.⁶⁷

These conditions make it difficult for developers to experiment thematically on a commercial scale. The high-risk nature of video game development often leads studios to prioritize proven, profitable formulas over innovative, untested concepts. Labor conditions in the industry further complicate this issue. Studios like Rockstar Games have faced criticism for their intense 'crunch' work periods; notably, 100 hour work weeks and unpredictable large-scale staff layoffs.⁶⁸ ⁶⁹ The challenges of publishing and distributing games add another layer of difficulty.

Innovation usually comes bottom-up in the video game industry. When AAA game producers construct a successful money flywheel, they're happy to iterate on that theme for as long as possible. Smaller and indie developers with less corporate pressure can be driven by their storytelling, vision, and artwork and thus are more likely to experiment; one example is the hugely popular⁷⁰ *Stardew Valley* (2016), initially developed by Eric Barone, a.k.a. ConcernedApe. Barone completed much of the development alone, revolutionizing the gaming industry by pioneering what we now consider "cozy" games based on themes and functionality in older titles like *Harvest Moon* (1996) and *Animal Crossing* (2001). While these two games were successful in their own right, they were confined to Nintendo products and inherited all the perceptions therein (a 2022 article called it the 'Disney of gaming'⁷¹); *Stardew Valley* brought low-stimulation, peaceful gaming to a mature audience across consoles and platforms by reimagining narratives from the ground up.

⁶⁶ Competition and Markets Authority. "Anticipated Acquisition by Microsoft of Activision Blizzard, Inc. Final Report." April 26, 2023.

⁶⁷ Copeland, Wesley. "The Long Road to Success: AAA Game Development Timelines." IGN, March 10, 2023.

⁶⁸ Frank, Allegra. "Rockstar Responds to Blowback over Red Dead Redemption 2 Team's '100-Hour' Workweeks: 'We Obviously Don't Expect Anyone Else to Work This Way'." October 15, 2018.

⁶⁹ "Riot Games Lays Off 46 Employees amid Shifts in Esports Strategy." Associated Press News. AP News.

⁷⁰ Clement, J. "Stardew Valley Lifetime Unit Sales 2016-2024." Statista, February 27, 2024.

⁷¹ Gibson, Dani. "How Nintendo Became 'the Disney of Gaming' through Ruthless Consistency of Brand." February 23, 2022.

Once a new title emerges that redefines a genre, the rest of the industry tends to follow. Indie successes like *Stardew Valley* demonstrate that new genres and ideologies can emerge and thrive, but these instances are exceptions rather than the rule. The industry's structural barriers make it difficult for novel concepts like SFGs to gain traction.

Despite these challenges, the success of innovative games like *Stardew Valley*, *Disco Elysium* and *The Last of Us 2* highlight the industry's potential to innovate and create new genres. These games have shown that there is a market for alternative gaming experiences that emphasize creativity, relaxation, and emotional depth. By embracing the principles of the Slow Feeder Effect, the gaming industry can continue to evolve, offering players enriching experiences that challenge traditional narratives and foster deeper engagement. The path forward requires a commitment to experimentation, labor reform, and a willingness to embrace new publishing models that support creative risk-taking.

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Appendix

21. There is little, if any, research on gaming media literacy, as well as whether gamers value or consider subtext.

37. It should be noted that the player has little narrative agency in TLOU2, and instead follows a pre-set storyline.

56. It should be said that while this game does take place during a zombie apocalypse, a large portion of the combat is between humans.

62. An in-game city capital.

64. *Disco* operates with a Dungeons-and-Dragons type dice roll mechanics for actions that require a certain degree of skill or luck. Players can better their odds by increasing certain social, mental and physical skills as they level up.

65. 'You' refers to Harry, the player character.

66. SUGGESTION is one of the many 'characters' that speaks in Harry's internal monologue.

67. Lieutenant Double-Yefreitor is defined, in game, to mean that Harry refused two promotions in order to not surpass his superiors out of respect

AI Note: Examples of ChatGPT prompts used to serve as proofreading tool throughout various portions of this paper:

- Make this section of text two sentences instead of a run-on.
- Check this paragraph for readability.
- Cite this article using Chicago style.
- Check this paragraph for grammar and sentence structure errors.
- Assess the readability of this section and provide feedback.