

How Do the Tropes of Gothic Literature Undergo Adaptation to the Medium of Video Games

Final Year Project in BA Digital Humanities and Information Technology

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Declaration of Originality

DH4003: Research Project

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Abstract

This project investigates the intricate process of transferring the many tropes of Gothic Literature from the page to the immersive realm of the interactive experience via the medium of the Video Game. This project also seeks to answer in which way, if at all, these tropes are affected by this adaptation to a new medium and if it enhances their impact. By examining and dissecting these tropes, some of which include a dark and ominous setting, a powerful and dastardly villain and tragedy-stricken relationships, I aim to capture the essence of them and represent them faithfully in a new medium. I will conduct a critical review of the literature that surrounds the genre of the Gothic and its elements while also analysing and reviewing literature that discusses books as video games and I will attempt to gel these topics together. I will specifically be looking at four tropes in this project and as such I will reference a number of novels in which these tropes are evident. I will also mention smaller tropes that do appear quite frequently in the literature. I will detail what tools and methodologies I used to reimagine these tropes in a new medium and what challenges I faced when doing so. I will be discussing my critical findings in relation to the adaption of the tropes to the medium of video games and how I felt these elements were affected by this. I will then conclude with my opinion and if these tropes can be successfully adapted in this way.

1. Introduction

Gothic literature has long held a presence in the world of fiction, and thus, the genre and its tropes have been adapted into several other mediums, such as film, theatre and, to a lesser extent, video games. The start of Gothic literature can be attributed to English author Horace Walpole and his 1764 novel, *The Castle of Otranto*; this book coined the term “A Gothic Story” and tells the tale of Manfred, lord of Castle Otranto and his descent into villainy and ultimate downfall. The novel introduced staple literary and thematic elements, such as the Gothic Castle, which have been reproduced and altered in works that have since followed the Gothic genre.

In the 19th century, other authors would take the tropes that Walpole established and expand upon them in such novels as Mary Shelly’s 1818 novel, *Frankenstein*, and its portrayal of the villainous mad scientist Victor Frankenstein and his dastardly and monstrous creation, which nowadays is dubbed as “Frankenstein’s Monster” or simply “Frankenstein”. Perhaps the most famous work of the entire genre, Bram Stoker’s 1897 novel *Dracula* introduced the vampiric Count Dracula to readers, which helped to establish the supernatural powerful villain in the genre.

The 20th century introduced the more modern take of the Gothic novel with notable works such as Daphne du Maurier’s 1938 novel, *Rebecca*, the story of a middle class woman haunted by the phantom-like presence of her husband’s previous and deceased wife, the titular Rebecca. Recent takes on the Gothic novel sees it intersect with the horror genre more often than not, combining into a category that focuses more on scares than it does on exploring the nuanced relationship between human beings, our psychology, and our mortality.

Suffice it to say that Gothic fiction has left an indelible mark on the last 300 years of literature, influencing so many other works of art. With all the popularity that this genre has, it is evident that

it has been adapted to several different mediums, particularly that of film, with notable adaptations of Dracula, Frankenstein and Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 novel about a man with a monstrous second personality, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, these adaptations were released during the golden age of horror films in the 1930s.

However, the video games industry has become the dominant entertainment force in the past two decades and in the year 2023 it was the highest grossing entertainment industry with a value of \$159.3 billion which exceeds the value of both the music and film industries combined (Divers, 2023). The gaming industry offers a breadth of genres to choose from and whatever type of experience you wish to have, chances are there is a game that offers said experience. The industry is filled with creativity that draws from other mediums such as the novel and film, and takes ideas and inspiration from these to form new gamified escapades to immerse the player.

However, video games rarely outright adapt novels into virtual experiences and only a seldom few have been successful or worth a mention. Some of the more well known works include *The Witcher Series* by Polish developers CD PROJEKT RED, *The Metro Series* by Ukrainian - Maltese developers 4A Games and *Dante's Inferno(2010)* by American developers Visceral Games. With respect to Gothic adaptations there have been some loose or inspired adaptations such as Japanese developer Konami's *Castlevania Series* that is heavily inspired by Stoker's novel. More recently, famed Japanese studio FROMSOFTWARE, created the gothic horror masterpiece *Bloodborne (2015)* to critical acclaim. This game takes heavy inspiration from works such as Dracula and the writings of H.P Lovecraft, to create a dark and macabre world full of tall Gothic towers, castles and cathedrals (Fawcett, 2015).

Moreover, there is a notable gap for a more clear adaptation of the works of Gothic literature to the world of interactive experiences and this is what I hope to address with this project by creating a game that tries to take identified tropes from the pages of these famous works and translate them, if possible, to a virtual world. This project aims to fill in this niche but noticeable gap in this particular area of literature. This failure to delve into the adaption of

gothic tropes into the medium of video games is, to me, a significant oversight as it is an opportunity to explore the depth and complexity that it could offer.

Gothic literature is made up of various themes such as horror, mystery and moments of the supernatural, this provides a wealth of narrative motifs that could be reinterpreted within the interactive realm of video games. However, the glaring absence of scrutiny into how these tropes are reimagined and incorporated into the gaming medium represents a neglected area of study. By addressing this gap, this project seeks to first hand explain and analyse the adaptation process and its implications for both Gothic Literature and Video Games.

Through a focused view and examination on several notable tropes, such as the setting of a Gothic story and the powerful villains that are at the forefront of said story, all from the viewpoint and context of a video game, I aim to elucidate the various nuanced ways that storytelling conventions can be transposed and remained in a new medium.

The project then ultimately revolves around my research question of *How Do the Tropes of Gothic Literature Undergo Adaptation to the Medium of Video Games, and to what extent does this transformation impact the effectiveness of these literary elements?* For this project I have identified four tropes that I have researched and that appear in multiple works of Gothic fiction across the centuries.

These tropes are The Setting of a Gothic Story, Nightmares and Omens, The Damsel in Distress/Gothic Relationships and finally The Gothic Villain. These literary elements will be carefully examined and transposed into a game that I have titled “*The Labyrinth of the Macabre*”. Each trope is distinct and represents a different aspect of what makes a piece of Gothic fiction Gothic in the first place and if this adaption is successful this project can highlight how more works of literature can be transposed from the pages of a book to the virtual world of interactive experiences.

2. Literature Review

This chapter will discuss the literature that surrounds video games as a form of literature, adapting literature to a new medium, and the impact of video games as an industry. Few genres possess the enduring allure and a captivating atmosphere of the genre of Gothic fiction. With so many authors leaving their mark on the genre, it has evolved into a rich tapestry of dark themes, eerie settings and morally complex characters. The adaptation of Gothic literature to video games represents an interesting convergence of two distinct but complementary art forms. Video games are naturally immersive and interactive, and they offer a unique platform to experience a genre such as the Gothic genre. With a video game you can explore the eerie landscapes and psychological depth which is inherent in Gothic storytelling. This intersection of these two different mediums raises intriguing questions about the process of adoption, interpretation and engagement.

According to Araújo Santos (2017) to adapt a piece of literature to the medium of video games there needs to be changes made in the transposing process in order to be presented in the virtual world which is known as “refunctioning”. While Araújo Santos aptly highlights that changes need to be made and this can be undeniable, it does depend on the type and genre of video game that is being created. The term “refunctioning” implies more than just a straightforward conversion of narrative elements from a book to a video game. Instead, it suggests to me a reimagining and restructuring of the source material to suit the unique needs of the video game medium. This involves not only adapting the characters of the story but the setting and plot lines also need considerable rethinking to be able to be “refunctioned” and it suggests a loss of the essence of the original text. While adapting does imply a degree of reinterpretation and reimagining, it is essential to strike a balance between honouring the source material and embracing the creative possibilities that transposing a medium offers.

However, Stobart (2018) believes that video games need to be analysed differently in terms of adaptations and the methodologies employed in these adaptations and video games require new methods of analysis as they are a relatively new medium in the grand scheme of things.

Stobbert rightly highlights some positive ideas for the necessity for new methodologies to be used when analysing adaptations to video games. Given the unique interactive and immersive nature of the modern video game, traditional approaches may not be the best option to fully capture the complexities of translating works of literature into immersive gaming experiences. Therefore, developing a new framework that is tailored to understanding the distinct characteristics and gamification that is needed from literature to video games is crucial for gaining a comprehensive understanding of the adoption process.

However, overlooking the substantial body of work that already exists in adapting other mediums should not be understated. Other creators have developed intricate methods in adapting literature to other mediums such as Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings Trilogy* (2001-2003) which successfully adapted J.R.R Tolkien's original 1954 novel to the big screen without scaling down or dampening what made the original novel great in the first place. By building upon established frameworks, future adaptations can effectively analyse how a novel adaptation to a video game can be done in the broader context without needing wholly new methodologies.

Furthermore, Hutcheon (2004) claims that we live in the age of adaptation and argues that it is a fundamental aspect of human creativity and a cultural production. Adaptation reflects on our innate desire to reinterpret, reimagine and retell stories across various mediums and contexts. Adapting a novel to other media, such as a film, can be fraught with challenges, particularly when it comes to reimagining the ideas of the readers with the visions of a particular filmmaker. One of the primary concerns that Hutcheon raises is the discrepancy between the subjective experience of reading a novel and the objective representation of that book in an adaptation, particularly that of a film adaptation. When a person reads a novel, they engage in a personal and imaginative process in which we construct, with the help of descriptions, our own vision of what characters look like, what the settings look like, and what how events unfold. However, when a book is adapted into a film, the director and creatives involved interpretations of the source material becomes the dominant visual and auditory representation of the story. This can lead to fans of the original source material feeling underwhelmed or disappointed by the creative's interpretation of said material.

As Hutcheon puts to the reader, is this a good or bad thing that we allow our beloved works of art to be reimagined in a way that we did not envision. Departing significantly from the original text, both in terms of the narrative and themes can run the risk of ultimately alienating devoted readers who feel that the adaptation took liberties with cherished characters, plots and the overall essence of the literature. It is important to recognise this difference between an individual's imagination and the artistic vision of the adapter in all forms of adaptation and I feel that Hutcheon does not take into account the realisation that not everything from the pages of a novel can accurately be transposed to a new medium in the exact way that is described or imagined by the reader. Adaption is a process of transformation and reinterpretation, and creators have the tough role of bringing new eyes to this work of art leading to more potential interest in the original text.

Whereas Hutcheon debates whether adaptations of literature are good or bad, Jackson (2022) posits that while video games today are influenced by more traditional forms of storytelling, such as the novel, they themselves influence the forms of storytelling back in a new and unique way. Video games nowadays often incorporate elements of established storytelling techniques used in the most popular of media such as strong character development over many hours, fluid plot progression and a depth of thematic exploitation.

However, video games are able to produce unique features to storytelling such as player agency, where the player has autonomy on the pace of the story and what may happen in some events. This interactivity does go against the linear narrative of a traditional books story to form a new way to tell modern stories in a modern way.

Hayot (2021) disagrees with the idea of video games being so culturally influential that they now influence storytelling of other mediums. Hayot argues that while in the last sixty or so years the video game industry has exploded in popularity and dominates the valuation charts, as Divers (2023) reported, with a staggering valuation today, they still fall short culturally and artistically of something such as the great American novel. It is undeniable that the video game industry has experienced a phenomenal growth in revenue and general interest among

the population, but the assertion that video games have not received the same level of scholarly attention requires some consideration. While it is true that the medium of video games have been generally overlooked within academic circles compared to that of a more traditional form of storytelling like the novel, this is an oversight as video games are a legitimate and influential medium in their own right.

Just in the past two decades alone there has been more and more video game based studies emerge from academics that are beginning to recognise the potential that games can have in telling immerse and unique stories. This comparison between the novel and the game, while certain similarities between the two can be made, ultimately overlooks the distinct characteristics and affordances of each medium. While both can offer immersive storytelling experiences and engages the reader or player, they do so through fundamentally different means. Video games are able to leverage interactivity, player agency, and emergent experiences that are distinct to the traditional experience of a linear, text based narrative of a novel.

Much like how a novel can, video games can have culturally impact and offer valuable commentary on issues affecting us in the world. One example of this is CD PROJEKT RED's *Cyberpunk 2077* (2020) which is a game set in a dark futuristic cyberpunk world plagued with mega-corporations who act more like governments than businesses. The writers of the game often critique the unchecked greed of capitalistic companies of our world by reflecting them as soulless operations that value money more than human life. Games have the potential to engage the players in nuanced and thought-provoking discussions regarding the society that we inhabit.

The debate surrounding the success of video game adaptations of literature is a complex one. While film adaptations often serve as the benchmark for successful book-to-screen translations, there's a growing argument that video games offer a unique opportunity to engage with the source material in a more profound and way.

Typically, success for adaptations has revolved around a faithful recreation of the plot, characters, and the setting from the original novel. However, this approach can be restrictive within the video game medium. Linear narratives, common in literature, often clash with the interactive nature of games. Additionally, the level of detail present in a novel may not translate well to the scope of a video game.

However, this doesn't mean successful adaptations are impossible. Instead of a straight-up copy and paste form of adaption, video games can excel by drawing inspiration from the core themes, characters, and settings of a work. This allows for a more creative interpretation, fostering an engaging gameplay experience that captures the essence of the original work.

For instance, a game based on a detail heavy historical novel might focus on a specific character or event, weaving a tighter narrative around a core conflict. Similarly, a classic detective noir story could be adapted into an open-world exploration game, allowing players to piece together the mystery at their own pace but still feel the essence of the original novel. This approach allows for innovative gameplay mechanics that wouldn't be possible in a traditional film or theatre adaptation.

Ultimately, the key to a successful video game adaptation lies in understanding the strengths and limitations of both mediums. By fully embracing the interactive nature of games and focusing on capturing the spirit of the source material, game developers can create experiences that resonate with both fans of the original work and newcomers to the story.

3. Methodologies

This chapter will discuss the various methodologies that I used in order to research, gather data, and the tools I used to ultimately create the video game adaptation of gothic literature tropes. To adapt the tropes that I have identified to the medium of video games I had to consider several key factors that would determine whether this project would be able to be created as I imagined it to be. These factors include designing what type of game this project

will be, what game engine is best suited to my creative needs and stringent prototyping of different ideas and gameplay mechanics.

3.1 Research Design

Researching the right tools and methods to create a game for this project was crucial in order to get an understanding on how video games are designed, evaluated and ultimately created. At the heart of this project lies a design-driven research approach that seeks to bridge the gap between the tropes of classic gothic literature and the video game. I drew heavy inspiration from the most popular of gothic novels which include the likes of *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelly, *Dracula* by Bram Stoker and *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë. This project aims to capture the essence of gothic literature and its numerous tropes while offering players an immersive virtual world that represents these tropes in 3D all while leveraging the principles of narrative design and game development theory.

3.2 Data Sources

The primary sources I used for this project were classic Gothic novels, with a particular focus on six books. These novels are *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, *Carmilla*, *The Castle of Otranto*, *Wuthering Heights* and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Other novels that I looked at in less detail were Charlotte Brontë's novel, *Jane Eyre* (1847), Matthew Gregory Lewis' romantic gothic novel, *The Monk* (1796), Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Uldolpho* (1794), and Oscar Wilde's, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). Each novel offered a unique approach to the gothic genre and each presented the tropes of the genre openly. I used secondary sources such as articles, reports and video breakdowns of these books to get a broader understanding of these works.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

A thorough examination of gothic novels, short stories and critical analyses was done in order to collect data on how to dissect the tropes of the genre and these works offered fantastic insight into the themes, narrative structures, and intricacies of the Gothic fiction. To examine

these works I used methodologies such as close reading and textual analysis in order to get a better understanding of these works and deconstruct them to fit into an interactive experience.

In their report, Jänicke, Franzini, Cheema, and Scheuermann (2015) define close reading as “the thorough interpretation of a text passage by the determination of central themes and the analysis of their development.” They emphasize the practice of close reading as a fundamental method in literary critique that can lead to deeper comprehension of any given text.

Close reading involves the meticulous analysis of a given text to uncover deeper layers of meaning, intricacies and nuances, and hidden symbolisms. Annotation of the source material is done to highlight important features and the use of different colours and underlining styles are done to help facilitate a deeper understanding by focusing on keywords and sentences .

The horror of the spectacle, the ignorance of all around how this misfortune had happened, and, above all, the tremendous phenomenon before him, took away the prince's speech. Yet his silence lasted longer than even grief could occasion. He fixed his eyes on what he wished in vain to believe a vision; and seemed less attentive to his loss, than buried in meditation on the stupendous object that had occasioned it. He touched, he examined, the fatal casque; nor could even the bleeding mangled remains of the young prince, divert the eyes of Manfred from the portent before him. All, who had known his partial fondness for young Conrad, were as much surprised at their prince's insensibility, as thunderstruck themselves at the miracle of the helmet. They conveyed the disfigured corpse into the hall, without receiving the least direction from Manfred. As little was he attentive to the ladies who remained in the chapel: on the contrary, without mentioning the unhappy princesses, his wife and daughter, the first sounds that dropped from Manfred's lips were, “take care of the Lady Isabella.”

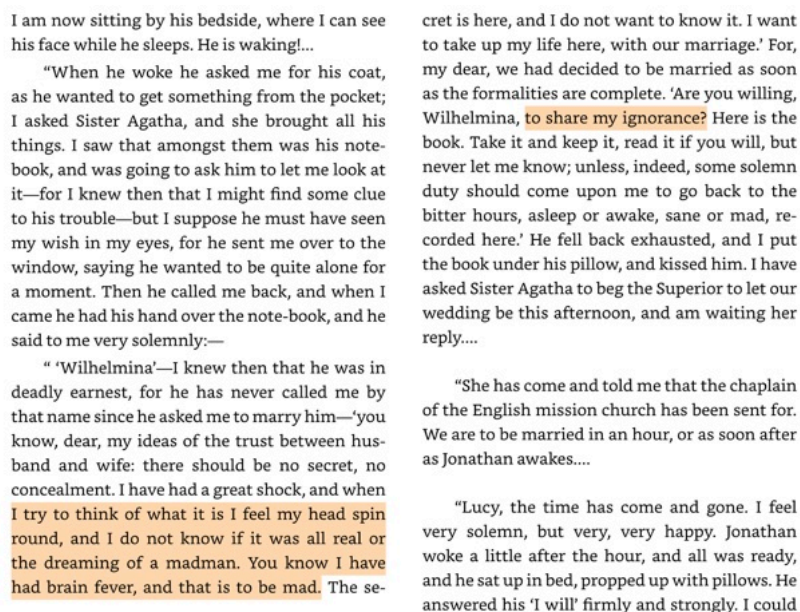
The domestics, without observing the singularity of this direction, were guided by their affection to their mistress, to consider it as peculiarly addressed to her situation, and flew to her assistance. They conveyed her to her chamber, more dead than alive, and indifferent to all the strange circumstances she heard, except the death of her son. Matilda, who doted on her mother, smothered her own grief and amazement, and thought of nothing but assisting and comforting her afflicted parent. Isabella, who had been treated by Hippolita like a daughter, and who returned that tenderness with equal duty and affection, was scarce less assiduous about the princess; at the same time, endeavouring to partake and lessen the weight of sorrow which she saw Matilda strove to suppress, for whom she had conceived the warmest sympathy of friendship. Yet her own situation could not help finding its place in her thoughts. She felt no concern for the death of young Conrad, except commiseration; and she was not sorry to be delivered from a marriage, which had promised her little felicity, either from her destined bridegroom, or from the severe temper of Manfred;

Figure 1: *The Castle of Otranto* Close Reading Example (Dover Thrift Kindle Edition)

From the above example of a page of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, I have used close reading to highlight several keywords such as “eyes”, which lends to the trope of The Gothic Villain as several novels make notes to remark on the eyes of the antagonist. Another keyword highlighted is “vision” which relates to the trope of Nightmares and Omens as visions of death and despair are evident in multiple works of Gothic literature. Digitisation of literature has helped scholars to have access to a greater number of texts than ever with such

tools as Google Books that enables them to use methods such as close reading more efficiently (Jänicke et al, 2015). My use of Amazon Kindle services and other platforms such as Project Gutenberg, has allowed me to find and analyse these classic gothic novels with relative ease.

Another method that I used in order to dissect these pieces of literature was textual analysis. Textual analysis from the outset is similar to that of close reading but upon closer inspection it offers different benefits in order to critique a novel and McKee (2001) simply defines textual analysis as “a way of gathering and analysing information in academic research”. With textual analysis one can identify patterns, recurring themes, and distinct narrative devices. I was able to isolate themes and plot structures of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* by using textual analysis. (See Figure 2 below)



I am now sitting by his bedside, where I can see his face while he sleeps. He is waking!...

“When he woke he asked me for his coat, as he wanted to get something from the pocket; I asked Sister Agatha, and she brought all his things. I saw that amongst them was his note-book, and was going to ask him to let me look at it—for I knew then that I might find some clue to his trouble—but I suppose he must have seen my wish in my eyes, for he sent me over to the window, saying he wanted to be quite alone for a moment. Then he called me back, and when I came he had his hand over the note-book, and he said to me very solemnly:—

“ ‘Wilhelmina’—I knew then that he was in deadly earnest, for he has never called me by that name since he asked me to marry him—‘you know, dear, my ideas of the trust between husband and wife: there should be no secret, no concealment. I have had a great shock, and when I try to think of what it is I feel my head spin round, and I do not know if it was all real or the dreaming of a madman. You know I have had brain fever, and that is to be mad. The se-

cret is here, and I do not want to know it. I want to take up my life here, with our marriage.’ For, my dear, we had decided to be married as soon as the formalities are complete. ‘Are you willing, Wilhelmina, to share my ignorance? Here is the book. Take it and keep it, read it if you will, but never let me know; unless, indeed, some solemn duty should come upon me to go back to the bitter hours, asleep or awake, sane or mad, recorded here.’ He fell back exhausted, and I put the book under his pillow, and kissed him. I have asked Sister Agatha to beg the Superior to let our wedding be this afternoon, and am waiting her reply....

“She has come and told me that the chaplain of the English mission church has been sent for. We are to be married in an hour, or as soon after as Jonathan awakes....

“Lucy, the time has come and gone. I feel very solemn, but very, very happy. Jonathan woke a little after the hour, and all was ready, and he sat up in bed, propped up with pillows. He answered his ‘I will’ firmly and strongly. I could

Figure 2: *Dracula* Textual Analysis Example (Unabridged and Fully Illustrated Kindle Edition)

From the above excerpt, I have highlighted a passage regarding one of the main themes in the book and that is the theme of madness. Several characters experience moments of madness in the novel and this passage highlights how Dracula uses madness to cause people to question their memories of him. With both methodologies in play it made the task of combing through these novels substantially more easy and I was able to uncover the tropes and themes and began to shape them into video game adaptations.

3.4 Software and Tools

Key to the creation of this project was the choosing the right software and tools. Careful consideration was given to choosing the appropriate game creation platform. My aim was to find an engine that was capable of not only impressive visuals, but offered a robust toolset that would allow me to have virtually zero restrictions on mechanics that I would wish to implement. Unreal Engine 5 by Epic Games was the engine that I ended up using for several reasons that I will discuss.

On the topic of visuals, I felt that it was important to create a realistic looking game with striking graphics to immerse the player into the world. Unreal Engine 5 offers world class graphically fidelity and is the engine of choice when wanting photorealistic graphics. When one imagines a gothic scene often fog and moody lighting is present and Unreal Engine 5 has a robust set of volumetric lighting and fog features that was key in creating a dark atmosphere in the game world.

Furthermore, I desired a tool in which used a programming language that I was already familiar with. Unreal Engine uses the popular language C++, which I have experience with prior, and it also uses a simple method of coding logic which is its Blueprints visual scripting language. Blueprints uses a node based system to create game logic just like how a programming language works. Blueprints is faster and easier than traditional programming and so I used it over using C++ for this game.

My decision to use Unreal Engine 5 for this project stemmed from a variety of factors. Firstly, the engine's unparalleled graphical capabilities were instrumental in bringing to life my vision of translating Gothic tropes into an immersive gameplay experience. Features like high-fidelity textures and real-time lighting allowed me to craft beautiful environments that captured the essence of the Gothic style.

Beyond the visuals of the engine, Unreal Engine 5 offers a robust suite of development tools that streamlined the creation process greatly. This comprehensive toolkit encompassed not

only environment design but also gameplay mechanics and narrative elements that I wished to implement, this fostered a cohesive development workflow for me.

Finally, the engine's user-friendly visual scripting language, Blueprints, proved invaluable, allowing for the implementation of complex logic without requiring extensive programming expertise and saved me dozens of hours. Ultimately, Unreal Engine 5 functioned as a powerful and versatile engine that empowered me to translate these tropes of Gothic storytelling into a visually stunning and engaging game.

4. The Tropes and Findings

In this section, I will delve deeper into the Gothic tropes employed within the game, exploring their historical roots, the in-game implementation, and then I discuss the interesting findings found during this process of adaptation. I will also examine how environmental storytelling serves as a powerful tool for weaving narratives around these tropes within the game world. Notably, the translation of these tropes from literature to the interactive medium yielded some surprising insights. While some tropes seamlessly transitioned to this new environment, others required a more nuanced approach to retain their essence.

4.1 The Setting of a Gothic Story

The setting of a Gothic novel is the most important trope as it tends to capture the overall atmosphere of the story and its themes. The setting is often an ancient eerie castle or a mysterious manor of some sort, and often these places are typically in a state of ruin or haunted by supernatural elements and beings. The setting can feel like another character in the story because of its constant presence in the story, interacting with the central characters and providing them with moments of terror, shock and sometimes feelings of joy or relief.

For instance in Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, one of the main characters Isabella is looking for a way to escape pursuit of Manfred the antagonist and comes across a hidden trapdoor that leads to a secret passageway out of the castle, "ray of moonshine, streaming through a

cranny of the ruin above, shone directly on the lock they sought. ‘Oh! transport!’ said Isabella, “here is the trap-door!’ ” (Walpole, 1764, Chapter 1).

4.1.1 The Gothic Castle and a Brief History

For my adaption I chose the setting of an ancient and dark castle set in a desolate mountain landscape. The castle is perhaps the most well know setting of a gothic novel with its long and spiral towers, imposing walls and giant steps up to its entrance. Before “Gothic” was associated with literature, it was associated with architecture and the many Gothic cathedrals and buildings that span across medieval Europe. Before gothic architecture was used, structures were dark, damp and limited but the introduction of this new style offered more light, better airflow in the interiors, and overall better constructed buildings.

Gothic architecture has several key characteristics which include pointed arches, vaulted ceilings, designs that favour height and ornate statues and carvings. (The seven key characteristics of Gothic architecture: From the Gargoyle to the flying Buttress - Exploring castles, 2018) It wasn’t until the mid 1700s with Horace Walpole that the term “Gothic” began to be related to the style of novel that he created. With this book, Walpole adapted the real world eerie features of the Gothic castle and cathedral and brought it to the page to add the macabre atmosphere and themes that he established.

4.1.2 Researching and Designing the Castle

When researching the castle form the novels I picked to adapt, I was expecting a plethora of paragraphs dedicated to the descriptions of the castles that they take place in. My main references for this section was *The Castle of Otranto* and *Dracula*. To my surprise I was met with very little information on how these structures look in these worlds. Stoker simply describes the castle as follows “The castle is on the very edge of a terrible precipice. A stone falling from the window would fall a thousand feet without touching anything! As far as the eye can reach is a sea of green tree tops, with occasionally a deep rift where there is a chasm. Here and there are silver threads where the rivers wind in deep gorges through the forests.” (Stoker, 1897, Chapter 2) There is no mention of the intricacies of the castles detail at all.

Walpole does add more by detailing that Castle Otranto is in ruin and it has several passageways hidden throughout the estate but elaborates no further.

When one thinks of a gothic castle images of a dark silhouette against a moonlit night sky, with jagged spires reaching the heavens above a crumbling wall and rusted tall iron gates may come to mind, and this sort of description is lacking from these novels. When designing my take on the castle I wanted to keep with the traditional look of a gothic castle or cathedral a main focus aesthetically.

While the novels themselves may offer only scant descriptions of these structures, the use of the term “Gothic” strongly suggests a deliberate use of that particular style. This connection becomes even more clear and compelling when considering the fact that author, Horace Walpole, had a fasciation with medieval Gothic architecture (Raphael, 1942). Walpole is credited with creating the genre of Gothic literature, and besides his work on *The Castle of Otranto*, he redeveloped a plot of land and built a Gothic style villa on it, known as Strawberry Hill (Jervis, 2010). By using the word “Gothic”, Walpole likely wanted to conjure images of these structures in the mind of his readers.



Figure 3: Image of *The Castle* adaption being developed in Unreal Engine 5

4.1.3 Implementing the Setting Trope

For my version in *The Labyrinth of the Macabre*, I kept the long vaulted ceilings, tall design, jagged spires and sharp arches as constant design elements throughout the area that the game takes place in order to immerse the player in my telling of this trope. In the game, the three other tropes have dedicated levels or areas that discuss that particular trope in detail, whereas the Castle trope encompasses the entire play area.

Having the player be able to explore the castle as an open area was a late design choice and earlier version had the castle not be as explorable, and mainly viewed from afar as the game was more linear and level based such as to mimic the structure of the novels. Opening up the area allows the player to have more agency as they explore the castle and discover the secrets that lay within.



Figure 4: In game screenshot of the Castle

From the instant the player loads into the game world they are met with the tall imposing structure of the Castle and a flight of cobblestone stairs that lead up to a large iron door to opens into an ornate room of pillars and statues. The sheer scale of the castle symbolises the powerful authority of a villain that resides within these walls. It also serves to act as a beacon of mystery to players, enticing them to explore further in the castle to see what hides around every dark corner.

Throughout the castle the player can come across various statues and banners that are suppose to represent to the them the sheer history of this place and lineage of a family that has been passed down from ruler to ruler for hundreds of years just as Manfred in *The Castle Of Otranto* wanted to pass down his rulership of his castle to his son Conrad.



Figure 5: In game screenshot of the Castle entrance with family banners

Several statues of people praying or religious positions can be located throughout the area and these statues represent the themes of Christianity and religion that is evident in the novels. In *Dracula* in particular, religion plays a big part with the characters of Van Helsing and Mina Harker being devout Christians who see Dracula as the ultimate evil entity. I wanted to represent this religion visually and thus I used to status to achieve this.

4.1.4 The Castle: Findings and Limitations

To represent these imposing structures in a 3D world I needed to either create them manually using a 3D modelling software or purchase asset packs. For the sake of time with this project I decided to purchase several asset packs that had Gothic a architectural style and while this was a faster approach it did limit me in terms of the design of the buildings. As I previously stated, from the novels that I read and analysed for this trope, I was met with very little

descriptions as to how these structures look and how I could accurately adapt them and this was a big limitation for this trope. I could not get a vivid picture of how these castles were structured so I simply had to go off of classic gothic architecture based off the fact that Walpole initially intended the style of the castle in his novel to appear in a traditional European medieval Gothic style due to his love of that era and style.

In conclusion, capturing the essence of a Gothic castle within a video game setting is well within reach when adapting gothic literature. By crafting towering and imposing castle structure that contains certain elements such as banners, religious symbols, secret passageways and sharp spires, while adding in good sound design, atmospheric lighting and interesting level design, one can faithfully adapt this trope to the medium of video games.

4.2 Nightmares and Omens

Two of the key elements in Gothic literature is that of the Nightmare and the Omen, they play a crucial role in building the eerie atmosphere of the novels. Nightmares are often vivid and terrifying and act as a closer glimpse into a character's deepest fears, anxieties and traumas. Nightmares foreshadow upcoming events hinting at tragedies to come. These bad dreams can be literal premonitions or symbolic representations of a character's internal struggles and turmoil. In *Frankenstein*, the titular Victor Frankenstein has constant nightmares in which he is plagued regarding the creation of his monster and these horrible dreams also represent Victor's inner evil desires.

Omens take on a more physical form as they might appear as strange discoveries, unsettling occurrences, and cryptic messages. A murder of crows circling the ruins of a castle, a monster peering in the window on a rainy night, and a sudden howling wind are all examples of omens that can send a sharp shiver down a readers spine. In *Jane Eyre*, a symbolic storm rages in the background during a tumultuous time between Jane and her lover Mr. Rochester, emphasising the growing tension between the two.

4.2.1 Implementing the Nightmares and Omens Trope

To represent these elements in the virtual world, I wanted to create a room in which the player is transported to a supernatural environment that is unlike the rest of the castle. In this room, I envision a glowing blue light emanating from the corners of the players view point to highlight a

nightmarish and dream like atmosphere. The room would be oddly laid out but it would be mimicking the real world with a twist such as a room with no walls and ceiling it has but furniture.

Elements such as the strange room and mysterious fog wall would entice to player to move forward and explore what might lay beyond.

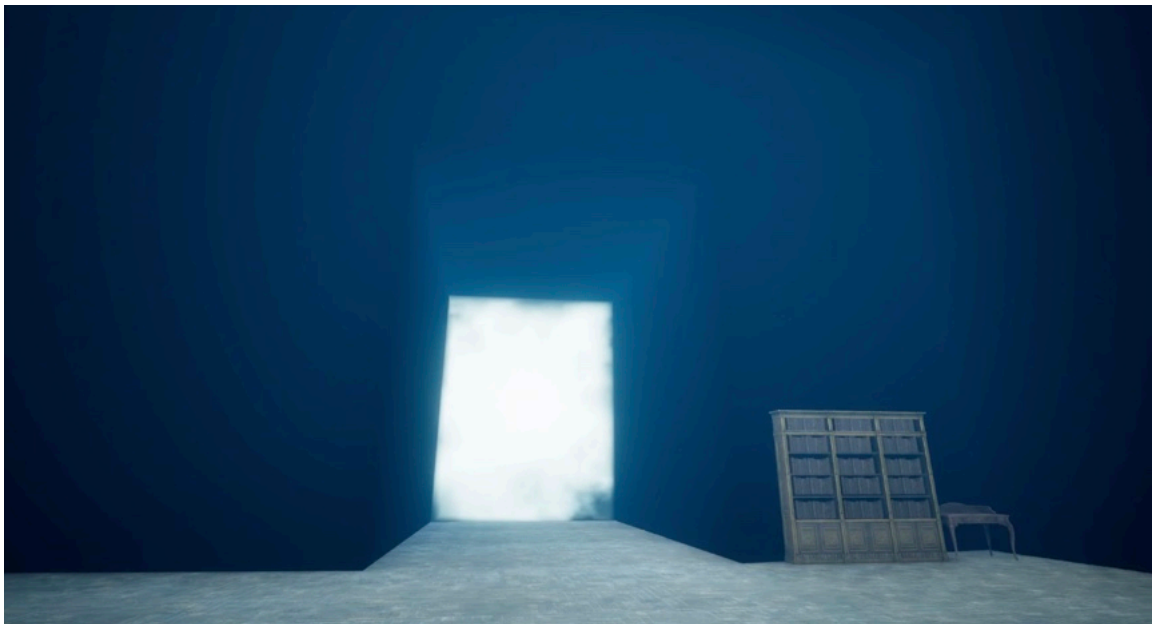


Figure 6: In game screenshot of the Nightmare and Omen room

Further in the room the players finds a series of graves, I wanted to blend both of these tropes together in this section to create a foreboding environment that speaks to the players of their ultimate and inevitably demise. As the players pushes on beyond the fog wall, the oppressive atmosphere thickens. The blue glow of the room is contrasted with giant paintings on the wall and a sprawling graveyard before them. This graveyard section is designed to blend both the

nightmare and the omen into one trope that becomes a oddly chilling dreamscape for the player to explore.



Figure 7: In game screenshot of the Nightmare and Omen room graveyard section

4.2.2 Nightmares and Omens Findings and Limitations

Gothic fiction has an innate ability to weave together suspense and dread to create haunting atmosphere for the reader. Nightmares in gothic literature often bleed into reality and mundane occurrences can often take on more ominous significance. Adapting these elements into a video game presented a unique challenge to me, how does one translate the introspective and personal nature of a Nightmare and the author's deliberate foreshadowing into a new medium that is built on player agency and choice.

The Labyrinth of the Macabre, attempts to answer this challenge by tying nightmares and omens together into the gameplay in a way that strongly capitalises on the unique strengths of a video game. The player finds themselves in a nightmarish black void, exploring a room devoid of walls and ceilings, but a crooked chair and table hide in the corner and a bookshelf with no books sits against one of the dark walls. Unlike in a novel where the reader is described these elements, the player directly experiences them, heightening the atmosphere.

The overall design of this section lies in the seamless transition from nightmare to omen. After navigating through this dark void, the player encounters a strange graveyard bathed in oppressive darkness. This shift is significant as it highlights the turn from strange nightmare to omen of the death, and the death of who and where is ultimately up to the players interpretation.

However, the game does not explicitly explain or connect these dots together for the player through something like a characters internal monologue. The lack of the monologue forces the players to come up with their own conclusions as to what they are seeing may represent. This gamified version of these tropes foster a deeper engagement that what may be found in the pages of a gothic novel. While the trope loses explicit descriptions of what the reader is supposed too feel in this scenario, it engages the player further in the experience.

By deciding to omit a direct explanation to the player, this creates a more rewarding experience and is akin to the storytelling found in FROMSOFTWARE's *Dark Souls Series*. In a sense the player is no longer just playing the game, but actively participating in constructing the narrative. The only real loss from transposing this trope is the vivid descriptions of the authors and their intent. Nightmares and Omens can be a great number of things and can very easily be adapted to new medium.

4.3 Damsel in Distress / Gothic Relationships

The trope of the Damsel in Distress is often criticised for portraying a helpless woman in need of a male saviour. In Gothic literature this is a prominent element that appears in many novels, think of Lucy in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. She is a woman who is in a constant state of needing saving and ultimately succumbs to the titular vampires' thirst. This trope can also be looked at as societal reflection on the constraints that were placed on women during the time of the writings of these novels.

Ann Radcliffe, author of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, initially presents damsels in a similar manner to that of Stoker, seeming helpless and in need of a hero, but her characters such as

Emily, posses a hidden inner courage and an strong sense of ingenuity as they navigate a crumbling castle in order to escape the evil that follows her.

Relationships in these novels are often far deeper than they may seem on the page. They are complex, woven with passion, love, suspicion, obsession, and betrayal. Mr. Rochester in *Jane Eyre*, is a perfect example of a brooding character with a dark past in which the main character, Jane, falls for because of his demeanour. Throughout the novel, Jane must battle with the moral complexities of their connection and ponder if their relationship can survive.

Similarly, Count Dracula is a manipulative and seductive character that preys on the vulnerabilities of the woman in the story, using his dark powers to draw them in. Gothic relationships explore the psychological complexities of human connection, where an attraction to someone can be blurred with fear and devotion.

4.3.1 Implementing the Damsel / Relationships Trope

With the adaption of this trope to a video game setting it presents a unique opportunity to reimagine them. The nature of video games allows for a more nuanced exploration of the themes and essence of these elements. In the game, the player can come across a bedroom scene where upon entering they are met with the shrieking sound of a woman screaming.

This abrupt noise raises questions toward the player immediately. Has the player stumbled upon a violent altercation? Is this some sort of twisted performance used to draw in potentially unaware individuals in order to be attacked? The player can choose to investigate further potentially stepping into a dangerous situation.

Further exploration into the room reveals a scene of utter disarray. Shattered bottles, vases, and broken picture frames litter the floorboards, which are supposed to represent the aftermath of a violent struggle or a desperate attempt at an escape. Spilled drinks and weapons lay across the entirety of the room as the layers of chaos add up in the players head.

The bed, which is the centrepiece in the room, further implies the narrative of a recent struggle. On the bed lay a discarded bottle of alcohol and a dagger, which speaks to the player about the events that have transpired in this room.



Figure 8: In game screenshot of the Damsel / Relationship room

In the corner of the room the player can find a letter resting on a desk that provides a crucial narrative thread that helps to unravel the situation that has happened. The contents of the letter detail a woman's decision to leave her husband due to his vile nature and an act of debauchery. This letter represents female characters in Gothic literature nightmarish relations with the male love interest.

This bedroom scene acts as a deconstruction of the damsel trope. The woman in this scenario can be seen as acting in a way not befitting of a typical damsel, she takes action and does not wait rescue from her situation from another male hero. The room also serves as a microcosm of the gothic aesthetic itself. It is a space in where beauty is combined with decay, where passion turns into fear around every dark corner.

The scene attempts to capture the core elements of a damsel in distress and a complex gothic relationship, the disarray in the room paints a vivid picture of an encounter between two lovers gone wrong. However, a weakness in this adaptation is evident in its brevity. I focused on a single, dramatic moment and sacrificed the nuances found in the novels.

4.3.2 The Damsel / Relationship Trope Findings and Limitations

We see the aftermath of this conflict but the scene offers little insight into the history of this couple, their dynamics, and the events that lead up to this volatile scenario. The little details of their relationships remains in mystery and the player can never get a full understanding of these two characters and their desires and motivations. The room essentially becomes a moment frozen in time that captures a mere moment in a potentially larger and more tragic story.

This is a limitation, much to my own design. With the overall scope of this project, sacrifices had and needed to be made in order to see this project through to the end in a manageable manner. The damsel / relationship trope perhaps suffered the most out of all the tropes selected to be adapted. A longer more focused project about a couple would be needed in order to fully capture the intricate details between a gothic couple that is evident in the original novels.

The ambiguity present in the scene acts as a sort of double edged sword. It allows for player interpretation and engagement it also severely limits the emotional depth of the overall narrative. You can capture glimpses of the woman's fear and the tension in the atmosphere, but you cannot fully connect with her story or understand the depth of pain she is experiencing. Similarly the male counterpart is shrouded in mystery, which does align with the nature of the dark and brooding male character in classic gothic literature, there is much to be desired in terms of beginning to understand their motivations.

To conclude, a closer adaption of the trope of the damsel and gothic relationships is possible and I believe I did not fully capture the intricate details needed to explore the complex relationship between gothic lovers.

4.4 The Gothic Villain

The Gothic villain is a captivating and multifaceted figure that is more than a mere evil character. They embody societal fears, have complex motivations, and often tragic histories that fuel their current darkness. The Gothic villain is one of the more standout elements of the genre and has even transcended it into other ares of entertainment.

The Vampire is perhaps the most iconic example of a Gothic villain and there is no vampire more famous than that of Count Dracula. In Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the titular character is a sophisticated aristocrat, who radiates charm and power. His curse of vampirism that gives him an unquenchable thirst for human blood drives a wedge between him and genuine human connection. Dracula represents a fear of many things from the time period on which it was written. He represents a fear of sexual transgression (Muskovits, 2010) as the way he interacts with other characters often has a sexual undertone in it, “ ‘I am so absolutely in his power; and to refuse would be to excite his suspicion and to arouse his anger’ ” (Stoker, 45).

The Count also represents the fear of the “other” during the Victorian era. Dracula is a foreign aristocrat arriving in Victoria London and has a stark difference to that of the regular Englishman. Dracula make the English characters feel inferior which only emphasises his “otherness” towards the English population (Kern, 2020).

Beyond that of the vampire is the figure of “the Monster” and no character embodies this quite like that of The Creature from Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*. The Creature in the novel is the product of misguided scientific ambition by Victor Frankenstein and is not an inherently evil being. The Creature, who is often mistakenly called “Frankenstein” in pop culture, is rejected by society when it tries to approach others due to its grotesque appearance and thus it

becomes an outcast. The Creature internalises these crude judgments of him and is aware of his self image (Sinlapanuntakul, 2021).

The Creature ultimately turns to monstrous violence, not out of malice, but out of growing sense of isolation and a desperate need for interaction and acceptance. This complexity of morals elevates this story of The Creature to a more subtle narrative of isolation, trauma and the need for acceptance in one's community.

Lastly, the spectre of a haunting Ghost is witnessed throughout many Gothic fiction narratives. Ghosts often haunt areas in which they have unfinished business, representing the past's hold on the present, or they simply possess a thirst for revenge. Matthew Lewis' *The Monk*, offers a chilling version of the ghost. In this novel the ghost known as the Bleeding Nun, interacts with the protagonist, Ambrosio, exploiting him and tormenting him over his religious anxieties.

The Victorians had a deep interest in the supernatural and it invaded the culture at that time (Craig, 2012). The supernatural represented their fear of mortality, regrets and guilts. The supernatural in gothic fiction "attempts to take the unreal and make it real." (Craig, 2012) This reflection on real life events adds a more disturbing layer to this trope as our internal anxieties fuel the haunting presence of the ghost.

4.4.1 Implementing The Gothic Villain Trope

The virtual representations of the villains of gothic literature are located in the very last section of *The Labyrinth of the Macabre* in a giant gothic building accessed by a great number of steps up to it. This structure sits atop the rest of the castle and acts as a representation of the powerful villain looking down on the rest.

Located in the Villains area is a door to a laboratory scene, which is heavily influenced by *Frankenstein*. The point of this area is to visually explore the "Monster" through

environmental storytelling and letters. As is evident in the other tropes, it is up to the player to piece together the narrative of this scene and come up with their own interpretations.



Figure 9: In game screenshot of the Villains area

In the centre of the room is the table where the monster is taking shape. This image of the monster does conjure images of how the character known as “Frankenstein” or “Frankenstein’s Monster” looks, with screws in the side of its temple and noticeable cuts along the circumference of its head and machinery all around it.

In the corner of the room there is the presence of a fireplace. Fire, a source of light and heat, can represent the spark of life and creativity, which is the very essence that Victor Frankenstein was looking for when creating his creature. However, fire can also be a symbol of destruction, mirroring the potential for violence caused by the unchecked ambition of a deranged scientist.

Finally, in the room the player can find the scattered notes of the creation process behind this monster, offering a glimpse into the mind of this mad scientist. The notes are sometimes coherent and other times appear to be the scribbles of a mad man creating something he will come to ultimately regret.



Figure 10: In game screenshot of the Monster laboratory

Across the way from this room is another that is the representation of the haunting spectre of the Gothic ghost. When the player enters the room they immediately see a static suit of armour hanging on a wall before them, almost acting as a guardian of this area. As the players moves past the suit further into the room, they hear a thundering crash behind. Turning around reveals the suit has disappeared from the wall jolting the player into a sense of unease.



Figure 11: In game screenshot of the Ghost area

The room is deliberately designed to be small and claustrophobic, which helps with the tension of the area. The room has a number of paintings hanging on the wall all of individuals who are gazing at the player. This further fosters a sense of paranoia within this tight space.

The final area of this section is the throne room of a vampire. Up one more flight of steps the player can view a mighty throne which is the seat of power of a vampire lord, presumably the lord of this castle. Behind his mighty throne is a giant heraldic banner of symbols, serving as a image of his lineage and power.

To the side of the throne is a bust of the vampire lord himself. This representation of himself speaks volumes about his ego, highlighting his grandeur. Beside the bust is a statue of a gargoyle, typically representing a guardian figure, it can also be looked at as a reflection of the vampires own monstrous self serving as a reminder to the player and the vampire himself of his transformation into a beast.

The throne itself symbolises the vampire's absolute power and authority within this domain. Resting on a table beside the throne is a chalice filled to the brim of his victim's blood which creates the stark contrast of an image of an insatiable hunger with a dependence on humanity.

To the left of the throne lays his coffin, his chamber of peace and slumber, and injects an element of vulnerability in the scene. A stake sits atop the coffin with an accompanying note, describing a mans's battle with this blood sucking creature.

The throne room paints a vivid picture of a powerful self absorbed creature that, despite seeming immortal, has a hidden vulnerability and weakness that can be exploited by those brave enough to stand up to this villain.

4.4.2 The Gothic Villain Trope Findings and Limitations

Gamifying the trope of the gothic villain presents interesting findings. Presenting these iconic villains as part of a brief environmental storytelling encounter shows to the player a small look at the elements and essence of these characters. The player can gain a deeper level of engagement with these elements that is not often present in the novels as the villains are seemingly distant. These tropes presented themselves with several advantages but also showcased multiple disadvantages.

The Ghost was the most seamless villain to adapt from the novels. Ghosts are seldom seen but interact with the environment where the protagonist inhabits. The ghost in the game interacts with the environment causing a direct sense of tension for the player. I found the Ghost to be very versatile and many gameplay opportunities presented themselves.

The Monster was somewhere in the middle in terms of adaptation. The Creature, in *Frankenstein*, is somewhat static for portions of the novel as he is being worked on by Victor and this was reflected in the game. However when one thinks This Creature, images of it staggering around and destroying objects comes to mind. This was not represented in the game as it was difficult to achieve and would have taken a substantial amount of time.

Finally, the Vampire villain was not fully able to be realised as intended in the novels in this adaptation. I was unable to capture the charming, powerful aristocratic aura that, for example, Dracula exudes in waves in this adaption. The Vampire himself was not seen in the game as it would have required extensive animation and character rigging to be done and this was just out of scope for this game.

4.5 Gamifying the Tropes

Gamification is the process of taking non game properties and adding game elements and mechanics to these properties to create a dynamic experience that rewards the player (Barney, 2023). This is achieved in various ways, such as a point system, collectables, and multiple

levels. For this project I gamified the tropes of Gothic Literature by adding them in to a non-linear setting in which the player has the freedom to explore and be rewarded with interesting levels and secrets should they choose to discover them.

The Labyrinth of the Macabre integrates three primary gamification elements to enrich the player experience in this world. Foremost among these elements is exploration, which is a cornerstone in many video games. From the moment players are spawned into the game world they are met with a castle in which they are given no information and they can explore and discover as much or as little as they desire.

The next element evident in the game is rewarding the player for the previous element of exploration. The player is encouraged to explore off the beaten path, which adds depth to the games' environment and creates a more engaging immersive experience. The player can seek out secrets and be met with interesting tidbits of information and parts of a narrative that overall serve to motivate the player to find more of these notes and letters.

Finally, the last element is that of the level system. In many other video games, a level system refers to the structure in which players through increasingly challenging areas or stages, in turn often increases the players own skills at the game. However, in *The Labyrinth of the Macabre*, the concept of a traditional level system is replaced with a more immersive and exploratory approach. Instead of discrete levels that the player can unlock or advance to, the game presents to the player an open area where the player can find rooms that serve as new "levels" or stages.

5. Conclusion

One of the key aspects that I focused on when developing this game was the sense of immersion through the distinctive style of Gothic literature. Emphasising mood and

atmosphere was key to capturing the essence of the books from which I adapted these tropes. While, *The Labyrinth of the Macabre*, was certainly built with the intention of it being a video game through and through, after creating the project and delving into research on the topic of adaptations, it has become more clear to me that *The Labyrinth of the Macabre* is more akin to an interactive experience than a traditional video game.

This project leaned more into a more atmospheric and narrative driven style with gamified elements rather than what one may consider to be a classic game. Many key game mechanics and settings are absent from *The Labyrinth of the Macabre*, and this coincided with the project's shorter length and more interactive and immersive focus. It also coincided with the project's limitations that prevented a more complete adaption of the tropes of Gothic literature.

The scope of the game was small because of the short amount of time I had to make the project and game development, as I learned, is incredibly complex with multiple systems built on multiple other systems that all have to be juggled in order for even simplest functionality to exist in the project world. Some of the tropes could not be fully realised in the nature that I originally intended be it to time restrictions, budgetary concerns, or lack of skill.

However, I do believe the project succeeded in capturing the atmosphere and essence of Gothic literature as a whole as a short interactive experience. Future projects that seek to adapt other genres or even the Gothic genre itself into different mediums could possibly learn from this study and embrace a broader scope to fully capture the nature of the genre in which they wish to adapt.

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