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COMPARISON OF THE GREAT ONES IN "BLOODBORNE" AND THE WORKS OF HOWARD PHILLIPS LOVECRAFT

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ПОРІВНЯННЯ ВЕЛИКИХ У ГРІ "BLOODBORNE" ТА ПРАЦЯХ ГОВАРДА ФІЛІПСА ЛАВКРАФТА

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This article explores the influence of H.P. Lovecraft's cosmic horror on the console video game Bloodborne. Beginning with an analysis of Lovecraft's key works featuring the Great Superior Beings and their common themes, the article lays the groundwork for understanding the literary background on which Bloodborne is based. Moving on to consider the game itself, it analyses the Lovecraftian elements present in Bloodborne, including cosmic power, alien nature, and the transformative influence of the Great Ones. The article emphasises the interactivity of the game as a medium, and how Bloodborne goes beyond mere simulation to actively engage players in a cosmic horror narrative. It takes into account the narrative technique of narration through the environment, which is characteristic of both Lovecraft's works and Bloodborne, demonstrating the game's ability to convey its narrative through the architecture of Yarnam and the supernatural design that attracts ghosts. An analysis of Lovecraft's works provides evidence to support the idea that there are commonalities in the way Lovecraft describes his Great Ones. The article highlights Lovecraft's overarching themes, such as the insignificance of humanity in the face of cosmic entities and the fear of the unknown, and draws parallels with existential horror. This article examines the integration of Lovecraft's themes into Bloodborne's gameplay and narrative, and how the game reflects Lovecraft's exploration of cosmic horror, forbidden knowledge, and the fragility of the human mind. The Insight mechanic is highlighted as an example that illustrates the consequences of the search for forbidden knowledge in the Lovecraftian tradition. The article highlights the importance of recognising this influence for the convergence of literature and video games, which shapes the future of storytelling in the gaming industry. In fact, the article analyses the combination of literature and games, which results in Lovecraft's cosmic horror with Bloodborne's gruesome narrative. The article not only analyses the intricate details but also considers the broader implications of this cross-media influence on storytelling and player experience.

Keywords: *Lovecraft, the Great Ones, Bloodborne, horror.*

У статті досліджується вплив творчості Г. Ф. Лавкрафта на консольну відеогру-бестселер "Bloodborne". Починаючи з аналізу ключових творів Лавкрафта, в яких фігурують Великі Вищі істоти, та їхніх спільних тем, стаття закладає основу для розуміння літературного підґрунтя, на яке спирається "Bloodborne". Поступово переходячи до розгляду самої гри, аналізуються лавкрафтівські елементи, присутні в "Bloodborne", включаючи космічну силу, інопланетну природу та трансформаційний вплив Великих.У статті підкреслюється інтерактивність гри як медіуму, а також те, як "Bloodborne" виходить за межі простої імітації, активно залучаючи гравців до космічного наративу жахів. Береться до уваги прийом оповіді через оточення, характерний як для творів Лавкрафта, так і для "Bloodborne", що демонструє здатність гри передавати свій наратив через архітектуру Йарнама та надприродну атмосферу, що притягує привидів.Аналіз творів Лавкрафта надає докази, що підтримують ідею про наявність спільних рис у тому, як Лавкрафт описує своїх Великих. У статті висвітлюються всеохоплюючі теми Лавкрафта, такі як нікчемність людства перед обличчям космічних сутностей і страх перед невідомим, а також проводяться паралелі з екзистенційним жахом.У статті розглядається інтеграція тем Лавкрафта в ігровий процес і наратив "Bloodborne", як гра віддзеркалює дослідження Лавкрафтом космічного жаху, забороненого знання та крихкості людського розуму. Механіка "Інсайт" висвітлюється як яскравий приклад, що ілюструє наслідки пошуку заборонених знань у лавкрафтівській традиції.Висновок підкреслює ключові знахідки і вплив Лавкрафта на ігрову індустрію; також висловлюється подяка "Bloodborne" за те, що вона відображає суть літературної спадщини Лавкрафта. У статті висвітлюється важливість визнання цього впливу для зближення літератури та відеоігор, що, зрештою, формує майбутнє сторітеллінгу в ігровій індустрії.Фактично, у статті аналізується поєднання літератури та ігор, результатом якого є космічний жах Лавкрафта з моторошним наративом "Bloodborne". У статті не лише аналізуються складні деталі, але й розглядається синтез літературного спадку Лавкрафта та сучасного геймдеву.

Ключові слова*: Лавкрафт, Великі, Bloodborne, горор.*

Problem statement. This article explores how H.P. Lovecraft's cosmic horror influences the video game "Bloodborne," analysing the translation of Lovecraft's themes into interactive gaming. It aims to understand how "Bloodborne" captures Lovecraft's essence, contributing insights to the evolving narrative landscape in the gaming industry and analysing the similarities between the Great Ones from "Bloodborne" and the Great Old Ones from H. P. Lovecraft's literary works.

Theoretical background. Gama and Garcia examine the entities referred to as the Great Ones in the video game "Bloodborne," establishing connections with H.P. Lovecraft's cosmic deities. In contrast to traditional linear storytelling, as explored by Leavenworth (Leavenworth,

2014) and Leite (Leite, 2017), the study sets the stage for an analysis of converging themes between Gothic and Lovecraftian narratives in the realm of video games.

The authors initiate their exploration by scrutinizing narrative structures in Lovecraft's "Beyond the Wall of Sleep" alongside those in "Bloodborne," highlighting the latter's deviation from Lovecraft's conventional linear storytelling approach. This departure prompts a deeper investigation into the impact of non-linear storytelling on the immersive experience and player engagement within the Lovecraftian context in video games. The research question that guides our analysis is the following: How does this departure contribute to the overall immersive experience and player engagement with the Lovecraftian narrative?

Leite's comparative analysis (Leite, 2017) provides a framework for understanding how "Bloodborne" uniquely involves players in the Lovecraftian narrative. Going beyond previous examinations (Gama & Garcia, 2019), Gama and Garcia navigate the interactive elements of "Bloodborne," placing particular emphasis on player agency and choices within the game.

The authors integrate thematic elements such as oneiric atmospheres, repugnant smells, and gruesome items into their analysis, drawing on Caracciolo's perspective on experientiality in literature and video games (Caracciolo, 2014).

Gama and Garcia reflect on the allure of "Bloodborne" as an interactive game, citing its ability to evoke players' previous experiences. Acknowledging the evolving nature of Gothic tropes, the authors advocate for a revised understanding, aligning with the scattered and evolving characteristics of the Gothic genre (Gama & Garcia, 2019).

This problem has also been studied by Justin Mullis, and Phillip J. Snyder (Mullis, 2015; Snyder, 2017) Meanwhile, the concept of the Great Ones in Bloodborne and their relationship to the Great Ones in the works of Howard Phillips Lovecraft is not sufficiently studied, and therefore further research is needed.

Aim. This article aims to analyse how H.P. Lovecraft's cosmic horror influences "Bloodborne," exploring correlations between Lovecraft's Great Ones and those in the game.

Research methods. In-game exploration and familiarisation: conducted gameplay sessions of "Bloodborne" to explore the game world, focusing on encounters related to the Great Ones; systematically observed visual details, dialogues, and in-game lore related to the Great Ones during gameplay; maintained detailed notes on specific locations, events, and character interactions involving the Great Ones for reference.

Literary framework for comparative analysis: established a conceptual framework outlining key elements related to the Great Ones, including origins, visual characteristics, roles in the narrative, and impact on the game world; organised key elements into categories such as origin stories, visual traits, psychological impact, and thematic contributions for systematic analysis.

Textual and visual material collection: gathered direct quotations from Lovecraft's works describing cosmic entities, focusing on language nuances, symbolism, and visual details; prepared direct quotations from Lovecraft's works for the analysis to emphasise thematic parallels between Lovecraftian themes and "Bloodborne"; quoted in-game dialogues, item descriptions, and environmental details related to the Great Ones – these quotations served to illustrate specific connections and distinctions found between Lovecraftian themes and those present in "Bloodborne."

Character and creature analysis: analysed visual characteristics of the Great Ones in both mediums, comparing the aesthetics of Lovecraft's entities with the visuals in "Bloodborne"; explored the psychological impact of encountering the Great Ones in the game, considering game lore; analysed the Great Ones in both narratives, focusing on themes of madness, forbidden knowledge, and their impact on the storyline; compared Lovecraftian quotations with in-game descriptions, dialogues, and visual representations of the Great Ones for similarities and differences; identified specific parallels between Lovecraft's cosmic entities and the Great Ones in "Bloodborne" based on language, symbolism, and visual depictions; pinpointed thematic elements unique to the Great Ones, including their connection to blood, influence on world-building.

Conclusion and Discussion. Our exploration led to discovering the following similarities between "Bloodborne's" narrative and H. P. Lovecraft's works: the notion of madness and its connection to insights and forbidden knowledge, the role of blood of the Great Ones, the nightmarish setting, the notion of immortality, the cosmic entities and their descriptions, the shape, form and visual look of Lovecraftian monsters and the Great Ones, and a few other interesting similarities that will be mentioned further.

The notion of madness is directly connected to the insights obtained by people both in H. P. Lovecraft's works and "Bloodborne". In many cases, these are obtained by the direct interaction with or a visual comprehension of a creature (Lovecraft, 2022) or an object (Fromsoftware, 2015). This is seen in Lovecraft's "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward": "...Marinus Bicknell Willett was sorry that he *looked* again…he has not been the same since. It is hard to explain just how *a single sight*… could so shake and change a man; …there is about certain outlines and entities a power of symbolism and suggestion that acts frightfully on a *sensitive thinker*'s perspective and *whispers terrible hints* of obscure cosmic relationships and *unnameable realities* behind the protective illusions of common vision…Willett *saw* such an *outline* or *entity*, for during the next few instants he was undoubtedly as *stark mad* as any inmate of Dr. Waite's private hospital. He dropped the electric torch from a hand drained of muscular power or nervous coordination, nor heeded the sound of crunching teeth which told of its fate…He *screamed* and *screamed* and *screamed* in a voice whose falsetto panic no acquaintance of his would ever have recognised, and though he could not

rise to his feet he crawled and rolled desperately away… to answer *his own insane cries*. He tore his hands… many times bruised his head… but still he kept on" (Lovecraft, 2022). Compared to Lovecraft, "Bloodborne" possesses the "Frenzy" mechanic – the physically painful experience of encountering some enemies such as Winter Lanterns, Amygdala, Fly-like enemies in Byrgenwerth and one of the Great Ones, the Brain of Mensis. Moreover, there is an "Insight" mechanic, which governs the amount of inhuman knowledge the protagonist has acquired by exploring the game and defeating enemies. When players gain insight, they will hear several, quick, faint *whispers*. Each additional Insight reduces the "Frenzy" resistance, while showing the player abnormal, horrifying monsters that are invisible (but still able to interact with the player) if the number of Insights is low. "You *see them*? You *see them*? You *see* the *things* that *float* and *flop* about you and through you every moment of your life? You *see* the *creatures* that form what men call the pure air and the blue sky? Have I not succeeded in *breaking down the barrier*; have I not shown you worlds that no other living men *have seen*?" (Lovecraft, 2014), "I *have seen beyond the bounds* of infinity and drawn down daemons from the stars" (Lovecraft, 2014) – the result of receiving the forbidden knowledge in Lovecraft's works leads to madness, just as well as in "Bloodborne".

The encounter with the Great Ones never bears any positive consequences: "I did not tell very much of what *I had seen*. I wish I could believe that doctor. It would help my *shaky nerves* if I could dismiss what I now *have to think* of the air and the sky about and above me. I *never feel alone or comfortable*, and a *hideous sense of pursuit* sometimes comes chillingly on me when I am *weary*." (Lovecraft, 2014) – this is not the worst scenario, as a person can be "turned into dust" or driven completely mad. In "Bloodborne", the matter of things is even worse: "While the Great Ones *use surrogates* as a way to deliver their children, Oedon directly conceives his children, doing so by *impregnating* maiden women *forcefully*. One of his presumed children is Mergo, a product of his union with Yharnam, the Pthumerian Queen. This is highly implied due to Mergo being formless, exactly like his presumed father." (Fromsoftware, 2015). The Great Ones of Bloodborne not only have immense power over the citizens of Yharnam but are also able to create Nightmares and alternate Dream Realms, like in Lovecraft's "The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath", that are not distinguished from reality. This leads to existential dread and a further connection between Lovecraft's creations and "Bloodborne" – blood. The nightmares and dreams in Lovecraft's works are depicted as glimpses into the cosmic terrors that exist beyond the material world or glimpses into the past: in Lovecraft's "Out Of The Aeons" the protagonist examines the eyes of an ancient mummy, which leads to the vision: "...I *shifted* my powerful *lenses* to the mummy's left *eye*…. I *saw* in a morbid flash of half-distinctness the insufferable thing that was welling up through the prodigious trap-door in that Cyclopean, immemorially archaic crypt of a lost world – and fell fainting with an inarticulate shriek of which I am not even ashamed" (Lovecraft & Heald, 2016).

"Bloodborne" shows an almost exact moment of insightful inspection – from *touching* and *looking* at the Beast's *skull* in the Grand Cathedral, the player witnesses a memory, a *vision* of an encounter between Laurence and Willem, in which Willem accuses the younger Laurence of betraying him. A note left on the Cathedral staircase reads: "Place your hand on the altar's sacred covering, and inscribe Master Laurence's adage upon your flesh" (Fromsoftware, 2015). Moreover, when the player defeats Mergo's Wet Nurse, another Great One, there is a message on the screen: "Nightmare Slain".

"Much of the Great Ones might be learnt in such regions, and those *with their blood* might *inherit* little memories *beneficial* to a seeker" (Lovecraft, 2018). "We are *born* of the blood, *made men* by the blood, *undone* by the blood. *Our eyes are yet to open. Fear the Old Blood*," [8, Master Willem]. The blood in Yharnam was used more widely than alcohol, for recreational purposes and as a cure for diseases. Yet the consequences of such usage in the long run were not studied, and, when the citizens of Yhranam began to fall sick with a beast disease, the Healing Church and the Old Blood were the first to fall under suspicions. Blood running in veins is a metaphor for life, an essence of life, without which a human can not live. And when it is mixed with the Old Blood of the dead ancient being – one should expect the consequences. Master Willem's quote serves as a poignant reminder of the transformative and perilous nature of the Old Blood, extracted from the left behind Great One, Ebretias, from ancient ruins, beneath the ground. "These mounds had something to do with the evil world *down there* – they were probably *ancient* closed-up passages to it, for once the Old Ones *below* had had colonies…", – which is another resemblance to Lovecraft's Great Old Ones (Lovecraft & Bishop, 2020). The Old Blood in "Bloodborne'" bears great power and the Healing Church of Yharnam was created around it. Firstly, Old Blood was used as a cure for any possible disease, so that even strangers from other lands came in searches to save themselves, and all people of Yharnam were opposed to the usage of the Old Blood, which made it being produced in larger amounts than alcohol. In "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" the citizens of Innsmouth were also related through the blood to the monsters from the seas (Snyder, 2017).

The notion of cosmic horror is conveyed through various visual adjectives and nouns related to space, unknown knowledge, and incomprehensible forms. One of the best examples that demonstrate it is the "Bloodborne" Great One's Moon Presence's look: an eldritch being composed of *human flesh* and *bone*, except for its head. It is covered in *dozens of tentacles*, mainly in its head, where they resemble hair and tail. Its body is mainly a large human *spine* and *ribs*. Moon Presence *doesn't have a face*, instead it only has a *hole* in its head. It looks somehow similar to Ghatanothoa from "Out Of The Aeons": "I had glimpsed such an unbelievable behemothic monstrosity that I could not doubt the power of its original to kill with its mere sight. Even now I cannot begin to suggest it with any words at my command. I might call it gigantic-*tentacled* -proboscidean-*octopus*

eyed-semi-amorphous- plastic-partly squamous and partly rugose-ugh! But nothing I could say could even adumbrate the loathsome, unholy, *nonhuman*, *extra-galactic* horror and hatefulness and unutterable evil of that forbidden spawn of black chaos and illimitable *night*" (Lovecraft & Heald, 2016). Another Great One from "Bloodborne", Ebrietas, is a monstrous creature that resembles a *slug* with *squid-like tentacles* emerging from her back. Her face appears to *split* in half and is covered in strange *growths* that resemble fungus that surrounds her head (only red *flesh* is seen, so it is possible that she has no real mouth), she has only two oval-shaped green eyes. Ebrietas also possesses a set of skeletal wings that grant her limited flight (Fromsoftware, 2015). The One Reborn, also from "Bloodborne", is born from an unholy Pthumerian ritual that used the bodies of Yharnam's populace, is an *amalgamate* of grotesque *misshapen* and decayed body parts assembled to form *one massive* unliving creature. It has a singular giant humanoid torso attached to the entire mass which controls its entire being, though other parts of its body seem just as independently alive as the humanoid on top of the horrific creature (Fromsoftware, 2015). It reminds Lovecraft's son of Yog-Sothoth, the Dunwich Horror, – "Above the waist it was *semi-anthropomorphic*; though its chest, where the dog's rending *paws* still rested watchfully, had the leathery, reticulated hide of a *crocodile or alligator.* The back was piebald with yellow and black, and dimly suggested the squamous covering of certain snakes. Below the waist, though, it was the worst; for here all human resemblance left off and sheer phantasy began. The skin was thickly covered with coarse black fur, and from the abdomen, *a score of long greenish-grey tentacles* with *red sucking mouths* protruded limply. Their arrangement was odd, and seemed to follow the symmetries of some *cosmic geometry* unknown to Earth or the solar system.", "Oh, oh, my Gawd, that haff *face* – that haff face on top of it . . . that face with the red eyes an' crinkly albino hair, an' no chin, like the Whateleys . . . It was a *octopus*, *centipede*, *spider* kind o' thing, but they was a haffshaped man's face on top of it…" (Lovecraft, 2021a). Amygdala, another "Bloodborne" Great One, is not an exception to a horrifying Lovecraft's fantasies: "Amygdala are monstrous entities with *spider-like bodies*, a short tail and a *head* which is very similar to a part of the brain called the amygdala or amygdaloid body. Their many *bulbous eyes* bulge. They have six-fingered hands on their *seven arms*, and *reptilian* talons on their two legs. Many also sport *tendrils* on their faces" (Fromsoftware, 2015), and the very *cosmic* nature of yet another Great One in "Bloodborne" bears not only its appearance, but also its name – Celestial Emissary, – "The Celestial Emissary is initially disguised as one of the numerous Celestial Minions, and its appearance changes very little when it changes phase, other than significant growth in size and *eyes glowing cosmic blue*" (Fromsoftware, 2015). Yet the truly incomprehensible are those Great Ones, that do not have the form we understand or are capable of perceiving, or describing: "The Old Ones themselves were *half-ghost* – indeed, it was said that they *no longer grew old or reproduced* their kind, but *flickered* eternally *in a state between flesh and spirit*"

(Lovecraft & Bishop, 2020). Lovecraft's Hastur reminds the "Insight" mechanic in "Bloodborne" and the *whispers* that can be heard when obtaining Insights and bears the similarity to "Bloodborne" Great One Oedon, which is seen from the following quotations: "The Unspeakable One, *existing on the periphery of reality*. Hastur's form is *elusive*, manifesting as a swirling *mist of* malevolent *energy*. Its influence is subtle yet pervasive, driving mortals to *madness* with cryptic *whispers*" (Lovecraft, 2017), "Nor is it to be thought that man is either the oldest or the last of earth's masters, or that the common bulk of life and substance walks alone. The Old Ones were, the Old Ones are, and the Old Ones shall be. *Not in the spaces we know, but between them*, they walk *serene* and *primal*, *undimensioned* and to us *unseen*" (Lovecraft, 2021a), "By Their smell can men sometimes know Them near, but *of Their semblance can no man know*, saving only in the features of those They have begotten on mankind; and of those are there many sorts, differing in likeness from man's truest eidolon to that *shape without sight or substance which is Them*. They walk *unseen* and foul in lonely places where the Words have been spoken and the *Rites* howled through at their Seasons. The wind gibbers with Their voices, and the earth mutters with Their *consciousness*" (Lovecraft, 2021a), "Now, as the baying of that *dead, fleshless* monstrosity grows louder and louder…" (Lovecraft, 2021b), and "Unlike the other Great Ones, Oedon is *formless* and only exists as a voice. The reason behind this is uncertain, although some believe that Oedon managed to *ascend* to a higher plane than the rest of his kin" (Fromsoftware, 2015) along with the one about Oedon we have already mentioned above.

There are also a few things we found interesting about Lovecraft's literary details resemblance in "Bloodborne", such as the following quote from "The Hound" – "I shall seek with my *revolver* the *oblivion* which is my only refuge from the *unnamed* and *unnamable*" (Lovecraft, 2021b), and one of the main "Bloodborne" game mechanics, where a Hunter uses their secondary weapon that might be a *gun* as well. With this knowledge, the quotation above acquires an additional, secondary meaning of fighting, not surrendering. Another thing is a character Patches the Spider, who is a Nightmare Apostle in "Bloodborne", a *spider with a man's head*. It reminds Lovecraftian Atlach-Nacha from "The Seven Geases", The *Spider* God: "The dark form ran toward him with incredible swiftness. When it came near he saw that there was *a kind of face on the squat ebon body*, low down amid the several-jointed legs. The *face* peered up with a weird expression of doubt and inquiry; and terror crawled through the veins of the bold huntsman as he met the small, crafty eyes that were circled about with hair" (Lovecraft, 2017).

Vocabulary used to depict the Great Ones is presented in the Table 1:

"Bloodborne"	H. P. Lovecraft
Things	Things
Creatures	Creatures
Formless	Formless
Morbid	Morbid
Tentacles	Insufferable
Face	Immemorial
Behemothic	Archaic
Slug	Tentacles
Squid-like	Face
Tentacles	Behemothic
Covered in strange growths	Gigantic-tentacled
Fungus	Octopus
Red flesh	Squamous
Skeletal	Plastic
Amalgamate	Loathsome
Grotesque	Unholy
Misshapen	Nonhuman
Decayed body parts	Extra-galactic
One massive unliving creature	Unutterable evil
Singular giant humanoid torso	Chaos
Horrific creature	Night
Bulbous eyes	Semi-anthropomorphic
Six-fingered hands on their seven arms	Crocodile
Reptilian	Piebald
Tendrils	Long greenish-grey tentacles
Cosmic	Cosmic geometry
Glowing cosmic blue	Albino
Incomprehensible	Centipede
Elusive	Spider
Undimensioned	Spider-like
Unseen	Incomprehensible
	Half-ghost
	Existing on the periphery of reality
	Elusive
	Mist
	Energy
	Undimensioned
	Unseen
	Fleshless
	Unnamed
	Unnamable
	Squat ebon body

Tab.1. Depiction of the Great Ones in "Bloodborne"and by H. P. Lovecraft

The table 1 shows the correspondence between the Great Ones in "Bloodborne" and the Great Ones in H. P. Lovecraft's works. Vocabulary, notions, and words related/used for visual depiction of the Great Ones bear great similarity, which underlines the resemblance between the compared, although "Bloodborne" has fewer vocabulary units used directly in the game scripts (monologues and dialogues).

Research perspectives. The exploration of H.P. Lovecraft's influence on video games, particularly evident in "Bloodborne," opens avenues for further research. Future studies could delve deeper into several key aspects to enhance our understanding of the interplay between literature, cosmic horror, and gaming. Here are prospective areas for future investigations: comparative analysis with other Lovecraftian games. Future research could extend the comparative analysis to include other video games inspired by Lovecraftian themes. Understanding how different games interpret and integrate Lovecraft's cosmic horror could provide a broader perspective on the varied approaches within the gaming industry.

Narrative structures in Lovecraftian games. A more in-depth examination of non-linear storytelling in Lovecraftian video games would contribute to understanding how narrative structures impact player engagement. Exploring how games like "Bloodborne" utilize ambiguity and environmental storytelling to convey cosmic horror narratives could unveil new insights.

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