

In the Horrifying Magic Cycle of Resident Evil 5: A Case Study

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Abstract

In two previous essays (Perron, 2006 and Arsenault & Perron 2008), I have conceptualized the partaking in a game as a cognitive frame, as an ongoing process. To explain the gamer's immersion and progression through a game, I have resorted to the figure of the cycle, of the spiral instead of talking about Huizinga's "magic circle". In this model, three interconnected spirals are represented: the heuristic spiral of gameplay (the most important), the heuristic spiral of narrative and the hermeneutic spiral. These are the cycles the gamer has to go through to answer gameplay, narrative, and interpretative questions. More the gamer learns to play the game, more he learns about the story and meanings, more he gains skills and knowledge.

As this gameplay-centric model has only been explained broadly, and in order to go into it more closely, this paper will focus its attention on only one game: Resident Evil 5 (Capcom, 2009). I'll expose my horizons of expectations about the game, my previous knowledge about the Resident Evil series, the facts I knew about the game through the reading of previews and the playing of the demo. From the moment I've started to play the game to my first ending, I'll reflect on the way I've gotten into the heuristic spirals of gameplay and of narrative. I'll be looking at the exact time it took me to learn the controls, to manage the extended inventory, to have the proper strategies to deal with enemies and the bosses, to succeed the chapters the first time, etc. As Resident Evil 5's "new cooperatively-focused gameplay revolutionizes the way that Resident Evil is played" (official website), I'll be dealing with this new type of gameplay. Insofar as the story of Resident Evil 5 involves the origin of the virus, I'll expose the manner I'm learning about this new terrorist threat. Then, with the controversy surrounding the African game setting and the fact that the Majini were Black, I'll get into the hermeneutic spiral and question the meanings of the game.

By the way, this paper will also allow me to carry on my study of the videoludic horror genre. What does Resident Evil 5 bring to the genre? What are the overarching gameplay patterns across the series? Are fear and adrenaline the same when the gamer team up with an A.I. or an other gamer to last until the end of the adventure against an outnumbering undead menace?

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