

**THE IMPACT OF VIDEO GAME
INTERACTIVITY ON THE NARRATIVE**

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This thesis is presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Research at Macquarie University. I certify that this thesis is entirely my own work and that I have given fully documented reference to the work of others. The thesis has not previously, in part or in whole, been submitted for assessment in any formal course of study.

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Summary

As the video game medium's emphasis on narrative evolves, an adequate framework for its study becomes necessary. The video game medium's interactivity separates it from established frameworks of literature and film studies, with video game academics classifying games as “simulations” rather than “representations”. In response, this thesis will construct a framework tailored to the video game narrative, drawing on Vladimir Propp and Joseph Campbell's studies of mythology and folklore, as well as narrative theory and game studies (Ludology). This thesis employs Propp and Campbell's work to analyse the *Bioshock* series and assemble “The Video Game Monomyth”, unveiling the impact of video game interactivity on the narrative.

Three key “characters” of the Video Game Monomyth will be analysed. “The Player-Hero” represents both the protagonist and the player, demonstrating the entry point of interactivity into the text. “The NPC Goddess” refers to the force that facilitates the player’s entrance into the text, while also demonstrating representations of women in video games. “The Game World” reveals how the actions of the video game text itself filters the impact of interactivity on the narrative. Through this study, this thesis hopes to create a framework for deployment in future studies of video game narratives.

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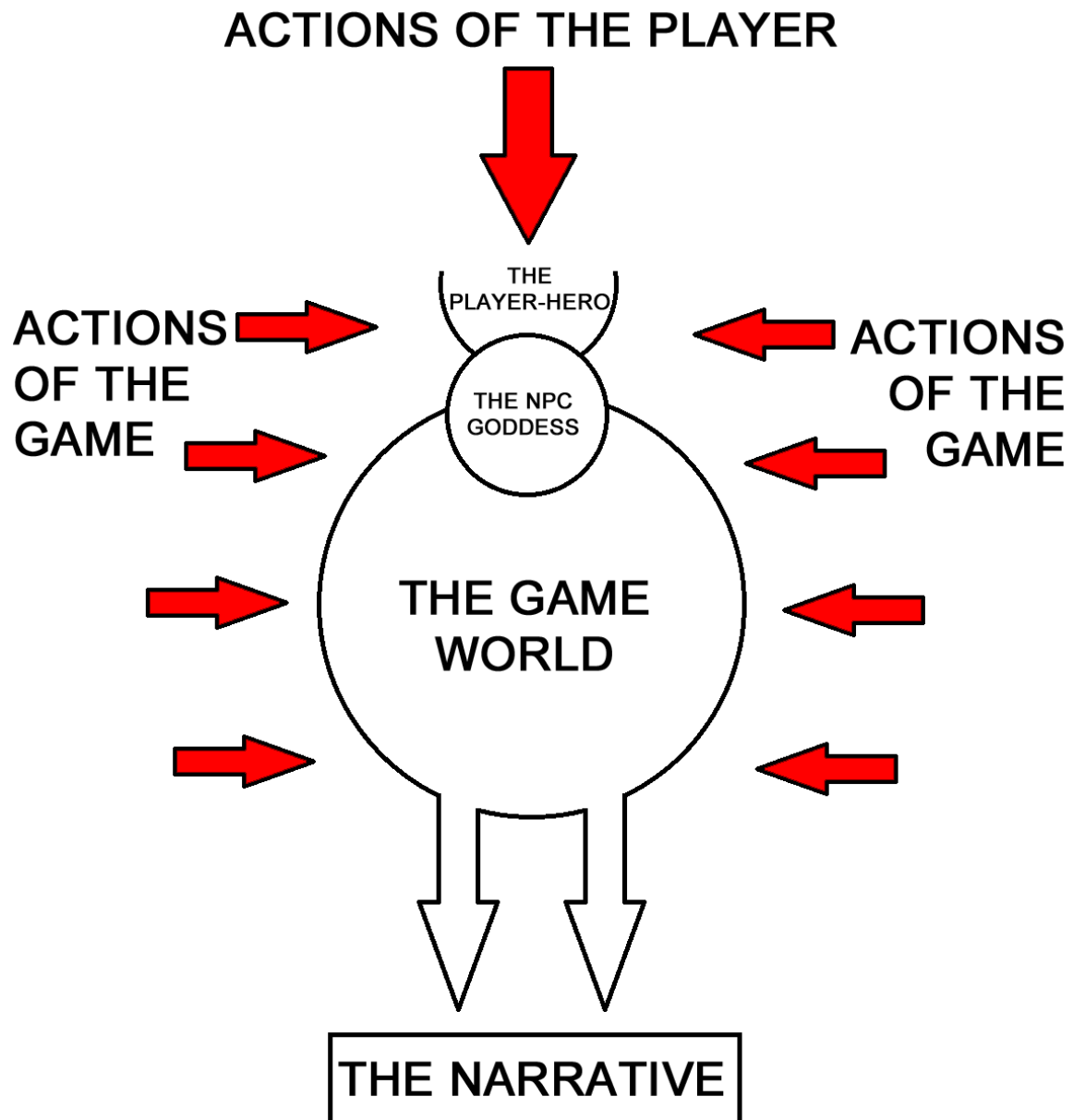
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Introduction

“There’s always a lighthouse, there’s always a man, there’s always a city.”
-Elizabeth, *Bioshock Infinite* (Irrational Games 2013)

Elizabeth's statement during *Bioshock Infinite*'s (Irrational Games 2013) closing moments demonstrates the awareness of game director Ken Levine towards the meta-narrative of many video games. Levine is not alone, with game developers increasingly interested in manipulating narratives. Although more focused titles such as *The Novelist* (Orthogonal Games 2013) and *The Stanley Parable* (Galactic Cafe 2013) provide commentary on interactivity and meta-narratives, mainstream titles such as *Mass Effect* (Bioware 2007) also focus on the development of rich narratives. The evolution towards a thoughtful and self-aware medium necessitates the construction of frameworks with which to study it. Rather than transposing literature or film studies to the video game medium directly, the additional dimension of interactivity inherent in video games must be considered. This thesis shall attempt to formulate a framework for studying the narratives of video games by analysing the impact of video game interactivity on the narrative. Through an analysis of the three games in the *Bioshock* series: *Bioshock 1* (2K Australia & 2K Boston 2007), *Bioshock 2* (2K Australia et al 2010) and *Bioshock Infinite*, as well as three primary “characters”, a meta-narrative dubbed “The Video Game Monomyth” will be constructed, the narrative’s fictive elements mirroring its structure.

By drawing on the work of mythology and folklore theorists Vladimir Propp and Joseph Campbell to construct a meta-narrative framework, this thesis will distil the theories of Propp and Campbell into three particular aspects or “spheres”: a hero, a goddess and a location. This thesis shall study the narratives of the *Bioshock* trilogy, analysing these three spheres to construct the Video Game Monomyth. In doing so, a framework for understanding the impact of video game interactivity on the narrative will be constructed, depicted as such:



This diagram demonstrates the interactivity-to-narrative process. The first chapter of this thesis shall explore the construction of the Player-Hero sphere. The Player-Hero sphere is the essentially hollow sphere of the game's hero. When filled with the actions of the player, the hero and player merge, defining the Player-Hero sphere. Chapter 2 shall move the discussion to the NPC¹ Goddess sphere, a slightly more traditional sphere that facilitates the entry of the Player-Hero into the Game World. The sphere also provides insights into the

¹ "Non-Playable Character". Any character within a game that the player is not in control of.

balance of power between player agency and the boundaries of the video game text. Chapter 3 shall focus on the Game World sphere, analysing how the actions and reactions of the game text itself regulate and bend to the Player-Hero's input. The Game World sphere's use of deception to create an illusion of choice positions it as the ultimate controller of the game's narrative expression, refining and regulating the impact of interactivity. This process will be analysed through a close reading of the *Bioshock* series' narratives utilising both narrative and ludology²-based academics to construct the Video Game Monomyth, which can then be employed in future studies of video game narratives.

Since the theory of the death of the author entered literary criticism, readers of texts have been granted a large degree of agency over their meaning (Barthes 1977). Although this could be considered interactivity by scholars, “video game interactivity” (herein referred to as “interactivity” for brevity) is functionally different. The player of a video game possesses a form of rule-governed control, their position in relation to the text more practically similar to an athlete playing a sport than the passive interactivity possessed by readers of film or literature.

In addition to the shift from “reader” to “player”, video games construct their narratives differently. A narrative is traditionally described as chronological actions, chained together and occurring through a spatial or temporal state. These actions, conglomerated, result in the expressed narrative of film, literature and most other mediums (Neitzel 2014). The video game medium's make-up is different, described as self-reflexive or repetitious (Neitzel 2014), its settings and characters in constant correspondence with the game's rules. The narrative is the expression of this correspondence. Narrative as the result of rules in action has precedent in sporting events and sports-commentary. As a sport is played, the commentator chronicles and narrates each movement/play almost immediately. The sequence

² The study of video games, expanded on throughout the thesis.

of plays forms a narrative (Watson 2012).

Although similar, the video game narrative is not identical to the sports narrative either. Sports narratives lack the fictional boundaries tethered to the video game medium. Fictions appear even in games that lack story components such as dialogue or explicit plot developments. Video game theorist Jesper Juul states:

When winning a game by slaying a dragon, the dragon is not a real dragon but a fictional one. To play a video game is therefore to interact with real rules while imagining a fictional world ... a video game is a set of rules as well as a fictional world. (Juul 2005, p. 1)

The link between real rules and fictional worlds positions the analysis of video game narratives as one between frameworks, requiring a new toolkit to be constructed before analysis can take place. To achieve this, a macro view of textual analysis must be taken, which can then be refined into a specialised framework for video game narratives. To achieve this view, studies of mythology shall be employed. Northrop Frye refers to mythology as the centre point from which all forms of literature and narratives spring, ranging from the stories of literal gods to representations of reality (Frye 1957, pp. 131-146). Frye demonstrates this in his analysis of the metaphorical “myth” that places humanity on a “middle earth” plane, with realms of existence both above and below. This metaphor appears in early mythologies, Christian doctrine and popular fiction (Frye ed. Denham 1990, p. 11). Frye's stance on mythology's all-encompassing nature is echoed in the works of Joseph Campbell, who refers to myths as the “secret openings” from which our understandings of the world stem (Campbell 2008, p. 1).

Through studying a text's fiction, mythological analysis unveils the functions of the text's discourse. Frye demonstrates this in his deconstruction of "charms" in poems, and their use by both poet-to-reader and magician-to-target (Frye 1976, pp. 123-126). Here, the use of words by a poet to conjure particular feelings in the reader, and the hypnosis employed by magicians within the poem to hypnotise their target, mirror one another.³ Understanding a text's discourse through analysing its fiction is crucial in uncovering the impact of interactivity (an element of discourse) on the narrative.

To fully deploy mythological analysis on the video game medium, the frameworks constructed by Campbell and Propp will be compared and contrasted to the *Bioshock* series' narratives. Within the deviations from these frameworks, the impact of video game interactivity on the narrative is revealed.

Most prominently, Propp produced a formula breaking-up the Russian Folktale's form into "spheres of action" and "functions". Through their actions, the characters of folktales fall into particular archetypes/roles ("Villain", "Princess", etcetera) known as spheres of action or "character spheres" (Propp trans. Scott 1968, p. 79). Functions are the potential events of each tale. The spheres and functions themselves contain many variances, or "dramatis personae" (Propp, p. 25). In the same way Frye's three-world metaphor is modified and perpetuated across all myth and literature, Propp's formula presents a framework that remains in place across changing iterations (a dragon instead of a wizard, a princess instead of a farmer's daughter). In its most basic form, Propp's formula is demonstrated by four examples:

³ Discourse-charms will be crucial to Chapter 3's analysis of "The Game World" sphere.

1. A tsar gives an eagle to a hero. The eagle carries the hero away to another kingdom.
2. An old man gives Súčenko a horse. The horse carries Súčenko away to another kingdom.
3. A sorcerer gives Iván a little boat. The boat takes Iván to another kingdom.
4. A princess gives Iván a ring. Young men appearing from out of the ring carry Iván away into another kingdom, and so forth. (Propp, pp. 19-20)

Propp's examples reveal three constants: a hero, a helper of some sort (revealed as a “princess” in this thesis), and a kingdom. With the three-pillared framework in mind, the analysis now requires a less narrow view than Propp's folklore-centric formula. The most prominent of mythology-based studies is Campbell's *Monomyth* or *Hero's Journey*. Like Propp, Campbell's *Monomyth* is a formula of sorts, presenting a meta-narrative upon which, he argues, all mythologies hang. Campbell's *Monomyth* presents the story of an ordinary individual passing from the natural world to the supernatural: Prometheus travels to the heavens, while Jason's journey for the Golden Fleece takes him through the Sea of Marvels (Campbell, p. 23). The climax of their adventures often involves a meeting with and marriage with the “goddess” figure of this world (Campbell, p. 91). Their journey complete, the hero becomes “Master of the Two Worlds” (Campbell, p. 196), unlocking the flow of life and knowledge from the supernatural to the natural world (Campbell, p. 23). Similar to Propp, Campbell's “Classical Monomyth” can be viewed as having three pillars: a hero, a goddess and a supernatural world. These three aspects will be referred to in this thesis as “The Classical Hero”, “The Classical Goddess” and “The Supernatural World”.

Campbell's analysis is far more broadly applicable than Propp's: his characters and events are more thoroughly described, and draw their inspiration from a variety of mythological sources. The *Monomyth* can also be found in an array of video games,

including *Super Mario Bros* (Nintendo 1985)⁴ and *The Legend of Zelda* (Nintendo 1986).⁵

Academics such as John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett have challenged Campbell's Monomyth and proposed the alternative “American Monomyth” or “The Myth of The American Superhero”, focusing on US comic books, Spaghetti Westerns and action films (Lawrence & Jewett 2002). As the Western world struggled with the aftermath of Wall Street's crash, wealthy princes such as Gautama Buddha (Campbell, p. 24) were no longer relevant. This resulted in the creation of super-powered, idealistic heroes, such as Superman (Morrison 2011, p. 8). In turn, The American Monomyth can be observed in video games such as *Streets of Rage* (Sega 1991)⁶ and *Metal Gear Solid* (Konami 1998).⁷

The far reaching nature of Campbell's Monomyth and academic discussion surrounding it makes it a useful tool in analysing changes in the video game narrative. The differences between the Classical Monomyth and a meta-narrative drawn from the analysis of the *Bioshock* series will be used to construct the Video Game Monomyth.

With the three aspects (hero, goddess, location) now identified, how they are constructed must be understood in order to formulate the Video Game Monomyth. This requires a framework for identifying narrative structure. Once again, this thesis shall draw on discourses associated with other mediums, but with the ultimate goal of developing a framework tailored for video games.

As demonstrated by Propp, characters themselves are conglomerates of actions they perform. O.B Hardison refers to the relationship between character and action as “action comes first; it is the object of imitation. The agents who perform the action come second,”

⁴ An iconic and long-running series synonymous with video games, directed by Shigeru Miyamoto.

⁵ A long-running series originally directed by Miyamoto and Takashi Tezuka, relying heavily on high-fantasy tropes.

⁶ Directed by Noriyoshi Ohba, the game features ex-police officers who must fight against a crime syndicate.

⁷ Developed by Hideo Kojima, the game is hailed as innovative in both gameplay and storytelling.

(Chatman 1978, p. 108). In this regard, characters are the semi-tangible by-products of their agents' actions. As mentioned, Propp refers to these by-products as spheres of action, also dubbed “character spheres”. Hence, the Monomyth, in its most basic form, is the interplay between the hero and goddess spheres, and their location.

Traditionally, the study of the video game medium has avoided a direct focus on narratives, with many video game academics viewing the narratives of video games as unimportant, or proposing that video games are void of narratives completely (Neitzel 2014). Many video game academics categorise video games as “simulations”, and film and literature as “representations” (Frasca 2003, p. 1), leading to the “Ludology vs Narratology” debate.⁸

Ludology originated in the study of games in general, gaining prominence in the early 90s as a tool-set for studying video games. At the time, theorists felt that the study of video games drew too strongly on literature and film studies (Frasca, p. 1). James Gee described video games as a new art form that is “largely immune” to the theories and rhetoric of other fields (Bradford 2010, p.55). Ludologists such as Gonzalo Frasca have argued that attempting to analyse video games within the scope of narratology incorrectly defines the way stories and characters manifest in them, as they do not represent actions and events, but instead simulate them. He states:

A film about a plane landing is a narrative: an observer could interpret it in different ways ... she cannot manipulate it and influence how the plane will land since film sequences are fixed and unalterable. On the other hand, the flight simulator allows the player to perform actions that will modify the behaviour of the system in a way that is similar to the behaviour of the actual plane. (Frasca, p. 3)

⁸ The debate will be expanded upon in The Conclusion.

Ludologists Ian Bogost and Alexander Galloway make similar claims, both focusing on video game's unique procedural processes or “actions”; players input actions into the medium, which set in motion certain processes. For example, the action may be attacking an enemy, setting in motion a process of that enemy dying and the player receiving a reward. These processes can then be contrasted against each other: perhaps if the player had instead chosen to avoid the enemy, their reward would have been greater. Meaning can then be drawn from how these actions/processes sit with one another (Anderson 2013, pp. 292-293).

As discussed, actions and agents are ingrained in the study of narratives, contradicting the ludic view that simulations and narratives are irreconcilable. Additionally, while the player is able to choose their actions, they are still limited to the built-in mechanics of the game and pre-determined outcomes. In defence of video game narratology, Clare Bradford highlights the similarities between literature, films and video games in that players of games negotiate meaning and themes in the same way readers of other mediums do: through their own cultural scope (Bradford, p. 54).

The Video Game Monomyth framework constructed in this thesis attempts to reconcile narrative studies and ludology. The text as a conglomerate of actions and events within defined fictional boundaries is the common ground shared by video games and other mediums, with the difference lying in how these actions and events are constructed (through interactivity). Within this difference, the interplay between literary and ludic concepts can be analysed, avoiding the pitfalls likely to manifest from a one-sided approach.

In order to analyse the video game narrative, definitions for its components must be established. As mentioned, video games feature boundaries set by the developer. Most prominently, these boundaries are pre-programmed, ordered points within the game, commonly appearing at the beginning and end. Often, these boundaries are achieved through the use of cutscenes, short “movies” in which the player is not in control of the events and

actions taking place. Many games will include cutscenes throughout, or utilise other techniques such as pre-recorded dialogue and text. These elements of the game are inevitabilities, taking place regardless of the player's actions. This line is blurred in games that feature pre-designed events that may play out of order, or include multiple and alternative endings, like those found in the *Bioshock* series. To differentiate between these forms of narrative expression, academic Cody Mejeur devised the “Narrative Expression Model”, referring to the player-action driven narrative expression as the “personal narrative” and pre-designed narrative elements as “determined narratives” (Yap et al 2015, p. 6). A model based on Mejeur's (modified for this thesis) is demonstrated in *Fig. 1*.

Further, terms related to the relationship between interactivity and narrative must be defined. “Decision points” will be used to describe points in the game in which the player's actions affect the determined narrative (Lebowitz & Klug 2011, pp. 191-192). The term is used primarily in the discussion of “branching path” stories, which refers to game narratives featuring a number of different paths, similar to *Choose Your Own Adventure* books (Lebowitz & Klug, p. 192). Due to the significance of player choice in both the determined and personal narratives of video games, games are often played more than once for a different experience. Each instance of a game being played from beginning to end is referred to as a “playthrough”.

With a theoretical backbone now established, the key texts to be analysed must be identified. To thoroughly analyse the impact of video game interactivity on the narrative, games that emphasise both aspects should be studied. The *Bioshock* series is heavily intertwined with the theme of furthering storytelling mechanics in video games. Director Ken Levine carried over many of his concepts from his previous work on *System Shock 2* (Irrational Games & Looking Glass Studios 1999) to the *Bioshock* series. Jordan Thomas continued this concept when directing *Bioshock 2*. Levine's game design goals are

consistently focused on pushing forward a new narrative style within the video game medium, placing the onerous of the narrative's momentum increasingly into the hands of the player (Robertson 2014). The *Bioshock* series has wide appeal, released across multiple platforms and receiving high critical praise (Metacritic 2015). In total, the series has sold 12.43 million copies worldwide (VGChartz 2015).

Bioshock 1 takes place in 1960 in the city of Rapture (*Fig. 2*), an underwater city designed by socialite Andrew Ryan as a libertarian utopia. The city's lack of regulations resulted in the development of “Plasmids” (*Fig. 3*), genetic modifications powered by the substance ADAM. ADAM was developed inside a species of sea slugs, which scientist Bridgid Tenenbaum found thrived when implanted in young girls. This resulted in the transformation of children into “Little Sisters”. Brain-washed, the Little Sisters wander Rapture protected by cyborgs known as “Big Daddies” (*Fig. 4*). On New Year's Eve 1958, a civil war erupted between Ryan and revolutionary “Atlas”. The war destroyed much of the city, its population descending into madness from excessive use of Plasmids, becoming known as “Splicers” (*Fig. 5*). By 1960, the city is in ruins. Little Sisters and Big Daddies continue to wander, using syringes to collect ADAM from corpses. A plane crashes over the Atlantic Ocean, with its only survivor, Jack (the game's protagonist), swimming to the surface and entering a nearby lighthouse. Jack finds an elevator-like contraption called a Bathysphere (*Fig. 6*) which takes him to Rapture, where he is greeted by Atlas who pleads with him to help save his wife and son, Moira and Patrick.

Jack encounters Tenenbaum and many of Rapture's other surviving aristocrats, using Plasmids and weaponry to fight his way through Splicers and Rapture's defence systems, choosing whether to “save” Little Sisters by curing them of their affliction or “harvesting” them, killing them and taking their ADAM (*Fig. 7*). Following the “deaths” of Moira and Patrick, Jack turns his attention to killing Ryan. Upon Ryan's death, it is revealed that Atlas is

in fact smuggler Frank Fontaine and that Jack was born in Rapture, the illegitimate son of Ryan. At birth, Jack was genetically modified to respond to the words “Would You Kindly”, carrying out the actions of anyone who utters them. Artificially aged to adulthood, he was sent to the surface with false memories by Atlas/Fontaine, who “activated” him in order to defeat Ryan. Tenenbaum removes Jack's brainwashing and instructs him to become a Big Daddy in order to defeat Atlas, which he does with the help of the Little Sisters. Depending on the player's actions, Jack will either head to the surface with the Little Sisters and raise them as his children, or kill them and terrorise the surface world (*Fig. 8*).

Bioshock 2 begins on New Year's Eve 1958. The Big Daddy named Subject Delta and his Little Sister, Eleanor Lamb, are confronted by Sofia Lamb, Ryan's philosophical opposite and Eleanor's mother. Using a mind-control Plasmid on Delta, Sofia takes Eleanor away, and forces Delta to kill himself. Ten years later, Lamb rules what is left of Rapture. Big Daddies and Little Sisters continue to roam, but many of those from Jack's adventure are either gone or have been transformed into Big Sisters (*Fig. 9*). Tenenbaum continues her attempts to cure the inhabitants of Rapture, while Eleanor is experimented on by Lamb in an attempt to turn her into a “collective consciousness” of Rapture's inhabitants. Eleanor uses her links with the Little Sisters to resurrect Delta, pleading with him to save her. Delta faces similar trials and choices to Jack, although is able to escort Little Sisters and help them collect ADAM. He encounters Grace Holloway, Stanley Poole and Gil Alexander, and the player may choose to spare or kill them. Towards the end of the game, Lamb defeats Delta and smothers Eleanor. To save her, a Little Sister absorbs Delta's consciousness, and turns Eleanor into a Big Sister. Depending on the player's actions prior, Eleanor will either save or harvest this Little Sister, returning Delta's consciousness to his body. Delta and Eleanor then escape as Rapture self-

deconstructs. The end of the game is dependent on the player's actions (*Fig. 10*).⁹

Bioshock Infinite (referred to herein as *Infinite*) is set in 1912. Gambler Booker DeWitt is given a chance to clear his debts by retrieving the young woman Elizabeth from Columbia (*Fig. 11*), a floating city ruled by Prophet Zachary Hale Comstock, whose followers believe a Founding Fathers-centric version of Christianity. The inhabitants of Columbia view Comstock's daughter, Elizabeth, as the “lamb” who will rule Columbia and destroy the “Sodom below” (the surface world). Aided by Robert and Rosalind Lutece, Booker travels to the city via a lighthouse. After rescuing Elizabeth from her tower and the Big Daddy-like monster Songbird (*Fig. 12*), the two attempt to escape, using Elizabeth's ability to open “tears” in space and time (*Fig. 13*) to access different realities when necessary. Eventually, Elizabeth is recaptured. Booker is thrown through time by Elizabeth to a future where she rules Columbia and is waging war on the USA (*Fig. 14*). Elizabeth gives Booker a note for her past self which will allow her to control Songbird. Booker is then sent back through time. He rescues Elizabeth and the two eventually confront Comstock. In rage, Booker kills Comstock. The tower constructed to weaken Elizabeth's powers is destroyed, allowing her to see all possible realities. She shows Booker “The Sea of Doors” (*Fig. 15*), in which the two can see an endless amount of lighthouses, and other versions of Booker and Elizabeth traversing them. It is here that Elizabeth tells Booker “There’s always a lighthouse, there’s always a man, there’s always a city”. Additionally, The Lutece “Twins” are revealed to be the same person but from different realities, separated only by gender.

Booker's past is then revealed: repenting for his actions at The Wounded Knee Massacre, he sought baptism. Although Booker changed his mind at the last minute, in other realities he was baptised and became Comstock. As Comstock, he worked with Rosalind

⁹ The narrative of *Minerva's Den* (2K Australia et al 2010) is not focused on in this thesis due to its deviation from the trilogy's coherency.

Lutece to create Columbia and the Lutece Device (*Fig. 16*) which created tears. Discovering he was impotent (due to excessive use of the Lutece Device), he sent Robert Lutece to the reality in which Booker refused the baptism and fathered a daughter named Anna. Robert told Booker he would erase his gambling debts if he gave Anna to Comstock. He agreed, but quickly changed his mind, struggling with Comstock at the tear (*Fig. 17*). Comstock pulled Anna through as the tear shut, cutting off the end of her finger, which remained in Booker's reality. Re-named Elizabeth, her powers stemmed from existing in two realities simultaneously. The Luteces are eventually killed, allowing them to move freely between realities. They repent for their actions and send Booker to rescue Elizabeth, which is where *Infinite* begins. Booker's mind reconfigured his memories to fit the scenario. After learning this, Booker is told he must be killed at the baptism to prevent Comstock's existence. A legion of Elizabeths from many different realities appear and drown Booker (*Fig. 18*).¹⁰

Chapter 1 of this thesis shall focus on the Player-Hero sphere (Jack, Delta and Booker), analysing the entrance of the player into the game through interactivity, filling and refining the Player-Hero sphere with their actions. Chapter 2 shall focus on the NPC Goddess sphere (the Little Sisters, Big Sisters, Eleanor and Elizabeth), analysing how the entrance of the Player-Hero into the Game World is facilitated and examining the balance of power between player agency and the video game text. The balance of power shall be further discussed in Chapter 3, shifting to an analysis of the Game World sphere (Rapture, Columbia) and how the actions of the game text itself regulate and bend to the Player-Hero's actions, creating an illusion of choice and resulting in the narrative expression.

¹⁰ The narrative of *Burial At Sea* (Irrational Games 2013-2014) will be explained in Chapter 2 where necessary.

Chapter 1

The Player-Hero: A Hollow Sphere

“A man chooses, a slave obeys.”

-Andrew Ryan, *Bioshock 1* (2K Australia & 2K Boston 2007)

Andrew Ryan's words, blasted from loud speakers and plastered on the walls of *Bioshock 1*'s Rapture, initially indicate nothing more than the libertarian city's mantra. As this chapter will uncover, however, the statement represents a key tenant of the Video Game Monomyth's "Player-Hero" sphere and its impact on the narrative. While protagonists of all mediums carry the reader into the text, video game interactivity unravels traditional, linear characterisation and replaces it with an endless interplay between player and protagonist – a “player-synthesis” unobtainable in other mediums. Through an examination of the three primary protagonists of the *Bioshock* series (Jack, Subject Delta and Booker DeWitt)¹¹ the anatomy of the Video Game Monomyth's Player-Hero sphere and how it responds to Propp and Campbell's morphologies will be uncovered. The consequences of player-executed actions on the Player-Hero sphere, and how these actions are expressed within the game's personal and determined narratives will be investigated. *Bioshock*'s protagonists share some qualities with the Classical Hero but challenge others, primarily through their hollow form, allowing the player to project into them. Uncovering the differences between the Classical Hero and the Player-Hero allows for an analysis of how video game interactivity impacts the relationship between the player, the determined and personal narratives of the *Bioshock* series, and other video games. As the *Bioshock* series progresses, the insight into the interplay

¹¹ The DLCs (“downloadable content”, add-on narratives/content for the games) *Minerva's Den* and *Burial At Sea Ep. 2* (Irrational Games 2014) both feature other protagonists in the form of Subject Sigma and Elizabeth. While Elizabeth will be explored in Chapter 2, neither are appropriate for Chapter 1's study.

between Player-Hero and Game World shifts from a view of the Player-Hero as an all-powerful force manipulating the world around them, to a single agent within a much greater system.

As demonstrated in the introduction, the hero is the most prominent of constants in Propp's formula and appears in all instances. Although the constant of an instigator to the hero's travels (the tsar, old man, sorcerer and princess) may be inhabited by various character spheres, the heroes vary far more subtly. The dramatis personae of "hero" is always fulfilled by the "hero" character sphere, the two unshakably tethered (Propp, pp.26-65). By default, Propp's hero sphere is gendered male, and he must be foreign to the place in which his journey unfolds (a kingdom in Propp's examples). While only Jack and Booker's travels to Rapture and Columbia are shown in the game, Delta also embarks on such a journey. His initial discovery of Rapture takes place before the events of the game, but he is once again thrust into the role of outsider when *Bioshock 2* begins, due to the change in political regime via Sofia Lamb and the further decay of the city's inhabitants.

In effect, Delta's existence is one caught between two worlds. Jack and Booker are also men that belong to neither the surface world nor Rapture/Columbia completely. Jack, descending from the surface, is the son of Andrew Ryan, and was born in Rapture and genetically modified before being sent above. Booker's existence is more complex, with Comstock, the founder of Columbia, being Booker from an alternate timeline. While the Player-Hero does not completely belong to the world they have entered, they do not truly belong to the alternative either. This symbolises the dual nature of the Player-Hero sphere as a conglomerate of the player and the protagonist (Jack, Delta or Booker), caught between the fictive representations of the hero and the rule-based control of the player.

The journey into an unknown world like Rapture or Columbia is a crucial element of the Classical Monomyth. Within Campbell's structure, the myth begins with an

uncovering/traversing of the Supernatural World, such as Jason and the Clashing Rocks, or Prometheus' ascension to the heavens (Campbell, p. 23). The Classical Hero will often possess an initial link with the Supernatural World. While mere humans who ascend to greatness exist, Campbell states it is far more likely for heroes to instead be endowed with extraordinary powers from birth (Campbell, p. 274). Most commonly, this manifests in the Classical Hero's heritage, such as Heracles being the son of Zeus (Ovid trans. Raeburn 2004, p. 694). This divine lineage is replicated on a smaller scale in *Bioshock 1*, with Jack replacing Heracles, and Ryan replacing Zeus. Additionally, Jack's genetic engineering allows him to possess tremendous power and fortitude.

By equipping the hero with supernatural powers from the beginning, the Classical Monomyth introduces the idea of pre-destined excellence, the journey into the supernatural world the climax of lives that have been extraordinary from the beginning. Once more, Jack shares this pre-destined excellence, as the game reveals Jack was taken by Bridgid Tenenbaum, Frank Fontaine and Dr Yi Suchong as an embryo, the alterations on his body and psyche made to turn him into Fontaine's "Ace in the Hole" in his war against Ryan. This becomes relevant to the game's personal narrative through the use of Vita-Chambers (*Fig. 19*), machines that the player passes throughout the game. If the player is killed, they "regenerate" inside the nearest chamber, allowing them to continue their journey even in the wake of death. While cheating death is not an uncommon trope in video games, providing an explanation for it within the game's narrative is significantly rarer. Most important is the fact that these chambers are designed to only respond to Ryan's DNA. Being Ryan's son, Jack is able to use them while his enemies are not. This makes Jack immortal, and thereby the most powerful entity within Rapture and the only character capable of fulfilling the actions necessary of a hero.

At first, the supernatural lineage of these heroes appears to diminish the relevance of the Classical Hero on their obviously natural readership: no matter one's efforts in life, they are incapable of ascension and enlightenment if it has not been willed by fate. However, it instead makes the ascension of “natural” heroes such as Dante (Algeheri trans. Kirkpatrick 2006) more potent. By contrasting the feats of mortal heroes with those pre-disposed to the Supernatural World, Campbell's Classical Hero becomes symbolic of escaping one's fate. Although they are born without supernatural lineage, through their own cunning and fortitude these ordinary individuals are able to achieve the same greatness and enlightenment as those with more fortuitous birthrights. Similarly, in *Bioshock 2*, where Delta has no supernatural lineage, he is able to be revived upon death due to Eleanor and the Little Sisters modifying the Vita-Chambers to respond to his DNA.

Regardless of their lineage, the Classical Hero always mirrors their culture's every-man, at least at the outset of their journey. For the conquering of the supernatural to have meaning, Campbell suggests, the hero must be in some sense natural (Campbell, pp. 271-274). This is similar to Jack beginning the game as an unremarkable plane passenger and Booker as nothing more than an out of work gambler. Through their flaws, the Classical Hero reflects humanity, rounded by their moments of empathy and achievement. The rounded, flawed hero is the most suitable candidate for the objective of the Classical Monomyth: the tapping of the world tree, and ascendancy to Godhood. Their flaws allow them to encompass all things: sin and virtue, pleasure and pain. This characteristic is necessary if the hero hopes to unlock and release the flow of life into the world (Campbell, pp. 32-35).

While the *Bioshock* series' response to the Classical Monomyth's ascension is important in analysing the inner-workings of the Player-Hero and player-synthesis, the way this tethering of player and protagonist occurs must first be analysed. Many mediums present protagonists that act as a surrogate for the reader, but the video game medium's distinct form

of interactivity means for a closer link between the two entities than possible in literature and film. Campbell's fears of dissonance in the "relationship of biography to character" (Campbell, p. 275) is quelled in the becoming of player as hero, and hero as player. While a reader may insert their own meaning, motivations, and symbolism into the actions of Classical Heroes such as Odysseus, the hero's actions themselves remain unchanging: this is true of both the macro (Odysseus will always trick the Cyclops by telling him his name is "Nobody") and the micro (Odysseus will always trick the Cyclops at the exact same point in the narrative) (Homer trans. Rieu 2003, p. 119).

As established in the introduction, characters are the conglomerates of their actions. With the player now the author of these actions, the make-up of the Player-Hero sphere is constructed by the player's choices. Jack, Delta and Booker all become the player via the executions of their actions, just as the player becomes each hero by entering the narrative through them. This presents the first point at which the Player-Hero and Video Game Monomyth begin to separate from Propp and Campbell's frameworks, occurring the moment interaction begins. The construction of video game protagonists by designers is undertaken with the eventual player-synthesis in mind, resulting in protagonists relatively void of characterisation, such as being without back-story or emotion.

While past-less and emotionless protagonists in film and literature may be viewed as stale or empty objects, the video game protagonist becomes a more effective device when their characterisation is stripped-back. A primary trope used to achieve this is that of the amnesiac hero (Lebowitz and Klug, pp. 62-63). This amnesia manifests in Jack's brainwashing and false, seemingly vague memories that are barely exposed in the game. Delta is introduced as a mute Big Daddy, his past before coming to Rapture is never revealed, and his memories of his time as a Big Daddy before his resurrection are clouded. Booker's memories are also vague and jumbled, constructed by his psyche in an attempt to make sense

of his shift between realities (which he himself is unaware of). The forces that send Booker to Columbia to retrieve Elizabeth are referred to only vaguely, and his exact actions as a soldier and a Pinkerton detective remain shrouded in mystery throughout much of the game.

In addition to the between-worlds and amnesiac tropes, *Bioshock 1* and 2 employ the use of the silent protagonist, with Jack and Delta both speechless throughout their journeys.¹² Silent protagonists have a long standing history in the video game medium, employed in far greater volume than in film or literature, with notable instances including Gordon Freeman, the protagonist of *Half-Life* (Valve 1998), a puzzle-based first person shooter written by Marc Laidlaw. *Half-Life* features no breaks in the player's control, with the game's story playing out around them. Freeman's actions are controlled by the player throughout, limited only by circumstance. In addition to removing dialogue, their silence strips them of internal monologues or narration, further expanding the void between player and protagonist. However, rather than making the psychological space between the player and protagonist impossible to pass, in the case of Jack, Delta and other video game heroes, it simply gives more opportunities for the player to project their own personality. By being foreign, past-less and voiceless, these protagonists become hollow spheres, the player filling them with their own ambitions, thoughts, and opinions through their actions, reducing the dissonance between the two entities and allowing for player-synthesis. This relationship is symbiotic, as it is through interactivity that the empty character spheres of Jack, Delta and to a lesser extent Booker are filled with action and meaning, escaping weak characterisation.

As established earlier, the process of player-synthesis begins the instant the player is given control of the character. This entry point is different in each instalment of the *Bioshock* series: In *Bioshock 1*, the player takes control of Jack as he emerges to the surface of the

¹² A voice-over line begins *Bioshock 1* which may belong to Jack, but this is ambiguous, and the dialogue itself is fairly irrelevant.

ocean following his plane's crash, surrounded by flaming debris. For Delta, this is after standing up following his resurrection, already in Rapture's halls. The player is given control of Booker while sitting in the boat rowed by Robert Lutece towards the lighthouse that takes him to Columbia. Here, the player begins applying actions to the protagonist. This is the point at which interactivity begins to impact the narrative. From the moment choices are made, the linear Classical Hero sphere of action is unraveled, and the Player-Hero sphere begins to form.

Before the player's inception into the game, Jack, Delta and Booker's actions are all guaranteed: Jack will always make the same movements on the plane, Delta will always kill himself when confronted by Lamb, etcetera. As soon as the player is given control, the potential actions of the sphere are unraveled, as the player (now an agent of the Player-Hero sphere) has a variety of actions they may perform. Regarding the determined narrative, these actions are predictable: the game's structure and rules present only a handful of possible moves for the player. In *Bioshock 1* the player meets a Little Sister who is alone and vulnerable. Atlas, the player's guide, tells them to kill the Sister and “harvest” her ADAM, while Brigid Tenenbaum, who appears on the balcony nearby, pleads with the player to instead “save” them from their affliction and revert them back to being normal children (*Fig. 7*). Occurring throughout the game, these Little Sister encounters are *Bioshock 1*'s only decision points.

The binary choice of “harvest” and “save” present polar opposites, and as such send two conflicting actions into the single Player-Hero sphere. If *Bioshock 1* was a linear text, the choice simply wouldn't exist: Jack would either save or harvest the Little Sister. The author would make a single choice regarding Jack's actions, whereas the interactivity of *Bioshock 1* shifts the onerous of Jack's choice to the player. Although meaning making may occur anew with every reading of the linear text, Jack's character sphere would be bound to the single

action, always retrospective. The Player-Hero sphere, however, is rewritten with every playthrough.

It is here that the empty sphere of the Player-Hero is all important: for both actions to be logically sound, Jack must lack indicators (dialogue, actions he has undertaken himself, or even references to his past) that would lead the player to believe he would choose one option over the other. Once the first choice has been made, however, Jack's character sphere is suddenly coloured and the Game World must react in kind, interacting with the player's actions just as the player has with it. The choices to harvest or save the Little Sisters throughout the game affects the way Tenenbaum reacts to the player, as well as altering the outcome of the game's determined narrative. This manipulation of the game's ending speaks to a greater discussion of the Player-Hero's agency in the game, which is further experimented with and commented on by both Thomas and Levine in *Bioshock 2* and *Infinite*.

The use of choice and multiple endings within determined narratives is pivotal to a broad understanding of the Video Game Monomyth and its effects on narrative, but fails to address how interactivity and player action manifests in the array of video games that lack branching path stories. Although still under governance of the rules and mechanics of the individual game, the way interactivity influences the personal narrative is an area of far greater possibility. The Player-Hero will inevitably execute unpredictable actions within the personal narrative. In the *Bioshock* series, this is most clearly demonstrated through analysing the player's interactions with their enemies, such as coming up against Splicers in *Bioshock 2*.

In *Bioshock 2*, the player may enter a room and see a Splicer. The abilities and weapons used by the player, the direction they approach the Splicer from, the strategies they employ, their timing, their competence and a number of other factors will result in a variety of much smaller “narratives” potentially unfolding. The player may choose to electrocute the Splicer and then bludgeon them to death; they may miss, and be done away with by the

Splicer before they can try again, or they may choose a different course of action completely. This is more clearly outlined in *Fig. 20*.

Protagonists of non-interactive mediums have only one action available to them at any time, while the Player-Hero's actions are seemingly endless, confined only by the game's rules and mechanics. Just like with the determined narrative, the choices made by the player in the personal narrative are not concrete: players may choose to re-play the entire game or certain sections of it and make different choices; the subtly or grandiosity of their choices confined only by the game's boundaries. As such, each individual instance of the game being played has the potential to spawn a completely different set of actions for the Player-Hero. Therefore, despite the setting of the game remaining the same, each playthrough tells the tale of a different hero. As player-synthesis reaches its zenith and the crafting of the Player-Hero sphere refines, the hero's objectives and progression across their journey must be analysed.

The *Bioshock* series is notable for its lack of cutscenes or other interludes in the player's control over the game. In *Bioshock 1 & 2*, cutscenes are only used to begin and end the games, while *Infinite* keeps the player present at all times (although severely limiting their control in some instances). This means for an unbroken player-synthesis throughout the course of the *Bioshock* series, in contrast to games that rely heavily on the use of cutscenes or other non-player driven segments, such as *Final Fantasy VIII* (Square 1999)¹³ and *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* (Konami 2001).¹⁴

This unbroken body of the game encompasses many of the Classical Monomyth's sequences, stretching from "The Crossing of The First Threshold" to "The Mastery of The Two Worlds" (Campbell, pp. 64-73, pp. 196-205). The entry into the Supernatural World

¹³ Directed by Yoshinori Kitase, the game follows Squall Lionheart, a soldier who uses both magic and technology to fight monsters, sorcerers and other nations' forces. The *Final Fantasy* series has been heavily influential on the story-driven RPG genre.

¹⁴ Focusing on former child soldier Raiden's mission against a terrorist plot, the game is hailed as an example of post-modern game design.

through the first threshold is signified in both *Bioshock 1* and *Infinite* by lighthouses, while *Bioshock 2*'s is an awakening. Like the Classical Hero, Jack, Delta and Booker must now face surmountable challenges: “The Belly of The Whale” (Campbell, pp. 74-8) is mirrored in the player learning the game’s controls, while the majority of gameplay falls across “The Road of Trials” (Campbell, pp. 81-90).¹⁵

The Road of Trials is present in many video games. While older and “arcade” style games contain levels that the player must linearly progress through with numerical points awarded along the way, the *Bioshock* series more subtly presents player progression. Although a strict system of levels and points are removed, the desire for ascension – like that found in the Classical Monomyth – is still present. Just as the Classical Hero's progression is shown through their conquering of trials and growth as a character, the Player-Hero must also change and evolve as the game continues, driving the player to push forward in the face of adversity. Through the choices the player makes in the personal narrative, the Player-Hero sphere is developed in a more nuanced way. In addition to their choices in combat, the player may also choose how Jack, Delta and Booker “level-up” throughout the games.

Levelling-up is present in many games, and refers to an increase in the power of a character, such as greater strength or faster movement. Many RPGs¹⁶ such as *Dungeons & Dragons: The Temple of Elemental Evil* (Troika 2003)¹⁷ relay this information to the player by making these statistics visible, including the player's specific “level” (*Fig. 21*). In the *Bioshock* series, this manifests in the collecting of “Plasmids” in *Bioshock 1* and *Bioshock 2*, and “Vigors” and “Gear” in *Infinite*. Plasmids are purchased by the player with the use of ADAM, the substance gained by harvesting or saving Little Sisters. If the player harvests

¹⁵ Other sequences which involve heavy interaction with the other character spheres, such as the Meeting With The Goddess, will be explored in later chapters when these spheres themselves are the focus.

¹⁶ “Role Playing Games”. Story-focused, RPGs typically give players a great degree of customisation over the design of the lead character(s).

¹⁷ Part of the much larger *Dungeons & Dragons* franchise, and based on a previous “pen and paper” edition.

them, they will gain more ADAM, allowing them to purchase upgrades at a quicker pace than if they save them.

Plasmids allow for the player to increase different attributes of Jack and Delta. Some allow the player direct manipulation of the world around them: electrocuting or incinerating enemies. Others are passive, and upgrade the player's health or increase their ability to hack into and control the various security systems around Rapture (*Fig. 22*). In *Infinite*, this is streamlined: Vigors are offensive powers, while Gear refers to items of clothing that offer protection or other tactical advantages. The player is limited to the amount of Plasmids and Gear they may equip at any one time.

Through the customisation of Plasmids, Vigors and Gear, the player is given greater control over the characterisations of Jack, Delta and Booker. As the player refines their selection, the Player-Hero sphere becomes more detailed and nuanced. In this way, the alterations of the sphere by the player can be quantified, demonstrated in Doug Walsh and Logan Sharp's *Infinite* strategy guide.¹⁸ Walsh and Sharp detail a number of different “outfits”: Gear combinations that speak to different play styles and strategies, presenting different personalities and characterisations for Booker. The “GUNSLINGER” outfit focuses on small firearm combat, and defines Booker as a reckless combatant who kills his enemies from a far, while the “DEFENDER” outfit presents a more thoughtful Booker, focused on avoiding direct combat with enemies (Walsh and Sharp 2013, pp. 76-77). In cataloguing these outfits, Walsh and Sharp demonstrate the impact of player choice in rendering the Player-Hero sphere.

The player's rendering of the Player-Hero sphere throughout the game speaks to the desire for advancement. In this way, Campbell's “Ultimate Boon” (Campbell, pp 148-165)

¹⁸ A form of para text for a video game, strategy guides contain detailed information on the game's mechanics, plot and creation, offering solutions and paths for many of the game's challenges.

and “Master of The Two Worlds” sequences are absorbed by the Video Game Monomyth. the Classical Hero's world is one in need of saving from its own deficiency, often shared by the hero (Campbell, p. 30). The Classical Hero represents mankind’s aspiration for divinity: while the natural world may be in need of help, it is within the power of its populace to harness the supernatural and restore balance. The hero's objective is not to abandon the natural in favour of the supernatural, but to master both. It is in the centre point of the natural and supernatural that the hero achieves divinity.

Similarly, mastery appears in the gameplay of the *Bioshock* series. Through dispatching their enemies and controlling the world around them, the player masters not only the halls of Rapture and streets of Columbia, but the game's mechanics themselves. This is commented on in *Bioshock I* through the radio announcement that blares throughout the halls of Rapture, advertising the Gatherer's Garden (*Fig. 23*), vending machines where Plasmids are purchased:

“My daddy's smarter than Einstein, stronger than Hercules and lights a fire with a snap of his fingers. Are you as good as my daddy, Mister? Not if you don't visit the Gatherer's Garden, you aren't!” (2K Australia & 2K Boston 2007)

Although the player may appear in control of their development, they are overtly governed by a need for power. Completing the *Bioshock* games without upgrading is impossible. The player may limit their purchasing and use of Plasmids, Vigors and Gear, but moments in the game will require their use, such as using the “Electro Bolt” Plasmid on a fuse box to restore power (*Fig. 24*). This succumbing to the need for power demonstrates that, despite their agency over aspects of the video game, players are still bound by the

game's rules.¹⁹

This greyiness of agency between player, protagonist and the rules placed upon them by the game can be analysed more thoroughly in the determined narratives of the three *Bioshock* games, which consciously comment on the role of the player's choices in crafting the Player-Hero sphere. In *Bioshock 1*, the third act of the game reveals Jack's true origins, including the code "Would You Kindly". When spoken, the three words force Jack to obey the actions of those who utter them. When this is revealed to the player after their encounter with Ryan, it becomes evident that at a number of points throughout the game's personal narrative, Atlas (now revealed to be Fontaine) has controlled the player through the use of this code. The most striking example of this is when the player first encounters a Little Sister, and Atlas says "Would you kindly lower that weapon?", which disables the player's ability to fight for that section. Here, player control is revealed to be an illusion, the personal narrative infiltrated by the Game World's overarching control. This furthers player-synthesis: just as Jack has been following orders but thinking he is in control, so has the player.

When Jack faces Ryan, he questions Jack's standing as a "man", calling him a "slave" for obeying orders and "sleep walking through life". Ryan reveals that the trigger code was used on Jack while on the plane, causing him to hijack and crash it into the ocean. Ryan then uses the trigger code and takes control of Jack. The player loses control of Jack, staring through his eyes as Ryan instructs Jack to kill him with his golf club, repeating "A man chooses, a slave obeys" between every bludgeon. As the player's control returns, they are given further instructions by Atlas, which they must carry out to continue. Conscious now of their lack of agency, the player has no choice but to obey, even though control has returned. The player's control of the Player-Hero is easily stripped from them by the Game World. In truth, the player's agency and influence over the game is an illusion dictated by the text itself.

¹⁹ This will be expanded upon in Chapters 2 and 3.

This idea of hopelessness is countered shortly after when Jack, with the help of Tenenbaum, escapes his mind control and goes after Atlas/Fontaine. Now, Jack must become a Big Daddy, earning the trust of the Little Sisters so they will help him defeat Atlas. The player fights and defeats Atlas with the Little Sisters delivering the final blows. While the game switches to a cutscene at this point, the ending is based on the player's choices: As demonstrated in *Fig. 8*, the Little Sisters offer Jack the key to Rapture – symbolically giving him control of the Game World. If the player saved all Little Sisters, Jack will refuse it and take the Little Sisters to the surface world. Jack grows old, and dies at peace with the now adult Little Sisters surrounding him. If the player harvested a Little Sister, Jack will instead kill these last Little Sisters before heading to the surface world and massacring all those around him. Despite pre-destined fate and mind-control, the player, as Jack, has overcome destiny and defined their own ending in both the personal and determined narratives. By becoming a Big Daddy, the player has symbolically completed the ascendancy to power alluded to in the Gatherer's Garden “Are you stronger than my Daddy?” announcement mentioned earlier, while still defining how Jack's powers have manifested. Further, Jack's mind-control would dictate the end of the game occurring after the meeting with Ryan, who was established as the game's primary antagonist and the target Atlas intended for him to kill. However, Jack and the player escaped their mind-control and were able to craft their own destiny by destroying Atlas and dictating the game's ending.

Bioshock 2 manipulates this idea of player choice further, with the ending removed from not only the player, but also Delta's control. However, it is still influenced by the Player-Hero's actions throughout. Much of *Bioshock 2* relies on the same mechanics and settings as its predecessor, with Ryan replaced by the opposite but equally tyrannical Sofia Lamb. As the player quests towards saving Eleanor and killing Lamb, they are given greater options to affect the game's outcome: while they may choose whether to save or harvest the

Little Sisters, they are also given the opportunity to kill or spare three primary characters: Grace Holloway, Stanley Poole and Gil Alexander. These choices culminate in the third act of *Bioshock 2*, in which Eleanor is saved and becomes a Big Sister. Unlike *Bioshock 1*, the game ends with the death of the Ryan-proxy (Lamb), with no Atlas-like character present. As depicted in *Fig. 10*, however, instead of the hero facing and defeating the game's antagonist, they watch Eleanor do so. As Delta stares into Lamb's flooding office, Eleanor dictates to the player the reasoning for her choice to either save or kill Lamb, based on whether Delta chose to save or kill Holloway, Poole and Alexander. This is followed by Eleanor and Delta rising to the surface, with the various endings (all of which result in the death of Delta in some way) based around the player's choices throughout the game regarding both the primary characters and the Little Sisters.²⁰ For the most part, the player is stripped of agency.

This reduction of player agency is concluded by Levine in *Infinite*. Although the player is presented with a handful of choices in the game, many appear minor, such as picking which broach Elizabeth wears (*Fig. 25*). Other choices, such as whether to spare or kill the war veteran Slate appear more poignant, but result in similar outcomes: if the player spares Slate, they find him locked in a cell later, completely non-responsive. On the surface, the player is given the illusion of choice over the game's determined narrative. However, as Elizabeth's ability to open tears in time and space becomes more apparent and the two venture into different realities where events have played out differently, the choices begin to feel trivial. No matter Booker's actions, another reality exists where he did the opposite. This is punctuated by the game having only one ending. Surrounded by Elizabeths from other realities, Booker is informed that he and Comstock are the same, splitting off at the baptism years before the game's events. In effect, the choice of baptism mirrors Jack and Delta's choices with their first Little Sisters, the difference being Booker/Comstock's choice was

²⁰ These choices are analysed in more detail in Chapter 2.

made without the player's intervention. It is revealed that the reign of Comstock can only be stopped if Booker is drowned before being able to make the choice, the game closing with the legion of Elizabeths drowning Booker.²¹ Unlike the previous entries to the series, the player's choices throughout are of no real value: the determined narrative will always end the same, no matter their actions.

Shortly before his death, Elizabeth shows Booker an endless sea filled with lighthouses, where other Bookers can be seen embarking on their journey. These other Bookers symbolise the vast, infinite number of different Player-Heroes that may appear with each subsequent playthrough of the game. Figuratively, the Player-Hero is simply one possible version of themselves.

Bioshock 2's ending suggests a nuanced relationship between the player's actions and their impact on the game's narrative: although the player's actions as Delta define both him and his fate, the actual execution of the game's ending is given over to Eleanor. Ultimately, the player is at the whim of the game's mechanics and rules. *Infinite*, however, suggests the Player-Hero sphere is a far less tangible entity: it is, figuratively, the amalgamation of not just one player's actions, but the actions of all who engage with the game. The building blocks of the Player-Hero are not just the choices made by the player, but the choices not made, as well.

The Player-Hero sphere is the vessel by which the player enters the text, and encapsulates the moment the impact of video game interactivity on the narrative begins. While many aspects of Propp and Campbell's morphologies are applicable to the Player-Hero sphere, separation from these frameworks occurs through player-synthesis. The player's actions colour and affect the personality and characterisation of the heroes of the *Bioshock*

²¹ A short return to gameplay after the credits suggests a version of Booker who never went to the baptism at all survived and raised Anna/Elizabeth.

series and other games, filling the otherwise empty Player-Hero sphere. These actions range from subtle movements to grandiose displays of mercy or malice, manifesting in both the development of the Player-Hero on a more micro level in the personal narrative, and on a macro level in the determined narrative. As such, the Player-Hero sphere showcases an endless interplay between player action and the mechanics and rules of the game: at first, the Player-Hero sphere is an empty vessel into which the player may project: its characters lacking definition to allow for more refined crafting and rendering as the game progresses. While this remains true throughout the analysis, the player is not in complete control, and remains at the mercy of the barriers and mechanics enforced by the Game World sphere. The analysis of the Player-Hero sphere and the interaction of the player with the game is crucial to realising this thesis' overall aim, but the facilitation of this interaction is equally important. The analysis must therefore continue into the Video Game Monomyth's NPC Goddess sphere.

Chapter 2

The NPC Goddess: A Bridge Between Spheres

“...*I have been watching you, Father, studying the way you have treated others, and now I know who I am.*”

-Eleanor Lamb, *Bioshock 2* (2K Australia et al 2010)

Eleanor Lamb's monologue at the climax of *Bioshock 2* reveals the overarching authority of the video game's mechanics/rules in the construction of both the personal and determined narrative. As uncovered in Chapter 1, even a player equipped with a large array of choices is still bound to the mechanics and rules of the game. As such, to fully understand the impacts of interactivity on the video game narrative, the mechanics/rules of the game and their agents involved must be analysed. Just as Propp and Campbell's theories have a facilitator between the hero and the kingdom/supernatural world, so must the Video Game Monomyth have one between the Player-Hero and the Game World. This chapter will analyse the bridging element between Player-Hero and Game World, examining the Video Game Monomyth's replacement for Propp's Princess and the Classical Goddess spheres, dubbed “The NPC Goddess”. The NPC Goddess is embodied in the *Bioshock* series through Little Sisters (*Bioshock 1* and *2*), Eleanor Lamb and Big Sisters (*Bioshock 2*) and Elizabeth (*Infinite*). In addition, the gendered nature of the sphere allows for an analysis of representations of women and the agency given to them within video game narratives. The construction of the NPC Goddess and how its morphology is directly influenced by video game interactivity will be analysed. The use of women as motivators for player progression and the shift from agent-less objects towards a more developed and powerful character sphere will also be discussed.

In Propp's formula, women often fall into the Princess sphere. They may be in need of rescuing, or may be offered as a wife to the hero following a difficult task (Propp, pp 79-80). It is possible, however, for princesses to fulfil other spheres as well, such as the Helper. The Helper-Princess combination appears in Propp's fourth example of the formula: "A princess gives Iván a ring. Young men appearing from out of the ring carry Iván away into another kingdom." (Propp, p. 20).

The Princess is prominent in Propp's functions of "The Villain Causes Harm Or Injury To A Member of A Family" such as being kidnapped by a dragon, "A Difficult Task Is Proposed To The Hero" such as the hero having to kiss her at a window, and "The Hero Is Married and Ascends The Throne" (Propp, pp. 30-63). The Princess also requires a father, who will often give the hero difficult tasks to determine if they can marry the Princess (Propp, pp. 79-80). While men may not inhabit the Princess sphere, it does allow for non-royal/wealthy women (such as a farmer's daughter) (Propp, pp. 63-64). As such, the sphere is defined primarily by gender.

The Little Sisters, Eleanor and Elizabeth all resemble aspects of the Princess sphere, primarily through being imprisoned. The Little Sisters' imprisonment is through their brainwashing, while Eleanor and Elizabeth are traditionally imprisoned: Eleanor is locked away in Lamb's headquarters and Elizabeth is trapped in her tower. However, Propp's marriage between hero and princess is replaced, as all three NPC Goddesses in the *Bioshock* series are daughterly figures (most overtly Eleanor and Elizabeth).

In *Bioshock 1*, where the Little Sisters play a less obvious role in the player's quest, a non-existent Princess is fabricated to fulfil the necessary sequences. As Jack descends into Rapture, Atlas pleads with him to help rescue his wife Moira and son Patrick. The player's first objective appears to be to help Atlas rescue his family, who then "die" when their Bathysphere explodes, shifting the player's objective to one of vengeance against Ryan. It is

eventually revealed that Moira and Patrick (much like Fontaine's "Atlas" alias) do not really exist, and were invented by Atlas/Fontaine to coax Jack into following his orders.

Through the use of Atlas' lie to steer the player, Levine comments on the necessity for a Princess to push the player forward: without the existence of a woman for the player to rescue, they will not be motivated to play the game (other "real" objectives could have existed instead, such as that of retrieving research in *Minerva's Den*²²). This brings to light the prevalence of Propp's formula in older video game narratives, best demonstrated in *Super Mario Bros* where at the end of each world²³ the player must defeat a monster in a castle, hoping to find Princess Peach within. In all but the final castle, the player instead rescues Peach's subjects, who state "Our Princess is in another castle", motivating the player to continue on. If no Princess exists, one must be fabricated to initiate the player's quest. This is reinforced by *Bioshock 2* and *Infinite*'s inclusion of such characters in Eleanor and Elizabeth. It is repeated in *Burial At Sea Ep. 2*,²⁴ where Elizabeth becomes the Player-Hero and a Little Sister, Sally, must be rescued.

While at first glance the prominence of a princess to motivate the player may appear to be due to tradition, Campbell's analysis of women and his own "Goddess" sphere reveals a more deeply rooted reason for the trope's persistence. Like Propp's Princess, Campbell's Goddess is specifically gendered, the broad range of feminine qualities they have – being sexual, maternal and daughterly all at once – are crucial to the sphere (Campbell, pp. 91-92). While some share Propp's Princess' need for rescuing (Campbell, pp. 293-296), many possess immense powers (Campbell, p. 92).

²² A DLC for *Bioshock 2* in which the protagonist, Subject Sigma, must retrieve research that could help cure the splicers.

²³ In this case, a group of levels that are thematically linked.

²⁴ An optional "DLC" for *Infinite*. A shorter narrative, *Burial At Sea* follows Elizabeth as she extracts her revenge on a version of Comstock who escaped to Rapture.

The Classical Goddess acts as the bridge between the Classical Hero and the Supernatural World they venture into, representing familiarity in an unfamiliar world. Campbell describes this familiarity as “the soul's assurance that, at the conclusion of its exile in a world of organised inadequacies, the bliss that was once known will be known again,” (Campbell, p. 92). As the Classical Hero's own goal is to master both realms of existence, the Classical Goddess's duality means they are an aspirational figure of sorts: through a “mystical marriage” between Hero and Goddess, the Hero is able to learn from the Goddess and ultimately reach their goal (Campbell, p. 101). This makes the Classical Goddess a crucial element to even the most stripped-back of morphologies and unveils why women as motivators for quests have persisted in video game narratives, continuing to manifest even when a new Monomyth is being formed. Just as the Classical Hero requires the Classical Goddess to bring them into the Supernatural World while keeping them linked to the natural, the Player-Hero requires the NPC Goddess to do the same. The majority of the game's rules and mechanics manifest in the enemies and environment throughout,²⁵ making a non-hostile force to aid the player (the NPC Goddess) vital. The promise of an ally drives the player forward, reinforced by the traditional signifiers of Princess or Goddess. Although the elements of Propp's Princess sphere may have infiltrated video game narratives through tradition, they have persisted for their utility.

The Little Sisters of *Bioshock 1 & 2* conform to the familiarity aspect of the Classical Goddess sphere, appearing physically more like “normal” children as opposed to the heavily disfigured form of the Splicers. In addition, their actions replicate that of small children in the real world: they sing songs to themselves, laugh and are cautious of strangers (including the player). This contrasts with the overtly hostile inhabitants of Rapture that act without any sense of real-world logic. Despite their normal features, the Little Sisters also wield syringes

²⁵ Elements of this will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

to drain ADAM from dead Splicers, protected by the lumbering Big Daddies. Their relationship with the Big Daddies and their willingness to toy with corpses are qualities limited to Rapture, aligning them with the Game World. The Little Sisters facilitate the Player-Hero's interactions with the game's mechanics through the ADAM they provide. Whether the player chooses to save or harvest the Little Sisters, they are given a portion of ADAM (they receive more if they harvest, but are rewarded later if they save). Without the Little Sisters, the player cannot participate in the moulding and levelling of the Player-Hero sphere discussed in Chapter 1, and cannot master the Game World.

The relationship between Elizabeth and Booker in *Infinite* also resembles the Classical Hero and Goddess relationship. When Comstock and Booker fight over the infant Elizabeth at the tear between their worlds, the tear closes on her finger, severing it and leaving it in Booker's reality (*Fig. 17*). From this point onwards, she is literally a being of both worlds. In the game's personal narrative, this manifests in her powers over space and time, which the player may then direct her to use in combat situations. Elizabeth is unaffected by the religious fanaticism that consumes Columbia, but is knowledgeable enough of its inner workings to make Booker's journey possible. She is both a reprieve from the alien and hostile culture of the floating city, and his guide through it. This is echoed in the game's mechanics, as Elizabeth, like the inhabitants of Columbia, is an NPC. Unlike most of the game's NPCs, however, she is not hostile towards the player. Her abilities to pick locks, provide the player with equipment, revive them upon death and open tears that reveal strategic advantages (*Fig. 26*) demonstrate her importance in helping the player traverse Columbia.

While an analysis of the Classical Goddess helps sketch the NPC Goddess sphere, the study is incomplete. Campbell's Goddess represents an absolute power, made evident by his similar description of "Mother Universe" (Campbell, pp. 255-259). This does not account for women in more compromised positions, such as Propp's (often imprisoned) Princess. These

imprisoned women can be seen as a variation of the Classical Goddess, “The Damsel”.

Analysing the Damsel uncovers a shift in agency for women within video game narratives from the agent-less princess to the more detailed and fully formed sphere of the NPC Goddess.

The Damsel does not share the powers of the Classical Goddess. Rather than complimenting and making the Classical Hero whole through her own teachings and powers (Campbell, pp. 99-100), her rescue at the hands of the Classical Hero demonstrates that he is a complete and powerful being (Campbell, pp. 293-295); the Damsel is his trophy and evidence of his strength. In effect, the saving of the Damsel represents the end of the Classical Hero's quest in a far more overt way than the mystical marriage with the Goddess. The Damsel's lack of power and action is reflected in Campbell's lack of analysis: she is not overtly explored by Campbell, only mentioned in his discussion of the “Lover” variation of the Classical Hero sphere (Campbell, pp. 193-196). This indicates weaker characterisation for women inhabiting the Damsel sphere.

On first glance, Eleanor and Elizabeth's characterisations appear to embrace the Damsel ideal: Delta must rescue Eleanor from a state that appears similar to *Sleeping Beauty* (Fig. 27), while Booker's objective is summarised as “Bring us the girl and wipe away the debt”. While Eleanor's freedom remains the objective throughout *Bioshock 2*, *Infinite's* objective changes as the game progresses. Towards the end of the game, Booker and Elizabeth's goal shifts from escaping Columbia to killing Comstock. Where Eleanor and Elizabeth differ most from the Damsel, however, is in their immense power, which is awoken once they have been rescued. Unlike the Damsel, Elizabeth and Eleanor's character arcs do not begin and end as objects for the Player-Hero to rescue. In breaking the conventions of the Classical Monomyth, the agency afforded to Eleanor and Elizabeth also challenges how women have been traditionally presented in video game narratives.

The lack of agency afforded to the Damsels of many video games is an important factor to consider when discussing how interactivity has influenced video game narratives over time. When equipped with agency, the NPC Goddess becomes a crucial element in understanding the interplay between player agency/control and the mechanics/rules of the text. Just as the Classical Goddess is the bridge between the Supernatural World and the Classical Hero, so is the NPC Goddess the bridge between the Game World and the Player-Hero, curating and facilitating interaction. Without agency of their own, however, the Damsels' sole purpose is to be rescued by the player, their story concluding there. Rather than having resolve or ambitions outside of the player's actions, they are forgotten about, only re-appearing to be captured again (generally by the same villain) in order to instigate another adventure.

This concept of a princess being captured and re-captured repeatedly resembles “Capture The Flag” modes often featured in multiplayer games such as *Quake III Arena* (id Software 1999),²⁶ requiring opposing teams of players to steal flags from each other's base to score points. This similarity between the Damsel concept and the competitive possession of objects has been highlighted by video game critics, citing the game *Fat Princess* (Titan Studios et al 2009) (Sarkessian 2013). *Fat Princess* features two gameplay modes similar to Capture The Flag, but replaces the flag with a princess. The princesses in *Fat Princess* are devoid of agency, carried back and forth by the teams until one has achieved both the rescue of their princess and the imprisonment of the opposing team's for an allotted period of time. Completely devoid of agency, the princesses of *Fat Princess* and *Super Mario Bros's* Princess Peach stop being characters entirely. As character spheres are defined by the actions within them, these princesses' incapacity for action means they are better described as objects

²⁶ An FPS focused primarily on the multiplayer experience, the game features many common multiplayer modes. Released in 1999 and designed by Graeme Devine and Tim Willits, it has featured prominently in competitive gaming tournaments.

and challenges for the Player-Hero, rather than equal characters with whom to interact.

These agent-less Damsels are rejected by the *Bioshock* series, with none of the NPC Goddesses finding themselves captured again following their initial rescue, save for Elizabeth's second capture in *Infinite*. However, in this instance Elizabeth masterminds her own rescue: Booker fails to save her, which leads to her becoming the ruler of Columbia and attacking the USA. In her old age, she repents, pulling Booker through time and space, and positioning him so he can save her. She is the architect of her own salvation, the player merely her tool to execute it.

The stark shift in power and agency from Princess Peach to the females of the *Bioshock* series demonstrates a shedding of the oppressive elements of Propp and Campbell's spheres, while reinterpreting the empowering aspects. Although the “good” ending of *Bioshock 1* ends with Jack and the Little Sisters returning to the surface world, he is not in complete control of them throughout the game, nor is their characterisation limited to being saved. The Little Sisters wander Rapture, seeking out dead Splicers and retrieving ADAM from them. If the player or any living Splicers approach them, they will scream, commanding their Big Daddy to protect them. When with a Big Daddy, they are completely impervious to the player's attacks. When they are finished, they command the Big Daddy to lift them up to an air vent which they crawl into (*Fig. 28*).

The shift in agency from Player-Hero to NPC Goddess is demonstrated through the dependency of the Big Daddies on the Little Sisters. Big Daddies without Little Sisters in *Bioshock 1* will wander aimlessly, banging on vents in frustration. In *Bioshock 2*, Delta encounters a number of Big Daddies who have been driven insane by their separation from the Little Sisters. As discussed in Chapter 1, the player does gain control over the Little Sister's fate if they kill their Big Daddy. However, if the player chooses to save them, the Little Sister is given free will again, which they use to escape through vents, reappearing

occasionally to deliver presents to the player.

Bioshock 2 presents greater agency for the NPC Goddess, through a recurrence of the Little Sisters, as well as the addition of the Big Sisters and Eleanor. The Big Sisters themselves demonstrate an increase in agency for the NPC Goddess. While Little Sisters continue to roam protected by Big Daddies, the Big Sisters take on a new role as protectors of the young, with their own set of skills and abilities. Remarkably more powerful than the Big Daddies (including Delta), the Big Sisters attack the player once they have rescued or harvested all Little Sisters in the area, announcing their oncoming arrival with a high pitch shriek, then appearing, as if out of nowhere, near the player, who is powerless to stop their approach. They react to the Game World independent of all other forces, coming into combat with whatever they please. Their ability to appear wherever they want sees them trump the mechanics and rules that govern all other NPCs in the game. Resembling Delta in appearance and sharing the player's ability to manipulate the game world, the Big Sisters challenge the power-balance between Player-Hero and NPC Goddess.

While the Big Sisters demonstrate their reach and agency through hostility, Eleanor uses hers to aid the player. Throughout the game, the screen will occasionally fill with Eleanor's face as she communicates telepathically with Delta and leaves items to aid him (*Fig. 29*). This action foreshadows Thomas and Levine's commentary on the role of the NPC Goddess in the Video Game Monomyth, and the freedoms it affords to all female characters. While Eleanor is both physically and mentally restrained by Lamb, she is still able to communicate with Delta, as well as instigating the events of *Bioshock 2* by using the Little Sisters to revive him, shifting the world-altering agency of the Player-Hero to the NPC Goddess. The third act of the game sees Delta restrained and Eleanor smothered by Lamb. The player takes control of a Little Sister, who must find the parts necessary to save Eleanor by turning her into a Big Sister. The sequence foreshadows the ultimate shift in agency for

the NPC Goddess, allowing women to inhabit the Player-Hero sphere.

The endings of *Bioshock 2* and *Infinite*, as well as Elizabeth's role in *Burial At Sea Ep. 2* all demonstrate the importance of the NPC Goddess sphere's function within the interactivity of the video game narrative. In both *Bioshock 2* and *Infinite*, control over the game's ending is taken away from the player – the agency established as uniquely theirs in *Bioshock 1* now revealed to be within the grasp of the game's text. This shift is personified in both Eleanor and Elizabeth, but its roots can be observed in *Bioshock 1*.

The Little Sisters' final appearance in *Bioshock 1* follows the player's impending defeat at the hands of an enlarged and enraged Atlas. Although structured as a traditional “boss fight”,²⁷ it ends with Jack's defeat. As Atlas stalks towards the player, who has now lost the ability to control Jack (so is devoid of agency), the Little Sisters appear from nearby vents and overwhelm Atlas, destroying him. Here, the NPC Goddess excels where the Player-Hero cannot, breaching the boundaries between personal and determined narrative and, ultimately, being the Player-Hero's source of salvation. Rather than the hero saving the princess as per tradition, the princess/goddess has saved the hero.

While the Little Sisters have taken on some of the conventionally protagonist/player-centric actions in the Atlas sequence (defeating the final boss), the end of the game's determined narrative is still in the hands of the Player-Hero, as discussed in Chapter 1. The possession of agency is further challenged in the final acts of *Bioshock 2* and *Infinite*. Once Eleanor transforms into a Big Sister, her powers become immense, surpassing Delta. No longer restrained, she acts with a greater amount of agency, beginning with her actions towards the Little Sister who saves her: if the player saved Little Sisters throughout, she will save the one in front of her, otherwise she will harvest her. She then frees Delta, allowing the

²⁷ A common sequence in older and more “game-like” video games where the player faces off against a single, powerful foe, often requiring the player to repeat a pattern until the boss is defeated.

player to progress. For the remainder of the game, she delivers orders to the player, instructing Delta on how to approach each scenario. Although the player is able to summon her into battle, Eleanor acts on her own in combat, dispatching with enemies at a far greater speed than the player is likely to.

Finally, as Rapture collapses around Delta and Eleanor, the player loses all control over Delta and becomes a spectator of what is left to unfold. With no agency of their own, the player watches as Eleanor decides whether to save or drown Sofia Lamb. The choice is based on a more complex system than the ending of *Bioshock 1*. Eleanor will save Sofia Lamb if the player spared the non-combative NPCs they met throughout the game, but kill her if otherwise, as shown in *Fig. 10*. The exact reasoning she gives to the player, however, is dependent on whether the player saved or harvested the Little Sisters. If the player chose to save both groups, Eleanor will state:

“You taught me that 'evil' is just a word. Under the skin, it's simple pain. For you, mercy was victory. You sacrificed, you endured, and when given the chance, you forgave, always. Mother believed this world was irredeemable, but she was wrong, Father. We are Utopia, you and I, and in forgiving, we left the door open for her.” (2K Australia et al 2010)

The Player-Hero has become an agent-less passenger, with what remains of the game carried forward by the NPC Goddess. While the player's actions influenced the outcome, direct control has been passed to Eleanor. Following their escape from Rapture, Eleanor, Delta and the Little Sisters (if they were saved) sit on the pier looking out at the floating wreckage. In most endings, Eleanor takes Delta's memories, ambitions and other attributes into herself through absorbing his ADAM, stating that the events in Rapture were only the

beginning of her journey, starkly contrasting the Damsel's fate of being rescued by the hero continuously with no life beyond that. If the player chose to save some Little Sisters but harvest others, they will be given a final choice to either be “absorbed” by Eleanor or to fall into the ocean and drown (both resulting in a death of sorts). Delta's actions have defined Eleanor, but her path is her own. In the “good” ending, she states:

“The Rapture dream is over but in waking I am reborn. This world is not ready for me, but here I am. It would be so easy to misjudge them. You are my conscious father, and I need you to guide me. You will always be with me now father: your memories, your drives ... If utopia is not a place but a people, then we must choose carefully because the world is about to change and in our story, Rapture was just the beginning.” (2K Australia et al 2010)

From Eleanor's transformation to her closing monologue, the NPC Goddess sphere and its role in the discourse between interactivity and narrative is demonstrated. The player has had some control over the personal and determined narrative: they have input actions to define their sphere (and Eleanor's) and influence the overall narrative of the game. However, their choices are ultimately governed by the game itself. The Player-Hero is simply the first step in the process of interactivity influencing the narrative. The NPC Goddess bridges the Player-Hero and the Game World. With *Infinite*, Levine comments further on this through Elizabeth.

In *Infinite*, Elizabeth's agency is more absolute. As discussed in Chapter 1, the game features only one ending, the player's actions unable to impact the determined narrative. When the tower blocking Elizabeth's powers is destroyed, this presents a stark dichotomy: although Booker and the Player-Hero can see and access only one option, Elizabeth becomes

essentially omniscient, able to view all possible options and realities. Elizabeth's insight is an allegory for the potential endings of the game that, in reality, are not accessible. No matter the player's choices throughout, the game will always end with a legion of Elizabeths from different realities drowning Booker. The legion of Elizabeths not only stop Booker from accepting the baptism, but prevent him from making a choice one way or the other. This presents a more absolute view of player agency over the narrative: while Eleanor in *Bioshock 2* suggested the Player-Hero has some influence on the narrative's end, the ending of *Infinite* proposes they have none, and that their choices are illusionary.

The *Burial At Sea* DLC that follows *Infinite* further comments on this superseding of agency to the NPC Goddess. It demonstrates how a more coloured and complex character sphere allows for greater representations of women in video games, such as women inhabiting the Player-Hero sphere itself. In *Burial At Sea Ep.1*, the player is led to believe the Player-Hero is Booker, somehow residing in a pre-*Bioshock 1* Rapture. Elizabeth (who this Booker doesn't know) appears and asks him to help her find a girl named Sally. At the close of *Ep.1*, however, Elizabeth reveals to "Booker" that he is in fact a version of Comstock who killed Elizabeth when she was an infant (her head being severed in the closing portal rather than her finger) and escaped through time and space to Rapture before reverting back to his Booker personality. In this instance, the NPC Goddess has demonstrated far greater knowledge of the narrative than the player, then takes all control away, drawing over a Big Daddy who kills Booker. In *Burial At Sea Ep. 2*, Elizabeth becomes the Player-Hero, on a mission for Atlas to gather the "trigger code" that brings Jack into Rapture in exchange for Sally.²⁸ By giving Elizabeth this role in the *Bioshock* series, Levine comments on the role of the NPC Goddess (Elizabeth) in facilitating the Player-Hero's journey. Elizabeth's mission for

²⁸ The shift of Elizabeth from NPC Goddess to Player-Hero, as well as other texts with similar occurrences, are best analysed once the framework of The Video Game Monomyth is complete. Some of these avenues of analysis are explored in the Conclusion.

Atlas makes her the architect for Jack's journey and, by extension, the series as a whole.

Other female protagonists such as Lara Croft in *Tomb Raider* (Core Design 1996) and Konoko in *ONI* (Bungie & Rockstar Toronto 2001), are only able to fulfil the Player-Hero sphere when presented as “cartoonishly erotic” caricatures (Lawrence & Jewett, p. 217). An analysis of video game press reveals an evolution of female characters in video games, shifting throughout the 90s and 00s towards more strongly sexualised female figures. These sexualised women often exhibit increased signs of victimisation or hostility, equating female sexuality with some form of pain or danger (Summers & Miller 2014). In order to inhabit the role of hero, women must either shed their femininity or parody it, lest they suffer higher degrees of violence than their male counterparts.

The portrayal of Elizabeth in *Burial At Sea Ep. 2* differs greatly from the depictions mentioned above, as she transitions to the Player-Hero sphere without rejecting or hyper-sexualising her femininity. Her abilities are based around her own intelligence and wit, with her Player-Hero sphere not suffering a loss of complexity due to her femininity. A similar depiction can be observed in the *Dishonored* series (Arkane Studios 2012).²⁹

The NPC Goddess sphere of the Video Game Monomyth is the facilitator of the player's interactions with the game, situated as a middle-ground between the Player-Hero sphere and the Game World. Through the Little Sisters, Eleanor, the Big Sisters, and Elizabeth, the effect of the NPC Goddess on the discourse of the video game narrative itself can be analysed. Their manifestations and actions within the game's personal and determined narratives are commentary on the overarching control the game's rules/mechanics have on the interactivity-to-narrative interplay. Like Propp and Campbell's Princess and Goddess spheres, the NPC Goddess is a central force, constructed by both cultural traditions and their utility in the interactivity process. While the player may, in some cases, have influence over

²⁹ This is discussed in greater depth in the Conclusion.

the game's determined narrative, they are ultimately at the whim of the mechanics and rules of the Game World. In other cases, as demonstrated by Elizabeth in *Infinite*, the player's actions are ineffective, and their choices illusionary. The empowering nature of the NPC Goddess sphere provides a gateway for more progressive representations of women within video game narratives as a whole. The NPC Goddess sphere acts as a springboard into other character spheres such as the Player-Hero, paving the way for more thoughtfully designed female heroes in video game narratives. The analysis of the NPC Goddess shifts this thesis from a focus on the player themselves and towards the video game text more purely. For the analysis to continue, the focus must now shift from the bridging element of the NPC Goddess and towards the Video Game Monomyth's most unique feature: the Game World sphere.

Chapter 3

The Game World: The Ultimate Controller of Interactivity

“Oh, DeWitt. You struggle against prophecy like a stone loosed from a sling. How thrilling the launch! How breathtaking the apex! And how terrifying the descent, as gravity drags you down into the inevitable.”

-Zachary Hale Comstock, *Bioshock Infinite* (Irrational Games 2013)

Comstock's taunt towards the end of *Infinite* summarises the ultimate power of the Game World sphere in controlling interactivity. Through its many agents, the Game World sphere enforces the rules and parameters of the game onto the Player-Hero sphere's actions, while also bending and shaping itself in response. The Game World regulates the impact of interactivity as it passes through the text, distilling interactivity's influence on the game's narrative. Despite the actions of the Player-Hero helping to shape and fill its own sphere, the overall narrative of the game is still controlled by the video game text itself. In the *Bioshock* series' fiction, the Game World is manifested through an array of agents: the antagonists (Ryan, Lamb and Comstock), the inhabitants of Rapture and Columbia, the various items within, and the cities themselves. The Game World is a failed city/world designed to be plundered and controlled by the player, allowing them to learn from and adapt to their surroundings. Through the use of discourse-charms to deceive the player and create an illusion of choice, the construction of the Game World sphere breaks away from literary frameworks and allows the Video Game Monomyth to be fully realised. Although elements of Propp and Campbell's work inform this chapter, a thorough analysis of the Game World sphere requires a broadened scope. To this end, Penelope Reed Doob's study of the Labyrinth

is employed, allowing for an analysis of both the choice-driven “multicursal” labyrinths and the restrictive “unicursal” labyrinths (Doob 1990, pp. 46-48) that exist as elements of the Game World sphere. In addition, Doob’s theory of metaphorical minotaurs (Doob, p. 73) provides insight into the lust for power prevalent in both the fictions and discourses of the *Bioshock* series.

The study of cities and systems as active participants in a game has precedent in ludology, although analysis is under-developed. Ian Bogost suggests early instalments in the *SimCity* series (Maxis 1989) and related games place the systems (represented as cities, colonies and processes) as the “protagonists” of their games. Bogost writes that *SimCity* is:

A game about urban societies, about the relationship between land value, pollution, industry, taxation, growth, and other factors ... the game got us all to think about the relationships that make a city run, succeed, and decay, and in so doing to rise above our individual interests, even if only for a moment. (Bogost 2015)

Bogost suggests that the cities, kingdoms or other locations in video games may fulfil the role of a protagonist due to the system-based nature of the video game medium. He extends this concept beyond cities (which are governed by systems and regulations) to processes themselves, such as ant colonies or taxation (Bogost 2015). As systems act/react to the forces around them, they are capable of fulfilling the role of actor/agent traditionally occupied by characters, allowing the Game World to be defined as a sphere of action itself, comprised of many agents. The video game text itself, which is also made up of systems (the same that form the narrative, but presented differently), is part of this sphere of action. As such, Rapture and Columbia are both the fictional cities the Player-Hero must traverse, as well as systems of the text’s discourse. For the Game World sphere to succeed in controlling

interactivity's impact on the narrative, it must feature an array of agents, including the enemies and NPCs that inhabit it.

Unlike the Player-Hero and the NPC Goddess, the Game World sphere does not have a precedent as a sphere of action in other mediums. In Propp's morphology, location is barely examined, despite being a constant in his formula. A kingdom, field, or other place is likely to appear at the centre of the journey, but is not active in any of the functions (Propp, pp. 51-52). Propp's kingdoms/locations are static settings in which events occur.

The Classical Monomyth places greater emphasis on the Supernatural World, as the Classical Hero's ultimate goal is to breach the "navel" between worlds, allowing the flow of knowledge from the Supernatural World to the Natural World (Campbell pp. 32-37). For this to occur, the Classical Hero must cross "The First Threshold", enter "The Belly of The Whale" and face "The Road of Trials" (Campbell, pp. 64-91) before they can achieve the mastery of both worlds discussed in Chapter 1.

The First Threshold of the Supernatural World is generally protected by a threshold guardian, such as an ogre or demon. The threshold guardian is mischievous and cunning, deceiving and eventually killing would-be heroes (Campbell, pp. 64-66). This is inverse to the First Threshold and its guardians in the *Bioshock* series. While the tremendous power of the Supernatural World's guardians deter many travelers and make the Supernatural World almost impenetrable, the Game World's guardians are instead much weaker, indoctrinating the Player-Hero in the mechanics of the game and giving them the knowledge needed to conquer future challenges. In *Bioshock 1*, after learning how to wield a wrench and gaining the Plasmid ability Electro Bolt, Jack faces off against his first Splicer, with Atlas telling him the "one-two punch" of electrocuting and hitting the Splicer with his wrench will defeat them. Similarly, Delta's first two encounters with Splicers gives him an advantage: the first Splicer he encounters is in the middle of a fire fight, making them easy to spot and weakened

from their battle. The second stands on a ledge raving, allowing Delta to approach from behind. In *Infinite*, the player is given a great deal of time to explore Columbia before being accosted at the raffle by a group of police officers who have identified him as the False Shepherd. Although slightly more confronting, the game pauses during the fight to tell the player the controls, giving them time to prepare.

In presenting the Player-Hero with weak enemies early on, the Game World removes a degree of urgency from the Video Game Monomyth. Through the conventions of the video game medium, the player is presumably aware that the first few instances of combat will be uneventful, tutorial-like experiences. Further, in all three games the player is relatively safe in these early segments. In *Bioshock 1*, even if the player swims into the burning plane debris, they will not die. Although the player can technically be defeated by the first few enemies, the Video Game Monomyth clearly shifts the First Threshold from a test of the hero's worth to a lesson in how to navigate the Game World. Juul summarises this idea of teaching through minor challenges by referring to the rules of games as “generally definite, unambiguous, and easy to use” but highlighting that the enjoyment of games stems primarily from presenting a challenge. Juul states “Playing a game is an activity of improving skills in order to overcome these challenges, and playing a game is therefore fundamentally a learning experience,” (Juul 2005, p. 5).

By teaching the Player-Hero, the Game World has granted them entry into it. In *Bioshock 1*, the Game World has used two agents: the initial, weak Splicer, and Atlas to communicate with and prepare the Player-Hero for what is to come. Aside from demonstrating the multiple agents of the Game World sphere, the incident also uncovers the power of the Game World sphere over the Player-Hero. The Classical Hero enters the Supernatural World by force, generally through destructive means. The Guardian's purpose is to prevent them, and their actions reflect this (Campbell, p. 67). At first, the Game World

sphere appears the same: Rapture and Columbia are both closed-off cities, and Jack, Delta and Booker are all intruders. However, the Game World's actions (providing the player with the tools and knowledge to break-through) reveal its true objective is to facilitate the Player-Hero's entrance. The threatening enemies are simply fictive deceptions by the Game World to entice the player into attempting to enter, reinforced by Juul's statement of fun stemming from challenge. This deception is the first instance of the Game World utilising Frye's discourse-charms, which are employed heavily throughout the *Bioshock* series. In his analysis of mythology in poetry, Frye observes the use of patterns, word-choice and other techniques within the discourse of a poem to tease out and stir particular emotions in the reader. Discords in assonance or alliteration that tamper with the overall form of poems, for instance, may be utilised to cause feelings of dread or uneasiness in the reader (Frye 1976, p. 126). These discourse-charms also have more tangible uses, such as repetition in political oratory to propel the populace towards a particular position (Frye 1976, p. 127).

These charms of discourse, like many aspects of mythology's relation with narrative, are mirrored in the text's fictions. The charms employed by the poet are similar to those utilised by the magicians that inhabit the texts, who use chants and other (often rhythmic) incantations/spells to hypnotise, soothe or spring their targets into action. A poet is a “magician who renounces his magic” (Frye 1976, p. 147) and instead turns to utilising the charms of their discourse to invoke emotions, re-creating – in a sense – the mythological world within their text.³⁰

In similar fashion, *Bioshock 1* features characters who utilise “charms” to influence the actions of both Jack and the player. Atlas's provocation of Jack using the “Would You Kindly” trigger code to commands him is functionally similar to hypnosis. The fabrication of

³⁰ Frye's analysis also includes an examination of “riddles”. While this may also apply to the video game medium, such an analysis would require a greater focus on the creation and deconstruction of the video game text than afforded in this thesis.

Moirai and Patrick discussed in Chapter 2 could also be seen as a charm of sorts, as they play on Jack and the player's sense of empathy to coax them into following Atlas' commands. Additionally, the intercom system that runs throughout Rapture blares advertisements and announcements regarding the use of ADAM, demanding citizens continue their commerce despite the civil war. These advertisements are transitional between the charms employed within the game's fiction to influence Jack, and the discourse charms employed by the Game World to influence the player. The advertisements and "Rapture Reminder" announcements relay information to the player regarding the game. As discussed in Chapter 1, these include challenging the player's strength, which teases at the player's desire for superiority and compels them to upgrade their character. The majority of these upgrades are optional, but through the charm of the announcements, the player's choice is influenced.

The Player-Hero upgrading and changing themselves to better face the challenges ahead aligns the Video Game Monomyth with Campbell's *Belly of The Whale* (Campbell, pp. 64-80). The Classical Hero must be consumed by the forces of the world they enter into, such as Heracles diving into the stomach of Poseidon's sea monster to rescue the Princess of Troy, Hesione (Campbell, pp. 74-75). To become worthy of entering the Supernatural World, the hero must destroy themselves and dispose of their ego in order to be reborn (Campbell, pp. 77-78).

Rebirth at the entrance to the Game World plays a large role in the *Bioshock* series and demonstrates how the Game World controls the impact of interactivity. In *Bioshock 1*, the plane crash sees Jack rise to the surface of the water surrounded by flaming debris, similar to the rising of a phoenix from the ashes, being reborn. This is also the point in which the player takes control of Jack, the character moving from an agent of the Game World to that of the Player-Hero. In *Bioshock 2*, this idea is furthered by the literal rebirth of Delta. Shortly after Delta's resurrection, the player encounters the statement "WE WILL BE

REBORN IN THE COLD WOMB OF THE OCEAN” (Fig. 30). Following this, a Big Sister demolishes a wall, causing the area to flood. The player must then traverse a womb-like sea-floor before

re-entering Rapture. In *Infinite*, rebirth is symbolised more overtly, with Booker ascending to Columbia and being greeted by Preacher Witting, who stands in a small pool of water surrounded by the followers of Comstock. Booker must be baptised and “born again” free of sin in order to enter Columbia. Additionally, both the Splicer that attempts to break into Jack's Bathysphere when he arrives in Rapture and Witting in Columbia ask “Is it someone new?” when meeting the player.

In all instances, these rebirths occur early in the game, with the player still learning how to navigate the world, the player-synthesis still in its formative stages. Although shrouded in mystery for the most part, Jack, Delta and Booker all have histories of some sort from before the events of the games. These events are unalterable by the player: no actions undertaken will prevent Jack from crashing the aircraft, Delta from killing himself on Lamb's orders, or Booker from battling at Wounded Knee. In similar fashion, the player enters into the game's text from their own background. To become the Player-Hero, the hero must succumb to the player's actions. In turn, the player must shed themselves of who they are and adopt the limiting roles of Jack, Delta and Booker. Only through the player's submission to the Game World may they become the Player-Hero and interact with the game. Without the Game World, no rebirth can occur, leaving the player unable to take control of and develop the Player-Hero sphere.

Thus far, the analysis has focused on the role of the Game World in the early stages of the interactive process. While Chapter 1 discussed the Road of Trials, a thorough analysis of the Game World's role in interactivity beyond the initial entrance of the player requires a spatial and choice-focused framework. This introduces Doob's analysis of the Labyrinth.

Rapture and Columbia are presented as isolated cities, with the player constantly attempting to gather their bearings, avoid dangers and explore them with the ultimate goal of escape, aligning them with the Labyrinth. Doob's analysis begins with The Cretan Labyrinth Myth. Most pivotal to this analysis is Theseus' entrance into the Labyrinth:

Ariadne, Monos's daughter, fell in love with the young prince and determined to save him from labyrinth and Minotaur alike ... she gave Theseus a clue of thread, which he tied to the entrance of the labyrinth and unwound as he followed the twisting paths to the centre ... he took Ariadne's second gift, a ball of pitch, and threw it into the Minotaur's gaping mouth. Choking on the ball and unable to attack the man who should have been his prey, the Minotaur fell victim to Theseus's sword ... The young Athenian rewound the clue of thread, retraced his steps, and emerged safely from the hitherto inextricable labyrinth. (Doob, p. 12)

Doob's summary of The Cretan Labyrinth Myth contains the same elements as Propp's formula (a hero, a princess/helper and a “kingdom”), but shifts the focus away from the hero and towards the labyrinth itself. Doob identifies two opposing forms of the labyrinth: the unicursal labyrinth is one with a single path, spiraling to the centre and then spiraling out again. Multicursal labyrinths have many possible avenues and choices for the walker to make, not all of which lead to the centre (Doob, pp. 46-48). Through an overview of these two labyrinth forms, an understanding of the Game World's role in the later stages of the interactivity-to-narrative process can be forged.

Beyond its physical layout, the Game World sphere contains two labyrinths: the determined narrative's labyrinth of binary choices (save or harvest in *Bioshock 1* and 2, and spare or kill in 2), and the personal narrative's much more complex array of choices. The

personal narratives, by their nature, are multicursal. The determined narratives of *Bioshock 1* and 2 are also multicursal, while *Infinite's* determined narrative is unicursal.

Doob's labyrinths are static. The Cretan Labyrinth, for instance, does not change depending on the strategies Theseus employs: the labyrinth does not shift or otherwise react to his use of thread to mark his path. This is similar to the function of the determined narratives of *Bioshock 1* and 2. While the player's choices influence the endings, the endings themselves already exist. The game does not create a new ending based on the choices of the player, but simply shows one or the other. This is similar to how, if Theseus chooses to go down one path over another, a new path will not be created, the one Theseus encounters will simply be different. However, this does not account for the dynamic and intricate functions of the personal narratives, which generate different outcomes and situations depending on the player's actions, thereby making the labyrinth of the Game World a metaphorical one. Doob discusses such intangibility through the metaphor of the Minotaur, which represents a force that prevents the labyrinth-walker's escape. Common manifestations aside from literal beasts include death (Doob, p. 73). At its core, the Minotaur of any labyrinth is the force that both keeps its walker there and also threatens its demise should they fail to escape (Doob, p. 73). This is present throughout the *Bioshock* series, most strongly demonstrated in *Bioshock 1*.

During its prime, Rapture's populace was comprised of aristocrats, scientists and artists seeking greater freedom and power than afforded to them by any existing nation. Their lust for power inevitably traps them in Rapture as it crumbles: their use of Plasmids to increase their strength, intelligence and beauty has driven them mad, and the player can often overhear Splicers arguing with one another over ADAM, resulting in fights and deaths. *Infinite* affirms this concept through Comstock's characterisation. Comstock represents the imprisoning nature of the desire for power. Following his baptism, his lust for divinity drives him to commit the acts that define him as an evil force, such as abducting Elizabeth (in order

to fulfil his “prophecy” and garner more followers). In similar fashion, Jack will become a monster of sorts in the end of *Bioshock 1* if the player harvests the Little Sisters to gain more power. Comstock's lust for power leads to his downfall, his appearance in *Burial At Sea Ep. 1* (Irrational Games 2013) showing him as repentant and grief-stricken. Returning to the personal narrative, the player themselves can become consumed and trapped by their desire for power: while Big Daddies will not attack the player unprovoked, they prove to be formidable enemies if the player attacks their Little Sister. If the player is defeated by a Big Daddy, they risk entering into a cycle of fighting and being killed by the same Big Daddy (or other enemies) in their attempts to gain more ADAM (power).

Ultimately, the temptation for power leads the player to raid and plunder Rapture and Columbia, searching rooms, locked boxes and the bodies of enemies for items to advance themselves further, risking encounters with more enemies and obstacles to obtain greater rewards. The concept of plundering the game world is present in many games, most readily demonstrated in the “Roguelike” game, *Rogue Legacy* (Cellar Door, 2013). In *Rogue Legacy*, the Player-Hero is a warrior who must enter and plunder a castle, killing the monsters within and eventually defeating the castle's ruler. If the Player-Hero is defeated, player control shifts to their descendent. With each entry into the castle, the rooms are randomly generated.

Rogue Legacy demonstrates the Game World sphere as a location to be plundered by the Player-Hero, reinforced in the *Bioshock* series. As discussed in Chapter 1, this concept of mastery carries over into the Video Game Monomyth. Both Rapture and Columbia are cities built upon particular ideals: Rapture was designed as a libertarian, restriction-free city for the individual with minimal laws. When Sofia Lamb comes to power, she replaces Ryan's ideals with an extreme socialist view. Columbia represents a form of religious patriotism, combining romanticised ideals of the founding fathers of the US with Christian doctrine. As such, the cities of Rapture and Columbia are defined by the power of their ruling dictators:

Ryan, Lamb and Comstock represent mastery through individual leadership. Audio recordings of debates between Ryan and Lamb show the former's control of Rapture began to crumble as soon as philosophical opposition was introduced. Lamb is unmatched primarily due to the lack of sane individuals left in Rapture, while Comstock's only opposition is the Vox Populi, depicted as a terrorist organisation.

Similar to allowing the Player-Hero entry, the Game World allows itself to be taken over and defeated by the Player-Hero. Through its multiple agents in the enemies and helpful forces throughout Rapture and Columbia, the Game World continues to teach the player, manufacturing rules that allow for them to win (what is to say the Game World could not be designed with impassable barricades or invincible enemies?). The Game World begs for the Player-Hero to defeat it, and engineers its own demise.

In *Bioshock 1* and 2, the Game World gives the player the option of assimilating most of Rapture rather than destroying it. Through the gathering of ADAM (either by saving or harvesting the Little Sister's), Jack comes to possess a bulk of Rapture's most powerful substance. While this may at first appear similar to the mastery of two worlds achieved by the Classical Hero, the difference lies in the Classical Hero's quest to learn from and gain knowledge from the Supernatural World, and Jack's attempts to inherently change Rapture: by gaining powers and using them for his own means, Jack destroys those in Rapture that oppose him, including its inhabitants and founder, rather than simply monsters or other trials that exist within. In addition to this, the player is encouraged to “hack” and control the technologically advanced security systems of Rapture. These include automated gun turrets, security cameras and flying robots as shown in *Fig. 22*.

While the player can choose whether or not to spend their time/resources on hacking these devices, doing so provides them the benefit of additional security within Rapture, which

includes the HUD³¹ notifying the player when one of their alarms have been triggered (*Fig. 31*). This returns in *Bioshock 2*, taking on a larger role. When a Little Sister in the player's care harvests ADAM, they are assaulted from all sides by enemies. As such, creating defences through hacking security systems and setting up traps is important.

While it is optional for the player to take control of the environment in this way, giving them the choice reveals the Game World's further facilitation of the Player-Hero. Rather than forcing the Player-Hero to destroy it to advance, the Game World allows itself to become an ally, its own agents turning against each other to pave the Player-Hero's path. Just as with their entrance, the Player-Hero appears to be defying the Game World, but is in fact playing into its true objective.

The facilitation and curving of the player's fate is demonstrated by Levine further in *Infinite*. While the player may still lay temporary traps using their powers, the way combat transpires in *Infinite* means the player's options are limited simply to destruction. The enemies in *Infinite* attack Booker and Elizabeth in waves, based around particular set-pieces that the player has little control over. The security systems are replaced by turrets and automations that Booker is able to take control over with the possession Vigor, but this control is limited, meaning the player must still destroy them eventually. In addition, the player is almost forced to triumph. While resurrection exists in *Bioshock 1* and *2* by way of the Vita-Chambers, in *Infinite* it comes from Elizabeth's aid. However, in parts of the game where Elizabeth is not present, the player is still unable to die: if they throw themselves off a ledge in Columbia, they will simply re-appear back on the ledge. The Game World is in complete control of the player's path, dictating when the player will encounter enemies and the limited control they will have over them. More so than in *Bioshock 1* and *2*, the player's

³¹ "Heads Up Display", the information and graphics shown to the player on screen that are often not part of the game's fiction. A bar showing the player's health, or a timer, for instance.

choices are artificial.

The appearance of choice is itself a discourse-charm used by the Game World to coax the player into following pre-designed paths. In order to direct the player's actions subversively, the *Bioshock* series uses traditional video game imagery to guide their movements. Overtly, this manifests in the golden glow of levers, doorways and other objects that the player must interact with to progress (*Fig. 32*). A common technique used in the video game medium, the objects in Rapture that glow do so to catch the player's attention and draw them towards them. This charms the player towards completing the game's tasks, as they are pestered or lured by the glowing lights, cutting short their own explorations and deviations from the game's primary path. While the player may feel they have chosen their own paths of exploration, they are manipulated by the Game World's charms.

The use of charms to navigate and control the Player-Hero's choices (and by extension interactivity) throughout the course of the game is most evident in *Bioshock 1's* Arcadia Gardens sequence. As Jack traverses the artificial garden created by botanist Julia Langford, Ryan attempts to kill him by releasing a chemical to kill plant life and suffocate Jack. Ryan then kills Langford for helping Jack, and the player must gather a number of items to complete Langford's "Lazarus Vector" and restore Arcadia. This is a multi-part, scavenger-hunt task for the player. Through the placement of enemies, the glowing of the items the player needs to collect, and audio diaries that provide hints, the Game World guides the player. As the player attempts the mission, they find an audio diary mentioning a cave of cultists. While the player can complete the game without entering the cave, the audio diary tempts them towards it. The player, believing they are doing so of their own volition, enters and fights the cultists. However, by investigating the cave, the player has fallen for the Game World's subversive discourse-charms. This mission is detailed in *Fig. 33*. Here, the Game World's actions have been filtered through a number of agents: Langford scrawls the safe

combination needed to start the mission on a window before dying, various glowing objects tell the player what they must interact with, the audio diaries feed the player information on the task, and the cultists near the cave's entrance goad the player into engaging them. The metaphorical Minotaur of power tempts the player to progress, with the visual and audio cues leading them.

A further embodiment of charms through multiple agents and the illusion of choice is seen in the Lutece Twins in *Infinite*, who appear sporadically throughout the game. Near the beginning of the game, the two appear and give Booker a shield (*Fig. 34*), allowing the player to take more damage in combat. In this way, the Lutece Twins have become agents of the Game World: their actions make up part of the Game World's sphere as a facilitator of the Player-Hero's adventure. The Game World also uses them to create an illusion of choice. The Lutece Twins send Booker a telegram while he is in Columbia, telling him not to "pick 77" at the raffle, referring to the "winning" raffle ball that the player pulls from a basket. However, the player will always pick ball 77, which results in the player being identified as the False Shepard and instigating the first instance of combat discussed earlier in this chapter. On the first playthrough, this may appear to the player as an element of chance (due to the letter they have received), maintaining the Game World's illusion of choice. It is only on subsequent playthroughs that the player discovers they are unable to alter the course of action here. This is reinforced by The Lutece Twins asking Booker to flip a coin and recording the result of the flip. Later, the Lutece Twins offer Elizabeth a choice between two broaches: a cage or a bird. Elizabeth asks Booker which she should pick, and the player is given a choice visually similar to their choice between "saving" and "harvesting" the Little Sisters in *Bioshock 1* and *2*, albeit with far more benign consequences (*Fig. 25*). While both the coin flip and broach selection appear to be choices for the player, neither play any significance in the game's outcome. The choice of broach does nothing to alter the outcome of the game, and – as hinted

at by Robert's scoreboard – the coin will always land on heads (*Fig. 35*). Both instances are deceptive charms of the Game World to convince the Player-Hero they are making choices, carried out by the Lutece Twins as agents of the Game World.³² Through these instances, Levine has demonstrated the ultimate power of the Game World over the impact of interactivity on the narrative.

The Game World sphere of the Video Game Monomyth is the ultimate controller of video game interactivity's impact on the narrative. Drawing on ludic studies on the role of systems/rules, as well as Doob's analysis of the Labyrinth, the Game World is revealed to be a powerful force in refining the output of the player's interactivity to shape the narrative expression. The Game World sphere uses a variety of discourse-charms to deceive and control the player, providing them with the tools necessary to defeat it. Ultimately, the Game World's objective is to teach and control the player, guiding them through its halls to create illusions of choice. No matter the Player-Hero's actions, the narrative is ultimately crafted by the versatile and active Game World sphere. More so than the Player-Hero and NPC Goddess spheres, the Game World's multi-agent construction allows the Video Game Monomyth framework to break away from literature and film studies. With the analysis of the Game World sphere complete, the impact of interactivity on the narrative proposed in the Introduction has been thoroughly discussed and can now be understood.

³² The two other choices in the game are whether to throw the raffle ball at a captive inter-racial couple or the raffle's host, and whether to kill or spare war veteran Slate. Although both have visible impacts, neither overtly effect the game's narrative.

Conclusion

Through the establishment of the Video Game Monomyth, the impact of video game interactivity on the narrative has been revealed: the Player-Hero sphere is the essentially empty sphere of the game's protagonist, with the actions of the player filling and refining it. Through their actions, players enact a synthesis with the hero, resulting in the Player-Hero sphere. The actions of the player are facilitated by the more traditional NPC Goddess sphere, bridging the Player-Hero and Game World. Finally, the Game World itself is a sphere of action comprised of many agents. The actions of the Game World sphere work to enforce and regulate the player's interactivity, refining and controlling their movements, resulting in the video game's narrative expression.

The player of a video game has been defined as distinct from the readers of literature and film by way of their influence on the text. The player is heavily influential in the construction of the narrative, setting in motion the process of video game interactivity through inputting actions into the game. The player and hero merge through the actions of the player, filling the initially empty Player-Hero sphere, which is used by the player to traverse the game.

The Player-Hero's entry into the Game World is then facilitated by the NPC Goddess sphere. While somewhat conventional in nature, the NPC Goddess symbolises the shift in power occurring within the video game narrative. The NPC Goddess provides the Player-Hero with skills, equipment or information necessary to complete their task, as well as illustrating a shift away from the typically agent-less goddesses and princesses of both Propp and Campbell's frameworks. As has been uncovered in this thesis, this shift is a relatively new development in video game narratives. The NPC Goddesses of the *Bioshock* series function as commentary by Levine and Thomas on the limitations of the player in

constructing the video game narrative, with the NPC Goddesses given increasing amounts of agency as the series progresses.

Finally, the Game World sphere acts and reacts to the actions of the Player-Hero, enforcing the game's pre-defined rules, as well as bending and adapting to the choices made by the player. Through the use of multiple agents, discourse charms and varying degrees of freedom, the Game World sphere refines and shapes the output and consequences of the player's interactivity with the video game text, resulting in the game's narrative expression.

The framework deployed in this thesis and the creation of the Video Game Monomyth seeks to reconcile the ongoing “Ludology vs Narratology” debate. As recently as 2013, scholars continue to engage in discussion over which framework is superior when studying video games (Anderson, p. 291). Other scholars have called for a hybrid approach to the study. In 2005, Janet Murray attempted to end the debate, stating “Game studies, like any organised pursuit of knowledge, is not a zero-sum team contest, but a multi-dimensional, open-ended puzzle that we all are engaged in cooperatively solving” (Murray 2005). This thesis has attempted to achieve Murray's position, demonstrating the importance in understanding video games as a unique narrative medium.

In creating this framework, this thesis has opened a number of avenues for future research into video game narratives. Examining representations of women, as touched on in Chapter 2, can now more readily be broached by academics with the NPC Goddess sphere established. Another NPC Goddess is Emily Caldwin of *Dishonored*. Emily mirrors many elements of the women discussed in the *Bioshock* series: she is a daughterly figure (alluded to being the biological daughter of the Player-Hero Corvo) and is rescued early on in the game, after which she develops her own thoughts and feelings, interacting with the game's other characters. In the upcoming sequel, the player may choose to play as either Emily or Corvo, with Emily featuring her own skills and abilities separate from that of her father (McWhertor

2015), similar to Elizabeth's evolution in *Burial At Sea Ep. 2*.

A more thorough analysis of Elizabeth and *Dishonored's* Emily utilising the Video Game Monomyth could then extend to analysing other examples within the broad body of video game texts, such as the creation of unofficial modifications to various *The Legend of Zelda* and *Donkey Kong* (Nintendo 1981) games to make the Princesses of these games playable (Good 2013). Examining these modifications (done by players who have tampered with the game's construction) can then lead to further study of player agency and Frye's concept of "riddles" briefly mentioned in Chapter 3, which function similar to charms but require the reader/player to "break" them (Frye 1976, pp. 137-147).

Further, the analysis of the Game World in Chapter 3 demonstrates new avenues in the study of characters/spheres of action and labyrinths. Analysing the Game World as a character sphere/sphere of action with multiple agents provides a framework for the study of systems/locations as protagonists in video game narratives (as suggested by Bogost). Additionally, this challenges the static labyrinths of Reed's work and the passive worlds/kingdoms of Propp, Campbell and other mythologists. This makes the analysis of video games with environment-dependent narratives more accessible for in-depth study. This includes a wide breadth of texts, such as open-world/sandbox games like *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (Bethesda, 2011),³³ and walking simulators like *Gone Home* (Fullbright, 2013).³⁴ Games focusing on systems/processes, such as *Papers Please* (Pope 2013),³⁵ also benefit from this framework.

It is the hope of this thesis that the Video Game Monomyth framework allows the academic conversation to shift focus to thorough analysis of video game texts and their narratives. The Video Game Monomyth provides video game academics with a frameworks

³³ A great deal of the game's storytelling is done through books, ruins, cultures and political affairs.

³⁴ The protagonist returns home to an empty family house, discovering the events of the past year via letters, drawings and other artefacts.

³⁵ A puzzle game where the player manages immigrants at a border check-point.

removed from those of other mediums while still retaining elements of literary and film studies where appropriate. It is through the Video Game Monomyth that the impact of video game interactivity on the narrative is better understood, and the academic study of video games and their narratives can evolve.

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Due to copyright restrictions, the Appendix (pages 87-101) has been omitted from this thesis.