# Chapter 13
# A Match Made in "Outer Heaven:"
## The Digital Age Vis–à–Vis the Bomb in *Guns of the Patriots*

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## ABSTRACT

*The stealth-action videogame Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots features the tired heroics of Solid Snake (also known as Old Snake), a retired, legendary soldier whose services are demanded one last time by a world in perpetual war. This epic game, containing almost ten hours of cutscenes alone, delineates the consequences not only of nuclear proliferation, but of mass (re)production in a digital age. In this fourth and final entry in the Solid Snake saga the two go hand-in-hand: a nuclear age exacerbated by advanced technology, advanced technology proliferated under the banner of a post-Cold War war economy. In this chapter, Kenneth Burke's rhetoric of rebirth and Slavoj Žižek's ideological criticism, along with several ludological frameworks, are adopted to show how various multiliteracies can be unearthed from this artifact of digital rhetoric. The chapter closes with implications for digital rhetoric studies.*

*The game is not the experience. The game enables the experience, but it is not the experience (Jesse Schell, The Art of Game Design, p. 10).*

## INTRODUCTION

Their ludological skeleton notwithstanding, more and more modern videogames embody artifacts of interest in rhetoric, literary, and literacy studies. In fact, as Colby, Johnson and Colby (2013) point out, three academic conversations about videogames currently converge: "the study of games as games, digital games studies, ludology; composition-rhetoric, writing studies, writing pedagogy; and discourse analysis, literacy studies" (p. 1). Through analysis of a particular videogame, my aim here is to show how the medium's multimodal nature lends itself to multidisciplinary approaches that can prove fruitful not only for understanding videogames as a form of digital rhetoric but for understanding multiliteracies. As Colby, Johnson and Colby (2013) state, "By researching video games and gameplay practices, scholars have the opportunity to understand gamers' complex learning and literacy development strategies, practices that carry significant implications for education in general" (p. 1). Aside from analyzing videogames through a rhetorical lens, some of the cards games bring to the table are "genres at least as diverse as literary genres, layers of interactivity, different styles of gameplay, player and player-character identities…procedurality, the rules of gameplay, gaming culture, gaming terminology, gaming history, the gaming industry, theories of design" (Johnson & Colby, 2013, p. 94). Even so, my analysis is at heart rhetorical, treating videogames as rhetorical artifacts, as others have (Bogost, 2008; Boone, 2008; Bourgonjon, Rutten, Soetaert, & Valcke, 2011; Colby, Johnson, & Colby 2013; Garrelts, 2013; Mateas & Stern, 2005; McAllister, 2006; Voorhees, 2009). In my case, I define "rhetoric" as "the art of communication" in order to encompass purposes other than persuading

(e.g., obfuscating), and "rhetorical artifact" as "any sign that communicates."

In presenting language as symbolic action at heart, Burke (1966) broadened the scope of rhetoric to encompass "any use of symbol systems in general," defining humankind as "'the symbol-using, symbol-making, and symbol-misusing animal'" and the "*Inventor of the negative*" (pp. 63, 6, 9). My rationale for employing Burke's (1962) dramatism (the perspective that "treats language and thought primarily as modes of action") for *Guns of the Patriots* is grounded in the idea that videogames, as rhetorical artifacts, are complex systems made up of symbols enacted by the player (p. xxii). Bogost (2008) echoes how Burke birthed the field of visual rhetoric: "In the tradition of oral and written rhetoric, language remains central. But Burke's understanding of humans as creators and consumers of symbolic systems expands rhetoric to include nonverbal domains known and yet to be invented or discovered" (p. 124). Among these domains are videogames as digital symbolic systems, and several scholars have applied Burke's theories to analyze them: Boone (2008) to *World of Warcraft*; Soetaert, Bourgonjon, and Rutten (2011) to *Civilization* and *Heavy Rain*; Bourgonjon, Rutten, Soetaert, and Valcke (2011) to *BioShock*; McAllister (2006) to avatars; and Voorhees (2009) to *Final Fantasy*. As of yet there is no scholarship on any game in the *Metal Gear Solid* saga situated in the wider multiliteracies or applying Burke's theories. Whereas scholars who do apply Burke focus on Burke's dramatist pentad (act, scene, agent, agency and purpose), my focus is Burke's rhetoric of rebirth (within dramatism) as one of several interpretive schema of multiliteracies that helps illuminate the arguments, symbols, and overall narrative of *Guns of the Patriots*. In addition to Burke as theoretical lens, I also adopt Slavoj Žižek's criticism of techno-ideology and deep ecology, and specific to ludology, Mateas and Stern's (2005) definitions of immersion and agency as well as Bissell's (2011) distinction between the framed narrative and ludonarrative.

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