

Kaleb Stone

Tyler A. Saunders

English 1105

17 November 2022

## Gaming Journalism: The Shining Stain of the Gaming Community

### Introduction

Most members of the broad video game community, if asked, would tell you how they dislike video game journalists, even if they had never read one of their articles before. There exists a large and far-reaching stigma against gaming journalism that may seem rather odd from an outside perspective. In theory, through updating their readers on news and following developments in gaming as a whole, they should occupy a position of respect and authority, but that could not be farther from the truth. Why do they have such a strong negative stigma? In this paper, I will be dissecting multiple video game journalistic articles in an attempt to figure out what the issue is. I will be referencing multiple different websites, authors, topics, and games, in order to identify a broad problem that is affecting the entire profession. First of all, I will be discussing an article from the website *VentureBeat* titled “Cuphead Hands-on: My 26 Minutes of Shame with an Old-Time Cartoon Game,” by journalist Dean Takahashi. The other two articles I want to delve into are both from the same author and website, written by journalist David Thier and published on the website *Polygon*. They also both follow a common theme, being titled “Yes, 'Dark Souls 3' Badly Needs an Easy Mode” and “'Sekiro: Shadows Dies Twice' Needs to Respect Its Players and Add an Easy Mode” respectively. Finally, by calling attention to the ways these articles misuse ethos, pathos, logos, and kairos, I would like to make a proposal on how to hopefully, over time, purge the negative stigma that surrounds gaming journalism today.

### Background Information

Video game journalism is, as the name suggests, journalism involving news and events regarding video games. The profession appears to have started in 1981 with a magazine titled *Electronic Games Magazine*. The field developed throughout the 1980s, eventually transforming completely with the rise of the internet in the 1990s. It was also around that time that bigger gaming corporations got involved with gaming journalism, such as Microsoft and Nintendo (Perreault and Vos). Gaming journalism, along with video games as a whole, began its career with widespread distaste within the media. Video games had yet to become mainstream, and were thus looked down upon by most people, including the mass media. As time went on, however, that stigma went away and was replaced by the stigma attached to it today around the 2010s, partially caused by the emergence of very difficult games such as *Dark Souls*. It is the modern stigma attached to the field that I will be elaborating on in this paper.

### **Analyzing the Issue**

To begin with, I would like to analyze the misuse of ethos in the article “Cuphead Hands-on: My 26 Minutes of Shame with an Old-Time Cartoon Game.” *Cuphead* is an indie platformer developed by Studio MDHR Entertainment and released in August of 2017. On Steam, the leading platform for computer games, *Cuphead* boasts a 96% approval rating among players, making it extraordinarily well-received (“Cuphead on Steam”). The game is known for being incredibly difficult, which is part of the reason for its acclaim. It boasts difficult platforming combined with challenging boss fights, often at the same time! Even so, it can make it seem unforgiving and brutal to some players, though given time just about anybody could persevere and find enjoyment in the game. In the article, Dean Takahashi discussed his experience playing the game in a preview before its release. The attached video is 26 minutes of him attempting to play the game and failing miserably. It took him almost three minutes to beat the simple tutorial at the very beginning of the game, a segment that should take most people roughly half the time

to complete (Takahashi)! This video quickly made Dean the laughingstock of the entire gaming community, absolutely ruining the *ethos* of his writing. If somebody lacks any semblance of skill in playing video games, do they have the authority to write about them? How much that truly matters certainly depends on the context of the writing, but for a game such as *Cuphead*, it matters greatly regarding how seriously readers will take the author (Takahashi).

The article “Yes, Dark Souls 3 Badly needs an Easy Mode” by David Thier helps showcase some other issues present in gaming journalism, particularly failure to effectively use logos. In this article, the author begins by stating that he has beaten *Dark Souls III*, and in fact, really enjoyed the game. This is an obvious attempt to set up ethos for his argument, placing him in a position of authority, because somebody who has beaten the game should have more authority than somebody who has not. The issue with this, however, is that he then spends the entire article making his argument from a position that is not his own! This would be more or less okay if he made concrete references to other people’s perspectives on the issue, but he does not. Instead, he makes a multitude of vague references to “too many of my friends” or “anyone who isn’t as good at this sort of thing” while never directly addressing whom he is referring to. As a matter of fact, he makes one concrete reference to somebody else in the entire article, and it is somebody whose view directly opposes the author. This all makes the author’s argument look extremely weak due to poor arguments and equally poor use of logos (Thier).

The author, David Thier, also attempts to utilize pathos in the same paper. He attempts to garner sympathy by making this group of people out to be almost victims of the game itself, thus adding pathos to his argument. Alongside the reasons I have already listed, this falls flat because, while I do believe that group exists, they are far fewer than the author makes them out to be. If it were truly as difficult as the author makes it out to be, the games would not be nearly as popular as they are. As a matter of fact, if *Dark Souls* was as hard as the author makes it out to be, I

personally doubt he would have beaten it either. Yet, this article makes it seem as if the games are an impenetrable wall that only the best of the best can hope to pierce, when that simply is not true, and he provides zero concrete evidence to suggest that it is. This causes any attempt to appeal to emotion and sympathy for this imaginary collective, and thus effectively wield pathos, to ring incredibly hollow (Thier).

There is an obvious fallacy in this article that I have not yet brought up: it is just plain badly written. A journalistic article should be held up to a certain professional standard, and this hardly meets it. The author is inconsistent with his formatting of video game titles, italicizing *Dark Souls* and then leaving *Demon's Souls* unaltered in the same paragraph. He starts sentences with prepositions, uses sentence fragments constantly, and he really enjoys using colons incorrectly. All of this further demeans the ethos of the piece, by portraying grievous unprofessionalism from a simple writing perspective. This is not a contained issue either, as most gaming articles I have read contain numerous grammatical errors, which just makes me deeply disappointed (Thier).

I would also like to briefly address the article “‘Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice’ Needs To Respect Its Players And Add an Easy Mode.” The primary reason I bring this article up is because of its title. The title is aggressive and is obviously attempting to make a large impact on prospective readers in order to garner as many clicks as possible. However, in doing this, it also alienates a large portion of their prospective readers, those who have played *Sekiro*, and openly antagonizes them. The act of antagonizing your readers is a horrible mistake regarding the kairos of the piece, as it causes many readers to go into the article already wanting you to be wrong, instead of experiencing your argument with an open mind. This is particularly important when discussing a controversial topic, such as difficulty in games like *Sekiro*. Lastly, as you may have

noticed, the article is mostly just rehashing the same argument from the other article, except it's about *Sekiro* instead of *Dark Souls III* (Thier).

### **Why Does it Matter**

This issue overall may not affect many Virginia Tech students, but it does affect me in particular very much. Firstly, I have played video games ever since I was very young, beginning with *Minecraft* and *Pokémon* roughly 10 years ago. Therefore, I am very invested in video game developments and the general discourse surrounding them. Alongside that, I am a writer, with an article published on the website “Richmond on the Cheap.” This means that when I look at the current state of video game journalism, I am immeasurably disappointed from two different perspectives.

I believe that correcting this issue would not only be a great boon to current active members of the gaming community, but also to people just trying to get into the hobby. For current members, it would be great to be able to use websites such as *Polygon* and *Kotaku* as reliable sources of information and news. More importantly, though, as it is now people who are new to the gaming community are open to being misled or turned off from the hobby due to gaming journalism. If somebody wanting to get into the gaming community looks at a horribly written and badly argued article as one of their first impressions, they may jump ship then and there!

### **Proposal for Change**

What can be done to change the situation is simple: gaming journalism needs to work towards correcting the issues I have identified in this paper. To start with, the popular websites for gaming journalism should hire better writers, give them additional time to write, pay them

more for their articles, or whatever needs to be done in order to improve the overall quality of their writing. Secondly, the writers should have, alongside simple good grammar and vocabulary, a good understanding of basic rhetoric. By improving their ability to use logos, the journalists would be able to formulate much more effective arguments, and through expertise in using pathos, they could hopefully avoid the grievous misuse that outright antagonizes the reader. Lastly, by ensuring the writers are more qualified to write about certain games, they can inherently improve the ethos of the articles. These changes do not need to be immediate, and they do not even need to be all-encompassing. I believe that as long as steps are taken towards fixing these issues, even if it is only one or two, the rest would sort itself out naturally.

## **Conclusion**

It is through grievous misuse of pathos, logos, ethos, and Kairos that I believe gaming journalism has reached the state it is in today, and I also believe that it is through improving the use of those rhetorical skills that, one day, gaming journalism can hopefully ascend to a position of respect throughout the community. I, personally, would love to see that happen. For the good of myself, everybody else in the gaming community, as well as everyone interested in joining the gaming community, this issue needs to be addressed. I, for one, would be willing to help aid the correction of gaming journalism, and I imagine there are countless more like me. If the entire gaming community works together, we can absolutely fix gaming journalism by correcting the issues I have listed one-by-one.

## Works Cited

Takahashi, Dean. "Cuphead Hands-on: My 26 Minutes of Shame with an Old-Time Cartoon Game." *VentureBeat*, VentureBeat, 24 Aug. 2017,

<https://venturebeat.com/games/cuphead-hands-on-my-26-minutes-of-shame-with-an-old-time-cartoon-game/>.

“Cuphead on Steam.” *Cuphead on Steam*,

<https://store.steampowered.com/app/268910/Cuphead/>.

Thier, Dave. “Yes, 'Dark Souls 3' Badly Needs an Easy Mode.” *Forbes*, Forbes Magazine, 14

Apr. 2016, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidthier/2016/04/13/yes-dark-souls-3-badly-needs-an-easy-mode/?sh=5d3f5536336e>.

Thier, Dave. “‘Sekiro: Shadows Dies Twice' Needs to Respect Its Players and Add an Easy Mode.” *Forbes*, Forbes Magazine, 31 Mar. 2019,

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidthier/2019/03/28/sekiro-shadows-dies-twice-needs-to-respect-its-players-and-add-an-easy-mode/?sh=676b91491639>.

Perreault, G., & Vos, T. (2020). Metajournalistic discourse on the rise of gaming journalism.

*New Media & Society*, 22(1), 159–176. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819858695>