
The Magical-Real Videogame

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Abstract: In this essay I focus on a subject that has not been treated at any great length in the past, that is, the relationship between magical realism and the videogame. This is surprising because even a cursory glance at the types of videogames that are currently available on the market shows that they are full of techniques and surprises and wonders that are characteristic of the genre of magical realism. This essay focuses on the overlap between the videogame genre and other related genres such as literature and film, particularly in terms of its use of the technique of magic.

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In this essay I intend to focus on a subject that has not been treated at any great length in the past, that is, the relationship between magical realism and the videogame. This is surprising because even a cursory glance at the types of videogames that are currently available on the market shows that they are full of techniques and surprises and wonders—such as people turning into animals at the drop of a hat, or having (or earning) the ability to fly—and it is full of the weirdest and most wonderful monsters I have ever seen. My interest in this genre is not specifically devoted to the technical side of videogaming—that is, the technology that has been used, mainly serviced by AI which has allowed the videogame phenomenon to take off (Flatley and French; Donovan; Stanton; Carpenter; Diver; Koyama). Nor am I interested specifically in its customer impact and market share, though it would be churlish not to mention that the videogame is one of the most successful creations of the modern era; it is currently an industry that makes \$100 billion a year, and there are no indications that it is about to shrink any time soon (Minnameier). I will refer, though, to one societal issue that videogaming has raised, that is, the “Proteus Effect,” or the tendency that serious videogamers demonstrate of mixing their virtuality with their reality, such that their hyperreal avatar is often used to fashion and customize different versions of human identity in real life (see below).

My main interest is in the overlap between the videogame genre and other related genres such as literature and film. Though, traditionally, the most financially successful videogame sub-genre has been the “shooter” or the shooter-inspired sub-genre,¹ which, as the research suggests, is favored by men (Jung et al.) there are many other sub-genres which have grown in popularity in the 21st century, and these have focused on the development of simulation and parallel lives, and these videogames, which are sometimes bracketed under the sub-genre of the “social videogame,” have often been favored by (young) women (Joshua). My main interest, though, is the magical-real sub-genre, if it can be so called, that overlaps in some clearly defined ways with the literary and filmic genre of magical realism. In this type of videogame, as we shall see, there is less room for the “shooter” narrative, and more room for simulation, vicarious experience and human empathy, as well as—as you might expect in a genre focused on magical realism—an interest in the magical and the supernatural, as well as the downright spooky and even grotesquely morbid.

But before we launch into an analysis of an admittedly small sample of the magical-real videogames, we need to lay down some basic principles about what we understand by the term “magical realism” as well as discuss some of the main pointers and co-ordinates of the cosmovision that it articulates, often in the field of the creative literary work.

What is the main idea animating magical realism when it appears in literature? The magical-real event is an event that lacks a naturalistic or logical explanation—even if it is described with realistic, empiric-sounding details. An event of this type appears in Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), which describes the event of Remedios the Beauty going to heaven:

“Don’t you feel well?,” she asked her.

Remedios, the Beauty, who was clutching the sheet by the other end, gave a pitying smile.

“Quite the opposite,” she said, “I never felt better.”

She had just finished saying it when Fernanda felt a delicate wind of light pull the sheets out of her hands and open them up wide. Amaranta felt a mysterious trembling in the lace on her petticoats and she tried to grasp the sheet so that she would not fall down at the instant Remedios, the Beautiful, began to rise. Úrsula, almost blind at the time, was the only person who was sufficiently calm to identify the nature of that determined wind and she left the sheets to the mercy of the light as she watched Remedios, the Beauty, waving goodbye in the midst of the flapping sheets that rose up with her, abandoning with her the environment of beetles and dahlias and passing through the air with her as four o’clock in the afternoon came to an end, and they were lost forever with her in the upper atmosphere where not even the highest-flying birds of memory could reach her. (195)

Magical realism is normally defined as the portrayal of magical or supernatural events in a dead-pan style as if they were real, and we can see this combination in the magical (the flight of Remedios the Beauty) with the real (the beetle in the garden) (Hart and Ouyang). This event is described from the perspective of the grandmother Úrsula as she sees Remedios the Beauty rise slowly upwards, before she takes off and disappears. But the details are provided in such a way that Remedios the Beauty’s perspective is also provided. In the phrase, “abandoning with her the

environment of beetles and dahlias and passing through the air with her as four o'clock in the afternoon came to an end," we get a glimpse of what she sees and takes with her, that is, the sight of the beetles and the dahlias in the garden and the fact that it is 4 o'clock in the afternoon. This magical-realist event, we can say, therefore, depicts the world from an impossible standpoint, that is, the standpoint of the person who has just died. Magical realism sees the world through the eyes of the dead. This is its magic, its transcendence of the real.

In the world of literature there are a number of ways in which the realms of magic and reality can come together. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, which we have already discussed, we have the amnesia epidemic that takes over the community of Macondo, that makes them forget what cows are for, so they put a message round the cow's neck, which says: "This is the cow. She must be milked every morning so that she will produce milk, and the milk must be boiled in order to be mixed with coffee to make coffee and milk" (46). In José Saramago's *Blindness*, everyone in a whole community—which might be the world—is suddenly and simultaneously struck down by blindness, and there is no rational or logical explanation of this event. In Isabel Allende's *The House of Spirits*, the ghosts of ancestors visit members of the family, and the women can communicate with each other using telepathy. In Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate*, Tita is forced to make the wedding cake for her sister, Gertrudis, who is marrying the man she loves, and the tears she drops into the batter make all the wedding guests cry uncontrollably about their own experience of "lost love" as soon as they eat the cake. In Mo Yan's *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*, Commander Long, a young woman, suddenly grows a big bushy tail beneath her clothes and develops some sharp white teeth while she turns into a fox just before she tries to rape Jiatong. During the night, in Murakami Haruki's *1Q84*, Little People come into our world by escaping through the mouth of a young girl while she is sleeping, and then start growing in order to make an Air Chrysalis. All of these examples of magical-realist events obey one formulaic rule which is the articulation of a magical event as if it was real. Behind this idea is the related idea that this is not just a literary technique, but relates to things and places in the real world.

Sid Natividad has named his choice of the best eight magical-real videogames as: *The Darkness* (2007), *Crusader Kings 2* (2012), *Kentucky Route Zero* (2013), *The Sims* (2014), *Life is Strange: True Colours* (2015), *Metal Gear Solid 5: The Phantom Pain* (2015), *Assassin's Creed Origins* (2017), and *Total War: Three Kingdoms* (2019). Apart from their common denominator—magical realism—these eight videogames draw on the language and narrativity of a variety of videogame genre parameters and protocols. The first, *The Darkness*, is a first-person shooter that takes place in 1990s New York City; Jackie Estocado, a hitman, is betrayed and killed, and his body parts are put back together by The Darkness, which is an evil cosmic reptilian being that then inhabits Estocado's body and takes revenge on the people who set Jackie Estocado up in the first place. In this way the (unavoidable) violence of this shooter genre is spliced with a magical-real sheen that draws on notions of the supernatural (a being who can come back to life after dying) and the extraterrestrial (The Darkness is a cosmic being who comes to earth to team up with Jackie Estocado in his revenge mission). Three of the videogames (*Crusader Kings 2*, *Assassin's Creed Origins*, and *Total War: Three Kingdoms*) involve military adventures and conquests located in an ancient time-zone (the European Middle Ages, ancient Egypt and ancient China, respectively), while another (*Metal Gear*

Solid 5: The Phantom Pain) involves war games in a more modern context (Afghanistan).

The last three of the games—*Kentucky Route Zero*, *The Sims*, and *Life is Strange: True Colours*—can be grouped together, broadly speaking, as magical-real “walking simulators” in which the gamer follows the protagonist on his or her journey. In *Kentucky Route Zero* the protagonist is Conway and he has a parcel to deliver to 5 Dogwood Drive and he ends up on a highway called The Zero which seems normal at first until he starts bumping into increasingly bizarre and magical-real events and people, one of whom—in a clear nod to the Colombian writer—is called Weaver Marquez. In *Life is Strange: True Colours* the gamer sees the world through Alex’s eyes; Alex can see the emotions of other people which are lit up for her like bright colors, and she uses this magical-realist gift in order to solve the mystery of her brother’s unexplained death. *The Sims*, for its part, even though it is based on an everyday life in which participants can dress up, meet a partner, get married, buy a house and even have babies, has a supernatural edge; thus, when a Sim dies, a tombstone or urn will appear, and the ghost of the deceased Sim may haunt the house where it died. One important feature that unites all of these videogames is that the magical, the strange and the supernatural are all treated with incredulity by the participants, and it is this combination of the magical and the real which is naturalized in these games.

But there is one magical-real videogame that should have been on Natividad’s list, and that is *What Remains of Edith Finch* (2017), for, as Marty Silva remarked: “*What Remains of Edith Finch* sits alongside *Kentucky Route Zero* as one of the finest magical-realism stories in all of video games.” This videogame swept the board of prizes soon after its release; it was voted as the Winner of Best Game at the 2018 BAFTA Game Awards, as well as winning Best Narrative awards at the GDC 2018 Choice Awards, 2018 SXSW Gaming Awards, and The Game Awards 2017.

What was the secret of the videogame’s success? Here is how *What Remains of Edith Finch* describes itself in the game introduction:

My name is Edith Finch, and I’m a 17-year-old girl with a problem: My family, going back at least three generations, has a habit of dying young. Really young. Most don’t make it out of childhood; my mother Dawn, who lived to 48, was an outlier. Only Eddie, my great-grandmother, bucked the trend. Coincidentally or not, she was also the chronicler of the Finch family history, whose strange stories are irrevocably intertwined with the sprawling, bizarre estate that housed the clan for decades. And now, at the beginning of *What Remains of Edith Finch*, I’m the last one left—and I’ve come home to suss out their secrets, and learn the truth about the Finch family curse. (qtd. in Chalk)

The videogame provides a simulated walk inside each of the rooms of the Finch mansion, in order to find out about the curse that damned almost all of Finch family members to an early death. The videogamer walks into any room of the mansion and, like a pop-up book, the narrative of that individual’s life surfaces before their eyes. We “see” the story of the family member from their POV. This is eerie since we see their story right up until their untimely death. As Silva put it: “The joy of *Edith Finch* is fully immersing yourself in the final moments of each Finch’s life.” I want to

focus on three narrative segments of *What Remains of Edith Finch*, as follows:



Figure 1: *What Remains of Edith Finch*: Calvin Finch's Final Moments

- (1) The first describes the sequence just before the death of Edith's brother, Calvin Finch. He is first seen on the swing and we watch the world from his point of view as he is pushing himself higher and higher on the swing. We hear the voiceover of his sister, and then we hear the mother who calls the two children to come back to the house to have their dinner. His sister runs off to the house and we are left with Calvin's POV as, now completely alone, he continues his exertions, pushing himself higher and higher, until the fateful moment—which we witness—just before he launches himself over the cliff face into the sea. This haunting moment is printed indelibly on the videogamer's imagination.



Figure 2: *What Remains of Edith Finch*: Lewis Finch's Final Moments

- (2) The second segment relates to the final moments of Lewis Finch, a member of the family who used to work in a cannery in Seattle. He has an extraordinarily vivid imagination, and the contrast between the embodiments of his imagination—relayed to us, far down below, in the background—as distinguished from the foreground that depicts his repetitive decapitation of the salmon is visually striking. This highly imaginative cross-layering of Lewis's imagination as compared to his empirically lived reality makes the portrayal of his death—he meets a grisly end as his inner and outer worlds collide at the end of the cannery guillotine blade—even more poignant.



Figure 3: What Remains of Edith Finch: Gregory Finch's Final Moments

- (3) The third segment revolves around the untimely death of the baby Gregory Finch who died in the bath because somebody—it is not clear who—forgot to turn the water from the tap off, and he drowned. We see the world from the baby's viewpoint; we see his wonder at the closeness of the baby ducks, his surprise at the sight of the bouncing frog and his joy as caused by the friendly whale. This turned out to be one of the most controversial scenes of the videogame. As Andy Chalk pointed: “the story moves into unambiguously dangerous territory—the death of an infant, which you will not just witness but participate in.”

For many, though, this was seen as one of the strengths of *What Remains of Edith Finch* by a number of videogamers and critics; that is, its ability to express a wide gamut of different emotions while encouraging us to enter into the emotional space of the Finch family. As Justin Clark suggested: “While the game isn’t above a sense of humor or whimsy, it never forgets it’s in the company of Death, a constant companion through an entire century of misfortunes in the Finch house. Its fatalism shapeshifts in every life it takes too soon; it’s oppressive in the game’s moments of joy, friendly in the face of misery, and never lacking in poetry.”

This was, indeed, one of the features of this videogame that particularly enthralled videogamers, that is, its invitation to empathize with the members of the Finch household. As one videogamer blogged on *Gamespot*, this videogame has “an intense personal quality expressive of feeling or emotion in an art (such as poetry or music)” (KahnArtizt). As we can see, videogamers viewed the stories of the members of the Finch family as moving because the game successfully conveyed a visually and emotionally compelling narrative about the value of life, even if it was cut short. In essence, it involved experiencing someone else’s life intensely and vicariously and—as suggested by the videogamer, KahnArtizt, quoted above—it brought the videogame as a genre closer to other arts such as poetry or music, and—I would add—novels and movies.

This type of focus on the vicarious experience of the life of others leads *What Remains of Edith Finch* away from the strictly “gaming” aspect of the videogame, towards the “experience” and “empathy” end of its spectrum of expressive possibilities. This movement towards experience and empathy is, indeed, part of a general trend that began to gather momentum in the second decade of the 21st century. As Nicole Clark explains:

Video games, like so much of the technology we now use regularly, sprang from the military-industrial complex. The first video games were war games, commissioned and designed by the Department of Defense for the explicit purpose of simulating war with the Soviet Union. Many of the design aspects of video games today still borrow from war games: the use of a “heads up display,” the onslaught of enemy targets, the vast predilection for violence, and even the staggering amount of money the Pentagon spends financing the video gaming world—so much so, in fact, that the Pentagon considers video games one of their key recruitment tools. Walking simulators aren’t the first games to buck these militaristic conventions, but their mechanics vary furthest from the video game’s original design. And while walking simulators may vary wildly in execution, they tend to have a few key similarities. Most lack puzzles or any sort of barrier to experiencing the narrative, with the exception of finding objects. You cannot fail a task in a way that forces you to repeat it, and you cannot die. Most of these games prioritize some kind of storytelling, be it linear or variable depending on your in-game decision making. A few are known for being quite beautiful.

These “walking sims” have been accompanied by a new set of emotional investment paradigms on the part of videogamers and they are, clearly, at the furthest remove from the “shooter” genre. As Nicole Clark suggests:

Perhaps the walking sim’s greatest power is how it makes players recognize and consider such decisions and the way they influence gaming outcomes and environments. A number of traditional big-budget titles don’t demand this kind of moral engagement, which makes sense—asking a player to stop and consider the horrible things they’re doing is antithetical to moving forward.

What we are, in effect, witnessing in the 21st century is a struggle in the arena of the videogame between what might be called the “walking terminator”—which is, essentially, what a “shooter” is all about—and the “walking simulator.” To understand fully what is involved in this struggle it is appropriate at this point to refresh our memory about the various genres of the videogame as they now exist in the third decade of the 21st century. Normally theorists talk about 11 distinctive types of the videogame genre, which are: (i) action, (ii) adventure, (iii) role-playing games, (iv) simulation, (v) strategy, (vi) sports and racing, (vii) puzzle, (viii) party games, (ix) horror, (x) educational, and (xi) virtual reality and augmented reality games. But the picture is more complex in that these genres also have a number of sub-theme-genres, as is evident from Figure 4, as follows:

1. Action (with 4 sub-genres)
2. Adventure (with 4 sub-genres)
3. Role-playing games (with 5 sub-genres)
4. Simulation (3 sub-genres)
5. Strategy (4 sub-genres)
6. Sports and racing (3 sub-genres)

7. Puzzle (3 sub-genres)
8. Party Games (3 sub-genres)
9. Horror (2 sub-genres)
10. Educational (2 sub-genres)
11. Virtual and Augmented Reality (2 sub-genres)²

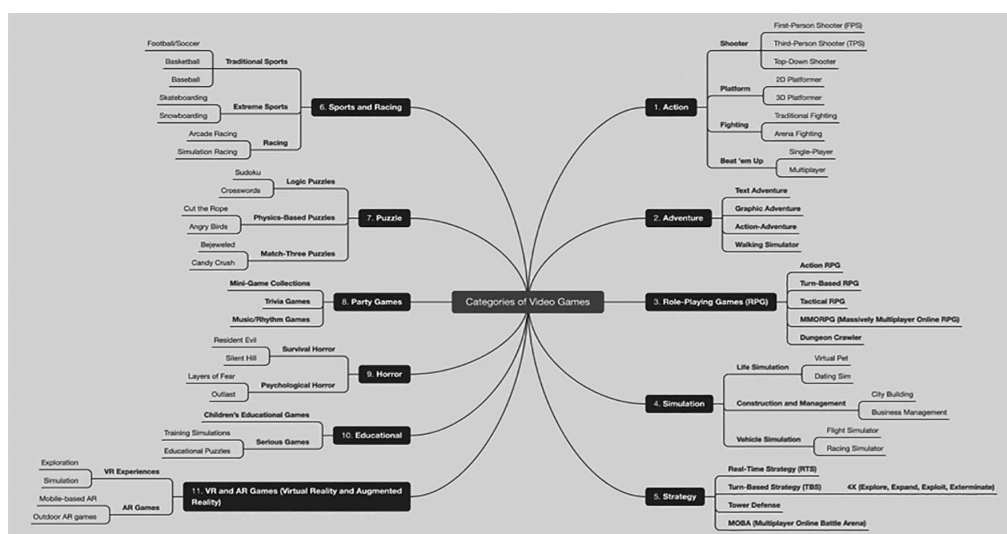


Figure 4: Videogame genres and sub-genres

As we can see, there is a great deal of variety in the videogame genre culture, as suggested by the 35 sub-genres. Although these figures (take your pick between 11 genres or 35 sub-genres) suggest a high level of diversity in the videogame culture, it is important to underline that this multiplicity should not disguise a basic underlying polarizing structure within the overall discursive fabric of videogame culture, that is the polarity between the “war game” and the “empathy game,” or—as suggested above—between the “walking terminator” and the “walking simulator” genre. It should also be noted that a number of the new genres relate directly or indirectly to simulation relating to everyday life. These include, for example, Genre 2 (Adventure, with particular reference to the “Walking Simulator” Sub-genre), Genre 3 (with reference to all 5 RPG genres), Genre 4 Simulation (with particular reference to Life Simulation), Genre 9 (with reference to both sub-genres, Survival Horror and Psychological Horror), and Genre 11 (including both sub-genres, that is, VR Experiences and AR Games).

If we are witnessing the emergence of a decisive new trend in videogaming, what are the conclusions that we should draw from this volte-face in videogame culture? What new meaning should be ascribed to the concept of game in this new videogame culture? Let us refresh our memory with the classic definition of the game provided by the Dutch cultural theorist, Johan Huizinga. His definition is as follows:

Play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and

place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy, and the consciousness that it is “different” from “ordinary life.” (qtd. in McDonald 248)

Echoing Huizinga’s original insight, the traditional videogame thrives on the idea that it is “different from everyday life.” But the new walking sim has begun to “walk away” (forgive the pun!) from this definition in its search for a more dynamic and interactive relationship with the videogamer’s everyday life.

One significant component of the sea change that has occurred in the videogamer’s expectations about the space and remit of the videogame was James Cameron’s film, *Avatar* (2009), which fundamentally transformed videogame culture in the sense that it revitalized the potential of the role played by the avatar in the videogame. It came as a surprise to many viewers that the spectacular mountains we see in Cameron’s *Avatar* were not created magically by CGI in a Hollywood studio but were based on the real mountains of Zhangjiajie in Hunan, China. Cameron used the magic of the mountains in China in order to create his own story, in *Avatar*, of a struggle between a mission from Earth that, in 2154, is intent on obtaining a valuable mineral, Unobtainium, from a moon Pandora, inhabited by the Na’Vi, a species of 10-foot-tall blue-skinned humanoids.

Avatar is a rich film in terms of its subterranean meanings, and Cameron himself has suggested that the film contains an environmental message.³ It can also be read as a magical-realist film.⁴ But, more importantly for our purposes in this essay, Cameron creates a hybrid, dynamic, and highly interactive version of the avatar in his film. Because of the toxic atmosphere on Pandora, which humans could not survive in, scientists have created genetically engineered Na’vi-looking “avatar” bodies that humans can use to interact with the Na’vi. *Avatar* thereby becomes a film about the dilemma of the modern human who is caught between nature and AI. This dilemma is lived out in the film in the space between Jake Sully as human and Jake Sully as avatar. He falls in love with Neytiri in her natural Na’Vi form, but Jake can only fully fall in love with her in his avatar form. Cameron uses a number of clever cinematic tricks to make this reality come alive before our eyes.⁵ By focusing on the space between Jake Sully as human and Jake Sully as avatar, Cameron was able to provide a new direction for videogaming and he, effectively, changed overnight the language of the videogame, by enhancing the acuity of its use of the avatar as a split-machine-human consciousness.⁶ And it is precisely this split-machine-human consciousness that a number of psychologists have named the “Proteus Effect” which they have begun to investigate from a societal, sociological, and psychological perspective.

The term “Proteus Effect” was introduced into videogame cultural discourse by Yee and Bailenson in 2007 to indicate the mutability of the gamer. The term had been borrowed from the mythological Greek god, Proteus—who had the power of metamorphosis and was able to alter himself to any shape or form he desired, a power that he sometimes used in order to trick others—as a way of focusing on the identity-games that videogamers use in their videogaming practice. They, furthermore, argued that “our self-representations have a significant and instantaneous impact on our behavior. The appearances of our avatars shape how we interact with others. As we choose

our self-representations in virtual environments, our self-representations shape our behaviors in turn. These changes happen not over hours or weeks but within minutes” (272). Their initial hypothesis has been borne out by a number of subsequent studies, including one by Kim Szolin, which suggests that

while the research evidence indicates that the gamer can, and often does, project elements of themselves into a game world through their avatar, the reverse may also be true and an avatar can impact or influence the gamer. More specifically, it has been suggested that the avatar may become integrated into the gamer’s sense of self, allowing for in-game avatar-related characteristics to influence the gamer in terms of both attitudes and behavior. (398)

This type of mutual identarian interactivity between the videogamer and their avatars is a phenomenon that is attracting more and more attention in videogaming circles, and one hypothesis that needs to be tested is that it is a symptom of the trend within certain sectors of the international videogaming communities to explore new videogame formats, particularly those that favor simulation, the everyday, and empathy.

As we have seen, the magical-real videogame—particularly in highly successful exemplars such as *Kentucky Route Zero* and *What Remains of Edith Finch*—has played an important role in the burgeoning interest in walking sims in the 21st century. One of the guiding principles of literary magical realism is that magical or bizarre or supernatural happenings are accepted as “real” and “quotidian,” and thereby naturalized, and this characteristic has clearly had an impact on a number of 21st century videogames in which the discourses of the real and the supernatural have been harmonized, including—most notably—*The Darkness*, *Kentucky Route Zero*, *Life is Strange: True Colours*, and *What Remains of Edith Finch*.

The magical-real videogame offers an interesting test-case of the growing interest shown by 21st-century videogamers in non-traditional and less-traditional formats. Even *The Darkness*, despite its robust “shooter” credentials as evident in its very gory scenes involving different types of dismemberment, contains what has been described as the videogame’s “most romantic moment”—when Jackie Estacado goes to see his girlfriend, Jenny, and they sit watching TV together; you can even blow out the candles she has lit for him on the birthday cake. Clearly, the normal has—in this process—taken on a more nuanced meaning. As Andy Chalk’s review of *What Remains of Edith Finch* suggests, while this videogame has elements that are “as out-of-left-field as anything I’ve ever encountered in a videogame,” at the same time the most striking thing about the Finch manor “is just how normal it all seems.” It is in this sense that we can argue that a new group of videogamers are emerging in the 21st century who are moving away from the traditional format of the videogame as epitomized by the shooter and turning towards games based on simulation, everyday life, and empathy. It is as if videogaming, like ouroboros, had decided to turn upon itself and eat its own DNA.

Notes

1. Of the ten best-selling videos of all time, five of these—*PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds*; *Red Dead Redemption II*; *Grand Theft Auto 5*; *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*; and *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*—are essentially shooters or contain shooter-type violence or are set in war zones; see Makuch.
2. I have not included the sub-sub-genres listed on this graph, since this introduces a level of complexity that is not appropriate for an essay of this kind.
3. So we have a struggle between humans and non-humans which draws on the sci-fi formula in which the struggle between humans and the Na'Vi becomes the story of colonialism, a struggle between Westerners who attack non-Western communities in their search for gold, land, power, etc., the latter which is represented as unobtainium. So far, so simple. James Cameron himself has helped us understand the environmentalist message that is also contained within *Avatar*. "There's a sense of entitlement," Cameron suggested in an interview, adding that humans believe they're "entitled to every damn thing on this planet. That's not how it works and we're going to find out the hard way if we don't wise up and start seeking a life that's in balance with the natural cycles of life on Earth" (qtd. in Cipriani). These two meanings of *Avatar*—anticolonialism and anti-extractivism—may be complemented by other readings.
4. Thus, for example, we have a number of "magical" elements that are associated with the world of the Na'Vi. Firstly, we might point to the world of Pandora which is a strange, magical world, and its appearance—as created throughout the film—is strikingly other-worldly (despite its being based on Zhangjiajie). Secondly, the fact that the Na'Vi have blue skins, are ten foot tall and have tails is another detail that allows us to propose that Pandora is a magical-real world. Thirdly, the fact that the Na'Vi are able to communicate directly and neurally via their "queue" or tail with the natural world as well as the animal world is nothing short of magical. But it seems real because they plug themselves in to what looks like a computer circuit.
5. As Dennis Gayirah, for example, suggested: "*Avatar* is a visually stunning film that combines live-action photography, motion-capture work, and virtual lighting conditions to create a fantastical, digital world."
6. I should add, though, that the videogame that was specifically based on *Avatar*—rather like the videogame *E.T.* that was based on the eponymous film—was a disaster. Millions liked the film *Avatar*, but not everyone liked *Avatar: The Game*. Erik Brudvig criticized the videogame for its "unpolished and thin gameplay elements"; his final assessment was "Videogame adaption of Cameron's universe doesn't quite deliver." Other reviewers suggested that they needed "more complex levels," more "complex obstacles," more "skills," as well as "more missions" to make it worthwhile. The videogame was, clearly, a big disappointment after the hyperbolic success of the film.

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