TRIFORCE OF CANON: EXAMINING THE CANON IN VIDEO GAMES

TRIFORCE KANONU: VİDEO OYUNLARINDA KANONU İNCELEMEK

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Abstract

The subject of this article is "canon" in the video games. This study examines the formation of canon in video games. The foundation of this research is built upon the synthesis of existing studies on canon in various media, including film and literature. This is achieved through a literature review, which also highlights the absence of analysis on canon in video games. The methodology is close reading technique and comprises an examination of the criteria to be utilized in canon determination with examples from video games. The discussion assesses the implications of canonization for game design, storytelling, and immersion. By advancing the understanding of canon in video games, this research contributes to the advancement of academic discourse about canon.

Öz

Bu makalenin konusu video oyunlarındaki kanonun incelenmesidir. Bu çalışma video oyunlarında kanonun nasıl oluştuğunu araştırmaktadır. Yapılan literatür taramasıyla film, edebiyat gibi çeşitli mecralardaki kanon üzerine mevcut çalışmaların sentezlenmesi ve video oyunları alanında kanon üzerindeki analizlerin eksikliğinin vurgulanmasıyla araştırmanın temeli oluşturulmuştur. Yakın okuma tekniğinin kullanıldığı metodoloji, çeşitli video oyunlarından örneklerle kanonun belirlenmesinde kullanılacak ölçeklerin sistematik bir analizini içermektedir. Bu araştırmanın bulguları, video oyunlarında kanonun belirlenmesinin ortaya çıkardığı durumları ortaya koymaktadır. Tartışma, kanonun belirlenmesinin; oyun tasarımı, hikaye anlatımı ve oyuncuyu içine çekme gibi daha geniş alanlardaki etkilerini eleştirel bir şekilde incelemektedir. Bu araştırma, video oyunlarında kanonun anlaşılmasına katkıda bulunarak kanon hakkında akademik söylemi geliştirmektedir.

INTRODUCTION

In the dynamic and ever-evolving world of video games, storytelling plays a pivotal role in creating engaging and immersive experiences for players. Central to this storytelling lays the concept of canon originating in literary studies. The term refers to the work or rule accepted as officially part of the narrative in an individual universe of a fictional work. Much like in literature and film, canon in video games provides a framework that ensures consistency and continuity, allowing for rich and complex storylines to unfold over time.

The concept of canon has long been a critical element in the immersion of the consumer of a given medium. The distinction between canon and non-canon works is straightforward in most media, including films and literature. In contrast, defining what is and is not canon in video games is more complex because of the role of the player in shaping the narrative of the story. Mass Effect 3, The Witcher 3, and many other games will have different endings based on the choices players make.

In order to gain an understanding of the concept of canon in video games, it is essential to recognize the role of the player in influencing the video game itself. In comparison to other media, such as film and literature, where the consumer's role in establishing the canon is more constrained, the canon in video games is also contingent upon the player's choices.

The objective of this article is to examine the processes by which canon is established in video games through the close reading technique. The findings of this study will provide a foundation for evaluations that will establish a definitive canon of video games.

THE DEFINITION OF CANON

The term "canon" has its origins in the Greek "kanon" which can mean both the law or rule of the Church and the books of the Bible that are accepted as authentic (The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology, 1996, p. 61). In contemporary usage, the term refers to two distinct concepts. One of them is "a generally accepted rule, standard or principle by which something is judged" as in legal, scientific or religious contexts where certain established norms or truths are considered canonical, i.e. widely accepted and adhered to as fundamental guidelines, while the other is "a list of literary works considered to be permanently established as being of the highest quality." (Pearsall, 2008, p. 205). According to these definitions, canon can be divided into "canon as facts" and "canon as works."

Star Wars universe is one of the most known applications of the canon concept in popular culture both as a canon as facts and canon as works. Since its debut in 1977, the franchise has spawned twelve films, numerous comic books, video games and novels. This extensive franchise has created a rich and complex universe in which certain stories and details are recognized as part of the official Star Wars canon, while others exist in a separate, non-canon category and giving canon a different meaning in the media.

Canon as Facts

Open Canon and Closed Canon

Sheenagh Pugh divides canon into two categories: "open canon" and "closed canon". The concept of open canon refers to works that were not completed by their original creators, while closed canon refers to works that were completed by their original creators (Cupalová, 2011, p.16). The Lord of the Rings is an example of a closed canon because its creators, J.R.R. Tolkien, and his son Christopher John Reuel Tolkien, passed away in 1973 and 2020, respectively. As a result, no information can be added to the series beyond what has already been written. Video game series such as Life is Strange (Square Enix), Grand Theft Auto (Rockstar Games), Last of Us (Naughty Dog), Assassin's Creed (Ubisoft) are examples of open canons as they are still ongoing franchises.

Fanon and Headcanon

While the canon of a work comes from official sources and creators, the source of fanon is fan works like fanfictions, comics, animations, and fan theories written by fans. If all or parts of these works are accepted by a large part of the fan community, they are called fanon (Thomas, 2007, p. 2; Larsen & Carstensdóttir, 2023, p. 386). Examples include The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword (2011) manga by Akira Himekawa, Ico: Castle in the Mist (2004) novel by Miyuki Miyabe and many more.

According to Carpenter, headcanon is "the structure of meaning that informs and defines a fan's interpretation" (2011, p. 20). Although remarkably similar to fanon in that it is created by fans, what distinguishes headcanon from fanon is that headcanon is unique to individuals (McKnight, 2018, p. 138). To illustrate, a considerable number of fans of the series, consider Link from Ocarina of Time (Nintendo, 1998) married to an NPC (non-playable character) named Malon, based on various information from other entries in the series. Other examples are Mass Effect 3's (Bioware, 2012) "The Indoctrination Theory" and Final Fantasy VIII's (Square-Enix, 1999) "Squall's Dead" theory.
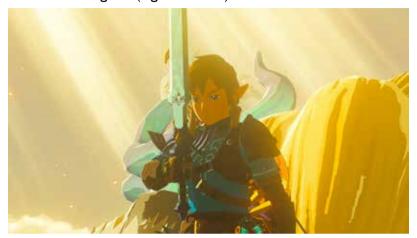
Canon as Works

Canon as a work is usually understood as a group of works, objects or texts that are recognized as exemplary within a defined social group and thus embody a set of binding rules (Locher, 2012, p. 31). As for video games, according to Perron et al. The Library of Congress in United States of America has already preserved games for its archives, following the establishment of a "game canon" selected by a small committee of academics, designers, and journalists (2022, p. 1). The concept of a "canon" in the context of video games differs significantly from its conventional definition. Rather than representing a fixed set of games that are universally accepted as the pinnacle of achievement, the video game canon encompasses titles that possess both historical and aesthetic value. Additionally, they do not embody binding rules to other video games.

FORMATION AND INTERCHANGEABILITY OF CANON AS FACTS IN VIDEO GAMES

The formation of a canon in a video game mostly begins with the release of it. The story, characters, and world-building elements in the game serve as the foundation for the game's canon. As Liebler and Chaney (2007, p. 1) say, the canon is defined by the creators of the work in question. But in some cases, fans' contributions can be confirmed and become part of the canon just like Leeroy Jenkins's inclusion to the World of Warcraft (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004).

The canon is frequently perceived as an inflexible set of immutable principles. However, as with other forms of knowledge, it is subject to change over time. According to Cook, the concept of canonicity is not set in stone but dynamic and subject to discussion. A work or a rule, in this scenario, is not deemed canon for eternity, but rather is canonized for a given time, with that status of canonicity constantly susceptible to change (2013, p. 273). For example, in an interview (Shmuplations, 2022), the creator of The Legend of Zelda series, Shigeru Miyamoto, stated that the order of the games in the timeline is as follows: Ocarina of Time, The Legend of Zelda (Nintendo, 1986), and A Link to the Past (Nintendo, 1991). However, the interview was conducted in 1999, and the series has since expanded to include numerous new games. Ocarina of Time was at the beginning of the game's timeline until the release of Hyrule Historia in 2011. The timeline presented in Hyrule Historia indicated that Skyward Sword (Nintendo, 2011) represented the first entry in the series' lore and canon, thereby altering Ocarina of Time's position in the series' timeline.

Another example is the weapon-wielding hand of Link, the protagonist of the game. Link, who used his left hand until Skyward Sword, started to use his right hand after this game (Figure 1 and 2).

Figure 1. *Link in Tears of the Kingdom, with his right sword-wielding hand holding the Master Sword*

Figure 2. *Link in Ocarina of Time (3D), with his left sword-wielding hand holding the Master Sword*

Friedenthal says that retcon (retroactive continuity) revisits past instalments to revise and rewrite them to create new narrative potential in the present, thereby influencing the future (2017, p. 12). For example, in Ocarina of Time, it was implied that the Sheikah were nearly annihilated in their efforts to defend the Royal Family of Hyrule during the Hyrulean Civil War, with only one Sheikah being seen in the game. But in Breath of the Wild (Nintendo, 2017) and Tears of the Kingdom (Nintendo, 2023), the Sheikah have a

considerable population. Another example comes from Bioshock: Infinite (Irrational Games, 2013) DLC (downloadable content) Burial at Sea (Irrational Games, 2014). Burial at Sea effectively negates the narrative of BioShock 2 (2K Marin, 2010) by rendering certain elements of the game, such as the Alpha Series Big Daddies and their connection to the Little Sisters, implausible within the established timeline. Conversely, the conclusion of Bioshock Infinite introduces the concept of infinite universes, suggesting the possibility of multiple Raptures. This has led to speculation among fans that one of these alternate realities could be the setting of the BioShock 2.

Reboots on the other hand, according to Willits (2009) means to restart an entertainment universe that has already been previously established and begin with a new storyline and/or timeline that disregards the original creator's previously established history, thus making it obsolete and void. Video game reboots extend beyond mere narrative alterations to encompass gameplay alterations as well (Lee et al., 2014, p. 6). For example, while Breath of the Wild rebooted the franchise in gameplay wise, God of War (Santa Monica Studio, 2018) rebooted the franchise both in story wise and gameplay wise.

CANON IN VIDEO GAMES

Heron (2017, p. 143 – 144) categorizes canon in video games into three types: "franchise canon", "individualized player canon", and "mechanical canon". Mechanical canon refers to the actions players can or cannot perform in the game. For instance, in Red Dead Redemption (Rockstar Games, 2010) and Red Dead Redemption II (Rockstar Games, 2018) John Marston cannot swim. In the context of individualized player canon all choices and actions made by the player are considered equally canon unless otherwise stated by authoritative sources. As an example, in The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt (CD Projekt Red, 2015), protagonist Geralt of Rivia can select Yennefer or Triss as a lover or in Red Dead Redemption II players can either have a bad Arthur Morgan or a good Arthur Morgan depending on their choices through the game. Although both are different choices, both are canon on the same levels. Conversely, the concept of the franchise canon represents a single exemplar within the broader spectrum of possibilities open to a given franchise. To illustrate, the first four instalments of the Resident Evil franchise by Capcom collectively established the defining characteristics of the series.

THE IMPORTANCE AND NECESSITY OF CANON

The concept of suspension of disbelief, first articulated by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in his book Biographia Literaria (1817, p. 159), suggests that readers (or players in this case) agree to temporarily accept the rules and logic of the fictional world to enjoy the work in question. However, for this suspension of disbelief to work effectively, video games, like any other media form, require a degree of internal consistency — such as a well-defined canon and established lore. Mentioned canon and lore, according to Liebler and Chaney, deal with the internal consistency of fictive universes; characters, and characterization (2007, p. 3). The rationale behind the necessity of canon and lore is that these two elements facilitate a more profound engagement with the video game for the player. Also, canon is important because it helps contextualize discussion and "rope off" irrelevant elements (Heron, 2017, p. 141) and according to Brooker "a wealth of fan-based material, rich in detail and imagination, is left to fill in the gaps of these official plots, to suggest new directions, flesh out secondary characters and build on or knock down the framework imposed from 'above' (1999, p. 50)".

In addition, The Critical Drinker / Will Jordan (2021) says that canon represents the collective belief of the fanbase in the world they care about and love. Furthermore, canon unifies them around the core ideas of that fanbase.

QUESTIONS REGARDING DEFINING THE CANON IN THE VIDEO GAMES

The Problem of Authorship and Player Agency

Video games are created by a team of many, just like the process employed in movie production. If the statements made by the film crew and artists are not regarded as canon, it is difficult to see why the same should not apply to video games. In video games, the statements made by the director and producer should be regarded as authoritative, as they are the most influential figures in the game's development just as the auteur theory developed by French and American critics such as François Truffaut, Andrew Sarris and Alexandre Artuc (MacKenzie, 2021, p. 133; Wollen, 2003, p. 39) states that cinema is the product of a director. According to auteur theory, the director is the author of a film, and the theory emphasizes cinema as a product of the director's personal, singular vision (Jackson, 2010, p. 1). This principle can be extended to video games as well. In the video game industry, there are individuals who exhibit the characteristics of an auteur, such as Hideo Kojima, Shigeru Miyamoto, Neil Druckmann, Sam, and Dan Houser.

One of the principal difficulties in defining canonicity in video games is their interactive nature, even within the basic gameplay there are a lot of variations to consider (Heron, 2017, p. 136; Larsen & Carstensdóttir, 2023, p. 38; Parker, 2013, p. 1). In contrast to movies, where the audience does not (directly) influence the narrative, in video games, the player has control over what occurs or does not occur. Although this is accurate, players are constrained in their actions by the limitations imposed by the game's creators. In this context, the general rule of determining canon (i.e., the creators of the work define what canon is or is not canon (Liebler & Chaney, 2007, p. 1) still holds to an extent. For example, in most The Legend of Zelda games, the player can select the protagonist's name. However, despite this freedom, the canon name of the protagonist has consistently been Link (Nihtilä, 2019, p. 29). Alternatively, in Assassin's Creed Odyssey (Ubisoft, 2018), players can choose to play as female Kassandra or male Alexios. However, in Assassin's Creed Valhalla (Ubisoft, 2020), it was revealed that the female choice of character is canon. Games with multiple endings like Dishonered 2 (Arkane Studios, 2016), games with branching paths like Fallout 4 (Bethesda Game Studios, 2015), open-ended narrative games like Detroit: Become Human (Quantic Dream, 2018), and games with fully player-driven stories like The Sims 4 (Maxis & The Sims Studio, 2014) (Bostan, 2022, p. 40-42; Lebowitz & Klug, 2011, p. 121-122) present a canon problem due to their high level of interactivity.

Canonicity of Transmedia Works like Crossovers, and Spin-Offs

In the modern era, transmedia works have achieved a greater degree of prevalence than ever before (Ryan, 2015, p.1). The concept of transmedia, emphasizes the dynamic and interconnected nature of narratives from different mediums. Scolari (2013, p. 46) defines transmedia storytelling as a kind of report in which a story is implemented through multiple communication media and platforms, and in which one part of the consumers plays an active role in this process of expansion. However, this intention also gives rise to a number of intentional problems, including inconsistency between transmedia works and the original work.

Crossovers and spin-offs are examples of transmedia works. Spin-offs are employed to expand the fictional universe, whereas crossovers are utilized for the purposes of providing fan service, enhancing brand visibility, and reaching a broader audience.

Miller defines spin-offs as "the modification of an established property for a new medium" (2014, p. 29). Spin-offs are found in various media, including video games, novels, comics, movies etc. For example, The Last of Us (2023)

series and Uncharted (2022) movie are a spin-off of the Uncharted and The Last of Us series by Naughty Dog.

Books like Bioshock: Rapture (John Shirley, 2011) And The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess manga (Akira Himekawa, 2016) are not considered canon because they are different from canon stories or not compatible with them and they are not official products. Heron (2017, p. 139-140) says that any official work like the movie can be regarded as exhibiting a lesser degree of canonicity than video games, or as having its own distinct canonicity. For example, in the Star Wars franchise, there is a canonicity difference between the different mediums. While there is a canonicity difference between the various media in the Star Wars franchise, this is not the case in the League of Legends (Riot Games, 2009). The animated series Arcane: League of Legends (Fortiche, 2021) is canon as the game itself.

Spin-off video games on the other hand differ from Miller's definition of spin-offs, although the video game spin-offs use the same medium as main-line games, they differ in gameplay, genre, narrative, and characters. For example, Link: The Faces of Evil (Animation Magic, 1993), Zelda: The Wand of Gamelon (Animation Magic, 1993), Zelda's Adventure (Viridis Corporation, 1996), Cadence of Hyrule: Crypt of the NecroDancer Featuring The Legend of Zelda (Brace Yourself Games, 2019), Hyrule Warriors (Koemi Tecmo, 2014), and Hyrule Warriors: Age of Calamity (Koemi Tecmo, 2020) are the spin-offs of the Legend of Zelda franchise. It should be noted that these games are not considered part of the official canon timeline, as they are not made by Nintendo. Nevertheless, there are instances where a franchise has canon spin-off games. For instance, Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops (Konami, 2006) and Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance (Platinum Games, 2013), both of which are part of the canon timeline of the Metal Gear series, are examples of such games. Or some previously canon games can be decanonized just like CONV/RGENCE: A League of Legends Story (Double Stallion, 2023).

While Guerrero-Pico & Scolari (2016, p. 187) defines crossovers as works that show characters from two or more narrative worlds in the context of the same medium, Carreker (2012, p. 55) provides two definitions for it: 1) an appearance of a character from one title in another character's publication," and 2) "the negotiated and legal appearance of one company's IP [intellectual property] in another company's product". As Heron (2017, p. 138) points out, certain works, such as Mario Kart (Nintendo) and Super Smash Bros. (Nintendo) are not considered by many to be part of the established canon because they are explicitly non-canonical works, and these must be ring-fenced to be excluded from any sensible critical discussion of the wider universe's lore.

Canonicity of Side Quests

Asimos says that side quests are distinct from the primary scripted narrative of a video game and are often employed as a means of facilitating world-building (2018, p. 103). As side quests are not a prerequisite for completing the game, they are not typically regarded as part of the canon. However, given that they can contain details about the game's lore, they do contribute to the lore and the information they provide is canon.

To ascertain whether something is considered canon, it is essential to establish whether it is included or referenced within the game or in official paratexts (like creator interviews) of the game itself. Without the criteria mentioned above, it is impossible to ascertain whether a piece of information can be considered canon. For example, in Breath of the Wild, players could choose to complete or not the "Hylian Homeowner" side quest (building a house for Link in Hateno Village) and the "From the Ground Up" side quest (building Tarrey Town) to beat the game because they did not affect the main story of the game. However, when Breath of the Wild's direct sequel, Tears of the Kingdom, was released, players found Tarrey Town and Link's house in Hateno Village in-game. Therefore, in the canonical trajectory (Benford & Giannachi, 2008, p. 73) of the game, Link must have completed these side quests; otherwise, the results of these side quests would not be in the direct sequel. So, with the release of Tears of the Kingdom, these side quests became part of the canon. However, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, it can be assumed that the existence of other side quests in the game is unconfirmed like "Fireproof Lizard Roundup" side quest. Consequently, these side quests are not considered to be part of the game's official canon until further information.

Canonicity of In-Game Files and Concept Arts

According to Heron (2017, p. 147), in-game files such as game assets cannot be considered part of the canon because a normal player cannot experience them in a playthrough. He says they can only be regarded as suggestive rather than canon. Heron's previously mentioned approach can be employed for the canonicity of concept arts as well. As with the in-game files, these concept arts offer players insights into the game, though they cannot be considered canon because they do not take place in the final product.

Canonicity of Different Versions of the Same Game

Although remasters and remakes are often used interchangeably, they do have slight differences. As Hayton (2020) says, most remasters have better

resolution and fidelity than original games. On the other hand, remakes simply take the original game's mechanics, and controls, and rebuild them using modern technology.

Although a game's remastered or remake version may not be significantly different from the original game, different versions of the same game can include details that alter the game's lore and canon. The murals at Hyrule Castletown in Twilight Princess (Nintendo, 2006) exemplify this situation. In the original version of Twilight Princess, the murals (Figure 3) were difficult to decipher due to low-quality textures. However, in the 2016 remaster by Tantalus Media, the murals were clearly visible with improved resolution (Figure 4). After playing the game and seeing the murals, fans began to theorize about their meaning and place in The Legend of Zelda canon. In 2020, a Reddit post, released added information about the murals[1]. The remastered version of the game features murals that were created by developer Jack Kirby Crosby, according to the post mentioned in the video. As the murals in the HD version were not created by the developers of the original version of the game, many fans no longer consider the murals as canon.

Figure 3. *The Murals from Twilight Princess*

Figure 4. *The Murals from Twilight Princess HD*

1 The Reddit post in question has been deleted, but a screenshot of the post was included in the video "Zelda: Twilight Princess' strangest mystery. . . solved?" by Youtuber Zeltik.

The original version of Link's Awakening was created by Nintendo in 1993 for the original Game Boy, but it is also available in versions for the Game Boy Color and the Nintendo Switch. In general, remakes include new features and improvements. To illustrate, the Color Dungeon in the Game Boy Color version and the Chamber Dungeons in the Nintendo Switch version are absent from the original version of the game. In such instances, it is necessary to determine whether these new features should be incorporated into the game's established canon and lore.

Localization and translation of video games may result in changes to the lore and canon of the game. For example, in the final boss battle of Breath of the Wild, Princess Zelda says, "He has given up on reincarnation and assumed his pure, enraged form" in the localized English version. On the other hand, the words she says in the Japanese version mean "This form was born from his obsessive refusal to give up on revival… (Legends of Localization, 2017)." Basically, the English version of the game says the opposite of the original Japanese text, thus changing the canon and lore of the game. In such cases, the prevailing opinion is that the non-localized version of the game is the accurate representation of the original, as it is the version created and written by the developer team.

Other alterations to the lore may be implemented by introducing game updates and patches. For instance, the date of Mark Jefferson's birth in Life is Strange was modified from April 11, 1967, to April 11, 1975, with the release of a patch update on January 19, 2016, approximately one year after the game's initial release, therefore changing the lore of the game and making the first date not canon.

Canonicity of Easter Eggs

According to Mago, "Easter eggs are hidden elements implemented especially in pop culture outcomes, and their definitions are unified in terms of their hidden, secret and surprising characteristics" (2019, p. 49). The issue of the easter egg's canonicity concerns the distinction between what is an easter egg and what is a normal part of the fictional universe of the video game. For example, there are a lot of places named after other characters and places from other Legend of Zelda games in Breath of the Wild and Tears of the Kingdom like Linebeck Island, Lake Saria and Mido Swamp. To ascertain whether a particular item can be considered an easter egg, it is necessary to determine whether it can be integrated into the game's universe. To illustrate, in Ghost of Tsushima (Sucker Punch, 2020), the protagonist Jin Sakai has paper figures on his desk, some of which are in the form of racing cars, guitars, and motorbikes (Figure 5). Given that the game is set in 13th-century Japan,

these objects have not yet been invented and therefore do not belong within the game universe. From this logic, it can be concluded that these figures are clearly easter eggs from Sony's other games like Gran Turismo Sport (Polyphony Digital, 2017) Horizon Zero Dawn (Guerrilla Games, 2017), The Last of Us Part II (Naughty Dog, 2020). It is necessary to determine whether these names are canon information or just an easter egg to determine the canon.

Figure 5. *The paper figures on Jin Sakai's desk*

In Link's Awakening, there are enemies from other Nintendo games, including Super Mario Brothers and Kirby series (Figure 6). Given that The Legend of Zelda games are set in a different universe to those games, it is evident that these are easter eggs.

Figure 6. *A Super Mario Brother's enemy (a Chain Chomp) in Link's Awakening (2019)*

In Grand Theft Auto V (Rockstar Games, 2013), players may discover a book entitled Red Dead, authored by J. Marston, within the house of one of the game's protagonists (Figure 7). Many fans have said that this book, either written by John Marston or his son Jack Marston from Red Dead series, substantiates the fan theory that the Grand Theft Auto and Red Dead series are in the same fictional universe. This item can be just an easter egg or evidence. In the absence of further confirmation, the question of whether it is an easter egg or not will remain unresolved.

Figure 7. *Library of one of the protagonists of Grand Theft Auto V*

Canonicity of Additional Contents

Hedman (2021, p. 7) outlines that downloadable content (DLC) constitutes a category of products that can be purchased to enhance the functionality of base games. While DLC's are typically in the form of software, they may also be in the form of hardware, just like Amiibo in Nintendo consoles. DLCs are created by the developers of the game in question, therefore they are canon just like the base game. However, just as with the canonicity of easter eggs (mentioned above), if the content of the DLC does not take place in the universe of the game in question and the content of it is clearly from another franchise, it will not be considered part of the game's canon. To illustrate, the DLC for Breath of the Wild features armor from Xenoblade Chronicles 2 (Monolith Soft, 2017). Despite the armor's origin from a canon source, it is not considered canon because it belongs to a different franchise.

LEVELS OF CANONICITY IN VIDEO GAMES

While canon might be assumed as a binary distinction between canon or not canon Larsen and Carstensdóttir, consider the relationship more nuanced and complicated than a binary distinction (2023, p. 384). For example, the Star Wars canon is divided into five categories. The "G-canon" is inviolable and comprises the six main Star Wars movies and all other ideas originating with George Lucas. The "T-canon" (Television Canon) includes animated and live-action series. The "C-canon" (Continuity Canon) comprises texts from the "Expanded Universe" that are canon, including materials such as comic books, novels, and games. These are fully canon, except when contradicted by "G-canon" or "T-canon" sources. The "S-canon" (Secondary Canon) comprises older texts and text elements. The final category is the "N-canon" (Non-canon), which contains the apocrypha of the franchise. (Parker, 2013, p. 160-161).

- First-tier canon: This is the canon that has been officially confirmed by the development team of the given medium. Princess Zelda(s) being a descendant of the Goddess Hylia and the Triforce being composed of courage, power and wisdom are examples of first-tier canon.

- Second-tier canon: The veracity of lore at this level is not explicitly confirmed but is based on the logical conclusion of confirmed first-tier canon lore. For example, it is established within the lore that Princess Zelda(s) is a descendant of the Goddess Hylia by blood. Therefore, it can be reasonably assumed that one or two of the parents of Princess Zelda(s) is also a descendant of the Goddess Hylia.

- Third-tier canon: In this tier, there is some evidence to suggest that this is the case, although this evidence is sometimes open to interpretation and has not been officially confirmed or left to ambiguity by purpose. Many fans, for example, found evidence of a romantic relationship between Princess Zelda and Link in Breath of the Wild and Tears of the Kingdom but when asked to Aonuma, the series' producer, he replied "I will leave it to everyone's imagination [whether Link and Zelda are in a relationship] (Bailey, 2023)."

CONCLUSION

The objective of this research paper is to provide a comprehensive examination of the canon problem in video games. This research paper employs close reading as a method to clarify this problem. The application of the close

reading technique to video games has yielded insights into the processes of canon formation in the evolving domain of digital narratives.

The analysis, conducted with franchises from different genres, aimed to elucidate the criteria for determining canon in video games, in the light of previous studies on the subject. The findings extend beyond the scope of game studies to encompass fan and media studies. In video games, the establishment of canon shapes the narrative of the game and the immersion of the player.

The results of the research paper reinforce the necessity for a more rigorous and systematic approach to defining the canon in video games. This research illustrates the viability of the close reading method as a means of resolving the complexities inherent in the determination of a canon for video games.

The research conducted for this article demonstrated that, although the canon of video games is essentially subjective, it can be based on objective criteria with sufficient research. In future studies, greater emphasis should be placed on objective qualities in determining the canon of video games.

The limitation of this research is the subjectivity of the canon in video games, which varies considerably between different fan communities and even individual players.

As the video games continues to evolve in both in narratological and gameplay ways, the role of canon will remain pivotal. The concept of canon anchors the vast universes that creators create, guides the storytelling process, and ensures that each new entry in franchise builds on a solid foundation. By respecting and expanding the established canon, creators can continue to deliver compelling, cohesive experiences that resonate with players for generations to come.

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Figure 1. Taken from The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom game by writers.

Figure 2. https://fictionphile.com/legend-of-zelda-ocarina-of-time-best-zelda-game/

Figure 3. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rKm43kUWYM

Figure 4. https://aminoapps.com/c/zelda/page/blog/confusing-rito-mural-in-castle-town-tphd/BQot_wujeRVvwkQlBbkQ2ojR6d350B

Figure 5. https://www.gamesradar.com/ghost-of-tsushima-ps4-exclusives-easter-egg-pays-tribute-to-god-of-war-horizon-and-more/

Figure 6. https://zeldauniverse.net/2020/09/19/zeldas-study-the-many-mario-enemies-in-links-awakening/

Figure 7. https://www.reddit.com/r/reddeadredemption/comments/919zxg/thoughts_on_this_red_dead_book_easter_egg_in_gta_v/

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