The City of Liberty: Constructed Truth, Controlled Power, and the Player's Dilemma

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Introduction

In the realm of storytelling, few forces are as potent or as perilous as knowledge. From Jorge Luis Borges' infinite library to the haunting symbolism in Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Birthmark," literature has long grappled with the dual role of knowledge as both a liberator and a tyrant. My game, *The City of Liberty*, is a dark fantasy narrative grounded in these tensions, where power is not enforced through brute strength alone, but through the manipulation of what is known, believed, and remembered. Drawing on philosophical texts by Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault, as well as historical analyses of inquisitions by Parker and Starr-LeBeau, this project reflects on how societies construct "truth" to maintain order, and how individuals confront, resist, or reinforce these constructions.

At the center of this game is a fractured world once united by a lie: the Rune of Order, a fabricated miracle that justified a hierarchy of control created by the first lord of order. Now, years after its mythic discovery, the world is governed by demigods: past heroes who overthrew the first order but now divided by ideology, and factions whose conflicting worldviews reflect deeper philosoph-

ical battles. From the Church and the Inquisitioners who uphold sacred order, to the Heretics and Book Burners who challenge it, to the Oni Cult and the enigmatic Vella Laikar faction seeking new meaning in chaos, *The City of Liberty* invites players into a world where every truth is contested. This essay explores the intellectual foundations of that world, reflecting on how the game's structure, characters, and choices are shaped by classical literature and scholarly theory.

Philosophy and Paradox: Nietzsche, Borges, and Hamlet

At its core, *The City of Liberty* is a meditation on the conflict between constructed order and chaotic truth, a theme deeply rooted in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*. Nietzsche argues that the most profound works of art arise from a tension between the Apollonian (reason, clarity, structure) and the Dionysian (ecstasy, emotion, destruction). This duality is embodied in the game's 5 demigods: former heroes who once brought balance but have since fractured into competing ideologies. One rules through strict order and enforced ritual; another embraces chaos and seeks to rewrite the world's runes entirely. The player, caught between these poles, must choose whether to perpetuate balance, challenge it, or collapse it entirely.

This existential uncertainty echoes the themes of Borges' "The Library of Babel," where infinite knowledge becomes indistinguishable from madness. The game's ruins, filled with forgotten runes and contradictory texts, take direct inspiration from Borges' vision of a limitless archive. In *The City of Liberty*, knowledge is no longer a tool of liberation it is a weapon, a curse, a religion. Different factions interpret the same fragments of truth differently, and players must learn that understanding is not the same as wisdom.

Similarly, *Hamlet* haunts the protagonist's journey. Like the Prince of Denmark, the player is pulled into a world where appearances deceive, loyalties fracture, and the search for truth leads only to more questions. Hamlet's famous hesitation, his need for certainty before action, parallels the player's own burden: how can one act decisively in a world built on lies? The game encourages

reflection, even paralysis, before revelation. Players are not rewarded for knowledge alone, but for how they live with it.

Ambition, Perfection, and Ruin: From Hawthorne to Bacon to Shelley

The world of *The City of Liberty* was born from ambition, Not divine prophecy, but human will. Centuries before the game begins, the original Lord of Order claimed to have discovered the Rune of Order, a perfect symbol that could restore harmony to a fractured world. This discovery, however, was a fabrication—an invention meant to stabilize chaos and unite the survivors of a ruinous war. Drawing from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Birthmark*, the Lord's attempt to impose perfection reflects a fatal flaw: the belief that purity and control are worth any sacrifice.

That lie held for a time. But truth, like Frankenstein's creature, eventually breaks free.

Inspired by Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the game's world now bears the scars of its creator's failure. After uncovering the lie, five heroes, now revered as demigods, overthrew the false ruler. Yet instead of liberating the world, they divided it. The most powerful among them, now known as the Hierophant, founded the Church to impose rigid control through ritual and fear. But Vella Laikar, once one of the five, grew disillusioned. Her journey reflects the arc of Bacon's *New Atlantis*, where knowledge becomes entangled with secrecy. Rather than reinforce the illusion, Vella began gathering followers in secret. In the game, this hidden faction can only be discovered through specific player actions, and their existence transforms the story.

Thus, the City of Liberty, once a utopia of free knowledge, now lies splintered. The Church upholds sacred order. The Heretics and Book Burners fight dogma with fire. The Oni Cult embraces chaos as rebirth. And Vella Laikar waits in the shadows, preparing for a second rupture—one not of war, but of revelation.

Power, Belief, and the Player's Dilemma: Foucault and the Machinery of Truth

In *The City of Liberty*, knowledge is not merely hidden it is produced. Michel Foucault's theory of discourse offers a critical lens for understanding how power operates in the game's world. According to Foucault, truth is not an absolute, but a construct shaped by institutional frameworks. The Church, founded by the strongest demigod, exemplifies this machinery. It does not merely silence dissent it redefines what dissent means.

This ideological enforcement is reinforced by historical precedent. In *Judging Faith, Punishing Sin*, Parker and Starr-LeBeau analyze how inquisitions shaped societies by defining sin and enforcing conformity. Similarly, the Inquisitioners in the game are not zealots but bureaucrats of belief. Their power lies in shaping not just behavior, but identity.

As the player moves through this landscape, they are constantly confronted by competing systems of meaning. Some factions offer comfort through tradition; others promise freedom through destruction. Every choice the player makes: what knowledge to trust, which runes to translate, which faction to support, becomes a philosophical stance. The game does not reward blind loyalty or rebellion, but reflection.

Conclusion: Building Meaning Through Code and Choice

The City of Liberty is more than a narrative experiment. It is a playable philosophy. It asks players not simply to win, but to think. But this reflection is not limited to narrative alone, it is embedded in the game's mechanics, built line by line in code.

Players begin their journey as students enrolled in a university within the City of Liberty. Their major determines their initial affinity with different types of runes. As they attend lectures, explore the campus, and interact with professors and forbidden texts, they uncover contradictions in the

system. This educational framing was deliberately chosen: learning, in this world, is political.

The game's Java implementation reflects this through a structured, stat-based system with a dynamic GUI. Dialogue options, events, and outcomes shift based on the player's knowledge level, rune affinity, and allegiances. Vella Laikar's faction, for example, remains hidden unless the player pursues certain lines of inquiry—mirroring how truth is often discoverable only through disobedience. The stats of the player including health and wisdom are hidden from the player creating a more realistic experience.

This fusion of narrative theory and technical design reflects the central message of the project: systems shape understanding. In building this game, I have come to understand not just how stories are told, but how systems tell them. *The City of Liberty* is both an homage to the thinkers who shaped it and an invitation to players to shape it further through doubt, through discovery, and, ultimately, through choice. The current state of the game is still under development and I plan to create a more digital game based on this project in the near future. The github address with all the code is this: https://github.com/Krasvi/LIBERTY I will also upload images of how the game compiles in my computer. please note that some of the code is not used in the current working game but is to be used for future development. The game as it is now only ends when certain choices lead you to meet Vella Laikar.

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