

## Chapter 2

# Telling Tales with Technology: Remediating Folklore and Myth through the Videogame *Alan Wake*

**Dawn Catherine Stobbart**  
*Lancaster University, UK*

### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter analyses the 2010 videogame Alan Wake, a narrative based videogame that makes frequent use of intertextuality. As well as using contemporary examples, the game also uses traditional international folklore in its narrative, with the antagonist Barbara Jagger being recognisable as the Russian folk tale character Baba Yaga, for example. Using the concepts proposed and elucidated by Vladimir Propp, Joseph Campbell, the chapter will first establish that the videogame offers a remediation of several traditional mythical narratives in one contemporary videogame, before going on to use the classifications found in The Morphology of the Folktale and The Hero with a Thousand Faces to place this videogame within the folklore and mythical tradition. It will also serve to establish whether these classifications are suitable for the narratives found in videogames, and if they depart from them, where the scholar needs to establish new concepts and definitions for these traditional classifications.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

As the technology used to create videogames evolves, videogame designers are progressively able to tell more complex stories, constructing narratives that support the perception that “many video games are stories, as well as games” (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Heide Smith, & Pajares Tosca, 2008, p. 204). Whilst these narratives need new methods of analyses to account for the interplay between ludology (the study of games, especially videogames, as a form of play) and narrative in videogames, such as interactivity, physical agency, and narrative involvement, there remains a narrative core that can be interrogated through existing literary methodologies and concepts. Using existing concepts allows a videogame to be situated within narrative studies and makes easier the remediation and inclusion of traditional themes, structures, and narratives in videogames, as they become increasingly adept as narrative carriers, an evolution in gaming and in narrative. This, in turn, enables older narratives to have continued recognition and survival in the 21st century. Contemporary videogames are able to carry explicit political or

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0261-6.ch002

## **Telling Tales with Technology**

moral messages, can retell fairy tales, and remediate myths from around the world, entwining traditional narratives into a contemporary setting, whilst retaining a recognizable core that has existed as long as the narratives they are retelling.

The narrative of the 2010 videogame *Alan Wake* (Remedy Entertainment, 2010), released by Microsoft for the Xbox 360 and Windows PC's, is created through an amalgamation of several myths from different cultures around the world that are entwined and updated to create a contemporary narrative. This game focuses on the protagonist, Alan Wake, as he engages with an entity known as "The Darkness" who has abducted his wife, Alice. This chapter will deconstruct the structure of the game, using the concepts proposed and elucidated by Vladimir Propp (who "holds a canonical position within the fields of literary criticism and folklore studies" (Smith & Riley, 2009, p. 184)) and Joseph Campbell (whose influence can be seen in film such as *Star Wars*, *Escape From New York*, and *The Terminator* amongst others (Palumbo, 2014)). This will be achieved through an analysis of the classifications found in *The Morphology of the Folktale* (Propp, 1968 edition) to show the game as a whole fits this structure, and *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Campbell, 2008 edition) to show the character types adhere to his classifications. (All subsequent references to these texts are from these later editions, as opposed to the original publications). This analysis will allow the placement of *Alan Wake* within a folklore and mythical tradition, highlight the remediation of several traditional mythical tales that appear in the videogame, and allow the videogame to be seen as entering into a dialogue that other media are invested in. This will show an historical evolution in videogame design and delivery. The overarching aim of the chapter is twofold. Firstly, it will show that folk tales are being shared by a global community who otherwise might never interact with them. These folklore stories are, in part, being kept alive by their inclusion in a popular contemporary videogame, breathing new life into tales no longer deemed relevant by a 21st century audience. This analysis will establish whether the experimental narrative delivery (at the time of the game's release) is noteworthy enough to be able to transcend the medium it is delivered through, offering an insight into the role of the videogame as part of the evolution of narrative, placing it alongside other media that have enabled narrative to evolve.

## **BACKGROUND**

Remediation, the "re-presentation of one medium in another" (Bolter & Grusin, 2000, p. 45) is not new; in their book *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin cite examples throughout recorded history, including print remediating oral tales, photography remediating painting, and the novel being remediating by film (*Blade Runner* (Scott, 1982) remediates the novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (Dick, 1968) for example). Recent years have even seen digital texts being remediating by print, and new media, such as computer technology and the internet are "doing exactly what their predecessors have done: presenting themselves as refashioned and improved versions of other media" (Bolter & Grusin, 2000, p. 14-15). Furthermore, film is frequently adapted (rather than remediating) into the videogame form, and there have been numerous attempts to adapt videogames into film, albeit not always to critical or popular acclaim, as the popular Nintendo characters Mario and Luigi highlight. When these characters were exported unsuccessfully, both in critical and economic terms, from game to film and this adaptation is frequently cited as the foundation for rejecting all subsequent filmic adaptations of videogames. Whilst visual media such as film is both remediating—and adapted—to and from the videogame, the reworking of less visual media into the videogame form is not as often

14 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

[www.igi-global.com/chapter/telling-tales-with-technology/157615](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/telling-tales-with-technology/157615)

## Related Content

---

### Development of a Game Communities of Inquiry Scale (GCoIS)

Ilker Soyturk, Enrico Gandolfi and Richard E. Ferdig (2020). *International Journal of Gaming and Computer-Mediated Simulations* (pp. 37-58).

[www.irma-international.org/article/development-of-a-game-communities-of-inquiry-scale-gcois/263770](http://www.irma-international.org/article/development-of-a-game-communities-of-inquiry-scale-gcois/263770)

### Virtual Learning Environments. The oLTECx: A Study of Participant Attitudes and Experiences

Adriana D'Alba, Anjum Najmi, Jonathan Gratch and Chris Bigenho (2011). *International Journal of Gaming and Computer-Mediated Simulations* (pp. 33-50).

[www.irma-international.org/article/virtual-learning-environments-oltecx/53152](http://www.irma-international.org/article/virtual-learning-environments-oltecx/53152)

### Games for and by Teachers and Learners

Peter van Rosmalen, Amanda Wilson and Hans G.K. Hummel (2014). *Psychology, Pedagogy, and Assessment in Serious Games* (pp. 243-269).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/games-for-and-by-teachers-and-learners/90527](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/games-for-and-by-teachers-and-learners/90527)

### Promoting Sexual Health Education via Gaming: Evidence from the Barrios of Lima, Peru

Arul Chib (2011). *Handbook of Research on Improving Learning and Motivation through Educational Games: Multidisciplinary Approaches* (pp. 895-912).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/promoting-sexual-health-education-via/52527](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/promoting-sexual-health-education-via/52527)

### Automated Event Recognition for Football Commentary Generation

Maliang Zheng and Daniel Kudenko (2010). *International Journal of Gaming and Computer-Mediated Simulations* (pp. 67-84).

[www.irma-international.org/article/automated-event-recognition-football-commentary/47206](http://www.irma-international.org/article/automated-event-recognition-football-commentary/47206)