

Paradise Lost – and Found Again

METRO 2033, the Ghosts of the Past, Moral Choices, and Game Rewards

Abstract

This article focuses on memories of the past and moral values in the video game METRO 2033: REDUX (4A Games / Deep Silver, UA/AT 2014). The game, situated in a post-apocalyptic Moscow and based on a book by the Russian author Dmitry Glukhovsky, is focused on the adventures of Artyom, with whom the player identifies, in the metro system. On their journeys, players face different situations and decisions, to which they can choose how to react. Furthermore, in this dystopian world the player not only travels through different tunnels, but also encounters memories of a lost past and different belief systems. Unbeknownst to the gamer, almost every segment of this journey holds an invisible moral evaluation, which will grant the player “moral points” if passed. The balance of moral points then defines the possible endings of the game.

Drawing on approaches in the study of historical narratives in video games, this article analyses the romanticisation and criticism of the past shown in the game as well as the various categories and situations in which moral points are awarded, exploring how they are related to moral values and how they affect the gaming experience. In addition, characters with different belief systems are present both in the book and, to a limited extent, in the game, and this article will reflect on the representations and role of beliefs throughout the Metro series.

Keywords

METRO 2033, Video Game Studies, Moral Values, Post-apocalyptic, Archaeogaming

Biographies

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Introduction

Video games often reproduce a lost past and reference different cultures and beliefs, which might in turn have an influence on the game experience. Within the field of cultural heritage, serious games are being developed within research projects or cultural organisations to enable different forms of engagement with the past and to disseminate – through a gaming format – specific knowledge. In parallel, archaeogaming¹ is an emerging field in which video games are studied for their representation of the past and their use of past technologies (as in retro-gaming) and are excavated to uncover layers of code and development decisions that influenced the construction and final rendering of the game story. Games can be analysed with reference to the programming and design of the final product, their inclusion of different storylines, and their reference to other cultural products, while gamers' cultures can also be studied through both qualitative and quantitative methods.

This article is a case study of the video game *METRO 2033: REDUX* (4A Games / Deep Silver, UA/AT 2014), which is set in a post-apocalyptic Moscow, whose remains fascinate and confuse the main characters. Rather than being set in the past, the game prefigures a rupture in history – a nuclear apocalypse – which a group of humans survive. Looking back at the imagined heritage of a pre-apocalypse society, mirroring its beliefs and factions, and conjuring with tropes of this past life, the game presents an original perspective on our habit of romanticising the past.

In this article we discuss how the pre-apocalypse times are romanticised and presented in the game, with a particular emphasis on beliefs and social organisations from the past, rather than representations of cultural heritage. Within this context, we focus particularly on the figure of Khan, a sort of spiritual guide through the tunnels of the Moscow underground. First, we present the game and then we briefly discuss the representation of past physical remains, beliefs, and social groups, before introducing the emblematic figure of Khan. In parallel, we note how the player has the possibility of getting rewards by making moral choices in different stages of the game, and how those ultimately influence the game narrative and its finale. We argue that visions of the past, moral choices, and gaming experiences are

1 Reinhard 2018.

closely connected in the video game, revealing how memories and empathy could contribute to making history – at least in the fictional world of the Metro series.

METRO 2033: REDUX

METRO 2033: REDUX is a video game based on the first book of the Metro book series, by the Russian author Dmitry Glukhovsky. The Metro series is a trilogy, consisting of the novels *Metro 2033*, *Metro 2034*, and *Metro 2035*, which Glukhovsky began publishing in 2002² (at first, self-published online; since 2005 published first by Eksmo and then by Popularnaja Literatura³ and translated worldwide). All the books take place in the Moscow metro and are set in the 2030s. Following a global nuclear war in 2013, the city of Moscow was destroyed, and its underground tunnels became a shelter for the residents. Here, the surviving population developed its own social system, with its own factions and relationships. The society in the metro includes old ideologies (such as communism and nazism) and religious beliefs (e.g. Jehovah's Witnesses), as well as new political and religious groups and also cults.

For the purposes of this article, we focus primarily on the first book in the series and its video game adaptation, as they share not only a dystopian world but also a narrative and main protagonist. The main character in Metro 2033 (book and game) is Artyom, a 24-year-old who lives in the metro station VDNKh. Following the discovery of the increased presence of the Dark Ones – a new species that evolved in the nuclear-contaminated external environment – in the underground, Artyom is tasked with heading to Polis, a conglomerate of closely related stations in the heart of the metro, to raise the alarm. Throughout his travel to the core of the Moscow metro, Artyom encounters different groups and explores the variegated society of the metro.

The video game adaptation (as well as its sequels) was developed by the Ukrainian studio 4A Games, which approached Glukhovsky proposing an adaptation of the book.⁴ Glukhovsky was impressed by the studio's work and accepted,⁵ becoming actively involved in translating the narrative to this

2 Krasnogorodskaya 2015; Severin 2018.

3 Schatte n. d.

4 McKeand 2018.

5 Garratt 2010.

different medium and paying particular attention to maintaining the consistency of the story and the meaning of the novel.⁶ The original version of the game is no longer easily available and in this article, we refer to its remastered version, METRO 2033: REDUX, which is currently available in multiple stores. The main differences between the two versions of the game lie in graphic improvements and a limited restructuring of the levels.⁷ However, the overarching narrative and game design have been maintained and thus the two versions are closely related to each other and to the book.

The Past in METRO 2033: REDUX

Video games have often used the past, its remains and its beliefs and cultures, as a setting and source of inspiration for their narratives and designs. As Michał Mochocki notes, in recent years, “[t]he critical attention has shifted from factual (in)correctness to counterfactual play; from historical accuracy to perceived authenticity”.⁸ As Aris Politopoulos and Angus Mol write, “video games are a crucial form of digital heritage because they can offer us *concepts* of the past, ways of thinking in, around, and about the past, as well as experiences of the past through play”.⁹

Archaeogaming has contributed to highlighting the uses of the archaeological past and archaeology as a discipline, and also raises questions of authenticity. In particular, “archaeogaming”, a term first proposed by Andrew Reinhard in 2013,¹⁰ focuses on the study of archaeology in and of video games. Colleen Morgan emphasised how archaeologists research “the history and materiality of archaeological games as artifacts”,¹¹ including excavation of video games’ material remains, analysis of archaeological representations in video games, and participation in the creation of video games. Reinhard has identified five key areas of concern for archaeogaming researchers: (1) the study of “physical videogames as well as the metadata surrounding the games themselves”, (2) a focus on reception, i. e. “the study

6 Bitmop/Glukhovskiy 2010.

7 Kamen 2014.

8 Mochocki 2022, 840.

9 Politopoulos/Mol 2021, 90, italics in the original.

10 Reinhard 2013.

11 Morgan 2016.

of archaeology within videogames”, (3) “the application of archaeological methods to synthetic space”, (4) a focus on game design and how it affects players’ experiences and interactions, and (5) “the archaeology of game mechanics and the entanglement of code with players”.¹² This framework provides an useful lens for observing the multiple temporal dimensions evoked in *METRO 2033: REDUX* through references to Moscow’s monuments, socio-political groups, names, and stories. The perception and reception of the recent past and its monuments, observable in the *Metro 2033* book and related game, is compounded in the game by its moral point system, as will be discussed in a later section.

The use of the past in the series has been highlighted from different angles in the literature. Chris Bishop has explored the use of antiquity in the *Metro 2033* book and the corresponding game, noting its importance in both contexts, despite what he identifies as a switch in narrative focus, with the novel being “a didactic allegory of Russian politics” and the game a “Bildungsroman”.¹³ He notices how Artyom is safest in the older metro stations, built under Stalin or completed shortly after his death, and encounters more risks in the stations built more recently. Furthermore, in the game we encounter the material remains of a pre-apocalypse world, mainly by exploring the library. Emerging from the underworld through Polis’ stations, Artyom explores the former National Library, where he finds numerous books displaying “History” on their cover. As Bishop concludes, “In the virtual world of the Metro games, safety lies in the stations that adhere closest to the classical aesthetic, and hope comes in the form of classical artifacts salvaged by a hero who bears the name of an ancient goddess. All this stands in marked contrast to the books that spawned these games.”¹⁴

This attention for a past that is not here anymore is actually evident from the beginning of the game, with postcards in Artyom’s room representing “a world that was – Egyptian pyramids, Rome, Venice”.¹⁵ Still, underground there are also many remnants of a more recent past, albeit incompatible with the presumed timeline of the game (which sets the nuclear war in 2013), such as Soviet posters from the 1930s.¹⁶ While Bishop emphasises the

12 Reinhard 2018, 3.

13 Bishop 2020, 312.

14 Bishop 2020, 322.

15 Bishop 2020, 325.

16 Bishop 2020, 317–318.

role of antiquity in METRO 2033 (4A Games / THQ / Deep Silver UA/US/AT 2010) and METRO 2033: REDUX, Griffiths suggests that “[t]he underground station names offer a visual connection to the preapocalyptic city yet prove to be no more than reminders of society’s loss”.¹⁷ Mark Griffiths argues that the Metro series can be studied in relation to “the ideological volte-face, mutated remainders, and haunting vestiges produced by catastrophe as well as their impact on society”.¹⁸

The impact of the past on society is evident in the names and social groups organising and structuring the present of the metro system: while “Polis” as the central governing group at the core of the Metro universe and the corps of “Spartans” as a policing and security force are obvious references to ancient Greece, the references to past cultures do not stop at antiquity. The merchants’ community “Hansa” takes inspiration for its name from the late medieval Hanseatic League, similarly, the “Nazi” and the “Red Line” communities obviously refer to 20th century totalitarianisms. These memories are made explicit by one of the characters, who reminisces about the Second World War, saying (in the level *War*): “I was about to go through the front line between the nazis and the communists. I’ve heard they once fought another war and that the nazis lost.”

Moreover, existing religions are also referenced at length in the book, from remains of destroyed Orthodox churches to an encounter with Jehovah’s Witnesses, in parallel to the Luddite cult of the Great Worm (whose leader admits to the falsehood of the cult while being held captive). As Frank Bosman has highlighted, video games have a long history of drawing on religion, using “religious themes, languages, images, symbolisms and the like to construct instant recognizable lores, characters and/or narratives [...], but also to stimulate the player to contemplate existential notions [...] or invite them (sometimes even force them) to behave in a way traditionally associated with religion”.¹⁹ In the METRO 2033: REDUX game, owing to the game dynamic, religions are discussed at less length than in the book, and the main spiritual encounter for Artyom is with Khan, who – in the style of Virgil with Dante – guides Artyom through the metro, leading him through a tunnel invaded by ghosts while offering mentorship on the beliefs and histories of the metro.

17 Griffiths 2013, 497.

18 Griffiths 2013, 483.

19 Bosman 2019, 1.

Longing for Past Values in Games

In a Reddit AMA (Ask Me Anything) session in 2016, while summarising the content of the Metro series Glukhovskiy highlighted its multiple layers:

it's also about the fact that we humans never learn from the mistakes of our past. And also about the fact we always see an enemy in strangers. And also about the importance of understanding one's mission in this world correctly. And also about the ways that grown-ups try to recruit the youngsters into their sects and ideologies before they can understand anything – and so they grow up indoctrinated.²⁰

Although Griffiths notes that the novel “shows that the apocalypse does not solely reinforce past structures, but can break them down or offer alternatives”,²¹ the criticism of past models is clear throughout.

The failure of the classical trope of *historia magistra vitae* and the risks of excessive indoctrination of new generations emerge in the game, although to a more limited extent than in the book. For example, towards the end of the game's third chapter, the player encounters a group of communists on their way to the frontline. An exchange between three characters takes place in front of the player:

CHARACTER 1: Hello, Sergey Sergeevich! I have a neighbourhood kid here, eager to fight! A true soldier to your cause.

CHARACTER 2: We're always looking for young people who embrace our communist ideals. Very well, son – you'll be issued a weapon and uniform immediately. Now, get on the train.

CHARACTER 3: Ideals' hah! What they really want are sheep who embrace death. Forward march – to the meat grinder! Sorry, I didn't mean to spoil your dreams of glory.

This first exchange aptly demonstrates how the enthusiasm of a young person, a “kid”, is welcomed by the army, but those same ideals are harshly criticised by another observer. Shortly after, two soldiers are seen talking to each other:

²⁰ Glukhovskiy 2016.

²¹ Griffiths 2013, 503.

CHARACTER 4: There's a black capsule in my ammo pouch... what is that, an antibiotic?

CHARACTER 5: No – it's cyanide, in case the enemy captures you.

CHARACTER 4: What?! But... God forbids suicide! I'd go straight to Hell!

CHARACTER 5: Listen, altar boy – a nazi prisoner is going to Hell anyway. Trust me – the pill is faster.

CHARACTER 4: I could never take my own life!

The dialogue among these soldiers moves from the understanding of an item in the military supplies (the cyanide pill) to religious opposition to suicide and ends in the mocking of the “altar boy”, thus showing in this instance a distrust of Christian ideals. Ideals are thus shown through passionate characters, accompanied by more cynical companions who demystify these doctrines, whether political or religious.

An exception to this situation is the character of Khan, who becomes Artyom's companion, supporting him in his travel from the metro station of Sukharevskaya to that of Turgenevskaya (corresponding to the end of the game level *Dry* and the level *Ghosts*). In an unusual fashion for a first-person shooter game – which is how its Steampage identifies METRO 2033:REDUX²² – the level *Ghost* is slow paced, with almost no fighting involved. Instead, the player is supposed to carefully pass shadowy figures while listening to Khan. Khan explains that these are the ghosts of the metro, trapped for eternity in these tunnels and constantly reliving the last minutes before their deaths, which Khan describes as “a harsh but not undeserved atonement of our sins”, almost reminiscent of Virgil's explanation of the punishments Dante witnesses in Hell (the *contrappasso dantesco*). In the following level, *Cursed*, Khan helps the player again and leads him to a memorial site for fallen or missing station inhabitants. Khan describes the site as a “shrine to hope”, elaborating that “even in these times, we can't relinquish the things that make us human”, suggesting that remembrance of the dead is a core aspect of being human. Here the player has the chance to inspect the memorial site, accompanied by a soundscape that resembles a Gregorian choir. Furthermore, Khan not only supports the player during these levels and contributes to the narrative, but also acts as a mentor, suggesting that – even in this fragmented post-apocalyptic society – a more open-minded and tolerant course of action is possible. In particular, Khan comments on some

22 METRO 2033: REDUX 2014.

of the new physical phenomena provoked by the war, advising Artyom, “try to get a better understanding of things before you make your judgement”, encouraging him to not label negatively phenomena he cannot understand and to look at problems from another perspective. We will see in the next section the importance of this notion.

Moral Decision-making in Video Games

METRO 2033:REDUX includes many references to the past, including past beliefs and political factions, as discussed above. In this context, the player encounters some of these ideologies and is called upon to make choices. Moral choices are not a novelty in games, and the potential of games for fostering moral reflections has been, for example, reviewed by Michael Heron and Pauline Belford.²³

Video games have used moral decision-making systems to award “karma” points, prompting the player to take ethical decisions. Indeed, some of the games listed by the gaming community as including such features date back to the 1980s.²⁴ An early example, which assigns the role of god to the player, is BLACK & WHITE (Lionhead Studios, UK 1998–2001).²⁵ In this strategy game, the player can decide whether to be a benevolent god or a cruel god, and the game design (e. g. lighting, sound) changes accordingly, thus making evident the consequences of the decisions taken by the player, with visual clues signifying what the player becomes through their actions – a monster or a peaceful “glowing” god.²⁶

The BioShock series, especially BIOSHOCK (2K Boston / 2K Australia, US/AU 2007) and BIOSHOCK 2 (2K Marin / 2K China / 2K Australia / Digital Extremes, US/CN/AU/CA 2010), also openly implements a morality system, in this case within a first-person shooter game. In BIOSHOCK, the player’s aim is to escape a violent underwater community. In doing so, they often encounter characters called “Little Sisters” (genetically modified young girls) and their guardians, “Big Daddys” (tall man in armoured diving suits). After successfully fighting the guardians, the player has the choice to either harvest the

23 Heron/Belford 2014.

24 See, for example, data in GiantBomb 2022.

25 Black & White 1998–2001.

26 BlackandWhiteWiki, Good 2011–2022; Evil 2011–2020.

chemical substance ADAM from the Little Sister, obtaining unique abilities but killing the Little Sister in the process, or spare her. These decisions play a crucial role in the gameplay, as they determine the end of the game: killing more than one Little Sister will automatically lead to a bad ending.²⁷ *BioSHOCK 2* builds on the same moral system, but extends it with decisions regarding ending or sparing the lives of three other non-player characters (NPCs) and the option of ending the player's own life.²⁸ These decisions, asking the player to decide on the young girls' fate, on NPCs' survival, and ultimately on their own life, pose a more evident moral dilemma than in *BLACK & WHITE* and have a direct impact on the game narrative.

Another typical example of the implementation of a moral system within a game is that of the role-playing series *Fallout*, which also features much more detailed decision-making mechanics in the gameplay. For example, in *FALLOUT 3* (Bethesda Game Studios, US 2008) players can gain positive or negative karma points based on their actions and conversations.²⁹ Players get negative karma points if they steal, lie, hurt a settlement's inhabitants, or act cannibalistically. Conversely, if they donate items, save innocent inhabitants, or fight bad people, they gain good karma points. The karma points impact the companions the players can aspire to be joined by and allow them to acquire specific honour titles ("karma titles").³⁰ *FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS* (Obsidian Entertainment, US 2010) adds a reputation system, through which players gain a good reputation within a faction if they complete quests, help other faction members, or fight a rival settlement. The reputation within a faction brings either, if positive, benefits or, if negative, the hostility of the faction members.³¹ By taking moral decisions, the players do not only impact on the course of individual short sequences affecting *only* the end of the game, but also influence the entire course of the game.

A different example of a reputation system affected by moral decision-making can be found in the *GET FAMOUS* expansion pack of the simulation game *THE SIMS 4* (Maxis, US 2014).³² The *Sims* series are simulation games, where players simulate real life and can make conscious decisions

27 BioShockWiki 2007–2022.

28 BioShock 2, 2012.

29 Fallout 3, 2008.

30 FalloutWiki, 2011–2022a.

31 FalloutWiki, 2010–2022; 2011–2022b.

32 Maxis 2014.

in establishing the actions of their Sim, for example, to donate money to charity or to cheat on one's partner.³³ However, what is particularly interesting is that most of these actions must be seen by other Sims if they are to influence a Sim's reputation; in turn, the reputation affects the interaction with other Sims.³⁴

Finally, the indie role-play game *UNDERTALE* (Toby Fox, US 2015) takes a different approach to morality decision-making.³⁵ In this game, the players take the role of a young boy named Frisk, who fell into a monstrous underground world and is now trying to find his way back up to the human realm. The game begins with a villain who tricks players into misinterpreting the functioning of the game, by suggesting that the aim is to defeat opponents in order to increase the player's *LV*, an abbreviation commonly interpreted as *level*. Although another NPC explains to the player that they have the option of talking to the opponents, the stats of typical role-play games – experience points (EXP) and level (LV) – lead players towards the defeat-your-opponents playstyle. Only much later in the game does the player learn that in this world *EXP* stands for *executional points* and *LV* or *LOVE* for *Level Of ViolencE* – the higher these values, the greater the number of opponents killed by a player. Based on these stats, the game has three possible endings: Neutral, (True) Pacifist, Genocide. The neutral ending can be achieved by only occasionally defeating (killing) monsters, which requires Frisk to leave the monster realm alone. Achieving this ending is also a prerequisite for a True Pacifist Ending, which happens after the player has played the game to a neutral ending and then, in the course of a second playthrough, spares every monster while befriending as many NPCs as possible: this ending results in Frisk leaving this world with his new friends. Conversely, the Genocide Ending not only requires the player to kill every monster, but also affects future playthroughs, making the achievement of a True Pacifist Ending impossible – unless the player does a hard reset of the game, which means deleting all the game files.³⁶ *UNDERTALE* therefore confronts the players with their “sins” even outside the game, as their bad decisions cannot be buried in a previous gameplay without additional steps.

33 Krista 2019.

34 Krista 2018.

35 Undertale 2015.

36 Pereira 2015; UndertaleWiki, Endings, 2015–2022.

Moral Points in METRO 2033: REDUX

METRO 2033: REDUX is therefore part of a group of games using moral decision-making as a way, hidden or explicit, to influence game experience and outcomes. The game has a series of achievements which are visible and clearly defined. These are unlocked by performing certain actions, both negative and positive, and the player can hold them as a badge on their profile. For example, the *Tank* achievement requires the player to “kill 10 enemies in a row without taking any damage”, whereas the achievement *Rescue Ranger* is obtained when the player manages to “save a group of Reds from Fascist captivity”. There are indeed many different achievements awarded for the killing of enemies, based on the number of enemies killed (from “kill a librarian” to “kill 200 Mutants”), the method of execution (for example, “headshots from at least 30 metres’ distance”³⁷ or the type of weapon used). A smaller, but no less important, amount of achievements result from good deeds, with *Generous* awarded “for being generous to Metro dwellers and donating bullets when asked. You need to give a bullet to three different people: a boy, a man and a vagrant.”³⁸ Other examples of good deeds include completing levels without killing anyone (*Invisible man*, *Merciful*) and saving military-grade rounds (rather than using them to kill others).³⁹

In parallel to the achievements system, METRO 2033:REDUX also has a hidden moral system – evaluating players’ actions throughout the game and scoring their “good” and “bad” deeds. Based on this score, the players have the opportunity to experience an alternate ending, which differs widely from the canonical ending of the book. Moral points are awarded in response to choices by the player, such as listening and opening a conversation with other characters, sparing other characters, exploring and positively interacting with the surroundings. For example, players can gain positive moral points if they donate bullets to other characters or listen to the stories and sorrows of other station residents. Sometimes the advantages are evident, and openness to dialogue and exploration affects the gameplay directly. For example, when first meeting Khan, the player has the possibility of staying and listening to him (positive) or ignoring him and running away (negative). Khan, as mentioned, has a mentoring role and prompts the player to reflect

37 Steam 2014.

38 MetroWiki, *Generous*, 2011–2019.

39 Steam 2014.

on the possibilities of a different, non-violent, behaviour: just by listening to Khan, the player not only gets moral points, but also has a direct advantage, in that Khan “is able to shield his companions from these dangers”.⁴⁰ In most cases, however, the benefits of choosing a peaceful course of actions are not revealed immediately. For example, the game encourages the player to kill as many enemies as possible in order to quickly free the way ahead and continue their quest – but, as Daniil Leiderman points out, the game also “problematizes this, albeit inconsistently: while it focuses on representing violence, it allows for stealthy alternatives too”.⁴¹ At the same time, players lose moral points by interrupting discussions or being unnecessarily brutal. Also in this case, the result is not immediately evident. This ambiguity makes it challenging to know what might be a morally good decision in METRO 2033:REDUX, and thus the moral tests set up by 4A Games are “easy to fail”.⁴²

If a player’s karma balance is negative, their only option is the canonical ending, witnessing the destruction of the Dark Ones in a new nuclear strike. If, conversely, a player accumulates enough positive karma points, they will have the possibility of altering the finale – by choosing to save the Dark Ones. As Leiderman notes, therefore, “Metro’s rhetoric operates on two levels: the day-to-day decisions of how to dispense ammunition (via altruism or gunshots), and the conclusion of either enacting atrocity or avoiding it.”⁴³ As Leiderman notes, this is an ending that only a committed player who consciously chooses to avoid the most natural gameplay will be able to achieve:

METRO 2033 promises the player agency and then drives them along a literal railroad track to a tragic, canonical conclusion to the plot, through a space symbolic of the violence of such authorial impositions. It also offers alternate endings, and thus the possibility of derailing this plot, but hides them behind game mechanics, making it so that only a committed player will realize that they can change the outcome of the narrative.⁴⁴

The standard ending, in line with the narrative of the book, is represented by the achievement *If It’s Hostile, You Kill It*, which will allow the player to “[b]

40 Bishop 2020, 313.

41 Leiderman 2022, 50.

42 Leiderman 2022, 50.

43 Leiderman 2022, 55.

44 Leiderman 2022, 53.

ecome a true ranger”⁴⁵ (i. e. a guardian of the status quo). The novel concludes with Artyom understanding that the Dark Ones are not hostile and could actually assist humans in rebuilding life in the metro; however, he cannot do anything to stop the missiles being launched to destroy the Dark Ones’ main centre. Similarly, the canonical ending of the game sees Artyom witnessing the destruction of the Dark Ones. Here, a final monologue insinuates doubt about the value of this ending, with Artyom’s last words asking, “When we burned the Dark Ones from the face of the earth, was something lost as well?”⁴⁶

The alternative ending, corresponding to the achievement *Enlightened*, is described as “find the truth”.⁴⁷ Here, Artyom wakes up and has the time to make a choice: he sees a Dark One repeating “we want peace” and can decide to stop the missile guidance system (and hence the destruction of the Dark Ones) or let the missiles be launched, leading to the Ranger ending. The player can therefore choose to spare the Dark Ones, with the implication that the two groups of population, underground and overground, can support each other in navigating life in and around the metro. This is a rare and difficult to achieve badge given that it alters the character of a first-person shooter game by asking the player to avoid killing anyone (which is virtually possible within the game) and choose a less violent approach. In this ending, the player is responsible “for following (or not following) the game’s enactment of the novel’s plot to the final atrocity”.⁴⁸

“Playing Nice”: Prompting Changes in Gamers’ Styles

Moral points are not unique to the METRO 2033: REDUX game, as discussed above. Indeed, according to the database maintained by GiantBomb,⁴⁹ more than 200 video games have this feature. Despite some criticism in the gaming community,⁵⁰ moral points are common in game development, also

45 Steam 2014.

46 MetroWiki, Endings 2011–2022.

47 Steam 2014.

48 Leiderman 2022, 51.

49 GiantBomb 2022.

50 e.g. Parker 2009, Birch 2014, and Madsen 2020 outline the problem of morality systems that focus on good and bad and argue that morality is a greyscale. Thus Moore 2012 criticises systems that “dictate what actions are morally right and what actions are morally wrong, leaving little room for meaningful player interpretation”.

because “[i]t seems like a good way for game designers to add variety and replayability to their games”.⁵¹ As demonstrated by the examples discussed above, moral points can lead to different endings, encouraging players to play the game at least a second time.

In *METRO 2033: REDUX*, the moral system does indeed support two different finales, the canonical one and the alternate ending, in which the player can choose to not destroy the Dark Ones. To achieve both endings, players have to change their playstyle according to the hidden morality system for each playthrough. For instance, if players want to achieve the canonical ending, they will play the game mostly focusing on combat and shooting, while ignoring most of the stories the NPCs and the game world have to share. Conversely, if players want to unlock the alternate ending, they have to “play nice”, which includes not only acknowledging their surroundings in the game world and the NPCs, but also sparing enemies, which means moving away from the traditional gaming style of a shooter game.

Playing nice therefore involves a drastic change in the gameplay style and its pace for the player. As Leiderman points out, this shift involves encouraging players “first, towards stealth over violence (matching the intended rhetoric); and second, encouraging them to use their knife more (not matching the intended rhetoric)”.⁵² First-person shooters typically engage the player in combat – mainly with ranged weapons like guns – usually against multiple enemies, and they are consequently fast-paced. Additionally, resource management also plays a significant role in a player’s survival in *METRO 2033:REDUX*, owing to the scarcity of healing items, gas mask filters, or ammunition. Accordingly, the game is not only a first-person shooter, but also includes components of the survival horror genre,⁵³ which adds another set of challenges the player has to overcome, in addition to armed opponents.

If players want to play nice, they have to act contrary to the common ways of solving these challenges (e. g. engaging in combat and saving resources) and avoid most of the achievements associated with the game, such as killing a given number of enemies. They have instead to listen to the stories and sorrows the people at the stations share, respond positively to NPCs begging for ammunition – which serves as a currency in the metro – or explore their surroundings. Thus, they need to prioritise generosity,

51 Moore 2012.

52 Leiderman 2022, 55.

53 *METRO 2033: REDUX* 2014; simalcrum/IGN 2012.

patience, and curiosity over valuable and important resources like gas mask filters or ammunition. This, in turn, can make it difficult to complete certain game sequences, because players may lack the necessary resources. However, the more players renounce the traditional gaming style of the genre, the more they are likely to gain moral points, and so unlock the alternative ending – which diverges from the traditional ending of a first-person shooter game. For instance, in the level *Dry*, a level full of enemy bandits, players are not allowed to kill a single enemy if they are to get moral points. Thus, players are forced to sneak through the whole level, which takes time and patience. The same rule applies to the level *Black Station*, where the player has to go through a station filled with nazi soldiers without killing anyone if they are to gain moral points and an achievement called *Merciful*. The prompt to avoid killing is not limited to human NPCs. For example, in the level *Dead City*, players can encounter a monster and its cubs near a stash of resources. This gives the player two possibilities – kill the monster, which will leave the cubs without a mother but also provide risk-free access to the stash, or spare it, which will mean the player either has a difficult time accessing the stash unnoticed or abandons the valuable resources altogether. Sparing the monster grants the player moral points. Players can also gain moral points if they actively listen to Khan's remarks regarding the metro being the only place left for the human soul after his death, or his remarks prompting them to engage with new phenomena such as the voices of ghosts in the pipes.⁵⁴ Indeed, the level with Khan and his character is very important for achieving the alternate ending of the game.

Furthermore, a particularly interesting example is the level *Front Line*, where the player finds themselves in the midst of the war between the Reds and the nazis of the metro. Here, the player can gain multiple moral points. The achievement of some, however, excludes the achievement of others. For instance, in the course of the level players have the option to rescue three communist prisoners. In order to do so, they have to kill some of the nazis patrolling the area. However, a moral point and the achievement *Invisible Man* are granted for not killing anyone while traversing this level. Furthermore, not killing anyone also means rescuing the communist deserter from being killed by his former comrades by knocking them out, which results in another moral point.⁵⁵ In short, by not killing anyone, the player seals the

54 MetroWiki, Moral Points 2010–2022.

55 MetroWiki, Moral Points 2010–2022.

fate of the three captured soldiers. If the player wants to rescue the three soldiers, he has to kill. A moral dilemma enclosed in a quest for moral points.

In conclusion, players have to deviate from the typical fast, combat-oriented gaming style of first-person shooter games in order to play nice and consequently unlock the alternate ending. Moreover, by playing nice in certain levels, players also unlock achievements, which may even be the last they need to complete their achievement hunting, a “goal-oriented way of enjoying video games to 100%”.⁵⁶ In short, the game encourages the players in various ways to break the typical first-person shooter gameplay cycle of killing and to alter their playing style. Moral points have a key role in both encouraging these alternative playing styles and opening up the possibility of a different ending, in which the player can choose to save the Dark Ones.

From Past Beliefs to Moral Values in METRO 2033: REDUX

This article has discussed the presence of elements from the past in the Metro world. In this fictional post-apocalyptic world, set in the future (in 2033), our present (or, better, the early 2010s) has already become “past” and is equally romanticised and fictionalised. The fictional nuclear apocalypse in 2013 has left the survivors living in a metro system in which older stations are safer and many memories of the classical world and of the communist period manifest themselves. However, the world in which Artyom moves across the metro system is also a dystopian future, which brings him into contact not only with physical remains of the past but also with many beliefs and ideologies that are still influencing social relationships and structures in the Metro world.

While the book is very clear about its criticism of ideologies and religious beliefs, the game also does not shy away from commenting on the risks and contradictions of these systems. As we have seen in the chat among young communist soldiers, the use of political beliefs to recruit young people or the prohibition of suicide in religion are both directly criticised. As Glukhovsky said in his Reddit AMA, the Metro series can be interpreted as being about the “indoctrination” of young people into belief systems.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ 100Pals 2015–2021.

⁵⁷ Glukhovsky 2016.

At the same time, we have discussed how the game breaks the traditional gameplay of first-person shooter games by implementing a moral system that force players to consider carefully their decisions and actions. In order to complete their quest for all achievements, players have to “play nice” and interact positively with the surroundings. By doing so, they will also gain moral points, achieving the possibility of changing the finale, thus saving the mysterious Dark Ones. As Glukhovsky, again, said, the series is “also about the fact we always see an enemy in strangers”.⁵⁸ There are the stereotypical enemies, such as the nazis, that the gamer should refrain from killing in order to reach the alternative ending. And there is an Other, the mysterious creature that prompts fear, and thus violence, in the Metro series, as well as – far too often – in our world. Here, the player can choose to reckon that this Other, the Dark Ones, is not a danger and could potentially be a peaceful neighbour, if not an ally. Moral points not only unlock another gaming style and a different ending, but they also prompt the player to reflect on the prejudices and violence between the different factions in the fictional Metro universe. However, these moral points are hidden; a player will first of all go through the game following the rules of first-person shooter games. As a result, the gameplay will be easier and more immediate for an experienced gamer, and the ending, culminating in the destruction of the Dark Ones’ settlement, would be considered usual for this type of game. But once a player uncovers the hidden moral system, they will want to play again, in order to unlock the alternative ending. As Leiderman mentions, this implicit invitation to replay the game proposes an “escape from cyclical history”.⁵⁹ Glukhovsky added that the series is also about humans’ failure to learn from the past⁶⁰: in the game, though, we have the possibility of learning and changing, breaking the cycle of violence and indoctrination in which past values and ideologies have enclosed the metro system.

As is suggested in archaeogaming and historical games literature,⁶¹ the use of the past in games enables exploration of alternative pasts and narratives. In the case of METRO 2033: REDUX, we have encountered different aspects of the past to which players could react, in turn triggering a moral

58 Glukhovsky 2016.

59 Leiderman 2022, 53.

60 Glukhovsky 2016.

61 e.g. Politopoulos/Mol 2021; Chapman/Foka/Westin 2016.

points system within the game. This moral system forces players to go beyond the traditional gameplay of first-person shooter games, engaging with the narratives and ideologies presented in the game. Alternative pasts and futures emerge from these interactions, with the game prompting reflection on the construction of heritage narratives and values. The past therefore is not used only as a reference for a romanticised period: in METRO 2033: REDUX there was never a paradise, and ideologies had contributed to its loss. By challenging the past and adhering to a new set of moral values, the player can uncover a more hopeful ending and get closer to paradise.

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