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Trabajo Fin de Grado

Never-Ending 1-Ups: Video Game Influences in the Narrative of *Edge of Tomorrow*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Doug Liman's *Edge of Tomorrow* (2014) is, first and foremost, a summer blockbuster. According to boxoffice.com, the film, released worldwide around the last week of May and the first of June in 2014, had an estimated budget of $225 million and grossed over $369 million worldwide. Spectacle plays a big part in the film, which links the film both to the current trend of blockbusters that, like *Edge of Tomorrow*, rely heavily on computer generated imagery (CGI), but also to the products of a non-cinematic domain: video games. More specifically, it mirrors one of the current trends in video games commonly referred to as "space marine" games, which, interestingly enough, do not need to be set in space or have a marine as a main character. It is enough if the protagonist (usually a male one) is affiliated to some sort of army, is equipped with futuristic-looking armor and weaponry and is able to fight alien-like creatures (more often than not, the hero is able to do the work of the entire army by himself). Some video games series that would fit this category are *Halo* (Bungie, 2001), *Gears of War* (Epic Games, 2006) and, a bit more loosely, *Metroid* (Nintendo, 1986).

The relationship between films and video games can be traced back, at least, to the early 1980s. Richard Patterson (1982) notes in an article about *Tron* (1982), the first film in which video games had an important role, that its director, Steven Lisberger, was inspired to make the film – a story about a hacker abducted into a video game world – after he became fascinated with video games. The film's connections to the video game world became even more obvious when its creators decided to use computer animation to recreate the video game world shown inside the film, a groundbreaking feat at the time. Even if Walt Disney Studios, its production company, saw its $33 million gross in the U.S.A. as a disappointment, the film and the animation technique it used was an inspiration for future animators, such as John Lasseter, of Pixar fame.

But even if *Tron* is best remembered for its animation technique rather than for its connection with video games, the film industry was not going to ignore that connection for long. Randy Nichols (2008, 132) claims that by the end of the 20th century, the video game industry's profits were greater than those of the film industry[1]. Film studios were not going to simply let go of such a potential market. Many famous video games in the late 1980s and early 1990s were adapted into films, as was the case of the games *Super Mario Bros.* (Nintendo, 1985), *Street Fighter II* (Capcom, 1991) and *Mortal Kombat* (Midway, 1992). Even if some of these films did well at the box office, the poor quality of these early video-games-into-film adaptations was met with very negative reviews.

As a result of the poor critical reception, film studios tried a different strategy: instead of turning games into films, they would turn films into games. As Robert A. Brookey (2010) says in his book *Hollywood Gamers*, the *Spider-Man* (Activision, 2002) and the *The Lord of the Rings* (Electronic Arts, 2002) games were created to coincide with the release of a major blockbuster film. Brookey (2010, 138) points out that these games are also considered to be of low quality; their development is usually rushed to meet the film's deadline and ultimately their hook is nothing but the expectation towards the film they are based on. Yet, the temporal demands of a film's release cannot be blamed for the poor quality of these adaptations since video games developed decades after the release of the films on which they are based do not fare much better: *The Godfather: The Game* (Electronic Arts, 2006) or *Reservoir Dogs* (Eidos Interactive, 2006) are not at all to video games what their filmic counterparts are to cinema.

[1] According to the Entertainment Software Association, in 2013 video games revenue in the USA was $21.53 billion. The figure almost doubles that of box office's sales for the same year: $10.9 billion (according to the Motion Picture Association of America).

In the light of this, one might think that the relationship between films and video games is a quite toxic one, apart from the income the videogames as ancillary products may produce. Fortunately, there are exceptions: youtuber Rafael de las Cuevas (2014), in his Scanliner Youtube channel, analyses in depth the many influences of cinema in Rockstar Games's products, makers of the extremely successful *Grand Theft Auto* (1997) series and the critically praised film-to-game adaptation *The Warriors* (2005). In cinema, Disney Studios saw critical success with the film *Wreck-It Ralph* (2012). One might argue that the success of these products is born from not trying to copy and paste from one medium to the other, but from taking little tidbits from one and adapting them naturally into the other: *Grand Theft Auto* borrows settings, characters and even whole scenes from gangster and heist films, but they are never carbon copies of them; the games create their own identity and story without being completely dependent on their sources. Similarly, *Wreck-It Ralph* understands that *Donkey Kong* (Nintendo, 1981) and the *Mario Kart* (Nintendo, 1992) series lack a filmic narrative structure, so instead of simply giving them a convoluted story, it uses them as the inspirational background for the narrative that involves the two characters Wreck-It Ralph (John C. Reilly) and Vanellope von Schweetz (Sarah Silverman) while developing characteristics not present in their sources and adding extra layers of meaning. This is, I believe, what *Edge of Tomorrow* does with its narrative.

In this essay I am going to analyse the narrative structure of *Edge of Tomorrow* using a video game as grounds for comparison in order to see how much the film takes from video games and examine the ideology that results from that relationship.

2. FORKING-PATH NARRATIVES

Edge of Tomorrow is the story of Bill Cage (Tom Cruise), a military officer thrown into a battle against the "mimics," an alien race that can manipulate time to their advantage. After he acquires this power, he teams up with Rita Vrataski (Emily Blunt), another soldier who also had the same power once, to locate and eliminate the Omega, the alien mastermind behind the war.

Even if apparently the film has an easy-to-follow plot, the way in which it unfolds is not. At a certain point in the film, the story ceases to advance in a chronological way: every time Cage dies, the story jumps backwards and Cage returns to the same starting moment. However, every time he does so, the events that follow are altered by Cage's action (only very slightly in the beginning and in a more radical manner as the film develops). During his first loop, Cage seems confused by events happening in almost the same manner he remembers them; after his last one, Cage manages to save the world.

In the sixth chapter of his book *Poetics of Cinema*, film scholar David Bordwell (2007) explores a storytelling pattern that he refers to as forking-path narratives. In these films, he claims, one single event that can have different outcomes creates, as an illustration of those outcomes, various radically different plot lines. This relates directly to the Physics idea of a multiverse, or parallel timelines, created through the chaos theory, or, more specifically, the butterfly effect, from which the film *The Butterfly Effect* (2004) takes both its name and its premise.

The butterfly effect theory argues that a seemingly insignificant action - the common example being a butterfly flapping its wings - can eventually alter something of much bigger proportions - like affecting the formation and direction of a hurricane. Like Bill Cage in *Edge of Tomorrow*, Evan Treborn (Ashton Kutcher) is continually

travelling back to his past in *The Butterfly Effect* in order to alter his present, but, unlike Cage, he is able to decide to which part of its past he wants to travel back (that is, he has more control over his time travel than Cage). Both films relate to the forking-path filmic pattern Bordwell describes in relation to films such as *Run Lola Run (Lola rennt)* (1998) or *Sliding Doors* (1998). In all four films we are shown the point in which the story forks into different realities (a different number of them in each film), which always have some connection with the others: in *Sliding Doors*, Helen (Gwyneth Paltrow) knows things only the Helen in the other reality should know, and in the other three films, Evan, Cage and Lola (Franka Potente) remember and learn from the alternate realities they have already lived. However, in *Edge of Tomorrow*, Cage is trapped in a loop: his different realities always begin and end with his death, and they are never as different from each other as they are in *The Butterfly Effect* and *Run Lola Run*, where the protagonists can decide when to put an end to their time-mingling, that is, when they are satisfied with the results. As Bordwell (2007, 183-184) has pointed out, in these films the last reality shown in the film is accepted as the most legitimate one.

Nonetheless, even Bordwell's rules for the forking-path films are broken sometimes. At the end of his chapter, he mentions an exception that, instead of providing only a few alternate realities so that the audience can follow and remember them easily, has a quite high number of them, although they are very short in length and are marked by the repetition of the moment that signals the forking point. That exception is *Groundhog Day* (1993), the film that most resembles *Edge of Tomorrow*. In both films, the main character is forced to repeat a time cycle - one day in *Groundhog Day*, two in *Edge of Tomorrow* - and is not able to escape it until they fulfill a certain purpose. In the case of the weatherman Phil (Bill Murray), the purpose is to put an end to his disdainful attitude and become a nice and compassionate person,

enough to have his coworker Rita (Andie MacDowell) fall in love with him. The reason or the method by which Phil enters the loop in *Groundhog Day* is never explained. In *Edge of Tomorrow*, however, it is: Cage, in a desperate act, manages to kill an Alpha, a special kind of alien that is directly connected through a network to the Omega, the alien mastermind, and is covered in its blood. This gives Cage the ability to travel back in time that the Omega has, but not the means to control it: the ability is just automatically activated every time he dies.

The ability to go back to the past every time the main character dies, but preserving the knowledge of what is going to happen and therefore gaining experience to progress further, has been one of the most recognizable characteristics of video games since its early days. That is what initially motivated me to explore more similarities between *Edge of Tomorrow*'s narrative and video games.

3. *EDGE OF TOMORROW*

3.1 Majora's Mask

The connection between *Edge of Tomorrow* and video games goes further than the aesthetics of the space marine games, or the video game mechanic of restarting from the beginning every time the character dies that is mirrored by the loop Cage is trapped in. An at first unlikely connection can be found between the film and the Nintendo 64 game *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* (Nintendo, 2000). Unlike the futuristic *Edge of Tomorrow*, the *Legend of Zelda* games are set in medieval fantasy worlds where magic prevails over science, and is even capable of producing time travelling. Although this was first introduced in *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo, 1998), the prequel to *Majora's Mask*, time travel functions differently in both games: in *Ocarina of Time*, Link, the protagonist of the series, can alternate between the present in which

the game begins and in which he is no more than a child and a temporal moment seven years into the future, when he is already a grown-up. In *Majora's Mask*, however, Link needs to use his magical ocarina to repeatedly travel back in time to a moment 72 hours before a scary-looking faced moon falls down on the land of Termina, ending everything and everyone in it. *Majora's Mask* is probably the video game that resembles the most the narrative line of *Edge of Tomorrow*, and because of that, I will be using it as a starting point to explore the many video game-like elements in the film.

Figure 1: The moon about to hit Termina

Figure 2: Skull Kid wearing the Majora's Mask

In *Majora's Mask*, Link's ultimate mission is to stop the moon that will destroy Termina in 72 hours by retrieving the Majora's Mask – revealed later in the game to be

evil and have a mind of its own - from Skull Kid, an imp from the woods that had a very minor role in the prequel, *Ocarina of Time*. In order to do so, Link must travel through the land of Termina guided by one of Skull Kid's former fairy companions, Tatl, and gather a number of magical artifacts and melodies to reach, open and then proceed to the final room of four temples. In each of those temples lies a gigantic monster that has placed a curse around the surroundings of the temple, affecting those living in the area. Once defeated, these monsters leave behind their remains in the form of a mask, and the seal that restrains each of the Four Giants, creators of the land of Termina, is released, with each Giant teaching Link part of the "Oath to Order," a song that will summon all four at the same time when complete, so that they can come to aid Link in stopping the moon from destroying Termina.

3.2 Video game influences in the film

Edge of Tomorrow begins with a newsreel comprised of many different news programs talking about the aliens – in many different languages in order to convey the impression that the alien threat is a worldwide problem, even if the action of the film only takes place in the United Kingdom and France. This quick newsreel provides context for the war humanity is waging against the mimics. This background-providing technique of having an outside source of information has been a staple for most videogames since their early days, being a quick motivation for the player, comforted by the idea that no matter how much time he or she spent playing, there would be a reward at the end. *Majora's Mask* is no different: when the player initiates a new game, five shorts paragraphs of text explain what has happened to Link after the events in *Ocarina*. This is followed by a short cut scene (a cinematic scene in a video game that takes control away from the player) providing the motivation for Link's new adventure:

catching Skull Kid and retrieving the horse he has stolen. Many other video games nowadays still use a scant introduction, sometimes mixed with a tutorial, in order not to bore the player and have him or her playing as soon as possible.

After that introduction, we find the protagonist of the film, Major Bill Cage (whom we had already seen in some of the news segments) on his way to London to meet General Brigham (Brendan Gleeson). When Brigham informs Cage that he will be in the frontlines of the battle against the mimics, Cage reacts cowardly, stooping so low that he even threatens to blackmail him, for which he is arrested, stripped of his rank and sent to battle anyway. Of course, his new companions are informed of his deeds and personality, so they not only refrain from helping him to get ready for the battle, they also restrain Cage's fighting capabilities by locking his battlesuit's safety program, preventing him from shooting altogether.

We can consider this moment in the film to be the one in which the "game" properly begins. After all the introductions have concluded, we are presented with a character that has lost all his former powers – in Cage's case, his rank. This trope, a character equipped with a set of powers or abilities who loses them just before his or her adventure, is referred to as "bag of spilling" by website TVTropes.org. The device is quite common in videogames, predominantly so in Nintendo's *Legend of Zelda* and *Metroid* series. Again, *Majora's Mask* offers us the best comparison: in *Ocarina of Time* Link saves the land of Hyrule after acquiring numerous items and defeating Ganondorf, King of Evil; after that, Link starts a new adventure in *Majora's Mask* and ends up in Termina, but, apparently, the only things he kept from his previous adventure are his sword, shield, ocarina and his horse, Epona – his boomerang, bow and arrows, hookshot, gauntlets… are long gone.

Of course, despite losing all that, both Link and Cage should still be able to defend themselves – Link has his sword and shield and Cage has a state-of-the-art battlesuit that has both armor and weaponry. However, as mentioned before, Cage is locked out of shooting as his comrades are unwilling to tell him how to remove the weapons' safety and the armor itself does not appear to be of much use against a direct hit from the enemy. In Link's case, at the very beginning of the game, he encounters Skull Kid, who steals his horse and ocarina and uses magic to transform Link into a Deku Scrub, an imp-like creature seemingly made out of wood and leaves, therefore making him incapable of using his sword and shield.

Figure 3: Cage wearing his battlesuit, about to find out he has run out of ammunition

What having these almost powerless characters does is create a feeling of satisfaction to the player or the viewer whenever the character makes some progress. In the video game, when Link manages to recover his ocarina and travel 72 hours back in time, the player is finally able to alternate between Link's human and Deku forms, granting them access to new ways of solving the puzzles ahead and having a sword to handle combat more efficiently. In the film, when Cage kills the Alpha and gains the ability to go back to the moment he woke up on the British base, the viewer is aware that Cage is not the complete coward we were led to believe, as he did not die

whimpering, but taking down an Alpha with him, making the viewer question if there might be hope for him yet.

From this point onwards, Cage goes through many loops, getting the hang of his newly acquired power while trying to save as many people as he can until he encounters Rita Vrataski, who, in a way, is similar to Link's Tatl, although Rita plays a much more active and important role in the story of the film than Tatl does in the game. Rita reveals to Cage that she already went through what is happening to Cage and introduces him to Dr. Carter (Noah Taylor), whose role is similar to that of the Happy Mask Salesman in *Majora's Mask*: he is the one who knows what the bigger problem is and the one who informs the hero on how to stop it. Link needs to stop the Majora's Mask and Cage has to kill the Omega, the mimic mastermind that is the origin of the power that Cage obtained.

Cage then needs to train his reflexes and wait for a vision of the location of the Omega that he eventually receives. Through many failed loops in which either he or Rita die while trying to reach the Omega, Cage discovers he has fallen in love with Rita, even though she forgets everything about him every time a loop starts. Cage eventually decides to eliminate the Omega on his own, unable to see Rita dying once more, only to discover that it was nothing but a trap set by the Omega: now that the mimics know how the battle is going to play out, they do not need Cage resetting time, so they try to injure him without killing him in order to have him receive a blood transfusion, causing him to lose his ability to go back in time. However, Cage manages to die and keep it to warn Rita and Carter, who tell him to go back to the beginning of the adventure – where General Brigham keeps a device that can help them find the exact location of the

Omega.

Figure 4: Cage and Rita asking General Brigham for the device

Unfortunately, even though he is successful in acquiring and using the device, Cage is wounded while escaping London and receives a blood transfusion, losing his powers. This makes the final battle exponentially riskier than any other, something that is also true for most video games, which present a final boss unlike most enemies in the game or, as in *Majora's Mask*'s case, disable the player's possibility to save their game in-between the different stages of the final boss fight, therefore having to spend more time by restarting the fight from the beginning.

The fact that Cage manages to eliminate the Omega was to be expected; what the audience probably did not expect is the happy ending that follows. For reasons unknown, time reverts once more, but this time, Cage does not wake up in the military base – he is back in London, ready to meet General Brigham. The film breaks its own time travel rules first by establishing the reset point further back in time, and second by altering the events that follow the reset point. Before killing the Omega, Cage had to repeat every action in every loop, as everything would progress in the same way, inalterably, unless Cage's actions changed it. Now, instead of having to repeat everything beginning a day earlier, we find that the mimics, killed by Cage at the

expense of his own life in his last loop, remain dead. This type of ending is common in video games, where it is usually deemed improper to prevent the player to witness the result of his or her actions after spending so many hours trying to save the princess, the nation, or the world. Such an ending gives the impression that the film equates itself with a video game: the spectators are players, and Bill Cage is the controllable character. The audience has to be active while viewing the film; they need to fill in the blanks whenever they see Cage, to wonder about what he has done or has not done each time he loops, to think which conversations has he had, in order to complete the narrative, to solve the puzzle. The ending is a reward – our reward, for reaching the end of the film and completing its game.

Figure 5: Cage meeting Rita after saving the world

3.3 Forging the hero

As any other cultural product, video games are not devoid of ideology (Bogost, 2007; Flanagan, 2009). When the Japanese company Nintendo released their first home console, the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES), in 1983, they advertised it as a state-of-the-art toy for children. The NES arrived in North America in 1985. It was such a hit that it put an end to the crisis that followed the video game crash of 1983 (Consalvo, 2006; Caruso, 2011). From that moment on, video games were associated

with some form of mindless fun. Thirty years later, video games have evolved in many different ways, but there are still many people who keep making that association, believing that, as toys, video games could hardly carry an ideology, much less a serious one.

When speculating about the future of video games, Brookey (2010, 135) mentions the existence of the Institute for Creative Technologies (ICT), whose aim is to "conduct basic and applied research and advanced technology development in immersive technologies to advance and maintain the state-of-the-art for human synthetic experiences that are so compelling the participants will react as if they are real." Yet, this apparently "neutral" goal acquires slightly different connotations if we take into account that the ICT is working with, and being sponsored by, the U.S. Army.

That is far from the only link between video games and the military. War first-person shooter (FPS) franchises *Call of Duty* (Activision, 2003) and *Battlefield* (Electronic Arts, 2002) release a new game almost every year, and every time they do, that game is among the top-sellers of the year, which is even more impressing considering they are released around late October or early November, so their yearly sales comprise only those two or three months. As Charlie Brooker explains in his documentary *How Videogames Changed the World* (2013), many of these games pay royalties to use virtual replicas of real weapons in the game, which, for many players, adds a welcome extra realism into their game. This seems to be sending a similar message to the one we find behind Bill Cage's temporal loops: war is fun.

In the course of the film, we see Bill Cage go from a cowardly major, as afraid of war as any regular citizen would be, to a perfect soldier, incredibly well-versed in combat and intently focused on his mission of saving the world. Every time he dies is nothing but an opportunity to do better, to be better; all for the sake of the mission, with

barely any negative repercussions on Cage. The only time we perceive Cage as depressed is after a series of Rita's deaths that Cage could not avoid. However, after he spends an evening in the local pub, he seems ready to start again, and after another failure he ultimately decides that, if he cannot prevent Rita from dying during their mission – which would make victory hollow for him – he would carry out the mission without her. Surprisingly, after realizing that his discovery of the Omega's location was in fact a trap laid out by the Omega itself, he is no longer cynical and he appears to be in high spirits again. What pushes him forward is the idea of having a new mission, a new goal.

The positive attitude that Cage displays throughout most of the film is contrary to that of Phil in *Groundhog Day*, who, after repeating his loop several times, falls prey to despair, is visibly tired and even kills himself to try to get out. This is also the attitude of Keiji Kiriya, the protagonist of Hiroshi Sakurazaka's *All You Need is Kill* (2004), the novel *Edge of Tomorrow* is based on. In the novel, Keiji is so disturbed by his newly-acquired power that he flees the military base he is on during his third loop and kills himself – something that Cage never does and only attempts once, when he falls for the Omega's trap and fears that the mimics will take his ability from him in order to win the war – at the beginning of his fourth loop.

It does, however, accurately reflect the state of war video games, which, as I mentioned previously, are some of the top sellers every year. Before last year's indie hit *This War of Mine* (11 bit studios, 2014) and Ubisoft's *Valiant Hearts: The Great War* (2014), not many video games had portrayed the not-so-obvious negative consequences of war. It became such a serious issue that the International Committee of the Red Cross announced back in 2013 that they would work with some video game developers to ensure that, whenever the player breaks the law of armed conflict – that is, whenever a

player commits a war crime – there would be consequences as realistic as the rest of the game. As Nina Huntermann (2011) claims, "military-themed video games simplify, glamorize and fetishize global conflict." They offer the player seemingly unlimited tools to kill and destroy almost anything on sight, just as it happens in *Edge of Tomorrow*: when Cage has decided to locate the Omega on his own, he tells squad mate Griff (Kick Gurry) that he needs "three more clips of 5.56, eight grenades and an extra battery." Griff is understandably shocked – to him, Cage is a coward who was caught impersonating an officer and who wishes to flee from battle; it should make no sense that someone like that would make such a request, but, nonetheless, Griff immediately complies.

Figure 6: Griff preparing Cage for battle

All of this is related to another idea often present in video games, the self-sacrifice of the hero, always aiming towards the greater good. As in any army, the life of a single soldier is expendable if it would help achieving the final goal of its mission; it is even less important, then, that Cage's eternal life is full of suffering. In video games, the fact that a character gets hurt or even dies is unimportant because they will eventually recover, as is the case with Cage. But just because they miraculously recover back to health does not mean their pain should be ignored – a cut does not hurt less

simply because it can disappear soon afterwards. Every death should take a toll on Cage, but it hardly shows; his pain is unimportant even for him, as long as he can complete his mission.

Cage is stuck in the loop, but he needs to repeat it a relatively little number of times before he learns how to escape it: Rita tells him that she lost the ability after a blood transfusion. At this point in the narrative, Cage has barely met Rita, so it is unlikely that he has fallen in love with her yet. As no one knows that Cage has his time-manipulation ability when he restarts a loop, that could be his perfect chance to inflict a wound on himself serious enough to receive a blood transfusion, but he never does – Rita told him that his ability is key to saving the world. That is the driving force that pushes Cage towards repeating the loop.

In a sense, Cage could be compared to the mythological figure of Sisyphus, the king of Ephyra in Greek mythology. He was extremely greedy and deceitful, to the point of tricking Thanatos, the personification of death, into being trapped with his own chains. With Thanatos trapped, no human could die, which enraged Ares, god of war, as this made wars lose their fun for him. Ares then freed Thanatos and handed him Sisyphus, who was to be condemned to roll a huge boulder up a steep hill. The boulder, however, was enchanted, and whenever Sisyphus neared the top, it rolled away from him and fell down, making the punishment eternal.

Just as rolling the boulder for all eternity is Sisyphus' punishment for being deceitful, it could be interpreted that falling into the loop is Cage's punishment for being a coward at the beginning of the film. But, unlike Sisyphus, Cage is theoretically free to flee at any time, which he resolves never to do before killing the Omega. This limited freedom is, again, something common in video games, whose distinctiveness from other mediums lie in their need for player interaction to be completed, as opposed

to the relative passivity of the reader or the spectator. In a video game, the player is apparently free to do as he or she wants – a level can be completed by killing every enemy or by rushing towards the end while killing none; the player can choose to play carefully, or in a more risky manner; the player can even decide to put their main mission aside and focus on subquests, smaller tasks to distract themselves from the main goal.

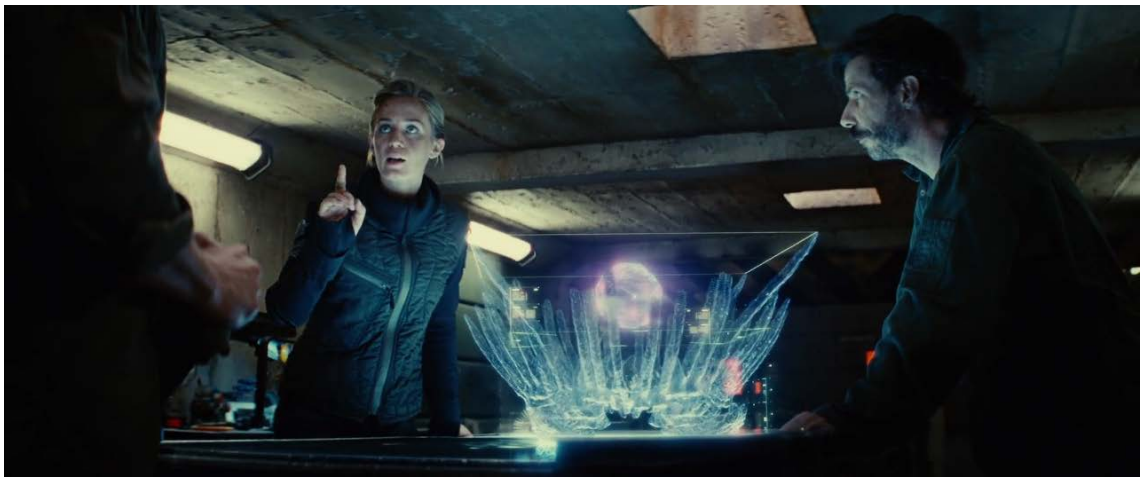

Figure 7: Rita and Dr. Carter showing Cage an hologram of the Omega

However, Mark J. P. Wolf (in Brookey 2010, 34), notes that this interactive freedom is in fact relative. The game's rules are geared towards a final goal or motive that makes the playthrough worthwhile. In order to do so, the game creates limitations, and if the player chose to ignore or interpret the game's rules in his or her own way, completion would become impossible. In other words, players only have freedom within the space the developers have established, taking away control from the player at any moment they deem appropriate to do so – as Chris Crawford (2003) points out, truly interactive video games are an illusion.

That is exactly the situation in which we find Cage. Theoretically, he could escape at any time and return to his cowardly ways, but in practice he is forbidden to do so by forces beyond the film. As a soldier, Cage has no option but to become a hero; it

is what is expected of him, and everything pushes him in that direction. Even when we learn, before the final confrontation against the Omega, that Cage has been completing subquests on his own (getting to know the members of J squad), that too has been in order to reach the goal that will make Cage a hero (after seeing how much Cage knows about them, J squad decides to accompany and help him in the final battle). The fact that we are never shown Cage in the process of completing those subquests is also important, as it remarks the importance of Cage's mission by making the audience focus entirely on the Cage's path to glory: how he becomes a military hero is not as important as the sheer fact that he becomes one. By doing so, the filmmakers seem to send the message that anyone, even someone as despicable as Cage was at the beginning of the film, can become a hero in the military. As Master Sergeant Farell (Bill Paxton) puts it, "battle is the great redeemer."

4. CONCLUSION

This paper has used the video game *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* as the starting point for the analysis of the video game influences in the film Edge of Tomorrow. As I have argued, the forking-path narrative structure of the latter, which for Bordwell is one of the recent trends in contemporary cinema, bears many resemblances with the narrative structure of videogames. The similarities between these two specific cultural products range from a narrative justification for the main character to enter a cycle of endless repetition to the use of traditional video game conventions like the bag of spilling trope or the use of subquests.

What is remarkable about the relationship them is how the film manages not just to copy the conventions of video games, but how it adapts them to a different medium. Video games require an active audience to work; they need to be actually played for the narrative to go on. Therefore, most of its conventions revolve around how to make that

playing time engaging. When these conventions become more passive, the video game tends to be less interesting for the players. Films, however, are a less interactive medium. They do not need an audience to get to the end of the story and, therefore, the spectator constructed by the film is usually a more passive one. *Edge of Tomorrow* manages to put the conventions of video games at the service of a filmic narrative by demanding a more active engagement with the narrative of the film. In order to enjoy the film, spectators must put together the different pieces of the narrative puzzle, one that, in this case, is constantly jumping backwards and built on endless repetition with a difference. It does not require the physical involvement a video game does, but it asks more of its potential spectators than just to sit down and enjoy the film.

As has been claimed, the choice of this specific narrative structure also has ideological implications. The use of video game language makes spectators take a more active role in the film, but it also makes the message of the film feel more playful, despite its actual crudity. The film takes advantage of the common association of video games with fun to pass that meaning into its subject matter. Through the use of a seemingly allowing but actually constricting narrative, as is the video game standard, the film makes the spectator believe that Cage can only become a hero, despite his initial behavior. By eliminating the consequences of death and downplaying its effect, war is made to seem never-ending fun and the path to glory (and even to a romantic ending).

Edge of Tomorrow has been described as “the best video game that you can’t play” (Watercutter, 2014). In the light of the film industry’s unsuccessful attempts to make the most of the increasing video game market, it may seem that, at least in this case, Hollywood has found the perfect formula to draw gamers into the movie theatre. At a time in which blockbusters are regarded as mind-numbing experiences filled with

explosions and/or comic superheroes, the narrative complexities of video games can suppose a breath of fresh air into the film industry, especially considering the pace at which they are evolving and their incontestable place in 21st century popular culture.

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