

**FILMMAKERS  
WITHOUT  
CAMERAS**

# ABOUT

Hello! This first issue is a proper smorgasbord of writing. I always loved that Nintendo's game designers were all people without a games background: Pikmin was created by a gardener, Splatoon by an artist. Disco Elysium was written by a political activist and novelist. I wanted the magazine to represent that: a group of people with experience and passions beyond films and games bringing their experiences to an oft-stuffy field of criticism.

At the back is a section on roleplaying games. For those of you who haven't ever played one, worry not! There's a section explaining what they are and how you can get started, too. Shameless promo warning: check out [rollwithit.events](https://rollwithit.events) if you wanna try one without throwing all your time into it.

Throughout you'll see the works of three local artists, too. Megan Dobbyn and Charlie Freer both graduated from Leeds Arts University and are a huge part of the creative scene in Leeds, and Matt McCarthy - otherwise known as SADGHOBILIN - is at the University of Huddersfield. It's an absolute honour to be able to feature their work.

Our Kickstarter backers really knocked it out of the park - when I set the initial goal at £350 I thought I was being a bit daft. And here we are, having raised over thrice that. I hope you enjoy what we've prepared for you. Stay safe. -Eryk

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CHARLIE FREER



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# STORYTELLING

## IN

# G A M E S

# PART 1

# COMPARED

## TO

# M O V I E S

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This is the first in a series of three articles, all focusing on the influence of film on video games - film is a huge industry, and one that video games (especially the big budget ones) are trying to align themselves with. The point of this series: to convince you that it's probably a bad idea. In this one, we'll explore the brief history of cinematography in gaming.

There's a lot to cover: cinema is well-explored; it's thoroughly dissected by academics and over-explained by YouTube essayists. Videogames...aren't. A lot of really interesting video game discourse happens on social media, pushed by marginalised voices who don't have access to academia. The industry chooses to ignore this, and looks to film for inspiration instead.

But games face new challenges that filmmakers never had to consider: control over narrative, systems and ways of playing that aren't immediately intuitive (ever tried explaining how to press the thumbstick-button L3?) and, in some ways, letting go of their authorial intent.

This interaction is what sets games apart from other art. This doesn't mean that games are fully divorced from other art, though - cutscenes take control away from the player and follow the conventions of cinema. Cutscenes are performed by professional actors, motion captured and animated. Developers can choose to use fancy lighting simulations, mimic the imperfections of cameras, and even record motion capture footage with virtual cameras.

Over the next three issues of Filmmakers Without Cameras (if we get there...), we'll talk about cinematography;

"interaction" and what it means to elicit empathy through gameplay; and finish on narrative structures and the widely misunderstood ludonarrative dissonance. It's a fancy term for the mismatch between gameplay and narrative. It'll make sense when we get there.

Hideo Kojima, director of the hugely successful Metal Gear Solid series, doesn't hide the influence cinema has had on his work. If anything, he embraces it, his Twitter profile proudly stating: "70% of my body is made of movies." (Kojima, 2010). His 2004 release, Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater opens on a clear pastiche of James Bond — a title sequence directed by Kyle Cooper (Rogue One, mother!, Seven), no less. The main theme? A haunting tribute to Bond's female vocals, performed by Cynthia Harrell (Hibino, 2004).

Kojima cites Hitchcock's North by Northwest as a huge influence on Metal Gear Solid (1998), stating "It is Hitchcock's use of this first-person view that resembles one of the key features in MGS." (Kojima, 2003). He notes that, due to the player being able to freely switch between first and view) perspectives "it was difficult to direct certain scenes as [he] would have wished" (Kojima, 2003). Metal Gear Solid uses another perspective dependent on the player's context. If the character leans against a wall, the camera swings down to the character's level and provides a clearer view of what lies around the corner. Kojima goes on to say that "...it is by limiting on-screen information with these three cameras that helps create a feel of menace." (Kojima, 2003).

I briefly spoke to Dori Arazi,



following a talk about his time as Director of Photography on Sony's 2018 game God of War. Coming from a film background, Arazi says a knowledge of optics was crucial to his success. As all his work was virtual, he and his team first had to teach their software to

interpret the data their virtual camera recorded. This required them to understand how each lens distorted the image, and how different lens worked under varying lighting conditions. His team was able to craft a 15–85mm zoom lens with a 1.8f aperture, something not yet possible with any lens on the professional market. While this is any cinematographer's dream — allowing for huge freedom in framing — Arazi mentioned that the PS4's computational power is a limiting factor when it comes to lighting. With each extra light added, the processor's load is multiplied exponentially, and so Arazi had to use each light as effectively as possible.

The benefit of a virtual camera is that heavy equipment isn't necessary for intricate camera moves. The animation department can take over from the virtual camera under Arazi's supervision. Dollies, tracks, jibs, and even drone shots can all be easily animated after the fact. Arazi made sure to highlight the fact that a virtual camera is not actually a camera — it is simply a way of recording motion data

that can then be manipulated in post-production. Camera shakes could be eliminated, missteps in the actors' blocking, or even whole actions could be altered and hand animated. One could claim that this is where the uncanny valley comes into play as characters' actions become too perfect, or too rehearsed. This, though, is an unfair criticism to make: an incapable or inexperienced animator would commit these mistakes, as an incapable or inexperienced actor would also make the same mistakes.

Games give Directors of Photography (DP) greater control over the finished product. Much as a film DP would need to location scout, Arazi had to collaborate with level designers and concept artists to create the virtual world the camera would inhabit. This does, however, require a wider skillset: Arazi quoted his history in animation and design as a help — knowing how an animator works made communicating his needs much easier. Rather than finding inspiration through location scouts, Arazi had to inspire: creating sets that the designers were happy with — ones that could accommodate battle segments, puzzles, or whatever other gameplay mechanics they wanted to implement — but also ones that enabled director Cory Barlog to lead the action in cutscenes.

Coverage (a film term for capturing action from several angles) is never a problem. As motion capture studios capture data from tens of angles, shots can be decided later on down the line. With the ability to seamlessly merge takes and hand-animate minor details,

the team can easily pull out the best performances without having to worry about hiding cuts. They don't have to worry about editing *at all*.

Arazi cites the game's interactive camera his main challenge: it was difficult for him to give up his authorial intent.

Working with designers and animators they decided that, though the player has ultimate control over the game's third-person perspective, there were animations and combat scenes that the team wanted to make sure players experienced. When Kratos goes in for a brutal killing blow, the camera punches in on the action and then goes back to its neutral position for the player to keep going.

These techniques combine the interaction granted by the medium as well as cinematographic principles; mixing gameplay with a dynamic camera that reacts to the player's inputs, while still producing an image that emphasises the action and has intent behind it. It's a workflow unique to the games industry: the DP has control over the image while working closely with the animators and designers, and having a grasp of all departments.

With time, cutscenes started acting as secret loading screens too. It's the perfect time to flush the computer's short-term RAM (random access memory) of the previous level and use it to load the assets needed for the next area. Those loading screens which notoriously ground pacing to a halt? Now mostly a relic of the past. Developer Naughty Dog takes these up a notch. Uncharted 4 (2016) combines

cutscenes and gameplay during moments of tension to slow the pace, mask loading of assets, and trick the player into believing they have the ability to affect the outcome of the situation. Following a lengthy car chase during which the player is jumping between cars and tearing through Madagascan countryside, the player's car crashes and the main character, Nathan Drake, becomes trapped underneath its flaming wreck.

This is actually just the midpoint of the sequence. The player controls Drake's arms as he's trying to pull himself out of the vehicle. As stakes are high, the player will try to be as quick as possible, but Drake's animation cycle and the rate at which the car sets aflame is well-timed. Despite the player's actions, the scene plays out at exactly the same pace every time. The timing not only sets up tension, but also allows enough time for behind-the-scenes processing to load the next scene's assets and allow the player to keep playing uninterrupted. It's a clear aspiration to be more filmic — a short breather in an action-packed sequence, only to be thrust right back into the action.

Criticisms levied towards Kojima and others of his philosophy place them as unsuccessful filmmakers making do with second best. Metal Gear Solid 4 is infamous for its ~8 hours of cutscenes, holding two Guinness World Records: "Longest end sequence in a video game" at 1 hour 9 minutes and "Longest cutscene in a video game" at 27 minutes (Guinness World Records Limited, 2018).

This opens an interesting debate: are purely gameplay-driven, cutscene-

free games like Half-Life 2 (2004) more deserving of the "video game" title than ones like Metal Gear Solid 4, which, as mentioned, contain almost 8 hours of cinematics? Davey Wreden's The Stanley Parable (2013) and The Beginner's Guide (2015) are derogatorily labelled as "walking simulators". They feature no cutscenes, nor do they have involved gameplay mechanics: the player simply navigates the environment, taking in the narrative delivered through text, environment, and narration. Without a fail state, can these pieces of work also be called games?

This is an old-fashioned train of thought: avoiding the fail-state was the player's objective in arcade games like Pac-Man (1980) or Donkey Kong (1981), where failure was often paired with having to put a quarter in to keep playing. The maturing of games as a medium has led to new sensibilities: the objective of "walking simulators" is narrative, and Dear Esther (2012) developer Dan Pinchbeck feels critics think that "games have to be defended from innovation" (Pinchbeck, 2016). This is a positive to most: games as a medium are still a young frontier. Developers can freely experiment with structures and storytelling methods.

CD Projekt Red's The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt (2015) is a huge game: its 450,000 word script (Stein, 2015) rivals most novels — Tolkien's Lord of the Rings trilogy totals 455,000 words — and to animate the game's dialogue was a gargantuan task. As The Witcher is an open world game — players are free to explore and interact as they wish, and in whichever order they wish — the team decided to automate this

process.

Cutscenes for the main story were all hand crafted, but side content was mostly created through a 'procedural' camera. The team created a template: the player character, Geralt, and the people he talks to have a pool of animations the system would randomly select from, ranging from simple hand gestures to body movements and expressions. Alongside a camera system that would select the best of pre-made angles (with criteria like: is the lens free of obstructions?) the team could quickly animate thousands of conversations between Geralt and other characters. They could then go in and quickly polish the scenes, work out kinks that came up — no automated process is perfect, after all — and save massive amounts of time.

### **Next issue...**

We'll talk about Half-Life 2's clever use of cinematographic techniques to teach players how to interact with its world, as well as the way some games use the way they're played to make players more attached to their characters. Thanks for reading!

High School Musical is a series of three Disney films following the highs, lows and anxieties of an American high school alongside, you guessed it, a fair few musical numbers. The films and their catchy hits captured the hearts of many and continue to be a fun escape from reality. However, could there be a deeper message behind the all-singing all-dancing school ensemble?

High School Musical 2 is set in the holiday resort Lava Springs, outside of the first film's school environment. The class divide in this film is made more apparent with Sharpay's family owning Lava Springs, the business that her school friends work for. Immediately we see the advantage Sharpay gains from being in a position of power and control over the

staff, and the way she uses this to her unfair advantage to gain further dominion. "We're all in this together" highlights the poor working conditions and unfair treatment the proletariat receive underneath the bourgeois, but places emphasis on the ability of the working class to survive hardship through comradeship.

Meanwhile, Sharpay is waited on by those "below" her without lifting a finger and Sharpay's entire definition of "fabulous" is inherently capitalist and rooted in wealth; this means it is only accessible for the bourgeois. Her distaste for the working class is clear, and she only has interest in comrade Troy if she can elevate him to her station. She views this as an act of charity and confirmation of her goodness, as well as a clear indicator of her misjudgement of the power of a united workforce against her.

The central struggle of the film focuses on Troy's capitalist desire to join the ranks of the bourgeois, which creates angst (rooted in jealousy) between the team. Troy

is seen as betraying his class by supporting their oppressor. This wedge weakens the power of a united proletariat as Troy starts to become disillusioned by capitalism. When Troy returns to his comrades and stands with the proletariat, the team rises up and rebels against the ruling class - in this case Sharpay. The musical number "I Don't Dance" highlights the proletariat's (Chad and the team's) distrust for members of the bourgeois (Ryan) with a tense and competitive song, with two teams fighting for a different goal. Ryan is an interesting character. We see him as a teen in a position of privilege and wealth who decides to move away from Sharpay and band with the workers to improve their rights, evening the playing

field for the Stardazzle Award. He could be seen as High School Musical's own Freidrich Engels. However, we still see Ryan take the Stardazzle award despite the performance being an equal show of solidarity against the ruling class. Is this a comment that ultimately power and reward will always simply revolve around the bourgeois?

We round up with "All For One", perhaps the most Communist song of the film. The song places huge emphasis on the values of class solidarity and the desire for an anti-capitalist movement resulting in a communist distribution of equal wealth ("all for one, one for all"). The song describes the achievement of this goal as the key to true fulfilment (Their "real summer can now begin"), showing that the equalisation of labour equates to a happier existence ("Fun in the sun now that all the hard work is done").

## HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL



## A MARXIST READING

MEGAN DOBBYN



# Life at Sea

Mysteriously missing merchant  
ships and the creatures  
of the deep

J. Weltreise

**R**eturn of the Obra Dinn follows an insurance adjuster in 1803, who boards a mysteriously unmanned merchant ship that has sailed into port after five years' disappearance at sea. It's your job as the insurance adjuster to discover the identity and cause of death for each of the sixty passengers and crew, through use of a magical timepiece that takes you back to each person's exact moment of death.

If you have not yet played Return of the Obra Dinn, stop reading now and do so. No other game on the market has the same ingenious complexity and open-ended puzzle solving mechanics as the Obra Dinn, as unlike traditional murder mystery games, there aren't a limited number of questions to ask of a limited number of suspects. Instead, everything you see and hear in the Obra Dinn is a potential clue, and only through purely logical reasoning can you arrive at each solution.

This article discusses an event that occurs shortly after the tutorial – and one that is definitely worth experiencing on your own – so if you have not yet played Return of the Obra Dinn, I recommend returning after you have played the first half hour of the game. For those that continue, just how accurate is the Obra Dinn? Aside from the more obviously fantastical elements, the answer is that the Obra Dinn is indeed quite accurate. The vessel's crew and uniforms reflect real crew manifests of merchant vessels in the

early 1800s, and the game's creator Lucas Pope (Papers Please) has stated that the boat's layout is based on the HMS Leopard, a 50-gun war ship of the English Royal Navy. And further, there truly have been several historical accounts of ships recorded missing, only for them to be rediscovered later with cargo completely intact but crew nowhere to be found.

Take, for example, the Mary Celeste, a merchant brigantine spotted near the coast of the Azores Islands in 1872. Captain David Morehouse of the British Dei Gratia first sighted the vessel on the morning of December 5th, sailing without a clear pattern and likely in distress. Upon sending a rescue boat to the Mary Celeste, his sailors discovered a ship with six months' worth of food and supplies, a fully stocked cargo of 1,701 barrels of alcohol, and crewmen's clothes and personal belongings still in their quarters. What had happened, then, to the crew? And why was this ship sailing near the Azores, and not en route to Genoa, Italy, where it had been destined?

Theories regarding what happened aboard the Mary Celeste flourished over the ensuing centuries – theories of sea monsters, mutiny, pirates, waterspouts, and even underwater earthquakes that caused noxious fumes to be released from the cargo. Yet despite the abundance of theories the mystery of the Mary Celeste has never been solved, with its legacy spurred on by the likes of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1884), Bela Lugosi (1935), and Doctor

Who (1965).

The *Mary Celeste*, however, is not alone. As recently as 2018, an unmanned “ghost ship” ran aground off the coast of Myanmar, more than 9 years and 5,000 miles from its last recorded location in Taiwan. Named the *Sam Ratulangi PB 1600*, the ship was a 177-meter-long commercial freighter built in 2001 and active for eight years before its recorded disappearance in 2009. In the intervening years since, it managed to sail south between Vietnam and the Philippines, navigate around the tip of Singapore, and then head north along the Malaysian and Myanmar coasts – by no means a straight and simple route.

Upon investigation by the Myanmar Navy, the crew of an Indonesian tugboat called the *Independence* admitted to having found the ship a month before its official discovery. They found it sailing without crew or cargo, and had decided to tow the freighter up the Myanmar coast. They’d intended to dismantle and salvage the ship at a factory in Bangladesh, but had set it adrift after their towing cables had snapped rather than attempting to haul it again. While this explains the ship’s last month of activity and its final destination, still nothing is known of what occurred to its crew or what happened during the *Ratulangi*’s final nine years. Stories like these of the *Mary Celeste* and the *Sam Ratulangi PB 1600* have captured the collective imagination and joined extensive maritime lore on ghost crews, sunken treasure, and vengeful

sea monsters. Return of the *Obra Dinn* draws heavily from these tropes, and particularly excels when it comes to mythical creatures of the deep.

Shortly after the in-game tutorial (warning: the spoiler), the player is thrown headlong into a scene of chaos as the Kraken attacks the *Obra Dinn*. Giant tentacles rise over the ship as the crew attempts to battle the creature from multiple decks. It’s a story that’s been told and retold numerous times; the angry sea monster hell-bent on destruction and tearing apart a ship’s crew. Though it’s now been fairly well established that the Kraken is not in fact real, its existence was considered scientific fact until as recently as the 18th century, in which the father of modern taxonomy Carolus Linnaeus included the Kraken in his 1735 *Systema Naturae*.

Written accounts of the Kraken date at least as far back as 1180, when King Sverre of Norway wrote of the Kraken as one of many supposed sea monsters. Norwegian stories of the Kraken were joined by Icelandic tales of creatures such as the *Hafgufa* (“sea-mist”) and the *Lyngbakr* (“heather-back”), which closely resembled giant whales in appearance. The Kraken likely subsumed features from these stories into its own mythos as its notoriety grew, leading to tales of a monster with wide and varied signs. According to the earliest legends, the Kraken’s depictions ranged from a gargantuan crustacean, to a massive sea serpent, to even a gigantic humanoid sea monster;

only in recent centuries has its image steadied around the tentacled cephalopod we picture today.

However, many of the more outlandish signs attributed to the Kraken do in fact have a basis in reality. Sightings of the Kraken were likely reactions to a combination of creatures and events, among which include unusual humpback whale feeding patterns, sperm whale battle scars, underwater volcanoes, giant squid, and fossilized tree resin.

For example, the Kraken was supposedly accompanied by enormous shoals of fish that could provide a bountiful catch for fishermen that dared to get close, and its arrival was signified by huge bursts of bubbles breaking the surface. This strongly evokes the bubble-net feeding strategy unique to humpback whales, in which a pod of whales release their bubbles in a rising spiral pattern to herd shoals of herring closer to the surface. The mouths of several whales then breach the surface as they consume the herring, and do so in such tight formation as could likely seem the mouths and arms of one giant animal to an uninformed onlooker.

Other tales tell of a vengeful Kraken that churns the water, attacking and sinking ships that dare to sail too close. Several of these stories are likely inspired by the very real danger posed from underwater volcanoes, as a gaseous marine volcano can spew bubbles at a rate so strong that it temporarily decreases the water density above the volcano and can cause unlucky

ships overhead to lose buoyancy and sink. This, in addition to the molten rocks and pumice that are also expelled, likely to strike the ship and rip holes in its keel in what could easily feel like an attack. Such volcanic activity is common in the North Atlantic Ocean along the Mid-Atlantic Ridge – where the Kraken supposedly lies – as well as in the Caribbean’s Bermuda Triangle, also infamous for mysteriously disappeared ships.

These and more form the likely basis for the Kraken’s myths, and another article entirely could be dedicated to its fascinating modern equivalent, the giant squid. Though we will never truly know what ancient sailors witnessed or what happened aboard the *Mary Celeste*, if you yearn to solve such mysteries take a mosey around Return of the *Obra Dinn*. Let us know what you think, and if you’re curious about the science and history behind a different game, let us know that too. Until then, I leave you with this ageless Latin wisdom:

*In mari multa latent.*

In the ocean many things are hidden.

# THE VVITCH

a feminist symbol or another femme fatale?

M E G A N  
D O B B Y N

**T**he VVitch - A New England Folktale, is a 2016 film, written and directed by Robert Eggers. The film is a beautifully shot, thoughtful and suspenseful thriller. The historical accuracy in costume and set alongside a creative use of genuine Puritan New England dialogue transports the viewer to a very realistic moment in time. The lack of gimmicky jump scares, coupled with the tense slow burn of the film, means we are able to really sink our teeth into diverging our own message and interpretation from this retelling of an old English folk tale.

Throughout this film we see Thomasin, the eldest daughter and main female character, burdened by an oppressive Puritan patriarchy, contrasted to 'the witches of the woods'. In more recent years witches have been used as a symbol of protest against oppressive mainstream social practices such as white supremacy and patriarchy. In 2017 protesters in Boston dressed as witches, holding signs showing slogans such as 'hex white supremacy' and 'good night alt right'. The quote "We are the granddaughters of the witches you weren't able to burn" from Tish Thawer's 2015 novel 'The Witches of Black Brook' has been seen at women's rights marches around the world. They represent sexual freedom, power, outsiders of western society; but, when the witch is used as the negative presence in a film, tearing apart the family unit by delivering pain and suffering - does she fall into the role of becom-

ing just another femme fatale? The atmosphere of the film and avoidance of cheap gore or jump scares gives us the opportunity to consider these deeper questions and themes.

The opening shot focuses solely on Thomasin, the scene then shows the family being banished from the Puritan colony with only male dialogue present. Thomasin watches as men decide what happens to her life as she is completely uprooted with the rest of her family. She is the only family member to hesitate to leave but is helpless to change the decisions made. Throughout the film, we see the women in the family unit depicted as property. Thomasin fulfils traditional roles in the home, carrying the majority of the burden of childcare, bedding the goats, cleaning and polishing, we also hear the parents discuss selling her off to another family for money. Later on we have a scene where Catherine, William's wife and Thomasin's mother, sobs and confesses her sin to becoming a 'shrew' to her husband and 'knowing she has become Job's wife'. Job's wife was often a negatively viewed biblical character who turns against her husband and doubts God's grace and mercy. Although Thomasin and Catherine have different social standing within the family unit this scene clearly shows us how they both live under the shadow of William as the Patriarchal head of the family unit.

The VVitch also draws attention to the fear and mistrust of women's sexuality in Puritan New England.



## THE WITCH

Thomasin is mistreated by her family, called a 'proud slut' and a 'whore', all because of a fear of her coming of age. Despite her brother Caleb being the one tempted by Thomasin's sexual maturity, Thomasin is the one blamed. This behaviour aligns with the Christian narrative of women as temptresses. Was Eve the first 'witch', the first sexual woman, the first follower of the devil, and now all must suffer because of her? Eve was persecuted and thrown from God's grace alongside Adam for not conforming to the rules of the garden she inhabited, and for tempting Adam to do the same. Throughout western history the persecution of witches has been the persecution of people who do not conform to the social norms of the society they live in and for 'enchanted' and 'tempting' men to do the same. According to Alison Rowland's "Witchcraft and Gender in Early Modern Europe." women make up 70-80% of those tried for witchcraft in Europe and New England.

Some viewers argue Thomasin chooses to turn to the Devil and embrace 'freedom' but it can be argued that Thomasin has very few viable options laid out before her. She can either return to the colony and explain what happened, in which case she will almost certainly be tried as a witch and die; return neither to the colony, or the Devil and stay at the farm alone, in which case she will have to fend for herself and likely become the prey of the witches; or she could take her own life which would (by her Puritan

beliefs) turn her away from God and heaven. It can be argued that Thomasin turns to the Devil so easily as she has already killed her mother, being brought up as such a devout Christian, and that after this act she likely already believes herself to be evil and too full of sin to be saved by the redemption of Christ. Either this, or she sees herself bereft of God's love or mercy and turns to another power to fill the desire she was raised with to worship and serve.

To me the film symbolises Thomasin's lack of choice in her own life. She lives in guilt before God, faces little choice or control in her life under the patriarchy, then she signs her name and agency away to live under the Devil. I would argue against a feminist take on Thomasin's turn to the devil, the concept that through signing his contract she shuns patriarchal society and becomes a powerful woman. In the instance of the *Witch*, what she is foreshadowed to be reinforces the concept of the femme fatale, women as a destructive and evil force. To imply that the idea of a New England woman who chooses to no longer conform to social norms, is a witch who forcibly seduces men, steals and kills babies and worships the devil - isn't my idea of an empowered woman. The ending of this film is a dire choice presented to a woman trapped, either kill or be killed.

# The Lore of Destiny:

## *Worldbuilding through narrative loot*

Loot in video games is hardly a new concept. From dungeon crawling for better gear in Diablo, to levelling up for new weapons and attachments in Call of Duty, loot is a core mechanic that gives players a goal and something to devote their time to. Storytelling, on the other hand, is often viewed as a separate aspect of a game, sometimes overlapping briefly, but seen as its own cog in the larger machine of the game. But what if finding character backstory and information about the world they inhabit is more than just clicking on something in a level, and instead gives you a reason to play the game in ways you otherwise wouldn't have? This is exactly what the game's developer, Bungie, did when creating Destiny, and the lore of the game world now sits firmly as one of the game's main forms of loot.

To say that Destiny's storytelling and lore is perfect would be a far cry from the truth. When Destiny 1 first launched, the narrative left many players wondering what had just happened after the campaign finished, and until the release of their first expansion a year later, many players were left thinking that the story wouldn't be a focus for the franchise. How wrong they were. It wasn't until the release of Destiny 2 that Bungie really found their footing with how they wanted to tell the story of the world they created.

Upon Destiny 1's release, this world building was done through 'Grimoire Cards', text entries that were made available once you had completed certain activities or events, that

weren't viewable in game. Yes you read that correctly. The lore you had earned was only readable on a website outside the game itself, and the players weren't happy. With the arrival of Destiny 2, Bungie took this concept and developed an in-game system where anything earned could be viewed from the comfort of the menu screens, like most games. The changes made during this migration though would be what lead to the lore entries being treated as loot.

Finding extra narrative information within the game isn't a new concept though. Borderlands 3 has Eridian Writings that give the player stories explaining the world's backstory, Bioshock Infinite has Voxophones that are personal recordings left in the environment by its inhabitants, and Elder Scrolls Online has Lorebooks which are text entries catalogued into various topics. Games also vary in the amount of additional narrative they provide, from smaller collections of lore, to more substantial efforts of world building. For the most part though, these are usually items you find or scan in the world rather than something you earn.

This isn't a bad thing. Collecting items is fun, and has been a part of games for a very long time (who doesn't like a good collectible after all). However, when this method of storytelling is used as a foundation for something more, be that rewards or new challenges, it causes the lore that it's presenting to become more integrated into the gaming experience. The greatest result of this approach in Destiny 2 is the amount of world

building it allows the writers to explore, and has led to the game containing approximately 1,237 lore entries earnable in the game, outside of the core story arc.

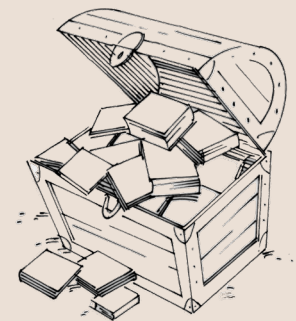
Whilst having an extensive narrative universe is not unusual in games either, Destiny provides a good example of the integration possible when viewing the lore as a part of the players experience and how they interact with the game. The upside of Bungie's approach with Destiny is something that larger franchises, such as World of Warcraft, Warhammer 40k, Mass Effect and even Bungie's own Halo franchise, can sometimes lose. Control. The plethora of lore Destiny has is held almost entirely in-game (with a few minor exceptions). Which has led to it having a well managed and almost entirely self contained narrative. This control has meant that Bungie are also able to manipulate the lore, releasing it when needed, and ensuring that it remains something worth chasing, like episodes of a TV series.

By successfully linking the universe's lore to various parts of the game as rewards, ways to earn rewards, and as additional rewards to regular loot, Bungie gives players additional incentives to complete quests, unlock weapons and complete challenges in activities. These will often have additional narrative entries tied to them, and often require specific criteria to be met to earn the lore as a reward. This additional reward also extends to loot like weapons and armour that often include stories that explore events in the game's history linked to the item. This leaves players in a position where the primary goal can become the lore itself rather than the activity or items they're attached to.

But has this been successful? While some may not think so, Destiny's narrative has inspired fans to create lore

communities dedicated to finding and piecing together the narrative of the wider universe the game inhabits, speculating on the consequences of newly found entries, and collaborating on creating a better understanding of a story that is still unfolding. But like any good loot, not everyone has or wants it.

Even now, 3 years after the launch of Destiny 2, and 6 years after the launch of Destiny 1, there are still players who only know the story as it was presented in the campaign. This isn't a bad thing or a failure in storytelling, quite the contrary. By incentivizing the story and creating a system where narrative is earned, Bungie has let players find their own place in the games universe and enabled them to experience it how they want. If the lore of Destiny truly is another form of loot in the game, then what would be the incentive behind giving it to everyone. After all, the best loot is always something the player desires but must be earned. And what better reward is there than knowledge.



**Nick Parry**

# THE ARCHITECTURE OF HORROR PLAYING BLOODBORNE

YARNHAM GAZETTEER

**SAMUEL T. MCNALLY**

**F**rom Gothic to cosmic, FromSoftware's 2015 critical and commercial hit *Bloodborne* encapsulates whole generations of classic horror literature within its walls. Through writing, blood sucking and bestial creatures, to the gameplay elements of madness - It captures the spirit of novels from 'Dracula' right through to 'Call of Cthulhu'. However, I'm here to talk about another element of its creeping horror: architecture. Now, when we usually talk about horror, the façade of a building at the curl of a road might not be what springs to mind. Yet the level designs, playable and unplayable, are integral to the atmosphere of *Bloodborne*.

## FORESHADOWING THE JOURNEY

The game opens lying in the bed of a dingy hospital, bags of blood sagging between jars of formaldehyde preserving god-knows-what for who-knows-how-long. Creeping through the crimson soaked floorboards, you'll fight your way out of the tight building to be met with the city of Yharnam. Specifically, the towering bridge that looms above you that you later learn leads to central Yharnam.

Players of FromSoftware games will know that whenever you see an interesting sky-scape or location, chances are you'll have to go there later on. This is usually a prospect that fills me with joy: looking at the castle wondering which boss I might encounter. Except, the case of *Bloodborne*, as you climb the first ladder in the game a guttural scream bellows from the bridge; this lets you know immediately that in this game (at least to begin with) you are not the hunter of demons and beasts,

you are their prey. From that moment, the bridge becomes a foreboding sight, towering above the paths that twists and turn throughout Yharnam and waiting for you to be brave enough to face whatever looms there. This encounter leads perfectly into the next phase of the game.

## LOST FROM THE NEST

The top of the aforementioned ladder leads to your first hunters' lantern, a point of safety and respite for you to level up without the threat of attack. One of the most wonderful fear-inducing elements of *Bloodborne* are these lanterns. Usually, they have a path leading away from them, the further away you go the more beasts you encounter and the more unknown threats that lurk in front of you. Who knows when you might stumble into a one-way road, trapping you with the nightmarish creatures that roam the streets? Not only that, but the paths leading away twist and turn, doubling back on themselves in a labyrinth where danger waits in every shadow. One of the reasons I love this game is, unlike most horror games, the monsters don't seek you, you have to leave your own safety to seek them. You are rewarded, if you travel far enough, by the opening of shortcuts, gates and doors locked from one side allowing you to travel back to safety more quickly. But, every time you venture out to seek them, you are fully aware of the risk of getting lost or killed far from the safety of the hunters dream. Speaking of getting lost...

## IMPOSSIBLE SPACE

Becoming lost and disoriented because the streets are difficult to navigate is one thing, but when the space around you defies the laws of physics, that's another thing entirely. It adds to the layers of confusion and the oppressive nature designed to make you feel scared and trapped. My favourite example of this is in the Old Hunters downloadable content - you find yourself in a towering research hall filled with the victims of failed experiments, trying to navigate a rotating staircase with lethal drops to the ground. At the summit, you find a garden and the Astral Clocktower. What do you find when you leave the clock tower at the highest point in the city? A fishing hamlet, veiled in mist with water lapping at the dilapidated shacks, seemingly held above the clouds. Normally it would be easy to say this is impossible or a dream, especially for a game filled with locations called *The Hunter's Dream* or *The Nightmare Frontier*, but this is also a world filled with magic and ritual, connected between physical places and dreams. It is jarring physically and emotionally, the labour of trying to work out where you are in the game combined with trying to understand how that plays into the story is fantastic, you find yourself asking "is this real?" which is a wonderfully awful position to be put in by a horror game.

## THE LOCKED DOOR ON THE GREAT BRIDGE

Think back to the Great Bridge of Central Yharnam, the first great piece of architecture you see in *Bloodborne*. After working up the courage to venture out to the bridge, risking life and limb, possibly multiple lives and multiple limbs, and fighting the dreaded Cleric Beast which guards the path forward; you arrive. You're faced with a locked door. Nothing

new to you as a player, "It must open from the other side" you think, knowing that the healing church has abandoned Yharnam, locking it off and leaving it to the beasts. You fight your way through graveyards and chapels and eventually find yourself at the balcony the Cleric Beast came from, looking out at the city filled with the howls and cries of beasts and bestial hunters. The other side of the door. You go to open it, and... it's locked.

Initially I thought it was a mistake. Then I thought that maybe this is the representation of the healing church abandoning the city. Then I thought maybe it's more. When you start the game, you look up at the great bridge, its daunting edifice hanging over you, foreshadowing the trials yet to come. When you reach this point, you look down upon it and the city that led you here. You have come too far forward to go back now, locked in with the healing church. You are no longer looking ahead to the horrors that lie within. You are among them.

In the end, *Bloodborne's* level design is central to its storytelling and atmosphere. This is of course normal for a FromSoftware game, which tends to be light on obvious exposition and hide their stories in the details of the worlds they rest in. But I think horror games can learn a lot from this. The locations you present, their design, how they progress and the architecture of the places you show, all build an atmosphere and a story of their own that can be incredibly powerful to the player.



**THE  
COLOUR  
OF  
LOVE**

**MELISSA  
FIELDING**

The Twilight Saga began as this vaguely Gothic indie romance about two awkward virgins (one who happens to be a vampire, one who happens to be Kristen Stewart) lying in fields talking about the weather, the threat of eternal damnation and wearing converse to prom - average 17 year-old things, you know? After a lot of intense and weird closed mouth snogging, it's because there is venom in his spit guys, that's why he can't kiss her properly - it's also a thinly veiled metaphor for Mormon restrictions on intimacy before marriage. Twilight began as a story that was about personal choice, reasoning and one 35 year-old stay-at-home mum's Vampire AU Pride and Prejudice fanfiction then became a blockbuster franchise that dominated the early 2010s. As each film grew rapidly more successful, the studios developed a habit of switching out directors for each individual instalment which resulted in inconsistent visuals and horrific clashes in style. When finally whole: The Twilight Saga is an ugly mess.

I love Catherine Hardwicke's Twilight (2008). I'm not ashamed of it. I love that Bella's wardrobe goes from moody tomboy to delicate florals as she falls deeper in love. I love Billy Burke's moustache and Bella's little cactus. I love the intense montage of Bella imagining Edward biting her neck, in crushed velvet and lace looking a little like a young Robert Smith. What I love more is Hardwicke's Forks. Everything is wet and cold and dull. It's

miserable weather and the ordinary hiding the extraordinary. Completely at home in the soft blue colour grade, is mousy Bella Swan. This is a reflection of Edwards' cool persona and marble skin, sure, but it's just as much the mundane and pure minded heroine at the start of her journey.

Heating up a little bit, I don't hate Chris Weitz's decision to focus on the warmth Bella desperately seeks out post heartbreak from childhood best friend and werewolf love interest Jacob. If Twilight is walking home in the rain, then New Moon (2009) is pressing cold feet against the radiator while you wait for your soup to heat up. It's opposing but complimentary. Twilight is the exploration of one world, New Moon is taking a closer look at what you haven't noticed about it yet.

Now, Eclipse (2010) is where everything starts to slip. There's this sort of weird warmth reminiscent of New Moon's 'folk tales by the campfire aesthetic' but it never quite hits the mark. Director David Slade was blessed by the contrasting styles set up but never uses them. By this point the cold blues and lush greens of Hardwicke's Washington are completely abandoned.

Thematically, Eclipse is about Bella Swan deciding between the safe, seductive temptation of immortality and the vulnerable but comfortably mundane alternative. Edward Cullen's eternal beauty and poetic dramatics versus the warmth of humanity and the promise of old age that Jacob Black begs her to reconsider. It wasn't really ever about "Which boy do

“*If Twilight is walking home in the rain, then New Moon (2009) is pressing cold feet against the radiator while you wait for your soup to heat up.*”

I date?" but male critics refuse to believe teenage girls can think about anything else. So, for the sake of profit, these 'boys' were wrapped into pretty little packages called Robert Pattinson and Taylor Lautner.

It would have been so perfect to throw Bella between the opposing styles that represent the intense adoration (and unrequited affection) of two boys; aesthetically tossing her back and forth as she struggles to weigh up what's worth living or dying for. There's a scene where Jacob knows he's lost the fight. Bella is engaged. Edward's won. Everything's miserable. There is an expensive looking sweeping shot as Jacob and Bella kiss for the first time (consensually!) and it is ridiculous because this moment isn't romantic; it's sad. There should have been a burst of sunlight suddenly hidden by clouds leaving nothing but the snow and cold in the mountains. All the colour of human life slowly fading out to make way for the cool breath of immortality. No more warm glow because Jacob isn't even a choice anymore.

I'm going to skip over any mention of the baby in *Breaking Dawn* (2011) because although I'm no longer 13 and bricking it I'll get pregnant the first time I have sex; thinking about the god awful implications of child grooming and your best friend/sort of ex boyfriend dating your daughter who will mature and reach the physical age of 18 within a few years of being born is still absolutely terrifying.

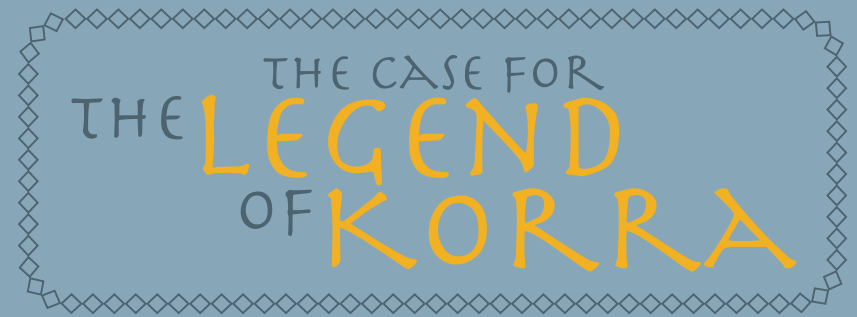
There are no more choices to be made in *Breaking Dawn*. Instead Bella learns to deal with the consequences of her decision. What makes them the worst films to me, is that Bill Condon makes no decision to visually separate Bella's life and death. It's so incredibly bright and golden. Everyone's hair looks bad and no one is 'beautifully pale with death' they are just

waxy and ugly looking. The 'vegetarian' gold contact lenses are no longer 'fey-like', just goofy and cheap and off putting.

Now Bella has firmly made up her mind to get married at 18; Part One should be visually cold. As we change to Jacob's perspective we should be haunted by it. Not only is the world wet with a teenage boy's miserable sulking but his whole existence becomes tied up in Edward Cullen's relationship. Just like Bella in the first film, Jacob nervously stumbles around a house full of unnervingly cold skinned, black eyed vampires who haven't eaten in days. Even more alienating is having to watch the still human Bella drink a mug full of human blood to feed her unborn child. Now Jacob is the human (sort of) in love with a vampire (sort of).

Part Two's opening titles introduce monochrome forests and violent red sunlight, but never follow through in showing the way the world looks through undead eyes. Wouldn't it be more fitting that colour dies when you do? Not quite a grey scale, it's not that the world has to be darker now; but creatures like these are meant to stay hidden during the day. The trees don't need to be less green; but how can you see the colour of life if you are no longer living in it?

Part Two is the only film that wasn't about choice; between silly, squabbling boys - or anything more thoughtful. It is about consequence. So why are we never shown the horror of it? Bella wakes up immaculate and in control. Happy to outlive her friends and father. Never thirsty, miserable or craving the warmth now she is so cold. Condon shows us a glimpse of world black with death, white cold touch and bright red with life - and dumps it (and it's themes) for an overpowering, lovey-dovey glow.



ERIN MCKEOWN

IT'S a daunting and disillusioning fact that any modicum of alteration to something beheld as so perfectly infallible will undergo intensely unfair scrutiny. Unfortunately, this unfoundedly aggressive reaction to change permeates the discussion surrounding the otherwise successful sequel series to the *Avatar: The Last Airbender* franchise, *The Legend of Korra*. Following the succeeding *Avatar* in the cycle, the series concerns the emotional and spiritual journey of the Southern Water Tribe *Avatar*, Korra, as she manoeuvres the spiritual and socio-political unrest permeating the new world left in the wake of *Avatar Aang*. In developing the pre-established landscape and lore, *LOK* excels in maintaining the nostalgic spirit of its predecessor whilst simultaneously providing a fresh perspective on the essence of *ATLA*, raising questions regarding life, death, and purpose in a

fashion far beyond conventional children's television. However, in popular circles of opinion, it is still regarded as an incredibly divisive show due to numerous and mundane biases. The pivotal message of the Eastern tenets of balance and mindfulness connects harmoniously with the obstacles conveyed within the show, whilst acting as a catalytic goal for an *Avatar* who stumbles over herself to carve out her own identity.

The predominant landscape within the show is the newly formed capital of Republic City, a previous Fire Nation colony which was liberated by Fire Lord Zuko and *Avatar Aang* after the resolution of the one hundred year war. It was intended to operate as a cultural melting point where all four nations, bender and non-bender, could co-exist peacefully and could function as a neutral ground for political negotiations. Book 1 spends a whole season within Republic City to ground the viewer

and demonstrate the exponential growth the landscape has undergone in the past seventy years. A commonplace critique regarding LOK is the dissatisfaction with the Westernisation of a landscape intended to represent a mixture of East Asian cultures, with the layout of Republic City likened to cities such as San Francisco and New York. Indeed, it is partially based on 1920's New York (The light blue statue of Aang on an island facing Republic City is rather obtuse) yet it's design also cites cities of that era such as Hong Kong, Tokyo, Shanghai and Seoul. The inclusion of motifs such as apartments above storefronts, skyscrapers and motorised vehicles are not exclusive to the West, and it is infantilising and naïve to protest so. The advancement of technology is also a point of displeasure, with individuals citing the industrial acceleration as unbelievable and unseemly. Irrefutably, when we observe the landscape of LOK it is evident they are building upon the advancements of an industrial revolution

akin to our own. It is essential to consider that within A T L A , the Fire Nation, in the midst of an inter-generational war, had already designed machinery such as steamboats, jet-skis, airships and tanks; arguably, that same technology would have progressed in a post war era from serving military purposes to urbanisation of the landscape.

LOK excels at depicting

nuanced and complex relationships, exemplified by the varied motivations fuelling the actions of the seasonal villains. These foes are not just powerful, but often have valid criticisms of the accepted norms "Team Avatar" either operates within or fights to protect. The revolutionist Amon represents the faults within the human concept of "equality", for though he desires to fashion a society where benders and non-benders are equal, his agenda becomes tainted when he takes advantage of non-benders' frustration, provokes outrage to get non-benders to join his cause, committing acts of terrorism, and robbing benders of their abilities. Of all of Korra's enemies, arguably Zaheer is the most intriguing and provocative. He despises overt power structures and "liberates" the Earth Kingdom by murdering their monarch through airbending, sucking every atom of air from her lungs. Airbending is

renown throughout the franchise as the ability of a peaceful nation, so to weaponise it on behalf of a political ideology casts an ominous and disconcerting perspective on airbending itself. Kuvira arises in the power vacuum following the demise of the Earth Queen, with the noble goal of unifying her fractured nation in the midst of civil unrest. Fatally, she embarks on this crusade using military force and intimidation and her power



and arrogance leads to her consequential downfall. Interestingly, the commonality uniting these powerful individuals, is that their actions do positively or significantly alter the landscape. Amon's uprising leads to the dismantlement of the council of benders, and Republic City elects a President. Zaheer's actions liberate the stratified class system of the Earth Kingdom from a tyrannical monarch. Kuvira's attempt to seize Republic City inspires the last remaining Earth Kingdom monarch to abolish the monarchy in its entirety and introduce democratic elections. Overall, these villains aim to parallel our own world and invite us to question and identify hypocrisy within our own systems of government.

The main target of persecution is the protagonist herself, Korra. Criticism directed towards her characterisation is predominantly unfounded and empty in that it's fuelled by indignation that she is not Aang. Whereas Aang was a pacifist skilled in the spiritual practises of mindfulness and introspection, Korra is his inverted image. She is confrontational, rash, even volatile; however, she is also defined by her status as the Avatar from a tremendously young age, which shapes her idealisation and view of herself in a detrimental fashion. Additionally, she's a girl fighting for a world that doesn't seem to care about her. Unlike Aang, who ran away from the responsibility of being the Avatar, Korra runs headfirst into it, and into situations she isn't fully prepared for, refusing to acknowledge human weaknesses such as fear and insecurity. Her actions have dire consequences, and she enters the final season physically and psychologically broken. Unfortunately, there are no easy solutions for Korra which is simultaneously frustrating from her perspective, and relatable to

the viewer because sometimes when we find ourselves in a dark place and we push forward to find the answers we desperately desire, we find nothing. She is not an infallible character, and we see her truly suffer and fight to overcome deeply rooted trauma. This chosen one fails over and over again, grappling with her self-worth as she learns to dismantle her perception of herself as the Avatar and confront her identity as an individual. The final showdown between Kuvira and Korra is the culmination of a journey of extensive spiritual and personal growth, showing deep compassion and introspection worthy of a great leader.

As a sequel, LOK is obligated to expand upon its predecessor by introducing new ideas and situations to differentiate itself as a stand-alone project. Often, individuals will consider their favourite mediums as concretely sacred texts and condemn anyone who tries to alter or improve the story. And yet, LOK interacts with the original series respectfully and harmoniously by expanding on lore and landscape alike, whilst introducing thematic issues and struggles relatable to a contemporary audience. ATLA and LOK perhaps have higher numbers than the usual median audience age for a Nickelodeon show; however, this is directly related to the representation of a character who faces an uncertain future in a dissonantly fraught world. Young adults get to see an individual struggling to find herself, reinforcing that feeling stagnant and unsure are rational feelings to face.

**WHAT** This next section is dedicated to roleplaying games. They're a niche, within a niche, within a niche, but also some of the most fun you can have with your friends. So: what even are they?

There's no right, or good, answer. It's a bit odd to describe. 3-5 friends sit around a table, rolling dice and telling stories. It's a bit like playing make-believe when you were kids, but this time bound by rules and dice. Unlike books, there is no set story to follow. Unlike video games, the choices you make are unlimited. Every RPG is a toolbox made for telling stories of a particular kind.

The one you'll probably have heard of before is **DUNGEONS & DRAGONS** - it dominates the market. And for good reason: it's expansive, detailed, and it taps into a shared understanding we all have of fantasy and elves and dwarves and dragons. It tells that classic story of brave adventurers going to dungeons deep, slaying dragons, collecting treasure and then doing it all again the week after. Controversially, I don't think it's the best choice for beginners.

It requires a lot of investment from everybody playing: someone will have to take the role of the Dungeon Master (the person who develops and narrates the world), and the others will have to become comfortable with its extensive rules mostly centered around combat.

There are, of course, lots of resources online which will show you how to play (shout out to Critical Role, the cast of which inspired me to start playing) but they can set an unrealistic standard for your game. Those people are professionals.

So, what is a good RPG for beginners? When you turn the page you'll see a game I made (based on another game, John Harper's Lasers & Feelings) called Virtues & Scandals. It's very simple: all you need to play is a 6-sided die and those two pages of rules. If you've watched Bridgerton, Downton Abbey, or read any Jane Austen novel you'll get the gist immediately.

**I**Sit down with some friends and make your characters together - rely on all your favourite tropes, and talk through the silliest, funnest story you can. Use the die to help you decide outcomes you're not sure of.

Virtues & Scandals and the original, sci-fi Lasers & Feelings rely on everyone you play with having a solid grasp of improvisation and like... being good at it. The lack of guidance can be a little daunting if you haven't played something like this before.

Look to the next page for some recommendations of RPGs that aren't D&D, and how you can get started with them. Taking the plunge is worth it - this is one of the most creative hobbies you could have.

## AN RPG?

## SCUM AND VILLAINY

S&V is an easy-to-grasp ruleset using lots of 6-sided die in a tidy framework that guides collaborative storytelling.

You'll be attuning to the Føøø Way and recreating the adventures of the Mandalorian, with a spaceship to boot.

A current favourite.

Part of a movement known as the Old School Renaissance, OSE is a reinterpretation of the first edition of D&D.

Considerably more straightforward than contemporary D&D, your goal is simple: run in, get all the gold you can, and get out safely.

Where S&V is focused on telling a fun story, OSE is more about the way you navigate the treacherous dungeon.

## OLD-SCHOOL ESSENTIALS

RETRO ADVENTURE GAME

## Quest

Quest is by far the most accessible of these - you can read through the rules in 20 minutes, or listen to them read out on their website at: [adventure.game](http://adventure.game)

It's simple, doesn't let the rules hold you back, and provides some excellent guidelines for creating characters with motivations and depth. It's also incredibly pretty!



**YOU ARE YOUNG ARISTOCRATS FROM THE TON**, a Regency-era Royal Court. You have everything you could wish for except for one thing: love. Ingratiate yourself to the **QUEEN**, pursue love, duel for your honour, and don't get embroiled in any uncouth scandals...

### PLAYERS: CREATE CHARACTERS

**1** Choose a style for your character: **Royal**, **Byronic**, **Gambler**, or **Lacking Familiarity with Marital Activities**.

**2** Choose a role for your character: **Duke/Duchess**, **Modiste**, **Opera Singer**, **Artist**, **Writer**, **Coachman**, or **Handmaid**.

**3** Choose your **number**, from 2 to 5. A high number means you're better at **VIRTUES** (bravery, shows of pomp). A low number means you're better at **SCANDALS** (seduction; wild, passionate action).

**4** Give your character a **name befit that of a royal**. (throw a dart at a map of England to pick a surname)

**You have:** an extravagant outfit (gown, suit, or other), a deed to an estate, communication issues.

**Player goal:** Get your character involved in scandalous schemes in the name of love.

**Character goal:** Choose one or create your own: **Get married**, **sire a child**, **Break free of tradition**, **Make a name for yourself**, or **Snog the coach driver**.

### PLAYERS: CREATE THE COURT

As a group, pick two traits of your court: **Wealthy**, **Holds Influence**, **Social Climbers**, **New Money**, **Progressive**.

Also, pick one problem: **Cold** (don't appreciate your pursuits), **Classist** (after the milkmaid? I don't think so), **Rabble-rousers** (you're never invited to the parties), **Grim Reputation** (Sins of the father cut deep).

### ROLLING THE DICE

When you do something risky, roll 1d6 to find out how it goes. Roll +1d if you're prepared and +1d if you're an expert. (The GM tells you how many dice to roll, based on your character and the situation.) Roll your dice and compare each die result to your number.



If you're using **VIRTUES** (honor, pomp), you want to roll under your number.



If you're using **SCANDALS** (seduction, action), you want to roll over your number.

**0** If **none of your dice succeed**, it goes wrong. The GM says how things get worse somehow.

**1** If **one die succeeds**, you barely manage it. The GM inflicts a complication, harm, or cost.

**2** If **two dice succeed**, you do it well. Good job!

**3** If **three dice succeed**, you get a critical success! The GM tells you some extra effect you get.

**!** If you roll your number exactly, you have **SCANDALOUS VIRTUE**. You get a special insight into what's going on. Ask the GM a question and they'll answer you honestly.

(A roll of **SCANDALOUS VIRTUE** counts as a success.)

**HELPING:** If you want to help someone else who's rolling, say how you try to help and make a roll. If you succeed, give them +1d.



### GM: CREATE A SCENARIO

Roll or choose on the tables below.

#### A Figure...

- |                            |                                |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. The Queen               | 2. Your Parents                |
| 3. An Elder Sibling        | 4. The Head of a Fellow Family |
| 5. A Mysterious Benefactor | 6. The Pauper's Son/Daughter   |

#### Wants to...

- |                                 |                         |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Hold a Ball                  | 2. Marry off their kids |
| 3. Poison someone close to them | 4. Conceal an affair    |
| 5. Put on a concert             | 6. Leave the Ton        |

#### But...

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 1. The child is illegitimate     | 2. They struggle communicating via fan |
| 3. Their class doesn't permit it | 4. The target isn't fond of walks      |
| 5. They're being blackmailed     | 6. A fire tears through town           |

### GM: RUN THE GAME

Play to find out how they fulfil their goals. Introduce love interests by showing evidence of their recent worthiness like achievements, wealth, and title. Call for a roll when the situation is uncertain. Don't pre-plan outcomes—let the chips fall where they may. Use failures to push the action forward. The situation always changes after a roll, for good or ill.

Ask questions and build on the answers. "Have any of you encountered Mr. Jones before? Where? What happened?"

### THE GOSSIP RAG

The Rag has eyes and ears everywhere; when a character makes a display of **SCANDALOUS VIRTUE**, the rest of the Ton is sure to find out. At the start of every session, use the Rag to spread information both false and true, and consider how the other families might react. The players might choose to try and spread disinformation themselves too...

Ask: "What are the Featherdowns hiding?", "Might the Bridgeleys be hiding a fatherless child?", "Is Mr. Gillenbie as good of a dancer as everyone makes him out to be?"

### VIRTUES & SCANDALS

(v1.1) is a micro RPG by Eryk Sawicki  
[eryk@hey.com](mailto:eryk@hey.com)  
[@peregrine\\_coast](https://twitter.com/peregrine_coast)

**VIRTUES & SCANDALS** is a hack of **Lasers & Feelings** by John Harper. Check it out!  
[onesevendesign.com/lase-rfeelings/](https://onesevendesign.com/lase-rfeelings/)

This game is licensed under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license.  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/us/>



# GWA&T of Bubbling Waters random encounters Compatible with **NORKBORG** by Joshua Luke Cable

The cult dedicates the last of their wretched lives to procuring and using the luxurious bubble baths in this abyssal hellscape. They evangelise the warm bubbling water of the bath; its great comfort and enlightenment before the dismal end takes them.

There are splinter groups within the fraternity: those who aren't so gracious. Even the most fanatical member of the Bubbling Waters would be willing to smite anything that stands in the way of the Warm Embrace.

## The Last Luxurious Bath

- 1 A cobbled together tub comprised of wood and metal. Barely fit for purpose, but huge.
- 2 A hole in the ground.
- 3 A pond in the grounds of some overgrown, forgotten estate.
- 4 A Witch's iron cauldron.
- 5 The hollow skull of a fallen giant.
- 6 A crumbling bathhouse, grand but faded.

## The Five Tenets of Transmodification

- 1 Carry the warmth of the water within yourself and embrace others with it.
- 2 Live in cleanliness, and clarity of the heart and mind will follow.
- 3 Ebb and flow with change, but stay true to your own form.
- 4 The tub is vast, there is room for all.
- 5 Purify those that seek to taint the waters.

## The Everlasting Candle

- 1 **Warm & Cosy.** A beautiful bonfire night ends wrapped up in a soft blanket as you breathe in crisp, fresh notes of cedar, cashmere, and eucalyptus.
- 2 **Crisp Camp-fire Apples.** The scent of freshly picked apples cooking over the fire in the crisp night air.
- 3 **Black Coconut.** Sunset in paradise... rich coconut, cedarwood and island blossoms promise an evening of luxurious tranquillity.
- 4 **Cherry Blossom.** An enchanting armful of Spring's freshest blooms that turns any room pink and happy.
- 5 **Dreamy Summer Nights.** A relaxing blend of vanilla bean, heliotrope and a hint of woodiness - it spreads the subtle magic of a warm night in soft bloom.
- 6 **Dried Lavender & Oak.** Hand-tied bunches of lavender mingle with the woody scents and spices of an outdoor farmer's market.

# ENCOUNTERING THE (roll a d10) CULT

## 1. GATHERING OF THE FAITHFUL

**Rejoice!** You have come across a grand gathering of the faithful seeking their Warm Embrace. It is a joyous ritual filled with warm and contemplative people. They have come from far and wide; they'll be willing to share what they know with like-minded people. If you partake, you shall be cleaned physically, and perhaps spiritually.

\*Roll on the Last Luxurious Bath table.

## 2. A FALLEN FRIAR

Out on the path, you find a **fallen Friar** of the Fraternity of the Bubbling Waters. Their cause of death is unclear, but what is obvious, they travelled a long way to get here. Their possessions include fragrant herbs and torn robes.

## 3. HOARDED WARMTH

You stumble upon a seemingly normal bath, a rather large one. Upon closer inspection you might see movement on the water. Unknown to the characters a fierce creature soaks inside the tepid waters, it only needs the slightest invitation to strike. It will be happy to add your bones to the collection it has gathered at the base of its bath.

## 4. A RESPECTABLE SCRUB

Out there in the rugged world, you come across an abandoned and yet

usable tub.

It is a brief respite. But otherwise uneventful.

\*Roll on the Last Luxurious Bath table.

## 5. THE EVERLASTING CANDLE

You spy a crack in the wall: a **light glows inside!** A closer look reveals a small alcove where one might seek shelter from the elements. Left neatly nestled in the alcove beside a bedroll are the belongings of a Friar of the Bubbling Waters. Their fragrant herbs, a staff, pair of sandals, their robes and expired food supplies. Simply left behind, with no sign of their owner. These items are dusty, the friar has been gone for some time, and yet, miraculously the burning scented candle remains undiminished. You have found the Everlasting Candle, a source of hope, it has been passed onto you.

\*Roll on the Everlasting Candle table.

## 6. THE DESPERATE PILGRIM

A **friar pilgrim** lingers near the mouth of a **hostile structure**. They need your help. They are adamant that the key to the Warm Embrace waits for them inside. A tub so splendiferous one good soak will alter your comprehension of the universe. However, a **horde of filth** stands between the eager pilgrim and their goal.

\*Roll on the Last Luxurious Bath table.

## 7. BLACK WATER SEEKERS

A band of rogue friars known as the **Black Water Seekers** slay any and all they come across, as a pre-emptive strategy to protect the waters from the desecration brought upon by the unclean. Your death is necessary, but they will not enjoy it, their methods are sterile, but highly effective, and they have found you.

## 8. TRAVELLERS ON THE ROAD

A band of **Friars** is traveling on the road, there's room on their wagon and they are eager to assist you, in any way they can.

## 9. STILL WATER

You come across a long cold, body of water inside of a bath. Corpses float inside the stagnant water, but mysteriously they are undecayed. Preserved by some force beyond your understanding.

\*Roll on the Last Luxurious Bath table.

Beside their damp bath robes piled on the ground, there are other items of varying quality. They carried no weapons. Mainly items of sentimental worth.

## 10. MARK OF THE PURIFIERS

The elite members of the Fraternity have come for you. Either to cleanse your body as a reward for your warm-hearted deeds. Or to cleanse the realm by removing you

from it, on account of the filth in your soul.

**Reward:** You are cleaned, fed, and watered. Whatever knowledge and resources they have to share, they will share it. The fraternity have also brought bespoke gifts of value relevant to their receiving characters, use GM discretion.

**Punishment:** You have proven to be filth. They will not dignify your existence with the invitation of a final word. They will seek to promptly silence you forever. They have no predisposition to honour or to valiant combat.

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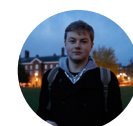
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# **Filmmakers Without Cameras is a misnomer.**

*This isn't a zine just **about** or **for** filmmakers; it's a love letter to films and video games, written by people whose passions lie beyond film and video games.*

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