A utilitarian antagonist: The zombie in popular video games.
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Although not the first horror game, *Resident Evil*, released by developer Capcom in 1996 for the Sony Playstation, certainly helped to popularise horror games, spawning numerous sequels and imitators, not to mention a successful film franchise. Much game scholarship has focused on this game and its role in the establishment and determination of the survival horror game. But, although the game is certainly legitimately established as canon in this respect, it is odd that, given the importance of representations in horror games, that one of the central aspects of this horror, the zombie, is largely ignored in favour of situating the game within broader genre categories.

Like the discipline of film studies in its nascent years, much work on videogames has been concerned with the construction of systems of classification and taxonomy. However, the interactive nature of games has necessitated that game studies produce a more complex version of genre than has traditionally been used in film scholarship. As a result contemporary theories of genre in the video game have categorised games in terms of both their aesthetic dimensions and representational strategies, particularly in relation to film and literary genres, and their ludic/interactive dimensions; the styles of interaction required to play them as well as the internal rule systems which govern play (see Mark J. P. Wolf 2001, in particular).

Although these approaches show an acknowledgment of the wider and more complex cultural interactions of games in relation to genre, play and technology, much of this work still looks to establish fundamental structural principles on which studies of the medium can be built. One of the issues with these approaches is that they have largely ignored specific motifs and phenomena that that cross generic categories and the boundaries between games, culture and other media. So what of phenomena that might imitate, echo or recycle images, representation or ideas that circulate more widely than in just films and games? What of the zombie? Who, as work in this volume establishes, does not just appear in the horror film, but emerges across a range of media texts and cultural discourses. As Orr succinctly puts it, 'cultural recycling is among postmodernism's key dynamics.' (Orr 2003: 95). In this sense the zombie is the most postmodern of phenomena, a cultural artefact increasingly cut adrift in a sea of intertextual meanings and dynamics, constantly reused and recycled.

This study is meant neither as an exhaustive nor exclusive list of zombie games nor as an attempt to define the zombie game as a genre or subgenre, either in aesthetic or interactive terms, but as an exploration of some of the diverse game texts in which the trope of the zombie has figured. Furthermore, it is not the aim here to fix the definition or meaning of the zombie. The zombie belongs broadly to the milieu of horror and, as Cherry (2009) has pointed out, the horror genre has been one that has been 'flexible' in

the way it has been able to address and reveal cultural concerns and anxieties. The zombie offers similar flexibility, not just in terms of its cultural meanings, but as an antagonist that can be, by turns, threatening, pathetic, comic and pleasurable.

THE ZOMBIE GAME

Although, as Andrew Tudor has argued, the grouping of texts within genre theory by aesthetic motifs is problematic (Tudor 1976), it remains a useful way of picking out points of congruence and cultural significance across textual materials. Thus, it is relatively easy to decide, at a pragmatic level, which games are 'zombie games'. The zombies in these texts are, for the most part, shambling corpses usually representing a threat, albeit sometimes limited, to the player/character or the player's in-game goals. Furthermore the representations and game worlds tend conform to the post-apocalyptic environments, stripped of people and populated by the roaming dead, that were central to the constitution of the zombie movie conventions in the films of George Romero, in particular the 1978 film *Dawn of the Dead*. This is, of course, a definition that functions as a convenient stepping off point (or perhaps a shuffling off point), rather than a category of heuristic solidity and, as I will go on to explore, the zombie may be constituted in a various ways in diverse game texts.

Apperley states that 'taken as a whole, the field of video games can hardly be considered to have a uniform—or consistent—aesthetic.' (Apperley, 2006: P7). He therefore calls for the significance of the interactive to be at the forefront of understanding games.

> Contra to conventional genres I argue that the nonrepresentational, specifically interactive, characteristics of video games should be deployed by game scholars to create a more nuanced, meaningful, and critical vocabulary for discussing video games; one that can perceive the underlying common characteristics of games that might otherwise be regarded as entirely dissimilar if judged solely on representation. (Apperley, 2006: P7).

However, the zombie is also a representational phenomenon. Mean or green, slow or fast, threatening or comic, the zombie is an image that signifies itself as a popular cultural artefact. It also simultaneously requires interaction in that the zombie must usually be killed or avoided within the interactive structures of these games. As Richard Rouse III so insightfully observes in his discussion of the way that technological limitations have made horror a good fit form many games.

> It's pretty obvious that characters are running on artificial intelligence (AI), no matter how sophisticated. Indeed, the more realistic their behaviour and appearance become, the more the perilous "uncanny valley" takes over the experience. This sort of "slightly off" world is ideally suited to the uneasiness of a horror setting. Often people joke that games feel like they're populated by zombies, so why not embrace that? *Dead Rising* (Yoshinori Kawano, 2006) had an excellent simulation of world filled with zombies, probably indistinguishable from a real shopping mall filled with the undead. (Rouse III, 2009)

Indeed, one might argue that many video game's antagonists are effectively zombies whether or not they borrow from the zombie tropes of other media forms or not. From the

relentless marching – and multiplying – aliens of *Space Invaders* to the partially reanimated monsters of the *Doom* and *Wolfenstein* franchises, the game antagonist is usually an almost infinite supply of mindless and inhuman monsters (*Night of the Living Dead* (1968), for all its influence on the popular conception of the zombie, doesn't actually use the term zombie). It is from this "fit" between video games and the zombie that its usefulness as a motif derives.

THE AESTHETIC OF APOCALYPSE

A significant popular cultural discourse, or meme, concerning the zombie (again derived form Romero's influence) is the mythos of the zombie apocalypse. Whatever its origins in myths about the practices of voodoo, the zombie in the contemporary imagination is synonymous with the end of civilisation and the breakdown of society and its structures creating the necessity for the survivors to find ways to deal with problem of the zombie (*28 Days Later*, *Resident Evil Apocalypse, The Walking Dead*). The tropes of the zombie and the zombie apocalypse represent a 'persistent aesthetic' rather than a genre (the same would apply to other representational aesthetics such as Steampunk). This persistent aesthetic explains how these visual motifs operate in a wider arena than simply as genre markers or narrative themes. As such, the zombie apocalypse forms a useful narrative backdrop to the action of the zombie game.

Whilst it is tempting to see the transfer of this discourses as a direct movement form film to game texts it needs to be acknowledged that the phenomenon of the zombie moves through various forms of popular cultural interaction. Orr (2003) explains that the reiteration or imitation of particular cultural ideas can be explained as cultural memetics, citing Richard Dawkins influential theory of memetics to explain that:

> 'Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or building arches. […] If the idea catches on, it can be said to propagate itself, spreading from brain to brain.' (Dawkins cited in Orr 2003: 104)

The language of brains and the implied metaphor of infection could scarcely be more apt.

Numerous websites, such as Zombieresearch.net, are dedicated to the documentation and arguments of their contributors' theories on how to survive a zombie apocalypse. Many of these sites feature decidedly tongue in cheek engagement with the notion of the zombie apocalypse. One internet "meme", featured on the site knowyourmeme.com, derives from internet users commenting on the perfect anti-zombie fortress. The chosen site is a concrete building in a mine in Japan, pictures of which are "photoshopped" by users to enhance its apparent impregnability. Even the more mainstream Huffington Post features numerous survival guides and blog entries offering tips on how to survive the zombie apocalypse with the site even going so far as to run a 'zombie awareness week in May 2011. Meanwhile the users of fora for games like *Left 4 Dead* and *Dead Island* tend to debate this directly in the terms of the games themselves, discussing their relative merits or realism.

Games such as *Resident Evil* (1996) and many of its sequels clearly fit the description in their usage of shambling hordes of dead people who attempt to attack and eat the protagonist. Capcom's *Dead Rising* games (*Dead Rising* (2006) and *Dead Rising 2* (2010)) feature a clearly recognisable antagonist conforming to the same tropes. The dead shuffle around the city and attack the protagonist as he passes near and the island of *Dead Island* (Deep Silver, 2012) is littered with corpses that will suddenly attack and the usual wandering dead.

The practical realities of game production make the zombie and the zombie apocalypse an ideal antagonist and aesthetic for a medium that, in spite of the recent spectacular advances in technology, retains a restricted relationship with the creation of believable environments and characters.

As Rouse argues, the limits of technology create interplay between generic, narrative and ludic elements of game design. As a result various facets of horror are convenient facilitators of ludic restrictions with deadly mist, mutating walls/game environments and monsters curtailing the player in ways that force interaction with certain elements of the game and hide – or at least explain - the restrictions of space.

This is clear in the *Resident Evil* franchise, particularly in early games where the debris and disaster from the pre-narrative zombie outbreak frequently worked to provide a restricted play environment in which broken cars, damaged doors, fire and other hazards worked to make the most of what was often very small game play spaces on each adjacent screen. If such contrivances work well within the horror genre more generally the now instantly recognisable visual aesthetic of the zombie apocalypse is a shorthand way of achieving this whilst also attaching narrative significance to these restrictions.

The attachment of genre motifs to basic games is a hallmark of many early successes for the nascent games industry. For example *Arkanoid* (Taito 1986) updated Atari's popular *Breakout* (1976) by adding a veneer of science fiction through design motifs and an introductory narrative. These narrative devices are instrumental in making the most of the audiences' imagination to make up for limitations of the technology and are more than empty 'gift-wrappings' (Eskilinen 2001: 16). These are profoundly intertextual elements of semiotic engagement, functioning as, what Jenkins terms 'embedded narrative' (2004: P126). Just as the cold war space race formed a meaningful backdrop to the birth science fiction as a video game aesthetic genre, *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* formed powerfully present cultural touchstones upon which the player was likely to draw. These aesthetics are rendered interactive by games with myriad titles dropping the player into a space ship to battle enemies in space and often required the player to navigate a narrow 'trench' to reach a goal drawing on the scene in *Star Wars, Episode IV: A New Hope* and the official spin-off games.

Games tend to call upon these filmic and ergodic moments for the provision of many of their pleasures. *Dead Rising* (Capcom 2006) provides a pastiche of *Dawn of the Dead* in situating the game within a zombie infested shopping mall and online flash survival game *The Last Stand* (ConArtist Productions) directly emulates *Night of the Living Dead* and requires the player to defend a barricade form an approaching zombie horde at night

whilst using daytime to find survivors and weapons through a mixture of third person 2D shooting and strategy.

A UTILITARIAN ANTAGONIST

Deleuze and Guattari pronounce that the zombie is 'the only modern myth' (1983: p335) and Cherry argues that the postmodern zombie film reveals 'social and political alienation in the consumer society' (Cherry, 2009: P11-12)

> Thus, *Night of the Living Dead* concerns race and the civil rights movement in the 1960s, Dawn of the Dead is a response to the emergence of the consumer society in the 1970s and Day of the Dead is about the crisis of masculinity in the wake of feminism in the 1980s.' (Cherry 2009: 168).

However, the zombie of the video game is less powerfully connected to metaphor as a result of the minimal narratives of video games. Although these games offer a pastiche or parody of zombie films they often feel much less *meaningful* than their film counterparts. This is revealed in the difference between *Resident Evil* films and games. In the translation to the more forcefully narrativised, and therefore metaphorical, medium of film, the real antagonist becomes the Umbrella corporation and its shadowy faceless powers, articulating anxieties articulated here are about global corporate power and biological warfare. The zombies are obviously meaningful here but they remain a symptom of the activities of the real antagonist even if they are a present threat to the film's protagonists. The experiments and control of the Umbrella Corporation remains a backdrop to the games and the player still works to uncover the truth of its nefarious operations. But the nature of this engagement is very different. The threat to the player remains the zombies that populate the game. Certainly progression through the narrative is a driver of the game experience but in terms of the structure of play the player spends far more time battling zombies and solving puzzles than progressing through the narrative. This is not to suggest that the narrative dimension of these games is unimportant; the uncovering of the narrative is central to the pleasures of the game and the text can most certainly be seen as congruent with the fears about the relationship between private capital, the ethics of biotechnologies and the military industrial complex. Indeed as the film franchise progressed through its various sequels (*Resident Evil: Apocalypse* (2004), *Extinction* (2007), *Afterlife* (2010) and *Retribution* (2012)) the idea of the ordinary zombie presenting any real threat to the increasingly powerful central character, Alice, decreases whilst her real battle is with Umbrella.

The diminishing lack of threat provided by the zombies in the latter films is also an issue for the games. The various horrific mutations in the latter iterations of the *Resident Evil* games attest the fact that the shambling zombie just may not be scary enough anymore. In fact, some subsequent iterations of the *Resident Evil* franchise are not zombie games in the same way that the early games, or indeed the films, were with the focus on the mutated monster rather than the zombie. In *Resident Evil Revelations* it is quite a surprise

that, on boarding the ship that serves as the arena for much of the game, the dead bodies encountered by the player do not rise up and attack but remain dead in favour of monsters that have mutated to be unrecognisable as humans or were never human at all. In *Resident Evil 4* and *5* the zombie horde are products of a different strain of the zombie virus and move in quicker and more intelligent fashion even using weapons, increasing their presence as a threat.

The alternative zombie is also a central feature of *Left 4 Dead* and its sequel. As with the gradual changes to the common antagonist in the R*esident Evil* franchise, the problem of the ease with which the shambling zombie can be dispatched in the more action orientated games necessitates some updating of the zombie trope. The "basic" zombies ('the horde') encountered by the player appear at first to be the slow, shuffling zombies of lore. However, when disturbed or alerted to the player and his or her part of survivors these zombies will attack at speed, running towards the player in waves. These zombies still offer only minimal challenge but in these games the player also encounters different forms of monster that require different playing strategies. These alternative zombies follow many of the conventions found in video game antagonists. These include a large, slow and powerful zombie ('the Tank'), a fast moving zombie capable of jumping large distances ('the Hunter') and a "sniper" style of zombie who attacks from hiding places (with a long tongue attack). These zombie types reflect wider patterns of antagonist design in video games in which large enemies are powerful but slow (the 'Hunters' in *Halo* for example) whilst smaller enemies tend to be more nimble, thus requiring different playing strategies (usually avoidance coupled with repeated attacks and accuracy, respectively). It is not just the zombie film that forms an aesthetic influence here; *Left 4 Dead* also features a female zombie called 'the Witch' who visually recalls the ghostly Sadako in Ringu (1998).

As Perron notes, there has been a shift in the nature of survival horror towards more robust protagonists, action oriented play and player gratification (Perron, 2009). As Therrien points out, the greater availability of ammunition in many horror games is reflects the provision of different pleasures for the player (Therrien, 2009). At some level this is clearly the result of the dominance of the First Person Shooter (FPS) in the console game market. Franchises like *Halo* have become behemoths of the games industry and their influence on other interactive genres is not surprising.[1]

Resident Evil: Survivor (Capcom, 2000) released for the PlayStation typified the offering of this type of pleasure. The novelty of playing a *Resident Evil* game with a light gun from a first person perspective.[2] The control system did much to undermine the experience of fear in the game, losing the famous difficulty of the earlier games' targeting and controls in favour of the light gun enabled the player to play more easily, making zombies far easier to shoot and kill. The game owed much to Sega's 1996 arcade game *House of the Dead*, which featured a more broad array of monsters but was typified by its fast paced 'on rails' shooting experience.[3] The break with zombie tradition that seemed so stark an innovation in Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (2002), is one of gaming necessity in these cases. As Taylor (2009) highlights, the shambling zombie offers little threat to the player well stocked with ammunition and a responsive control system. The zombie as fodder for the player also appears in *[Prototype]* (Activision, 2009) wherein the trope of

the rampant viral threat is again the centre of the narrative. Significantly, the normal infected represent little of a threat to the player and the superhuman abilities bestowed upon Alex Mercer by the virus mean that the 'ordinary' zombies can be easily despatched in large numbers and can be punched across the street hurled into buildings or torn to pieces with ease.

What becomes clear in these examples is that the zombie, although emergent from horror genres intended to instil fear or discomfort, isn't necessarily a figure that still instils fear. Moreover, as the *Dead Rising* games demonstrate, the zombie offers a form of pleasure based in the ironic excesses of violent game play. Carroll notes the zombie as monstrous through its 'interstitiality' (Carroll 1990: 47), occupying a position of being neither alive nor dead and thus engendering disgust. However, the zombie also offers, not just a site of fear, but also a dehumanised antagonist that the gamer need feel no remorse for repetitive slaughter forming part of the pleasure of the game experience.

The history of concern about horror film shows why this strategy has been successful in games. Moral panic or outrage has been levelled at the horror film more generally but its particular vicissitudes tend to be aimed at the torture of humans by humans. This was certainly the key dimension of concerns about the video nasties (see Barker 1984 and Egan 2007) Human violence to the Other of the zombie has met with considerably less concern as can be seen in the case of *Carmageddon* in 1997, a game in which the player could mow down pedestrians in a vehicle for bonus time. The initial release produced a considerable backlash in the mainstream press for its violent content and the volume of the moral panic in the press was such that developers re-released the game replacing the 'people' with zombies to diffuse the criticism that the came glorified bad driving.

These pleasures of zombie combat are catered to extensively by the modding community who create, and make available, 'skins' and maps for games such as *Counterstrike* and *Call of Duty* that transform these games from their period war settings to battles with zombie hordes. Modding can be effectively provided by games developers themselves. Rock Star Games demonstrated the commercial application of this in releasing an expansion game for their 2010 Western *Red Dead Redemption*, called *Undead Nightmare*. Interestingly the Red Dead zombie add-on demonstrates a mixture of two persistent aesthetics the western and the zombie apocalypse.

DEAD FUNNY: ZOMBIES, IRONY AND COMEDY

As the example of *Carmageddon* shows, irony is a powerful component of how games often attempt to distance themselves from public concerns about violence in media texts. In the rush to find the meanings of the monster, academic work on horror has often neglected the humour that abounds in many zombie texts. If this is true for scholarship on the zombie in film it is doubly so for the minimal scholarship on games. The focus on the most famous franchise of *Resident Evil* has canonised this text to such an extent that it has almost come to the zombie game However, other games have a far more ambivalent relationship with the notion of fear. It is fair to say that the most critically and

commercially successful zombie games have opted for a more serious tone, notably *Left 4 Dead* and its sequel and *Dead Island*. However, titles like *Dead Rising* and *Dead Rising 2* need to be considered slightly differently.

Dead Rising offers a somewhat ambivalent experience in terms of its relationship with horror. Whilst games are often constructed around narratives, these narratives are not the only means of play in game use. The rise of the 'sandbox' games, such as the *Grand Theft Auto* and *Elder Scrolls* series, in which the player has great freedom to roam the in-game world and choose whether or not to follow the game's narrative demonstrates that game designers are aware of the different ways in which games might provide pleasure. *Dead Rising* in particular offers the player the opportunity to play the game outside of the narrative. One may choose to follow the narrative of the games, in the first game the protagonist Frank West has 72 hours to find out the reason for the zombie outbreak before the helicopter returns to rescue him (although like its sequel there are numerous possible endings). However, the missions within the game are not entirely enforced (leading to these different endings). Other survivors can be rescued or not (given the difficulty of doing so, frequently not) and, other that the changes to the endings, the central status of the player is not unduly affected by the failure to complete these missions. In both games the player can simply enter the playing area and attempt to kill as many zombies as possible before being overwhelmed.

This is far from a subversion of the game system or an act of meaningful resistance. Such pleasures are often facilitated by game design. In both *Dead Rising* games one of the indicators of the game developers facilitation of this kind of play is the ability to utilise a huge array of objects as weapons against the zombie horde. What is telling is that many of these "weapons" are not particularly effective, often offering a considerably worse tactical alternative than simply avoiding the zombies. The pleasure here lies in both the excesses and absurdity of the game. In *Dead Rising* 2 the player/character Chuck can assault zombies with such diverse instruments as a tennis racquets (which enable the player to hit balls at zombies), coathangers, a large swordfish or even a giant fluffy bunny. If such items offer absurdity with excess, violent excess is found in the use of drills, sledgehammers and guns or the ability to literally 'mow down' zombies with a lawn mower. The weapon augmentation system (also a feature of *Dead Island* and borrowed from the conventions of the RP games) further pursues this logic of excess and absurdity allowing the player to combine a wheelchair with a lawnmower, or a power drill with a bucket – the resulting artefact, the 'drill bucket' is placed on a zombies head, killing them rather messily. Numerous online guides and wikis detail the various combinations that can be found for players to experiment with.

The sense of excess is also narratively situated within the game. The game is set in the aftermath of a large scale zombie outbreak in the USA and Chuck is a contestant in a gameshow titled Terror is Reality in which contestants compete to kill zombies on camera for the edification of an online audience. The gameshow can be played online and consists of nine different events, described in the following way in the game booklet:

> Don't miss Terror is Reality XVII! Here in the ultimate playground, America's biggest

nightmare: zombies! But now it's time to turn the tables, as players form all around the worlds slice and dice their way through America's menace!...

Slicecycles: Rip your way through a massive horde of zombies on a custom motorcycle – complete with chainsaws. Aim for the bonus zombie to skyrocket your score. Didn't do so well in previous rounds? Be prepared for a massive time delay before joining the carnage. (*Dead Rising 2 Instruction booklet* 2010: p7-8)

The concept itself owes much to the violent game show of *The Running Man* (1987) in its satire of the excesses of American popular television whilst also borrowing heavily on Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*.

Perron notes that, 'Very quickly the horror video game attempted to measure itself against literary and film canons' (Perron, 2009), yet what is at work in *Dead Rising* is a pastiche and parody of popular film. In fact, the game also offers the player ways to undermine serious moments in the narrative. One such example is that failing to provide the drug (Zombrex) that prevents Chuck's daughter from succumbing to the virus and turning into a zombie results in a cutscene wherein Chuck fall to his knees on the realisation that his daughter is dead. Whilst many games have been praised for their ability to provide narrative moments like that of their film counterparts (see King and Krzywinska 2002), the fact that the player can witness this scene having dressed Chuck in a range of absurd clothing, from womens' shoes to a toddler outfit, allows an undermining of the pathos of the scene. Similarly, dressing Chuck in comedic outfits throughout the game does much to undermine the wider sense of threat that we might expect a game associated with horror to contain.

It must be noted here that the player does necessarily expect to 'survive' such modes of play. In this it has much in common with older styles of non-narrative games where the player could never 'complete' the game but would play – usually competing for a high score – until all 'lives' had been exhausted; games such as *Pac-Man* or *Space Invaders* being illustrative examples. Nor is this exclusive to the video game. Zombie films are often constructed in terms of a certain pleasure in the destruction of Zombies, notably in *Zombieland* (2009) which often revels in the violence against zombies, and *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), which explicitly plays with this in the musical montage of zombie destruction to the rock band Queen's 'Don't Stop Me Now'.

Moreover, in some games the player has the opportunity, or is even required, to be a zombie. The *Left 4 Dead* games offer online players the opportunity to play in competitive multiplayer online games as zombies. In *Stubbs the Zombie: Rebel Without a Pulse* the player controls a zombie, Stubbs, graphically rendered as a comic green zombie, who wreaks revenge on the town that witnessed his death by destroying the town and eating its inhabitants' brains. The game allows the player to infect the townsfolk, turning them into a zombie army to assist the player. The more deadly opponents offer another important feature of *Left for Dead* that is unusual even in the diverse world of zombie games, the ability to play, in online games as a zombie. Gaming pleasure is offered in terms of the opportunity to sneak up on or overwhelm human antagonists.

The example of *Stubbs* highlights that, not only can the zombie be unthreatening, it can also be funny. Whilst the technological capabilities of contemporary games consoles and PCs, and the visual and narrative complexity of texts produced by the multi-million dollar games industry have escaped many of the technological limitations that hindered early games (or drove creativity, depending on one's perspective), there remains an arena of game production where considerable technological restriction still has a considerable role. Online games, usually free to play on the internet and mobile games, usually downloaded for smartphones are now a substantial section of the games market. The zombie game has become a common staple of these, particularly in online flash games.[4] So much so that a number of dedicated sites have emerged to pull together the various flash based zombie experiences that exist online. Sites like Zombiegames.net offer a portal that features an array of zombie based flash games. Indeed, at the time of writing the site hosted three hundred and twelve different games with a zombie theme. Elsewhere, flash game host sites like Flonga.com have a dedicated category of zombie games. Significantly, of the 41 genre categories listed, only three refer to aesthetic categories or motifs: 'Zombie', 'Ninja' (another prevalent motif in games) and 'Tank', with other categories based around the interactive genres of these games, such as sports, arcade, and puzzle.

The zombie trope crosses these interactive genres, and can be found in emulations of survival horror, sports games (*Zombie Baseball*) and is added as an aesthetic theme to puzzle games. One such game, *All We Need is Brain* (developer VladG) requires the player to strategically drop human brains near graves to lure zombies into traps. Like many of these games the zombies are comically rendered. They are green and their lower bodies are missing resulting in them crawling across the screen trailing internal organs. When destroyed by traps such as explosive mines the zombies are disintegrated leaving a pair of staring eyeballs. A similar set of comic representations is found in *Flaming Zombooka* (developer RobotJAM). Here the player must destroy a number of zombies placed in positions on the game screen using a limited number of shots from a bazooka. Representations here are simple and cartoonish with games commonly constructed in 2D graphics contained within a single screen or simple scrolling space.

Adding to the comic tone of these games is that fact that the zombies pose no threat to the player or the players' avatar in the game. In *All We Need is Brain* the player has no presence in the game beyond mouse interaction in dropping the brains into the game screen. In *Flaming Zombooka* the player's avatar is a soldier (who looks like the protagonist of the *Duke Nukem* games) who remains in one static place on the screen. The zombies in this game do not even move.

Parodies of horror and zombie tropes also abound within these games. For example the game *Zombie Hooker Nightmare* in which the player takes the role of a prostitute and must simultaneously battle zombies with petrol bombs, shovels and martial arts attacks whilst enticing 'customers' to a caravan. The game is produced by the popular American cable channel Adult Swim, famous for their irreverent animated parodies of popular culture such as *Robot Chicken*. A search of Apple's App Store under the term 'zombie' alone uncovers over three hundred games in which zombies feature as the main antagonist, almost half of which are based on humorous premises (*Zombie Granny*).

Some of these are not necessarily games. For example, *Make a Zombie* and *Make a Zombie 2*, found in the Apple App Store, allow the 'player' to construct a cartoon zombie using basic pre-designed icons. In addition apps like *Zombie Picture Booth* enable the user to take pictures of themselves or others and transform the subjects into zombies using a suite of simple editing tools. The zombie can even be found in educational games, for example the iPad app *Maths Zombies* in which the player must correctly answer multiple-choice arithmetic questions to fire a cannon that staves off an endlessly marching line of zombies. As befits the zombie tradition these creatures shuffle slowly towards the player whilst successful answers result in limbs and heads being blown from still marching zombies.

Among the most unusual, entertaining and original games found online are those in which the player does not attempt to stop or survive the zombie apocalypse but to facilitate it. In particular the *Infectionator* games (*Infectionator* and *Infectionator: World Dominator*) feature the player attempting to infect and kill all of the inhabitants of major cities of the world to complete the game. The game itself is steeped in irony and intertextual knowingness common in these games. The aesthetic itself is styled around the graphics of early 8-bit colour games and features an array of mildly satirical pop culture references. Having triggered the virus in which the citizens turn into zombies and devour each other the player must also utilise bonus zombie characters to defeat the security forces that threaten to kill all of the zombies before the populace can be infected. These bonus characters include a Colonel Sanders (the mascot of Kentucky Fried Chicken) who unleashes zombie chickens, a zombie Michael Jackson and zombie Spider-man. The death and destruction wreaked by the zombies is rewarded with money that the player can spend on upgrading the virus and the zombies themselves. Released in 2010 the game proved popular enough that it maintains a consistent presence in the most played games on a number of games sites such as onemorelevel.com (where at the time of writing it was the most played game on the site). The appeal of the game remains in its humour in that the player actually has a minimal role in playing beyond a few mouse clicks to release the virus and place 'special' zombies, with the level itself largely played out automatically as the zombies either infect or fail to spread adequately to infect each level/town.

Of course none of this is to suggest that these games and their narratives are without meaning. The humour of *Infectionator* might reasonably be assumed to be a cathartic engagement with contemporary cultural fears of epidemic and infection. The Sars scare, avian influenza and others reveal a contemporary concern with epidemics on both a local and global scale as well as the usual concerns about biological terrorism and the conspiracies about the creation of weaponised viruses by governments or unscrupulous companies within the military industrial complex.

Not all of these games are delivered as parody. Again the zombie apocalypse narrative is particularly suited to a sub-genre of narrative based survival games that have much in common with the "serious" horror of *Resident Evil*. In the more advanced of these the player interacts with a series of point n click adjacent spaces in an attempt to navigate the game world and survive through the collection of artefacts such as ammunition and food. A more fascinating sub-genre reveals the way that the zombie apocalypse narrative and

its visual aesthetic help to transcend the limits of the flash format. These games feature a text based choice system much like the Gamebooks that found short-lived popularity in the 1980s such as the *Choose Your Own Adventure* series of books published by Bantam in the UK. Games like the *The Sagittarian* (Hyptosis 2011) make use of stylised or evocative still images and eerie soundscapes and music to provide the backdrop to a narrative adventure in which the player makes a series of multiple-choice decisions in an attempt to survive the narrative. These particular examples trade on the popular zombie apocalypse strategies that abound in both zombie films and internet memes in which the wilderness or little inhabited rural areas and small towns of the United States offer both the opportunity for survival and uncanny places of desolation and terror. This trope has travelled from films like *Psycho*, *Deliverance* and *The Hills Have Eyes* in which the seldom travelled back roads of America house many hostile terrors, both human and Other.

What we see here is that the zombie's aesthetic influence on games is not just as a direct pastiche of film conventions but is a complex set of intertextual cultural references. More importantly, the appearance of the zombie in these games cannot be understood only in representational or narrative terms but must be considered intrinsic to their interactive and ergodic nature. Thus the zombie is a "fit" between the need for games to provide embedded and meaningful narrative backgrounds to enhance the experience of play and to provide an antagonist for their various modes of engagement.

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[1] 'The flood", an antagonist in the first Halo games is also a zombie of sorts in that they infect other NPCs transforming them into mutated versions of allies and foes alike.

[2] It should be noted that the ability to play the game with Namco's GunCon light gun controller was only available in the European/UK release of the game.

[3] The frenetic nature of the arcade on rails light-gun shooting games is the combination of technological and economic factors far more that the nature of the narratives. The novelty of using a handheld 'gun' in arcade games had begun with the popular *Operation Wolf* (Taito 1987) and the short game time and high difficulty that typified the arcade experience – with the emphasis on the machine harvesting money for plays – demanded an engaging and action filled experience to provide value.

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[4] Flash games are built using Adobe's Flash animation software, or a similar software package, and enable the creator to produce animated images that can be controlled and therefore constructed as games. There are an incredible number of these games on the internet varying in quality and complexity and by genre and content. Everything from reworkings of classic arcade games to relatively complex RPG adventures can be found in this format and a substantial online industry in game production and hosting is present online. Games are rarely specific to one game site and can be found across numerous game portals.