Of Shining Sea and Rising Sun: cultural storytelling in the genre of horror in video games

Anna C. Webster
Virginia Commonwealth University

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INTRODUCTION:
Storytelling techniques vary between cultures and across time, but how have they manifested in the new genre of “digital texts”? Storytelling in horror video games seems to divide into two polarized schools: the Eastern School (Japan) and the Western School (USA) of horror. But how? And why?

METHODS:
With the careful analysis of eight video games, four from each respective school, I have been able to identify different themes, mechanics, and techniques used within the horror genre of this unique medium.

WESTERN GAMES:
- Resident Evil 4 (Capcom)
- Five Night’s At Freddy’s Franchise (Cawthon)
- The Evil Within (Tango)
- Outlast (Red Barrels)

EASTERN GAMES:
- Silent Hill Franchise (Konami)
- Rule of Rose (Punchline)
- Fatal Frame 2 (Tecmo)
- Ib (Kouri)

FINDINGS:
Throughout my findings, I assessed certain criteria:
- What features of the games overall create the style of each respective school?
- Why might these features be prevalent in that specific locale/society (based on psychology, anthropology, folklore, etc.)?
- Where might these common themes find origin within the culture: religion? History? Elsewhere?

WESTERN SCHOOL:
- Generally surrounds a white male protag. who has some sort of mission: save the president’s daughter, investigate something, etc.
- Guns, gore, and blood
- Presence of “jump scares”
- Heavily combat-oriented
- Enemies are usually zombies/humanoid creatures

EASTERN SCHOOL:
- Generally surrounds a young woman protag. who is searching for something.
- “Slow burn” concentrating on eerie atmosphere rather than intense combat and jump scares.
- Greater presence of the supernatural (ghosts, demons, monsters, “body horror” etc.).
- Puzzles are used to advance plot, rather than combat.

Reasoning/Origins:
- Blood and gore – desecration of the human body. Engrained fear of Christianity-based sin?
- Presence of combat part of the American psyche due to post-WWI hegemony?

The Breakdown:

Acknowledgements:
UROP – funding (Summer Fellowship 2016)
Brian McTague – Mentor
NCUR 2016 – Opportunity to Present

References: