



RESIDENT EVIL VILLAGE

CAPCOM: *Resident Evil Village* (PlayStation 4 version). [digital game]. Osaka : Capcom, 2021.

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*Resident Evil*¹ is a well-known horror franchise with an extensive and rich history: among others, several movies and video games tell the story of the T-Virus that can turn biological beings into mutants or zombies. As S. Boluk and W. Lenz underline, the zombies have an Afro-Caribbean origin, and they arise from the voodoo culture.² In contrast, the plague zombie is a twentieth-century phenomenon that emerged when modern science unmasked the pestilence's mystery. Many *Resident Evil* stories use this type of enemy.

*Resident Evil 7: Biohazard*³ took a different turn: a new, faceless protagonist, Ethan Winters, was introduced, who had to fight against the creatures of a fungal superorganism, the mold. The sequel, *Resident Evil Village*, also focuses on Ethan's journey, while it announced some unique enemies and locations. With the help of the mold, supernatural beings and mutants can come to life (instead of zombies, they are the werewolf-like Lycans), which are agile, aggressive entities. As the director, M. Sato, said in one of the interviews, "the players should not mindlessly react to the game, but engage the game and even second guess themselves, then finally overcome their fears and the obstacles in front of them".⁴ Before the analysis of *Resident Evil Village* goes deeper, it is essential to mention that the following review will contain major spoilers.

Village is a first-person shooter, the player's vision is restricted to the protagonist's point of view, and there are direct corollaries between the character and the player.⁵ Ethan Winters is a faceless hero, he seems like an average human, but he has incredible regenerative power. However, this ability does not suspend the feeling of vulnerability, the player has to navigate between narrow corridors, dark places, and the threat can hide in every corner. The protagonist does not control the environment, and the camera angles permit a view, which allows the enemies to get up close before the player can detect the threat. *Village* uses jumpscare, in some cases, the game 'plays' with the users' attention: when the player has to search for a code (the numbers are written in bright colours) they can see it from a window, and when they step closer, a monster jumps in front of them. This jumpscare builds on the player's predictability, and there are many similar details and solutions in the game.

The gameplay follows the previous *Resident Evil* games' mechanism: it is possible to combine and upgrade items, and players must be aware of how and what to store in their inventory due to the limited space. There are several routes and opportunities to defeat the enemies, and clever puzzle elements and minigames are placed inside the main game.

1 CAPCOM et al.: *Resident Evil* (series). [digital game]. Osaka : Capcom et al., 1996-2021.

2 BOLUK, S., LENZ, W.: Infection, Media, and Capitalism: From Early Modern Plagues to Postmodern Zombies. In *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 2010, Vol. 10, No. 2, p. 134-137.

3 CAPCOM: *Resident Evil 7: Biohazard*. [digital game]. Osaka : Capcom, 2017.

4 *Making of Resident Evil Village – The Internal Struggle*. Released on 21st May 2021. [online]. [2022-05-26]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EIS-TW1XeNg&ab_channel=ResidentEvil>.

5 For more information, see: DANSKY, R.: Writing for Horror Games. In DESPAIN, W. (ed.): *Writing for Video Game Genres. From FPS to RPG*. Wellesley, MA : A K Peters Ltd., 2009, p. 113-126.

These minigames represent the meta-level, which is unnecessary for progression but can add further challenges to the game. As A. M. Green highlighted in *Storytelling in video games. The art of the Digital Narrative*, players who spend more time on uncovering every secret bond more with the game world, and they can reach a *well-played* state.⁶ In *Village* the player's additional efforts will be rewarded with unique and strong items; it is worth completing the minigames, but it is not mandatory. *Village* has a framework, and players can decide how they want to navigate within it. Due to the open area, it is almost like an open-world video game, but of course, there are restricted places. These aspects give the impression of free will and at the same time, remind the player that they are exposed to the developers' intentions. Even the open fields hide threats, we can never know from which direction the enemies will strike. One of the most memorable is a field with scarecrows. Even though the space is open, the player can not see much because of the plants (Picture 1). We can tell from the sounds that something is hiding there, causing an oppressive feeling. The narrative and the spatial constructions fit into the horror genre perfectly.



Picture 1: Even open fields strengthen vulnerability

Source: GRAEBER, B. et al.: *Resident Evil 8 Village Wiki Guide*. Released on 5th December 2021. [online]. [2022-05-23]. Available at: <www.ign.com/wikis/resident-evil-8-village>.

The plot takes place in a rural area of Europe (Lei is the currency, which implies that the location can be found somewhere in Romania) after three years of the previous game's events. Ethan has to find his kidnapped daughter in this isolated area and defeat the four lords and their leader, Mother Miranda. Initially, Miranda was a scientist who had lost her child (Eva), and after this tragedy, she discovered the Magamycete, a fungal root, which is the source of the mold. In order to bring her child back to life, she started to experiment on other human beings with the mold – that is how the infection started in the village. And also, that is how she created the lords. In this sense, she is both mother and creator, who can control superhuman, unnatural forces, and has protected the inhabitants from the Lycans. She became the leader of the village's new religion; the residents prayed to her and treated her portrait as a cultic object.

6 For more information, see: GREEN, A. M.: *Storytelling in Video Games. The Art of the Digital Narrative*. Jefferson, NC : McFarland & Company, Inc., 2018.

Miranda appears in different forms during the game, she is a shapeshifter. She can mimic other persons (such as Ethan's wife, Mia), but usually, she has black wings and covers her face with a mask. With her wings, she resembles the Biblical angels and the villagers believe in her good intentions, but she has a sinister side: her character design is more demonic during the game's final stage. During the final boss fight, her eyes are completely covered – this possibly represents that grief made her 'blind', she only cares about her goal, and everything else is subordinate to Eva's resurrection. In addition, she has huge claws and her dress is shredded (Picture 2).



Picture 2: Mother Miranda usually has black wings and appears as a human (left), but her final form shows her true, demonic nature – huge claws, spiky wings, messy clothes (right)

Source: Miranda. [online]. [2022-05-23]. Available at: <www.residentevil.fandom.com/wiki/Miranda>.

The metaphor that conceptualizes the political body as if it was a living, biological body is widely recognized. The village resembles T. Hobbes' Leviathan, a commonwealth, where the desire for safety holds together the system.⁷ This narrative usually sees the outsider as a threat. In the game there is a scene where the survivors lock themselves in a house to protect themselves from the dangerous outside and the deadly Lycans. First, they do not want to let the protagonist in because he is an outsider, not a part of the 'body', he does not belong to the community. But thanks to the owner of the house, he can step in and can stay with the villagers. However, the threat comes from the inside: one of the survivors starts to act strangely and then turns into a Lycan, because he had been infected. The mold is a biological threat, which acts like a virus and remains invisible until someone turns into these werewolf-like creatures. Ethan tries to save everyone, but it is too late. He is the only one who survives the surprise attack. It is interesting how Village and the mentioned scene show us the infected insider and the innocent outsider. It turns out that the outsider is not the threat, the true risk comes from a well-known villager, who has been infected and with this attack, the whole system – the remnants of the survivors – lose their lives. Later on, Ethan will not meet any other healthy villagers, we can assume that the survivors in the house were the last ones.

The player also learns that the leader of the system let the body die because she almost reached her goal – Ethan's daughter is a perfect vessel to bring her child back to life –, and she does not care about it anymore. Miranda also leaves behind her more significant experiments, the four lords, and it looks like she intentionally sent Ethan to them. The "body has been immunized rather than replaced: not only does it survive the death of its members, it even periodically derives its reproductive energy from them",⁸ states

7 See also: HOBBS, T.: *Leviathan or the Matter, Forme, & Power of a Common-wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civill*. London : Yale University Press, 2010.

8 ESPOSITO, R.: *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life*. Cambridge, Malden, MA : Polity Press, 2011, p. 130.

R. Esposito in *Immunitas*. We can see the same process in *Village*, because Miranda lets the lords die to give their energy back to the Magamycete.

Resident Evil Village has up-to-date design, and thanks to motion capture technology, all the characters – except Ethan – have rich facial expressions. The actors make the motives and backgrounds of the four lords more believable, which helps immerse the player in the fictional world. In addition, *Village* has a complex story with many surprises and symbols. The game perfectly connects to the original storyline (the *Resident Evil* franchise), we can even learn a little about Oswell E. Spencer's life. The gameplay is challenging and offers many possibilities to eliminate enemies, players have to think and second guess themselves, just as M. Sato originally wanted.

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