

# Game Narrative Review

---

**Name:** Vasilisa Shcherbakova  
**School:** DigiPen Institute of Technology  
**Email:** v.shcherbakova@digipen.edu  
**Month/Year of submission:** November 2024

---

**Game Title:** *Cult of the Lamb*

**Platform:** Microsoft Windows, macOS, Nintendo Switch, Playstation, Xbox

**Genre:** Roguelike, Action-Adventure, Base Building, Management Simulation, Co-op

**Release Date:** August 11, 2022

**Developer:** Massive Monster

**Publisher:** Devolver Digital

**Game Writers:** Jay Armstrong, JoJo Zhou

## Overview

---

*"Come closer. Fear not, for though you are already dead, I still have need of you."*

– *The One Who Waits*

With these haunting words, *Cult of the Lamb* throws players into a world of divine betrayal and cultish devotion, combining action-adventure and management simulation into a singular, charmingly odd experience. You play as the Lamb, a creature resurrected by the banished god Narinder, also known as The One Who Waits, after being sacrificed by the four elder bishops of the current world order. Once allies, these Bishops — Leshy, Heket, Kallamar, and Shamura — turned on their sibling Narinder, sealing him away out of fear of his growing power not only over life and death but over reality itself. As Narinder's chosen vessel, your mission is clear: build a cult, grow its influence, and defeat the Bishops to break the chains holding your newfound patron captive.

As you crusade through the Bishops' lands, you take on the demanding role of a cult leader. The Lamb must balance resource management, faith-building, and moral decisions to maintain the loyalty of their growing flock while growing their own power. Through rituals, doctrines, and sermons, you shape your followers and the culture of your cult, navigating between choices that range from benevolence to tyranny.

Is the Lamb a newfound liberator or just a pawn in a divine game? Are the followers blind devotees or willing participants in your grand design for the new world? *Cult of the Lamb* invites players to ponder these questions through a tale that is as quirky as it is disquieting. In this review, I will examine how the game prompts reflection on power dynamics and related player choices through the characters of the Lamb, the followers, the Four Bishops, and Narinder, uncovering what makes it a standout exploration of these themes.

## Characters

---

- **The Lamb** – the protagonist, resurrected by The One Who Waits to lead a cult in his name. The Lamb starts as a sacrificial victim but rises to power, balancing their role as both a leader to cult followers and a servant to Narinder.
  - **The Goat** – the deuteragonist form that an optional player cooperator takes on. While not directly referenced in the story, the Goat can make the same story decisions as the Lamb.
- **The Followers** – adorable creatures who form the backbone of the cult. Whether they are rescued during the Lamb's crusades or come of their own will, they pledge loyalty to the Lamb, making up the social fabric of the cult and becoming essential to its growth and survival.
- **The Four Bishops** – the leaders of the Old Faith, who betrayed Narinder and sacrificed the Lamb, set the events of the story into motion, serving as the inciting incident:
  - **Leshy** – the Bishop of chaos, clings to the wilderness and resists progress.
  - **Heket** – the Bishop of famine, controls others through deprivation and cruelty.
  - **Kallamar** – the Bishop of pestilence, uses and embodies fear and insecurity.
  - **Shamura** – the Bishop of wisdom and war, burdened by regret and the emotional weight of leading the betrayal of Narinder.
- **Narinder, The One Who Waits** – a manipulative and power-hungry god of death who orchestrates the Lamb's rise to power to secure his own freedom. Oldest sibling to the Four Bishops.
- **Haro** – a mysterious owl who provides cryptic lore and reflections. Haro offers insights into the Bishops' betrayal, Narinder's imprisonment, and the broader elements of the world's backstory.

## Breakdown

---

*Cult of the Lamb* combines a diverse number of mythological motifs and stories into a singular experience, made more interesting through the lens of power dynamics and group psychology. The story is made unique through the player's unusual position as the Lamb: an absolute glorious leader to their followers, while simultaneously being a servant to higher powers that are ultimately controlled by even greater forces.

On the gameplay side, this involves balancing resources such as hunger, sanitation, and morale to keep your followers happy while using their work to continuously fuel your campaign to defeat the elder gods who have imprisoned your current master. The game follows a cycle of managing and improving your cult while continuously battling through the lands of the old gods.

*Cult of the Lamb* tells two stories simultaneously, mirroring this gameplay loop. The central story happens during the crusades, where the Lamb fights the Bishops and works to free Narinder. This is the overarching goal that pushes the player forward. The second story happens during the downtime of cult management. This is where the game feels the most personal, as you interact with followers, build relationships, and directly manage their lives. The cult story has the strongest emotional connection, as players live alongside their followers and see how their personal choices directly affect their lives, be it for good or bad. Massive Monster described this integration as a core game principle, emphasizing that “each half of the game always fed into the other” (Couture, 2022).

This balance between the crusades and the cult ties directly into the structured routines of

cult management. Enforcement of such routines within the game, from the player to their followers and from the game to the player, keeps both the followers and the player from questioning the greater forces at play while working towards goals outside of their understanding. Combined with a very cute and cartoonish art style, this allows *Cult of the Lamb* to delve deeply into what otherwise would be very grotesque psychological aspects of power and group dynamics. As you progress, the game introduces more drastic elements to the cult management side, creating both opportunities to gain more power, but also to lose followers or accidentally turn former allies into new enemies.

The choice of art direction plays a significant role in allowing the writers to get away with displaying some of the more hideous aspects of extreme cult behavior. Actions, such as ritualistic murder or cannibalism, are presented as everyday occurrences within the narrative's context but are offset by the game's cartoony art style. As Jay Armstrong, the game's director, explained in an interview with Joel Couture, the team sought to combine narratives — stories that naturally emerged from the game's management and fighting mechanics — and found the cult theme the perfect way to blend them. Paired with the game's "cute art," this approach allowed the developers to explore "horrendous things" without the experience ever feeling too heavy (Couture, 2022). This has the additional effect of allowing the game to lure in players who would otherwise feel too uncomfortable with the game's narratives.

While the game explicitly explores these themes within the story, *Cult of the Lamb* further emphasizes these themes in its meta-narrative by subtly forcing the players to utilize more and more grotesque solutions to issues until players suddenly discover the level of horrors that they have normalized and accepted.

One of the main progression mechanics for cult management comes in the form of Commandment Stones, which let you establish doctrines for your cult. Each time, you must choose between two mutually exclusive options, one often being more violent or extreme than the other. The primary method of achieving the "descent into madness" theme is implemented here. More oppressive and grotesque doctrines often provide much more direct and tangible benefits for the cult, often at the price of general morale. At the same time, the more "humane" options often create more aesthetic or thematic benefits alongside morale boosts. The trick here, however, is how the game rationalizes ritualistic murders and cannibalism for players: early on, it intentionally forces you to unlock the ability to completely ignore negative morale changes entirely – by directly brainwashing your followers with hallucinogenic substances. The result is that aside from purely moral or aesthetic reasons, the violent and grotesque options almost always provide more direct mechanical benefits, encouraging players who seek efficiency onto the darker path.

This design forces the player to explore what kind of leader they are, by decoupling the morality of the decisions from the aesthetics of those decisions. While you may have built propaganda speakers and made elderly followers fight each other to the death, the lighthearted tone always remains, so it certainly can't be that bad, right?

## **The Lamb (and the Goat)**

---

The Lamb is the central figure of the game. Beginning as quite literally a sacrificial lamb — the last of its kind, no less — they are resurrected as the embodiment of the ancient god of death, Narinder, also known as The One Who Waits. Starting as a servant, the Lamb progresses to either becoming the messiah of the old god, single-handedly reviving Narinder's religion, or instead surpassing Narinder, becoming the god of death in his stead.

Mechanically, Lamb's position as embodiment of Narinder is the justification that puts the player into a position of power within the cult. The Lamb is able to very directly influence the outcomes by doing the same work as the followers, especially early on, while also deciding on how the followers should do their individual jobs. This is achieved by allowing the Lamb to commune with ancient powers through the temple, presented in the form of sermons, doctrines, and rituals, all of which directly shape the behavior of the cult.

Of particular note is the sheer degree of control the Lamb has over the followers. Players can customize almost everything about the followers of the cult upon their indoctrination, from their name to animal species. Functionally, this serves to create a greater degree of emotional connection between the player and the cult. In terms of the narrative, this emphasizes the sheer control that Narinder and the Lamb have over the cult members, both physically and psychologically. This ties into another peculiar detail. Unlike the Lamb towards the followers, the players have almost no control over the customization of the Lamb, aside from the ability to wear a different coat. While the Lamb is under the control of the player, it doesn't serve as a personification of the player, which leads to one of the most interesting uses of behavioral psychology within the game.

*Cult of the Lamb's* arguably most effective meta-narrative revolves around the cognitive dissonance of the player. The game tricks the player into committing heinous actions by creating an extensive number of distractions to distance the player from the moral implications of their decisions. The identity of the Lamb being separate from the player is just one example of this. The whimsical art style and sound design, the continuous and almost hypnotic core gameplay loop, the cartoony violence, as well as mechanics that allow you to circumvent harm, are all used to allow the player to make decisions free of moral implications. This is further reinforced through the careful exploration of implicit and explicit attitudes in leadership. Players' explicit choices — such as selecting doctrines that define the cult's ethos — contrast with the implicit pressures to optimize gameplay, very often leading to darker decisions being prioritized. The game's mechanics encourage players to experiment with both benevolent and authoritarian leadership styles, embodying the theme that “power corrupts,” while consistently offering a choice to resist that corruption, but making that choice weaker mechanically.

Building on the cognitive dissonance created by the Lamb's morally ambiguous actions, *Cult of the Lamb* further immerses players in the psychological complexity of leadership through Heider's Balance Theory, which suggests that individuals strive for harmony in their relationships and attitudes by resolving tensions or conflicts (Heider, 1946). Players must juggle their relationships with followers, the cult's goals, and their own sense of morality. When the Lamb enforces doctrines or performs rituals, actions that may seem cruel or benevolent, players often rationalize these choices to maintain harmony within the cult. For example, a ritual sacrifice may feel justified if it boosts faith or secures resources. This triadic relationship mirrors Heider's premise of seeking balance in social relations, where tension or disharmony prompts a shift in behavior or attitudes. The game turns leadership into a constant act of balancing choices and cult stability.

One element that deserves mentioning for being particularly unique is the way the game handles multiple players. *Cult of the Lamb* allows drop-in multiplayer, which initially seems like a direct advantage, as it provides a whole other set of helping hands to handle the game with no visible downside. From the psychology perspective, however, this results in an experience unique to *Cult of the Lamb*: balancing moral leadership decisions between two people with equal control.

Interestingly, the multiplayer mode amplifies these themes by introducing a unique dynamic: both players hold absolute power, jointly leading the cult. This mode forces players to navigate the push and pull of shared power, making decisions together while maintaining their own moral vision for the cult. It adds an additional layer of tension and complexity to the game's exploration of leadership, as players experience how conflicts between authoritarian figures can shape or destabilize a group.

Ultimately, *Cult of the Lamb* asks the classic question of how benevolent rulers turn into bloodthirsty dictators. Through its clever design, the game doesn't just present this transformation; it makes the player actively experience it. Every decision, whether made individually or in tandem with another leader, reflects the central theme that power, no matter how well-intentioned, has a way of eventually corrupting its wielder.

## **The Followers**

---

The followers in *Cult of the Lamb* play a central mechanical role, making up the Lamb's cult. They don't play a specifically defined part in the explicit narrative of the game, only occasionally being possessed by the gods as punishment for the Lamb. In the meta-narrative, however, they take center stage as the primary source of emotional connection for the player. While the game gives explicit gameplay-related positive and negative traits to the followers, these traits often serve to define personality rather than strictly influence gameplay. Coupled with the ability to read followers' thoughts and a wide variety of customizable, visually expressive appearances, this creates a surprising sense of individuality and attachment in what initially appear to be simple workers.

In terms of resources, the game treats followers as a unified whole. This means that when morale is low, you will get cascading effects of rebellion and dissolution with your leadership, but while morale is high, you are unlikely to get any negative effects whatsoever. This can be seen as a representation of group conformity and compliance, where the group members are pressured to align with the beliefs of the rest of the group. If most of the group is content, then those who have doubts convert to being content. Alternatively, when most of the group is unhappy, even staunch believers will change their views.

At the same time, the game mechanics incentivize players to actively reward individual followers in meaningful ways, illustrating how attitude change occurs through direct positive reinforcement. This is done by locking one of the main progression mechanics behind followers' level of faith, which is primarily improved through one-on-one interactions with individual followers. Together with unique appearances and personalities, this gives a surprising amount of emotional weight to the player's interaction with followers, despite not playing an explicit role within the story.

This changes when observed through the lens of the meta-narrative. While the player has total mechanical control over the followers, over time, followers may gain more and more emotional leverage over the player. Especially towards the late game, players may spend hours grinding one of the hardest crusades in the game, simply to get a nice new suit for just one of twenty followers, because that follower has a trait that makes them like good clothing, and you have seen them grow from a child to one of the most significant cult members.

This becomes particularly important as the game introduces conflicts between followers, as well as mechanics that allow you to prolong the lives of specific individuals, but only for a select few. Players are often faced with the difficult choice of letting go of favorite characters, often as a result of violent interaction between cult members, or spending extensive resources to

keep them alive, even when these efforts provide no significant gameplay benefits. Further tension arises through the use of doctrines that restrict followers' freedoms, such as forced tax collection or food restrictions, creating dissent among those who resist. This aligns with reactance theory, which explains how individuals push back when their freedom of choice is threatened (Garg, 2021). As a result, followers perceive the restrictions as an affront to their freedoms and begin to rebel.

Followers also represent a strong case of groupthink, where the need for group agreement causes individuals to ignore their own doubts or concerns (Cherry, 2024). This is evident as followers rarely express horror at even the most extreme actions performed by the player. Depending on the culture you cultivate, followers even begin to support horrific rituals and doctrines. Dissent, when it occurs, is almost always purely out of personal spite due to actions you perform, or do not perform, towards individual followers. One of the most interesting examples of this is how the game treats child followers. Actively interacting with newborns to build positive attitudes toward the Lamb often results in them growing into the most loyal and effective cult members. However, neglecting them during their childhood almost always leads to rebellion, with these individuals becoming some of the most vocal dissenters.

At the same time, obedience to authority comes out as a central theme in the relationship between leadership and follower compliance. Regardless of whether players lead with kindness or cruelty, followers comply as long as their actions align with the cult's overarching goals. This may work as a critique of how social roles and group identity suppress individuality, creating a system where the outcome, obedience, is often the same, regardless of the method.

From the moment followers are recruited, the Lamb relies on fear appeals to cement their loyalty. Recruits often join the cult out of desperation, having been saved from danger or punishment, and their initial devotion stems more from self-preservation than genuine belief. This mechanic reflects normative social influence, where individuals align their behavior with the group to avoid disapproval or punishment (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). The Lamb's leadership enforces these norms through explicit consequences for dissent: dissenters can be imprisoned, brainwashed, or even sacrificed.

Beyond normative pressure, the game also explores informational social influence, where individuals conform because they believe others possess more accurate information about reality ("APA Dictionary of Psychology," n.d.). Followers rely on the Lamb's commands and the cult's rituals to navigate their new reality. Over time, fear of punishment gives way to genuine acceptance of the Lamb's authority, creating a culture where even grotesque practices are normalized.

## **The Four Bishops**

---

The Four Bishops — Leshy, Heket, Kallamar, and Shamura — are the central figures shaping *Cult of the Lamb*'s narrative, each representing a facet of leadership and power gone awry. These siblings are not just adversaries, but deeply disturbed characters, torn between their divine duties and personal fears. Their betrayal of Narinder, their brother, lies at the heart of the story. Fearing his growing dominion over life and death, the Bishops made the agonizing decision to imprison him, stripping him of power and sealing him away with divine chains. This act, driven by collective fear, exemplifies group polarization, where their shared deliberations amplified their individual doubts and led to an extreme decision that none of them might have made alone (Myers & Lamm, 1976). Their betrayal was not born of malice but of desperation – a

choice made to maintain balance in a world threatened by Narinder's ability to defy the natural order.

Their actions, however, came with severe consequences. Narinder, in his defiance and fury, struck back at his siblings, leaving them with gruesome wounds. Leshy, embodying chaos, lost his eyes and became blind, symbolizing his inability to foresee the consequences of their collective decision. Heket, who presides over famine, had her throat slit, leaving her unable to speak without pain – perhaps a reminder of the silence that followed their betrayal. Kallamar, the Bishop of disease, had his ears torn off, symbolizing the denial of his pleas for mercy and his failure to listen to reason. Shamura, the eldest and wisest, was dealt the most profound wound: their skull was split, shattering their once-brilliant mind. These injuries are more than physical scars; they are permanent reminders of the price of their decision to chain away their own brother.

The Bishops' fear of Narinder was not without merit. As the god of death, Narinder wielded power that challenged the natural cycle of life. This made him dangerous not only to the Bishops but also to the fabric of existence itself. Yet, their choice to imprison him was not unanimous in spirit. While some of the Bishops justified their actions as necessary to preserve the world, others carried deep regret, mourning both their brother's suffering and the burden of their betrayal.

Through cryptic dialogue and haunting appearances, the Bishops reveal their fragmented perspectives on their decision. Some, like Heket, mask their guilt with cruelty, projecting strength to deny their remorse. Others, like Shamura, openly express regret, acknowledging the love they once had for Narinder. Their words are often cryptic yet meaningful, hinting at the Lamb's own potential descent as the new bearer of the crown. The Bishops' scars and personalities reflect not only their divine domains but also the emotional weight of their shared betrayal. Their pain and regret make them tragic figures – sympathetic, morally grey, and far more human than they may initially appear as elder gods.

The Bishops' thematic roles and the overarching narrative seem to echo the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, with their domains — chaos, famine, pestilence, and war — reflecting aspects of divine judgment and suffering. This parallel ties the game's story to religious symbolism, reinforcing its themes of formation of faith, power, and the cost of leadership.

The game's fragmented storytelling approach invites players to piece together the narrative, revealing the Bishops' personal complexity. Their story foreshadows the Lamb's own fate, challenging players to question the cost of their own power and leadership.

## **Leshy**

---

Leshy, the first Bishop encountered, embodies chaos and destruction, with his missing eye representing the sin of "See No Evil" for his choice to turn a blind eye to his sibling. Residing in Darkwood, his realm is a reflection of his nature: wild, unpredictable, untamed, and actively resisting outside change. Leshy's personality is brash and confrontational, yet he stands apart from his siblings in one key way: he targets only the Lamb, leaving the followers untouched. This focus on direct confrontation gives him an almost honorable air, as though he revels in the fight rather than in control or manipulation.

Leshy's chaotic nature is mirrored in his words. He taunts the Lamb, proclaiming: "So you foolishly persist, little Lamb. I hear your lies and I smell your fear. The Red Crown rises again... but what an UNWORTHY bearer it has." Despite his outward bravado, glimpses of

vulnerability emerge in his ultimate moments, suggesting a tragic acceptance of his fate. Leshy's dialogue hints at deeper insecurities as he struggles with his role within the family. Haro, the enigmatic bird, also sheds light on this dynamic, describing him as "hapless," the youngest and most reckless of the Bishops.

The scars Leshy bears, both literal and metaphorical, stem from Narinder's betrayal. His punishment is tied to his chaotic nature, symbolizing a loss of control over his domain. By the end of the Lamb's crusade, Leshy's demise feels less like a victory and more like a tragic inevitability, painting him as a figure defined by a lack of foresight rather than malice.

## **Heket**

---

Heket, residing in Anura, governs famine and starvation, weaponizing hunger as a means of control. Brutal and cruel, and with a wound on her throat, she embodies the sin of "Speak No Evil" for her failure to speak up against Narinder's imprisonment. After the Lamb defeats Leshy, she appears unannounced, declaring, "Your sins are many, and for that your loyal Followers must SUFFER! They shall starve!" This threat underlines her disdain for mortals, treating them as tools rather than beings with agency. Her crusade region reflects her inability to nourish and nurture, leaving her domain barren.

Nevertheless, Heket's cruelty is not without remorse. In her final moments, she laments about the fate of her siblings, "The Bishops... my family. Have they not suffered enough? Have I not suffered enough?" This rare moment of vulnerability reveals the weight of her role in Narinder's imprisonment and a sense of anguish about what transpired.

Despite her ruthlessness, Heket's actions seem driven more by desperation than true evil. Regret and grief linger beneath her domineering presence, reinforcing the moral ambiguity that defines the Bishops.

## **Kallamar**

---

Kallamar, ruling over the disease-ridden lands of Anchordeep, is the most tragic of the Bishops. His wound represents the sin of "Hear No Evil," or failing to respond to Narinder's pleas, which is also mirrored by his area being set in the underwater realm. Unlike his siblings, Kallamar does not revel in power. Instead, he is defined by his cowardice and fear of Narinder's return, perhaps hoping he took no part in his imprisonment. When confronted by the Lamb, Kallamar begs for mercy, crying, "Please, I beg you, spare me! Kill Shamura, but do not send me to him!"

His plea is not one of defiance but of sheer terror, making him likely the most emotionally impactful of the Four Bishops. Kallamar feared the Red Crown most of all. His fear made a coward of him, yet his cowardice was his prison. His behavior reflects the psychological consequences of living in constant dread. This, in turn, may signify that his support of the imprisonment of Narinder came more out of peer pressure and survival instincts than from malice.

The wounds Narinder inflicted on Kallamar symbolize his inability to overcome fear, choosing to hide away and ignore the consequences of his choices. His narrative highlights the corrosive effects of power when wielded by someone incapable of confronting its burdens, manifesting as physical and spiritual decay of his realm. Kallamar's ultimate demise is less a result of his villainy and more a reflection of his inability to rise above his fears.



## Shamura

---

Shamura, the eldest and most contemplative of the Bishops, resides in Silk Cradle, a realm of webs and traps. As the embodiment of war and knowledge, Shamura's wound in his skull represents the sin of "Think No Evil," reflecting his position as the one who introduced Narinder to the idea of extending past his domain of death and failing to realize how it will lead to their conflict. Unlike the other Bishops, Shamura openly acknowledges their role in Narinder's imprisonment, confessing, "I introduced him to ideas of change; for my domain is knowledge, and it is ever evolving. An organic state of being for myself, but for him... most unnatural. Death cannot flow backward." Laced with regret, this confession reveals their acceptance of blame, stating, "It was I who had him chained. Forced into subjugation by the four of us."

Shamura's domain reflects their fractured psyche. Once the wisest of the siblings, their betrayal of Narinder leaves them consumed by guilt. Narinder himself reflects on Shamura's fall, stating, "Once, they were the brightest of us, their mind gracious and strong, like the spider's silk." This acknowledgment of Shamura's intellect and downfall adds a layer of tragedy to their character, as the one who is primarily responsible for the downfall of all of the siblings.

Shamura's wounds are self-inflicted, a representation of their internal struggle between wisdom and action. By forcing the players to fight their own followers, Shamura tests not only the Lamb's strength but also their resolve as a leader. This conflict positions Shamura as a mirror to the Lamb, both figures grappling with the weight of leadership and the consequences of their choices.

---

The Four Bishops in *Cult of the Lamb* tell a story of fear, regret, and ignorance of the consequences of their power and actions. Their betrayal of Narinder was driven by a desperate need to maintain order, but it left them fractured and scarred both physically and emotionally. Each Bishop's wounds are a reminder of the pain caused by their choice, a decision that shattered their family and burdened them with guilt. As players confront them, they unravel a story of regret and denial, revealing characters that are neither wholly good nor entirely evil. Their story reflects the lasting impact of choices made in fear and the struggles of living with those decisions.

## The One Who Waits

---

The One Who Waits, or Narinder, initially plays a role as your main ally, saving the Lamb from death – but at a cost. From the outset, Narinder's narrative explores the course ambition takes when paired with absolute but inhibited power. As the god of death, he is ever-present, his form as a black cat tied to mythological and cultural associations with mortality and superstition. Narinder's ambition to transcend his role disrupted the balance his siblings sought to maintain, leading to his imprisonment. His chains serve as both a physical restraint and a representation of the familial betrayal that bound him. His position as the god of death, paired with his eternal confinement, leads to Narinder viewing himself as an inevitable force of revenge – a force beyond morality.

The betrayal that sealed Narinder's fate for his unspecified transgressions against natural order is central to his arc. Haro laments, "Bonds of familial duty, turned instead to chains," suggesting that The Four Bishops' betrayal was more about preserving the world than about slighting their sibling. While Narinder's anger toward his siblings is evident — he constantly refers to them as cowards and fools — there are moments of lingering affection. His words after Shamura's death reveal a sense of loss: he recalls their brilliance, comparing their mind to the

delicate spider's silk that once encased their home. This complexity reveals that, beneath his hunger for revenge, Narinder may still hold a measure of love for those who betrayed him. However, his hunger for revenge overshadows any possible chance for reconciliation with his siblings, at least in his current life, and his motivations remain deeply rooted in the desire to reclaim his power, more than anything else.

Narinder's view of his siblings highlights the tension between loyalty and ambition, an idea that becomes central to the climax of the game. He dismisses Leshy as chaotic and insignificant — "Leshy fell before you like a grain of sand before a tidal wave" — and derides Kallamar's fear, mocking him: "Do you fear me, Lamb? My brother, Kallamar, lived in fear of me. He shook at the mere thought of death!" Yet beneath this scorn lies a lingering connection, an unspoken acknowledgment of the traits that once led them to respect each other as equals.

Narinder's relationship with the Lamb is defined by manipulation cloaked as mentorship. From the start, he positions himself as an indispensable guide, providing tools and advice to lead the cult, but always steering the Lamb toward his own goals. His commands are framed as necessary for survival and progress, while simultaneously nudging the players towards a darker path: "Sacrifice a follower to absorb more power – this will aid you in your quest to free me." By presenting cruelty and efficiency as intertwined, Narinder tempts the Lamb to adopt a leadership style that mirrors his own. The choices offered to the Lamb, while ostensibly free, are shaped by his persistent violent presence, subtly reinforcing the idea that, in his view, power and control justify any means.

Psychologically, Narinder represents the reactance of a powerful individual being forcibly restrained, and the degree of retaliation that comes from such betrayal. While his brothers sought to only imprison him to prevent the world from falling apart, in his return, Narinder seeks not to just restore his freedom, but to bring much greater annihilation to the ones who wronged him. His own downfall, spurred by his fear of being overthrown by his siblings, became a self-fulfilling prophecy, fueling the sense of inevitability that he now has about his revenge. And if the Lamb chooses to betray him at the end of the story, he experiences behavioral confirmation, seeing the Lamb the same as him and his siblings after all. This mirrors the Lamb's relationship with their followers, creating a cycle where leaders exert control, justify their actions, and demand loyalty, all while setting up the conditions for the very betrayal that destroys them.

Even as Narinder's advice pushes the Lamb toward moral ambiguity, his influence carries a sense of inevitability of violence and suffering. Haro's reflection, "How does one kill Death? ... Alas. One cannot," underscores the futility of fully escaping death god's shadow. Even defeating him simply results in you having to take up his duties instead. Regardless of the Lamb's choices, Narinder's torturous presence persists.

## **Strongest Element**

---

The strongest element of *Cult of the Lamb* lies in its art direction, which masterfully balances the cutesy, cartoonish visuals with its grotesque premise. While the art design itself is very lighthearted, the subtle details, such as the brief sadistic smile that appears on Lamb's face during a swing of the sword or the sudden expression of peace on the follower's face right before they're sacrificed, manage to effectively convey a great amount of emotional depth to the game's characters. This juxtaposition is so compelling that it disarms players and makes the darker elements of the gameplay feel oddly palatable. As the developers explained, the followers'

cuteness is intentional: “It helps endear them to you... creating a stronger emotional stake when you come to do horrible things to them” (Couture, 2022).

This visual style is enhanced by excellent UX design. The tactile controller rumbles during decisions, and satisfying sound effects and a whimsical yet haunting soundtrack all work together to make each action feel impactful. Whether it’s the followers’ collective gasp after a sermon or the satisfaction of unlocking new rituals, the game ties its visuals, sound, and gameplay into one delightful, seamless experience, even when your actions are not as delightful themselves. *Cult of the Lamb* stands out for its ability to make the adorable and the horrific coexist in perfect harmony.

## Unsuccessful Element

---

One aspect where *Cult of the Lamb* falls short is in its combat design. While the combat is functional, it lacks the depth and polish to make it as engaging as the cult-building mechanics. Simple additions, such as backstab mechanics or improving the selection of tarot cards, could have made combat far more rewarding. Currently, many cards feel unimpactful or like a waste of resources, often turning them into an unsatisfying reward. These small adjustments could have significantly enhanced the moment-to-moment gameplay, which in turn may have contributed to more emotional weight to the parts of the narrative that are conveyed during combat segments.

## Highlight

---

The final confrontation with Narinder, The One Who Waits, is the highlight of *Cult of the Lamb*, bringing together the game’s themes of betrayal, power, and moral ambiguity into a singular defining moment. After spending the entire game working to free him, Narinder reveals his true intentions that the Four Bishops warned you of: to make you the final sacrifice and claim the Red Crown back for himself. The game succeeds at putting you into an encounter where you have absolutely no idea what to expect, forcing you into a fight that feels both personal and inevitable. Do you give in, or do “you think to stand in the very face of death?”

Narinder’s eventual defeat doesn’t offer relief but instead presents a final moral dilemma: to spare him or end his life. The player is forced to confront the cycle of power and violence that has defined the game. His small, helpless form after the fight contrasts sharply with his earlier dominance, as he sneers, “No longer can you blame your vile acts on me.”

This moment encapsulates everything *Cult of the Lamb* excels at. It combines high emotional stakes, exploration of power dynamics, and the game’s mix of cute animals and eldritch horrors into a singular moment that feels both exciting and unpredictable. It’s a perfect culmination of the experience that highlights what makes the game so memorable.

## Critical Reception

---

**GameSpot Review by Jessica Cogswell (Score: 9/10)** – Jessica Cogswell described *Cult of the Lamb* as “a delightfully demented roguelike,” applauding its seamless blend of roguelike action and base-management simulation. She praised the combat for being fast-paced and fluid while highlighting the depth of its base-building mechanics, which she found robust yet accessible. The game’s darkly playful art style and music were commended for creating an engaging tonal contrast that enhances the whole experience. Cogswell also emphasized the importance of player-driven choices, like doctrines and rituals, which add a sense of ownership and replayability, calling the game’s balance of dense mechanics and chaotic fun a “triumph.”

***Destructoid Review by Jordan Devore (Score: 8.5/10)*** – The reviewer praised *Cult of the Lamb* for its “short yet impactful” narrative setup, which quickly establishes the stakes and provides a solid foundation for the game. The writing was noted for creating “a tortured, sinister-yet-weirdly-cute world worth getting to know,” seamlessly blending roguelike action with cult management mechanics into a cohesive and engaging experience. The integration of the narrative elements into the gameplay was also highlighted, particularly how choices tied to the Lamb’s dark descent, like doctrines and rituals, shape the cult’s development and player strategy. These elements present players with compelling moral dilemmas, leading to “memorable situations as the simulation unfolds.” Ultimately, Devore described *Cult of the Lamb* as “a winning combo” that combines the best aspects of its genres into an experience that is “hard to put down.”

***IGN Review by Tom Marks (Score: 8/10)*** – Marks described the game as “a wolf of a satisfying base-management game in the sheepish clothing of an approachable action-roguelite,” praising its clever mix of genres. He highlights the game’s engaging loop of dungeon crawling and cult building, with the base-management aspect standing out as the true heart of the experience. While the reviewer found the combat fun but straightforward, he appreciated the emotional connection players develop through naming followers and customizing their cult, calling *Cult of the Lamb* “something altogether different,” commending its balance of charm and chaos.

## Lessons

---

### 1) ***Contrasting Aesthetics to Reinforce Narrative:***

A game’s aesthetics don’t always need to align directly with its themes to be effective. Unexpected or contrasting visual styles can highlight key narrative elements by creating tension or drawing attention in unique ways. This approach shows that breaking conventional expectations can lead to a more impactful and memorable experience, where the juxtaposed aesthetics highlight rather than simply mirror the story.

### 2) ***Subtlety in Thematic Storytelling:***

*Cult of the Lamb* shows deep themes, like those about power and morality, don’t need to be explicitly stated to resonate with players. Instead, the game carefully represents these ideas in its characters, gameplay, and world design, letting players discover them on their own terms. This subtle approach keeps players curious and engaged, encouraging them to explore and piece together the story independently rather than having the story hold their hand.

### 3) ***Unity around a Central Theme:***

Successfully uniting all aspects of the game around a specific central theme can work to create a compelling experience, even if that theme initially appears rather cliché. In the case of *Cult of the Lamb*, the core narrative, the meta-narrative, as well as the moment-to-moment gameplay all come together to explore the themes of authority and power dynamics, resulting in a unique exploration of that concept that feels fresh, without sacrificing any parts of the gameplay to convey them.

## Summation

---

*Cult of the Lamb* is deserving of analysis because it weaves a story that challenges players to reflect on the nature of power, devotion, and morality while avoiding the pitfall of feeling preachy. Its characters and systems work together to explore complex dynamics, such as

the Lamb's precarious role as both leader and servant, players' slow descent into normalizing violence, and the cyclical nature of betrayal and revenge. The game's ability to combine mythological themes with gameplay, all without taking itself too seriously, is what allows its narrative to feel organic. By tying these themes into the player's constant need to choose between violence and progress or mercy and tranquility, *Cult of the Lamb* creates a deeply engaging experience that you can never quite get out of your head.

***“...are you to be a vengeful false idol, or a merciful coward?”***

— Narinder, *The One Who Waits*

## Citation

---

1. APA Dictionary of Psychology. (n.d.). Retrieved from dictionary.apa.org website: <https://dictionary.apa.org/informational-influence>
2. Cherry, K. (2024). How groupthink impacts our behavior. Retrieved from Verywell Mind website: <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-groupthink-2795213>
3. Cialdini, R. B., & Goldstein, N. J. (2004). Social influence: Compliance and conformity. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 55, 591–621. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.55.090902.142015>
4. Cogswell, J. (2022). Cult of the Lamb Review - A Cult Classic. Retrieved from GameSpot website: <https://www.gamespot.com/reviews/cult-of-the-lamb-review-a-cult-classic/1900-6417933/>
5. Couture, J. (2022). How Cult of the Lamb's cute aesthetic allowed its developers to explore darker themes. Retrieved from Game Developer website: <https://www.gamedeveloper.com/design/interview-corralling-the-inherent-cuteness-of-cult-of-the-lamb>
6. Devore, J. (2022). Review: Cult of the Lamb. Retrieved from Destructoid website: <https://www.destructoid.com/reviews/review-cult-of-the-lamb-pc-version-town-builder-action-roguelite/>
7. Garg, D. (2021). Reactance theory. Retrieved from The Decision Lab website: <https://thedecisionlab.com/reference-guide/psychology/reactance-theory>
8. Heider, F. (1946). Attitudes and Cognitive Organization. *The Journal of Psychology*, 21(1), 107–112. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223980.1946.9917275>
9. Marks, T. (2024). Cult of the Lamb Review. Retrieved from IGN website: <https://www.ign.com/articles/cult-of-the-lamb-review>
10. Myers, D. G., & Lamm, H. (1976). The group polarization phenomenon. *Psychological Bulletin*, 83(4), 602–627. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.83.4.602>