

The D-Day Landings in First-Person Shooters (1999-2005)

**A Case Study in Cultural Imperialism and
the Americanisation of Popular History**

A Dissertation Submitted By

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Abstract

This study investigates the extent to which levels featuring the D-Day Landings in six First-Person Shooter games released 1999-2005 contain narrative choices that reinforce the versions of history preferred by the United States government; how they are presented; and how they compare to the cinematic depictions that preceded them. Through their predominance in the industry at the time, the US held great power in consistently representing their version of history, thus impacting the cultural memories of a significant portion of consumers. Research into the games was broken down into the different layers in which narrative is communicated to the players: paratexts; cinematics; and gameplay – each containing their own strategies according to the medium in which they exist. A great number of narratives can be found at every level that correlate with those that benefit the US government, such as centralisation of the US within World War II; glorification of war; and positioning it as a 'good' war – downplaying or even omitting many of its negative aspects.

Table of Contents

List of Figures.....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vii
Author’s Declaration	viii
Introduction	1
Chapter One: Literature Review	4
Definitions	4
Digital Gaming	6
Digital Games Studies	10
Government Influence in Media.....	15
Cultural Imperialism.....	20
Conclusion.....	22
Methodology.....	24
Chapter Two: Established Cinematic Narratives.....	26
The Films.....	27
Cinematic Style.....	29
Narrative Themes.....	32
Conclusion.....	36
Chapter Three: Priming Narratives.....	37
Authentic History.....	38
Authenticating Detail.....	41
Cinematic Legitimation	45
Narrative Themes.....	51
Conclusion.....	56
Chapter Four: Framing Narratives.....	57
Authenticating Detail.....	58
Cinematic Adaptation.....	69
Narrative Themes.....	72
Conclusion.....	73

Chapter Five: Ludonarratives	74
Cinematic Adaptation	74
Authenticating Detail.....	77
Narrative Control.....	81
Glorification of War	82
Conclusion.....	84
Conclusion.....	85
Bibliography	87
Glossary.....	95

List of Figures

<u>Figure 2.1</u>	<i>Stills from The Longest Day (top) and Saving Private Ryan (below), depicting</i>	42
<u>Figure 2.2</u>	<i>Binns and Ryder’s “quintessential D-Day shot” following troops as they advance up the beach.</i>	
<u>Figure 3.1</u>	<i>An example of how the MOHAA Strategy Guide uses its design to give a feeling of historical authenticity by including a mock newspaper clipping and a ‘handwritten’ version of Eisenhower’s D-Day speech.</i>	54
<u>Figure 3.2</u>	<i>A still from the MOHF ‘Behind the Scenes’ video (top), and an advert for</i>	57-8
<u>Figure 3.3</u>	<i>MOHF and MOHAA (immediately above) showing American troops exiting</i>	
<u>Figure 3.4</u>	<i>their Higgins Boats under German machine-gun fire – clearly taking inspiration from the opening sequences of Saving Private Ryan (below).</i>	
<u>Figure 3.5</u>	<i>A still taken from the MOHAA trailer showing an over-the-shoulder shot of</i>	59
<u>Figure 3.6</u>	<i>a German machine-gunner mowing down American soldiers as they exit their Higgins Boat (above), clearly adapting a similar shot from the Omaha sequence in Saving Private Ryan (below).</i>	
<u>Figure 3.7</u>	<i>An inlaid picture taken from the back cover of MOHF, showing the player</i>	60
<u>Figure 3.8</u>	<i>aiming a pistol at a tank crossing a bridge (left). Compare to a shot taken from the climax of Saving Private Ryan of the protagonist vainly firing his pistol at a tank crossing a bridge toward him (right).</i>	
<u>Figure 3.9</u>	<i>The closing shot of the MOHAA trailer. The heroic GI becomes a dominating figure, with a heavenly light glowing around their silhouette.</i>	65
<u>Figure 4.1</u>	<i>“The eyes of the world are upon you,” as depicted by MOHF (above) and</i>	72
<u>Figure 4.2</u>	<i>COD 2 (below). MOHF’s eyes are the Allied leaders Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin. COD 2 opts for the emotionally affective women and children, taking shelter from the war.</i>	
<u>Figure 4.3</u>	<i>The mission briefing in MOHAA takes the form of a slideshow presentation, opening on the official Great Seal of America, conferring a sense of authority on the narratives to come.</i>	74
<u>Figure 4.4</u>	<i>The MOHAA level briefing contains several maps (above). A basic map</i>	75-6
<u>Figure 4.5</u>	<i>showing the important locations and US landing beaches (top); a more</i>	
<u>Figure 4.6</u>	<i>detailed strategic map of Normandy and the six Allied landing targets</i>	
<u>Figure 4.7</u>	<i>(middle); and an even more detailed map of Omaha Beach and its fortifications (immediately above). BRO’s map is similar to MOHAA’s first and second maps, however it interestingly uses a less-politicised flag for the German forces (below).</i>	

<u>Figure 4.8</u>	WWII GI load-screen, utilising one of Robert Capa's Magnificent Eleven photographs of the landings.	77
<u>Figure 4.9</u>	The MOHAA briefing uses an in-game image of the beach, substituting simulation for reality. The presentation is also situated within a simulated briefing room, with environmental props such as a telephone, lamp, and information slate.	78
<u>Figure 4.10</u>	The simulated desk environments within the load-screens of MOHAA (above)	80
<u>Figure 4.11</u>	and COD 2 (below).	
<u>Figure 4.12</u>	The underwater shot from SPR (above), showing soldiers dragged down by the weight of their equipment and killed by machine-gun fire. This is copied	82
<u>Figure 4.13</u>	in MOHF (below).	
<u>Figure 4.14</u>	A traumatised Captain Miller watches as soldiers run from a burning Higgins	83
<u>Figure 4.15</u>	Boat in SPR (above). A similar scene can be found in COD 2 (below).	
<u>Figure 5.1</u>	A medic throws his equipment in anger as his patient is killed in SPR (above).	88
<u>Figure 5.2</u>	Similar events occur in MOHF (below), where a medic prepares a needle shortly before his patient is shot.	
<u>Figure 5.3</u>	Hemmbalken defences in SPR, consisting of a slanted pole topped with a landmine. However, SPR's are set facing the wrong way, as landing craft were supposed to drive up the pole to the mine. The Czech Hedgehog, a large metal tank trap, also features in the bottom-left.	89
<u>Figure 5.4</u>	WWII GI's Waffen SS Command flag, used in place of the more obviously politically-charged swastika.	90
<u>Figure 5.5</u>	MOHAA's use of the Nazi Imperial Eagle, stamped on boxes throughout the bunker complex	91
<u>Figure 5.6</u>	BRO's use of maps and posters to simulate a populated German bunker.	92
<u>Figure 5.7</u>		

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Author's Declaration

I declare that this dissertation/project is all my own work and the sources of information and the material I have used (including the internet) have been fully identified and properly acknowledged.

C. I. Dewson

Introduction

For in the past winners wrote history; now they are programming and selling it.
— Andrew J. Salvati and Jonathan M. Bullinger, *Selective Authenticity and the Playable Past*

The United States has long enjoyed a disproportionate ability to influence popular perceptions of the past, through its hegemony over particular narratives in media production for a significant section of the planet. Government intervention in the industry has been well-documented and shows that Hollywood, in particular, has been subject to vast amounts of interference to ensure their productions contain only narratives that benefit the US. Despite the popularity of the video game industry – also largely dominated by American developers – there has still been little study of how this new medium continues the film industry’s work in shaping world views.

To begin filling the gap, this thesis will take a case-study approach looking at First-Person Shooter (FPS) games featuring the D-Day landings, released between 1999-2005. FPS games – in which “players explore a virtual world from a first-person perspective while using various firearms and other weapons to fight enemies” – are a natural choice as they form a large proportion of WWII-based games; constitute some of the most popular games of all-time; and the nature of the genre allows developers great control over player experience, as well as increased player immersion.¹ World War II (WWII) is also an obvious choice of topic, given its status in the collective memory of not only the United States but much of the world, and forms the basis from which the US rose to its global hegemony. From this, D-Day provides an excellent event thanks to its significance within the war’s narrative - often (incorrectly) seen as the first real entry of the US into the conflict and thus the turning-point. The timeframe of 1999-2005 represents the first wave of WWII FPS games which lasted until around 2007 (however the D-Day setting slowed before this, hence the smaller timeframe).

There are several clauses to this research that must be noted, however. Though this thesis will be looking at the use of video games as an agent of cultural imperialism by the United States, this is not to say that other countries do not also participate in utilising media to better their positions in the minds of audiences. There is also little possibility of being able to prove that the narratives are intentionally formed in an attempt to shape opinion. It is impossible to deduce the intent of an artist, just as it is impossible for art (including video games) to have the exact same effect on every member of its audience. This is especially relevant to video games which tend to be a group effort, meaning attributing

¹ Pieter Van Den Heede, “Engaging with the Second World War through Digital Gaming” (Thesis (Ph.D.), Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2021), 6, 30, accessed October 1, 2021, RePub, Erasmus University Rotterdam's Institutional Repository, <https://repub.eur.nl/pub/134918>.

its content to a single authorship is problematic in itself, even before other actors such as marketing place their own influence on audience reception.²

This thesis is also not a demand for ‘accurate’ games. Complete accuracy is impossible, as Robert Niemi wrote regarding films, media are inevitably “[products] of selective analysis, guesswork, speculation, and fantasy [...] influenced by the filmmaker’s biases and political agenda.”³ However, this does not preclude important discussions around accuracy, which contribute to the broad discourse surrounding the subject by every stakeholder in the industry – from academics, to developers and their marketing teams, to players themselves.⁴ One debate is on what ‘accuracy’ can mean, for example whether it is reducible to visual fidelity, or if it includes the ability to evoke “certain feelings or responses.”⁵ Jean Baudrillard’s concept of ‘hyperreality’ has also been applied to historical video games in this context, as they produce another simulacrum for consumption. Baudrillard contends that as events are recreated through media, they evolve into something new and the original is lost – the real events no longer exist, the games that depict them do not actually depict reality as it happened but the audience’s expectations of what they *believe* happened.⁶ Thus, any attempt at accurate recreation is a fantasy in Baudrillard’s eyes.

The first section of this thesis will look at the context in which its research is undertaken, what relevant literature exists in this area and what they can provide to help this analysis. The review will focus immediately on the research closest to the thesis topic: how WWII is depicted in digital games, and how digital games can be studied. It then expands to the subject of government influence in the media – particularly the film industry -, and how this can show the American Government’s involvement in shaping popular media narratives of the past and how this has evolved to include the digital gaming industry. Finally, the review takes a brief look at the concept of imperialism and cultural imperialism; how they have been applied in the past and how they can be linked to the US gaming industry. The chapter concludes by explaining the methodology with which this thesis will investigate how these games push narratives beneficial to the United States.

Chapter Two sets the backdrop to the analysis: how the D-Day landings were depicted in the films that preceded the games. Eight films have been included here, chosen as they include D-Day and had a significant release (thus, it does not include small films such as those that may have been released straight to video, DVD, or streaming). Of those eight, just three (*The Longest Day*, *The Big Red One*,

² Clara Fernández-Vara, *Introduction to Game Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2015), 57.

³ Robert Niemi, *100 Great War Movies: The Real History Behind the Films* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2018), xii.

⁴ Tara Jane Coppleson, "But That’s Not Accurate: The Differing Perceptions of Accuracy in Cultural-Heritage Videogames between Creators, Consumers and Critics," *Rethinking History* 21, no. 3 (2017): 416, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2017.1256615>.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 417.

⁶ Eva Kingsepp, "Immersive Historicity in World War II Digital Games," *Human IT* 8, no. 2 (2006): 65, 70, <https://humanit.hb.se/article/view/121>.

and *Saving Private Ryan*) feature the landings to any significant extent and are therefore analysed in more depth.⁷ By analysing the style, content, and narrative themes of these earlier depictions it is possible to then draw parallels and distinctions with the games that followed. The main body of this thesis is to be found in Chapters Three, Four, and Five. The analysis of the games themselves has been broken down into three layers, each forming a chapter. Chapter Three focusses on the priming layer found in paratexts: how games sell themselves; frame the gameplay; and add additional meanings to their content. Chapter Four looks at the next layer: the framing narrative –found in load-screens, cut-scenes, and cinematics that contextualise gameplay. The fifth and final chapter centres on the ludonarrative. These constitute the experiences of playing the D-Day levels and how the games continue to drive the narratives in the most interactive layer.

⁷ Darryl F. Zanuck et al., *The Longest Day* (Darryl F. Zanuck Productions, Inc., 1962); Samuel Fuller, *The Big Red One* (Lorimar, 1980); Steven Spielberg, *Saving Private Ryan* (DreamWorks Pictures; Paramount Pictures; Amblin Entertainment, 1998).

Chapter One: Literature Review

While there is a lot of research already undertaken in important adjacent fields, there remains a gap in the synthesis of these areas into a study of how popular history has been portrayed in ways that benefit a particular (in this case, American) narrative. This review aims to give an overview of what has been written before, teasing out elements that will be useful to this study, and give an insight into where this study can fit within the existing scholarship. The interdisciplinary nature of this thesis has resulted in a wide range of subjects being included, and so the literature review will feature those areas closest to the thesis subject first before widening to the more peripheral areas of study.

Following a short section defining some of the key terms used throughout the thesis, the next section focusses on the scholarship closest to this work, that which looks at the representation of World War II (WWII) in digital gaming and how they can be studied. Many insights will be utilised later in the thesis, such as Gish's 'tripartite narrational layering' structure that can be found within games – and has been adapted to form the overall structure of the thesis. The research of other academics into WWII video games are also discussed, as well as how they reinforce the central idea of the thesis that these games continue and reinforce traditional (US governmental) narratives of the war. However, while there is an existing discourse around the subject, there is yet to be any real application of these separate findings into a single analysis that considers the combined effects of such narratives on historical understanding. This wider scope is considered in the second part, which delves into the practice of games studies: the obstacles faced, and methods used, and how these will apply to the thesis.

The next section expands to government influence in the media, particularly in the US. Much of this area focusses on the film industry: how it has collaborated with the US government, and how this has aided official aims. Unfortunately, the evidence of the continuance of such collaboration has dried up over the years as the government has endeavoured to conceal its work. There has been some coverage of the expansion into the gaming sector, however details remain thin and thus the research has been forced either into looking at the broad strokes of information available to the public, or into more theoretical fields. The final section will look at work on the concept of cultural imperialism. This is both the broadest research, and the furthest from the thesis itself, but still requires inclusion for contextualisation and justification of the term's use in describing US activities in the title.

Definitions

Several terms are used throughout this thesis that deserve defining here. The most prominent is 'popular history,' which is used to refer to history as it is marketed toward, consumed by, and thus exists in the minds of, the public – usually in the form of television, film, books, and games. While this kind of history may be looked down upon by academic purists, it is undoubtedly the case that popular history makes history accessible to the masses and generates interest in the subject in ways that academia often fails to achieve. However, with accessibility often comes simplification and popularity multiplies the dangers of misinformation. Modern historians generally agree that there is no single version of history,

and certainly not one that can encompass every aspect of the debate, interpretation, and complexity that ultimately construct it – but this does not make for very accessible reading. Thus, popular history tends to simplify events, their causes, and consequences, and provide an easily digestible narrative that fills the audience's appetite for neatly packaged stories. The lack of historical education can lead to audiences accepting this as *the* history, rather than one potential interpretation, giving disproportionate weight to popular history over academia in the minds of the general population - whether they have been simplified for accessibility or sensationalised for increased sales, leading to potentially problematic versions of history becoming widely accepted.

Adaptation is broadly defined by Hutcheon and O’Flynn as “an extended, deliberate, announced revisitiation of a particular work of art.”⁸ This definition is then broken down into three perspectives: “acknowledged transposition [...], appropriation/salvaging [... and] an extended intertextual engagement.”⁹ As Straumann notes, film has long “sought to accrue cultural capital by drawing on the literary canon,” while also using well-known texts as “a way of ensuring prior knowledge” in the audience – a strategy that has been passed on to video games.¹⁰ Hutcheon also points out the financial incentives for adaptation, with pre-established texts being seen as a “safe bet,” or companies recycling franchises through multiple media to appeal to existing audiences, as well as new ones.¹¹ But adaptations are not always exact replications, they employ different ‘attitudes’ to the source texts “ranging from tribute and homage, illustration and translation to appropriation and transformation, rewriting and critique, re-vision and subversion.”¹² Most relevant is Miller’s note that repetition of narrative is “one of the most powerful [...] ways to reassert the basic ideology of our culture,” and Naremore and Bazin’s suggestion that “adaptations can support the creation of cultural and national myths.”¹³

Remediation is defined by Bolter and Grusin as “the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms.”¹⁴ In other words, it describes the interaction between media, as they “[appropriate] the techniques, forms, and social significance of other media.”¹⁵ Like adaptations, remediation works as a dialogue, with newer and older media borrowing from each other – for example, video games borrow

⁸ Linda Hutcheon, and Siobhan O’Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London: Routledge, 2013), 170.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁰ Barbara Straumann, "13. Adaptation - Remediation - Transmediality," in *Handbook of Intermediality: Literature - Image - Sound - Music*, ed. Gabriele Rippl (Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 252.

¹¹ Hutcheon, and O’Flynn, *Adaptation*, 5.

¹² Straumann, "Adaptation," 250.

¹³ J. Hillis Miller, "Narrative," in *Critical Terms for Literary Studies*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 72; Straumann, "Adaptation," 253.

¹⁴ Jay David Bolter, and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 273.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

cinematic techniques such as camera angles, while film has incorporated digital technology to enhance special effects.¹⁶

First defined by Gerard Genette, paratexts are texts that accompany and form the ‘threshold’ between the inside and outside of other texts. Regarding books, Genette gave examples of paratexts such as covers, dedications, interviews, reviews, and advertisements.¹⁷ These can be used to create a fuller picture of these main texts, as they help consumers add additional meanings and can therefore demonstrate how texts are framed by their producers and received by their consumers. Promotional paratexts can also show “how the industry views its own individual attempts at writing history in and through videogames,” as well as the “idealised audience and the positioning of games.”¹⁸

Digital Gaming

World War II in Digital Gaming

The most relevant literature to this thesis is that covering how WWII is depicted in digital games. Debra Ramsay identifies several themes that appear throughout American media depicting WWII: the citizen-soldier, the average Joe forced into service; a war that is both necessary and virtuous; the bonds of brotherhood forged in battle; and the GI as both protagonist and victim.¹⁹ But Eva Kingsepp takes this further, arguing that these games do not just continue the themes of previous depictions, but directly reference them. The imagery and setting experienced while playing these games are the recreation of media such as *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), which in turn are recreations of documentary footage – thus the player is experiencing an intertextuality going several layers deep.²⁰ Kingsepp proposes that in games such as *Medal of Honor: Frontline* (2002), “it is primarily a simulation of Spielberg’s film that we are experiencing, not one of occupied Europe – although in popular memory this may account to just about the same.”²¹ Ramsay points out that the games also often feature actors from these films, and even directly copy levels and cut-scenes.²² This adaptation within games will help answer the research

¹⁶ Straumann, "Adaptation," 254.

¹⁷ Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (London: New York University Press, 2010), 25.

¹⁸ Esther Wright, "On the Promotional Context of Historical Video Games," *Rethinking History* 22, no. 4 (2018): 600, 602, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2018.1507910>; Ed Vollans et al., "Introduction: “It’s [Not Just] in the Game”: The Promotional Context of Video Games," *Kinephanos: Journal of Media Studies and Popular Culture* 7, no. 1 (2017): 2, accessed April 17, 2022, <https://www.kinephanos.ca/2017/its-not-just-in-the-game-the-promotional-context-of-video-games-le-contexte-promotionnel-des-jeux-video/>.

¹⁹ Debra Ramsay, "Brutal Games: "Call of Duty" and the Cultural Narrative of World War II," *Cinema Journal* 54, no. 2 (2015): 94-95, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43653093>.

²⁰ Kingsepp, "Immersive," 68; Spielberg, *Saving Private Ryan*.

²¹ Kingsepp, "Immersive," 68; EA Los Angeles, *Medal of Honor: Frontline*, Electronic Arts, PlayStation 2, 2002.

²² Ramsay, "Brutal Games," 99.

questions, relating the depictions back to their ‘original’ portrayals in earlier media – giving a clearer picture of how narratives have evolved or remained the same over time.

Harrison Gish provides a structure that can be used to analyse the “tripartite narrational layering of history” within WWII games.²³ This layering can be broken down into: the setting of the game within the war; the setting of each individual level; and the gameplay itself. The first layer is usually established in the opening and closing sequences, often in cinematics that create the grander historical background for the game and thus the players’ actions, giving the audience a feeling that they are about to recreate and participate in an authentic historical experience. The second layer is the narrative linking the setting and gameplay, generally utilising cutscenes that establish a “spatio-temporal localisation” of the level and provide the player the context of the incoming battle. A final layer of narrative is then provided through the actual experience of playing, which in First-Person Shooter (FPS) games can generally be reduced to moving, shooting, and looking for weapons or ammunition – a narrative of violence.²⁴ Though in this thesis the first layer will be the least important in many of the games, as the D-Day landings tend to feature as a single level, it will still be important to make note of the games’ backdrop to better situate them within the overarching narrative the games set the events in. More important are the second and third layers, which establish the more immediate setting of the landings and the story told as the level progresses – these should give a clearer view of how the events are portrayed, which can then be related back to previous media. However, I would propose that there is in fact a fourth layer – that of a priming narrative provided by the paratexts that accompany the games and in fact precede those described in the initial structure -, thus turning Gish’s tripartite layering of narrative into a quadripartite structure (this fourth, paratextual, layer will be discussed later).

Van den Heede’s study of the marketing paratexts of WWII games find several common ‘developer narratives.’ First is a “near exclusive focus on military and political history” that tends to concentrate on technological aspects such as weaponry and ‘battle-centred’ narratives that focus on the military strategies (both of which reduce violence to the abstract, avoiding the death and destruction involved).²⁵ Paratexts also tended toward ‘Nazisploitation’ themes, as well as depicting soldiers in two different dichotomies: the good Allies and evil Axis, but also distinguishing between evil Nazis and supposedly ‘apolitical’ Wehrmacht. As in the games themselves, marketing paratexts make direct references to previous depictions - both those produced during and after the war - as well as propaganda produced by the Nazis themselves, to further increase the recognition and thus ‘authenticity’ that players will feel.²⁶

²³ Harrison Gish, "Playing the Second World War: Call of Duty and the Telling of History," *Eludamos* 4, no. 2 (2010).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 170-172.

²⁵ Van Den Heede, "Engaging," 34-36.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

As Ramsay notes, a study undertaken by Joel Penney concluded that gamers who play FPSs set in WWII choose this setting as they see it as a source of authenticity, a main selling point of WWII genre games, and therefore gain deeper emotional engagement.²⁷ Kingsepp emphasises this, pointing to paratexts that focus heavily on linking their games to ‘authentic’ weapons and missions that the player will recognise from other media.²⁸ They argue this results in a game’s perceived authenticity being reliant on how well it relates itself to the player’s conception of the war, resulting in developers using elements of popular culture and ‘myth’ more than historical reality.²⁹

Attempts at portraying the feeling of authenticity occur at every level of the games. Both the games and individual missions tend to be introduced to the player through cutscenes and other onscreen signifiers. Ramsay and Gish look at the introductions in *Call of Duty: World at War* (2008), noting its use of multiple, simultaneous narrative elements to produce the impression of credibility and authenticity.³⁰ Using maps and stylised graphics, the sequences superimpose a slew of facts, dates, and statistics, as well as windows showing archival footage of battles and even war crimes, complete with arrows from these windows pointing to the locations in which this footage was supposedly filmed.³¹ In the games themselves authenticity is produced through careful replication and use of lexia such as weaponry, an aspect of the war that has become almost fetishised – an obsession that can be seen in every aspect of the gaming community, from magazines to forums to the marketing – to the point that, Ramsay concludes, knowledge of these weapons has become a cultural currency within these communities.³²

Kingsepp looks at the use of sound - often overlooked, yet arguably of equal importance to visual authenticity. Sound is an effective means of producing atmosphere, both through music and sound effects, though the use of soundtrack varies by game depending on its intended transparency (for example, the use of non-diegetic music reduces the transparency of a game as it is not something that would be present in reality). Another aspect that should be considered is the use of language, particularly German. Using *Wolfenstein 3D* (1992) as an example, Kingsepp compares the stereotypical exclamations by the Nazis in this game to those found in other WWII media.³³ Of particular significance is the idea that the German language does not need to be understood for it to fulfil its purpose, it is the ‘German-ness’ of the sounds and their association to war films that is the point here, they exist to signify the enemy – something that Kingsepp believes can become problematic, as it can imply a connection between evil and ethnicity.³⁴ All of these methods games use to appeal to past portrayals as signifiers of

²⁷ Ramsay, "Brutal Games," 102.

²⁸ Kingsepp, "Immersive," 70.

²⁹ Ibid., 73.

³⁰ Treyarch, *Call of Duty: World at War*, Activision, PC, 2008.

³¹ Ramsay, "Brutal Games," 101-102; Gish, "Playing," 171.

³² Ramsay, "Brutal Games," 106.

³³ Kingsepp, "Immersive," 76-77; id Software, *Wolfenstein 3D*, Apogee Software, DOS, 1992.

³⁴ Kingsepp, "Immersive," 78, 81.

authenticity will provide vital supports in constructing a framework of analysis. By continuing the tropes and techniques of popular depictions of the war, these games continue to reinforce the established narratives – narratives that continue to benefit the United States.

It is also important to note the number of problems these games face in their production. They are in a way hostage to the myths built around the war, just as they perpetuate them, as the importance of the justness of the war in the popular consciousness cannot now be contradicted in any fundamental way. As Chris Kempshall argues, in modern portrayals of the war “the allied soldiers who fought in it cannot be anything less than heroic.”³⁵ Developers are also constrained by their own profit-seeking, resulting in a reluctance to move outside what is perceived as commercially safe and tested genre-conventions, as well as avoiding controversy by omitting sensitive topics.³⁶ Pfister and others focus on the omission of the Holocaust and other crimes from games, despite their popularity as a subject in other mediums. Concluding that by focussing exclusively on combat and avoiding, or even removing references to, Nazism and its crimes these games are not in the end acting morally but instead depoliticising and downplaying the destructive effects of the war.³⁷

Further depoliticisation occurs when games try to differentiate between Nazis and the Wehrmacht. Van den Heede’s analysis of marketing paratexts noted that developers of all nationalities make this distinction and thus perpetuate the myth of the ‘clean’ Wehrmacht that denies its involvement in the Holocaust and other war crimes.³⁸ As Pfister writes, this is perpetuated also by the inclusion of multiplayer modes - as one side must play opposing the Allied forces, and developers do not wish to allow the playing of Nazis, the only real option left is to create a ‘clean’ version of the Axis to fight as.³⁹

But one of the most important factors the developers take into consideration when making decisions about how to present the war in their games is entertainment. Pfister points to the history of war games, in which both sides are presented as abstract opponents of equal strength, and the martial accomplishments of the enemy are respected in a certain, depoliticised, way.⁴⁰ Kingsepp summarises the effect of the ‘gamification’ of the war as “reshaping WWII as a stereotypical event with more connections to popular films than to actual historical events.”⁴¹

These effects all help reinforce the ‘official’ narratives of WWII. Gish refers to Josh Smicker’s argument that “re-enactment games emphasize a jingoistic perspective that positions international war

³⁵ Chris Kempshall, "Modern Warfare: Call of Duty, Battlefield, and the World Wars," in *Historia Ludens: The Playing Historian*, ed. Alexander von Lünen et al. (New York: Routledge, 2020), 260.

³⁶ Van Den Heede, "Engaging," 51-52.

³⁷ Eugen Pfister, "'Man Spielt Nicht Mit Hakenkreuzen!' Imaginations of the Holocaust and Crimes against Humanity During World War II in Digital Games," in *Historia Ludens: The Playing Historian*, ed. Alexander von Lünen et al. (New York: Routledge, 2020), 274-275.

³⁸ Van Den Heede, "Engaging," 45-46.

³⁹ Pfister, "Imaginations," 279.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 270-271.

⁴¹ Kingsepp, "Immersive," 60.

in terms of American militarist and national progress.”⁴² Ramsay’s focus on the lack of non-combatants in these games leads them to argue that this reduces war’s perceived destructive capacity, “[intensifying] perceptual binaries between war and peace, us and them, good and evil,” and thus allow for the possibility of waging war honourably and cleanly.⁴³ Though the absence of civilians may result in helping to justify an aggressive military ideology, Ramsay is sure to stress that this may not be a political choice but a technical one – adding non-combatants to these games raises its own difficulties and expenses that the developers may feel outweigh their inclusion.

It is here that this thesis ultimately aims to add to the discourse. By analysing the depictions of the D-Day landings found in First-Person Shooters, themes and methods that occur throughout the genre can be identified. These choices can then be analysed themselves using approaches established in other fields, such as memory studies and theories of cultural imperialism. By doing so, we can answer the key research questions posed by this thesis:

- (1) In what ways do the narrative choices in digital game depictions of the 1944 Normandy landings reinforce those pushed by the United States to further their own goals in presenting an American version of history?
- (2) How are these narratives pushed?
- (3) How do these depictions compare to depictions in mass media preceding them?

Though there has been increasing study of historical games and their depiction of WWII in recent years, there remains a significant gap in the literature. While there have been studies in adjacent fields, very little has been written on the intersection between how these depictions continue the official, US governmental narratives established in war films, and how these adaptations further reinforce aspects that effectively rewrite popular history in the minds of their audiences – to the benefit of the United States.

Digital Games Studies

Studying digital games is not only useful for their historical content, but to study culture more generally. A number of scholars have pointed to the idea that games, like any media, are “the product of their society, culture and politics and are consequently shaped by these political, social and cultural ideas and discourses—both intentionally and unintentionally.”⁴⁴ Robert Cassar, who applies Gramsci’s theories of culture onto digital gaming, agrees: “Games, like any other popular culture medium, are the result of the historical circumstances that helped to generate them,” proposing that they can provide insight into the ideological conflicts present in society.⁴⁵ However, ideology is not a fixed and independent quantity,

⁴² Gish, "Playing," 170.

⁴³ Ramsay, "Brutal Games," 107.

⁴⁴ Pfister, "Imaginations," 268.

⁴⁵ Robert Cassar, "Gramsci and Games," *Games and Culture* 8, no. 5 (2013): 331-332, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1555412013493499>.

they will inevitably vary by player and social context, and so we must be wary of assigning a single narrative outcome to our findings.⁴⁶

Studying digital games can similarly provide insight into the potential of media to influence culture - as Cassar notes, the supposed neutrality of games allows players to “[end] up inundated with ideological content without realizing it.”⁴⁷ Tara Jane Copplestone agrees, arguing that “videogame developers can and do [...] play a significant role in how history or cultural-heritage is produced.”⁴⁸ Breuer et al. point to the interactivity and immersivity of digital games as additional persuasive elements, with Holger Pötzsch naming the glorification of war and the reinforcement of military solutions as “less problematic, more efficient, and more virtuous than they in reality are” as examples of gaming’s effects.⁴⁹

There are several issues that must be navigated to study digital games. Any analysis of gaming must trade-off between depth and breadth of study due to the complexity involved in an interactive medium, and the sheer number of games available.⁵⁰ Therefore studies generally fit into three categories: macro analysis that looks at a large number of games or an entire genre, but using faster methods such as game reviews or synopses; micro analysis that takes an in-depth look at an individual game; or somewhere in the meso level, which take a sample of games and look at a limited amount of play in each game.⁵¹ Esther Wright’s work highlights issues of ephemerality, a problem that plagues all historians, where games become unplayable over time; code is lost; blog posts fall to linkrot; comments sections deleted; box art and manuals lost; and physical material simply no longer being created as the community shifts into purely digital platforms.⁵²

To understand the basis for *how* to analyse historical digital games Adam Chapman has provided a defining work on the subject, *Digital Games as History*, and thus will underpin much of how this thesis approaches its analysis.⁵³ This work will split into three approaches: narrative; gameplay; and paratexts. Regarding narrative, Chapman proposes game story structures can fit into three categories:

⁴⁶ Ibid., 341.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 334.

⁴⁸ Copplestone, "Accurate," 420.

⁴⁹ Johannes Breuer, Ruth Festl, and Thorsten Quandt, "Digital War: An Empirical Analysis of Narrative Elements in Military First-Person Shooters," *Journal of Gaming & Virtual Worlds* 4, no. 3 (2012): 217, https://dx.doi.org/10.1386/jgvw.4.3.215_1; Holger Pötzsch, "Selective Realism: Filtering Experiences of War and Violence in First- and Third-Person Shooters," *Games and Culture* 12, no. 2 (2015): 4, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1555412015587802>.

⁵⁰ Breuer, Festl, and Quandt, "Digital War," 219.

⁵¹ Ibid., 222.

⁵² Wright, "Promotional," 603-604.

⁵³ Adam Chapman, *Digital Games as History: How Videogames Represent the Past and Offer Access to Historical Practice* (Oxon: Routledge, 2016).

deterministic, open, and open-ontological.⁵⁴ Most FPS games follow a deterministic structure, where the overarching narrative of the game is pre-determined and cannot be changed by the player's actions, as opposed to open-ontological or open structures which allow players to create all or some narrative decisions.⁵⁵ Chapman describes deterministic story structures as possessing "strong and regular framing goals, cutscenes, linear spaces and pre-scripted events [...] with choice generally limited to progress or failure."⁵⁶ Though the player still retains some control over the story they experience through playing the game ('ludonarrative'), this is generally limited to options such as choice of weapon, movement, and approach to challenges.⁵⁷

As established above, Gish's narrative layers provide a useful structure to analyse the narratives put forth by these historical games. The first layer's portrayal of the war in its totality will be useful to determine the backdrop in which these games situate the D-Day landings, as they establish "an historical basis for the ensuing missions and incorporate the individual game's forthcoming play within a genuine past occurrence."⁵⁸ Though important in setting a base of expectations, most narrative regarding the landings in these games occurs in the second layer, exemplified in the framing narrative of cut-scenes that accompany the levels. Framing narrative, Chapman writes, can be further divided down into 'fragments' that take the form of "discrete, directing, self-contained and often contextually non-specific, pre-scripted, fully formed sections of narrative," designed by the developer to guide the player through the game in a way that piece together to create a whole.⁵⁹ Such framing narratives are used to convey the motivations of the characters; explain changes in time or location; provide resolution to the players' actions; and fulfil any other narrative function the developers wish to deliver in a way that is not suited to gameplay. Fragments also help construct a feeling of causality within the game, and a sense of authority and teleology to the history presented.⁶⁰ Such feeling is reinforced by the game's framing goals, the objectives of the game, which are often presented via narrative fragments and used to bracket gameplay in a way that frames the motivations of play and pre-set the only possible outcome from the scenario (other than failure), often presenting it as the only course of events that could have happened.⁶¹

Once the narrative backdrop has been established through the first layer, the players experience narrative through playing the game itself. The rules of the game are the main method in which the developers can maintain authority without direct and complete control over play, particularly in deterministic games. Chapman calls these 'framing controls' and describes their function as:

⁵⁴ Ibid., 127.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 128-130.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 128.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 138.

⁵⁸ Gish, "Playing," 170.

⁵⁹ Chapman, *Digital Games*, 121.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 147-148.

⁶¹ Ibid., 122.

“[preventing] the ludonarrative from [...] becoming non-complicit with the intended framing narrative, ensuring that possible combinations of lexia maintain some kind of coherency.”⁶²

Though theoretically the players create ludonarrative through gameplay, the developers can still control their experience through the rules they impose by punishing actions at odds with their interpretation of history and rewarding those that follow the narrative the developers wish to push.⁶³ One consequence of these rules, Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter suggest, is the casualisation of violence and death. In many games the only costs of participating in war is the blood-spattered screen signifying injury and the forced repetition of a level – a punishment that they argue transforms “whatever horror you may have felt at the deaths of your men [...] to exasperation,” it is a war without moral dilemmas or lasting consequences.⁶⁴

Chapman also introduces the concept of ‘narrative gardens’ as a method for developers to utilise space within games to further control narrative. Much like a real garden, the environment has been crafted to guide the audience through a specific, developer-created experience (as opposed to a ‘space as canvas’ structure, where the audience is encouraged to create their own).⁶⁵ But the interactive nature of games ensure a certain degree of player-produced narrative, and there is no guarantee that narratives encountered by players are interpreted in the ways intended.⁶⁶ Audience interpretations are guided in part by the references made by the games, often to preceding depictions such as *Saving Private Ryan*, and their relationship with the material through experience and cultural identities.⁶⁷ The freedom of interactivity similarly allows the player to perform their own reconstructions of history, which may come in the form of avoiding shooting allies to create a sense of realism; or choosing a particular outfit or weapon to resonate with their own conceptions of war.⁶⁸ But as this thesis is focussed on developer narratives, potential ludonarratives will form only a small part of the analysis.

One of the larger aspects that will be analysed are the games’ lexia, which Chapman describes as “combinable ludic representations of agents, objects, social structures, architecture, processes, actions and concepts.”⁶⁹ As mentioned earlier, lexia are one of the main methods that developers use to instil a sense of authenticity in their games, be they in the form of characters, weaponry, or scenery, and are thus an important aspect in how narratives are portrayed. The options and uses given to these lexia can impact the narratives experienced by players, as they use or ignore lexia in ways that can result in

⁶² Ibid., 125.

⁶³ Ibid., 40.

⁶⁴ Nick Dyer-Witheford, and Greig de Peuter, *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 111-112.

⁶⁵ Chapman, *Digital Games*, 104.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 35.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 139.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 42-43.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 123.

“different ludonarratives of combat according to each player’s choices and skill.”⁷⁰ This can also apply to audio lexia, as it is possible to both respond to hearing them or even not be in earshot and thus miss it altogether. By playing the game in non-identical ways it is possible for players to experience very different ludonarratives.⁷¹

Finally, paratexts are a greatly important facet to explore when analysing game narratives. Originally defined by Gérard Genette in relation to literary studies as the elements surrounding the text, Jonathan Gray adapted the concept to other media. In this case, paratexts such as marketing materials are designed to not only provide insight into the media, but to add additional meanings and attempt to ‘authenticate’ and sell those meanings to prospective audiences. They are then used to allow audiences to participate in ‘speculative consumption,’ where they can engage in the media from a distance without actually consuming the primary output, in an effort to decide between a range of choices – resulting in many people only interacting with certain media at a paratextual level.⁷² Van den Heede writes that such marketing also allows potential players to “assess whether or not a game... will both reconfirm, and legitimately and meaningfully expand upon, a player’s pre-existing knowledge,” once again pointing to the developer priority of creating a sense of authenticity.⁷³

Wright’s work on game paratexts is foundational to this thesis’ approach. By analysing paratexts we can gain insight into “how the industry views its own individual attempts at writing history in and through videogames,” and thus their role as a ‘developer-historian’.⁷⁴ They can also allow insight into how narratives are received by the players, through means such as forums, reviews, or online comments.⁷⁵ Game paratexts are not immune to referencing previous media portrayals, as the narrative and gameplay layers do, in fact many of the practices of the gaming industry directly imitate those employed by other mediums such as cinema – often using previous representations and historical details to authenticate their own portrayals – for example, several promotional paratexts analysed in this thesis have used famous scenes from *Saving Private Ryan* as clear inspiration for their choice of images.⁷⁶

But one of the most important purposes for these paratexts is the ‘pre-configuration’ of player expectations. By surrounding these games with authenticating paratexts, these developers can almost set the standards from which the accuracy of their own games will be judged.⁷⁷ Often these developer-historians will release paratexts, such as blog posts or videos, that display their research and adherence to historical fidelity in ways that essentially “gathers together disparate historical ‘facts’ and evidence,

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 124.

⁷² Van Den Heede, "Engaging," 23-24.

⁷³ Ibid., 25.

⁷⁴ Wright, "Promotional," 600.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 602.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 599.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

and from them creates a new discrete and contained narrative that supports marketing claims.”⁷⁸ By directly referencing sources that back their claims and selectively applying realism within their games, the developers can effectively create a screen behind which they can hide their involvement in the creation of their narratives.⁷⁹ Wright touches on the impetus behind this thesis, noting that these paratexts can interact with the games’ narratives and can alter the ideological content therein, thus even if a game is created to be free of politics (despite the impossibility of this goal) its intended meanings can nevertheless be completely ‘re-authored’ by these paratextual materials.⁸⁰

Government Influence in Media

Another way for video game narratives to be re-authored from the original intentions is the involvement of external actors, such as government agencies – a factor that has had to be considered for decades. President Dwight Eisenhower’s 1961 farewell address warned of the emergence of a “military-industrial complex,” in which the economic influence of the military and its industrial partners had translated into political influence. This concept has evolved into what James Der Derian calls the “Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network” (or MIME-Net), which now includes the media and academic industries into the collaboration – aiming to “boost recruitment, to (re)write military history, and to influence the portrayal of the armed forces.”⁸¹

In 1942 Elmer Davis, the Director of the Office of War Information, said:

“The easiest way to inject a propaganda idea into most people's minds is to let it go through the medium of an entertainment picture when they do not realize that they are being propagandized.”⁸²

This looks to be reflective of the official consensus at the time, as the next year an OSS memo described films as powerful psychological weapons as “a potent force in attitude formation” that can be used even against domestic populations – coming to the same conclusions as other national governments, such as Nazi Germany, who placed great emphasis on cinematic propaganda.⁸³ But other forms of entertainment can also fulfil this role, as Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter write:

“Games have always served empire: from Cicero’s claim that gladiatorial sports cultivated the martial virtues that Rome required to the Duke of Wellington’s apocryphal assertion that the Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton.”⁸⁴

⁷⁸ Ibid., 601.

⁷⁹ Chapman, *Digital Games*, 67.

⁸⁰ Wright, "Promotional," 602-603.

⁸¹ Sebastian Kaempf, "'A Relationship of Mutual Exploitation': The Evolving Ties between the Pentagon, Hollywood, and the Commercial Gaming Sector," *Social Identities* 25, no. 4 (2018): 543, 545, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2018.1514151>.

⁸² Matthew Alford, and Tom Secker, *National Security Cinema* (Drum Roll Books, 2017), Chapter 1, EPUB.

⁸³ Ibid., Chapter 2.

⁸⁴ Dyer-Witheford, and de Peuter, *Games of Empire*, xxxiv.

The use of media in this way has been studied for some time, with academics analysing the role of popular culture in not only reflecting, but helping shape people's understanding of the world around them.⁸⁵ For example, Luke Caldwell and Tim Lenoir note a number of scholars, including Stahl; Andersen; Der Derian; Kline; Dyer-Witheford; and de Peuter; as crediting US-produced games as "primarily responsible for disseminating images and narratives that elicit consent for US militarism and military engagement."⁸⁶ However the theory of 'reflectionism,' or the idea that media reflects its environment, also has its detractors - such as David Bordwell, who argues that the idea that a piece of art can "embody some state of mind common to the millions of people living in a society" is "implausible" at best. Such a theory, according to Bordwell, uses circular logic ("All popular films reflect society's attitudes. How do we know what the attitudes are? Just look at the films!") and that the theory that popularity equals relatability is not necessarily true: as popularity is often measured through sales or viewing figures, one cannot subtract those who consumed the product and did not enjoy or relate to it.⁸⁷ However this thesis will be primarily looking at the content of the games, rather than any reflectionism that may be present.

The film industry has long had a working relationship with the US military, a collaboration that has evolved into what Matthew Alford and Tom Secker term 'National Security Cinema': "those films that follow self-serving official histories and exalt in the righteousness of US foreign policy."⁸⁸ Their research found that 814 films received support from the US Department of Defence (DOD) between 1911 and 2017, as well as 1,133 TV titles, with many more having been helped or influenced by other areas of government.⁸⁹ One prominent example of this collaboration is *Top Gun* (1986), which received extensive support and returned a 500% increase in applications for Naval aviators.⁹⁰ The US government has been involved in Hollywood from almost the very start – one early cooperation was the military's provision of tanks for *Birth of a Nation* (1915).⁹¹ But in 1942 this stepped up significantly when the Pentagon established its Motion Picture Liaison Office and began supplying Hollywood with men, equipment, and funding to support the creation of propaganda – with nearly 2,500 films made between

⁸⁵ Georg Löffmann, "Hollywood, the Pentagon, and the Cinematic Production of National Security," *Critical Studies on Security* 1, no. 3 (2013): 281, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2013.820015>.

⁸⁶ Timothy Lenoir, and Luke Caldwell, *The Military-Entertainment Complex* (London, England: Harvard University Press, 2018), 18.

⁸⁷ David Bordwell, "Zip, Zero, Zeitgeist," *Observations on Film Art*, August 24, 2014, accessed August 26, 2022, <http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2014/08/24/zip-zero-zeitgeist/>.

⁸⁸ Alford, and Secker, *National Security Cinema*, Preface.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Tony Scott, *Top Gun* (Paramount Pictures; Don Simpson/Jerry Bruckheimer Films, 1986); Travis Rice, "Could 'Top Gun: Maverick' Boost Recruitment?," *Fox II*, May 30, 2022, accessed August 27, 2022, <https://www.foxla.com/news/could-top-gun-maverick-boost-recruitment>.

⁹¹ D. W. Griffith, *Birth of a Nation* (David W. Griffith Corp., 1915); Alford, and Secker, *National Security Cinema*, Chapter 1.

1939 and 1945.⁹² The responsibilities of coordination with the media now lie with the DOD Entertainment Media Office.⁹³

The study of official influence in Hollywood is limited, partly due to the scarcity of primary resources available to researchers. This is, according to Matthew Alford, essentially down to two factors: governmental secrecy, and Lawrence Suid. Since 2004 the documents kept by governmental departments working with Hollywood have been barebones, if made at all - even the Office of the Inspector General's investigations found that its records were incomplete, leaving them unaccountable.⁹⁴ Though there are many records known to have been created before 2004, they have almost exclusively ended up in historian Lawrence Suid's private archives, apparently inaccessible to other scholars in what Alford calls "a substantial and unnecessary loss to the research community" - even accusing Suid of "concealing" material in ways that have saved the DOD from embarrassment.⁹⁵ Thus the true extent of the US government's influence in the media industry, both past and present, is difficult to judge with any accuracy.

This is true, also, of their influence in the digital gaming sector. In 1999 the Pentagon founded the Institute for Creative Technologies in Los Angeles with the aim of fostering collaboration between the military and Hollywood, as well as toymakers; game developers; and academics.⁹⁶ Through these collaborations the military gains access to toymakers' weapon ideas; screenwriters' conflict scenarios; academics' strategies; and game developers' training simulations. In return, the companies involved get access to military technology and thinking, for example simulators and devices designed through this collaboration have been released commercially to great success, and military input allows them to develop more realistic and contemporary conflicts in their games.⁹⁷ This is a similar transaction to the longstanding deal in Hollywood. As David Robb puts it:

"The Pentagon has what Hollywood wants - access to billions of dollars [sic] worth of sophisticated military hardware to put into movies; and Hollywood has what the Pentagon wants— access to the eyeballs of millions of viewers and potential recruits."⁹⁸

Access to the Pentagon's resources is so important for some films that without their assistance they cannot be made. This allows the Pentagon to choose who and what they support and set conditions for doing so, applying strict Production Assistance Agreements, script revisions, supervision throughout

⁹² Kaempf, "Mutual Exploitation," 545.

⁹³ U.S. Department of Defense, "Help Center - Public Affairs," accessed February 9, 2022, <https://www.defense.gov/Help-Center/#public-affairs>.

⁹⁴ Alford, and Secker, *National Security Cinema*, Chapter 1, 2.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, Chapter 1.

⁹⁶ Kaempf, "Mutual Exploitation," 552.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 553.

⁹⁸ David L. Robb, *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censors the Movies* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), 26.

filming, and post-production review.⁹⁹ Alford and Secker also point out that the government have worked even more covertly in the past, recruiting high-level film industry professionals to both spy on and influence film production.¹⁰⁰

DOD assistance, according to their policy documents, relies on the product being: authentic or feasible; informational or “in the best interest of public understanding”; and beneficial to recruitment and retention.¹⁰¹ But in reality, the DOD is looking to do more than just ensure films are accurate and informational - as Kaempf writes, “For the Pentagon, films are powerful means to create heroic myths and to rewrite history.”¹⁰² Accuracy is not as important as the military’s image, evidenced by a number of films that have had to change or even were entirely scrapped as a result of DOD demands despite their accuracy, because they didn’t portray the military in the ‘right’ way.¹⁰³ Recruitment is a major motivation, to the extent the DOD even interfered in the production of *Lassie* (1954-74) and *The Mickey Mouse Club* (1955-8) to target children.¹⁰⁴ Digital gaming gave the military another avenue to explore recruitment opportunities, releasing *America’s Army* free to play in 2002.¹⁰⁵ Over the years there have been numerous updates and expansions and several sequels, released to great success – with studies claiming that:

“30 percent of all Americans age 16 to 24 had a more positive impression of the Army because of the game and, even more amazingly, the game had more impact on recruits than all other forms of Army advertising combined.”¹⁰⁶

Despite this success, in February 2022 they announced that the games will be shut down – possibly to allow a shift into “more fertile recruiting grounds in streaming and esports.”¹⁰⁷ The US Army now field an esports team as part of their recruiting command, hosting competitions that redirect to recruitment forms targeting children as young as 12 – in an environment often free from parental supervision.¹⁰⁸ The DOD is also concerned about their image in Congress, Robb notes - army technical

⁹⁹ Alford, and Secker, *National Security Cinema*, Chapter 1.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., Chapter 2.

¹⁰¹ United States Department of Defense, *Dod Instruction 5410.16 - Dod Assistance to Non-Government, Entertainment-Oriented Media Productions, Number 5410.16*, by United States Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs (Arlington County, VA: United States Department of Defense, 2015), 1-2.

¹⁰² Kaempf, "Mutual Exploitation," 546.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 549.

¹⁰⁴ Robb, *Operation Hollywood*, 26; Robert Maxwell, *Lassie* (Lassie Television; Robert Maxwell Associates; Jack Wrather Productions, 1954-74); Walt Disney, and Hal Adelquist, *The Mickey Mouse Club* (Walt Disney Productions, 1955-9).

¹⁰⁵ United States Army, *America's Army*, United States Army, PC, 2002.

¹⁰⁶ Andy Chalk, "America's Army Is Finally Closing for Good," *PC Gamer*, February 8, accessed February 10, 2022, <https://www.pcgamer.com/americas-army-is-finally-closing-for-good/>.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Joshua Goodpastor, "How the Military Uses Call of Duty as a Recruitment Tool," *GameRant*, August 7, 2020, <https://gamerant.com/call-duty-modern-warfare-recruitment-tool/>.

advisor Major David Georgi is quoted as saying “Obviously, a movie is not always 100 percent factual, so when we get Congress to watch it, they see it in a favorable light, and down the road, this will help with funding.”¹⁰⁹

A number of scholars (such as Dyer-Witheford, de Peuter, Lenoir and Caldwell) look at the ideological motivations behind these products, proffering the idea that “routinizing war is important for a globalized capitalist empire.”¹¹⁰ Shaping public opinion and manufacturing consent has been high on the agenda for the US government since the Vietnam War, according to Lenoir and Caldwell, a policy carried out through what Roger Stahl conceptualises as ‘militainment’: “state violence translated into an object of pleasurable consumption.”¹¹¹ As the game industry has grown, it has not necessarily fallen into line with an orchestrated attempt at manipulation, but “simply continued and amplified the narratives and strategies of the companies that had produced training and recruitment products for the military.”¹¹²

It is important to note that this relationship is not wholly one-way, there are numerous financial incentives for the industry to participate. Lenoir and Caldwell emphasise this point, describing MIMENet as “better characterized as an opportunistic nexus of coinciding interests,” focussing on the financial impetus of creating appealing games rather than furthering official ideological goals.¹¹³ Many depictions found in these games can be explained by the financial need to appeal to the widest audience possible - to avoid narrowing their potential consumer base, these games “[pack in] as much ambiguity into their narratives as possible to ensure that the greatest number of players can find something to identify with,” while avoiding controversial issues.¹¹⁴ Developers also face “[making] something as boring, traumatic, and universally condemned as war into a source of repeatable entertainment experiences.”¹¹⁵ Thus, the games they make tend to fall into the narratives the military want to push, creating an experience that focusses on entertainment and ‘realism’ rather than more critical aspects.¹¹⁶ Lenoir and Caldwell conclude the intersection between government desire and developer output only exists where consumption benefits – those discourses and aims of authenticity that benefit the game financially will be included, but realism that harms player experience is abandoned.¹¹⁷ But this debate is largely outside of the scope of this thesis, which focusses on the methods used by the developers and the narratives they deliver, rather than the intent behind them.

The efficacy of these methods is also hotly debated, Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter describe the argument that the narratives espoused by these games are replicated in the minds of every player as

¹⁰⁹ Robb, *Operation Hollywood*, 27.

¹¹⁰ Lenoir, and Caldwell, *Complex*, 29.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 31.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 105-106.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

“simplistic and unconvincing.”¹¹⁸ However they then clarify that this does not mean that the narratives have no effect, as “the same militaristic identities and assumptions are reiterated by numerous media channels and asserted by many institutions, the chances for their reproduction rise.”¹¹⁹ Alford and Secker write that any analysis of long-term effects would be near-impossible, due to the sheer quantity of material and the number of other factors to take into account. But short-term effects are much more quantifiable where they have been studied. Unfortunately, little research has been done on the effects of video games but regarding the related (though different) medium of film, they cite a study that found that around 25% of their subjects became more trusting of government and faith in the nation’s direction after watching the CIA-supported films *Argo* (2012) and *Zero Dark Thirty* (with no evidence of any opposite trend).¹²⁰ Meanwhile, Lawrence Suid discusses the perceived authenticity of war films and the division among military veterans’ opinions on the matter - for example, General Maxwell Taylor apparently stopped watching war films due to their poor portrayals of military life, whereas General David Shoup praised *The Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949) for its recreation of his experiences on Tarawa.¹²¹ But inevitably, given enough influence, it is possible a government or agency can affect how history itself is perceived by its audiences.

Cultural Imperialism

The use of the term ‘cultural imperialism’ in the title of this thesis requires defining and justification. US government interference in media production arguably goes beyond protecting themselves from negative publicity, and enters the realm of cultural imperialism, as it deliberately shapes depictions of the past to its own benefit.

The term ‘imperialism’ first appeared in Britain to describe Napoleon’s ambitions and has grown to include power relations in not only political, but social and cultural spheres also.¹²² With the term so politically charged, there is still much debate over how to define it and many prominent scholars have contributed to the discourse, such as Kautsky; Luxemburg; Hobson; Lenin; Arendt; Chomsky; Zinn; and Said.¹²³ The nature of the term also ensures that different scholars with different backgrounds have varying approaches to the concept and its impact on the world.¹²⁴ Barbara Bush gives a further explanation of the term’s discourse in the late 20th Century, explaining that decolonisation led to many orthodox historians declaring imperialism over, opposed by “Third World nationalists and radical

¹¹⁸ Dyer-Witheford, and de Peuter, *Games of Empire*, 116-117.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 117.

¹²⁰ Alford, and Secker, *National Security Cinema*, Chapter 2; Ben Affleck, *Argo* (Warner Bros., 2012); Kathryn Bigelow, *Zero Dark Thirty* (Columbia Pictures; Annapurna Pictures; First Light Production, 2012).

¹²¹ Lawrence H. Suid, *Guts & Glory: The Making of the American Military Image in Film* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 9. Allan Dwan, *Sands of Iwo Jima* (Republic Pictures, 1949).

¹²² Barbara Bush, *Imperialism and Postcolonialism* (Harlow: Longman, 2006), 2.

¹²³ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage Digital, 2014), 5.

¹²⁴ Bush, *Imperialism*, 7.

Western intellectuals” who argue that it continues in ‘informal’ economic and political power relations.¹²⁵ More recently, Edward Said used the broad definition of “the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory” whilst also using Michael Doyle’s more specific:

“a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society. It can be achieved by force, by political collaboration, by economic, social, or cultural dependence.”¹²⁶

This definition leads into the more relevant concept of ‘cultural imperialism.’ Though imperialism is generally seen as a conquest of land, Said argues that culture is as important as other methods as it can form the narratives that decide “who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who now plans its future” – thus de/legitimising imperialistic actions in the mind and, in a sense, establishing the nation as an entity altogether.¹²⁷ These stories can similarly encourage imperialism by forming ideological narratives packed with notions of “inferior” or “subject races” that require colonisation.¹²⁸ Cultural imperialism is undertaken through combining imperial power with control over ‘knowledge production,’ and thus the ability to disseminate the establishment ideology and work in the interests of the dominant groups of both metropole and colony.¹²⁹ These ‘conduits’ have appeared in many forms, Bush lists “Western medicine, science and technology, Christianity, European education and languages” as examples, which were later boosted further by mass media.¹³⁰

Edward Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) focussed on another aspect, analysing “narratives of empire in fiction and history,” both in constructing and challenging colonial systems.¹³¹ Said summarises his thesis by arguing that:

“Stories are at the heart of what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world; they also become the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history,”

however they also note that while these depictions are not predetermined by the author’s ideology or class, they are still a product of the history of their societies.¹³² Bush highlights some critiques of the concept, for example the idea that it “implies a conscious, one-way process of cultural imposition,” which is countered by the fact that such policies were often resisted, but also that the imperial cores

¹²⁵ Ibid., 46.

¹²⁶ Said, *Culture*, 9.

¹²⁷ Ibid., xii-xiii.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 9.

¹²⁹ Bush, *Imperialism*, 123.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 125.

¹³¹ Ibid., 115; Said, *Culture*.

¹³² Said, *Culture*, xii, xxii.

were not immune to adopting some cultural aspects from their colonies.¹³³ However, Bush also provides the counter-argument that they can diminish the power disparities between coloniser and colonised that continue to affect former colonies today while, Bonnie G. Smith writes, “everything the West and Japan absorbed from colonized peoples was taken up voluntarily and enriched the cultural heritage and way of life of the conquerors.”¹³⁴

With advances in mass media technology in the past century, those that controlled production and distribution wielded great power over culture. This is made especially evident in the United States, who continues to dominate the film industry in much of the world (“in terms of box office gross, the region maintained a solid second place in 2021, surpassed only by China and still far ahead of other economies across Asia and Europe”) and have thus had a great potential influence over the views of their audiences – both domestic and foreign.¹³⁵ This dominance grew after WWII as the US expanded its repertoire into news, television, and radio, which reached global audiences – allowing the media to “[reinforce] an ideological framework that works in the interests of US business” and has repeatedly “waged cultural wars against movements that threatened US imperialist interests.”¹³⁶ One example is President Reagan’s support for the Christian Broadcasting Network, whose “Christian fundamentalism was viewed as crucial to US government/CIA strategies to counteract social movements demanding greater justice and equality for the poor.”¹³⁷ Even though the latter half of the 20th Century saw the end of most direct colonialism, imperialism “lingers where it has always been, in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic, and social practices.”¹³⁸ This is where this thesis suggests these games may sit, in a position of hegemony over the WWII D-Day narratives (in the gaming sphere) and thus contributing to a greater notion of cultural imperialism emanating from the US.

Conclusion

This literature review has endeavoured to cover the related subject areas that this interdisciplinary thesis overlaps with and identify the gaps that can be filled. It has covered how WWII video games have been covered by previous literature, and what pre-existing structures can be used to analyse the games in this thesis – for example, Gish’s narrational layering and Wright’s work on gaming paratexts. This thesis combines the works of these two academics, adapting Gish’s tripartite layering into quadripartite by including the priming narratives of paratexts as a ‘zeroth’ layer. This system allows the thesis to be

¹³³ Bush, *Imperialism*, 134.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 135; Bonnie G. Smith, *Imperialism: A History in Documents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 111.

¹³⁵ Bush, *Imperialism*, 194; José Gabriel Navarro, "Film Industry in the United States and Canada – Statistics & Facts," *Statista*, August 29, 2022, accessed October 13, 2022, https://www.statista.com/topics/964/film/#topicHeader__wrapper.

¹³⁶ Bush, *Imperialism*, 193.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 193-194.

¹³⁸ Said, *Culture*, 9.

broken into three chapters to analyse more closely not only what narratives are pushed, but how and where they occur in the gaming experience –be they in the priming paratextual layer; framing narratives of game cinematics; or ludonarratives created through gameplay. However, before the games can be analysed, they will be placed into context through examining the films that preceded them.

This thesis intends to fill a hole in the current literature – to identify the narrative themes present and analyse the extent to which these themes can influence the historical understanding of players in ways that benefit the United States. As made evident by the works covered, the US government has long been active in shaping the narrative output of the entertainment industries and, while proving their involvement in or the intent of developers behind the inclusion of certain narratives is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is possible to track those themes through previous cinematic depictions of the war into the new mediations in video games.

Methodology

This thesis will analyse the six FPS games, listed below, released between 1999-2005 that feature the D-Day landings. All were developed and published by American companies, apart from *Battlefield 1942* which was developed in Sweden by Digital Illusions and published by Electronic Arts (the same publisher as the *Medal of Honor* games).¹³⁹ This demonstrates the potential power that the US can collectively hold over the perception of the landings in video games, and will have continued to influence not only players but other developers working on games utilising D-Day in the years that followed.

Game	Developer/Publisher Nationality
<i>WWII GI</i> (1999)	US
<i>Medal of Honor: Allied Assault</i> (2002)	US
<i>Medal of Honor: Frontline</i> (2002)	US
<i>Battlefield 1942</i> (2002)	Sweden/US
<i>Call of Duty 2</i> (2005)	US
<i>Call of Duty 2: Big Red One</i> (2005)	US

From these games we can gather information via, most obviously, the gameplay and storylines. The study of digital games has similarities to the study of film, and therefore many of the same techniques will be applied to their analysis (including the comparison to films on the same subject). But of equal importance is the paratextual content that often accompany these games, that often prove to be “an intrinsic, inseparable aspect of the representation of the past that a particular game offers; and moreover, the historical experience a game may afford players.”¹⁴⁰

The analysis shall be broken down into four sections, after the literature review. The first section will look at portrayals of the D-Day Landings that were produced before the games (for example, in films such as *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) (*SPR*); and *The Longest Day* (1962)), establishing the standard narratives attached to its depiction. This is particularly important as Steven Spielberg played a significant role in the production of one of the first major WWII games, *Medal of Honor* (1999), and the opening of *SPR* has been recreated in games ever since.¹⁴¹ Most significant will be the cinematic styles of the films, how they present the war and why – for example, how Spielberg attempts to recreate combat footage taken at the actual events in an attempt to increase the ‘realism’ and immersion, creating

¹³⁹ Digital Illusions CE, *Battlefield 1942*, Electronic Arts, PC, 2002.

¹⁴⁰ Wright, "Promotional."

¹⁴¹ Dreamworks Interactive, *Medal of Honor*, Electronic Arts, PlayStation, 1999.

a sense of legitimacy in the eyes of the audience. The films' narratives and themes will also be analysed, allowing comparison to the games in later chapters, as well as some discussion of government involvement in production.

The next three chapters will form the main body of the thesis, working down the different layers of narrative, from the most immediate priming narratives through the framing narratives to the ludonarratives. Chapter Three's focus on priming narratives means it will look at paratexts – those external media such as trailers, adverts, and manuals that aim to influence the player further by 'priming' their expectations before playing the game. These exist for several reasons, for example to make the game more attractive to consumers or to add value through additional content. However, by doing this they add and alter the narratives players experience through play and are therefore vitally important components to include – especially as many people will be familiar with some of these games *exclusively* through paratexts, such as game covers or adverts, if they have not played the games themselves. Analysis of this layer will include discussion of self-authentication through associating the games with experts and museums; claims of replication of historical detail; and pandering to technological fetishisation – as well as linking themselves to their cinematic predecessors via their directors, cast, and imitation of specific scenes and events. The narrative themes in the paratexts will also be reviewed, identified through analysis of the text of manuals, strategy guides, and game pages; the content and camera angles of trailers; and the inclusion of in-game bonus features such as behind-the-scenes footage.

Chapter Four steps into the next narrative layer, that of the framing narrative. This layer exists within the game itself and consists of the cinematics and cut-scenes that bracket and contextualise each level. By looking at the cinematics' style, content, voiceovers, and how these aspects interact, it is possible to extract what the developers are trying to tell the players. Often this consists of contextualising the level within history, and more specifically the war, as well as introducing the characters the player will be embodying and fighting alongside in order to construe the historical, global, and personal stakes to the audience. In many cases, this more cinematic layer directly remediates and adapts cinematic depictions from the past (particularly *SPR*) and uses them as legitimating actors by both linking themselves to such famous films but to the history that these films have, in a sense, replaced.

The last chapter focusses on the final layer of narrative the player will encounter: the ludonarrative. This consists of the narratives the player experiences (and sometimes co-creates) while playing the game. As the most interactive and personal layer, it is possible that this is where the most effective narrative transmission lies – though studying efficacy is outside of this thesis' scope. Once again it is possible to see that some of the major techniques in legitimising narratives is to link themselves with previous cinematic depictions through copying environments and events, as well as through the use of surface-level authenticating detail such as weaponry and symbols associated with the period. Once the techniques are identified, the chapter goes on to discuss the narratives these games push. There is a lot of commonality between the layers, and it is possible to see how such narratives become self-reinforcing through the repetition of the message in different mediums and techniques.

Chapter Two: Established Cinematic Narratives

Through researching the crowdsourced database *MobyGames*, there appears to have been a healthy interest in World War II (WWII) from the early game industry, with games such as *Tanktics* (1976).¹⁴² D-Day as a subject grew in popularity from around 1980 with around a dozen titles featuring the landings released between 1980-1998, such as: *D-Day: The Invasion of France* (1980); *Beach Landing* (1984); *Crusade in Europe* (1985); and *D-Day: America Invades* (1995).¹⁴³ However, these games are predominantly top-down strategy games - it would not be until after *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) that the landings would be depicted in a First-Person Shooter (FPS) game.¹⁴⁴ Thus the use of the setting in games can be seen as the next stage in “an ongoing remediating ‘synergic chain’ of novels, movies, TV series and digital games, all referencing each other.”¹⁴⁵

To analyse the depiction of the Normandy landings in games and the techniques used to affect players, it is of vital importance to establish a sense of the base from which these games grew. This chapter will thus look at the depictions of the landings that were created *before* those in game form, analysing the techniques and conventions of the previous media that may be recreated, adapted, or even inverted by later portrayals. The cinematic styles of these films are of great importance to their perceived authenticity, and will therefore be the main focus, followed by the numerous narrative themes that can be identified – many of which were carried over into the games that followed. Thanks to their reach and popular accessibility, those representations that are most notable and most influential are those in the form of films – particularly *The Longest Day* (1962), *The Big Red One* (1980), and *Saving Private Ryan* (1998).¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Pfister, "Imaginations," 270; Chris Crawford, *Tanktics*, The Avalon Hill Game Company, Apple II, Atari 8-bit, Commodore PET/CBM, FM-7, KIM-1, Mainframe, TRS-80, 1976.

¹⁴³ Computer Simulations Company, *D-Day: The Invasion of France*, Computer Simulations Company, TRS-80, 1980; Inc. Optimum Resource, *Beach Landing*, Weekly Ready Family Software, Apple II, Atari 8-bit, 1984; Inc. MicroProse Software, *Crusade in Europe*, MicroProse Software, Inc., Apple II, Atari 8-bit, Commodore 64, PC Booter, Windows, 1985; Inc. Atomic Games, *D-Day: America Invades*, The Avalon Hill Game Company, DOS, Macintosh, 1995.

¹⁴⁴ Spielberg, *Saving Private Ryan*.

¹⁴⁵ Pfister, "Imaginations," 273.

¹⁴⁶ Zanuck et al., *Longest Day*; Fuller, *Big Red One*.

The Films

I have identified 8 significant films depicting the D-Day landings that were released between 1945-2000. These are:

Breakthrough (1950)

The Desert Fox: The Story of Rommel (1951)

D-Day, the Sixth of June (1956)

The Longest Day (1962)

The Americanization of Emily (1964)

Overlord (1975)

The Big Red One (1980)

Saving Private Ryan (1998)

Of these, only *The Longest Day* (TLD), *The Big Red One* (TBRO), and *Saving Private Ryan* (SPR) portray the landings in more than a cursory sequence. One of the first films made after the war that depicted the D-Day landings is *Breakthrough*, whose depiction of the landings is simply a 30 second montage of planes overhead and soldiers landing on the beaches unopposed, before a radio announcement voiceover explains that the Allies have landed and formed a beachhead.¹⁴⁷ Similarly, *The Desert Fox* gives a 3-minute combat footage montage, showing Allied efforts on D-Day with virtually no resistance.¹⁴⁸ The sequence in *The Sixth of June* lasts under 10 minutes and actually depicts a fictional raid on a coastal battery before the main landings.¹⁴⁹ As Clayton Odie Sheffield argues, this is a film that used the name of D-Day to entice audiences, regardless of the real subject.¹⁵⁰ *Overlord* uses the invasion similarly, following a soldier's time leading up to the invasion – where he is killed peeking over the top of the landing craft, and ending the film with a short combat footage montage.¹⁵¹ *The Americanization of Emily* provides a little more content from the beaches, climaxing with a sequence of around 2.5 minutes in which the main character is ordered to become “the first dead man on Omaha beach” to prove the Navy's worth, and is subsequently forced up the beach at gunpoint.¹⁵² A single high-angled long shot of the beach shows the rest of the invasion, but there are no more than 15 soldiers in a frame that spans the small portion of the Los Angeles beach the director used to recreate Omaha.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁷ Lewis Seiler, *Breakthrough* (Warner Bros., 1950).

¹⁴⁸ Henry Hathaway, *The Desert Fox: The Story of Rommel* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1951).

¹⁴⁹ Henry Koster, *D-Day the Sixth of June* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1956).

¹⁵⁰ Clayton Odie Sheffield, “The War Film: Historical Perspective or Simple Entertainment” (Thesis (Masters), University of Florida, 1995), 18.

¹⁵¹ Stuart Cooper, *Overlord* (Joswend, 1975).

¹⁵² Arthur Hiller, *The Americanization of Emily* (Filmways Pictures, 1964).

¹⁵³ Suid, *Guts*, 169.

Thus, there are three depictions left to discuss, those found in *TLD*; *TBRO*; and finally *SPR*.¹⁵⁴ Darryl Zanuck's *TLD* provides a comprehensive account of June 6th, 1944, based on the book of the same name by Cornelius Ryan that was informed by "all 240 books published about D-Day, and he and his researchers conducted 700 interviews."¹⁵⁵ Jeanine Basinger uses this film as a clear example of the 'fourth wave' of WWII combat films: having passed through the initial wave of combat films produced pre-1943; the second wave from 1944 to just past the war's end, where the genre had been established and filmmakers can use "visual shorthand to refer to the concepts;" and a third wave throughout the 1950s in which the genre is re-adapted and re-adjusted to fit new meanings.¹⁵⁶ The fourth wave established itself in the 1960s, and is characterised by "epic recreation, with its attention to minute detail as to timing and place, may be seen as the final evolutionary stage: the true war has been removed, and in its place is its filmed replica."¹⁵⁷ This relates back to Baudrillard's theories of hyperreality, as discussed in the introduction – the events of history have been repeated, remediated, and simulated so often that now there is no original to compare to, the depiction is pure simulacra.¹⁵⁸ This thesis argues that the new simulacra that have replaced 'reality' is one that ostensibly benefits the United States, creating a new narrative that justifies the actions and continued hegemony of the US – a narrative that would be picked up by video games later on.

Produced during the era of the Vietnam film, Samuel Fuller's *TBRO* formed itself into a kind of crossover with the brutality of a Vietnam film, but the morality and message of a more traditional WWII picture – the soldiers "gave food to children, delivered a baby, and as Marvin stressed, they killed, not murdered, their enemy, only out of necessity."¹⁵⁹ The story follows soldiers of the American 1st Infantry Division through the war, from North Africa through D-Day and finally liberating a concentration camp before the war ends.

After a period of relative dormancy through the peak of the Vietnam genre in the 1970s and 1980s, the WWII combat genre was revived in the late 1990s – largely due to *SPR*. Why this happened when it did is disputed, but Jeanine Basinger suggests possibilities such as directors wishing to recreate the combat films of their youth; a new conservatism; or nostalgia caused by the end of the millennium – as they explain, the genre was maintained because it was able to fit "new ideologies, problems, and pressures" that emanated from the end of the Cold War and America's rise to unipolar power.¹⁶⁰ Albert

¹⁵⁴ Zanuck et al., *Longest Day*; Fuller, *Big Red One*; Spielberg, *Saving Private Ryan*.

¹⁵⁵ Cornelius Ryan, *The Longest Day: June 6, 1944* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1959).

¹⁵⁶ Jeanine Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 122, 154.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 188.

¹⁵⁸ Kingsepp, "Immersive," 65, 70.

¹⁵⁹ Suid, *Guts*, 426.

¹⁶⁰ Jeanine Basinger, "Translating War: The Combat Film Genre and Saving Private Ryan," *Perspectives on History* 36, no. 7 (1998): 219, <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/october-1998/translating-war-the-combat-film-genre-and-saving-private-ryan>; Basinger, *Anatomy*.

Auster proposes a different cause, suggesting America's recent successes (i.e., the collapse of the USSR, victory in Iraq, and success in Yugoslavia) as an alternative. Though these confirmed America as the hegemonic power, and 'redeemed' the military in the eyes of the public after Vietnam, none of these victories translated to screen, in the same way as WWII, thus the industry returned to the iconic 'good war' as a surrogate.¹⁶¹

Following an introduction at the American Cemetery and Memorial in Colleville-sur-Mer, *SPR*'s audience is taken back to D-Day at Omaha Beach for a 23-minute sequence showing the main character, Captain Miller (Tom Hanks), storming the beach with his American comrades. Once the beach is taken, Miller puts together a small squad to undertake a special mission – to find Private Ryan and return him home as the sole survivor of four brothers. Though as this thesis is focussed on the landings, the scenes outside of the actual landings will be treated as contextual rather than analysed to the same extent.

Cinematic Style

The styles of these three films are indicative of the kind of story these three directors aimed to produce. *TLD* was intended to give the audience an 'accurate' and contextualised recreation, almost trying to deliver a documentary that could never have been made. Thus, the film switches throughout the film from a 'macro' to a 'micro' vision of the conflict, giving the perspectives of both those in charge as well as those on the ground, the Allies and the Axis – a technique continued in the invasion scenes, shifting between sweeping shots of the beaches and individual soldiers.¹⁶² The scale of Zanuck's production allowed the liberal use of long shots and wide angles, "granting the audience a prime and privileged position from which to observe the battle."¹⁶³ The documentary style of the film allows for these changes in perspective and type of shot, without signalling a jarring change in the style of filming.

TBRO is the recreation of director Samuel Fuller's own experiences of the war, and thus is filmed in a style that gives "an abstracted, incoherent narrative from the point of view of a foot soldier who did not have the big picture and was only trying to survive."¹⁶⁴ The D-Day sequence only lasts around 10 minutes, and so there is less to analyse, however it is shot very differently from *TLD*. The sequence follows a far more personal perspective, making more use of camera angles (such as low angles as the camera takes cover, or high angles looking down on vulnerable soldiers) and close ups to provide emphasis or feelings of danger. There are no shots of the enemy, or of huge numbers of troops storming the beach, the sequence only shows the actions of a single group of soldiers as they escape the water to take cover behind a sea wall and attempt to clear a route off the beach.

¹⁶¹ Albert Auster, "Saving Private Ryan and American Triumphalism," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 30, no. 2 (2002): 100, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01956050209602844>.

¹⁶² Basinger, *Anatomy*, 192.

¹⁶³ Daniel Binns, and Paul Ryder, "Re-Viewing D-Day: The Cinematography of the Normandy Landings from the Signal Corps to "Saving Private Ryan"," *Media, War & Conflict* 8, no. 1 (2015): 93, accessed March 25, 2022, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26164685>.

¹⁶⁴ Basinger, "Translating War."

Spielberg's intent in *SPR* to "show war like it was, and like it is," is eminently clear in the opening scenes - the slaughter of Americans on the beach shows the audience how serious the director is taking the subject. As Toby Haggith observes, the level of blood and gore was not unprecedented in cinema, however it had not been seen before in an historical film – and rarely did you see this number of American deaths go unanswered.¹⁶⁵ To place the audience in the soldiers' shoes, the opening scenes of *SPR* were shot to look, as Sean Axmaker describes it, "very much like color newsreel footage from the 1940s, which is highly desaturated and very grainy and extremely low tech."¹⁶⁶

The cinematography took inspiration from combat film shot during the landing, and in other battles such as those made into the films *The Battle for San Pietro* (1945) and *With the Marines at Tarawa* (1944), as well as the famous *Magnificent Eleven* photographs of Omaha Beach taken by Robert Capa.¹⁶⁷ To achieve this look the film uses a number of different techniques such as using less saturated film and stretching the colours; removing lens coatings; and changing the degree of shutter from 180 to 45 degrees.¹⁶⁸ To further the sense of audience presence in the action the camera mimicked the combat film's ground-level shots and handheld shakiness, even drawing attention to the camera's presence by spattering the lens with blood or water. However, the authenticity of this style is questionable, with the veracity of both *The Battle of San Pietro* and Capa's *Magnificent Eleven* coming under question by several historians such as A. D. Coleman – who claims Capa's version of events is a "myth," and many of his photo's descriptions inaccurate.¹⁶⁹

The replication of this style also has issues and demonstrates Spielberg's selective use of the style to borrow a feeling of authenticity. Haggith provides great insight, writing that the Army Film and Photographic Unit (AFPU) that filmed the D-Day landings were taught to brace themselves to ensure a steady camera, and "frame carefully and pan judiciously in order to save film" and keep quality high – the opposite of Spielberg's "low-production value" style.¹⁷⁰ The director also fails at replication in the opposite direction: the AFPU cameramen missed the vast majority of the action, being unable to anticipate the chaos of battle (for example, one cameraman failed to capture the deaths of both the sergeant major and commander of his unit that were shot right next to him), meanwhile *SPR* was

¹⁶⁵ Toby Haggith, "D-Day Filming: For Real. A Comparison of 'Truth' and 'Reality' in "Saving Private Ryan" and Combat Film by the British Army's Film and Photographic Unit," *Film History* 14, no. 3/4 (2002): 334, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3815436>.

¹⁶⁶ Sean Axmaker, "Saving Private Ryan (1998)," *TCMDb*, accessed March 19, 2022, <http://www.tcm.com/tcmdb/title/335178/Saving-Private-Ryan/articles.html>.

¹⁶⁷ Haggith, "D-Day Filming," 335; John Huston, *The Battle for San Pietro* (U.S. Army Pictorial Service, 1945); Richard Brooks, and Louis Hayward, *With the Marines at Tarawa* (United States Marine Corps Photographic Unit, 1944); Robert Capa, "The Magnificent Eleven," (Photographs, *Life*, New York, 1944).

¹⁶⁸ Haggith, "D-Day Filming," 335-336.

¹⁶⁹ A. D. Coleman, "Alternate History: Robert Capa on D-Day," *Medium*, 2019, accessed March 20, 2022, <https://medium.com/exposure-magazine/alternate-history-robert-capa-on-d-day-2657f9af914>.

¹⁷⁰ Haggith, "D-Day Filming," 341.

carefully choreographed to capture as much action as possible.¹⁷¹ Another notable ‘error’ in replication is the behaviour of soldiers toward the camera. In real footage the soldiers are incredibly aware of the camera – often glancing or smiling at it, or “pretend not to notice it and strike a powerful pose of confident aggression.” This is certainly not replicated in *SPR* where the soldiers seem unaware of the camera, and in the assault craft they instead look nervous or vomit – something Haggith contends “is hard to believe [they] would allow himself to be filmed” doing.¹⁷²

Spielberg is not actually attempting to replicate the combat footage from the invasion but has simply lifted some of its aesthetics for emotional impact and feel of authenticity. This is further proven by his inconsistent use of the style throughout the sequence. Several shots depart from the style, for example showing the beach from a German pillbox or filming from within the firing line of some riflemen – something actual combat cameramen would not have risked.¹⁷³ These, along with other issues, lead Haggith to conclude that:

“For all the hype about realism and authenticity, Spielberg has done no more than borrow some stylistic elements characteristic of combat filming to enhance the dramatic power of the scenes.”¹⁷⁴

One of the most consistent stylistic similarities between films depicting the landings is what Binns and Ryder call “the quintessential D-Day shot: a lateral track running parallel to the American troops as they advance, while explosions and gunfire ring around them” (see **Figures 2.1 and 2.2**).¹⁷⁵ This is not only useful for progressing the soldiers up the beach, but also for emphasising the scale of the operation and the challenges the soldiers faced in carrying it out. Though they claim that “this shot is echoed - with varying length, angle, and composition - in nearly every film that includes the Normandy assault,” it is still dependent on the intended style of the director.¹⁷⁶ For example, the personal nature of *TBRO* (and possibly the limited budget) restricts the use of some angles that would show a wider view of the beach and the size of the invasion force. However, the shot is indeed present in both *TLD* and *SPR*, adapted to their respective styles. As depicted below, the earlier use provides a high, wide-angled long shot that tracks hundreds of soldiers from their landing craft and onto the beach – giving the audience the context of the sheer scale of the invasion. Spielberg’s use of the shot has changed to suit the different style - the shot is handheld, and while it thus does not give an overview of the assault like Zanuck’s shot, it achieves the sense of scale through closely packing the shot with soldiers, bodies, and tank traps.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid., 342-343.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 340.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 348.

¹⁷⁵ Binns, and Ryder, "Re-Viewing D-Day," 93-94.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 94.



Figures 2.1 & 2.2. Stills from *The Longest Day* (top) and *Saving Private Ryan* (below), depicting Binns and Ryder's "quintessential D-Day shot" following troops as they advance up the beach.

Sources: Darryl F. Zanuck et al., *The Longest Day* (Darryl F. Zanuck Productions, Inc., 1962); Steven Spielberg, *Saving Private Ryan* (DreamWorks Pictures; Paramount Pictures; Amblin Entertainment, 1998).

Narrative Themes

Glorification of War

One of the most prominent themes that can be identified in these three films is the glorification of war. The scale of *TLD* necessitated government aid lest the cost of equipment, extras, expertise, and vehicles become prohibitive. Zanuck managed to secure help from four governments: the USA; France; Germany; and the UK. The US provided troops and vehicles (though support fluctuated over production); the British also promised men and WWII-era ships (though were replaced by the US Sixth Fleet when the British Admiralty informed Zanuck of the \$300,000 fuel bill); the Germans provided materiel and technical advice; and the French provided 3,000 troops (including 1,000 to replace

withdrawn American support), even allowing them to wear American uniforms.¹⁷⁷ The film also utilised 70 technical advisors, including experts who had participated in the events.¹⁷⁸

But official involvement came at a cost and several changes to the script were demanded. One of the first interventions was by the President of Twentieth Century Fox itself, who called an early draft insufficiently patriotic, and requested the writers add more Nazi oppression and show more French gratitude for the operation.¹⁷⁹ The Production Code Office requested the film “minimize the dramatizations of personal killings” and “avoid the 'bloodbath' effect.”¹⁸⁰ The biggest sticking point, however, seems to be the scene where a US Ranger shoots two German soldiers as they try to surrender. The Army demanded that this be scrapped, which the Pentagon had originally understood would be removed when they approved the script in the first place. However when the film had been completed and the scene was still present, the Pentagon warned that it would not be approved for release – a demand that Zanuck responded to a week after the premiere, arguing that none of the high-ranking officers he had screened the film for had objected.¹⁸¹ The Department of Defense (DOD) could not do much by this point, and so simply refused to aid some publicity efforts.¹⁸²

Despite Zanuck’s apparent intentions of conveying an anti-war message, this stood at odds to his simultaneous aim of making a film that would be “a reminder to millions and millions of people that the Allies, who once stood together and defeated an evil because they stood together, can do so again,” a thinly-veiled allusion to the Cold War that had evolved from WWII.¹⁸³ The anti-war message may have been stronger had Zanuck kept the original ending in which a soldier sits sobbing on the beach, throwing stones into the water.¹⁸⁴ The DOD objected to this scene, wanting a more positive ending - so it was replaced with a fictional sequence that ends in the camera tracking General Norman Cota in a Jeep as it drives up the hill, passing the rest of the American force moving inland to win the war – leaving behind any anti-war sentiment that may have been created.¹⁸⁵

Another major detriment to any anti-war effect is the distinct cleanliness of death, which continued in line with the Production Code era’s strict rules on the depiction of violence. Jay Jacobs wrote in *The Reporter* at the time:

¹⁷⁷ Suid, *Guts*, 172.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 177.

¹⁷⁹ Peter Lev, "Filming "the Longest Day": Conflicting Interests," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (2005): 266, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43797239>.

¹⁸⁰ Mel Gussow, *Don't Say Yes until I Finish Talking* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 198-199. Quoted in; Suid, *Guts*.

¹⁸¹ Suid, *Guts*, 183-185.

¹⁸² Lev, "Filming," 265.

¹⁸³ "Calendar," *Los Angeles Times*, April 1, 1962; Quoted in Suid, *Guts*, 172.

¹⁸⁴ Suid, *Guts*, 199.

¹⁸⁵ Lev, "Filming," 265; Suid, *Guts*, 200.

“Zanuck has put the handsomest face he possibly could on war. [...] One gets the impression that each death is instant, sanitary, and the result of a mercifully accurate shot to the heart. Nobody has the bad taste to be hit in the face or the belly.”¹⁸⁶

TBRO follows a similar path. Despite its less deferential view of the officers – with much of the sequence taken up by ‘The Sergeant’ forcing his troops one by one into the firing line to clear the path – each soldier who dies on the beach seems to be killed instantly and cleanly. Just two exceptions indicate a less-than-clinical death, where Private Zab passes a medic using what looks to be a blood-bag, before falling on top of a dead soldier whose guts have been exposed (an experience he seems unfazed by, simply dipping into the man’s pocket and stealing a replacement cigar). However, it must be noted that the “clutch-and-fall,” as Stephen Prince calls it, was largely the standard for depicting violent death even after the end of the Production Code era – even in many (though certainly not all) WWII films -, to the point that Prince argues that *SPR*’s “graphic carnage [...] was a conscious attempt to negate the action-adventure terms of many of Hollywood’s World War II movies.”¹⁸⁷

While an aversion to unclean death is not something that *SPR* suffers from, it still fails to depict the full horror of combat. To Nicholas Cull, the film is evidence that American cinema still had “some way to travel” before it could confront the nastier side of the ‘glorious’ WWII, with its friendly fire; moral ambiguities; and absence of unifying logic.¹⁸⁸ The film thus still sanitises conflict, and avoids the tougher questions that arise from discussing it, instead sticking to the well-trodden path of WWII combat films outside of its immediate shock value style. Howard Zinn argues that the film “draws on our deep feeling for the GIs in order to rescue not just Private Ryan but the good name of war.”¹⁸⁹ Robert Kolker agrees, arguing that *SPR* “[purchases] emotion at the expense of analyzing alternatives or examining the details of history, which becomes spectacle that confirms power and hierarchy” – a hierarchy that maintains the US’ position at the top.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶ Jay Jacobs, Review, "Song without Words," review of *The Longest Day*, *The Reporter* (New York City), November 8, 1962, accessed April 8, 2022, https://archive.org/details/sim_reporter_1962-11-08_27_8/page/50/mode/2up.

¹⁸⁷ Stephen Prince, *Classical Film Violence: Designing and Regulating Brutality in Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1968* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 153-155.

¹⁸⁸ Nicholas J. Cull, "Saving Private Ryan. Produced by Steven Spielberg, Ian Bryce, Mark Gordon, and Gary Levinsohn; Written by Robert Rodat; Directed by Steven Spielberg. 1998; Color; 170 Minutes. Distributor: Dreamworks," *The American Historical Review* 103, no. 4 (1998): 1378, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1086/ahr/103.4.1377>.

¹⁸⁹ Howard Zinn, "Private Ryan Saves War," *The Progressive*, October, 1998, <https://web.archive.org/web/20030803014200/https://progressive.org/zinn1098.htm>.

¹⁹⁰ Robert Kolker, *A Cinema of Loneliness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 341.

American Superiority

Despite Americans making up only 57,000 of the 150,000 Allied troops landing on D-Day, *SPR* shows no other nations taking part. In fact, the rest of the Allied forces are mentioned just once, when the main character discusses how “overrated” British General Bernard Montgomery is, giving the impression that “the US won World War II in spite of the lesser efforts of its fighting partners.”¹⁹¹ The film reinforces the impression of American superiority through its total lack of contextualisation of the landings, as Niemi argues, it:

“implicitly reiterates the popular but erroneous American notion that the United States almost singlehandedly won the war against Hitler’s Germany and that D-Day was the decisive turning point.”

Meanwhile, it completely omits the monumental Soviet efforts that forced the Germans into retreat from Stalingrad over a year before D-Day.¹⁹² While responsibility for Allied victory is still debated, giving an account that skews so heavily to such a simplified view of a complex and politically charged debate could be seen as irresponsible – especially given the size of the audience. However, the debate on the responsibility of media toward accuracy and impartiality lies largely outside of the scope of this thesis, apart from the call for increased discussion of its potential effects.

Rehabilitation of Germany

One of the reasons that *TLD* received so much cooperation from the four nations was the potential propagandistic value regarding not only individual nations, but the newly formed NATO alliance as well – an alliance that included (the Western half of) their former German enemy. As General Lauris Norstad, commander of NATO, recommended the film:

“[the production] could be very useful to the military services and to the United States. I think the German aspect could be handled in reasonable perspective and, on balance, the film would benefit the alliance.”¹⁹³

Robert Brent Toplin notes how this came through in the film, as it depicts the Western Allies cooperating to defeat a common enemy (a point NATO wished to reinforce, now they stood against the Soviet Union), while:

“depicting the German leadership with a modicum of empathy. [...] They are not enthusiastic about Nazi policies, and, in one telling moment in the story, a general complains about Hitler’s foolish leadership.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Trevor McCrisken, and Andrew Pepper, *American History and Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 97-98.

¹⁹² Niemi, *Great War Movies*, 277.

¹⁹³ Lauris Norstad, To Arthur Sylvester, February 1, 1961; quoted in Suid, *Guts*, 173.

¹⁹⁴ Robert Brent Toplin, "Hollywood's D-Day from the Perspective of the 1960s and the 1990s: The Longest Day and Saving Private Ryan," *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 36, no. 2 (2006): 26, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/flm.2006.0038>.

Suid points to *SPR*'s lack of context regarding the enemy, with little reference to the brutality of the Nazi regime, a point they refer to as "even more ironic in light of Spielberg's having made *Schindler's List*" - however this once again enters the debate over the responsibilities of entertainment media, which remains outside of this thesis.¹⁹⁵

Historical Negationism

One of the more overt effects of *TLD* on the narrative of D-Day is the negationism undertaken on behalf of the French Government. Cooperation with the film's production was undertaken at significant cost to the French, who were in the middle of the Algerian War at the time. Thomas Craigin and Peter Lev argue that the portrayal of the French in this film as a united, patriotic, and fervently anti-Nazi resistance plays perfectly into the historical picture that President Charles de Gaulle wished to portray. The conflict in Algeria caused his government trouble in maintaining national unity and confidence, thus a film that "completely ignores the political split between the largely Communist partisans and the conservative Free French government-in-exile led by General Charles de Gaulle" would have been hugely attractive to the General who had become President.

Conclusion

Despite the claims of recreation or documentation, Basinger sees *SPR* as – much like other WWII combat films - another step in the transformation of the war from history into legend.¹⁹⁶ In all, *SPR* seems to be built almost entirely on cultural reference and collective memory. Spielberg relies on the audience coming preconditioned to understand the film's context, and this is what helps them evoke the heroism and glory of the war without delving into the actual history or politics involved. This continues Baudrillard's hyperreality theory, in which *SPR* fits perfectly as a simulation of a simulation of a simulation and has reached the point at which the film no longer references anything real, only the simulations that came before it – the only experiences of D-Day that most of its viewers can reference to. As this thesis will go on to discuss, this latest adaptation is then used as reference for the next generation of simulacra in multiple ways, including in advertising.

¹⁹⁵ Suid, *Guts*, 634.

¹⁹⁶ Basinger, "Translating War."

Chapter Three: Priming Narratives

As discussed above, this thesis will follow an augmented version of Harrison Gish's tripartite narrational layering of history structure, with a paratextual fourth layer.¹⁹⁷ One of the primary purposes of paratexts is priming players into the narrative, and in the process can create new and enhance existing narratives within the games – thus it can be argued that they produce a discrete fourth layer, making Gish's structure quadripartite. This chapter will therefore examine the objectives of paratexts, analyse their techniques, and identify the narratives they create.

One purpose of paratexts is to advertise and 'prime' the player into developing meanings in the product, adding to the accumulation of information surrounding the text into a growing 'macro-text'.¹⁹⁸ One of the most important aspects that historical games' developers often attempt to promote is the authenticity of their creation. Paratexts often try to generate anticipation, while simultaneously prefiguring expectations of what can be considered accurate. This is frequently attempted through positioning the creators as 'developer-historians', who not only produce the games but also "gathers together disparate historical 'facts' and evidence, and from them creates a new discrete and contained narrative" that legitimise the stories the games tell.¹⁹⁹ In practice the games rely on the 'fetishization' of historical details and, as Jonathan Stubbs writes of historical films, "tend to be built from the details up" in order to "overwhelm viewers" in a feeling of authenticity over actual historical fidelity.²⁰⁰

Paratexts also attempt to legitimate games through linking themselves to previous cinematic portrayals. This allows them to borrow the presumed authenticity of these previous mediations, in ways that feed into a cycle of "selling 'America', past and present, in the ways in which it has already been 'sold to the world.'"²⁰¹ These links take many forms, from discussing the gameplay and environment; to use of Hollywood props or actors; to use of "the language of film, whether through letterboxing, cinematic landscapes, or long, well-developed cut scenes."²⁰²

¹⁹⁷ Gish, "Playing."

¹⁹⁸ Ed Vollans, "[Para]Textually Here: Paratexts and Presence in Games: How Paratexts Extend the Game's Network," in *Paratextualising Games: Investigations on the Paraphernalia and Peripheries of Play*, ed. Benjamin Beil, Gundolf S. Freyermouth, and Hanns Christian Schmidt (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2021), 2-3.

¹⁹⁹ Wright, "Promotional," 599, 601.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 599; Jonathan Stubbs, *Historical Film: A Critical Introduction* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 58.

²⁰¹ Esther Wright, "Marketing Authenticity: Rockstar Games and the Use of Cinema in Video Game Promotion" *Kinephanos: Journal of Media Studies and Popular Culture* 7, no. 1 (2017): 133, <https://www.kinephanos.ca/2017/rockstar-games-and-the-use-of-cinema-in-video-game-promotion/>.

²⁰² Ibid., 132-132, 155; Theo Plothe, "Not Actual Gameplay, but Is It Real Life? Live-Action Footage in Digital Game Trailers and Advertising as Gamerspace," *Kinephanos: Journal of Media Studies and Popular Culture* 7, no. 1 (2017): 227, accessed April 26, 2022, <https://www.kinephanos.ca/2017/not-actual-gameplay-but-is-it-real-life/>.

Analysing the content of these paratexts provides much the same kind of information as analysis of the texts themselves: how the creators depict the history in their games. What is unique about the study of paratexts, compared to narrative and gameplay, is that it can show how actors outside of the text's immediate production can attempt to 're-author' its meanings. This can occur in marketing or other paratexts designed to prime the player and influence their subsequent reading of the game – to focus on different aspects to appeal to different markets, or downplay the more 'critical' meanings in an effort to reduce risk.²⁰³ Various narratives are provided at this level, especially in consumer-facing texts, as producers create an environment of 'speculative consumption' for potential players to "form an idea of what pleasures each text will offer" when purchasing games.²⁰⁴ This is particularly important, as van Den Heede notes, as often a much larger audience have not played the games, but have still interacted with the texts at an exclusively paratextual level when exposed to its marketing – thus, many people may have drawn narrative conclusions from paratexts alone.²⁰⁵

What follows is the analysis of the paratexts that accompany the six games studied in this thesis. While a great deal of time has gone into finding these paratexts, their inherent ephemerality combined with the time since their release means that inevitably the collection is incomplete. Of those known to be lost, several online posts have been deleted or missing and many have suffered from linkrot. There are also paratexts that have been lost so completely that no clues to their existence remain. Those paratexts that have been analysed include game box covers; official game pages where players can buy digital copies; manuals; promotional videos (both trailers and behind the scenes films); printed adverts from game magazines; interviews with developers; as well as a couple of officially-licensed strategy guides that were released to provide the player with extra information on not just the narratives but how to complete each level.

Authentic History

The most obvious way of promoting a sense of authenticity (and thus selling historical content) to consumers is through literally claiming to have accurately recreated the events, as executive producer of *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* (2002) (*MOHAA*) Rick Giolito did in a 2002 interview where he claims they wanted "to create a game so totally immersive, so deep in content and steeped so deeply in authenticity that the player becomes lost in the experience."²⁰⁶ There is universal use of authenticating language throughout the paratexts, with phrases such as "an unprecedented historical combat

²⁰³ Wright, "Promotional," 603.

²⁰⁴ Van Den Heede, "Engaging," 24.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ 2015 Inc., *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*, Electronic Arts, PC, 2002; Rick Giolito, and Dale Dye, "Rick Giolito of Electronic Arts and Dale Dye," interview by Gestalt, *EuroGamer*, Gamer Network Limited, February 15, 2002, Magazine, <https://www.eurogamer.net/i-mohassault>.

experience” and “genuine WWII Normandy military scenarios” commonplace.²⁰⁷ They also claim to have recreated history itself, with assertions like “history comes alive;” “Play one of the most enduring legends in military history;” and even the bold claim that “WWII GI is the invasion of Normandy.”²⁰⁸

Less directly, developers claim authenticity through emphasising the research that went into creating the games. In a ‘Behind the Scenes’ promotional video, the developers of *Medal of Honor: Frontline* (2002) (*MOHF*) claim “every detail in *Medal of Honor Frontline* is meticulously researched,” with the Senior Game Designer Christopher Cross stating:

“[He thinks] that people definitely get a feel for what it was like to fight in those locations. We do an extensive amount of research both here, on site, through video and book and normal research means.”²⁰⁹

Similarly, the producer of *Battlefield 1942* (2002) (*BF1942*), Ken Balthaser, claimed that “the development team spent an enormous amount of pre-production time researching and gathering reference material so they could really capture the feel.”²¹⁰

These efforts culminate in the self-created position of ‘developer-historian’ where, as the name suggests, the game developers also take on the role of historians themselves. Frequently in these paratexts, the developers redirect the reader to their own websites where they provide more detailed information on subjects such as the weapons and vehicles they have recreated.²¹¹ In promoting *MOHAA*, military advisor Dale Dye claimed that:

“This game is starting to teach people what that great seminal event World War Two was really about [...] we also hope that it makes you understand what soldiers may have to go through, and more importantly what all of them went through in World War Two.”²¹²

²⁰⁷ Electronic Arts, *Battlefield 1942 Manual*, Manual (Electronic Arts, 2002), 7.

https://archive.org/details/battlefield-1942_windows_0cld-manual/page/n2/mode/1up; Ziggurat Interactive, “World War II GI,” *Ziggurat Games* (Game Page), accessed April 19, 2022, <https://www.ziggurat.games/game/world-war-ii-gi>.

²⁰⁸ Activision, *Call of Duty 2: Big Red One Manual*, Manual (Activision, 2005), 5; Activision, “Call of Duty 2: Big Red One Cover,” (Game Cover), 2005, posted August 8, 2020, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://archive.org/details/Call-of-Duty-2-Big-Red-One-ps2-hiresscans>; Ziggurat Interactive, “WWII GI Game Page.”

²⁰⁹ Electronic Arts, “Medal of Honor Frontline - Behind the Scenes (4k/60fps),” (Promotional Video), hosted by “Monotrematic Studios”, on *YouTube*, 2002, 00:09:12, posted December 3, 2021, accessed May 2, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCzlfeyYlho>.

²¹⁰ Ken Balthaser, “Battlefield 1942 Interview with Ken Balthaser,” interview by Steve Polak, *PC PowerPlay*, Next Publishing, December, 2002, Magazine, 56-57, <https://archive.org/details/PCPowerplay-080-2002-12/page/n55/mode/2up>.

²¹¹ Electronic Arts, *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault Manual*, Manual (Electronic Arts, 2002), 15; Electronic Arts, *BF1942 Manual*, 10.

²¹² Giolito, and Dye, interview.

The *MOHAA* strategy guide also reinforces this, with the author (who is sure to mention his credentials as a former US Naval officer) justifying their role in writing historical context for the game by noting: “even though it is a game, it is also based on fact. We thought it only appropriate to lay out those facts in the introduction.”²¹³

Another route to authenticity is through associating themselves with other sources of legitimacy, such as museums, military advisors, and official organisations. The first feature on *MOHF*'s official EA page does this, claiming to provide “authentic WWII content with the assistance of the Smithsonian's HO-IX expert Russ Lee and renowned technical consultant Capt. Dale Dye.”²¹⁴ The back cover of *WWII GI* (1999) similarly uses a veteran to legitimise itself, quoting a “Former Sergeant of Marines” as confirming that the game “successfully captures all the tactical military challenges of the real Allied invasion.”²¹⁵ Not only did EA host its UK launch of *MOHAA* in the Imperial War Museum, they also had the aforementioned military advisor Dale Dye in attendance to help promote the game. As described by *EuroGamer*'s interview, Dye is:

“a retired US Marine who did three tours of duty in Vietnam as well as serving in Beirut and Central America. More recently he has put that experience to good use, acting as military consultant to Steven Spielberg on *Saving Private Ryan* and the excellent TV mini-series *Band Of Brothers*.”²¹⁶

With his military and cinematic credentials established, Dye can now lend his legitimacy to the developers. Speaking of how “different” the game is to its contemporaries, Dye discusses how far he went to ensure the developers understood how to authentically recreate combat:

“I took these worms out into the high desert in about 110 degree heat and I made them fire real weapons, live ammunition down range, so they could get the feel of reloading and recoil, and what a weapon would do. And I brought them back into the studio and they began to incorporate those things.”²¹⁷

Dye even suggests the game is more realistic than the films it emulates (and also uses to legitimise itself), pointing out “there aren't any bottomless Hollywood magazines.”²¹⁸ The *MOHF* manual provides a select list of medals awarded in World War II (WWII) and their requirements, before dedicating a whole page to the Medal of Honor and EA's involvement with the Congressional Medal of Honor

²¹³ Mark H. Walker, *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault - Official Strategy Guide*, Strategy Guide (Indianapolis: BradyGames, 2002), 3, 5.

<https://archive.org/details/medalofhonoralli00walk/page/n3/mode/1up?view=theater>.

²¹⁴ EA Los Angeles, “Medal of Honor Frontline,” *Electronic Arts* (Game Page), accessed April 20, 2022, <https://www.ea.com/games/medal-of-honor/medal-of-honor-frontline?isLocalized=true>.

²¹⁵ TNT Team, *WWII GI*, GT Interactive Software, PC, 1999; GT Interactive, “WWII GI Back Cover,” (Game Cover, Back), hosted by Moby Games, 1999, posted May 19, 2002, accessed April 19, 2022, <https://www.mobygames.com/game/wwii-gi/cover-art/gameCoverId,12681/>.

²¹⁶ Giolito, and Dye, interview.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

Society – which “seeks to promote full and vibrant lives in peace for these living symbols of what it means to be an American,” and according to the manual:

“In times of duress, Americans need to look no further than the Congressional Medal of Honor Society for the values of valour, respect and honour [...] – the values that make the United States of America great.”²¹⁹

Authenticating Detail

Though similar to authenticity, where the goal is to convince the audience of historical accuracy, realism here refers to the sense of accurate *recreation* of combat. Though paratexts may claim that the developers have engaged in meticulous research with the help of museums and military advisors to seem authentic, it is how this research has been implemented into the game that can create the sense of realism these games strive for. As Chapman defines it, “when we talk of a realist simulation, we are referring to its stylistic approach to representation rather than evaluating its historical content.”²²⁰

Emphasis is made on claims to realism by these paratexts, particularly on their official game pages and covers – where consumers are most likely to see them when deciding whether to purchase. Particularly, these highlight level design, claiming the games provide “realistic,” “fully realised and highly-detailed 3D environments,” that offer “more immense, more intense, more realistic battles than ever before.”²²¹ *MOHAA*’s cover also focusses on the game’s “Award-winning Sound Design” that allows the player to “hear the powerful sounds of war.”²²² Realism is also promoted by the descriptions of the details included in the environments themselves, ranging from descriptions of the levels available to play, where the player will fight “in a no man’s land of twisted shrapnel, dead bodies, and heavily armed Nazi-infested machine-gun bunkers” and on a beach “littered with barbed wire, tank obstacles, and the twisted wrecks of landing craft from previous failed assault attempts.”²²³ *Call of Duty 2* (2005) (*COD 2*) emphasise how well they have recreated the environment of war, with effects: “Beautifully rendered snow, rain, fog, and smoke, combined with dynamic lighting and shadows, make this the most intense WWII shooter yet;” and level design: “bigger battles, with more tanks, troops, and explosions on-screen, and bigger scope, with a wide range of locales and environments.”²²⁴

²¹⁹ Electronic Arts, *Medal of Honor: Frontline Manual*, Manual (Electronic Arts, 2002), 16-17.

²²⁰ Chapman, *Digital Games*, 61.

²²¹ Ziggurat Interactive, “WWII GI Game Page.”; EA Los Angeles, “MOHF.”; Activision, “Call of Duty 2,” *Steam* (Game Page), accessed April 21, 2022, https://store.steampowered.com/app/2630/Call_of_Duty_2/.

²²² EA Los Angeles, “Medal of Honor: Allied Assault Back Cover,” (Game Cover, Back), hosted by Moby Games, 2002, posted November 15, 2019, accessed April 19, 2022, <https://www.mobygames.com/game/medal-of-honor-allied-assault/cover-art/gameCoverId,607807/>.

²²³ Ziggurat Interactive, “WWII GI Game Page.”; David Knight, *Battlefield 1942 - Prima's Official Strategy Guide*, Strategy Guide (Roseville: Prima Games, 2003), 180.

https://archive.org/details/Battlefield_1942_Prima_Official_eGuide/mode/1up.

²²⁴ Activision, “COD 2 Game Page.”

The fetishisation of weaponry is on full display in these paratexts, and the developers frequently advertise both the quantity and quality of their recreations.²²⁵ Four of the six games studied prominently specify in their trailers, adverts, and on their covers how many “authentic” and “historically accurate” weapons the player can experience.²²⁶ These claims are then further compounded when developers provide more detailed information on their weapons. The *MOHF* manual, for example, provides an entire page of tables giving weapons a score for accuracy, rate of fire, damage, and clip capacity – mixing both real-life and in-game statistics.²²⁷ *MOHAA*’s strategy guide provides a ten-page section called “Tools of the Trade” describing the game’s weapons and gives their range; rate of fire; ammunition type; and capacity.²²⁸ When playing *BRO*, there are unlockable pages that give players more information on both the background and statistics of every weapon and vehicle in the game.

Several of the games similarly emphasise the ability to use vehicles, though none more so than *BF1942* – due to its nature as a more open, map-control game focussing more on individual gameplay, giving players more choice of weapons and vehicles compared to its story-driven competitors. Throughout its paratexts, *BF1942* talks of its “35 authentic WWII land vehicles, ships and aircraft” that range from “tanks, armoured personnel carriers and battleships to the P-51 Mustang and the U-boat.”²²⁹ Despite using its extensive armoury to advertise the game’s realism, commercial pressures ensure that entertainment value remains paramount and is stated several times. The manual describes the vehicles as “designed for maximum all-out warfare, while maintaining the integrity of the originals as much as

²²⁵ Ramsay, "Brutal Games," 106.

²²⁶ Ziggurat Interactive, "WW2 GI Trailer," (Trailer), on *Vimeo*, 00:01:06, posted August 6, 2020, accessed April 19, 2022, https://vimeo.com/445317003?embedded=true&source=vimeo_logo&owner=120356794#at=0; GT Interactive, "WWII GI Back Cover.,"; EA Los Angeles, "Medal of Honor Allied Assault War Chest," *Electronic Arts* (Game Page), accessed April 19, 2022, <https://www.ea.com/games/medal-of-honor/medal-of-honor-allied-assault-war-chest?isLocalized=true>; Electronic Arts, "Medal of Honor Advert," (Advert), Issue 71, *PC PowerPlay*, March 2002, posted October 7, 2016, accessed April 20, 2022, <https://archive.org/details/PCPowerplay-071-2002-03/page/n3/mode/2up>; EA Los Angeles, "MOHF.,"; Electronic Arts, "Medal of Honor Frontline - Video Game Teaser (2002)," (Trailer), hosted by "barbarianbros", on *YouTube*, 2002, 00:01:12, posted December 31, 2015, accessed April 20, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5psLBBG0Sms>; Electronic Arts, "Medal of Honor: Frontline Cover," (Game Cover), 2002, posted September 8, 2020, accessed April 20, 2022, <https://archive.org/details/medal-of-honor-frontline-ps2-hires-scans/Medal%20of%20Honor%20-%20Frontline%20-%20Box.jpg>; Electronic Arts, "Battlefield 1942 Back Cover," (Game Cover, Back), hosted by Moby Games, 2002, posted September 28, 2002, accessed April 20, 2022, <https://www.mobygames.com/game/windows/battlefield-1942/cover-art/gameCoverId,14529/>.

²²⁷ Electronic Arts, *MOHF Manual*, 11-12.

²²⁸ Walker, *MOHAA Strategy Guide*, 9-19.

²²⁹ Electronic Arts, *BF1942 Manual*, 4; Electronic Arts, "Battlefield 1942," *Electronic Arts* (Game Page), accessed April 20, 2022, <https://www.ea.com/games/battlefield/battlefield-1942?isLocalized=true>; Electronic Arts, "BF1942 Back Cover."

possible;” meanwhile in Balthaser’s interview he states that while “Dice spent much of the development time tuning and tweaking the individual vehicles so they performed close to how the real life vehicles performed,” the game “was never meant to be a sim and for the most part the physics for the vehicles are arcade like.”²³⁰

Attempts to accurately recreate the tactics and experiences of soldiers is another prominent talking point. Talking of *MOHAA*’s aims to differentiate itself from its competitors through ‘authentic’ combat, Giolito stated they wanted to be:

“moving the player away from the Rambo style of run and gun gameplay and forcing him to think about tactics, to think about risks to himself and his squadmates, to think about moral choices.”²³¹

However, the *Call of Duty* games seem to focus on this aspect much more than the others. The *COD 2* game page emphasises the squad-based aspect of the game, claiming:

“The dozens of Allied soldiers surrounding you are fully aware of the changing situations [...] They will draw enemy fire, lay down cover for you, use foxholes and moving tanks for cover, and warn you of incoming enemy troops and hostile fire.”²³²

This last aspect was particularly emphasised by Grant Collier, President of the developers Infinity Ward, where they spoke of the specially-created “battle chatter” system that enables the AI to audibly communicate: “they will spot enemies in buildings, they will call that out, the friendlies will redeploy and you really feel that you are part of a real, robust squad.”²³³ Additionally, Collier spoke of the AI’s tactical coding which would give the characters vision cones and hearing radiuses, as well as the ability to act in response to the player: “they can set up ambushes, they can try to flank;” and claiming “anything that we could think of that people would do in war, we have added, we have hardcoded into the AI of *Call of Duty 2*. So you’re gonna see very realistic situations.”²³⁴

The style of the *MOHAA* guide is also designed to confer a sense of authenticity, styled after period document folders with typewriter font, notes made to look like they were written on scraps of paper, and “Top Secret” stamped throughout (see **Figure 3.1**). One other way developers use historical material as a source of authenticity is to include select quotations by famous historical figures. The most popular figure to use is General Dwight D. Eisenhower and his D-Day speech, in particular the opening line: “You are about to embark upon the great crusade.”²³⁵ The manual for *Call of Duty 2: Big Red One*

²³⁰ Balthaser, interview.

²³¹ Giolito, and Dye, interview.

²³² Activision, “COD 2 Game Page.”

²³³ Grant Collier, “Call of Duty 2 - Filefront Interview,” interview by Ana Karina Sato, *FileFront*, FileFront, 2005, Video, https://archive.org/details/cod2_filefront_interview.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Electronic Arts, “Medal of Honor: Allied Assault Advert,” (Advert), hosted by Moby Games, Issue 95, *PC Gamer*, March 2002, posted October 26, 2018, accessed April 19, 2022, <https://www.mobygames.com/game/medal-of-honor-allied-assault/promo/promoImageId,448224/>; Electronic

(2005) (*BRO*) uses a number of quotes referring to the division it is named after, including the Division's motto; a quotation by Lieutenant General Omar Bradley, commander of the U.S. First Army; and an anonymous quote that talks of their willingness to place themselves on the front lines.²³⁶



Figure 3.1. An example of how the MOHAA Strategy Guide uses its design to give a feeling of historical authenticity by including a mock newspaper clipping and a 'handwritten' version of Eisenhower's D-Day speech.

Source: Mark H. Walker, *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault - Official Strategy Guide*, Strategy Guide (Indianapolis: BradyGames, 2002), 76, <https://archive.org/details/medalofhonoralli00walk/page/n3/mode/1up?view=theater>.

Arts, "Medal of Honor - Allied Assault (2001)," (Trailer), hosted by "Victor Cerezo *vEK*", on *YouTube*, 2001, 00:02:49, posted June 23, 2010, accessed April 20, 2022,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NnmGQTQeAzU>; Walker, *MOHAA Strategy Guide*; Electronic Arts, "Medal of Honor: Frontline Advert," (Advert), Issue 7, *Play Magazine*, July 2002, posted July 2, 2016, accessed April 20, 2022,

https://archive.org/details/UneditedPLAY_marktrade/PLAY_07u/page/n15/mode/2up; Electronic Arts, "MOHF Trailer."

²³⁶ Treyarch, and High Voltage Software, *Call of Duty 2: Big Red One*, Activision, PlayStation 2, 2005; Activision, *COD 2: BRO Manual*, 5, 7, 12.

But not everything appears so realistic. A couple of the most obvious cases occur in the *MOHF* trailer, where a short clip shows the player firing a Bazooka while riding a minecart, soon followed by the title “Astounding Enemy AI” over a clip of a German soldier being shot, checking himself for blood, and launching himself over a railing in a strangely comedic fashion.²³⁷ Speaking of *COD 2*’s new health system, Collier describes a compromise between ‘realism’ and entertainment. Where in the first game, players reportedly backtracked through the level to retrieve health (thus breaking from the action), the sequel implemented a regeneration system that makes the game more difficult until the player stops taking damage and can recover – “you’re only killed with a shot to the head or a shot to the chest [...] The difficulty level, now, determines the size of your head and the size of your chest.”²³⁸ There are, naturally, many more smaller details (such as the limited number of combatants, or cross-weapon compatibility of ammunition) that make the game less realistic, but again this is often due to the compromise between ‘realism’ and entertainment.

Cinematic Legitimation

Authenticity can also be generated through linking themselves to previous cinematic incarnations of the subject matter, borrowing the faith that consumers may have grown in these experiences.²³⁹ Setting the standard of visual effects and experience of combat, cinema is seen to be the ideal that these games can strive toward. This is shown no more clearly than in *COD 2*’s marketing, which frequently propounds the developers’ achievements in “[redefining] the cinematic intensity and chaos of battle.”²⁴⁰ Going further, Giolito says *MOHAA* is “more like a movie than a game.”²⁴¹

More directly, several of the paratexts explicitly reference films that have influenced the creation of the games. For example, this is unambiguously explained in *MOHF*’s ‘Behind the Scenes’ extra, where the Senior Game Designer confirms “Watching movies, we get ideas. Like the whole Nijmegen Bridge scenario is loosely based off of some stuff from *A Bridge Too Far*.”²⁴² *MOHAA*’s strategy guide compares the game to cinematic (and television) portrayals several times, when describing the Omaha level as “just like the opening scene from *Saving Private Ryan*,” and in an interview, one tester describes the best part of the job being “watching *Band of Brothers* and then playing levels in *MOHAA* that reminded me of things I saw in the show.”²⁴³ *BRO*’s manual provides a short biography of each of the player’s squadmates, not only further investing the player in the story but also playing into the traditional WWII combat film group established by Hollywood, as described by Jeanine Basinger:

²³⁷ Electronic Arts, “MOHF Trailer.”

²³⁸ Collier, interview.

²³⁹ Wright, “Marketing Authenticity,” 133.

²⁴⁰ Activision, “COD 2 Game Page.”

²⁴¹ Giolito, and Dye, interview.

²⁴² Electronic Arts, “MOHF Bts.”

²⁴³ Walker, *MOHAA Strategy Guide*, 156, 177.

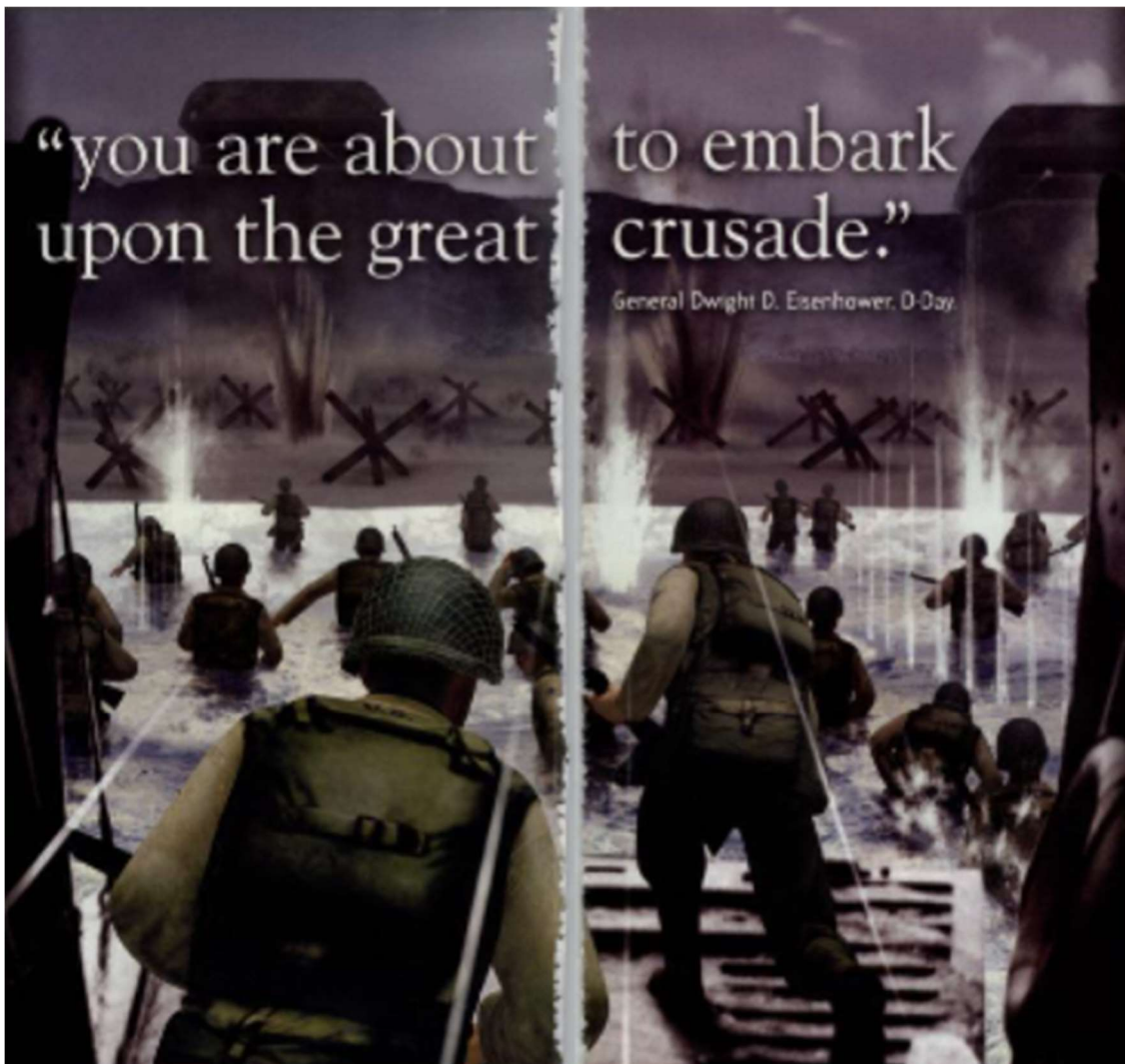
“The group is made up of a mixture of ethnic and geographic types, most commonly including an Italian, a Jew, a cynical complainer from Brooklyn, a sharpshooter from the mountains, a midwesterner (nicknamed by his state, "Iowa" or "Dakota"), and a character who must be initiated in some way (a newcomer without battle experience) and/or who will provide a commentary or "explanation" on the action as it occurs (a newspaperman, a letter writer, an author, a professor).”²⁴⁴

The squad roughly fits this description: Pvt. 'Brooklyn' Bloomfield ticks both the Jew and the one from Brooklyn (though actually from the Bronx); Sgt. Hawkins fits the Midwesterner role (though not by nickname); and Pvt. Kelly is the intellectual keeping a journal (though not to commentate to the audience).²⁴⁵

Visually, there are multiple occasions that the paratexts reference scenes and shots from cinema, in particular *Saving Private Ryan* (*SPR*). The *Medal of Honor* games, with proximity to the film through both Spielberg and time, provide the most explicit recreations. **Figures 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4** show the recreation in a behind the scenes video and a magazine advert of *SPR*'s most famous image – the POV from the back of the Higgins Boat, showing the slaughter of the soldiers in front as they attempt to disembark. **Figures 3.5 and 3.6** give another example of direct recreation in the *MOHAA* trailer, with an over-the-shoulder shot from the opposite perspective, that of a German machine-gunner mowing down landing troops. The trailer has several other moments that call back to the film, such as the tracking backward through the soldiers as they are transported to the beach, with one vomiting and another praying just like *SPR*. Once the ramp lowers, the cinematic style remains with *SPR*, the 'handheld camera' shakily following the troops onto the beach. **Figures 3.7 and 3.8** demonstrate that the influence of *SPR* is not confined to its famous Omaha Beach sequence. *MOHF*'s cover gives a direct homage to the film's climax, where a mortally wounded Captain Miller (Tom Hanks) fires his pistol at a tank crossing a bridge (before it is destroyed by a P-51 Mustang fighter plane – the same plane above the tank in the *MOHF* image).

²⁴⁴ Basinger, "Translating War."

²⁴⁵ Activision, *COD 2: BRO Manual*, 7.



Figures 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4. A still from the MOHF 'Behind the Scenes' video (top), and an advert for MOHF and MOHAA (immediately above) showing American troops exiting their Higgins Boats under

German machine-gun fire – clearly taking inspiration from the opening sequences of Saving Private Ryan (below).

Sources: Electronic Arts, "Medal of Honor Frontline - Behind the Scenes (4k/60fps)," (Promotional Video), hosted by "Monotrematic Studios", on *YouTube*, 2002, 00:09:12, posted December 3, 2021, accessed May 2, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCzlfeyYlho>; Electronic Arts, "Medal of Honor Advert," (Advert), Issue 71, *PC PowerPlay*, March 2002, posted October 7, 2016, accessed April 20, 2022, <https://archive.org/details/PCPowerplay-071-2002-03/page/n3/mode/2up>; Steven Spielberg, *Saving Private Ryan* (DreamWorks Pictures; Paramount Pictures; Amblin Entertainment, 1998).





Figures 3.5, and 3.6. *A still taken from the MOHAA trailer showing an over-the-shoulder shot of a German machine-gunner mowing down American soldiers as they exit their Higgins Boat (above), clearly adapting a similar shot from the Omaha sequence in Saving Private Ryan (below).*

Sources: Electronic Arts, "Medal of Honor - Allied Assault (2001)," (Trailer), hosted by "Victor Cerezo *vEK*", on *YouTube*, 2001, 00:02:49, posted June 23, 2010, accessed April 20, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NnmGQTQeAzU>; Steven Spielberg, *Saving Private Ryan* (DreamWorks Pictures; Paramount Pictures; Amblin Entertainment, 1998).





Figures 3.7 and 3.8. *An inlaid picture taken from the back cover of MOHF, showing the player aiming a pistol at a tank crossing a bridge (left). Compare to a shot taken from the climax of Saving Private Ryan of the protagonist vainly firing his pistol at a tank crossing a bridge toward him (right).*

Sources: Electronic Arts, "Medal of Honor: Frontline Cover," (Game Cover), 2002, posted September 8, 2020, accessed April 20, 2022, <https://archive.org/details/medal-of-honor-frontline-ps2-hirescans/Medal%20of%20Honor%20-%20Frontline%20-%20Box.jpg>; Steven Spielberg, Saving Private Ryan (DreamWorks Pictures; Paramount Pictures; Amblin Entertainment, 1998).



Paratexts also indirectly link themselves to the cinematic predecessors through their cast and crew. Most notable is the link between *SPR*'s director, Steven Spielberg, and his brainchild *Medal of Honor*. Giolito makes much of this connection in his interview, where he describes taking *MOHAA* to the set of *Minority Report* to demonstrate the D-Day level to him:

“in front of a constantly growing crowd of DPs, grips, sound technicians and actors. And oh yeah, by the way, he had pulled along George Lucas [...] Steven's looking at it, and people are whooping and hollering, and George Lucas says to him, 'oh god, it looks just like *Saving Private Ryan*'. And Steven turns to George and says 'yeah, and I love it'.”²⁴⁶

Here, not only does Giolito link the game to Spielberg but to George Lucas (another famous director, and creator of *Indiana Jones*, a character who frequently fights Nazis), simultaneously providing himself with an endorsement by the two directors, and the legitimization of the game being “just like *Saving Private Ryan*.”²⁴⁷ In the same interview, Dale Dye managed to link the game to another of Spielberg's WWII projects: *Band of Brothers* (2001), claiming that when filming the television show the actors would spend their spare time “in the warming tent playing *Medal Of Honor*.”²⁴⁸ This is particularly interesting, as seven members of the cast would go on to provide voice acting in the *Medal of Honor* series' rivals *COD 2* and *BRO* – with the latter being narrated by star of *The Big Red One* (1980), Mark Hamill – further linking the game to its cinematic predecessors. But most importantly, they maintain and expand the narrative themes found in the films.

Narrative Themes

Americentrism

The most overt example of Americentrism (the centralising of the US and its culture within world events or discussions) in the paratexts comes in the writing of historical context. For example, the ‘Historical Background’ section of *MOHAA*'s strategy guide jumps straight from a paragraph on the Treaty of Versailles and Hitler's rise to Pearl Harbor – completely skipping the vast number of important events that occurred before direct American involvement.²⁴⁹ *BRO*'s manual, meanwhile, gives no context to the war other than the history of the 1st Infantry Division the game is based on.²⁵⁰

A more common theme that emerges throughout these paratexts is the veneration of the American forces. In its opening history, *MOHAA*'s strategy guide claims that “From Pearl Harbor to D-Day,

²⁴⁶ Giolito, and Dye, interview.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Walker, *MOHAA Strategy Guide*, 6.

²⁵⁰ Activision, *COD 2: BRO Manual*, 5.

American determination to confront the German army never wavers.” Of the African campaign, the guide focusses exclusively on how the Americans progressed, and how by the Allied invasion of Sicily “the Americans had a cadre of hard-bitten war veterans and a Rommel calibre general (Patton) to lead them.”²⁵¹ *BF1942*’s guide is less obvious, but still implies American supremacy, where it describes the events of D-Day as “widely recognized as history’s most violent beach landing, Allied forces, through sheer tenacity, prevailed over strong German fortifications on Omaha Beach.”²⁵² While technically describing the efforts of the entire Allied forces, it still only mentions Omaha Beach – the famous *American* landing zone -, thus once again implicitly giving the US primacy in the operation. *MOHAA* also does this regarding the Pacific Theatre, which it claims was “almost totally the United States’ responsibility,” and only mentions the vast contributions of the Commonwealth, Chinese, and other Allied forces in a throwaway acknowledgement that “there were other allies.”²⁵³

Another consistent feature that venerates American contributions occurs when other Allied nations are mentioned, by subtly reiterating their reliance on US aid or even implying they acted as a hindrance to American efforts - however this is almost exclusively found in *MOHAA*’s strategy guide, as the main source of historical writing. Of Britain, the only mention independent of American involvement is of “the disastrous British raid on the French port of Dieppe in August 1942.”²⁵⁴ The other mentions of Britain are all written as if it were a ‘junior partner,’ in which they agreed to invade Europe but “within three months the British were hedging their bets” – though this time there is no mention of the Dieppe raid that caused the rethink.²⁵⁵ This is followed by a description of how Britain almost dragged America into the Mediterranean, to which “the American Joint Chiefs bemoaned the dilution of forces.”²⁵⁶ Also of interest here is *BRO*’s vehicle description of the M3 Stuart Light Tank, where it gives no history, physical description, or statistics – only that “Many U.S. Stuarts were delivered to Britain as part of the Lend-Lease Act.” The Soviets fare equally poorly in this guide’s historical account. Starting their story 6 months after their formal entry into the war, the focus here is almost exclusively on how the Americans aided the Soviets through diverting German troops away from the Eastern Front and invading North Africa and Sicily. Through forcing Italy’s surrender:

“Germany would not only have to garrison and fight for the Italian mainland, but also replace Italian troops [...]. This dispersion of manpower was one the Wehrmacht could ill afford and played directly into the Soviet’s [sic] hands.”²⁵⁷

²⁵¹ Walker, *MOHAA Strategy Guide*, 187.

²⁵² Knight, *BF1942 Strategy Guide*, 177.

²⁵³ Walker, *MOHAA Strategy Guide*, 192.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 184.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 185.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 183, 185.

The account even ends by asking whether America cooperating with their allies actually prolonged the war – proposing, implicitly, that the Americans were dragged down by their Allies and may have been better off saving the world on their own.²⁵⁸

However, it must be noted that this trend is not universal thinking among the developers. In an interview with IGN, Grant Collier discusses their intent to counter the idea, stating that “we just felt that it was a disservice to continue on with the tradition of showing about how 'the great Americans have actually single-handedly won the war'.”²⁵⁹ Specifically, they point out that “the war started in 1939, and we got involved in 1944 [sic], so there was a lot that happened in Europe, long before the Americans ever got involved” – showing that, while the dates may be inaccurate, they still have an awareness that the war didn’t start with Pearl Harbor.²⁶⁰

Good and Evil

The reduction of the war to a black-and-white conflict is another trope common among these paratexts and combines with the themes of ‘Nazisploitation’ – a term that originated to describe a genre of low-budget cinema that originated in the 1970s, described by Daniel H. Magilow as:

“films that conflate the history of World War II and the Holocaust or that invent new and fantastic histories altogether, Nazis are more caricature than character. In the logic of the Nazisploitation film, all Germans are Nazis, all Nazis are members of the SS, and all members of the SS are war criminals, medical experimenters and sexual sadists.”²⁶¹

As discussed above, this is a system that has been used consistently throughout depictions of WWII to portray a ‘good war’, while simultaneously providing the game with a backdrop for guilt-free carnage, as the Allies are unambiguously on the side of good.²⁶² *WWII GI* offers the player to “Blast your way to freedom,” while a *MOHF* advert commands “Save yourself. Save France. Then save the world.”²⁶³ The virtue of the soldier is also upheld here, including a variant of Frank Bernard Camp’s poem *Our Hitch in Hell* that ends with a soldier claiming, “I’ve served my time in Hell.”²⁶⁴ The less savoury side of the Allies is also notably omitted from *BRO*’s description of the V2 Rocket, which

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 192.

²⁵⁹ Grant Collier, "Call of Duty 2 Xbox 360 Interview - Grant Collier Interview," *IGN*, IGN, 2005, Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hywkFYIWdSo>.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Daniel H. Magilow, "Introduction," in *Nazisploitation! The Nazi Image in Low-Brow Cinema and Culture*, ed. Daniel H. Magilow, Elizabeth Bridges, and Kristin T. Vander Lugt (London: Continuum Books, 2012), 2.

²⁶² Pfister, "Imaginations," 272; Ramsay, "Brutal Games," 95.

²⁶³ GT Interactive, "WWII GI Front Cover," (Game Cover, Front), hosted by Moby Games, 1999, posted May 19, 2002, accessed April 19, 2022, <https://www.mobygames.com/game/wwii-gi/cover-art/gameCoverId,12680/>; Electronic Arts, "MOHF Advert."

²⁶⁴ Electronic Arts, "MOHF Advert."; Frank Bernard Camp, "Our Hitch in Hell," in *American Soldier Ballads* (Los Angeles: Geo. Rice & Sons, 1917).

“helped fuel U.S. Space travel development” when they were captured. This brief description, whilst not technically incorrect, gives the false impression that the US simply used the designs to help get to the moon, whereas in reality the US recruited scientists from Germany – many of whom were dedicated Nazis, some even standing trial at Nuremberg – to work on “developing rockets, chemical and biological weapons, aviation and space medicine (for enhancing military pilot and astronaut performance), and many other armaments.”²⁶⁵

Nazisploitation is rife throughout these paratexts, building up the German forces as superhuman zealots and unrepentantly evil. A whole section of *MOHAA*'s strategy guide is dedicated to this, describing each different kind of German the player will encounter, literally titled “The Bad Guys.”²⁶⁶ First is the Wehrmacht, which while consisting of “farmers, merchants, machinists, and any other German male,” were still a force that “almost captured Europe.”²⁶⁷ The fanaticism of the Nazis is repeatedly emphasised, with almost every enemy described as “fearless in their zeal” and “dedicated to Hitler.”²⁶⁸ The Wehrmacht Engineer is described as “probably building or destroying something for the cause,” and the player is urged to “put an end to his clever brand of evil.” Most in-keeping with Nazisploitation tropes is the description given to the Scientist: “Quite skilled in discovering ways to make you feel pain, these scientists are forever loyal to the Führer.”²⁶⁹ *MOHF*'s advert also participates in the demonisation of the Germans, warning that “If the hypothermia, underwater mines and Belgian Gates don't kill you, there will be plenty of Nazis awaiting your arrival only too glad to help finish the job;” *BRO*'s manual similarly warns that “you can be sure Gerry [sic] won't hesitate to shoot you down.”²⁷⁰

A complementary stage of the demonisation of the enemy is through dehumanising language. For example, enemy-held areas are frequently described as “infested,” making the player the exterminator, *MOHAA*'s strategy guide even describes combat as “going hunting.”²⁷¹ *WWII GI*'s trailer urges the player to “wipe out scores of Wehrmacht and SS soldiers” and the *MOHAA* guide recommends dealing with German Workers simply as: “just take them down and move ahead.”²⁷²

Glorification of War

Several positive characteristics are emphasised by these paratexts that result in glorifying war, namely heroism; sacrifice; aggression; brotherhood; the citizen soldier; and remembrance. A consistent theme

²⁶⁵ Annie Jacobsen, *Operation Paperclip: The Secret Intelligence Program That Brought Nazi Scientists to America* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 2014), 5-6.

²⁶⁶ Walker, *MOHAA Strategy Guide*, 21.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 22-35.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁷⁰ Electronic Arts, “MOHF Advert.”; Activision, *COD 2: BRO Manual*.

²⁷¹ Ziggurat Interactive, “WWII GI Game Page.”; Walker, *MOHAA Strategy Guide*, 75.

²⁷² Ziggurat Interactive, “WWII GI Trailer.”; Walker, *MOHAA Strategy Guide*, 35.

throughout the games is hyperbolic description, commonly manifested in phrases such as “Relive the greatest war in history;” “the battles that changed the fate of the world;” and “create a victory for the generations.”²⁷³ *MOHAA*’s trailer venerates the soldier in a montage toward the end, filling the screen with the words “VALOR;” “DUTY;” “LEADERSHIP;” and “SACRIFICE;” before culminating in a shot circling a soldier wiping his brow. A low angle shows them standing proudly in front of an almost halo-like sun (**Figure 3.9**), with the narrator asking the audience: “Can one man truly make a difference?”²⁷⁴



Figure 3.9. *The closing shot of the MOHAA trailer. The heroic GI becomes a dominating figure, with a heavenly light glowing around their silhouette.*

Source: Electronic Arts, "Medal of Honor - Allied Assault (2001)," (Trailer), hosted by "Victor Cerezo *vEK*", on *YouTube*, 2001, 00:02:49, posted June 23, 2010, accessed April 20, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NnmGQTQeAzU>.

Players are also primed to enjoy war through aggressive language. They are told they will be “armed to the teeth” to “outgun hundreds of Nazi soldiers” and “bring about the destruction of the German war machine.”²⁷⁵ This is epitomised by *MOHAA*’s strategy guide telling the player:

“General Patton once said that patriotism isn't dying for your country, it's making the other poor slob die for his. That's what we hope this briefing will do - instruct you on how to make the Germans die for their country.”²⁷⁶

BF1942’s manual similarly argues that “a good day is a day without casualties, unless they're on the other side of the trenches” – once again turning the consequences of war into a positive.²⁷⁷

The brotherhood between soldiers and the concept of the citizen-soldier is another source of exaltation. These were “ordinary soldiers asked to overcome extraordinary challenges,” “standing

²⁷³ Electronic Arts, "BF1942."; Activision, *COD 2: BRO Manual*, 5; Electronic Arts, *BF1942 Manual*, 10.

²⁷⁴ Electronic Arts, "MOHAA Trailer."

²⁷⁵ Electronic Arts, "MOHF Game Cover."; Electronic Arts, "MOHF Trailer."

²⁷⁶ Walker, *MOHAA Strategy Guide*, 37.

²⁷⁷ Electronic Arts, *BF1942 Manual*, 21.

shoulder to shoulder,” ready to defend their families and country.²⁷⁸ Dale Dye, discusses his hopes that *MOHAA* “makes you understand what soldiers may have to go through, and more importantly what all of them went through in World War Two,” continuing to elevate the war by claiming that “we owe where we are and who we are and what we are to those folks.”²⁷⁹

The games are also frequently dedicated to the memories of the soldiers that fought, for example *BRO*’s manual states that the game “is dedicated to the members of the Big Red One and their families. We will never forget your courage, dedication and sacrifice. Duty First.”²⁸⁰ *COD 2* is even more explicit in mixing the ‘good war’ into its remembrance: “To the men and women around the world who gave their lives in defense of our freedoms, we will never forget you.”²⁸¹ The end of the *Medal of Honor* manuals instead dedicate themselves to educating the reader about the award that lends its name to the franchise and the society that accompanies it, once again memorialising the sacrifice and bravery of the soldiers of the US, and indirectly glorifying the wars these soldiers fought in.²⁸²

Conclusion

Through authenticating themselves and claiming to provide realism to the player, these games – through their paratexts – can more effectively disseminate several different narratives upon the audience. As demonstrated, authenticity can be generated through discussion of the research behind the project and the creation of the developer-historian. It can also be borrowed from other sources with established reputations, such as military historians. Film’s higher authority is also useful here, whether the games associate themselves through recreation of specific scenes or tropes; the directors; or the cast. By providing a more ‘realistic’ experience the games also gain authority in their portrayal of history, as players become more receptive to the idea that the gameplay is closer to real events. This can be achieved through the barrage of detail, fetishisation of weaponry, and the creation of more intelligent AI.

The effects discussed can then be propagated to the audience with more authority, like the Americentrism that seems inherent in popular American historical production - be it through focussing exclusively on the US involvement in the war; the aggrandising of its forces; or the diminishing of the efforts of its allies. The concept of the ‘good war’ can also be bolstered through paratexts, by contrasting the virtuousness of the US and the Allies while demonising the Nazis to dehumanising levels – perpetuating the idea of a just war, free from nuance or negative effects like civilian casualties. This then contributes to the final narrative discussed, the glorification of war itself. Once again, the supposed benefits and positive traits of war are played up – the valour, bravery, and sacrifice -, while the negatives are left unsaid and unthought. Once again, all of these themes are continued into the games themselves.

²⁷⁸ Activision, *COD 2: BRO Manual*, 5; Electronic Arts, *MOHF Manual*, 5.

²⁷⁹ Giolito, and Dye, interview.

²⁸⁰ Activision, *COD 2: BRO Manual*, 18.

²⁸¹ Activision, *Call of Duty 2 Manual*, Manual (Activision, 2005), 13.

²⁸² Electronic Arts, *MOHF Manual*, 25.

Chapter Four: Framing Narratives

Continuing the augmented structure of narrational layering, this chapter focusses on Gish's first and second layers that occur once the player has begun the game (following the additional zeroth priming layer).²⁸³ Consisting of the contextualisation of the game within World War II (WWII) as a whole, generally within the opening cinematics, these layers thus "provide an historical basis for the ensuing missions and incorporate the individual game's forthcoming play within a genuine past occurrence."²⁸⁴ This is followed by a second layer that open and close each level, providing additional historical context for the player, giving "a spatio-temporal localization [...] and a personalization of the conflict's stakes and meanings."²⁸⁵ This is undertaken through previous levels; briefings, often taking the form of cinematics or short films styled after contemporary newsreels; and cut-scenes that immediately precede gameplay. Chapman refers to these as 'framing narrative fragments':

"discrete, directing, self-contained and often contextually non-specific, pre-scripted, fully formed sections of narrative that emplot and structure the events of the game's narrative."²⁸⁶

The way in which the D-Day levels of these games are contextualised provides much information on how the developers wish for the players to interpret the events themselves. Not only do the framing narratives continue priming players, but they allow the developers to include themes and events that are more difficult to include in gameplay – facilitating more complex exposition, controlled story events, and demonstrating the larger causes and consequences of the scenarios depicted.²⁸⁷ The explicit content of the framing narrative fragments are not the only important feature, the form in which they take demand equal investigation. Using similar techniques to paratexts, the framing narratives use a range of authenticating methods in their presentation. This chapter will therefore investigate how the style of presentation and inclusion of authenticating detail, such as maps and photographs, help in legitimising narratives, before looking at the narrative themes themselves – particularly those that continue to reinforce the same themes presented in the priming, paratextual layer.

The six games discussed here are, once again: *WWII GI* (1999); *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* (2002); *Medal of Honor: Frontline* (2002), *Battlefield 1942* (2002); *Call of Duty 2* (2005); and *Call of Duty 2: Big Red One* (2005).²⁸⁸ Of these, *WWII GI* provides no framing narrative to go along with the landings – as one reviewer wrote:

²⁸³ Gish, "Playing," 170.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Chapman, *Digital Games*, 121.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 147.

²⁸⁸ TNT Team, *WWII GI*; 2015 Inc., *MOH: Allied Assault*; EA Los Angeles, *MOHF*; Digital Illusions CE, *BF1942*; Infinity Ward, *Call of Duty 2*, Activision, Xbox 360, 2005; Treyarch, and High Voltage Software, *COD 2: BRO*.

“you'd think that the development team would have taken some time to explain the historical significance [...] but] you'll see no cutscenes, no movies and will read nothing of any real interest about the second World War.”²⁸⁹

While *WWII GI*'s lack of context may be down to the scale of the game, *Battlefield 1942 (BF1942)* provides only two paragraphs of written briefing, with another paragraph on completion of the level, and thus provides little framing narrative to analyse.

Authenticating Detail

Much like *Saving Private Ryan (SPR)* used the style of 1940s combat film to authenticate itself through aesthetics, the games copy this tactic by not only replicating *SPR* (as demonstrated above), but by including said newsreels into the narrative alongside numerous other details such as maps, photos, quotes, and placing the player in simulated environments while receiving the games' narrative setting. These are intended to “position the narrative in a distinct space and time and with a specific set of meanings and associations.”²⁹⁰

Newsreel-Cinematics

One of the most frequently used tactics in these games is the use of newsreel footage in the cinematics intended to introduce the players to both the game and the level. This utilises the authenticity associated with such imagery, both from their original newsreel format and their subsequent war documentary remediation. *Call of Duty 2 (COD 2)* takes this one step further, by adding the logo of the *Military Channel* (an American cable station, later rebranded as the *American Heroes Channel*). As Allison proposes, this helps authenticate the message in two ways:

“In one way, this mimics the military insignia that would introduce a period documentary, and [...] to place the player into the historical period. In another way, however, this sequence places the player outside of history, as a contemporary viewer watching cable television and learning about events far in the past.”²⁹¹

These newsreel-cinematics tend to be accompanied by either a contemporary speech (a recording or read by an actor), or a “voice-of-God-style narrator with an old-fashioned tone to his voice,” once again lending authenticity through literal use of historical material, or the simulation of it.²⁹²

Newsreel-cinematics are not only used to conjure authenticity, but to reinforce the narratives being created by the developer-historians. Their construction is carefully designed to, Jaimie Baron argues, “actively shape and limit the historical meanings that may be attributed to this footage, producing a

²⁸⁹ Trent C. Ward, "WWII GI," *IGN* (Review), August 10, 1999, accessed April 19, 2022, <https://www.ign.com/articles/1999/08/10/wwii-gi>.

²⁹⁰ Tanine Allison, "The World War II Video Game, Adaptation, and Postmodern History," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (2010): 188, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43797655>.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 189.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 188.

particular, ideologically charged version of the past.”²⁹³ Whatever player agency that exists within the game is removed (at least, as far as one can remove agency in the consumption of media) during these sequences, and a specific historical narrative is fed to the audience. By placing these cinematics in a strictly linear, chronological order – both by levels throughout the game, and by event in the history provided – the developers can further control the perception of history, reinforcing “the traditional linear, singular, and teleological conception [...] even as it introduces interactivity” in the gameplay itself.²⁹⁴ Baron continues by pointing to the usage of newsreel footage in “heavily edited and sutured” sequences, which are specifically picked and ordered in ways that limit the meaning that can be derived from them separately, thus ensuring the player is reliant on the narrative provided by the developers themselves.²⁹⁵

However, it is important to also note there remains a barrier between such cinematics and the actual gameplay, both through the perceived temporality – the footage belonging to the war, while the game belongs to the present – as well as the visual difference between the real and the computer-generated. These barriers can have two potential, opposite, reactions in the consumer. The temporal disparity caused by the “dated” look of the footage compared to the “immediate and viscerally engaging” gameplay results in “the illusion of presence and interactivity that the older images lack.”²⁹⁶ At the same time, the ‘realism’ of the footage contrasts more immediately with the simulated play, creating a disruption in immersion and can act in opposition to the intended authenticating effect.²⁹⁷ Situating the cinematics in a diegetic fashion, for example by portraying it as a projection onto the wall in the briefing room as in *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault (MOHAA)*, is perhaps an attempt at creating an internal logic for its inclusion. But in the end, this newsreel-cinematic approach has faded over time - “as game engines became more powerful, cutscenes increasingly came to incorporate game-style animation,” which fit more consistently with the gameplay.²⁹⁸

The newsreel-cinematic was such a popular tactic during the early period of the WWII FPS genre that all four of the games that contain cinematics use this format. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the subject matter, two of these newsreel-cinematics utilise General Eisenhower’s D-Day speech as the narration – *COD 2* and *Medal of Honor: Frontline (MOHF)* – though the latter uses an abridged version. *COD 2*’s version opens with the aforementioned *Military Channel* logo in the bottom right, with the details of the speech appearing in the bottom left: “General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces. London, 1944.” Eisenhower first addresses his

²⁹³ Jaimie Baron, "Digital Historicism: Archival Footage, Digital Interface, and Historiographic Effects in Call of Duty: World at War," *Eludamos* 4, no. 2 (2010): 303, <https://dx.doi.org/10.7557/23.6050>.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 304.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 306.

²⁹⁶ Allison, "World War II," 189; Baron, "Digital Historicism," 305.

²⁹⁷ Baron, "Digital Historicism," 304-305.

²⁹⁸ Andrew J. Salvati, and Jonathan M. Bullinger, "Selective Authenticity and the Playable Past," in *Playing with the Past: Digital Games and the Simulation of History*, ed. Matthew Wilhelm Kapell and Andrew B.R. Elliott (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 160.

audience, “Soldiers, sailors, and airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force,” with *COD 2*’s cinematic showing clips of each of the three military branches - meanwhile, this address is removed by *MOHF*’s version. This could be for any number of reasons, but the effect is the same - it dilutes the feeling of temporal disparity and allows the speech to directly speak to the player with its next line: “You are about to embark on the Great Crusade.”²⁹⁹

The two games also take different approaches to what images they pair with the speech. To accompany “The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you,” *MOHF* chooses to picture the eyes of the world as the ‘Big Three’ leaders – Winston Churchill, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and Josef Stalin (**Figure 4.1**) – and the “liberty-loving people” as female munitions workers. Meanwhile, *COD 2* utilises footage of women and children surviving in the ruins of a city (**Figure 4.2**). The divergence here displays the difference in emotional affect the developers wish to instil in their audience. *MOHF*, by using famous wartime leaders and pictures of military production, are emphasising the political and militaristic narratives that aim to create aggression and nationalism in its players. *COD 2*, by using footage of the victims of the conflict as women and children, are attempting to evoke a sense of protectiveness and moral righteousness to continue the ‘good war’ narrative and further villainise the enemy.



Figures 4.1 and 4.2. “The eyes of the world are upon you,” as depicted by *MOHF* (above) and *COD 2* (below). *MOHF*’s eyes are the Allied leaders Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin. *COD 2* opts for the emotionally affective women and children, taking shelter from the war.

Sources: EA Los Angeles, *Medal of Honor: Frontline*. Electronic Arts, PlayStation 2, 2002; Infinity Ward, *Call of Duty 2*, Activision, Xbox 360, 2005.

²⁹⁹ EA Los Angeles, *MOHF*.



The cinematics continue with Eisenhower claiming:

“In company with our brave allies and brothers-in-arms on other fronts, you will bring about the destruction of the German war machine, the elimination of Nazi tyranny over the oppressed peoples of Europe, and security for ourselves in a free world.”

COD 2 simply accompanies these words mostly with footage of German troops, thus emphasising the threat of the “German war machine.” *MOHF* provides more variety in its montage: illustrating “our brave allies” are some rapidly edited short takes of a French flag being raised in a ravaged field and British troops running through a devastated street; a demonstration of how “you will bring about the destruction” of the enemy is given with footage of (American) troops climbing aboard Higgins landing boats; and finally the “Nazi tyranny” the player will be facing is summed up in a quick-cut sequence of swastikas, ships, planes, tanks, and Hitler himself giving the Nazi salute. Here, it is possible to again see the different approaches to narrative formation. *MOHF* is introducing their players to the game, and to the war, and thus must lay out the stakes and show how the enemy must be destroyed without remorse. With its game’s plot following a single soldier, it is also more important to include the fact that other nations were involved in the war. Compared to *COD 2*, where the D-Day level is only unlocked after the player has completed at least one Russian level (training, the first level of seven) and the nine British levels (of thirteen) that take place before D-Day chronologically. By this point in the game, the players should know several nations are involved, who they are fighting, and why. However, *MOHF* then omits the next section of Eisenhower’s speech that gives context to the preceding years of the war – though *COD 2* includes it. This would seem to go against the previous theory, but *MOHF* is an exclusively American game, it does not try to provide historical context beyond the immediate setting - in this game, WWII begins on June 6th, 1944. With the player experiencing the war before the landings, *COD 2* uses this part of the speech to contextualise not the history, but the player’s actions in the previous levels. Once the speech has concluded, *MOHF*’s cinematic then closes with a shot of the game’s logo,

immediately followed by the details of the speech: “Dwight D. Eisenhower. June 6th, 1944,” once more associating and authenticating itself through historical detail.

These techniques are continued in the newsreel-cinematics found in the other games. *Call of Duty 2: Big Red One* (BRO) uses the format, and *MOHF* even uses a second newsreel-cinematic after the level has been completed to give further narrative on the results and aftermath of the invasion. While *MOHAA* does include a similar format, it is slightly different in that it uses still images in a ‘slideshow’ projected onto the wall of the briefing room. *BRO*’s cinematic, like its counterpart in *COD 2*, opens with the authenticating *Military Channel* logo - though this time it is placed over an image of a Czech Hedgehog and barbed wire (and accompanied by a newsreel-style trumpet sting). Like the use of the logo, both *Medal of Honor* games briefings include the American ‘Great Seal’ (see **Figure 4.3**) as an authenticating image, through associating the narratives with an official national and governmental symbol. While there is little else to be added here from these three final cinematics, both *MOHAA* and *BRO*’s briefings do also include other historical references in their construction, particularly maps.



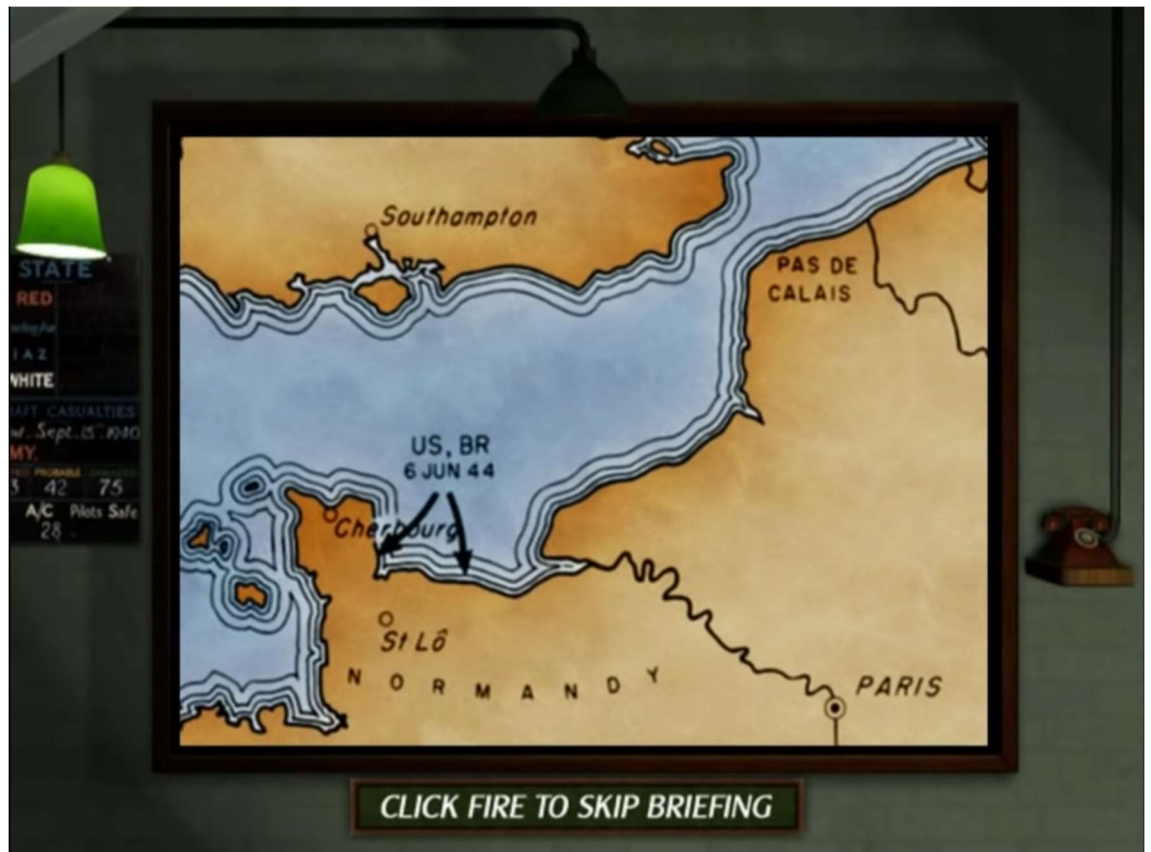
Figure 4.3. The mission briefing in *MOHAA* takes the form of a slideshow presentation, opening on the official Great Seal of America, conferring a sense of authority on the narratives to come.

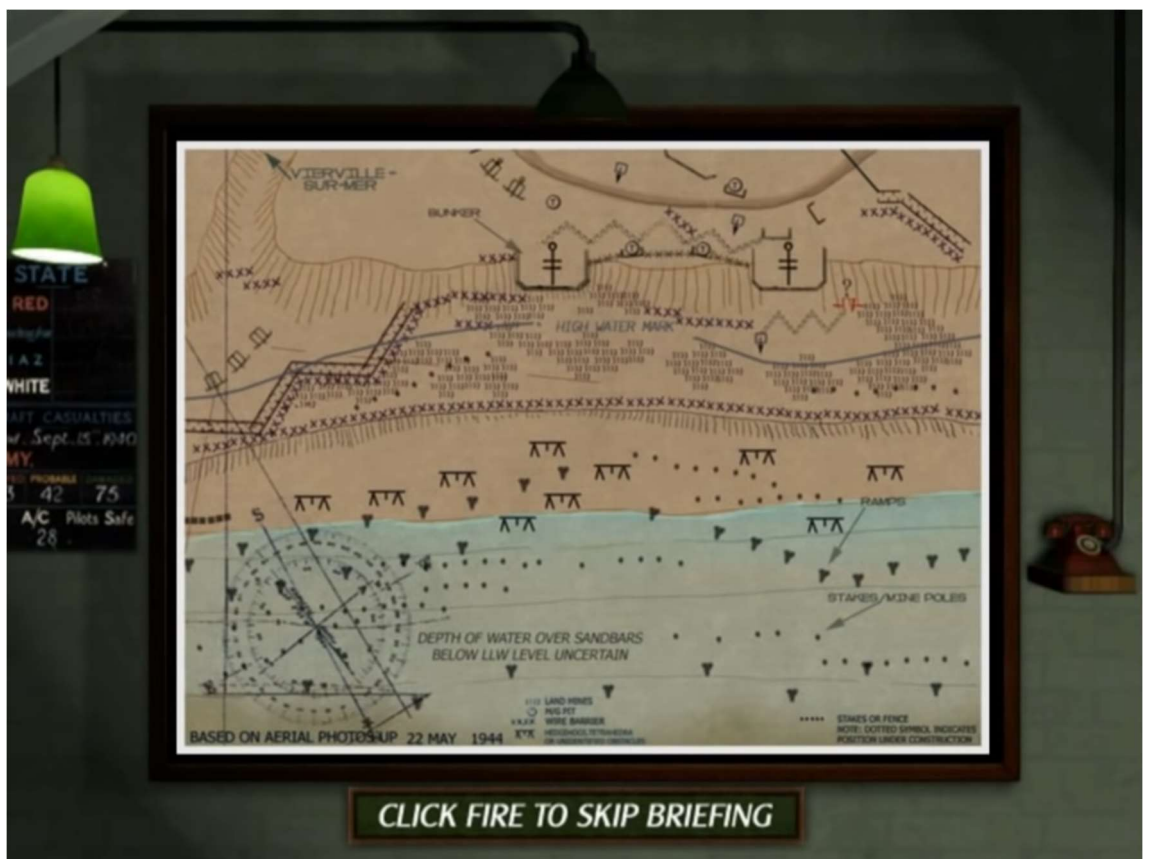
Source: 2015 Inc, *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*, Electronic Arts, PC, 2002.

Maps & Photographs

Maps are a common reference found in these games and are used frequently in the *MOHAA* slideshow briefing. The first map (**Figure 4.4**) shows Southern England to Northern France and visualises the narrator’s speech: “The Germans know we’re coming, and coming soon, but we’ve got them thinking that the invasion will be up at Calais, well north of the actual landing beaches.” The map thus labels the relevant locations, as well as arrows pointing to the beaches at which US forces plan to land. Later, a closer map (**Figure 4.5**) shows the five beaches targeted by the Allies, along with national flags; arrows; and division names. A similar map appears in *BRO*’s briefing (**Figure 4.7**), which also includes flags

depicting German forces, though notably replacing the swastika with the less political Iron Cross – still recognisable as representing Nazi forces, but less controversial. The last ‘slide’ (**Figure 4.6**) shows an official-looking strategic map of Omaha Beach, complete with terrain and defences – further authenticating details include a compass and information such as the date of the photos the map is based on - while the narrator warns that “the Germans have left no spot undefended. Every inch of beach is covered by machine guns and artillery, and the place is surrounded by miles of barbed wire and countless minefields,” further emphasising the dangers on screen.





Figures 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, & 4.7. The MOHAA level briefing contains several maps (above). A basic map showing the important locations and US landing beaches (top); a more detailed strategic map of Normandy and the six Allied landing targets (middle); and an even more detailed map of Omaha Beach and its fortifications (immediately above). BRO's map is similar to MOHAA's first and second maps, however it interestingly uses a less-politicised flag for the German forces (below).

Sources: 2015 Inc, *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*, Electronic Arts, PC, 2002; Treyarch, and High Voltage Software, *Call of Duty 2: Big Red One*, Activision, PlayStation 2, 2005.



Like newsreel footage, contemporary photographs are also used as an authenticating agent throughout the establishing narratives. Not only does the inclusion of photographs refer back to the newsreels but also to other 'legitimate' forms of historical provision, such as textbooks and museums. Roland Barthes even argues that the very essence of the photograph as a medium is more authenticating than words:

“the Photograph is indifferent to all intermediaries: it does not invent; it is authentication itself; [...] Photography never lies: or rather, it can lie as to the meaning of the thing, being by nature tendentious, never as to its existence.”³⁰⁰

This is the only piece of authentication that *WWII GI* provides, with its entire establishing narrative dependent on a singular load-screen photograph (**Figure 4.8**) - the most famous picture of the D-Day landings, one of Robert Capa's *Magnificent Eleven*.³⁰¹ *MOHAA*'s slideshow uses photographs in place of footage, but more importantly it mixes in renderings of its own level with real photographs – thus authenticating itself through both association with the real and by effectively making its simulation of the beaches substitutable for reality (**Figure 4.9**).

³⁰⁰ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 87.

³⁰¹ Capa, "Magnificent Eleven".



Figure 4.8. WWII GI load-screen, utilising one of Robert Capa's Magnificent Eleven photographs of the landings.

Source: TNT Team, *WWII GI*, GT Interactive Software, PC, 1999.



Figure 4.9. The MOHAA briefing uses an in-game image of the beach, substituting simulation for reality. The presentation is also situated within a simulated briefing room, with environmental props such as a telephone, lamp, and information slate.

Source: 2015 Inc, *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*, Electronic Arts, PC, 2002.

Quotations

Quotes are used throughout these games as further authenticating details. As discussed, Eisenhower's D-Day speech was utilised as voice-over for the briefings of both *COD 2* and *MOHF*, but it is also used in written form on the load-screen of *MOHAA* – further proving the developers' near-universal belief in the authenticating ability of his words. *COD 2* uses quotes frequently throughout, providing one on the event of both victory and death. Using the community-built page of mission quotes on *Strategy Wiki*, the second instalment of the series is shown to follow the trend set by its predecessor, and many of Salvati's observations of the earlier game still apply. The quotes come from a total of 51 possible sources, with the most quoted remaining the same men in both games: Winston Churchill (8 & 9); Napoleon Bonaparte (6 & 7); George S. Patton (7 & 6); and Douglas MacArthur (5 & 5).³⁰² As Salvati notes, and is still relevant here:

“The quotations are from overwhelmingly male sources, with writer Barbara Kingsolver representing the lone female voice. The sources are also overwhelmingly white male Western figures from government, science, the military, literary canon, philosophy, and even film (John Wayne). The only salient aberrations are Emiliano Zapata (Western, but non-white) and Ali ibn-Abi-Talib.”³⁰³

This limited pool of sources betrays the historical views of the developers, in which they either subscribe to a Western male-dominated, martial primacy, or are willing to allow such a hegemonic, traditional view to go unquestioned. Either way, the continuance of such an approach in these games reinforces it and allows those with less historical experience to fall into such thinking also – a process that simultaneously promotes the narratives beneficial to the United States.

The opening cut-scene for *MOHF*'s D-Day level starts with the emotive words of the *Soldier's Poem* (an adapted version of *Our Hitch In Hell* by Frank Bernard Camp): “And when he gets to Heaven, To Saint Peter he will tell: One more soldier reporting sir – I've served my time in Hell.”³⁰⁴ Another famous quote is used in *BRO*, once the player's character makes it to shore the player can hear George A. Taylor's: “Two kinds of people are staying on this beach! The dead and those who are going to die!” This is used for multiple reasons: it simply states the stakes of the situation to the player and primes them for the level's fast pace; authenticates the game through its use of a real quote from the landings;

³⁰² Salvati, and Bullinger, "Selective," 161; "Call of Duty 2/Mission Quotes," *Strategy Wiki* (Wiki), February 10, 2022, https://strategywiki.org/wiki/Call_of_Duty_2/Mission_Quotes.

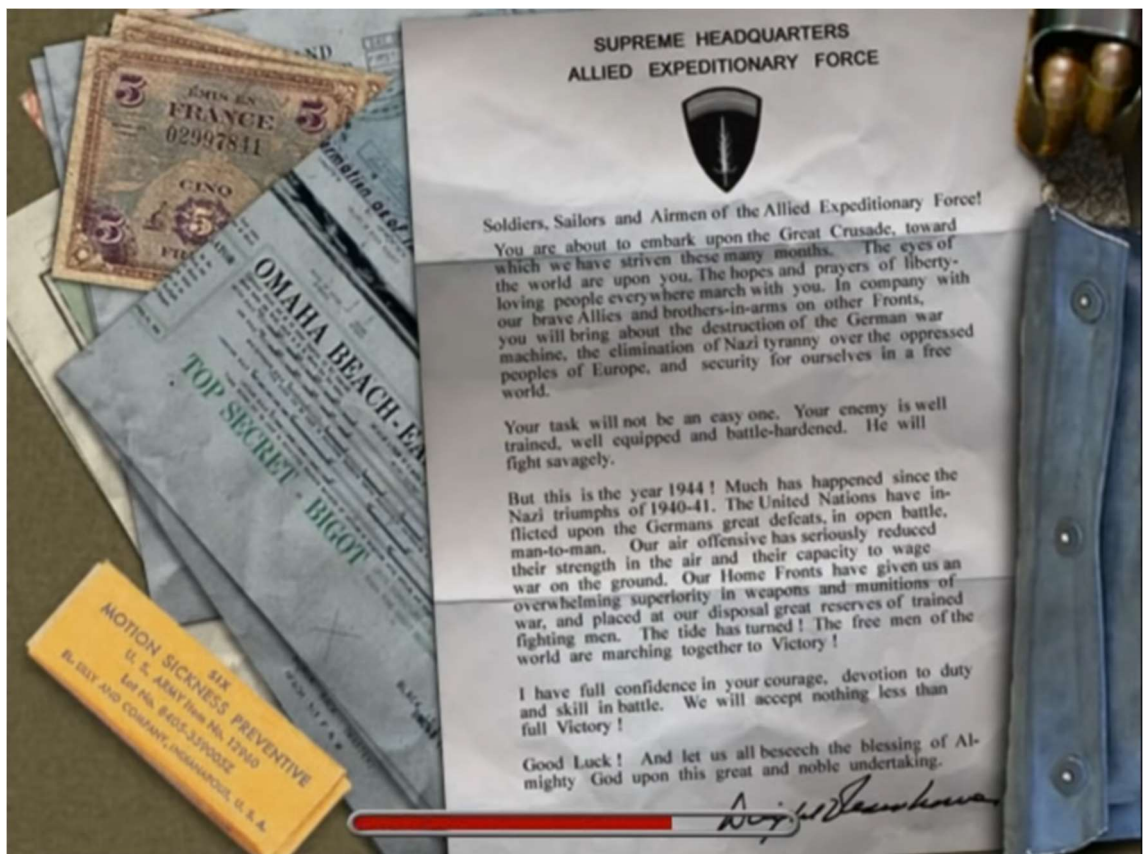
³⁰³ Salvati, and Bullinger, "Selective," 161.

³⁰⁴ Camp, "Our Hitch in Hell."

and finally, it also authenticates the game through repeating the use of this quote from the film *The Longest Day* (1962).

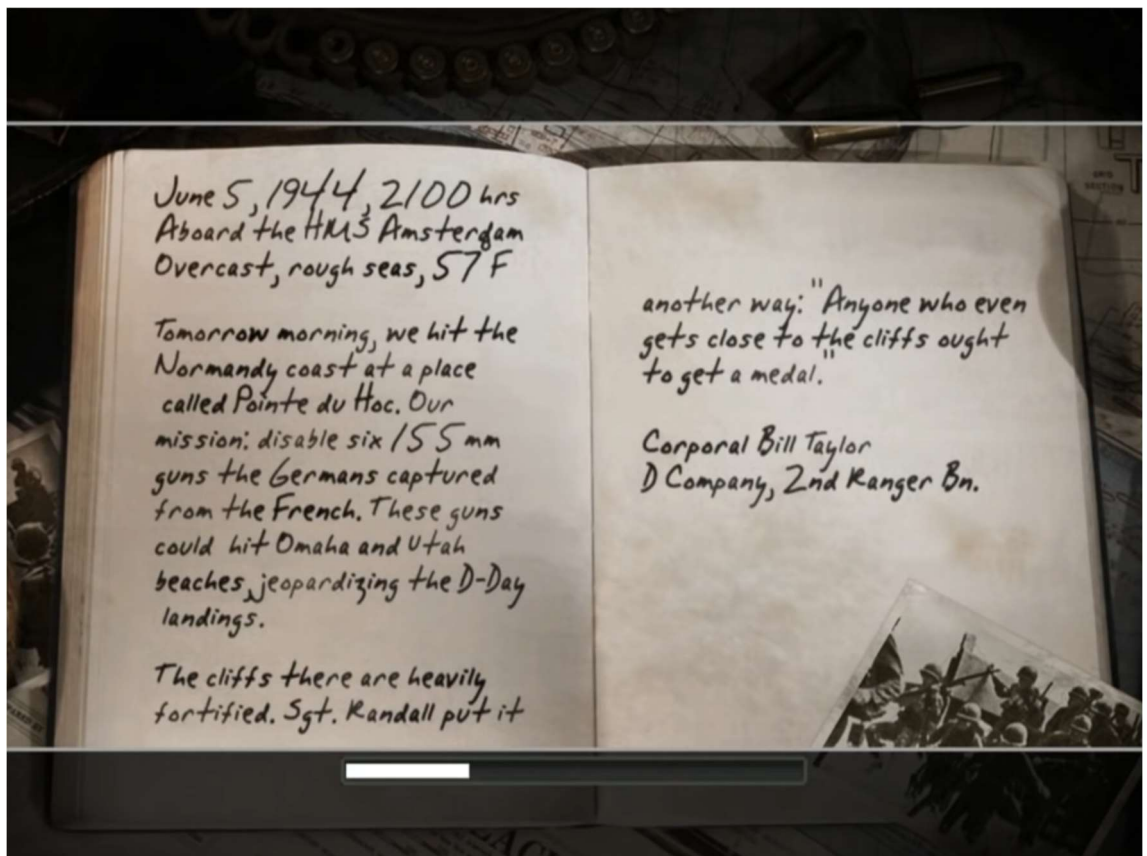
Simulated Environments

One final use of authenticating detail to be discussed is the simulation of an environment into which the menus are integrated, further conveying a sense of immersion. This occurs most prominently in *MOHAA* when the briefing cinematic is presented as a slideshow from a projector, including the sound of the slides being changed, and is projected onto a wall of the briefing room in which the game's main menu is set – bracketed by an information slate to the left, and a telephone to the right (see **Figure 4.9**). This immersion is continued in the load-screen (**Figure 4.10**), which shows a desk covered in authenticating ephemera including, again, Eisenhower's speech; bullets; French currency; papers marked "TOP SECRET"; and motion sickness medication – presumably for the rough journey across the English Channel. This tactic is also used by *COD 2*, which provides a handwritten diary entry written by the protagonist that gives further information and immersion into the level (**Figure 4.11**). The diary is also surrounded by authenticating ephemera, including black-and-white photographs of soldiers exiting Higgins boats (presumably training); bullets; a map; and rope.



Figures 4.10 and 4.11. *The simulated desk environments within the load-screens of MOHAA (above) and COD 2 (below).*

Sources: 2015 Inc, *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*, Electronic Arts, PC, 2002; Infinity Ward, *Call of Duty 2*, Activision, Xbox 360, 2005.



Cinematic Adaptation

The narratives that are moulded around the games analysed in this thesis are a major portal through which the developers can adapt the cinematic portrayals of D-Day – most notably the opening scenes of *SPR*. The film's influence can be seen in several ways: from explicit recreation of the sequence; through the cinematic style discussed earlier; to smaller nods like including the actions of background characters. Conceived by Steven Spielberg, the *Medal of Honor* series have not only drawn inspiration from his WWII depictions, but have been directly influenced. *MOHAA*, for example, not only has levels based on the Omaha landings but other scenes such as one:

“laid out to mimic the "dueling snipers" scene in *Saving Private Ryan*, complete with crumbled buildings, piles of brick, and an empty clock tower. Another is modeled after the movie's last scene, where the final battle took place through the streets of a war-torn French town.”³⁰⁵

As expected of a game featuring the Normandy landings, four of the six games open with the player standing in a Higgins landing craft (with *BRO* starting on a larger LCI boat, and *BF1942* allowing the player to spawn on a Destroyer with the option to drive a Higgins themselves). While *BF1942* and *WWII GI* throw the player directly into the action, the remaining four prime the audience with a cut-scene. Though these approach the opening differently and replicate different aspects of the sequence, there are still commonalities. One prominent example of a direct replication from *SPR* is the inclusion

³⁰⁵ Amer Ajami, "Medal of Honor: Allied Assault," *GameSpot* (Review), May 17, 2006, accessed May 12, 2022, <https://www.gamespot.com/articles/medal-of-honor-allied-assault/1100-2674355/>.

of two soldiers vomiting, as the camera tracks backwards through the craft. Seemingly an innocuous detail to add realism, the actions have been replicated in *three* of the four games with opening cut-scenes (*MOHAA* being the fourth), thus it can be deduced that this character has become an authenticating symbol, linking the games to the historical authority the film has become. Another detail that has been used similarly, though to a lesser extent, is the inclusion of a soldier making the sign of the cross as they await the ramp dropping – found both in *SPR* and in *MOHF*.

Interestingly, the most famous part of the film's landing sequence – the massacre of GIs as the ramps drop – is replicated by only *MOHAA*'s cut-scene, though with muted success compared to the impact of the film. Thanks to the limited computing power available at the time, the 'slaughter' is reduced to a few men in front of the player falling dead as they exit into the lightshow of machine-gun fire - perhaps the reason it was not attempted elsewhere. Instead, the other three depict different versions of the player's craft being hit by artillery. *COD 2* has the craft explode as soon as the player exits; *BRO* hits the LCI and knocks the player's character unconscious, transporting them to the beach by lifeboat; and *MOHF* has the explosion throw players over the side and into the water.

Once in the sea, *MOHF* then adapts *SPR*'s underwater shots (see **Figures 4.12 and 4.13**). As in the film, the player watches as men are dragged down by their heavy equipment and drown or are hit by bullets flying through the water (despite bullets losing lethality once hitting water in real life).³⁰⁶ Once the character wades ashore, the cut-scene ends and the player receives control.



Figures 4.12 and 4.13. *The underwater shot from SPR (above), showing soldiers dragged down by the weight of their equipment and killed by machine-gun fire. This is copied in MOHF (below).*

³⁰⁶ Kyle Mizokami, "U.S. Special Forces Take Huge Step toward Developing an Underwater Bullet," *Popular Mechanics*, November 29, 2019, <https://www.popularmechanics.com/military/weapons/a29963216/us-special-forces-underwater-bullet/>.

Sources: Steven Spielberg, *Saving Private Ryan* (DreamWorks Pictures; Paramount Pictures; Amblin Entertainment, 1998); EA Los Angeles, *Medal of Honor: Frontline*, Electronic Arts, PlayStation 2, 2002.



Once ashore, *SPR*'s Captain Miller becomes disoriented by the traumatic experience, signified by slow-motion and muffled audio followed by a tinnitus-like ringing sound, only to be brought back to reality by a POV shot of a soldier's face demanding orders. This experience is replicated in both *Call of Duty* games. As the LCI is hit in *BRO* the player's screen goes black as the character loses consciousness, before slowly returning accompanied by tinnitus over a muffled background audio. Just like the film, the player then hears a fellow soldier speaking right into their face, though this time it is a message of reassurance. The process repeats as the player wakes up in the lifeboat, and again as they are lifted onto their feet on the beach. In *COD 2*, the player is thrown into the air as the Higgins craft explodes behind them, causing a slow-motion sequence with muffled audio. The character lays on their back, looks right and sees more men running onto the beach, before their boat catches fire and burning soldiers emerge from the inferno – just as Captain Miller saw (see **Figures 4.14 and 4.15**).



Figures 4.14 and 4.15. A traumatised Captain Miller watches as soldiers run from a burning Higgins Boat in *SPR* (above). A similar scene can be found in *COD 2* (below).

Sources: Steven Spielberg, *Saving Private Ryan* (DreamWorks Pictures; Paramount Pictures; Amblin Entertainment, 1998); Infinity Ward, *Call of Duty 2*, Activision, Xbox 360, 2005.



By directly replicating scenes from the films, particularly *SPR*, the games both legitimise themselves and the events they copy. The authority audiences place in the films are thus transferred, as the similarities remind them of the previous simulations – thus contributing to the next level of simulation, moving the events further from reality in turn. By repeating the events, the games also reinforce their ‘realism,’ whether they are actually realistic or not, thus more effectively conveying the narratives within.

Narrative Themes

The centralisation of the United States within the Normandy landings, and in the war itself, continues into nearly every aspect of the establishing narratives of these games. This is partly since two-thirds of them follow exclusively American protagonists, though all six are set on American-designated beaches (Omaha and Pointe-du-hoc) and thus follow Americans through the landings. In fact, only *MOHAA* and *BRO*’s briefings explicitly state that the landings were not a strictly American endeavour. For example, *BF1942*’s briefing tells the player that:

“General Eisenhower’s order to attack has mobilized an unprecedented military force. About 4,000 ships will deliver over 175,000 men and supplies to the Normandy beaches.”

Though the other Allied troops are counted, they are not named, and the player could assume that the landings were wholly American. In this game, all other D-Day efforts fall into the shadow of Omaha. The victory screen also fails to mention the other nations, even ignoring the other American beaches:

“In spite of the monumental losses, US forces eventually secured the beachhead. This hard-fought victory will never be forgotten by the troops who refused to stop until they seized Omaha Beach.”

Another feature to note in these games is the choice and order of the games’ levels. *WWII GI* and *MOHF* open with D-Day – seemingly ignoring the five years of conflict in Europe since Germany

invaded Poland in 1939. *MOHAA* and *BRO* (after flashing back from France, 1944) begin in Operation Torch, the 1942 Allied invasion of North Africa and the first major intervention by American troops. *BF1942* and *COD 2* both follow multiple nationalities in their overarching narrative, and while the former runs chronologically from North Africa 1941 through to Iwo Jima (via Omaha Beach as the 11th level), the latter is less consistent. It begins with a tutorial level as a Russian training in 1941 Moscow, before unlocking the next level in the Russian campaign as well as the first level of the British campaign. From there, the player can decide to follow either but will unlock the American levels (with D-Day as its first level) only upon completing ‘Assault on Matmata,’ the ninth level of the British campaign and the last set before D-Day. Thus, in most of these games, even when they do not focus exclusively on the US, or even start at D-Day, the US is still the central nation around which the narrative of the war is constructed.

One other aspect of the level choices that can provide insight into the narratives these developers wish to portray – namely those of the good war and the teleological, inevitable victory of the Allies - is the starting dates. *WWII GI* and *MOHF* begin with D-Day in 1944, one of the big turning points in the European theatre; *COD 2* begins in Stalingrad, the first major turning point of the Eastern Front; and *MOHAA* and *BRO* start with the Allies invading North Africa in 1942 – once again, another turning point in the war. Of all six games, only *BF1942*’s first level occurs before the United States joined the war - opening with an Allied defeat in Libya, 1941 (though the player can still win the battle), though even then it jumps three years into the war and thus avoids the disastrous campaigns the Allies initially experienced.

Conclusion

As with the priming narratives present in game paratexts, the framing narratives of cinematics and cut-scenes utilise several different techniques in order to legitimise the narratives they embody. Authenticating detail continues to factor into this strategy, however the change of medium results in a different approach. Where paratexts focussed mainly on telling the player how well the game recreates weaponry or tactics, the framing narratives are more confined to the visual conveyance of historical legitimacy. The developers attempt to convey this feeling through recreating the style of contemporary newsreels and including other details associated with official historical production, such as maps and photographs. Self-legitimation through linking the games to previous, cinematic, depictions (particularly in *Saving Private Ryan*) is another tactic that crosses the boundaries between layers. However, the nature of the framing narrative once again limits the ways in which this can be achieved to adaptation of events in an experiential manner. These strategies are employed by the developers to more effectively deliver the narratives embedded in the games, of which the central theme found in this layer is the centralisation of America and the glorification of war – both of which work to the benefit of the United States if they can be properly instilled in the minds of the players, and can thus be similarly found in the gameplay.

Chapter Five: Ludonarratives

The final narrational layer is the ludonarrative, or the narratives experienced and created by the players as they interact with the game itself. Ludonarrative here encompasses the events in which the player can meaningfully participate (semi-interactive cut-scenes, in which the player can only change where they are looking are therefore included in the previous chapter). Chapman defines the ludonarrative as combining “both lexia (the elements that can be combined into a narrative) and framing controls (the rules and pressures which limit and determine these combinations), as well as player agency.”³⁰⁷ Lexia takes many forms, from non-player characters; weapons; health kits; to the landscapes and buildings themselves – whether the player can interact with them physically or just visually.³⁰⁸ Thus the ludonarrative becomes a narrative that is cooperatively built by developer creation and player choice.³⁰⁹

However, in deterministic story structures like those employed by these games, the developer holds most of the power in creating narrative. To ensure the player remains within the (almost universally single) narrative that exists within the game, the developers use framing controls to limit choice to those that are generally inconsequential to the fixed framing narrative – choice is “limited to progress or failure.”³¹⁰ This is not to say that the player has no influence, but their agency is limited to determining their specific actions, for example how long it takes them to complete the level; which guns they use; and occasionally the order in which they tackle objectives.³¹¹ The nature of the First-Person Shooter (FPS) genre, as Breuer argues, gives an extra layer of influence as the interactivity and immersivity of the first-person perspective can add to player identification, boosting persuasiveness.³¹² This keeps much of the power over narrative with the developers and, while interpretation can vary between individuals, therefore it is still important to explore developer narratives and how they are pushed. This chapter will follow similar techniques as previous layers: those of cinematic adaptation and authenticating detail; however the nature of the ludonarrative allows developers to further their control over player experiences and therefore over the reception of the games’ narratives.

Cinematic Adaptation

Unlike in the games’ cinematics, developers cannot so directly remediate previous depictions – through replication of camera shots, events, or other cinematic techniques – as gameplay allows greater freedom for the player in their choice of action, leaving the developer less control over the experience. One way gameplay can still evoke the feeling of representations like *Saving Private Ryan* (SPR) is through using

³⁰⁷ Chapman, *Digital Games*, 119.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 123.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 122.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 128, 138.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 138.

³¹² Breuer, Festl, and Quandt, "Digital War," 217.

the desaturated style of the film (and the 1940s footage it imitated) that has “become general shorthand for ‘authentic’ combat in both film and games.”³¹³

However, some references can be made to earlier portrayals through level design, as well as mission structure and the use of smaller events that can happen in the background or are triggered by player action. Level design is of particular importance here, as replicating the battlefields the players have experienced on screen allows them to participate in “actually (re)performing” cultural memory and historical discourse.³¹⁴ The most obvious links to *SPR* are the (logical) starting points for the games within the Higgins landing craft. Although most of the games use the Higgins in the opening cut-scene before giving over control on the beach, *WWII GI* starts the player at the back of their craft as the ramp opens. However, this added moment of verisimilitude is quickly dispelled by the common need to kill your own teammates, who frequently end up blocking the exit – as one reviewer commented on the experience: “So much for realism.”³¹⁵

From there the levels generally follow the same design (in fact, the two *Medal of Honor* levels are barely distinguishable from each other), one familiar to anyone who has seen *SPR*. The players face a beach covered in Czech hedgehogs, hemmbalken (though these slant away from the beach, with the intent of landing craft riding up to the mine at the top, as opposed to the incorrectly positioned obstacles in the film, see **Figure 5.3**), and barbed wire, and are fired upon by two machine-gun bunkers with machine-gun nests on the clifftop. The only two that deviate from this template are the *Call of Duty* games, with *COD 2* being set at Pointe du Hoc rather than Omaha, while *Call of Duty 2: Big Red One (BRO)* instead has their players work horizontally across the beach to the exit before moving inland through the German bunker complexes. Those that follow the established design generally also include a shingle embankment behind which the troops can take cover from the onslaught. After reaching cover the player is instructed to retrieve the Bangalore torpedoes to blast a hole through the barbed wire that tops the embankment and covers the land behind it. These explosives not only feature prominently in *SPR*, but *The Big Red One*’s landing scene largely revolves around their deployment. Once a gap is opened, the two *Medal of Honor* games continue to follow *SPR*’s path by having the player move forward and take cover beneath the lefthand bunker. Men are then sent out to destroy the machine-gun nests on the ridge (and are killed), leaving it to the player to complete. From here, the games diverge from *SPR* as they order the player across the gap and to the trenches at the base of the righthand bunker, rather than up the hill (a good demonstration of the narrative control the developers retain over player agency, despite the more interactive nature of video games, a topic covered below).

³¹³ Allison, "World War II," 184; Chapman, *Digital Games*, 64-65.

³¹⁴ Chapman, *Digital Games*, 139.

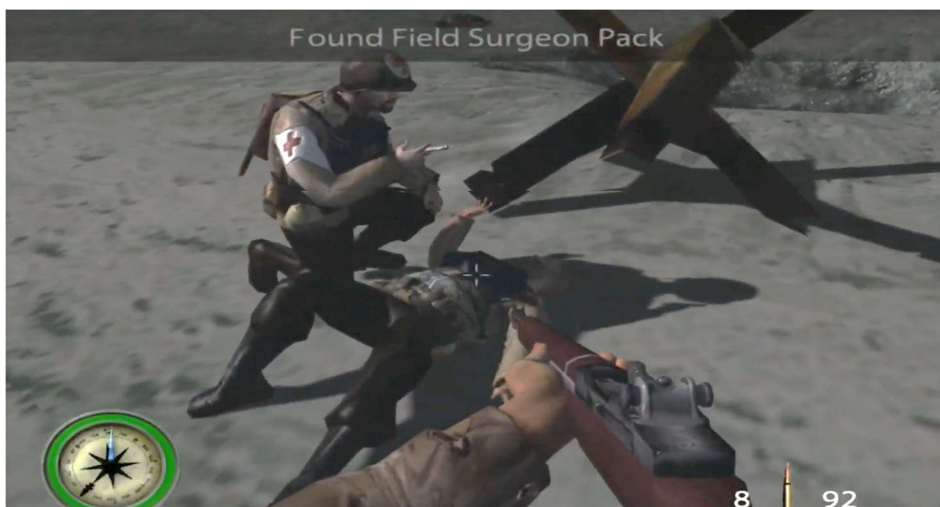
³¹⁵ Paul Schuytema, "WWII GI," *Game Center* (Review), July 15, 1999, accessed April 19, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20000816112313/http://www.gamecenter.com/Reviews/Item/0,6,0-2966,00.html>.

Several other events are adapted in these games, either by direct replication or through nods to more general use of war film tropes. Much like Captain Miller pulling an injured comrade up the beach in *SPR*, only to find out they had been blown in half on the journey, the player will witness one of the soldiers they are sent to rescue disappear in an explosion as they reach them in *Medal of Honor: Frontline* (*MOHF*). The film features a short sequence in which a medic is trying to save a dying soldier, but just as he happily exclaims that he has stopped the bleeding the patient is shot in the head and the medic curses at the beach's defenders (**Figure 5.1**). This sequence is again replicated in *MOHF* where a medic tends to a patient, but when the player approaches the patient is shot – cuing the angry medic to shake his fist at the bunkers before being killed themselves (**Figure 5.2**). There are still inherent commonalities between the war genre and digital games, even when not a direct adaptation from any particular film. One major example is that the player becomes the protagonist who generally leads the action, pushing the narrative forward, and dispatching dozens of Nazis at a time.



Figures 5.1 & 5.2. A medic throws his equipment in anger as his patient is killed in *SPR* (above). Similar events occur in *MOHF* (below), where a medic prepares a needle shortly before his patient is shot.

Sources: Steven Spielberg, *Saving Private Ryan* (DreamWorks Pictures; Paramount Pictures; Amblin Entertainment, 1998); EA Los Angeles, *Medal of Honor: Frontline*, Electronic Arts, PlayStation 2, 2002.



Authenticating Detail

Much like in the establishing narratives, these games also authenticate themselves through detail, though whereas cinematics use archive footage and maps, the gameplay embeds objects (also called 'lexia') into the levels, forming the games' mise-en-scene and creating a sense of verisimilitude and immersion. Through these spaces and the lexia which fill them, the developer can create authenticity not only through inclusion of historical detail, thus 'realism', but again through association with previous depictions that included the same details. This is further evidenced by the claim that Spielberg gave the *Medal of Honor* designers advice on placement of the beach defences on Omaha – something in which his only qualifications seem to be his involvement in his *SPR*'s simulation, in which the hemmbalken pole defences are positioned facing the wrong way (see **Figure 5.3**).³¹⁶



Figure 5.3. Hemmbalken defences in *SPR*, consisting of a slanted pole topped with a landmine. However, *SPR*'s are set facing the wrong way, as landing craft were supposed to drive up the pole to the mine. The Czech Hedgehog, a large metal tank trap, also features in the bottom-left.

Source: Steven Spielberg, *Saving Private Ryan* (DreamWorks Pictures; Paramount Pictures; Amblin Entertainment, 1998).

All five Omaha levels contain the same basic elements of detail: Czech hedgehogs (anti-tank defences made of intersecting metal beams, see **Figure 5.3**), barbed wire, and craters, while hemmbalken are less common, and only *MOHF* features a Belgian gate (another anti-tank device consisting of a heavy metal fence with supports). Most also include landing craft either sitting on the beach, returning to load more men, or wrecked on the shore. Here lies an interesting note, while most of the games show only a few Higgins boats unloading men onto the beaches, *COD 2* reverses the trend

³¹⁶ Ajami, "MOHAA Review."

and shows 14 craft on the short beach at Pointe-du-Hoc – many more than the ten allocated to the beach, seven of which made it to shore.³¹⁷ Several also feature the bodies of fallen soldiers, though in greatly varying numbers, with few to be found in *BRO* up to the killing fields of *COD 2*. Interestingly, the games tend to understate the amount of death compared to the depictions in *SPR* and the descriptions of “the shingle shelf clogged into a mass of bodies” – though this may be due to the physical limitations of the games (lacking the processing power to render so many objects at once) rather than by design.³¹⁸

Once inland, the player is tasked with securing the beachhead, generally through clearing out the bunker complexes built into the cliffs. These bunkers are often filled with authenticating detail, ranging from mundane props that add to the *mise-en-scene* to those designed more to authenticate the history and drive emotion, such as the swastika. Swastika flags can be found adorning the walls in *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault (MOHAA)* and *BRO*, while *WWII GI* uses the less recognisable (yet still evocative of Nazi aesthetic) flag of the Waffen SS Command (see **Figure 5.4**). Throughout the complexes in the *Medal of Honor* games the player sees many crates and boxes stamped with the Nazi Imperial Eagle, (see **Figure 5.5**) stacked on the floor, shelves, and on tables among other paraphernalia.



Figure 5.4. WWII GI's *Waffen SS Command* flag, used in place of the more obviously politically-charged swastika.

Source: TNT Team, *WWII GI*, GT Interactive Software, PC, 1999.

³¹⁷ John Man, *The Penguin Atlas of D-Day and the Normandy Campaign* (London: Penguin, 1994), 51.

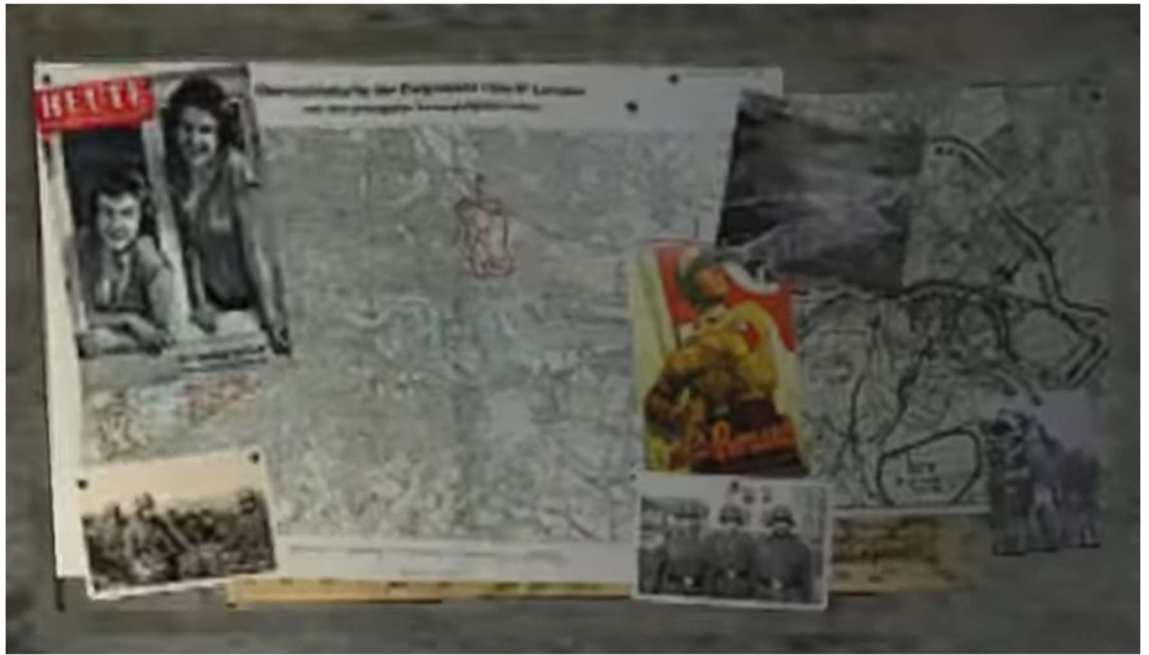
³¹⁸ *Ibid.*



Figure 5.5. MOHAA's use of the Nazi Imperial Eagle, stamped on boxes throughout the bunker complex.
Source: 2015 Inc, *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*, Electronic Arts, PC, 2002.

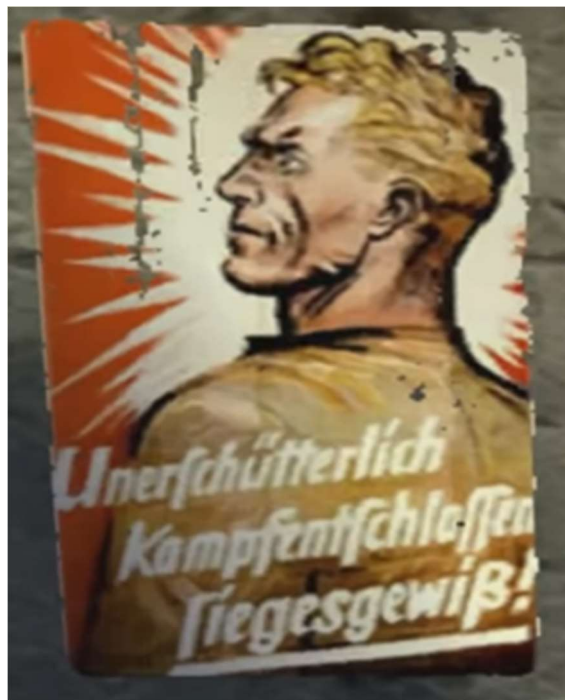
Other lexia are scattered throughout the levels that lend recognisability and authenticity to their environments. Maps are one common such item, often found hanging from the bunker walls, as in *WWII GI* and *BRO* (see **Figure 5.6**). Posters are also common in these areas, mostly propaganda posters (see **Figure 5.7**), but also some instances of pin-ups in the bunkrooms of *BRO*. *MOHAA* also includes copies of a magazine titled *Die Wehrmacht*, with covers depicting tanks and officers. The bunkers of *COD 2* have Nazi slogans painted onto the walls, in the classic gothic font associated with the period propaganda, and while the messages reinforce the idea of Nazi fanaticism (“Sacrifices created the Greater German Reich. Through sacrifices it will be forever!”) the combination of the font and the clearly German wording is enough to understand the message the developers are trying to portray – Kingsepp’s conclusion on German voices is just as applicable here: “it is the German-ness of the voices that is important, not the linguistic message” when the developers are essentially dehumanising the enemy, associating the very language with evil itself.³¹⁹

³¹⁹ Kingsepp, "Immersive," 78.



Figures 5.6 and 5.7. BRO's use of maps and posters to simulate a populated German bunker.

Source: Treyarch, and High Voltage Software, *Call of Duty 2: Big Red One*, Activision, PlayStation 2, 2005.



Though technological and militaria fetishism has increased as the games have improved the quantity and detail of their arsenals, it still exists in these early instalments in the WWII FPS genre. One of the most common weapons available, featuring in all six games, is the iconic Thompson submachine-gun – used by *SPR*'s protagonist, Captain Miller. There is a range of approaches to the choice of weaponry available to the player, from *Medal of Honor* providing two or three guns for the player to carry, to *COD 2* allowing the player to pick up 12 different weapons from dead soldiers. No matter how linear the stories are, the ability to choose between weapons increases the potential ludonarratives, with

some completing the game with the default weapons while others may prefer more specialist means, or perhaps adapting to whatever weapon is available as they run through their ammunition – though these options, too, can be controlled by the developers.³²⁰

Narrative Control

Narrative control in gameplay is primarily achieved through rules and linear level design. The developers can control the players' experiences within the game through "the tangible presence of rules that allow, restrict, punish and reward us in lieu of the developer-historian's actual presence."³²¹ As Chapman describes, these FPS games provide 'narrative garden' spaces for the player to explore, in which "the space is arranged as a linear series of fairly tightly defined" areas that:

"gives the developer-historian most control over spatial storytelling and ensures that the player is confronted with all of the spatial elements and events of the history in a particular employment."³²²

The extent of narrative control present in these games sit on a spectrum. Though all (but *COD 2*) are set in the same location and follow the linear level structure, how the players progress differs greatly. *WWII GI* provides no direction of any kind, the player is simply dropped into the game and expected to find the way to the end through using explosives to open holes in the beach defences (essentially opening secret doors) and following the course of the rest of the map.

The *Medal of Honor* games are next on the spectrum, again providing a single course of progression through the level, but they also provide a 'script' of objectives to complete in order to keep players moving through the map. Caldwell refers to *MOHAA*'s system as:

"[breaking] new and influential ground. [...] Rather than receiving instructions only from informational screens bracketing missions, Allied Assault players were fed objectives from scenarios internal to the mission narrative."³²³

By strictly controlling the ability to move around the map and the order in which the player can complete their objectives:

"*Allied Assault* marks the beginning of increasingly controlled campaigns to produce a particular affective experience for the player—a level of narrative immersion that comes at the expense of player autonomy."³²⁴

The *Call of Duty* games offer the player a little more autonomy. While still providing a linear story and systematic objectives, movement through the map is less controlled. Rather than only moving on defeating all enemies (incentivized by the 'lone soldier' dynamic of the *Medal of Honor* games), the player becomes the frontline, able to leave their squad to deal with bypassed enemies - thus allowing

³²⁰ Chapman, *Digital Games*, 123.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 121.

³²² *Ibid.*, 102.

³²³ Lenoir, and Caldwell, *Complex*, 112.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

certain implicit objectives (such as *COD 2*'s flak gun that sends heavy fire over the battlefield) to either be taken on or ignored by the player. This again provides further potential for disparity in player experience within a relatively controlled developer narrative.

The freest player experience occurs in *BF1942*. The player can play as either an American or a German (the only game of the set that allows this option) and is given only very basic objectives – either capture all three objective locations (as Americans) or kill enough enemy soldiers that they run out of respawn ‘tickets’. The player is left to decide their own progression – from their choice of class (a term used for equipment choice, for example the Medic class uses a sub-machine gun and can heal players, while Engineers use a rifle and can repair vehicles) to how they decide to attack (or defend) the beach with its multiple paths. But the developer narrative still exists. For example, the Germans start with a much lower ticket count, thus giving the Americans the numerical advantage (in respawn count, rather than physical number of soldiers on the battlefield at one time). The Americans are also given an advantage on the first objective marker, which is placed in the centre of the beach and can only be captured by the Americans, thus allowing them to respawn on the beach rather than forced to ride in again on a landing craft. Whilst this makes for fairer and more entertaining gameplay, it does block the very real possibility that the Allied landing forces may have been pushed back into the sea – once more catering to the teleological triumphalist narrative of both D-Day and WWII as a whole.

The other games also perpetuate this notion, as Allison argues, through their use of the linear progression model: “since death in a video game is never final, the player has unlimited chances at success [...] the triumph of the Allied powers is assured, over and over and over again.”³²⁵ The developers can ensure that their interpretation of history is pushed forward through their creation and application of game rules that “reward narrative outcomes they wish to promote and punish actions that conflict.”³²⁶ The cultural and social values of the developers can similarly influence the portrayals, for example there are no civilians to be found in any of these games – despite several of them including civilian housing as part of the battlefield -, once again contributing to the sanitization and glorification of war.³²⁷

Glorification of War

Holger Pötzsch identifies four filters present in FPS games that aid in “predisposing player experiences and performances at the level of both procedural and narrative rhetoric.”³²⁸ The first is the violence filter which controls how violence exists within the games, for example by removing civilians or the possibility of friendly fire. Though the latter is allowed in *WWII GI* and *BF1942*, it is restricted in the *Call of Duty* games – either the gun refuses to fire when aimed at an American, or if the player succeeds,

³²⁵ Allison, "World War II," 191.

³²⁶ Chapman, *Digital Games*, 40.

³²⁷ Fernández-Vara, *Introduction*, 131.

³²⁸ Pötzsch, "Selective Realism," 4.

they are presented with a failure message “Friendly fire will not be tolerated!” Meanwhile, the *Medal of Honor* games simply don’t deal the damage to allied soldiers (at most allowing their helmet to be shot off). Debra Ramsay picks up on this filter, arguing that:

“the overall reduction of war to fighting between soldiers preserves the idea that war can be waged ‘justly’ [...] despite the fact that civilian casualties outweighed military casualties on all sides.”³²⁹

War is similarly sanitised through its noticeable lack of blood which, while justified to maintain a wide audience, still contributes to the overall effect of a ‘clean’ war.

Next is the consequence filter, through which both long- and short-term consequences are depicted (or not). Rarely does the player encounter a soldier dying slowly or from gruesome injuries. Just as *The Longest Day* (1962) was criticised for giving “the impression that each death is instant, sanitary, and the result of a mercifully accurate shot to the heart,” it certainly seems that the games live in the same universe.³³⁰ This is most easily demonstrated through the health systems of the games where, rather than taking permanent damage, health can be fully restored through means such as standing next to a medic, collecting health packs, or even just taking cover for a few seconds. There is no hint that war leads to lifelong injury or disability, trauma, or PTSD. Nor are there any signs that such fighting affects the world outside of the immediate conflict, such as at the societal, economic, or political level.³³¹ Once again, this filter contributes to the idea that war can be fought cleanly, “as efficient and surgical operations without individual or collective long-term costs.”³³²

The character filter controls who in the game can become more than just a combatant, and how their stories are told. This works for both sides, with the player’s allies generally built as good men “working on behalf of ultimately benevolent forces” while “opponents usually remain largely invisible, without recognizable identities or traits.”³³³ Through this filter, developers can ensure that the heroism and sacrifice by allies is more affective, while the enemy remains a guilt-free target that must be eliminated for the good of the world with no need for thought.

Finally, Pötzsch identifies the conflict filter, which aims to control how the player can understand and react to the war.³³⁴ War is presented as inevitable and history teleological, simply by giving no other options – to win the game, the player *must* kill.³³⁵ Meanwhile, the cost of the player dying in the game is rather low. Should the player die, they are presented with a failure screen and offered to restart from

³²⁹ Debra Ramsay, "Television's "True Stories": Paratexts and the Promotion of Hbo's Band of Brothers and the Pacific," *InMedia: The French Journal of Media Studies* 4 (2013): 5, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4000/inmedia.720>.

³³⁰ Jacobs, "Song."

³³¹ Pötzsch, "Selective Realism," 5.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Gish, "Playing," 172.

the last checkpoint – reversing time and allowing the player to learn from their mistakes.³³⁶ The reduction of war to a glorified abstraction is evident nowhere more than in the victory screens at the end of several of the levels. These screens provide the player with a statistical analysis of their performance, with information on such things as accuracy, hits taken, and enemies killed – incentivising the player to go back and re-fight the war to improve how brutally efficient they are.

Conclusion

The final layer of narrative found in the actual gameplay continues the major strategies employed by the previous layers. Cinematic adaptation continues to play a large role in legitimising the narratives presented, perhaps more so than before, as the player can now participate in the re-enactment of the events of the films and, they are led to believe, history. Authenticating detail similarly continues into this layer, however they now appear in the form of ‘physical’ lexia within the levels, as opposed to the more abstract signposts of authenticity that occupy the previous levels. The ludonarrative authenticates itself through inclusion of objects such as flags, maps, and posters rather than the more symbolic use of quotes and photographs found in the other layers. This works to instead create the feeling of historical recreation and player immersion over the attempt at recreate the legitimacy of museums and textbooks. Thus, by using the same technique in a different layer the developers are able to multiply the strategies in which they can confer authority to their narratives in the minds of the games ‘players.

Though there are arguably fewer narratives to be found in gameplay, those that exist are again likely to be more effective thanks to the interactivity of the layer. The Americentrism is evident in the exclusive focus on American endeavours during the landings, though this focus is so complete that there is little more to say on the subject. The glorification of war is inevitable in games such as these, that focus exclusively on the combat with engagement in killing the only way forward. The combat itself is sanitised in a number of ways, and the nature of the games again push the player toward a black-and-white ‘good war’ perspective.

³³⁶ Dyer-Witheford, and de Peuter, *Games of Empire*, 112.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to answer three questions. The first asked:

“In what ways do the narrative choices in digital game depictions of the 1944 Normandy landings reinforce those pushed by the United States to further their own goals in presenting an American version of history?”

The narratives identified in the games studied have been discussed at length and have been found to each repeat several themes, as well as within their different narrative layers. Americentrism is a keystone, portraying the US as the dominant force of the war and therefore the saviour of the world. This is present in many forms, from the often-exclusive focus on the US in the historical context to the near-denigration of the other Allies at points. This centralisation of the US in the history of World War II (WWII) is clear historical revisionism and, in essence, the Americanisation of history itself. One other major theme present throughout is the glorification of war - WWII is consistently portrayed as a ‘good war’ or even “the greatest war in history.”³³⁷ Players are primed to enjoy combat through aggressive language; black-and-white morality; ennoblement of sacrifice; and excision of negative aspects of war such as civilian casualties, friendly fire, unclean death, and even in many cases defeat as a whole.

The second question asked how narratives are pushed by the games, which this thesis similarly found to be fairly consistently applied throughout the games and their layers. Narratives in themselves are largely ineffective in entering the players’ understanding if they are not taken seriously - therefore legitimisation is greatly important to developers. One of the most prevalent strategies identified is the inclusion of authenticating detail, which is present in every layer in different ways. For example, detail in the priming narratives takes the form of bold claims of realism; historical information and statistics on weaponry; and emphasis on the authenticity of the recreation of combat. In the framing narratives, authenticating detail is more visual – with the cinematics copying the styles of contemporary newsreels, using documentary footage, maps, photographs, and quotations that give the impression of historical authority associated with museums and textbooks. By the ludonarrative these details are part of the games’ mise-en-scene as lexia within the level – weapons, defensive structures, vehicles, flags, and propaganda posters -, any kind of object that the player may recognise as belonging to the era or environment being simulated. One other major strategy used to legitimise the narratives here is the adaptation and association with previous depictions (particularly the film *Saving Private Ryan*).

This strategy helps answer the thesis’ third question:

“How do these depictions compare to depictions in mass media preceding them?”

Chapter Two looked closely at the cinematic depictions of D-Day that were released before these games, setting the stage for the thesis to be able to compare between the two mediums. Not only are there multiple examples of direct simulation of events and scenes from the films in every layer, but the

³³⁷ Electronic Arts, "BF1942."

paratexts take every opportunity to link the two – whether through describing how alike they are, using the same military advisors, or hiring actors from the films to voice characters. It is also possible to identify multiple narrative themes that have been inherited by the games, namely the centralisation of America and the glorification of war discussed above. However, there has largely been a discontinuation of the rehabilitation of Germany that was present in the earlier films. The games have instead gone in the opposite direction – in many cases there is no distinguishing between German and Nazi, and the player is actively encouraged to engage in their wholesale slaughter. Perhaps now that the Cold War is over, Germany no longer needs rehabilitation and the war has once more become the black-and-white 'good' war that provides the US with their unambiguously heroic origins as world leader.

Through continuing the narratives of films such as *The Longest Day*, *The Big Red One*, and *Saving Private Ryan*, the six games analysed by this thesis reinforce historical revisionism that benefits the United States. Such revisionism places the US at the centre of the Allied forces, WWII, and the defeat of Nazism – cementing in the minds of the audience, through repetition, the justification of America as world leader, military superpower, and moral arbiter. This americanisation of history provides the US with a national myth in which the reins of power were thrust upon them, before mobilising their full might to save the world from unequivocal evil – a myth that not only justifies their position and subsequent actions to themselves, but one that can be exported through mass media to instil the same views into a global audience. No matter what the US has done or will do, they now have the ability to point to the history they have written and say, “look what we did.”

While this thesis has indeed begun to fill a gap in the literature, looking at how video games have influenced historical understanding, its nature as a case-study inherently leaves open many possibilities for future research in this field. D-Day made for a convenient choice of event to study, but there is much more to the history of WWII that can be studied also – indeed, this thesis looked at a single level within these games, which often span several years of the war. Study can also be expanded to other historical events: for example the colonisation of America, the frontier, and the American Civil War all provide their own narratives that can and have been influenced into becoming national myths that justify US actions. One could also apply the same analysis to the products of other nations, as all nations partake in shaping history to suit their own agenda. Even though the US continues to be the dominant actor in many markets, there are others that have significant influence elsewhere.

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<i>BRO</i>	:	<i>Call of Duty 2: Big Red One</i> (2005)
<i>COD2</i>	:	<i>Call of Duty 2</i> (2005)
<i>DOD</i>	:	Department of Defense
<i>FPS</i>	:	First-Person Shooter
<i>MOHAA</i>	:	<i>Medal of Honor: Allied Assault</i> (2002)
<i>MOHF</i>	:	<i>Medal of Honor: Frontline</i> (2002)
<i>SPR</i>	:	<i>Saving Private Ryan</i> (1998)
<i>TBRO</i>	:	<i>The Big Red One</i> (1980)
<i>TLD</i>	:	<i>The Longest Day</i> (1962)
<i>WWII</i>	:	World War II