

Outlasting the Binary: Analysis of Gender and Queer Representation in

Outlast II

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Abstract

The components within Horror Media has been a topic of study for decades. A major gap in the scholarship is how representations within horror media impacts marginalized communities negatively. Using the first-person survival horror game *Outlast II*, I ask how these tropes accentuate the archetypes of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity as well as how they conventionalize individuals that challenge the gender binary. The cutscenes, dialogue, documents, and recordings collected will be analyzed, providing evidence for the forthcoming discussions about the representation of gender and queer communities within this game. Results show that the game emphasizes similar themes commonly found in horror media. These include: the “male protector” and “damsel in distress” archetypes, the violent mistreatment of women, framing sexually transmitted diseases (STD’s) as grotesque, exclusion of primary female characters, stereotyping queer characters, and emphasis on hegemonic masculinity, a term coined by Connell (1987). This case study will provide further evidence for ongoing research on horror media and its use of the gender binary, stereotypical male/female roles, and exclusion of non-stereotypical gender non-conforming or queer characters.

Keywords: videogames, horror, gender binary, hegemonic masculinity, emphasized femininity, queer representation

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Introduction

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a video game as “a game played by electronically manipulating images produced by a computer program on a monitor or other display” (Video Game, n.d.). In comparison to movies, Video games are a different form of media; movies are watched passively, meaning you are detached from the characters movements and their decisions. Whereas in a video game, you are the character; you control the characters movements and their decisions, which unravels more of the story and subsequent gameplay. Each genre is captivating based on its unique features: action games tend to involve fast-paced, more realistic situations in their gameplay, such as the *Call of Duty* (Activision, 2003-2019) series; adventure games tend to lean on puzzles and exploring vast dungeons, such as *The Legend of Zelda* (Nintendo, 1986-2020) series. One hybrid genre has captivated audiences for it’s terrifying and tension-rising gameplay. Out of the action/adventure genre, Horror is considered a subgenre. Within that subgenres are the categories of horror games; one such categorization is Survival Horror.

Survival Horror titles tend to utilize first-person perspectives, adding either psychological traumas or survival tactics as main features of the gameplay. One common survival tactic involves using weapons to fight off hordes of enemies, as seen in the *Resident Evil* (Capcom, 1996-2019) or *Silent Hill* (Konami, 1999-2014) series. Kirkland (2009) mentions that the survival horror genre tends to limit the players' agency—the capability of being fully independent or using one’s own will—by either closing the player into a confined space, limiting resources, or restricting movement (3). One particular series, the *Outlast* series, utilizes survival tactics that cause the most panic; run or hide. There is a feeling of protection in survival horror games when the player is given a weapon or other means to protect themselves from the

monsters that bump in the night. In *Outlast*, this is taken away, which adds a new level of difficulty for the player by removing the choice to fight off their assailants; the assailants who are twice as strong and almost as fast as the player. Thus, the player is forced to hide in particular areas. Failure to hide in the correct locker or slowing the attacker could mean certain death.

I investigate what the gendered dynamics are within the video game *Outlast II*, and how those gender dynamics further support traditional gender roles and heteronormative displays. In addition, I question the representation of gender-variant characters and their role in *Outlast II*; and how their portrayal subsequently negatively affects the gender non-conforming community. In this analysis, I argue that the common themes used in horror media—while effective in scaring individuals—can have an adverse effect on the communities they represent. I propose that the themes found in this case study will highlight the repetitive themes of violence and other forms of negative influence on women and those within the queer community. The structure of this paper is as follows: I review the literature on gender representation in video games, and representation of the queer community in video games. The paper will then explain the methodology for the case study, then transition into a short introduction to the developers of the games. Following, the paper will go into the direction of discussing the gameplay and plot for *Outlast II*. The paper will end with a discussion of the findings, including limitations and future research.

Literature Review

Games and Gender Representation

A study done by Melinda Burgess and Stephen Burgess (2007) analyzed the portrayals of women and men in video game covers. The researchers did a content analysis of two hundred and twenty-five console covers and found that male characters were four times more likely to be

portrayed than female characters. In addition, female characters were more likely to be hypersexualized, and were often objectified. The researchers also found that sex and violence were frequently portrayed with the female characters; males were more frequently associated with their muscular physiques. The researchers discuss the impact such portrayals could have on the gamers since they are more likely to show unrealistic expectations of male and female body image.

In a similar vein, researchers Dill and Thill (2007) did a content analysis of images of video game characters from top-selling gaming magazines in the United States. Their content analysis showed that male characters are more likely than female characters to be seen as aggressive and hyper-masculinized, whereas females are more likely to be depicted as showing a mix of sex and aggression, amplifying hyper-femininity and female stereotypes. The first study by Dill and Thill (2007) involved trained undergraduate psychology students as “raters” to analyze the images in the following six gaming magazines: *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, *PC Gamer*, *Game Informer*, *The Official Xbox Magazine*, *Computer Gaming World*, and *GamePro*. Criteria included categorizing oversexualized females as “curvaceously thin,” a term coined by Harrison (2003) due to his previous research of stereotypical male and female portrayal in media. Males were categorized as hypermasculine if they fit into the stereotypical masculine man; chiseled features and facial expressions of power or dominance. Females were rated based on video game depiction of beauty, described by Dietz (1998). A total of 479 images of video game characters were analyzed.

Results found that 59.9 percent of female video game characters fit into the oversexualized/”curvaceously thin” category. Female characters also dominated the scantily clad category, with females totaling 38.7 percent and 8.1 percent of males. 82.6 percent of males in

comparison to 62.2 percent of females were depicted as aggressive. Stereotypical portrayals were a common occurrence, with 33.1 percent of male characters were depicted as hypermasculine and 62.6 percent of females were considered beautiful. In addition, 26.6 percent showed overlapping characteristics of beauty, hypersexualization, and being scantily clad. 32.5 percent of males were rated as both hypermasculine and aggressive (858). Overall, the researchers found that women are underrepresented in video game magazine articles and advertisements.

After coders determined synonyms of the recorded responses, participants stated that a typical male video game character is described as powerful, aggressive, hostile, and athletic. A typical female video game character is under-dressed, curvaceously thin, large sexual prowess, and aggressive. Interestingly enough, the data showed that words such as helpless, victim, subservient, polite, pretty, and bitchy were synonymous with stereotypical female video game characters. Words that were synonymous with males were warrior, superhero, rage, asshole, and cool (860). From this evidence, it is shown that gender representation in video games reflects the rest of the industry: cisgender male centered. This centering also leans more to heterosexual men, as those who are Queer are placed in the background.

Games and LGBTQIA+3 Representation

Researcher Shaw (2012) went through an online message board targeting the 'gay male community' (71). After a month of posing questions to the site, Shaw started to interview individual members about their experience with LGBTQIA representation in video games. Within the group of interviewees, Shaw found five female-identifying members, four male-identifying members outside the US, and 4 male-identifying members outside the US. Through the interviews, it was found that the US, UK, and Canada are more representative of the LGBTQIA3+ community than other countries. Female-identifying members of the site were only

recognized as lesbians. Shaw found that the representation was needed, but it needed to be careful in its use to avoid tokenizing LGBTQIA3+ characters. One interviewee stated that all forms of identity, including sexuality and gender identity, are important for not only character development but also important for emphasizing storyline and plot (78). From his interviews, Shaw found that the lack of LGBTQIA3+ representation in video games is due to two factors: first being that “non-normative genders” and “sexuality formations” are issues that do not belong in fantasy games. The second being that with accurately representing the LGBTQIA3+ community, comes the discussion of homophobia, transphobia, and other issues that sit within the community. The final theme is taking the politics out of LGBTQIA3+ communities, which poses an issue in of itself. On the topic of media representation, Gaymers do not want to be recognized as a token character. One interviewee states: “we want good games. If those games happened to include non-binary, non-normative gender roles, and non-heterosexual relationships and references, all the better” (78). The main argument is that the lack of diversity in gaming markets--in other words, games that are not bought by cisgendered, heterosexual men--is one of the reasons why there is an underrepresentation of those in the LGBTQIA3+ community.

Shaw mentions that “the focus on gender in isolation is problematic as it presumes a mutual exclusivity of gender and sexuality (not to mention race, class, etc.), and internal consistency among those who identify as with a particular gender or sexual identity label” (79). Shaw summarized that, because of the cacophony of issues that come with wanting accurate representation of other communities in games, ‘gaymers’ would rather have a lack of LGBTQIA3+ representation in games rather than being recognized via stereotypes. One interviewee states that “representation is always a balancing act; one must mobilize tropes of homosexuality and bisexuality without becoming too stereotypical and make sexuality relevant

but not exceptional” (80). If there were to be a representation of LGBTQIA3+ characters, developers should take warning as to how said characters are portrayed in their game.

Shaw and Frisem (2016) analyzed 300 games with more than 500 examples between 1985-2016. They analyzed LGBTQIA3+ characters, their sexualities, their relationships, their gender, and their actions; as well as how they are mentioned in-game. The exploration of sexualities outside what is heteronormative is rare in video games, but even the exceptions are something to consider whether or not it is inclusive to the LGBTQIA3+ community. The examples that were included were Trevor Phillips in *Grand Theft Auto V*, Curtis Craig, in *Phantasmagoria: A Puzzle of Flesh*, and Hana in *Fear Effect 2: Retro Helix* all of whom are recognized in-game as bisexual (4). However, most characters that are openly part of the LGBTQIA3+ community are non-playable characters (NPC), and some will not mention their sexuality if it is not prompted by specific choices of dialogue or gameplay. This point shows that characters are implied to be heterosexual unless otherwise stated, and this then tokenizes the characters that are claimed to be members of the LGBTQIA3+ community as they are outside of heteronormativity; in addition, they are normally unplayable characters, which leaves out the chance of LGBTQIA3+ players finding a character that they relate to.

In terms of their gender, most of those from the LGBTQIA3+ community who identify as transgender, non-binary, genderqueer, or intersex characters are less likely to be presented in the game. While an example of a rumored intersex character is Kainé in *Nier*, explicitly stated transgender men are even less likely to be presented in games. The researchers noted that there are many cases of transgender women, but in many cases, their gender is treated as a problem that must be dealt with by the other characters. It is also noted that to further emphasize that the character is transgender, “transgender men and women are often voiced by actors whose gender

is opposite of their own” (6). This analysis further demonstrates that those who are presumed to be transgender are more likely to experience negative feedback from either the playable characters (PC’s), the NPC’s, or from the narrative. In the review, Shaw and Friesem use the example of one of the games Birdo has guest-starred which states that she has an “indeterminate gender” and was in another game arrested for “using the wrong bathroom” (6).

Actions in games for the LGBTQIA3+ community are shown to be outlandishly stereotypical. Fighting games will use homoerotic finishing moves or, for larger titles, cross-dressing may be implemented to complete certain parts of the game. An example used in the review included Cloud from *Final Fantasy VII* dressing as a woman to gain access to a brothel. Another more recent example would be Link from *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*, in which the hero must get into Gerudo Vai dress to enter Gerudo town because only women are allowed in the city. The researchers stated that the act of cross-dressing and the emphazitions of stereotypical homoeroticism is mainly used in games for its humor, and therefore not seen as something worthy of a more serious role. Another topic mentioned in the review is on transphobia and homophobia. It is noted that characters can and in some cases will be chastised if the PC does not take interest in the opposite sex or does something that is not considered heteronormative (9).

An analysis of one specific type of representation is androgyny in video games and the issues that surround both androgynous heroes and villains. Harper, Adams, and Taylor (2018) discussed the issues of androgynous characters and their representations. As discussed, androgynous characters are recognized as being male while attempting to exude feminine qualities. Androgynous characters are misrepresented and influence stereotypes. These characters are presented in games to be “variously humorous, pitiable, or monstrous, and often

all three” (147). Their analysis wanted to acknowledge the video games acceptance of androgyny as “masculine-skewed” and therefore pleasing, while also being unacceptable. As the researchers have stated, “these differing valuations center maleness and innate masculinity as normative and present gender-variance—and implicitly femininity—as inherently wrong” (148). The researchers have found that, even with those characters who are labeled to be androgynous, they are seen as white, able-bodied, thin, and masculine. The researchers explained that those qualities are seen as a “neutral” state of androgyny while others--such as being feminine, racially diverse, or fat--are seen as deviations from the norm.

Androgynous heroes have an absence of pronounced secondary sex characteristics. A typical hero will wear gender-neutral clothing, but nothing overly feminine such as heels or skirts. So, while the character is to be identified as androgynous, the characters dress and mannerisms are that of a more masculine nature. As discussed by the researchers, this skewing of masculinity as being “neutral” and femininity as abnormal further exemplifies that the gaming industry has a certain look for androgynous characters; the neutrality that gaming companies try to exude is playing into more masculine qualities (Adams, Harper, and Taylor, 2018). It is not just androgynous heroes that suffer this neutrality; it is also the villains who experience misrepresentation of androgyny.

Harper, Adams, and Taylor (2018) state that any gender conflict is within the realm of villainous characters. The gender non-conforming villain reinforces the gender binary given that certain identifiers are used to show the gender variance of the character; those identifiers are normally exclusive to male or female, which uses gender variance as a symbol of villainy. Video game depictions of androgynous villains often include vainness, obsession with beauty, clothing, and speech (155). They also often hate women and are portrayed as narcissistic. As explained,

these depictions fall on the stereotypes of transgender women and gay men: gender non-conforming villains are normally sexually predatory and will prey on men and “trick” them into having sex with them. They add that these depictions “reveal the gender essentialist core of mainstream video game culture: supposedly conflicting gender signifiers mixed-signal otherness and villainy” (155). Examples used included Birdo in Super Mario Bros. (Nintendo, 1988), Poison from Final Fight (Capcom, 1989), Vega from Street Fighter (Capcom, 1991), Flea from Chrono Trigger (Square Enix, 1995), Duvall from Resident Evil: Dead Aim (Capcom, 2003), and Sander Cohen in BioShock (2K Games, 2007). The researchers found that these intermixed gender identifiers are typically depicted as attractive, which when added with the character's perceived level of vanity, makes the character overall seem pathetic. The notion that feminine and masculine gendered identifiers are seen as attractive separately and unattractive when combined gives the depiction of perverse gender signification, which is influenced by androgynous villains.

Using Birdo as an example, researchers have seen that, even though Birdo has female-identifying physicality's (i.e., pink bow, pink skin, eyelashes), they use he/him pronouns and is thus gender nonconforming; not only this, but it is seen on Birdo's trophy in Super Smash Brothers Brawl (Nintendo, 2008) that they are “a creature of indeterminate gender.” However, their representation in the Super Mario Bros. game is lackluster. That same year, a Japan-only release game titled Captain Rainbow depicted Birdo being arrested for entering a women's restroom. It is also seen in-game that the player must find proof that Birdo is female. The evidence used was a “vibrating object hidden under her pillow, blacked out with a purple question mark, heavily implied to be a sex toy” (156). This plays into the stereotype that only women use sex toys. Also, this game references the persecution and violence gender non-

conforming folk must face through the supposed “bathroom bills” that have come to fruition in certain parts of the U.S. Since the release of this game, Nintendo has tried to hyper-feminize Birdo; this can be speculated that Nintendo, possibly facing backlash from fans about the character, is using trans-erasure by hyper-feminizing a character that has already been seen to be gender ambiguous. What is most interesting about this character in the Super Mario Bros. series is that Birdo was originally a villain. In Western examples, gender non-conforming villains normally embody stereotypes of “transgender identification, drag theatricality, and queerness” (157). Researchers have mentioned that the discomfort with gender non-conformity is reflected in the gaming industry as being transphobic and homophobic. Not only this, but androgynous villains are connected to androgynous heroes in a way such that “their maleness is their true gender, in contrast to feminine artifice” (159).

Methodology

I played *Outlast II* on a Nintendo Switch console. I played the game first in “story mode,” allowing myself the time to collect all recordings and documents. I replayed the game on normal difficulty to fully experience the nature of the gameplay. My gameplay time totaled at ten hours and fifty-four minutes. When playing “Story Mode” on the Nintendo Switch copy of *Outlast II*, I died a total of two times. In “Normal Mode,” I died a total of seven times. I then analyzed the contents within the comic book, *The Murkoff Account*, as it both adds context to the events unfolding and involves characters that are important to the plot but are not seen in-game. When analyzing the other difficulties and how it affected the gameplay, I resorted to “Let’s Play’s” and online walkthroughs. A “Let’s Play” is when a content creator films themselves playing a video game; this is normally seen on YouTube, and many Let’s Player’s film with another camera recording their reactions as they play; this is known as a “face cam.” When analyzing the content

collected throughout the game, I transcribed the text within the documents, dialogues, and recordings in order to come to my conclusions of gender representation and queer representation in this game and in horror media. My gameplay was not increased due to reading documents or re-watching recordings, as I analyzed the recordings and documents once they were collected on the main menu screen. These methods were beneficial in not just seeing this game from an academic perspective, but from the perspective of a consumer. As a consumer, I wanted to interpret the gameplay first-hand without the influence of other opinions seen in “Let’s Plays” or other online walkthroughs. Replaying the game allowed going back to specific points in the game to reference dialogue and re-read documents, both of which were extensively referenced in my study. In addition, physically playing the game (rather than observing the gameplay) allowed a fully immersive experience; when playing the game, you can only allow yourself to put your attention to so many situations or objects at one time.

Outlast: Background Information

Founding Story

Formerly known as Red Barrels Games, Red Barrels Incorporated (Red Barrels Inc.) is an independent video game company with headquarters located in Montreal, Canada. It was founded by senior game designer David Chateaufneuf, senior artist Hugo Dallaire, and senior game designer Phillippe Morin, who had all worked at Ubisoft Montreal and EA Montreal, companies that produced games such as *Assassin's Creed* and *Army of Two* (redbarrelsgames.com). The summary of their first title, *Outlast*, involves a freelance journalist, Miles Upshur, investigating the horrors within Mount Massive Asylum. What he discovers are patients, known as “variants,” who escaped their confines and murdered all personnel. They are all insane due to the experiments they were succumbed to, what is then known as Project

Walrider and The Morphogenic Engine; both of which will be explained in depth later. The downloadable content (DLC) of the first game, *Outlast: Whistleblower*, is a prequel to *Outlast*, explaining the events that caused the patients to escape and the Asylum to fall into shambles. The most recent title in the series, *Outlast II*, is a continuation of the first game and DLC, expanding further on what had happened after the Mount Massive Asylum breakout.

Marketing for The Outlast Series

Marketing for the games were posted on the companies Facebook and Twitter accounts. The developers are most active on their Twitter page. It is shown on their Twitter that the developers are interacting with their fanbase via replying to comments, retweeting fanart, and retweeting reviews of their games. More recently, the Red Barrels team posted a picture on their Twitter of a beer with the *Outlast* title and Red Barrels logo on the bottle, decorated with a wooden cross (Figure 1). The beer was crafted by the brewery Le Trou de Diable. This could be a marketing tactic for an upcoming title *The Outlast Trials*, which does not have a confirmed release date.



Figure 1: Tweet of Outlast beer, from Red Barrels Twitter account. Notice the male executioner. From Red Barrels [@TheRedBarrels] (2019, November, 27). Thank you to @MEGAexpomtl/@MIGS for an awesome event! Special thanks to all those who stopped by to say hello & try our beer, created by the talented brewers at @troududiable The team is back in the studio and more inspired than ever! [Tweet]. Twitter.

Based on their marketing tactics, it clear that the Red Barrels team is devoted to making their fanbase happy by producing quality content. A recurring pattern seen in this series though, including with their marketing, is it tends to lean towards a more male-dominated audience. One example are the two main antagonists for their respective titles, both of which are male. Male characters are more likely to appear in video games than females, leading them to be under-represented concerning the actual US population. The Entertainment Software Association in 2009 found that 60 percent of gamers are male and 40 are female. When females do appear, they are secondary characters rather than primary ones (Williams et. al, 820). The *Outlast* beer is another example of a male-dominating audience. Beer commercials tend to influence hyper-masculinity (Strate, 1992), and alcohol use tends to influence men's desire to confirm their own masculinity (Fugitt & Ham, 2018). The bottle was pictured next to the concept art of an executioner from *Outlast II*, of which all of them are men. Within the three titles of the *Outlast*

series, there is an overwhelming amount of male characters and extremely limited female characters.

The Gameplay of the Outlast Series

Outlast is a first-person perspective survival horror game. The player must either run or hide from the enemies in the game; combat is not an option. However, the enemies can and will look in areas that the player can hide in; in the first game, enemies are known to open the locker nearest the one the player is hiding in to unnerve the player. Being found in one of these areas will result in being pulled from the hiding place and attacked.

Outlast's real terror comes from the chase scenes. There are a plethora of chances to be chased in the game. When being chased, there are obstacles the player must avoid in order to keep distance between themselves and the enemy. These include launching over objects, squeezing through tight spaces, and closing doors to slow the enemies progress. To escape the chase, the player must either hide until the pursuer looks elsewhere or get to the next checkpoint. The player is only equipped with a video camera, which is used to record the horrors the protagonists are witnessing. The camera has night vision, which is used most throughout the game to navigate through the dimly-lit areas. The camera is used to record events, and some events will trigger notes that are written for the player to read. These notes are used throughout the game to add personal commentary from the protagonist, and to add story-building to the environment. Furthermore, most of the story-building is found through documents lying in empty rooms. The documents discovered give context to the environment around the protagonist, and the player must seek the documents out to understand what had happened before, during, and after certain events. In *Outlast II*, an important event will be prompted to record when the camera flashes a beeping red 'REC' symbol, with a circle filling itself around the object being recorded

(Figure 2). The camera is battery operated, and so the player must actively seek out misplaced batteries to avoid the camera dying. In the first game, the player can hold up to ten batteries; this amount changes based on the difficulty the player chooses at the beginning of the game.

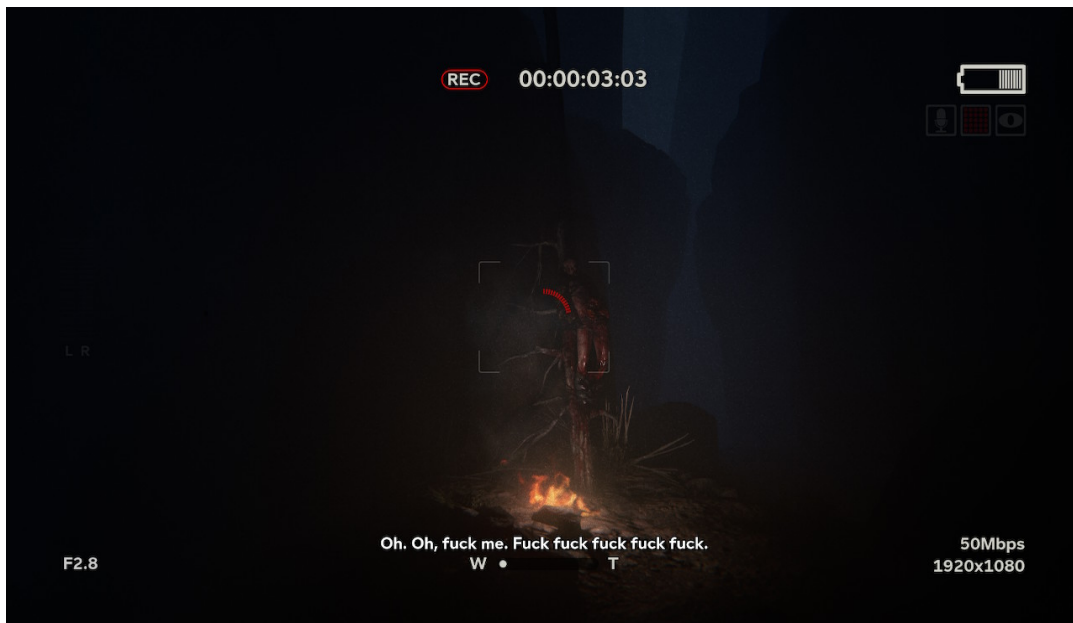


Figure 2: Screenshot of Recording Prompt as seen in Outlast II. Notice the red circle beginning to form (Red Barrels, 2017).

The player gets to choose the difficulty in the *Outlast* series. The game has five difficulties, ranging from least to most difficult: Story Mode, Normal, Hard, Nightmare, and Insane. Story Mode is different from the other difficulties in that the enemies are less observant and deal less damage to the player, allowing to fully immerse themselves into the story. While the storyline, recorded events, recorded notes, or document locations do not change, the more difficult the mode, the more limited amount of batteries to be found. In addition, the enemies of the game become more difficult and more cunning, making it easier for them to find the player and kill them in fewer hits. The most challenging of the difficulties, Insane Mode, does not

autosave; if the player dies during gameplay, they lose all of their progress and must start from the beginning.

The gameplay in *Outlast II* has changed from that of its predecessors. In the first game, the player portrayed a freelance journalist who was nimble and fast, not changing even the slightest of pace when being chased down dark hallways and through small spaces in the walls of the asylum. In *Outlast II*, the environment is more open, set in the rural outskirts of Arizona. Not only this, but the protagonist wears glasses and has little stamina, forcing the player to conserve the act of running. There were not any instances where Blake had to traverse through the environment without his glasses. The camera equipped includes the game's signature night vision and a microphone to use when hidden to detect nearby enemies. The camera battery life is diminished quicker when using the microphone or night vision. The story of *Outlast II* is broken into six chapters: *Genesis*, *Job*, *Lamentations*, *Judges*, *Leviticus*, and *Revelation*. The notes are replaced by auditory commentary from the protagonist. The protagonist is also given the ability to heal himself via bandages, which adds another layer of difficulty; if he does not heal himself, the player risks dying by one blow of another enemy, resulting in a game over.

The Plot of Outlast II

The description of *Outlast II* on the Red Barrels site reads:

“You are Blake Langermann, a cameraman working with your wife, Lynn. The two of you are investigative journalists willing to take risks and dig deep to uncover the stories no one else will dare touch. You're following a trail of clues that started with the seemingly impossible murder of a pregnant woman known only as Jane Doe. The investigation has lead you miles into the Arizona desert, to a darkness so deep that no one

could shed light upon it, and a corruption so profound that going mad may be the only sane thing to do.” (Red Barrels, 2017).

The beginning of the game starts with a black screen, with a voice begging Blake to help her as a man chases after her. Blake awakens to his wife, Lynn Langermann, scolding him for being asleep. The two begin filming the beginning segment of their story for Newstomorrow.net. The Langermann’s go to the Havasupai reservation, located in Arizona, in search of any evidence regarding Jane Doe, who was found wandering the outskirts of the reservation eight months pregnant and had died in the hospital due to unforeseen circumstances. As they are flying over the reservation, a bright light and sound erupts, causing the engine to fail and the helicopter to crash.

Blake “wakes” again in a hallway of a seemingly abandoned Catholic school, which is later to be discovered as his elementary school of St. Sybil. As Blake tries to catch up to a man further up the hallway, the doors in front of him slam shut, and he is greeted by a young girl. In what is presumed to be an homage to the signature elevator scene in *The Shining*, a wash of blood bursts in, submerging both the girl and Blake. The personal afflictions Blake encounters are from flashbacks indicated in-game by a booming horn sound and blinding white light. Blake is then transported to a particular night during the fourth grade, in which he found the body of his friend Jessica Gray at the bottom of the staircase, neck broken. In reality, Jessica was murdered by their music teacher, Father Loutermilch. Feeling as though it is his fault, Blake continues to revisit the school during certain sequences in the game, collecting clues that recount of the night Jessica was murdered. The complete memory starts with Blake and Jessica staying late after school. Jessica taunts Blake, asking him about a school play in which he is to kiss his future wife, Lynn. It is unknown whether Blake is aware of Jessica’s feelings for him. As the two make

their way out of the school, Father Loutermilch stops them in the hall and asks why they were staying so late; his tone insinuates that he thinks they were doing something inappropriate. The guilt continues as Loutermilch asks Blake to leave while he speaks with Jessica alone. Seeing Jessica's hesitancy to be left alone with the Father, Blake only leaves after being forced out. As he rounds the corner of one of the hallways, he hears Jessica scream, and runs to her aide. When he opens the stairwell, he sees Jessica's body laying at the bottom, her neck broken. Loutermilch covered Jessica's death as a suicide, writing her "suicide note" on a chalkboard in the music room. In those dream sequences, Blake is chased by a naked monster whose body is protruding with tongues and hands; this monster has the same birthmark on his forehead as Loutermilch, so the monster represents Loutermilch and his perverse nature.

Blake regains consciousness and, as he observes the wreckage, the absence of his wife. When Blake tries to find help in a small village, he is chased by Marta, who is one of the main antagonists of the game. It is revealed later that Marta is the enforcer of Temple Gate, executing both followers and strangers alike when prompted or provoked. When Blake reaches a chapel, he overhears cult leader "Papa" Sullivan Knoth tell his followers that the end times are near, and the pregnant woman they found, Lynn, is harboring the antichrist. Killing her is the only chance of reversing the apocalypse. Lynn is seen jumping out a nearby window moments later, and the two reunite for a brief moment. Their reunion is short lived however, as the Langermann's are ambushed by Temple Gate residents, who are then killed by The Heretics. The Heretic leader, Val, knocks Lynn unconscious and steals her away. Once they leave, Blake goes further into Temple Gate to find information on where Lynn was taken.

Ethan, an exiled Temple Gate follower, explains to Blake that Knoth rapes the women of Temple Gate, resulting in many pregnancies. His daughter, Anna Lee, was one of the women

who was forced to consummate with him, and the “Jane Doe” that Blake and Lynn are investigating. As a result of one of Knoth’s messages from God, Knoth orders that any existing children and children born into Temple Gate are to be murdered as they could be the antichrist. In addition, Knoth has syphilis, and those who have had the disease long enough to no longer hide their sores are sent to live in a camp away from the commune; they are called The Scalled. Ethan is killed by Marta in an attempt to keep Blake hidden. Blake discovers Lynn’s whereabouts via a tortured Heretic, in which she is being held under the mines near Temple Gate. Blake, on his way to the mines, gets attacked by The Scalled and taken to the co-founder of Temple Gate and ex-deacon Laird Byron and his partner Nick Tremblay. Laird Byron believes Blake to be the Messiah; his crucifixion, burial, and consuming of his flesh will lift the “sickness” off of Scalled so that they may return to Temple Gate. Blake is then nailed to a cross and then buried in a makeshift coffin. He manages to escape both the cross and the coffin and leaves the camp after witnessing the death of Laird Byron and Nick at the hands of The Scalled. Blake takes a raft across the lake to get to the opening of the mines. It is within this part of the game that Blake can see the environment is embodying the plagues mentioned in the book of Exodus: raining blood, dead fish/birds, flies, death of livestock, boils, and locusts.

Blake falls into the Heretic temple found within the mines. At the center of a large orgy is a pained and visibly pregnant Lynn. He is then ambushed by Val, who wishes for Blake to join in their orgy as they celebrate the hastening of the end times. He manages to escape during another school hallucination. The Langermann’s escape to the chapel, where Lynn gives birth on a Rack. She stares at the baby in disbelief, stating, “there’s nothing there,” before dying. Blake falls unconscious and awakens to Knoth telling Blake to kill his newborn baby for the sake of the world, then takes a dagger to his own throat. Blake goes outside to see the entirety of the cult has

killed themselves via cyanide poisoning. As he goes past the carnage, Blake is blinded by the sun. When his vision clears he is back in St. Sybil and is greeted by Jessica, who leads him into a room before they start to pray. The screen fades to black, and the game ends.

Analysis of *Outlast II*

Gender Representation (Or Lack Thereof)

The concepts of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity were coined by Connell (1987) in order to understand the relationship between gender and power. As Dill and Thill (2007) explain:

According to Connell's theory, which we refer to as Hegemonic Masculinity Theory (HMT), masculinity and femininity are always constructed in relation to each other, rather than independently. Socially prescribed masculinity is an understood ideal, and though not attainable for many, includes power, aggressiveness, material success, and heterosexual conquest. Emphasized femininity is only construed in relation to this hegemonic masculinity; women exist for men's sexual titillation and ego stroking, to mother children, and generally to serve men. Under HMT, sexist images in the media exist, not to reflect day-to-day reality, but as a necessary force that sustains the socially held ideals of masculinity, femininity, and, most importantly, of the dominance (e.g., in business, government, and bed) of men over women (854).

This theory suggests that masculinity and femininity are constructed simultaneously, and this simultaneous growth leads to the tropes seen within the context of hegemonic masculinity—such as aggressiveness, “heterosexual conquest,” and male privilege—and emphasized femininity—i.e., being an object of desire, an object to dominate, or an object used for servicing other males

and his children. This theory is visible throughout media to maintain societal ideals of what it means to be masculine and to be feminine.

Another theory that supports the heteronormative tropes of masculinity and femininity is the Ambivalent Sexism Theory (Glick et al, 2004). This theory premises that our social structure is powered by a male-dominated hierarchy and the women are portrayed to be submissive. The members of the society hold hostile attitudes towards the sexes which include “three content domains: paternalism (power differences), gender differentiation (roles and stereotypes), and heterosexual relations” (715). It is explained further by Dill and Thill (2007):

Benevolent attitudes toward men include the stereotypes that men are instrumental, respectable, and powerful, while hostile attitudes include the beliefs that men are arrogant, unscrupulous, and aggressive. In contrast, women are stereotyped as warm and likeable, but also as weak and submissive. In the domain of heterosexual relations, this means women are the objects of men’s desire and exist to satisfy men’s needs as opposed to being sexual agents with their own desires. Media stereotypes perpetuate inequality by telling sexist stories about gender and power and about the relationship between men and women (5).

For the forthcoming discussions of the gender binary, and for those who go against it, it is beneficial to explore previous research conducted on nonbinary communities. Helana Darwin (2018) attempts to answer the questions in regards to those who withstand the gender binary. Questions such as: “How do people attempt to do gender beyond the binary? Under what circumstances does nonbinary (NB) gender become recognizable—and thus successful—according the interactionist model? Does this doing of non-binary gender contribute toward the redoing or undoing of (binary) gender?” (330). Using the server Reddit, Darwin (2018) found

that those in non-binary communities or those who label themselves as non-binary do not all follow similar “rules” to being non-binary; individuals express their nonbinary gender differently. Darwin (2018) finds that this difference of expressing nonbinary gender contributes toward the reconstruction of gender—specifically the gender binary—and to be more inclusive to gender identities outside of identifying oneself as masculine or feminine. She adds that nonbinary individuals are not transgender, but rather their own separate gender identity. Darwin (2018) states:

Indeed, it appears that NBs are held accountable to binary misconceptions of transgender during their interactions with others and even within their own internal dialogues. Due to this binary accountability that they experience within the transgender identity category, some NBs reject the label altogether. It may be more accurate to say that NBs are not “doing transgender,” so much as they are *redoing* transgender, by expressing themselves in a manner that challenges these transnormative scripts. In other words, perhaps NBs do not simply “do gender” or “do transgender” so much as they challenge binary accountability within both scripts by “doing nonbinary gender” as a unique interactive process unto itself...it is apparent that institutionalized gender ideology is beginning to shift in recognition of NBs’ existence (330-331).

The Ambivalent Sexism Theory (AST), in conjunction with the Hegemonic Masculinity Theory (HMT), are frameworks of which I will use to discuss the mistreatment of the women at the expense of either a man’s personal gain or following the orders given to them by another man.

The exploitation and neglect of women is a common theme within *Outlast II*. In the game, women are forced to conform to stereotypical female “roles.” This includes being

objectified by the male gaze and recognized as either an object to offer or to rescue. Any objection of female roles seen from women result in agonizing death. Examples include Lynn Langermann and Marta. Lynn Langermann and Jessica Gray are two examples of damsels in distress, in which they rely on the assistance of the male protector; in this case, the male protector being Blake. Marta is a reiteration of the old, evil hag trope, commonly seen in horror movies as the evil witch or the terrifying “aging woman.” There is also mention of mistreated women who are apart of the LGBTQIA+3 community; this character being Pauline Glick from *The Murkoff Account* comic. Other examples of neglected women are Mary and the woman seen in the recording “The Showroom.” These women are used as objects of the male gaze, either being used as an interrogation tactic or forced to consummate with the cult leader, Papa Knoth. This mistreatment is shown through specific archetypes of hyper-femininity and hyper-masculinity. Examples such as: The Damsel in Distress and The Male Protector. Lynn Langermann is the first example of women being controlled by the confines of emphasized femininity.

Emphasized Femininity: The Mistreatment of Women in Outlast II

Lynn is a freelance journalist for Newstomorrow.net and the wife of Blake Langermann. In the document “Heaven’s Gate Subjects,” (See Appendix B, Figure 1) she is described as “ambitious, keenly aware of the corrupt state of the world, and eager to find the story that will make her career.” (Red Barrels, 2017). This description illustrates why Lynn takes the initiative to investigate the murder of Jane Doe even though the police report states that she “strangled herself to death” (Red Barrels, 2017). The Jane Doe was identified as Anna Lee, a member of Temple Gate who was forcefully impregnated by Knoth and was murdered by Pauline Glick in the hospital (Petty, *The Murkoff Account*, Issue 5, 20). Lynn is depicted as being the strong

female lead; she goes through great lengths to find the truth about another woman and exudes a powerful presence. In the game, there are only three moments where the player can interact with her: before the helicopter crash, the moments before she is captured by Val and The Heretics, and the moments leading up to the birth of the antichrist. There are moments within these interactions that are similar to stereotypes of women that should be established.

The following conversation marks the first interaction with Lynn. This interaction happens after Lynn wakes Blake from his dream:

Lynn: "Jesus, Blake, were you really sleeping?"

Blake: "I'm awake."

Lynn: "You should have slept last night."

Blake: "I had to get that hospital footage organized."

Lynn: "You were calling out some other woman's name."

Blake: "What?"

Lynn: "In your sleep. Jessica, I think."

Lynn: "You know a Jessica?"

Lynn states this in an accusatory tone, crossing her arms across her chest and raising an eyebrow at Blake. Blake stutters a response:

Blake: "Oh. No. I was just thinking of Jessica Gray? From when we were kids?"

Lynn: "Ah. Yeah. I haven't thought about her in ages" (Red Barrels, 2017).

This scene, while minor, shows a common trope seen within female characters in media. It is evident in this interaction that Lynn was jealous over Blake calling out another woman's name. Blake's tone as he explains himself is somewhat nervous, as he stumbles over his words before stammering out a reply. Seeing Lynn's interaction with her husband start with chastising,

then accusation, then guilt shows the player parts of Lynn's character: she becomes jealous quickly, and she instructs Blake to do anything she tells him to. In this interaction, Lynn's personality can fall into a stereotype of the "bossy female." This trope can be explained through Lynn's profession. In the workplace, it is seen as a double-bind if women are seen to embody masculine traits such as ambition, which in turn the general public view as being bossy, while for men the traits are seen as exhibiting great leadership and are admired (Frye 2005, 88-90). It is discussed in Ridgeway's (1997) work that gender status plays a large role regarding the inequalities of women in the workplace. Ridgeway (1997) found that gender status creates gendered behaviors. For example, people will judge males "as more competent and more worthy of reward than equivalent women, to miss or discount information in the situation that undermines gender stereotypes, and to perceive an implicit status threat in the equal rewarding of equivalent men and women" (226). Lynn's job as a freelance journalist leads her to exude typical "masculine" qualities: ambition, leadership, initiative, etc, qualities that defy expectations of emphasized femininity. Because Lynn is female, these common masculine traits depict her as being domineering or imperious. In addition, Lynn's interactions with other men in-game are harsh, barking orders and exhibiting behavior—such as swearing—that is considered "unladylike." This is another example of Lynn being caught within a double-bind, as women who do not exhibit explicit feminine behaviors are categorized as a whore (85). It is due to these double-binds that Lynn is categorized to be bossy or, more explicitly, "bitchy."

This bossy female trope is seen in other horror video game females. Byman (2019) discusses the theories surrounding gender politics in another horror game, titled *Until Dawn* (Supermassive Games, 2015). One female character, Emily Davis, is written to be "the bitchy woman, meant for the universal subject player to hate. Since Emily has been constructed as a

stubborn and bitchy woman” (632). In this context, Lynn, based on her short interactions with Blake, is also written to be “the bitchy woman.” This is seen in her interaction with Blake in the helicopter, and her aggressive—but valid—attitude towards the Temple Gate acolytes. What Byman explains about Emily is that her agency in the game reveals the interpellation of surrounding women in power: “they are hegemonically instructed to be bitchy” (632). Clover (1987) explains in her essay “Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film,” that the male gaze focuses on capturing images of terrified or injured women (212). In this example, the use of terrified women is seen with Lynn the first moments of the game. During the helicopter scene, as the helicopter is crashing down, Lynn grabs onto Blake for her life, and the player can see what is obvious terror on her face. In addition, her expressions continue as the player can see her for the first time after the crash. She has cuts and bruising along her face, arms, and legs. Lynn can also be heard crying out for Blake on multiple occasions throughout the game, which adds to the image of a terrified woman. While the player does not get to flesh out Lynn’s character as a player would in *Until Dawn*, her ambitiousness, especially seen in how Lynn interacts with Blake, can come across as arrogant. As mentioned, this portrayal is evident in other interactions with NPC’s.

When Blake goes to the commune to locate his missing wife, she can be heard threatening and cursing at the Temple Gate acolytes, who have her bound and gagged. The player can overhear the conversation happening between Lynn and Knoth, and once the gag is off Lynn is heard screaming, “get your fucking hands off me” (Red Barrels, 2017). In the next moment, Lynn is seen launching herself out of an open two-story window. When Blake jumps down to her and asks her where to go, she composes herself and instructs Blake to go “anywhere but here” (Red Barrels, 2017). In the scene leading up to her capture, Temple Gate acolytes come

from upstream and ambush the Langermann's. Lynn threatens the men once more, stating that the first person to touch her "loses their eyes" (Red Barrels, 2017). The men subdue Lynn and Blake, and Blake is forced to watch as his wife writhes helplessly under two men who are trying to kill the antichrist supposedly within her. Val and The Heretics only escalate the situation by killing the Temple Gate members and choking Lynn into unconsciousness before taking her away.

When Lynn is recovered from The Heretics, she is seen visibly pregnant and much weaker than she was at the start of the game. What is interesting to mention is the gendering of the baby within the last moments of the game; Lynn and Blake gendered the "baby" before it was even born, and had not had prior knowledge of Lynn even being "pregnant." Lynn, when asked if she was having labor pains, states that "she's coming soon" and Blake, as the player watches a recording made of the mass suicide, states that "she'll get to grow up. She'll get to do everything she was born to do" (Red Barrels, 2017). In addition, it is seen in "The Gospel of Knoth: Chapter 14" (See Appendix B, Figure 2) that Knoth had gendered the antichrist to be female. He states: "And in the moments before her birth the Antichrist shall wake, even in her womb, and her owe and mister will bleed and corrupt the earth" (Red Barrels, 2017). Even in the instance of the antichrist, the "baby" was gendered to be female and thus experienced the same amount of neglect and abuse from the men of the game just as Lynn did; an example would be the constant death wishes of the "baby" made by members of the cult to Blake, including Knoth. When speaking with Blake, tells him that if he loves anything at all he would "crush it's skull under your heel" (Red Barrels, 2017). This is interesting because in Christian eschatology, depictions of the antichrist include being male or exuding masculine qualities. In this instance, the antichrist is presumed to be feminine. In the case of the women in *Outlast II*, even babies are

subjected to the violence the men hold over the women. In what seems to be a punishment for her lack of falling within the forms of emphasized femininity, Lynn, along with other women in *Outlast II*, are killed brutally; arguably, more brutal than the deaths of the men in-game. By the time they reach the chapel, Lynn cannot wait any longer and gives birth to the baby. After her initial shock, she looks on in exhaustion, telling Blake that there is no baby before she succumbs to her fatigue. As seen from horror media, there is a common theme of pregnancy being a proponent of fear. Jones (2014) found from three late 20th century titles alone—*Rosemary's Baby* (Polanski, 1968), *Dead Ringers* (Cronenberg, 1988), and *A Nightmare on Elm Street: Dream Child* (Hopkins, 1989)—that “birth is depicted as petrifying” (427). Lynn throughout the entirety of the game, continued to reassure herself and Blake that she was not pregnant and those who thought otherwise were “all fucking insane” (Red Barrels, 2017). The supposed baby Lynn birthed can be explained through Murkoff’s role in the game.

The Murkoff Corporation was the driving force behind The Morphogenic Engine. Project Walrider uses the Morphogenic Engine to find a host for The Walrider, a swarm of nanites which is controlled by psychosomatic direction. In *Outlast*, The Walrider is controlled via the lucid dreams of patients. The Morphogenic Engine’s job is to monitor the patients while they undergo these prolonged states of psychosomatic lucid dreaming, allowing themselves to control the Walrider. When being monitored, patients are put into a spherical container, suspended by fluid and differing tubes within the person’s nose and mouth (Red Barrels, 2013; Red Barrels, 2014). Based on the conversation between experiment Simon Peacock and mitigation officer Paul Marion in issue #6 of *The Murkoff Account*, the Walrider is able to communicate with whoever it pleases, the nightmares becoming hallucinations that infect people’s minds. Simon Peacock states that religion is an affective “delivery mechanism” (Petty, 10). Therefore, the Walrider is

then speaking with the leaders of the respective sub-cults, feeding into their paranoia and forcing them to hallucinate the apocalypse. In documents titled “Gender Selection in Mount Massive Contractors” (See Appendix B, Figure 3) and “Miscarried Profits” (See Appendix B, Figure 4), it is evident that symptoms of women being affected by the morphogenic engine involve phantom pregnancies. Phantom pregnancies are what occurs in women who develop signs of pregnancy, but are not actually pregnant (Drife, 1985). Women were not present in any of the gameplay in both *Outlast* and *Outlast: Whistleblower*. Any women in Mount Massive were forced to evacuate the premises in order to evade the pregnancies caused by the Morphogenic Engine (Red Barrels, 2014). In this instance, Lynn is seen in the beginning of the game as not being pregnant. However, less than 12 hours, Lynn is found to-term, and seems to experience incredible labor pains. Her death was unexpected, and for those who are not immersed into the series, it may come off as confusing and lackluster.

Before the release of *Outlast II*, the only female that was both an important character and present in the *Outlast* universe was another antagonist: mitigation officer Pauline Glick. Pauline Glick is one of the main characters in *The Murkoff Account*, a comic book written by J.T. Petty and illustrated by Black Frog; Petty is also the scriptwriter for the *Outlast* series. The comic book explains the before, during, and after effects of *Outlast II* (Petty, 2016). While not involved with the game, Pauline is an example of misrepresented female figure. She, like Lynn, is seen to exhibit mannerisms that move her into the “bossy female” archetype. Pauline has moved up in the ranks of her insurance mitigation profession; for example, she has security clearances above Paul, and is thus able to interact with the men in her profession (Petty, Issue 2, 8). The men, such as Jeremy Blaire and Rick Trager, see her as nothing more than a woman to seduce. For example, when Jeremy Blaire asked her to dinner—after the events that occurred in issue 2 of

The Murkoff Account in which Rick Trager tried to drug and rape Pauline—she blatantly refuses (Petty, 14-15). In the comic, Pauline is attacked, insulted, and drugged; she is mistreated by her environment and by men within the series, and this reflects how the women are treated in *Outlast II*. In addition, it can be speculated by the content in Issue 5 that Pauline is also queer/LGBTQIA+ (Figure 3). In a phone conversation between her colleague Paul and herself, she is shown photographing two naked women, who are posing on her couch. When Paul stated that he was not coming into work the next day, Pauline states, “we all need personal time” as she watches the two women kiss; she has a snide smile on her face (Petty, 6). This provides evidence that other queer representations in the series, or at least premised, are also depicted to be figures that are on the antagonist’s side.



Figure 3: Screenshot of Pauline on the phone with Paul. Notice the pleased look on her face (Petty, *The Murkoff Account*, Issue 5, pg. 6).

The violence towards Pauline is reflective of how women are treated in *Outlast II*; women are threatened, tackled, tortured, burnt, among other gruesome acts. While men also succumb to these deaths, the violence against women last longer in game than the men. When the player is able to watch the deaths of others around them, males are shown to be killed in a swifter way than what is shown with the women. An example would be in The Scalled camp, in which Laird Byron shoots down two of his own members, killing them instantly by shooting them in the head. However, in Lynn's case, it was death due to excruciating labor. The fault of these character's mistreatment is placed on societal tropes constantly shown in media that influence the interactions and subsequent mistreatment of women in the *Outlast* series. In horror media especially, women are shown to need protection or emphasize their femininity by dress or mannerisms. This is shown in Lynn's character development. Lynn's regression from being strong and independent to weak and requiring Blake's protection can be attributed to both the male savior archetype and the damsel in distress archetype.

Within the first half hour of gameplay, Blake: survives a helicopter crash, goes looking for his wife, realizes she is kidnapped by Knoth, Lynn escapes, and within moments is captured again by another splintered religious group. Even though she was depicted to be arrogant and "bossy," Lynn immediately shifted from an ambitious freelance journalist to a prototypical damsel in distress. Once recovered from the helicopter crash, the main goal for the player is to suddenly rescue Blake's wife from certain death. The damsel in distress is a common trope seen in horror media. Dietz (1998) found that 41% of video games did not include women, 21% videogames depict violence towards women, 80% of games included aggression towards the 28% of women in video games who are portrayed as objects of desire. Dietz also found that the second most common trope of women in video games were Damsels in Distress; requiring the

aide of their male hero as part of the overall mission into winning the game (435). In this case, Lynn is seen to be not only an objective to the player but the objective is mandatory; Blake is forced to come to Lynn's aide. Even though it is stated in the beginning of the game that neither Lynn nor Blake are fighters, her character was an independent, strong-willed woman who was not going to be captured by the people of Temple Gate without a struggle. And yet, her fighter façade faded away the moment she was captured by The Heretics; even when kidnapped by the Temple Gate residents, Lynn was still adamant about putting up a fight.

Another example of mistreatment in the series comes in the form of Blake Langermann's hallucinations: Jessica Gray. Jessica does not have a motherly figure in her life, as seen in the email written between two members of St. Sybil faculty: Fr. Porcarri and Shelly Parham. During the game, specifically *Job: St. Sybil Administration*, Blake can come across a computer that has an email from guidance counselor Shelly Parham to Fr. Porcarri. The email reads that Fr. Loutermilch worries that if Jessica goes on the planned field trip to the piano factory then she is at risk for being a runaway; it is emphasized in the email that her mother is dead, and her father has a "big personality" (See Appendix B, Figure 5, Red Barrels 2017). The counselor thought it best to put her on library duty, which is an area of the school where the player encounters demon Loutermilch, a monster with hands and tongues that undulate as he moves. With the evidence of the email, the demon Loutermilch, and the complexity of the maze that the library becomes, there is the notion that one of the places Loutermilch molested Jessica was in the library. Jessica tried to reach out for help within another community; specifically, a chat room. In Chapter *Judges*, Jessica is seen speaking with a fifty-year-old woman who is looking for advice regarding her abusive husband. When Jessica asked the woman if she has reached out to friends or family about the abuse, and what to do in those situations, the woman reacted by asking if Jessica could

talk to one of her teachers about it (See Appendix B, Figure 6, Red Barrels, 2017). This implied that the woman realized she was speaking with a minor about the subject of domestic violence and shut the conversation down. Not only this, but the woman became aware that Jessica may be asking these questions because she herself is being abused by her father; this is not confirmed in-game, but can be implied due to both Jessica's avid curiosity on the topic and the email exchange previously mentioned. Because Jessica does not have a motherly figure to look after her and an abusive father, she is left with speaking to other womanly figures to cope with the traumas of home and hinting at her own assault. In addition, with Jessica experiencing sexual violence in her own life, she was possibly looking for an adult to help her get out of the situation. The only other male figures in her life besides her abusive father are Fr. Loutermilch and Blake.

Loutermilch used his status as one of the teachers of St. Sybil to not only continue to molest Jessica up until her murder but to also manipulate Blake into keeping her murder secret. When playing back recordings made during the school sections, the image shows static and garbled voices. However, the garbled voice is the voice of Loutermilch, and when the recordings are played in reverse, he says:

Fr. Loutermilch: "You killed her, but I never told a soul. I kept your secret. Our secret. Thank you. Thank you. Never told a soul. You let the smaller sorrow of her suicide wash over the unacceptable tragedy of her murder. You killed her. You saw what she was. You knew the sin rested on her shoulders as much as on my own. You took her, and I could not. She was so ripe with possibility. So resilient, smiling, flirting. Never even aware of the power she had. Let me share in their wanted path to adulthood... You removed the temptation and the armor of the flesh and I was able to resist. Dear Lord, sweet Jesus,

forgive my sins and accept my gratitude. Thank you, God, for killing the child” (Red Barrels, 2017).

The dialogue shows that Loutermilch considered himself the victim in Jessica’s murder, stating that she was “flirting” with him, and he could not resist his temptation. Loutermilch’s interjections in the physical world become more frequent toward the end of the game; especially so in the mines. It is here that Blake has a hallucination of the fateful moments before Jessica’s murder. When the two children are confronted in the hallway by Loutermilch, Jessica is seen to tense up and plead Blake to stay with her. When Blake feels the same amount of hesitancy, Loutermilch begins to shame Blake. The dialogue reads:

Fr. Loutermilch: “You know...shame is a gift from God...to let you know right from wrong.”

Fr. Loutermilch: “And what you want is very wrong.”

Fr. Loutermilch: “Go home and pray.” (Red Barrels, 2017)

Before this scene, Loutermilch uses auditory interjections to taunt Blake and the player; all of which point at Blake as being the reason for Jessica’s murder. Examples include:

Fr. Loutermilch: “You were jealous. You were frightened.”

Fr. Loutermilch: “You’re not evil, Blake.”

Fr. Loutermilch: “Just confused.”

Fr. Loutermilch: “I remember being a young man.”

Fr. Loutermilch: “You've always been so nervous. You don't have to be.”

Fr. Loutermilch: “If you've done something, I want you to tell me.”

Fr. Loutermilch: “What did you do to her?” (Red Barrels, 2017)

As shown in this one-sided dialogue, Loutermilch tried to push the death of Jessica onto him, forcing him to believe that he was the reason Jessica was murdered; and further shielding the

blame from Loutermilch. Loutermilch is Blake and Jessica's music teacher. He is one of many male teachers at St. Sybil; pictures of men in priest outfits, though none of them are Loutermilch, line the hallway walls. What should be mentioned is the reason Loutermilch is allowed to abuse his authority is both because of his status in the school—In "Heaven's Gate Subjects," Loutermilch described to be an excellent fit for "a fine United States Senator or Supreme Court Judge" (Red Barrels, 2017)—and because he is using his power as a man to oppress Jessica. Loutermilch's school status is high enough to where others trust his judgement, which he uses as an advantage to abuse Jessica. Jessica is afraid that if she tells anyone about this abuse it will impact her negatively in her home life; this is shown by Jessica's protest to Loutermilch threatening to call her father. Jessica is caught between two difficult situations: her teacher abuses her, and so does her father. The only people she has to trust are Lynn and Blake, classmates who are just as afraid of Loutermilch because of his authority in St. Sybil. Lynn and Jessica are seen in the game as Damsels in Distress. While Loutermilch is the cause for her distress, Blake is seen as someone who could have saved Jessica from her fate, and in response tries to undo the wrongs Blake thinks he's committed. For Lynn, her character went from being portrayed as strong and independent to devolving into the Damsel in Distress. Blake, then, can be seen through an iteration of hegemonic masculinity that coincides with the Damsel in Distress archetype: this iteration is known as the "Male Protector."

Blake's role in *Outlast II* is one commonly seen in horror media; the white male protagonist saving the damsel in distress or object of desire from certain doom. Blake is seen as the sole protector of Jessica and Lynn, risking his own life multiple times in order to ensure both the safety of his wife and his childhood friend. Blake is given an objective every chapter, to convey what the player must do in order to reach a new checkpoint. His first checkpoint: "Find

Lynn.” Blake adds emphasis to this by stating that “nothing matters but Lynn” (Red Barrels, 2017). In this context, Lynn is seen as a strong female lead who devolved into needing Blake in order for her survival. who is not only a “male savior” to Lynn but to Jessica.

The “White Male Savior” trope is discussed in Waldie’s (2018) discussion of gender politics in *Until Dawn* (Supermassive Games, 2015). This trope explains an individual’s purpose as rescuing those who need them. Waldie (2018) focuses heavily on the racial aspect of the role of protector: the white heterosexual male takes on the role of the savior, the one who must protect the women in the group. The savior takes on stereotypical masculine traits including being a “rugged military man,” by donning weapons and a recovered army jacket to emphasize his role as the protector (30-31). In Waldie’s analysis, women are the objects of men’s desire and are subject to the male gaze (33).

Similarly, Clover (1992) discusses the protector-victim relationship in horror cinema. She finds that,

“there is something about the victim function that wants manifestation in a female, and something about the monster and hero functions that wants expression in a male. Sex, in this universe, proceeds from gender, not the other way around. A figure does not cry and cower because she is a woman; she is a woman because she cries and cowers” (12-13).

In Clover’s analysis, the role of protector and victim are gendered; men are the protectors of the cowering and scared women. Blake, in this case, is the protector of Lynn and Jessica, two “cowering” women.

In this same context, Blake is incredibly resilient, keeping pace with finding Lynn after being hunted, stabbed, crucified, and buried. There are two instances that Blake feels the need to protect his wife. In the first instance, Blake is seen trying to shield Lynn from the Temple Gate

acolytes' moments after she is found in the commune. The second time, Blake again shields her as Marta approaches them, moments before she is killed. For Jessica, Blake is seen covering for Jessica when they are both caught by Loutermilch. The dialogue reads as follows:

Fr. Loutermilch: "What are the two of you doing in here?"

Jessica: "I'm sorry, Father Loutermilch."

Blake: "We stayed after school for journal."

While not emphasized in the dialogue, Blake said this phrase in a questioning tone, as if trying to lie, but not succeeding due to his tone. The dialogue continues with:

Blake: "We were just leaving."

Fr. Loutermilch: "Let's step back into class, please."

Jessica: "...Blake?"

Fr. Loutermilch: "You're not in trouble yet, Blake..."

Fr. Loutermilch: "You don't want to get in trouble, do you?"

Jessica: "Just stay with me."

It is evident that Jessica wants Blake to stay with her due to her troubling relationship with the music teacher. Loutermilch's goal was to force Jessica to be alone with him. In order to do that, he had to make Blake leave. Loutermilch begins to threaten the children with calling their parents, to which Jessica protests. When Loutermilch asks Blake to go home while Loutermilch "prays" with Jessica, Jessica begs Blake to stay. The dialogue reads:

Fr. Loutermilch: "Why don't you go along home, Blake?"

Jessica: "Don't go."

Fr. Loutermilch: "Did I interrupt something between you two?"

Blake: “It wasn’t like that.”

Blake then begins to defend Jessica by trying to de-escalate the situation. When Loutermilch accuses the children of doing something wrong, Blake retaliates by stating that the relationship between Jessica and him is not romantic. Loutermilch forces Blake to leave, with Jessica’s begging whispers right behind him. While this dialogue is uncomfortable, it shows that Blake tried to protect both himself and Jessica from Loutermilch, even going as far as staying by Jessica’s side up until he was forced out by the music teacher. Blake runs to Jessica’s aid shortly after seeing her run down the hallway with Loutermilch at her heels. This is a form of gendered vulnerability of women, seeing that Jessica is being chased down by Loutermilch, whose sexually-charged interactions with Jessica frame him as a sexual predator. This justifies the concept that men are constructed as predators in horror media. Blake takes the blame for Jessica’s death, and this interaction is the foundation for Blake’s hallucinations seen within the game. He feels like he has to protect Jessica because no one else will. He feels the same for Lynn. This is problematic, as it emphasizes the trope within emphasized femininity that women are objects of desire, or something that needs protection from a male figure; it emphasizes that women cannot stand up for themselves. Seeing Blake as the male savior to both Lynn and Jessica shows the underrepresentation of strong female leads.

This theme is also seen through Marta, the most relentless antagonist in *Outlast II*. Marta is only known to speak in hymns, carries a large pickaxe, and never gives up the chase. While her age is not confirmed, it is relevant to find an approximation. Based on “The Gospel of Knoth: Chapter Three” (See Appendix B, Figure 7):

“Now it was in the thirty-fourth year of Sullivan Knoth, who would be Ezekiel, in the four-hundred and seventy-ninth year of Zion, in the one-thousand-nine-hundred and

seventy-first year of Christ, in the eleventh month, on the dawn of the twenty-sixth day”
(Red Barrels, 2017).

Knoth was 34 in 11/26/1971. In “Outside Marta’s Chapel,” (See Appendix B, Figure 8) Knoth states that Marta is his “intimate companion since childhood” (Red Barrels, 2017). I can approximate that, give or take a few years, Marta is around the same age as Knoth. And given that the game is to take place in 2015 (See Appendix B, Figure 9), this would make Knoth and Marta to be aged in their early-to mid-seventies. I make this point because of another common trope seen within female characters; old and vain villains. In the book, “Elder Horror: Essays on Film’s Frightening Images of Aging,” sections speak on the use of the elderly and their purpose in horror films. A chapter by Maddi McGillvray speaks on the aging of women in found footage films as an element of horror. McGillvray used examples such as *The Visit* (2015) and *The Taking of Deborah Logan* (2014) to express the “vile crone” that is used, along with the frail and aging body to emphasize body horror and other elements of disgust. In both films, the grandmothers delineate from their previous wholesome demeanor to being a projection of horror. McGillvray explains that being “sickly, polluting, and unclean” are opposite of what is normally depicted to be feminine (74). Marta is depicted to be an aging older woman, hunched over by the overbearing weight of her axe, who is used as a projection of horror by being a ruthless pursuer and killing the player in a gruesome act. Barbara Creed explains in “The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis” that the female monster’s common theme is male castration and sexual difference. Creed speaks about Freud’s interpretation of the Medusa myth, stating that Medusa’s head is to represent female genitals. While an odd interpretation, Creed mentions that the myth is “mediated by a narrative about the difference of female sexuality as a difference which is grounded in monstrosity and which invokes castration anxiety in the male spectator”

(31). The old woman, normally depicted as a witch, is represented as “an old, ugly crone who is capable of monstrous acts” (28).

In this context, Marta is depicted with a Grim Reaper quality to her character: she wears all black, using a veil to cover most of her face, carries a large scythe-like weapon, and is hunched, further obscuring her figure. Marta embodies the monstrous feminine by exposing the male anxieties of castration. This is seen whenever Blake is caught and killed by Marta. While not seen in any other execution of minor characters, Marta is seen to castrate Blake in two ways: Marta either impales Blake with the end of her weapon or takes one end of her double-bitted axe and slices through Blake’s genitals. For viewers, this is depicted to be a particularly gruesome death for Blake; other Blake death scenes include being stabbed in the face or chest. Marta is the only NPC to castrate Blake. As mentioned by Creed, this plays into the monstrous feminine, as the theme of male castration is a “phallogocentric ideology” (31) in which castrating the male takes away their patriarchal power and thus, gives the power back to the woman. It is seen in folklore that older women are to be depicted as violent and threatening, but in some fairytales are also shown to be quite helpful when prompted (Blaire, 2015). Marta is the depiction of an “old crone” whose sole purpose is to do the bidding of Papa Knoth, and to destroy the enemy that could cost her the paradise that Knoth continues to reiterate.

Her death scene is fairly gruesome: As Blake and Lynn traverse the land amidst the “apocalypse,” Marta ambushes them. Before she is able to deliver the final blow to the outsiders, a thunderstorm rips a metal cross from the top of the chapel and falls onto Marta, impaling her. She struggles for a second before she dies, and her body slides forward. Her death is shown to be the more graphic of deaths, especially one that the player witnesses. Marta’s death is the only death in which the character is killed via impalement, which could be reflecting her use of her

weapon to impale and castrate the protagonist. Her gruesome death supports the common trope in horror media of violence towards women. It is due to her age, yet her immense physical strength, that make her a strong female role in *Outlast II*. And yet, her strengths as both a woman and a villain are thwarted by her gruesome death scene, making Marta another victim to female mistreatment seen in the game.

Another example is Mary, an NPC. Mary, while a minor character, embodies a portion of the lack of gender representation and violence in-game to the women; this in part is due to her death. There is a cutscene in which Blake hides in a confessional when two heretics—Josiah and Mary—are found and interrogated for information regarding the whereabouts of Lynn. In order to make Josiah talk, Mary is strapped to The Rack, a medieval torture device. After Knoth and his executioners get the information they need, Knoth has Josiah and Mary killed. While Josiah was delivered a “swift” death by way of an executioner striking him in the chest with an axe, Mary is pulled apart by The Rack; the player can approach the bodies and see Mary’s bones have torn from the skin at both the arm and knee joints. This, by comparison, shows that Mary’s death was a slower, more tortuous one. A recording is prompted from this cutscene, titled “Torture” (See Appendix B, Figure 10). Blake’s commentary states: “They always...hurt women to punish men. Its sick. Its cowardly” (Red Barrels, 2017). Before this instance, there is a recording titled “The Show Room” (See Appendix B, Figure 11). In this recording, Blake comes across a sleeping woman who is shackled to a bed. The NPC woman that is lying there has an identical character model to Mary, the heretic woman who was tortured and killed later on. It is not confirmed as to whether or not it is the same character. The commentary reads: “I guess this is where the magic happens. Chairs for an audience to watch. I only saw her afterwards. I couldn’t have...” (Red Barrels, 2017). Both recordings provide evidence that the women in the game

were not seen as anything but something to be used. In addition, Blake is aware of the mistreatment of the women, based on the commentary he gave in “Torture” and “The Showroom.” His awareness is pivotal to the discussion of gender politics in this game, as it is giving awareness to the player. While the instances the player witnesses is inhumane, Blake’s awareness specifically towards the abuse of the women are then forcing the player to think of the larger hegemonic structures within both this game and representing horror media in general. This point is then further supported by a document titled “Letter from a Husband” (See Appendix B, Figure 11). In the letter, the husband Marcus asks his wife, Judith, to stop being mad at him because she is mourning the loss of the child that was part of the Temple Gate infanticide. He states, “It was Papa’s will and God’s will an’ you can’t stay mad at me or I’ll be forced to be firm with you.” (Red Barrels, 2017) Not only this, but Marcus says that he wrote this because he hopes that he can write down “what’s so hard for a man to say” (Red Barrels, 2017) It is this letter that provides evidence to show that, not only are women seen to be something owned and controlled, but forms of hegemonic masculinity take place within the men of Temple Gate.

Based on my analysis of the characters in the *Outlast* universe, there are categories the women fit into within the series: supporting roles to the protagonist, in *Outlast II*, it is Jessica and Lynn, supporting characters for building the environment; such as within documents written by and for women, or supporting antagonists to the main antagonist—such as Pauline Glick, and in the case of *Outlast II*, Marta being the supporting antagonist for Knoth. Strong female leads are shown to be neglected and then killed off gruesomely, and women are not put on equal ground as the men are. Dietz (1998) found that within video games, even though there are exceptions, there are minimal females; within those exceptions, women are either seen as objects of desire or supporting roles to men (12). In the context of *Outlast II*, the characters Lynn and

Jessica are supporting characters to the protagonist, Blake, who is male. Blake is shown to have mostly one-sided interactions with the female characters; most interaction with Jessica is held near the end of the game, when Blake is reverted back to being his fourth-grade self. Other interactions with Jessica were one-sided, in which she would scream for Blake to save her. Interactions with Lynn involved Blake being instructed or told where to go by Lynn, with little interaction involving building their relationship of her own character. The female characters in *Outlast II* are cast aside as either supporting roles to protagonists, antagonists, or the environment altogether, and nothing more. This gives evidence to conclude that the women in game were mistreated, and misrepresented.

Emphasized femininity and its transgressions are shown through the archetypes seen with Lynn, Jessica, Marta, Mary, and the unnamed woman from “The Showroom” recording. The woman from “The Showroom” recording—rather, her body—was seen as an object of male desire. It can be speculated, due to the identical character models, that Mary and the woman from “The Showroom” recording are the same person. This could further the discussion of Mary emphasizing her femininity as her body was used as a means to interrogate Josiah. In addition, the women of Temple Gate are known to consummate (most unwillingly) with Knoth, as documents have referenced men telling their women to find “womanly comfort” with him. The overarching violence on the women in *Outlast II* is also shown through Marta. Marta portrays the “old hag” stereotype, in which ageing women are seen as grotesque; marking youth as beautiful and sought after by men. Marta transgresses through emphasized femininity by her depiction of a decrepit, hunched woman mumbling hymns and slaughtering other characters with a large pickax. Because of this transgression though, she meets a gruesome demise. Emphasized femininity is mostly seen through Jessica and Lynn, the “damsels in distress.” The bossy woman,

Lynn, was portrayed in the beginning as fully capable of handling herself amidst the crash and the cultists; even when first captured by Knoth, Lynn is heard openly threatening her captors. However, within moments of being captured by The Heretics, Lynn ultimately needed protection, and she fell into the damsel in distress prototype. The bossy woman is further reiterated with Pauline Glick, a woman who was physically and theoretically dominated by men in *The Murkoff Account*. Pauline Glick was assaulted by men in almost every issue she was in: out of the six issues, Pauline was assaulted in half of them: Issue #1 she was assaulted by Chris Walker, Issue #2 there was attempt of sexual assault by Rick Trager, and Issue #4 she was assaulted by Simon Peacock. Pauline is another example of transgressing emphasized femininity. Pauline does not allow men to court her, as seen by dismissing Jeremy Blaire in Issue #2. In addition, she is presumed to be LGBTQIA+3 based on the evidence provided in Issue #5. As such, her transgressions were, like Lynn's and Marta's, punished by the men in her environment. Jessica Gray, another damsel in distress, was an innocent youth who was preyed upon as an object of the male gaze, leading to the unfortunate molestation and murder of Jessica by Loutermilch. The damsel in distress archetype personifies the feeble and meek woman, who needs protection from a male figure; this is emphasized by the male protector trope, in which Blake is the male protector to both Lynn in reality and Jessica in his school hallucinations. These women, along with the background NPC women, were subjected to violence by the men of Temple Gate. It is because these women transgressed the means of emphasizing their femininity by exhibiting unladylike behaviors, exhibiting male qualities, or being physically older. Other women were forced to accept their means of femininity, such as the women told to find comforts with Knoth or, even worse, being forced to consummate with him.

Hegemonic Masculinity: Masculine Norms and The Men of Outlast II

Kareithi (2014) discusses the importance of hegemonic masculinity in the film industry. He states that the industry “feeds the global culture with an endless stream of violent male icons” (31). In addition, Kareithi mentions that images of masculine aggression and violence results in the increased violence towards women (31). The men of Temple Gate tend to adopt tropes of hegemonic masculinity by enforcing masculine stereotypes. Examples include: showing a lack of emotions, deeming the display of emotions as a feminine trait, and treating women as something to be owned. Knoth has written in his scripture, specifically *The Gospel of Knoth: Chapter 10* (See Appendix B, Figure 12) to consummate with females in Temple Gate. It is even encouraged by other acolytes in Temple Gate for women to have sex with him. This is seen in a document, “My Dear Sweet Ellie” (See Appendix B, Figure 13). The player picks up a note that speaks of Tom asking his wife to forgive him for his suicide and to find “womanly” comfort in the arms of Knoth (Red Barrels, 2017). It can be assumed that the womanly comfort Tom means is to have Knoth emotionally comfort her and grieve with him; this letter shows that any feelings of grief or sadness are considered feminine. This abuse of authority demonstrates that the women in-game were to be treated as something to offer to Knoth and should be honored. In the document “Sundries from the Sinful World,” (See Appendix B, Figure 14) Papa Knoth is given “Penissilon” to be what he calls his “study aids” (Red Barrels, 2017). In actuality, Penicillin is a treatment for Syphilis. Thus, after the women are “offered” to Knoth, Knoth transmits his syphilis to his following while taking medication to disguise his symptoms. As a result of his neglect, a camp located just outside the commune, The Scalled, are riddled with Syphilis.

The Scalled are so badly afflicted that they are depicted to be zombie-like. They are malnourished, feverishly scratching away at their weeping skin. Characters are seen without lips

or noses. Nick Tremblay and Laird Byron, for example, are seen with cloth covering most of their bodies and some of their face, as the skin seems to weep and to have been eaten away (Figure 4). It is not just their physical appearance that embodies a zombifying quality; The Scalled also adopts some cannibalistic qualities. There is an instance in which, after Blake is buried, he must traverse through the tall grass to find a fence to crawl into the next checkpoint. While he searches the area, three of The Scalled crawl on hands and feet toward Blake, trying to bite and gnaw at him. In addition, The Scalled must feast on the flesh of the Messiah in holy communion to “be cured” and return to Temple Gate. With the concordance of the seemingly rotting flesh, the malnourishment, and the many attempts The Scalled made at trying to cannibalize Blake, it is evident to see that The Scalled are not to be depicted as people being afflicted with a sexually transmitted disease but instead seen as a violation of nature, and something to be disgusted at. Knoth and Laird Byron consistently tell their followers that they have an “sickness of the soul” (See Appendix B, Figure 15, Red Barrels, 2017) rather than an affliction that is not only treatable but an affliction that their leader—who is known to rape the women in the cult who then transmit the diseases to their husbands—took medication for to disguise the fact that he had it in the first place.



Figure 4: Screenshot of Laird Byron and Nick Tremblay “rotting away” due to Syphilis (Red Barrels, 2017).

As with the rest of The Scalled, Laird Byron does not understand his affliction, all he knows is the affliction came from “those whose lust delivered them to sin, and whose sin delivered them to lust” (See Appendix B, Figure 16). In the document, “Our Quarantine,” Laird Byron writes that Papa Knoth sent away those afflicted to this camp. Laird Byron adds that those afflicted should not believe the “outer world lies” of being afflicted with “the Syphilis or the Gonorrhoea...This is a sickness of the soul, and only by purging your soul will you find health” (Red Barrels, 2017). In “Heaven’s Gate Subjects,” Laird Byron is known to be the co-founder of Temple Gate. Laird is incredibly devoted to Knoth, who abuses him. In the document, “Paradise Soon” (See Appendix B, Figure 17), Knoth writes to Laird Byron regarding his letter that he’d sent; in which Laird describes that he prefers “the gentle path” when controlling The Scalled (See Appendix B, Figure 18, Red Barrels, 2017).

Knoth tells Laird Byron that self-pity is a womanly sin, and his feelings are invalidated (Red Barrels, 2017). Because of the demand for traditional male roles in society, emotional

vulnerability is depicted as “weak” or “womanly” if a man were to show emotions of pain, sadness, or feelings of intimacy with others of the same sex. Lewis (1978) mentions that, along with the traditional male roles, lack of emotional vulnerability comes from the pressures of competition, homophobia, and aversion to openness (110-114). Knoth’s invalidation of Laird’s emotions supports the notion that Knoth embodies the tropes that are commonly found within hegemonic masculinity. His overemphasizing of his masculinity is the reason behind the violence towards the women in Temple Gate; However, Temple Gate may not have become a reality for Knoth if he hadn’t met Lydia Deagan. It is known that, before Temple Gate was established in Arizona, Knoth and his following were staying on a follower’s ranch; this follower being Lydia Deagan. Without her, the following would not have had the foundations it did to establish Temple Gate when the group made it from New Mexico to Arizona (Sliva, 2017). And yet, Knoth’s relationship with women is abusive, as he emphasizes the male gaze by seeing women as something desirable rather than another human being. Knoth abuses his power in a myriad of ways. One is using his status as both founder and prophet to instruct his acolytes to do his bidding; including the capture and murder of the Langermann’s.

In the beginning of the game, Knoth’s voice is heard throughout the commune via loud speakers. He explains that the outsiders who have come to the cult are the harbors of the antichrist. He states that it is “empirically true” given that he found proof that Lynn was pregnant with the antichrist. He instructs his followers to find Lynn and “rip the devil from her belly and crush it beneath your boot heels” (Red Barrels, 2017). He is seen in the document, “Come with These Men” (See Appendix B, Figure 19), to threaten Val with violence if they do not come back to Temple Gate (Red Barrels, 2017). When Val continues to disobey, Knoth takes to the writing of Val to Marta, another person Knoth abuses his power towards. It is seen in the

document, “Outside Marta’s Chapel” that Marta and Knoth have known each other since their childhood, and it may be speculated that there are intimate feelings between the two. It is also explained that Marta believes she is a sinner because she ruthlessly murders civilians of Temple Gate by order of Knoth; an example of his authority taking priority over Marta’s comfortability. Homophobic insults are also seen in the game. During the altercation between Ethan and Marta, Marta explains that Ethan is a sinner and a “catamite to the devil” (Red Barrels, 2017) for being hesitant to offer his fifteen-year-old daughter to Knoth. Being a catamite is “A boy or young man who is made use of as a (typically passive) sexual partner by an older man. More generally: a (younger) passive partner in homosexual anal intercourse” (Catamite, n.d.). While this is specific to a young boy and an older man, Ethan is middle aged; Marta meant to insult Ethan’s sexuality, emphasizing heteronormative relationships in the commune. In Temple Gate, not only is there a hierarchical structure of authority, but also a structure that accompanies hegemonic tropes. Using this ambivalent sexism theory, the hierarchy in Temple Gate involves the male presence of Knoth instructing other males to keep the hierarchy in place by keeping their women submissive. Any sign of emotion or lack of hyper-masculinity is a “womanly sin” and that men are seen to be forceful and aggressive towards both the women in Temple Gate and towards Lynn.

The discussion of hegemonic masculinity and the “male gaze” are further discussed in Byman’s (2019) study of *Until Dawn*. Byman (2019) both observed other gamers and played the game herself to find the connection between the male gaze and how the manifestation of the male gaze transfers to the player. In the context of *Until Dawn*, one of the characters, Michael (Mike) Monroe, embodies the norms of the hegemonic male: “white, straight, and neurotypical” (630). Each of the characters in-game are given three traits that are seen to the player and in comparison, to other characters, Mike is given the most positive traits. Byman mentions the

Affective Disposition Theory, which states that “individuals as consumers want good things for characters they like” (631).

Using the Affective Disposition Theory, the consumers, meaning the players, want to see Blake save his wife and escape the cult. In “Heaven’s Gate Subjects,” Blake is described as: “Quick to despair but slow to surrender, Blake is not exactly a hero but he’s honest and can take a remarkable amount of punishment” (Appendix B, Figure 3, Red Barrels, 2017). Blake is also seen as a white, heterosexual male, who the players want to see succeed. While his hegemonic traits are not shown in the beginning of the game, Blake transforms from a cameraman to a hero, whose sole purpose is to rescue his wife from certain death. He also possesses the stereotypical fearlessness of a hegemonic male, in which he continues to venture further and further into the cult, being chased and attacked at all turns. The women, as shown by the examples given above, are also a target to the male gaze. The woman in “The Showroom” was shackled to the bed, chairs for people to watch, while she is subjected to what is assumed to be violent sexual acts. She is an example of how the men in Temple Gate see the women; not as people living among them, but as physical tokens to either offer or abuse. In addition, the character designs of the Temple Gate acolytes show both the lack of female representation and how that misrepresentation is seen in the recycling of NPC’s in-game.

There is not much variation among the females in Temple Gate to the males. Throughout the gameplay I noticed that there were two different models for the females. Yet, the males have five different character models, all different in either dress or facial features (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Screenshots of NPC character models seen within the second-to-last scene in the game. Notice the similar male (blue) models to female models (red) (Red Barrels, 2017).

It is rare that Blake comes across a body that is not already covered in virtualistic flies. However, the only male deaths the players are forced to witness are Knoth's, Laird/Nick's, and Josiah's. Josiah's death was from the result of manipulative behaviors, in which Knoth instructed that heretics be captured and tortured in order to locate the whereabouts of Lynn and the antichrist. Laird and Nick's were brought upon by revolution within The Scalled. Knoth slit his own throat after forcing his commune to commit mass suicide. The deaths of the women tended to be more drawn out, and more gruesome. Jessica was brutally murdered, Lynn died of complications from a phantom pregnancy, Mary was tortured to death, and Marta was impaled. While Blake comes across the dead body of Jessica, he did not watch her die. However, she is still found to be bloodied up, neck bruised, and hanging limply from her hangman's noose. Lynn died of excruciating labor pain and complications giving birth to absolutely nothing. Marta was impaled in the chest by a broken metal cross that stood on top of the chapel. She struggles for a moment

before she dies. While it is still unsettling to see a grown man slice open his own throat, the deaths that occurred for the females, especially Jessica's, were long, drawn out, and in comparison more gruesome than the total amount of deaths witnessed by the player.

The men in *Outlast II* were shown to uphold stereotypes seen within Hegemonic Masculinity Theory. Men were documented explaining that the open expression of emotions is womanly, and that women were seen as objects to be offered to Knoth or abused in some other fashion. The men in *Outlast II* treated the women poorly, which portrays the overall violence of women seen in other horror media. Women being seen subordinate to men is not only seen within hegemonic masculinity but also within emphasized femininity; women are portrayed as being overall submissive to their male counterparts. This is documented as discounting emotions as 'womanly sins' or 'womanly comforts,' and dismissing or mocking men who show the aforementioned emotions. These masculine norms—dismissing emotions, usage of homophobic slurs, and the views of women as either an object of desire or objects to abuse—support HMT, thus showing that the men in *Outlast II* were portrayed to be stereotypical and hypermasculine, which is commonly shown in other horror media.

The Evil in Androgyny: Val in Outlast II

Although recognized as a secondary villain, Val (Figure 8) plays an important role in both the storyline and overall representation of gender non-conforming people in the game. From an analysis of the documents, I found that Val is the leader of The Heretics; Temple Gate residents who began to have the same lucid dreams Val had, and met secretly in the mines to discuss them. From said discussions erupted The Heretics and their newfound God, one who wants the hastening of the "end times." Val writes about their God in their last journal entry (See Appendix B, Figure 21):

“I cut the children's throats in dreams and wake filled with sex and appetite. I love you, I am yours. I cut the throats of Knoth's sheep in waking life and sex floods me like the fear of fire in a child. I love you, I am yours. I could fuck and burn the world for all my joy. I love you. I am yours. I will purge this world, soft with rot, of all but ecstasy and terror, so that you may build your throne on the charred remains. I love you, I am yours. I know now as surely as I breath what I never knew of that flaccid, distant God. You love me. I am yours” (Red Barrels, 2017).

When being in the mines, there are instances where the ground begins to shake and parts of the mine break and collapse. These tremors are possibly due to the radio towers going off, and the vibrations of the frequency affect those most who live underground. The mines, which are where The Heretics are located, are also closer to the towers than Temple Gate, leaving those inside the mines to experience the radio waves at a greater intensity.

Before becoming leader of The Heretics, Val was appointed chief deacon by Knoth, and was put in charge of being the sole caretaker to children whose parents were sent to live among The Scalled. The document “Val’s Journal: Part 1” (See Appendix B, Figure 22) notes that they cared for forty children in total. Val states in the same document that they cannot have children of their own, and that they love their children immensely. Knoth, after another “momentous” vision of the apocalypse, orders all of the Temple Gate residents to kill their children as any of them could be the true antichrist. As more children are being killed, Val begins to have lucid dreams that wake them “laughing, and aroused, and often wet from the involuntary lust of sleep” (Red Barrels, 2017). The journal entries are shown to mark the descent into the madness Val succumbs to. In the game, Val is incredibly lustful, but only towards grown adults; it is not mentioned or assumed in-game of Val molesting any of the children they cared for. Their lustful

demeanor is demonstrated within minutes of meeting them. In their debut, Val straddles and licks the players face, stating that they wished to share their love with the father; the father being Blake to the antichrist. At the end of the game, Blake falls into what looks to be a ritual, in which The Heretics are in the throes of a large orgy while Lynn writhes in pain, suspended in the air via ropes. Val tackles Blake to the ground, and he falls into a flashback before the situation escalates. Val's hypersexual demeanor is seen as odd, especially considering that the character's gender is completely ambiguous. While it can be implied Val is male due to the use of he/him pronouns, the use is limited, and does not explain the lack of pronouns used in other contexts.

As mentioned in the first part of their journal, Val cannot have their own children. However, this could be due to a multitude of other factors; not simply because Val may lack a female reproductive system. Additionally, it is interesting that Val, who is presumed to be male, is in charge of the care of over forty orphans. This is interesting because—*aforementioned in my points of hegemonic masculinity seen in Temple Gate*—Val's newly appointed parental role is not due to a lack of women in the commune. Based on the stereotypes seen in hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity, women are normally given the job of caretaker of the home and children; additionally, the phenomenon of women being both employed and caretakers is coined "the Second Shift" by Hochschild (1989). A male taking a role that is gendered to be feminine would be an obstruction of masculine norms. In this case, Val takes the role of being both chief deacon and caretaker to the orphans, a role that is gendered to be feminine. These two jobs—both of which emphasize compassion, morality, and catering to other's needs—emphasize "feminine" emotions that are not normally displayed in men; or at least, are normally frowned upon if masculine men were to display them. Despite Val's job centering more feminine qualities, Val is still seen by their peers as masculine; which explains why certain characters use

he/him pronouns. However, in any other context where Val is mentioned, it is only by their name and not their pronouns. Out of the total fifty-four collectible documents, Val's name was counted versus Val's "pronouns." Val's name was mentioned twenty-one times; a total of five documents. In contrast, Val's pronouns were used twice: once in each document. The limitation of their pronouns is also seen in the dialogue. For example, when Knoth interrogates Josiah as to where Val took Lynn. The dialogue between Josiah and Knoth is as follows:

Knoth: "Val and his apostates stole away the unborn enemy."

Knoth: "We only have these few hours to find her and kill her and save this paradise from Hell everlasting."

Knoth: "Where is she? Where did Val take her?"

It is then they begin to torture Mary to try and gain information out of Josiah. Josiah breaks, and tells Knoth that The Heretics are housing Lynn in the mines (Red Barrels, 2017). This conversation shows inconsistency with the usage of Val's pronouns. While Knoth used he/him in the beginning, he then switches to just addressing Val by their name. Josiah as well, stating that Val has Lynn in the mountains, instead of, "he has her in the mines." Val's pronouns are also seen in the document "Val's Secret" (See Appendix B, Figure 23) in which Ruth, the woman who wrote the note, addresses that "Val and his character" are different from what they remember. In "Heaven's Gate Subjects," Val is described as:

"Knoth's closest confidant and the keeper of Temple Gate's secrets, Val is a spiritual and moral leader in the community. Val is moved upon by inspiration at levels rivaling even Sullivan Knoth, hoping to know the law and mind of God more than the will of any earthly prophet. More than anything, Val is defined by dedication, a desire to care for the

spiritual wellbeing of the people in Temple Gate, even if that means a scourging of their flesh” (Appendix B, Figure 3, Red Barrels, 2017)

What is interesting is the usage of third person the entirety of “Heaven’s Gate Subjects”; meaning, there is a lack of pronouns used with Val. The line, “even if it means a scourging of their flesh,” implies some see Val as masculine, while others may not or are even unsure of their gender. In addition, it is seen in Chapter 11 of The Gospel of Knoth that any mention of Val was in third person; an example from the scripture is: “Val’s mind descended among the damned and hated of God, and communed with the Enemy, and bathed in the seed of the spider-eyed lamb” (See Appendix B, Figure 24, Red Barrels, 2017). These findings support the argument that Val’s gender is meant to be left ambiguous. This ambiguousness continues with their dress, which looks to be the tattered remains of a priestly garb. Even though the dress and pronouns are ambiguous, Val is presented as having more masculine features, such as a pronounced jaw, high cheekbones, and a flat chest. However, this masculinity is negated by Val’s appearance in the second half of the game, in which they are completely naked and the player can make out breasts and female reproductive organs on the character model. When asked by a fan on Twitter about Val’s gender, Red Barrels responded with: “Val is Val” (Figure 7, twitter.com). While this may be seen as the developers giving this answer because the gender of the character doesn’t matter in the context of the gameplay or storyline, the mannerisms and demeanor of Val may be representative of negative stereotypes seen within other androgynous villains in horror games.



Figure 6: Screenshot of First Meeting Val (Red Barrels, 2017).

Gender is a social construct. West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that “doing gender” is often confined within normative expectations of masculinity and femininity. They state: “doing gender means creating differences between girls and boys and women and men, differences that are not natural, essential, or biological” (137). The researchers found that gender is boiled down into three concepts: sex, sex category, and gender. Sex is the biological proponent, classifying genitalia to be either male or female, and this then begins the sex categorization of the individual. Each gender is given displays and characteristics that are normative to the gender, also deeming those normative properties appropriate; an example includes pink only being an appropriate color for girls/females. Sex categorization is solely due to interactions among peers that further emphasize those categorizations and characteristics. Gender is the reinforcement of not only physical appearance and social interactions; gender is the “configurations of behavior that would be seen by others as normative gender behavior” (131-134). In their article, “Doing Gender,” researchers West and Zimmerman mentioned the work of Garfinkel (1967), who used the

example of Agnes, a transsexual male to female individual as an example of how “gender is created through interaction and at the same time structures interaction (Garfinkel 118-140; West & Zimmerman 131). Not only did Agnes have sex reassignment surgery and performed acts that were seen as gendered (the example used was letting a man light her cigarette), Agnes was noted to attempt to be “120 percent female” (129) by displaying behaviors and slipping into the norms women are expected to act upon in order to be seen as a female.

Using the concept of “doing gender,” Val in the game is seen to support behaviors that are normatively feminine. This is seen in their mannerisms, and how others perceive Val. In “Val’s Secret,” Val’s mannerisms are seen as unusual to Ruth, one of the Temple Gate acolytes. She states that Val came to her in the early morning, offering what she described as “secret and sexual in nature” (Red Barrels, 2017). Ruth’s concern over Val’s character provides evidence that their feminine displays are seen as abnormal. The discussion of Val and their gender non-conformity is not described in detail by the men of Temple Gate, but it can be implied by the few uses of he/him pronouns that Val presented themselves as a masculine individual. In the displays of doing gender, Val is challenging the traditional gender roles that are normally applied to the men of Temple Gate by exhibiting feminine traits and higher sexual prowess. Others can also perceive Val’s gender based on their physical movement; specifically, their gait.

I was able to observe what I have called a “preying pattern” of the male and female models of the characters in the game. A “preying pattern” is the observation of the movements of the characters while they stalk Blake. Most characters stay within a confined area of space, and rarely will follow Blake out of that space should he be chased out of it. I observed both the supporting characters and Blake’s movement pattern from 3rd person walkthroughs of the game; particularly one posted by user “Creepy Guy” (youtube.com). The patterns of the male models in

Outlast II show that the males from Temple Gate all walk with a slight bend to the knee, letting most of the movement come from their torso or shoulders. Blake is also seen to move mostly with his shoulders, his arms leading his gait. The females are seen to walk almost the same as the males. Val, especially shown in the first cutscene in the mines, is one of the only characters in the game to walk primarily with their hips, letting them sway side to side as they approach. Not only this, but Val seems to walk fairly slow, allowing the movement of their hips to prominently lead their gait. Their walk mimics the gaits seen in games such as *Grand Theft Auto*, where the women—specifically the prostitutes—sway their hips to display their sexual prowess. *Grand Theft Auto*, and other similar titles, have also been proven to emphasize the performance of gender and the influencing of gendered violence (Gabbiadini, Bushman, Riva, Andrighetto, & Volpato, 2017; Gutiérrez 2014; Leonard 2006). Their gait is not only portrayed to be feminine, but Val in both cutscenes is shown to constantly be touching the player, especially the subtle movement of their hand brushing against Blake's cheek; this intimate stroking of the cheek can be understood as feminine. Additionally, Val's voice further eludes gender confirmation. It is extremely sultry, their tone gravelly and seductive, which plays into their walk and mannerisms. Val is also voiced by Claudia Besso ([IMDB](#)), a female voice actor. Val's walk, mannerisms, and even voice displays are more feminine. This is further evidenced by Val's naked character model in the Chapter, *Leviticus: The Descent* and *Leviticus: Val's Rebirth* (Figure 8). In addition, the chapter title of *Leviticus: Val's Rebirth* insinuates that Val was reborn; one may perceive that this rebirth was from being a male to a female, which is further personified by Val's physical appearance in the mines. Based on the three concepts of gender discussed by West and Zimmerman (1987)—sex, sex categorization, and gender—Val's gender remains completely ambiguous. Based on their character model in the mines, Val's genitalia resembled a vagina, thus

it can be speculated that Val may have been born a female. Val's sex categorization is male, given that both Knoth and Ruth have used he/him pronouns. However, based on the confusion of the naked character model and the he/him pronouns, Val's gender is left unconfirmed. Because they display both masculine and feminine characteristics, Val would be labeled as androgynous. Previous research has shown that, unfortunately, even androgyny is gendered; for example, androgynous players tend to lean more masculine.

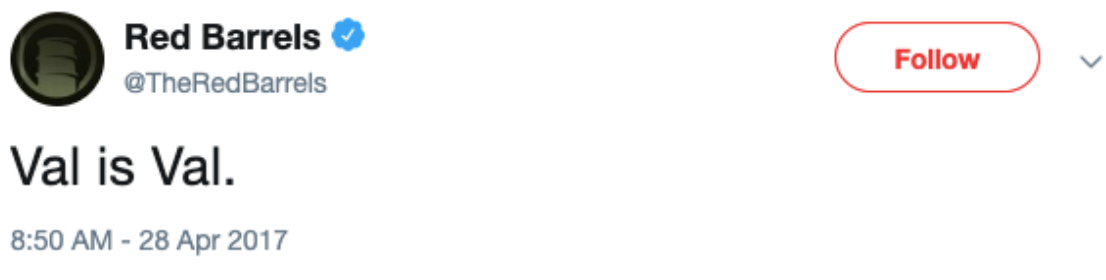


Figure 7: Red Barrels “confirming” Val’s Gender. From Red Barrels [@TheRedBarrels]. (2017, April, 28). *Val is Val* [Tweet]. Twitter.

Meghan Adams (2018) notes that androgynous players are more masculine skewed. She further justified this point by explaining that “this skewing, like the use of the bow to indicate femininity, reifies masculinity as neutral and makes femininity abnormal” (150). Even though Val is given he/him pronouns, the character still displays traits that are traditionally feminine; which in the context of the game not only plays into their character but is seen by other characters as abnormal. This androgynous villain can also be referred to as the gender-variant villain, which is discussed in the chapter “Bye, Bye, Birdo: Heroic Androgyny and Villainous Gender-Variance in Video Games” in the book “Queerness in Play.” Adams (2018) states that the tropes of gender non-conforming villains uses signifiers that belong exclusively to either men or women, and these tropes then portray gender-variance as something associated with being evil (155). In addition, Androgynous villains are hypersexual and tend to “masquerade as a woman as

well as being a sexually voracious predator out to “trick” men into sex” (155). In this context, Val’s signifiers would be their feminine physique mixed with their male pronouns, and this gender-variance is negatively represented in a villain. In addition, Val tries to seduce Blake, who is assumed to be heterosexual based on his heterosexual relationship with Lynn. When the player first meets Val, they approach the player stating that they want to share their love with the father; the father being Blake. They then straddle Blake and lick his face, telling him that God doesn’t love him as much as Val does. In the mines, Val shoves Blake to the ground and tries to restrain him as they tell him that they have “so much pleasure to share” with Blake (Red Barrels, 2017). This is an obvious example to the trope of queer folk trying to “convert” or seduce the heterosexual into being queer, even if it means by force. Val’s character negatively represents queer folk. This is shown by Val actively displaying sexual voracity towards straight men in an effort to seduce them; an example is displaying their naked selves to Blake. In addition, Val blatantly assaults Blake and Lynn. These negative stereotypes are seen amongst gender non-conforming characters in other horror media. An example would be Dethmold from *The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings* (CD Projekt, 2011), which is discussed further by Adams (2018).



Figure 8: Screenshot of Val's "True Face." (Red Barrels, 2017).

The author states that Deathmold's "queer sexuality and mounting evil are revealed alongside one another." (158). Adams explained that the character is shown to display the stereotypes seen within gender-variant villains: "ironic vanity, sexual rapacity, and dislike of women" (158). The player is given two options of killing the mage. The first is an offscreen death, the second involves the player assisting in the castration and decapitation of Dethmold. Adams emphasized that, even for a game where gruesome deaths are common, "Dethmold's sexuality and gender (as crime) and death (as punishment) are inexorably wedded in this potential ending" (158). The second choice of Dethmold's death is punishment for his gender transgressions. Val is given an offscreen death. It can be speculated that the player could find their off-screen death as a punishment for their gender transgressions: a possible conclusion could be that since Val did not conform to one specific gender they do not get to have an on-screen death. The other antagonists were given death scenes; one of which is Sullivan Knoth, who did not take any part in the mechanics of the gameplay except for context; Blake did not interact with Knoth any other time

in the game except for the very end. Val's offscreen death is similar to the option of the offscreen death for Dethmold seen in *The Witcher 2*. While it was not seen in-game that Val's potential death was because of their gender-variance, the ambiguousness of their gender and their feminine displays were seen as abnormal to other NPC's, showing their gender-variance to be something negative. Val's sexual rapacity is seen with their advances toward Blake and Lynn. While they are not depicted to be vain or particularly dislike women, Val's sexual aggressions were their main point of villainy. That is to say, Val was the most physically intimate antagonist in the game, leaving that feature to stick with the player (and in result, unnerve them). This trope not only unnerves the player but also influences the stereotype seen in gender-variant villains.

Androgyny can not only be seen as a punishment for gender transgressions, but also for comic relief in other media. Raiden in *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* (Konami, 2001), at least in comparison to his predecessor Snake from *Metal Gear Solid*, is seen as an androgynous male with softened features and more soft-spoken. Raiden's androgyny in *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* is explained in altmaguk.net:

“Although his androgyny is often used to comic effect (the President having to check he is, in fact, being rescued by a man) adds to the player's empathy with Raiden and, at least in my case, alienated the player from the characters "offending" him (the fact remains the President is in the hands of whoever comes to rescue him and, his assumption that he will be rescued by, essentially, muscles in a uniform, is a form of sexism, suggesting only men who fit the gender stereotypes of society are worthy of his presence)”

(altmaguk.net).

From the examples given, the notion of androgyny or gender-variance is shown to be used for comedic affect, a form of punishment, or an excuse to negatively stigmatize those in the queer

community by being sexually predatory towards other characters. Val and The Heretics are seen to be sexually predatory, hypersexual beings who place their own pleasure for the sake of other's suffering or discomfort. Blake's responses to Val's advances are of obvious discomfort, yet Val continues because they decided to put their sexual needs before Blake's consent. Val was seen to be the antagonist with the most background, and this could be due to the possibility that the developers wanted to give the player context into exactly why there are technically three sub-cults within the Havasupai region: those three being Temple Gate, The Heretics, and The Scalled. However, if this was the case, then there would be documents explaining Laird Byron's background in greater depth, possibly explaining how he was made the leader of The Scalled or how he contracted Syphilis. Val from *Outlast II* is yet another example of the misrepresentation and negative stereotypes towards those in the queer/gender non-conforming community. The analysis of this character supports my presumption that their gender non-conformity is used to confuse and make the player uncomfortable, along with Val's sexual advances. This discomfort with Val's mannerisms and overall physical being are then depicting that gender-variance is something to be uncomfortable towards or seen as something villainous.

Adams (2018) offered a suggestion for future game developers when considering creating a gender-variant character. She states:

“game designers, critics, and players can approach androgyny and gender-variance thoughtfully in terms of both production and consumption. We can reject stereotypical characterizations in our own work and in work we encounter. We can offer our own creations, but we also need to recognize that representation through specific characters, which has been a major focus of this article, is only one aspect of inclusivity. We can also consider how our game environments might support or

dismantle gender binaries...It is important that we interrogate how androgyny as an aesthetic can center thin, white masculinity.” (160).

In addition, Kathryn Morgan, author of “Androgyny: A Conceptual Critique” approaches the idea that androgyny should no longer present itself as a balanced ideal of masculinity and femininity but rather an ideal in which being androgynous are based on variation of individual choices of presenting masculine and feminine traits; something that is coined as “polyandrogynism” (267; 272). Approaching the topic of including gender-variant characters that do not encroach on negative stereotypes is possible, but it takes progress. And progress can only be made if a problem has been realized and recognized as such.

Discussion

Outlast II received immaculate praise after its release. The game received a score of 8.3 on IGN (O’Brien, 2017), a 9/10 on Steam (steampowered.com), and a 7/10 on pushsquare (Barker, 2019). Reviews included players of the game stating that:

Being pursued by the tongue creature in the dark in a labyrinthian library comes to mind, or slowly inching a cart forward that will allow you to climb over a wall to escape the Tall Woman while she gurgles her malicious prayers at your heels. These are some of the most terrifying moments I’ve experienced in a horror video game, ever (O’Brien, 2017).

Another review applauded with,

It brought up some of the most difficult memories in my life, issues I had buried long ago. My reactions to that anguish have run the gamut, but more than anything, I respect that *Outlast 2* has the singular focus and intensity to dredge up those emotions; that alone made it worth the time spent for me (Kollar, 2017).

Based on previous experiences with other horror titles, I have to agree with the reviews; *Outlast II* turned the horror genre on its head with the intense gameplay, terrifying plot, and gruesome cast of characters. I played the game so often and with such intensity that I could recite dialogue out loud, which tended to unnerve those who observed my gameplay. The player was either being hunted by an aging woman controlled by an authoritative male figure or being licked and groped by a queer person whose goal is to “share their love.” The player is amidst a cult who believes the apocalypse is upon them and the player, with no way to defend themselves, is the key to stopping the end times. The usage of torture, body horror, and graphics were enough to make any avid-horror gamer jump in their seat. While the jump scares and sound cues are given to surprise individuals, what unnerved the player was the mistreatment of women, the overarching structures of hegemonic masculinity controlling the environment, and those affected as a result of those structures taking place. For example, some of the cult’s following contracted Syphilis due to Knoth; he continued to spread his infection—medicating himself in secret—while his following believed their sickness was of the soul rather than of their neglectful Reverend.

The *Outlast* series has had a remarkably scarce amount of female representation in their franchise; *Outlast* and *Outlast: Whistleblower* did not have any women in-game. The use of women in *Outlast II*, while more realistic, were severely mistreated in comparison to the males. When looking at character models, there were a smaller number of female models than male. Females in the game were seen being impaled, going through extensive pain that lasts for hours (only to have a phantom pregnancy and die from the complications), tortured, or offered as something materialistic to a heteronormative male with a power trip. Lynn and Jessica, two important women in Blake’s life, were mistreated in separate ways: for Lynn, it was to make her

dialogue and interaction with any male characters to be assertive or domineering, which has a greater possibility for the player's to not like her, and thus put her in the "bitchy" female NPC. She was a freelance journalist-turned-damsel in distress in a matter of moments, and any chance of redeeming her character or expanding on her backstory were ripped from the player when she gave birth to "the antichrist" and died from the complications. For Jessica, she was an example of being manipulated by both a figure of power and a male figure, one she could supposedly trust. Her demise was something that could have been prevented, had Blake not been guilted by Loutermilch into both leaving her alone and keeping her murder a secret. Jessica was a girl who was not given a trusting father figure, and was without a mother, leaving her with no guidance or resources when she needed them most. The only male figure she trusted was her childhood friend, who was not mature enough to file charges against the perpetrator or have someone investigate Loutermilch even if Jessica told him about her mistreatment. Marta was used as support to the discussion of age in horror media.

Marta, whose devotion to her religion and to her people force her to believe in Knoth when he manipulates her to murder countless civilians. She has stated her concerns to Knoth, and he continues to force his authority over her comfortability. Marta's age also plays a factor. Based on prior analysis of the documents, Marta is approximated to be in her early-to-mid seventies. Her character fits into the "old crone" stereotype. One commonly used in horror media, this trope speaks about the malevolence of older women and the grotesqueness of ageing. Older women are seen as unattractive, vain, and evil. Assuming that Marta is within the age-range for being considered "old," she would fit into these categories due not only to her personality but to her lack of feminine dress and stature; Marta dresses in all black, is barefoot, hunched over, and covers most of her face with a black veil. Not only does this obscure Marta, making her seem

more frightening, but it gives her a Reaper-esque quality to her character. Knoth addresses her as his “avenging angel,” who may swiftly deliver justice and death to those who oppose the faith of “The Modern Ezekiel.” For Marta’s case, she is an older woman whose sole job is to kill for the bidding of another man, showing not only her devotion but also the gendered dominance of men’s word over women’s. It is both her age and her preferred method of subduing the player that place into a “monstrous feminine” character; in which this character pushes the anxiety of male castration and exhibits behaviors that challenge femininity. An example of Marta challenging her femininity is her profession; being the enforcer of anything, let alone a cult, would not typically be seen as a female profession. Yet, she does it, and she strikes down any who oppose her, Temple Gate, or Knoth. Her death was gruesome, being impaled in the chest by the symbol she worshipped in result of being forced to do the bidding of an abusive heteronormative male.

The women in *Outlast II* were shown to be severely underappreciated by the men and had violence done against them when they would either stray away from stereotypes within the emphasized femininity trope—such as Lynn, who exuded qualities that were “unladylike” and thus was treated poorly by both Temple Gate men and in her own death—or continued to experience the abuse of domineering men manipulating the women—such as Jessica, whose innocence was stripped away by the “male gaze” and thus subject to Loutermilch’s perverse interactions and her murder. Mary was killed from torture in result of interrogation by Knoth

The men in *Outlast II* only continued to support these tropes. When discussing the plot, it is obvious that Blake Langermann was a cameraman-turned-superman, giving up everything to be the male savior/male protector to not only his wife but to his hallucination/childhood-friend Jessica. Blake’s description in “Heaven’s Gate Subjects” is far from what people consider a male

savior, yet it is this switch from being “Cameraman Blake” to “Hero Blake,” fighting tooth and nail to rescue his wife who, at the beginning of the game, could seemingly handle herself. He is seen physically shielding Lynn in the game; while this may be considered an act of courageousness, it also shows the standard of women needing protection from a male figure. Blake is fixed to be the hero of the game, even if previously described not to be.

Knoth’s influence on the Temple Gate residents showed the player that they were willing to do anything for their prophet, including torturing a woman for the whereabouts of another cult, only to be killed shortly after. It was mentioned in Knoth’s scripture that the women are to be offered to him to grow their following, which led to the statutory rape of Anna Lee and the reason why Blake and Lynn investigated the reservation in the first place. An NPC in “The Showroom” recording—whose character model is identical to Mary’s—was shown shackled to a bed, leaving chairs for an audience to watch what is assumed to be sexual acts done to her. The women in Temple Gate were only used for the male gaze, as they were only recognized as offerings to Knoth or “vessels” for the ever-growing following. The males in the game were influencing stereotypes of hegemonic masculinity. Such as: a lack of showing emotion (or seeing emotion as a “womanly trait,” fetishizing women, and seeing women as material to offer to other men.

Alongside the mistreatment of women came the misrepresentation of queer folk, specifically those who are gender non-conforming or gender variant. Val was an ex-deacon of Temple Gate, who lost their faith in Knoth and found a new God, who emphasizes the quickening of the apocalypse and consistent acts of sexual aggression towards others. Val, who does not have a confirmed gender, is the leader of the Heretics, who worship the same God Val does. The Heretic leader is known to molest Blake on separate occasions, at one point holding

him down and it is proposed that they forced him to join the orgy. The confusion of Val's gender was not resolved by the developers, who just responded with "Val is Val."

Val represents the gender variant villain. For Val's background to be the most developed out of the other antagonists and to be the only representation of those in the queer community in-game, only to have an offscreen death leaves the players to wonder why they were not given a proper death scene. Their displays are similar to other gender variant villains such as Dethmold from *The Witcher 2*, who has an option for an offscreen death. The difference being the player finds out what happens to Dethmold in his offscreen death, where it is only implied that Val was killed with the rest of The Heretics in the mine raid. Val impacted all the characters in *Outlast II* personally; Val had a relationship with Knoth as his deacon, Laird and Marta as their colleagues, Temple Gate acolytes as one of their leaders, and Blake as not only sharing dialogue with Loutermilch but also foreshadowing Blake's hallucination of Jessica wrestling him in Leviticus: "Val's Rebirth." For the character to have such a large impact in-game and such an expectation to represent the queer community only to be boiled down into emphasize of stereotypes that are toxic to those in the queer community shows that the horror genre lacks positive representation of those not within the gender binary. In fact, it is shown through both Val and Dethmold's off-screen deaths that their gender variance is seen as punishment, and this is further shown by the choice to have an on-screen, brutal death of Dethmold in *The Witcher 2*.

The emphasis on hegemonic masculinity, the male gaze, emphasized femininity, and violence towards women are common amongst other horror media, as shown with examples in *Until Dawn* and *The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings*. These themes, however, lead to the underrepresentation and mistreatment of women that reinforce negative traits of hyper-

masculinity/hyper-femininity. Moreover, they misrepresent those outside the gender binary through depicting negative stereotypes of queer individuals.

But why do we consider the concepts of mistreatment, body horror, cults, and hallucinations caused by a corporation as scary? Especially since prior evidence has suggested that video games tend to reinforce the gender binary and heteronormative stereotypes of being masculine and feminine? These concepts scare people because they are immoral, inhumane, and abnormal to societies norms. Known as the curiosity/fascination theory, McCauley (1998) proposes that the enjoyment of horror films, gore and all, is due to curiosity; and our immediate need to satisfy it. He states, “a horror film is immediately and directly enjoyed as it satisfies our curiosity” (149). In addition, Carroll (1990) explains that “horror attracts because anomalies command attention and elicit curiosity” (195). What was analyzed from *Outlast II* are common tropes in horror video games and in video games as a general media; these common tropes, unfortunately, tend to pronounce stereotypes that either reinforce or influence the gender binary and hyper-masculinity/hyper-femininity.

Outlast II is a beautifully crafted game: the gameplay is intense, the plot is terrifying, and the characters are enough to leave the player anxious but eager for more scares. The aims of this research are not to shed a criticizing light on a game that is doing what it should be doing: scaring others by showing material that is frightening or disgusting. Rather, this research was to begin to criticize the horror gaming genre as a whole, by exploring its common themes and explaining how these themes can then harm others in smaller communities. I decided to use the title of *Outlast II* due to the positive reviews and how it has changed the “survivor horror” genre by prohibiting weapons.

In addition, by unraveling the game's horror mechanics and providing similar examples, this can show that not only are common themes in the horror genre misrepresentative of certain groups, but it shows the consistency of which these tropes can be used, and how its consistency further influences prejudiced views on other marginalized communities and reinforces the gender binary. The horror genre tends to limit itself by sticking to tropes and emphasizing gender norms simply because horror creators know that it scares people. What I would suggest is to step away from these themes seen in horror media. Examples include: the white, cisgendered, male protagonist, the neurotypical male, the hyper-feminine female, the damsel in distress, and the stereotypical gender-variant villain. Stepping away from those tropes and exploring new ways to both scare the consumer and integrate more PC females, PC's of all sexualities, races, and ethnicities, would explore territories that may scare more consumers than one would think. At the very least, I would suggest that developers keep these tropes at the forefront of their minds when designing a horror game, and possibly open discussion about them in some way.

The gender binary and queer representation in video games have yet to be thoroughly discussed by the industry, though there have been attempts (Mikula 2003; Near 2013; Jenson & De Castell 2010; Richard & Hoadley 2013; Richard, G. T. 2017). If more discussions were had, then it would become easier for those tropes to be recognized and, at one point, removed from being included in the game. I mention these points because it is something that I as a consumer have noticed. These suggestions, if used, would not only expand the market for horror consumerism, but would also be inclusive to those who are not in the majority.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Future directions of this research include further analysis of common horror themes among this series. For example, the lack of representation of queer individuals and females being in both *Outlast* and *Outlast: Whistleblower* can be further analyzed. Another theme to consider to future research include more well-known proponents to fear in horror games. It may be beneficial to focus the research on studying specific views, such as: mental health, fatphobia, or further discussion of STD's used as components in horror media. Further analyzing these proponents in this series—or other modes of horror media—could support the argument that inserting these tropes can result in harm to minorities. This future research may result in the recognition of common tropes that harm certain parts of society or the environment that they reside. This research could then be used as reference points for future game designers and developers who would discover new ways to scare their consumers.

Another direction that I hope to pursue is to collect and analyze fear responses to playing horror games via YouTube “Let’s Plays.” Kirkland (2009) mentions that the “uncanny” components of survival horror games—avatars, the environment, and the objects used—are heavily correlated with how strong the relationship is with the player and the avatar (1-2). Sigmund Freud coined the term “uncanny” through a psychological theory, in which objects that are both familiar and unfamiliar tend to cause uneasiness. The avatar not only provides immersion, but also represents the uneasiness the player feels when the avatar is witness to something “uncanny” (3). I believe that the responses to horror video games, especially ones like *Outlast* which emphasize genital mutilation and other forms of body horror, would further support my argument that the responses to fear amongst different genders are based on how immersed the person is in the game. For example, Marta’s signature move of killing Blake

includes impaling him through his crotch with her pickaxe. I hypothesize that females will not be as inclined to physically react simply because they aren't male, and this "gendered situation" will not affect them as strongly as it would men. Further research of this topic would include a content analysis of YouTube creators completing a playthrough of a horror game and examining their reactions based on intensity and what it was that frightened them.

When faced with immediate danger, the body begins to prepare using the fight or flight system. Survival horror uses instances that activate that system, which leads to the players frightened reaction. *Outlast* takes survival horror and flips it on its head, forcing the player to be defenseless and using only night vision to light the way through dark and dangerous areas. The fear when playing *Outlast* is true terror, and that is what makes it such a quality game that I recommend every chance I get. However, the game is not without its flaws, and they are only mentioned in an effort to show game developers that these tropes impact the community they represent negatively. With this game used as a case study, the discussion of gender politics in horror media can progress further, until horror media can be considered fully inclusive; not that it isn't already universally terrifying to hear a woman chant at you as she raises her pickaxe high: "God give me voice, God guide my hand."

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Appendix A: Images

Figure 1: Tweet of Outlast beer. Notice the male executioner. From Red Barrels [TheRedBarrels] (2019, November, 27). Thank you to @MEGAexpomtl/@MIGS for an awesome event! Special thanks to all those who stopped by to say hello & try our beer, created by the talented brewers at @troududiable The team is back in the studio and more inspired than ever! [Tweet]. Twitter. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/TheRedBarrels/status/1199745705226588160>



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Figure 3: Screenshot of Pauline on the phone with Paul. Notice the pleased look on her face. From Petty, J. T. (2016-2017). *The Murkoff Account: Part 5* [Cartoon]. Red Barrels Studios. Screenshot taken by author.



Figure 4: Screenshot of Laird Byron and Nick Tremblay “rotting away” due to Syphilis. From *Outlast II* [Nintendo Switch], Red Barrels, 2017. Screenshot taken by author.



Figure 5: Screenshots of NPC character models seen within the second-to-last scene in the game. Notice the similar male (blue) models to female (red) models. From *Outlast II* [Nintendo Switch], Red Barrels, 2017. Screenshot taken by author.



Figure 6: Screenshot of First Meeting Val. From *Outlast II* [Nintendo Switch], Red Barrels, 2017. Screenshot taken by author.



Figure 7: Red Barrels “confirming” Val’s Gender. From Red Barrels [@TheRedBarrels]. (2017, April, 28). *Val is Val* [Tweet]. Twitter. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/theredbarrels/status/857985504670879744?lang=en>



Val is Val.

8:50 AM - 28 Apr 2017

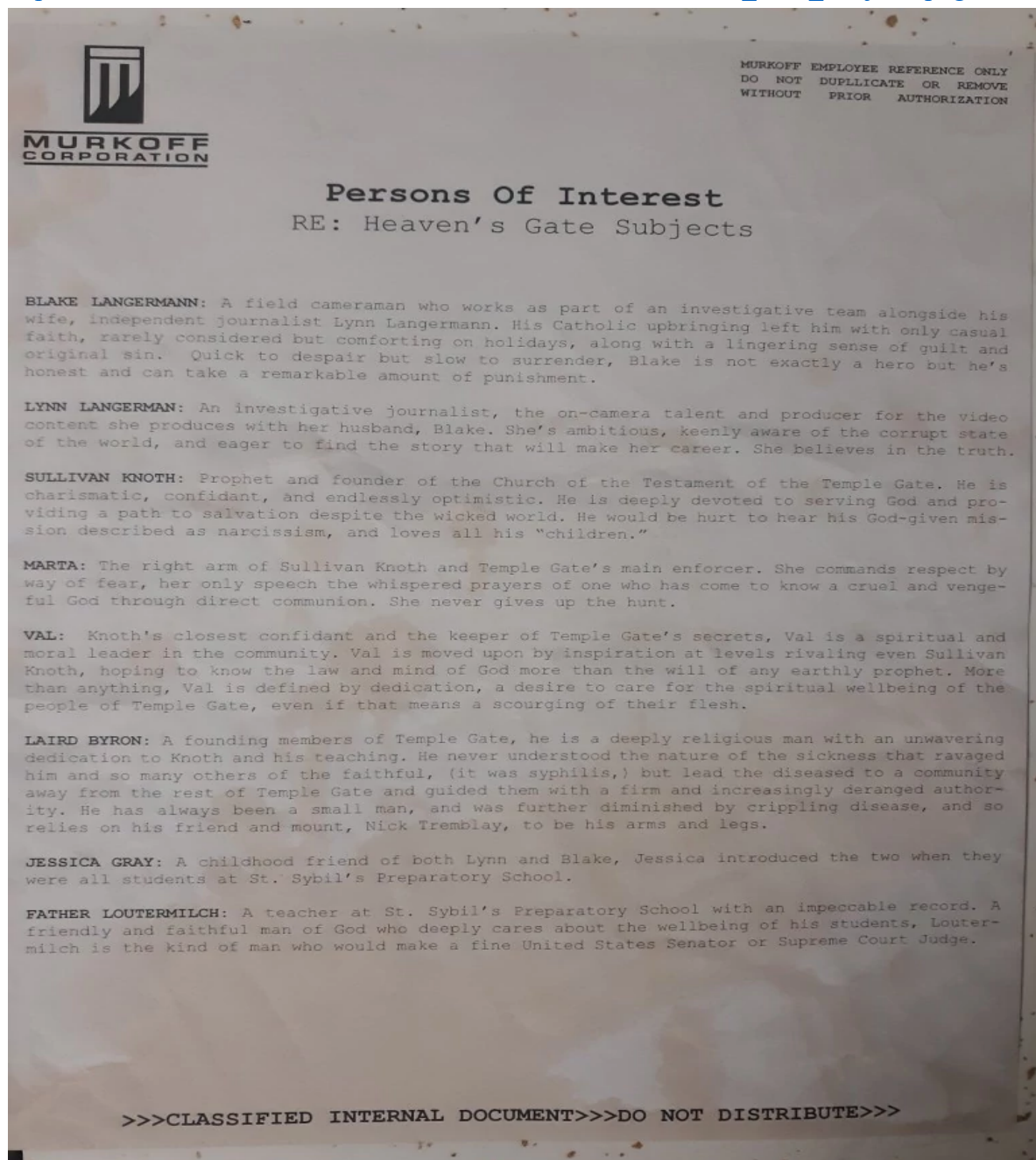
Figure 8: Screenshot of Val's "True Face." From *Outlast II* [Nintendo Switch], Red Barrels, 2017. Screenshot taken by author.



Appendix B: Referenced Documents and Recordings

Figure 1: Heaven's Gate Subjects. Uploaded by "NewGenTV" from

https://outlast.fandom.com/wiki/Thread:29325?file=Heaven%27s_Gate_Subjects.png#2



Document Transcript:

Blake Langermann: "A field cameraman who works as part of an investigation team alongside his wife, independent journalist Lynn Langermann. His catholic upbringing left him with only casual faith, rarely considered but comforting on holidays, along with a lingering sense of guilt and original sin. Quick to despair but slow to surrender, Blake is not exactly a hero but he's honest and can take a remarkable amount of punishment.

Lynn Langermann: An investigate journalist, the on-camera talent and producer for the video content she produces with her husband, Blake. She's ambitious, keenly aware of the corrupt state of the world, and eager to find the story that will make her career. She believes in the truth.

Sullivan Knoth: Prophet and founder of the Church of the Testament of the Temple Gate. He is charismatic, confidant, and endlessly optimistic. He is deeply devoted to serving God and providing a path to salvation despite the wicked world. He would be hurt to hear his God-given mission described as narcissism, and loves all his "children."

Marta: The right arm of Sullivan Knoth and Temple Gate's main enforcer. She commands respect by way of fear, her only speech the whispered prayers of one who has come to know a cruel and vengeful God through direct communion. She never gives up the hunt.

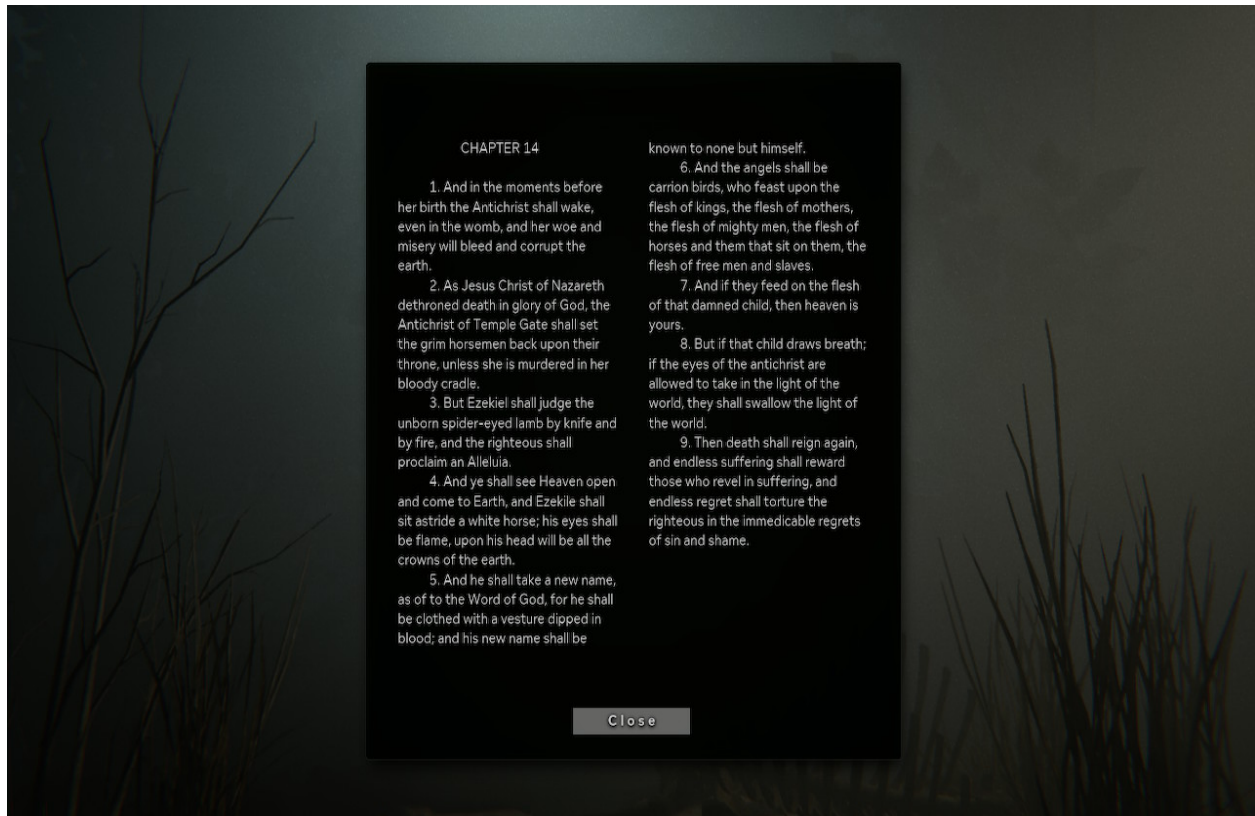
Val: Knoth's closest confidant and the keeper of Temple Gate's secrets, Val is a spiritual and moral leader in the community. Val is moved upon by inspiration at levels rivaling even Sullivan Knoth, hoping to know the law and mind of God more than the will of any earthly prophet. More than anything, Val is defined by dedication, a desire to care for the spiritual wellbeing of the people of Temple Gate, even if that means a scouring of their flesh.

Laird Byron: A founding members of Temple Gate, he is a deeply religious man with an unwavering dedication to Knoth and his teaching. He never understood the nature of the sickness that ravaged him and so many other faithful, (it was Syphilis,) but lead the diseased to a community away from the rest of Temple Gate and guided them with a firm and increasingly deranged authority. He has always been a small man, and was further diminished by crippling disease, and so relies on his friend and mount, Nick Tremblay, to be his arms and legs.

Jessica Gray: A childhood friend of both Lynn and Blake, Jessica introduced the two when they were all friends at St. Sybil's Preparatory School.

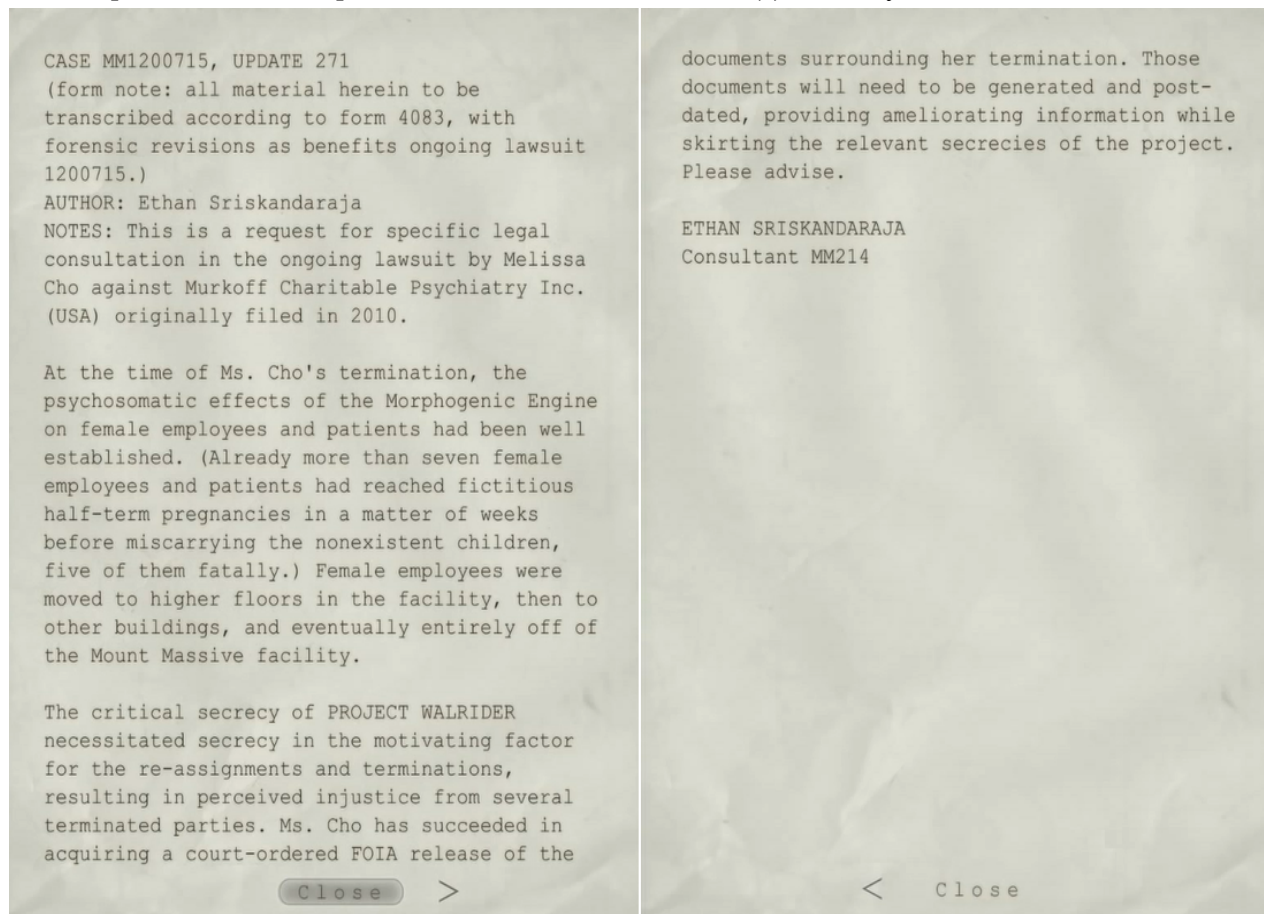
Father Loutermilch: A teacher at St. Sybil's Preparatory School with an impeccable record. A friendly and faithful man of God who deeply cares about the wellbeing of his students, Loutermilch is the kind of man who would make a fine United States Senator or Supreme Court Judge."

Figure 2: Screenshot of the document “Gospel of Knoth: Chapter 14” From *Outlast II* [Nintendo Switch]. Red Barrels, 2017. Screenshot taken by author.



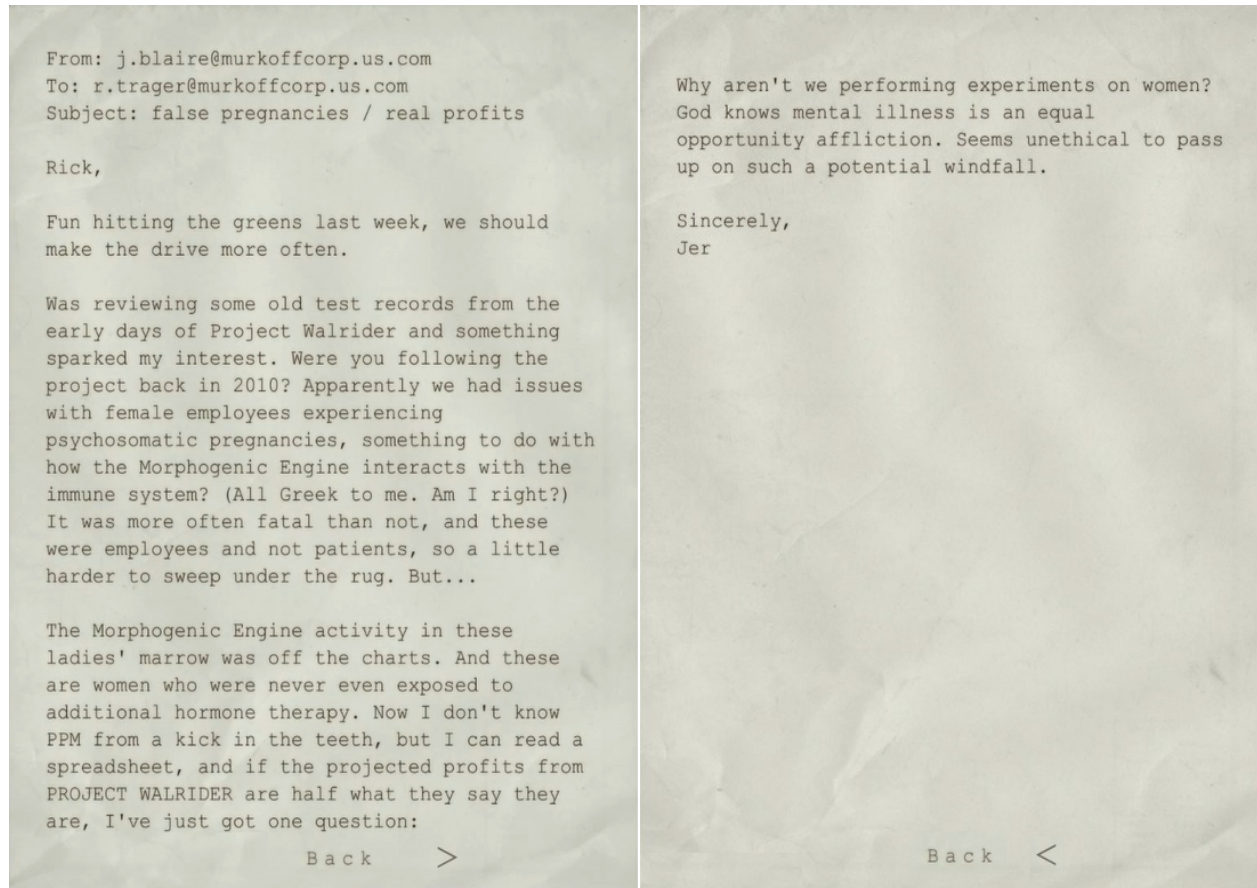
Document Transcript: “And in the moments before her birth the Antichrist shall wake, even in the womb, and her woe and misery will bleed and corrupt the earth. As Jesus Christ of Nazareth dethroned death in glory of God, the Antichrist of Temple Gate shall set the grim horsemen back upon their throne, unless she is murdered in her bloody cradle. But Ezekiel shall judge the unborn spider-eyed lamb by knife and by fire, and the righteous shall proclaim and Alleluia. And ye shall see Heaven open and come to Earth, and Ezekiel shall sit astride a white horse; his eyes shall be flame, upon his head will be all the crowns of the earth. And he shall take a new name, as of to the Word of God, for he shall be clothed with a vesture dipped in blood; and his new name shall be known to none but himself. And the angels shall be carrion birds, who feast upon the flesh of kings, the flesh of mothers, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and them that sit on them, the flesh of free men and slaves. And if they feed on the flesh of that damned child, then heaven is yours. But if that child draws breath; if the eyes of the antichrist are allowed to take in the light of the world, they shall swallow the light of the world. Then death shall reign again, and endless suffering shall reward those who revel in suffering, and endless regret shall torture the righteous in the immedicable regrets of sin and shame.”

*Figure 3: Screenshot of the document “Gender Selection in Mount Massive Contractors” From *Outlast* [Nintendo Switch]. Red Barrels, 2013. Screenshot(s) taken by author.*



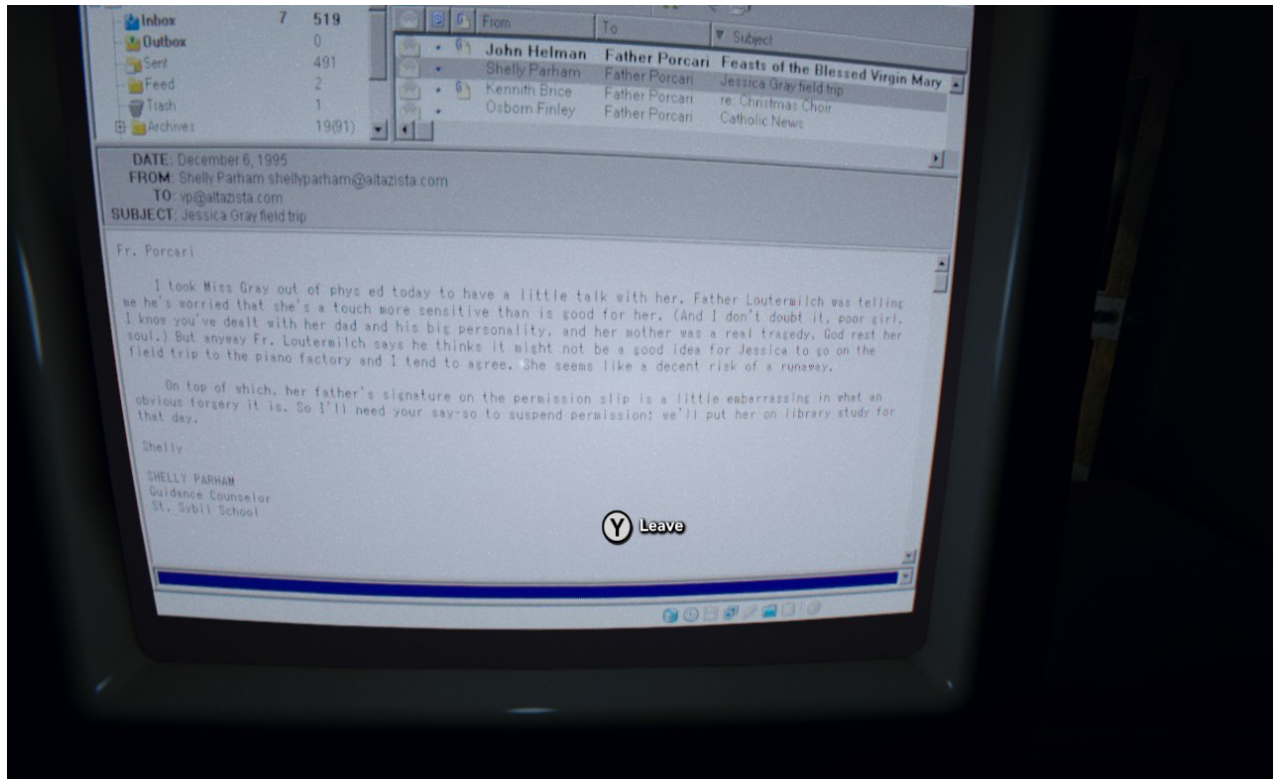
Document Transcript: “At the time of Ms. Cho’s termination, the psychosomatic effects of the Morphogenic Engine on female employees and patients had been well established. (Already more than seven female employees and patients had reached fictitious half-term pregnancies in a matter of weeks before miscarrying the nonexistent children, five of them fatally.) Female employees were moved to higher floor in the facility, then to other buildings, and eventually entirely off of the Mount Massive facility. The critical secrecy of PROJCT WALRIDER necessitated secrecy in the motivating factor the re-assignments and terminations, resulting in perceived injustice from several terminated parties. Ms. Cho has succeeded in acquiring a court-ordered FOIA release of the documents surrounding her termination. Those documents wil need to be generated and post-dated, providing ameliorating information while skirting the relevant secrecies of the project. Please advise.”

Figure 4: Screenshot of the document “Miscarried Profits.” From *Outlast* [Nintendo Switch]. Red Barrels, 2013. Screenshot(s) taken by author.



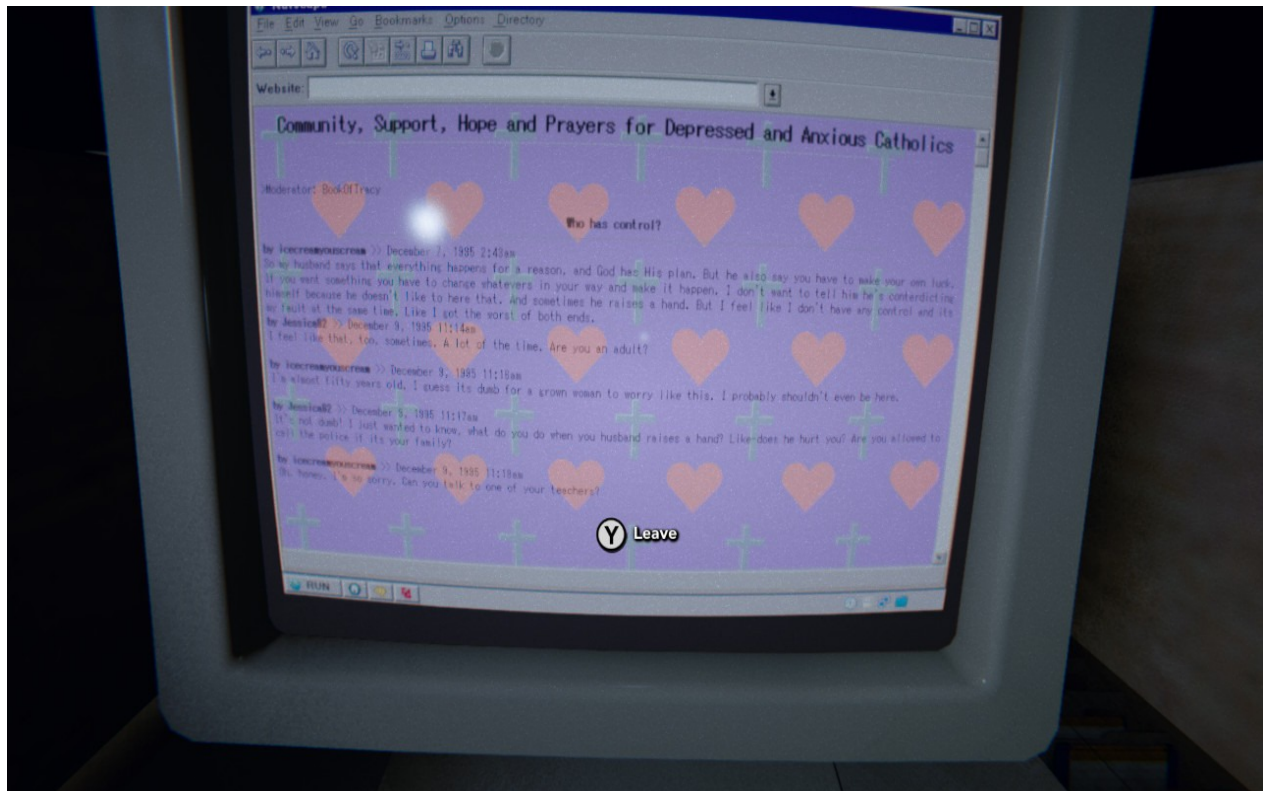
Document Transcript: “Fun hitting the greens last week, we should make the drive more often. Was reviewing some old test records from the early days of Project Walrider and something sparked my interest. Were you following the project back in 2010? Apparently we had issues with female employees experiencing psychosomatic pregnancies, something to do with how the Morphogenic Engine interacts with the immune system? (All Greek to me. Am I right?) It was more often fatal than not, and these were employees and not patients, so a little harder to sweep under the rug...The Morphogenic Engine activity in these ladies’ marrow was off the charts. And these are women who were never even exposed to additional hormone therapy. Now I don’t know PPM from a kick in the teeth, but I can read a spreadsheet, and if the projected profits from PROJECT WALRIDER are half of what they say they are, I’ve just got one question: Why aren’t we performing experiments on women? God knows mental illness is an equal opportunity affliction. Seems unethical to pass up on such a potential windfall.”

Figure 5: Screenshot of Email Exchange Between Shelly Parham and Father Porcari. From *Outlast II* [Nintendo Switch], Red Barrels, 2017. Screenshot taken by author.



Document Transcript: “I took Miss Gray out of phys ed today to have a little talk with her. Father Loutermilch was telling me he’s worried that she’s a touch more sensitive than is good for her. (and I don’t doubt it, poor girl. I know you’ve dealt with her dad and his big personality, and her mother was a real tragedy, God rest her soul.) But anyway Fr. Loutermilch says he thinks it might not be a good idea for Jessica to go on the field trip to the piano factory and I tend to agree. She seems like a decent risk of a runaway. On top of which, her father’s signature on the permission slip is a little embarrassing in what obvious forgery it is. So I’ll need your say so to suspend permission: we’ll put her on library study for that day.”

Figure 6: Screenshot of Chatroom Exchange Between Jessica (Jessica82) and Older Woman (icescreamyouscream). From *Outlast II* [Nintendo Switch], Red Barrels, 2017. Screenshot taken by author.



Document Transcript:

By icescreamyouscream: “So my husband says that everything happens for a reason, and God has His plan. But he also say you have to make your own luck. If you want something you have to change whatever in your way and make it happen. I don’t want to tell him he’s contradicting himself because he doesn’t like to here that. And something he raises a hand. But I feel like I don’t have any control and its my fault at the same time. Like I got the worst of both ends.”

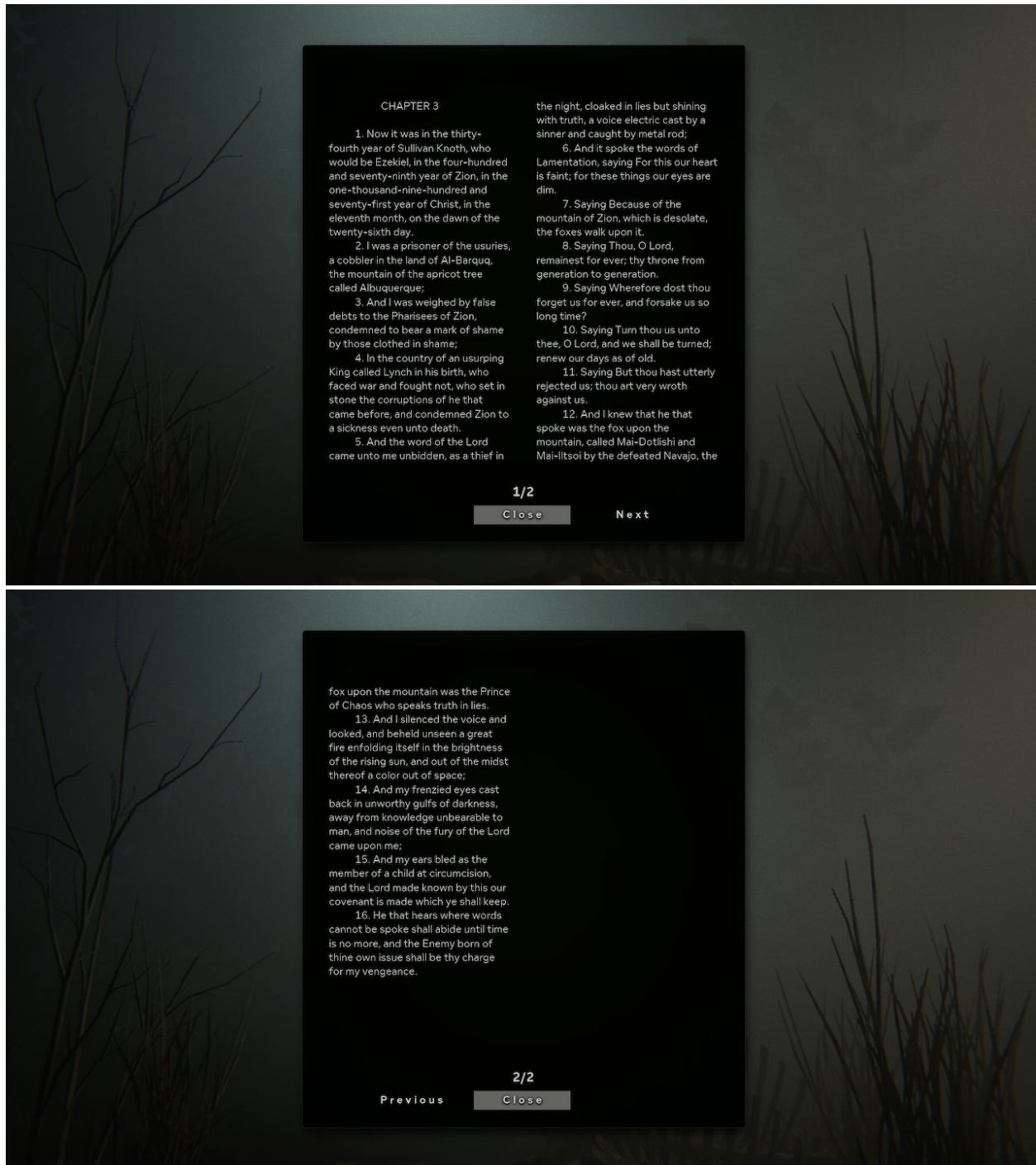
By Jessica82: “I feel like that too, sometimes. A lot of the time. Are you an adult?”

By Icescreamyouscream: “I’m almost fifty years old. I guess its dumb for a grown woman to worry like this. I probably shouldn’t even be here.”

By Jessica82: “It’s not dumb! I just wanted to know, what do you do when you husband raises a hand? Like does he hurt you? Are you allowed to call the police if its your family?”

By Icescreamyouscream: “Oh. Honey. I’m so sorry. Can you talk to one of your teachers?”

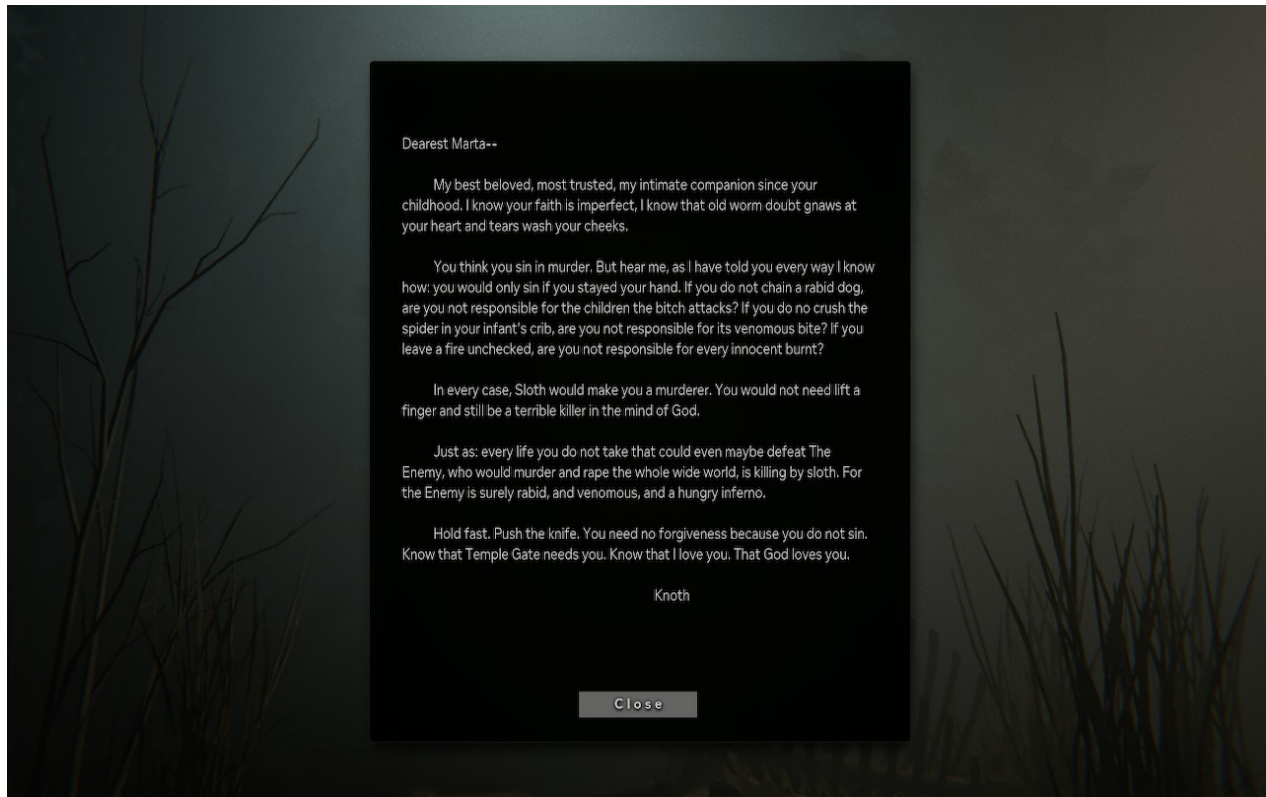
Figure 7: Screenshot of the document “Gospel of Knoth: Chapter 3.” From *Outlast II* [Nintendo Switch], Red Barrels, 2017. Screenshot taken by author.



Document Transcript: “Now it was in the thirty-fourth year of Sullivan Knoth, who would be Ezekiel, in the four-hundred and seventy-ninth year of Zion, in the one-thousand-nine-hundred and seventy-first year of Christ, in the eleventh month, on the dawn of the twenty-sixth day. I was a prisoner of the usuries, a cobbler in the land of Al-Barquq, the mountain of the apricot tree called Albuquerque; And I was weighed by false debts to the Pharisees of Zion, condemned to

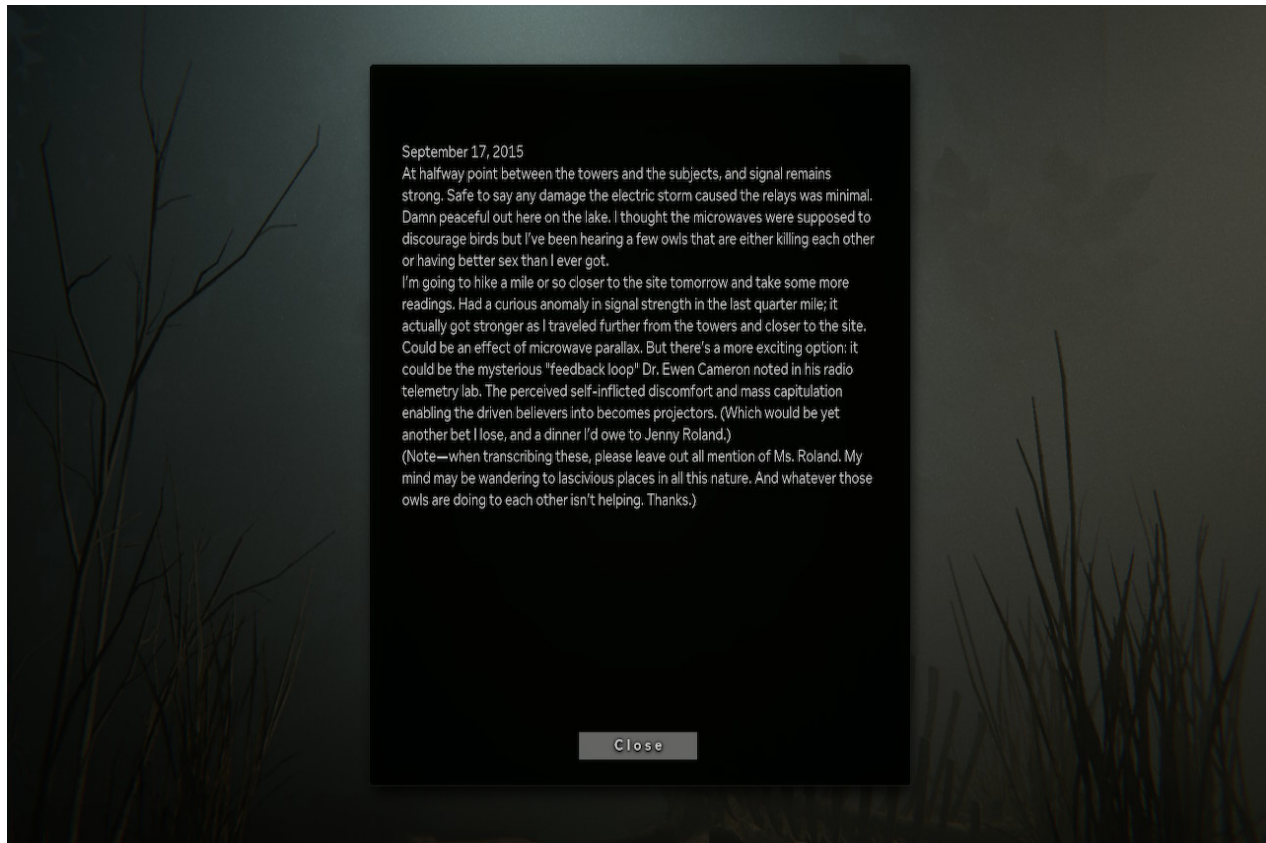
beat a mark of shame by those clothed in shame; In the country of an usurping King called Lynch in his birth, who faced war and fought not, who set in stone the corruptions of he that came before, and condemned Zion to a sickness even unto death. And the word of the Lord came unto me unbidden, as a thief in the night, cloaked in lies but shining with truth, a voice electric cast by a sinner and caught by metal rod; And it spoke the words of Lamentation, saying "For this our heart is faint; for these things our eyes are dim." Saying "Because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it." Saying "Thou, O Lord, remainest for ever; thy throne from generation to generation." Saying "Wherefore dost thou forget us for ever, and forsake us so long time?" Saying "Turn thou us unto thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old." Saying "But thou hast utterly reject us; thou art very wroth against us." And I knew that he that spoke was the fox upon the mountain, called Mai-Dotl'ishī and Mai-Iltsói by the defeated Navajo, the fox upon the mountain was the Prince of Chaos who speaks truth in lies. And I silenced the voice and looked, and beheld unseen a great fire enfolding itself in the brightness of the rising sun, and out of the midst thereof a color out of space; And my frenzied eyes cast back in unworthy gulfs of darkness, away from knowledge unbearable to man, and noise of the fury of the Lord came upon me; And my ears bled as the member of a child at circumcision, and the Lord made known by this our covenant is made which ye shall keep. He that hears where words cannot be spoke shall abide until time is no more, and the Enemy born of thine own issue shall be thy change for my vengeance."

Figure 8: Screenshot of the document “Outside Marta’s Chapel.” From *Outlast II* [Nintendo Switch], Red Barrels, 2017. Screenshot taken by author.



Document Transcript: “My best beloved, most trusted, my intimate companion since your childhood. I know your faith is imperfect. I know that old worm doubt gnaws at your heart and tears wash your cheeks. You think you sin in murder. But hear me, as I have told you every way I know how: you would only sin if you stayed your hand. If you do not chain a rabid dog, are you not responsible for the children the bitch attacks? If you do not crush the spider in your infant's crib, are you not responsible for its venomous bite? If you leave a fire unchecked, are you not responsible for every innocent burnt? In every case, Sloth would make you a murderer. You would not need lift a finger and still be a terrible killer in the mind of God. Just as every life you do not take that could even maybe defeat The Enemy, who would murder and rape the whole wide world, is killing by sloth. For the Enemy is surely rabid, and venomous, and a hungry inferno. Hold fast. Push the knife. You need no forgiveness because you do not sin. Know that Temple Gate needs you. Know that I love you. That God loves you.”

Figure 9: Screenshot of the document “Old Traveler.” From *Outlast II* [Nintendo Switch], Red Barrels, 2017. Screenshot taken by author.



Document Transcript: ““September 17, 2015. At halfway point between the towers and the subjects, and the signal remains strong. Safe to say any damage the electrical storm caused the relays was minimal. Damn peaceful out here on the lake. I thought the microwaves were supposed to discourage birds but I've been hearing a few owls that are either killing each other or having better sex than I ever got. I am going to hike a mile or so closer to the site tomorrow and take some more readings. Had a curious anomaly in the signal strength in the last quarter mile; it actually got stronger as I traveled further from the towers and closer to the site. Could be an effect of microwave parallax. But there is a more exciting option: it could be the mysterious "feedback loop" Dr. Ewen Cameron noted in his radio telemetry lab. The perceived self-inflicted discomfort and mass capitulation enabling the driven believers into becomes projectors. (Which would be yet another bet I lose, and a dinner I'd owe to Jenny Roland.) (Note—when transcribing these, please leave out all mention of Ms. Roland. My mind may be wandering to lascivious places in all this nature. And whatever those owls are doing to each other isn't helping. Thanks.)”

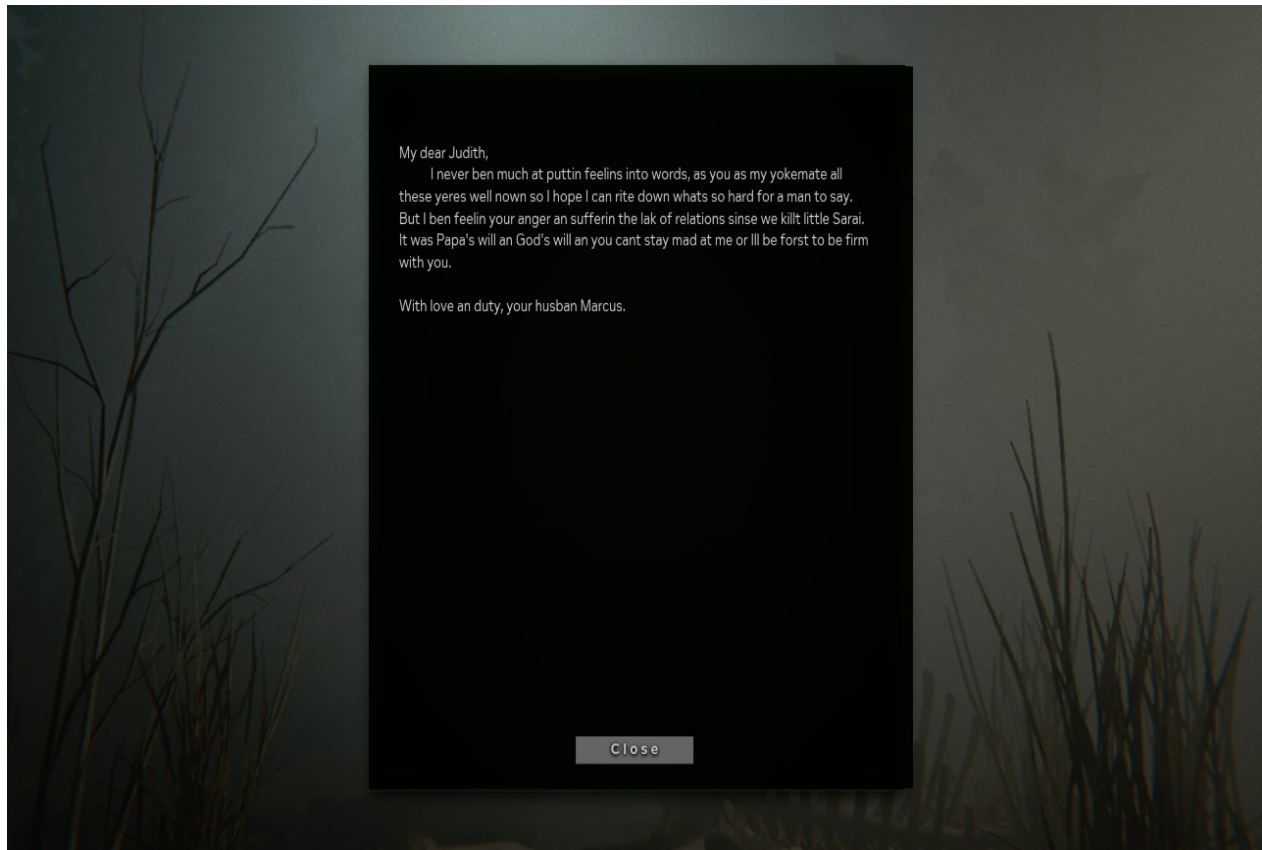
Figure 10: Screenshot of “Torture” recording. From *Outlast II* [Nintendo Switch], Red Barrels, 2017. Screenshot taken by author.



Figure 11: Screenshot of “The Showroom” recording. From *Outlast II* [Nintendo Switch], Red Barrels, 2017. Screenshot taken by author.

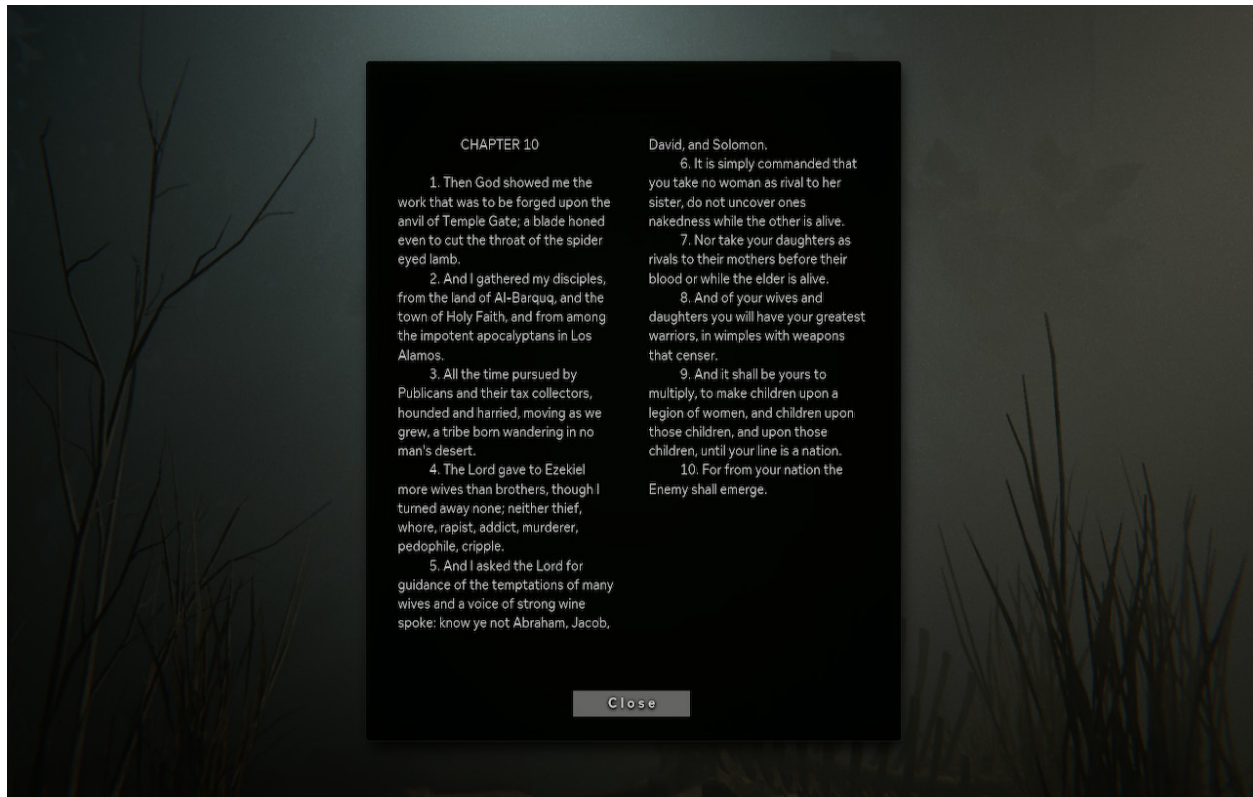


Figure 12: Screenshot of the document “Letter from a Husband.” From *Outlast II* [Nintendo Switch], Red Barrels, 2017. Screenshot taken by author.



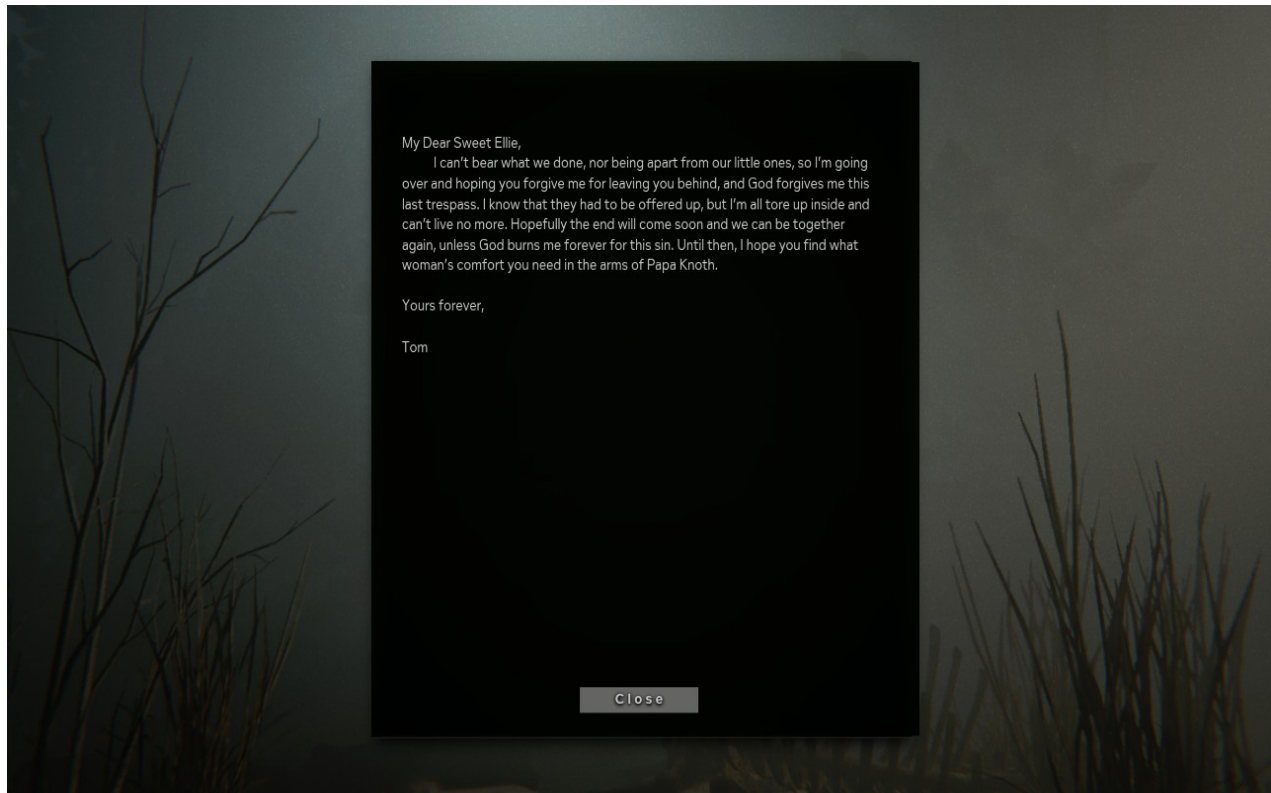
Document Transcript: “I never ben much at puttin feelins into words, as you as my yokemate all these yeres well nown so I hope I can rite down whats so hard for a man to say. But I ben feelin your anger an sufferin the lak of relations sinse we killt little Sarai. It was Papa's will an God's will an you cant stay mad at me or Ill be forst to be firm with you.”

Figure 13: Screenshot of the document “Gospel of Knoth: Chapter 10.” From *Outlast II* [Nintendo Switch], Red Barrels, 2017. Screenshot taken by author.



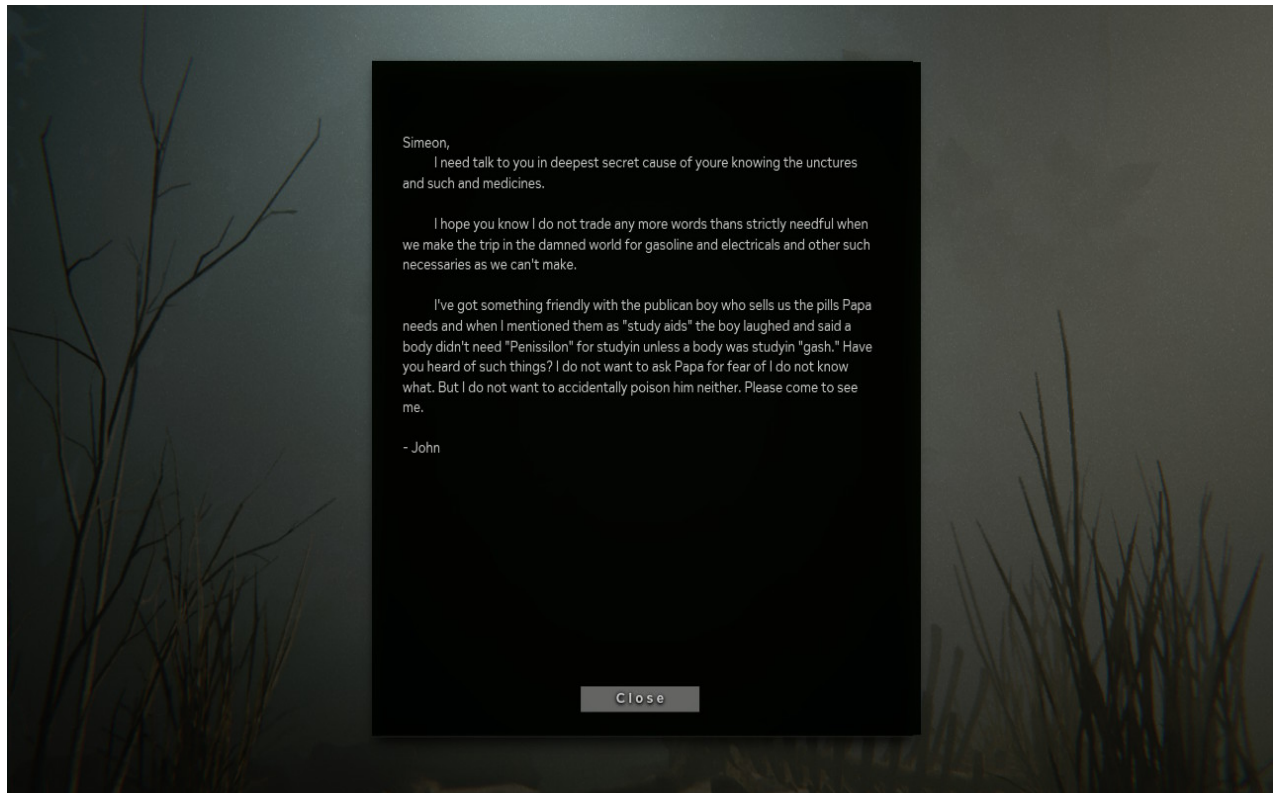
Document Transcript: “Then God showed me the work that was to be forged upon the anvil of Temple Gate; a blade honed even to cut the throat of the spider-eyed lamb. And I gathered my disciples, from the land of Al-Barquq, and the town of Holy Faith, and from among the impotent apocalyptans in Los Alamos. All the time pursued by Publicans and their tax collectors, hounded and harried, moving as we grew, a tribe born wandering in no man's desert. The Lord gave to Ezekiel more wives than brothers, though I turned away none; neither thief, whore, rapist, addict, murderer, pedophile, cripple. And I asked the Lord for guidance of the temptations of many wives and a voice of strong wine spoke: know ye not Abraham, Jacob, David, and Solomon. It is simply commanded that you take no woman as rival to her sister, do not uncover one's nakedness while the other is alive. Nor take your daughters as rivals to their mothers before their blood or while the elder is alive. And of your wives and daughters you will have your greatest warriors, in wimples with weapons that censer. And it shall be yours to multiply, to make children upon a legion of women, and children upon those children, and upon those children, until your line is a nation. For from your nation the Enemy shall emerge.”

Figure 14: Screenshot of the document “My Dear Sweet Ellie.” From *Outlast II* [Nintendo Switch], Red Barrels, 2017. Screenshot taken by author.



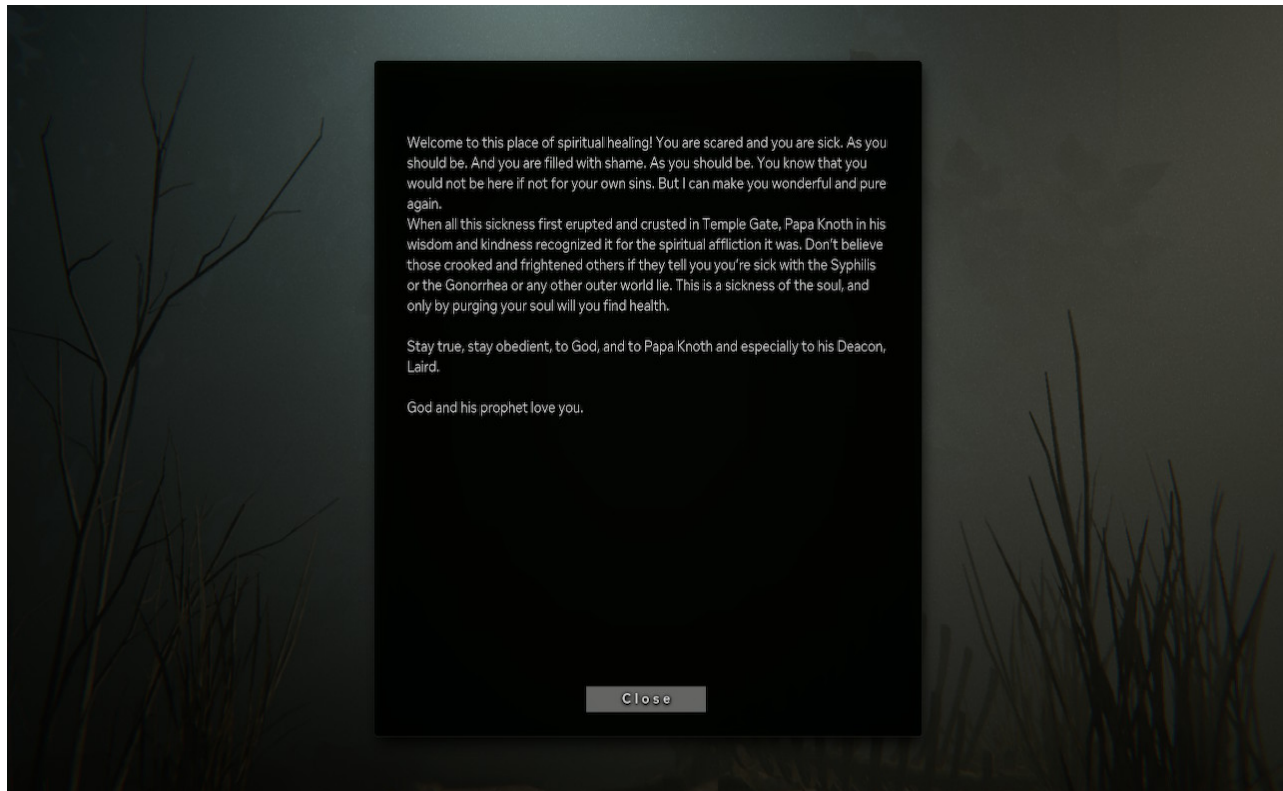
Document Transcript: “I can't bear what we done, nor being apart from our little ones, so I'm going over and hoping you forgive me for leaving you behind, and God forgives me in this last trespass. I know that they had to be offered up, but I'm all tore up inside and can't live no more. Hopefully the end will come soon and we can be together again, unless God burns me forever for this sin. Until then, I hope you find what woman's comfort you need in the arms of Papa Knoth.”

Figure 15: Screenshot of the document “Sundries from a Sinful World.” From *Outlast II* [Nintendo Switch], Red Barrels, 2017. Screenshot taken by author.



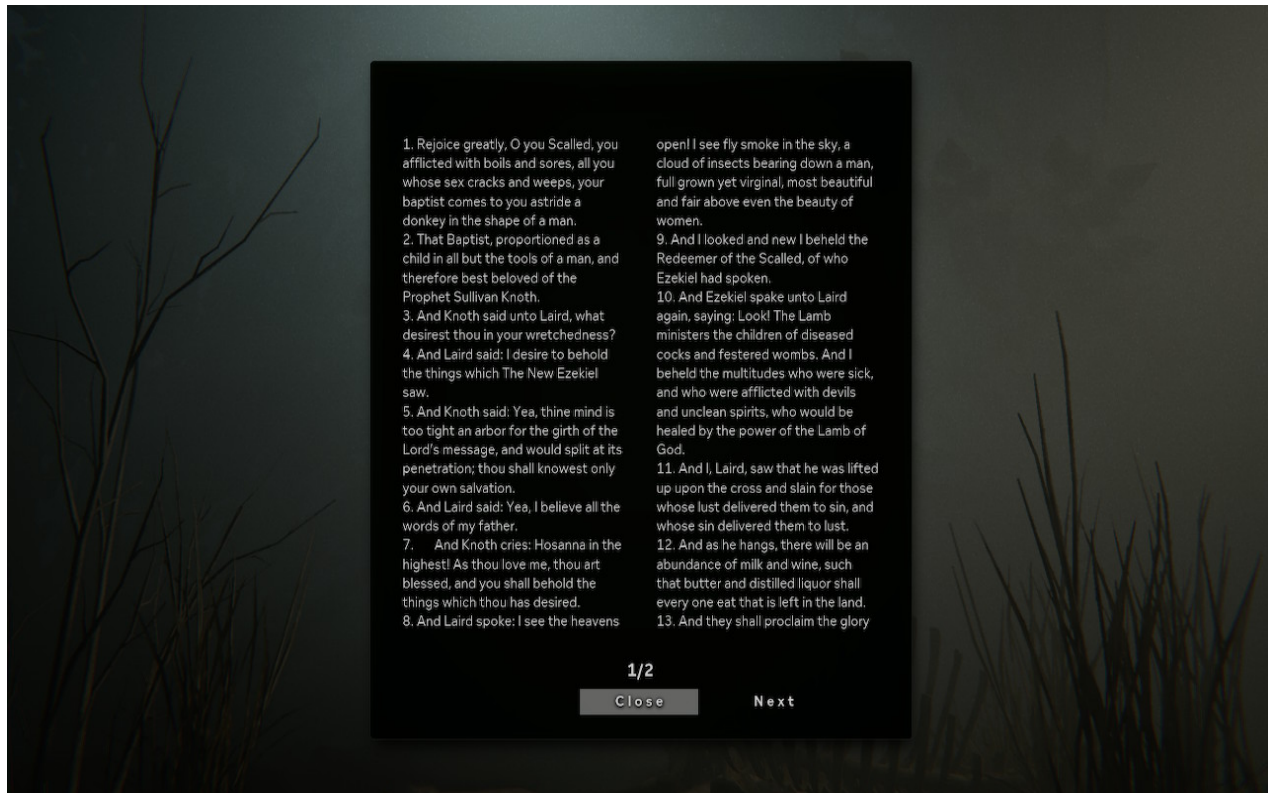
Document Transcript: “I need to talk to you in deepest secret cause of youre knowing of the unctures and such and medicines. I hope you know I do not trade any more words thans strictly needful when we make the trip in the damned world for gasoline and electricals and other such necessaries as we can't make. I've got something friendly with the publican boy who sells us the pills Papa needs and when I mentioned them as "study aids" the boy laughed and said a body didn't need "Penissilon" for studyin unless a body was studyin "gash". Have you heard of such things? I do not want to ask Papa for fear of I do not know what. But I do not want to accidentally poison him neither. Please come to see me.”

Figure 16: Screenshot of the document “Our Quarantine.” From *Outlast II* [Nintendo Switch], Red Barrels, 2017. Screenshot taken by author.



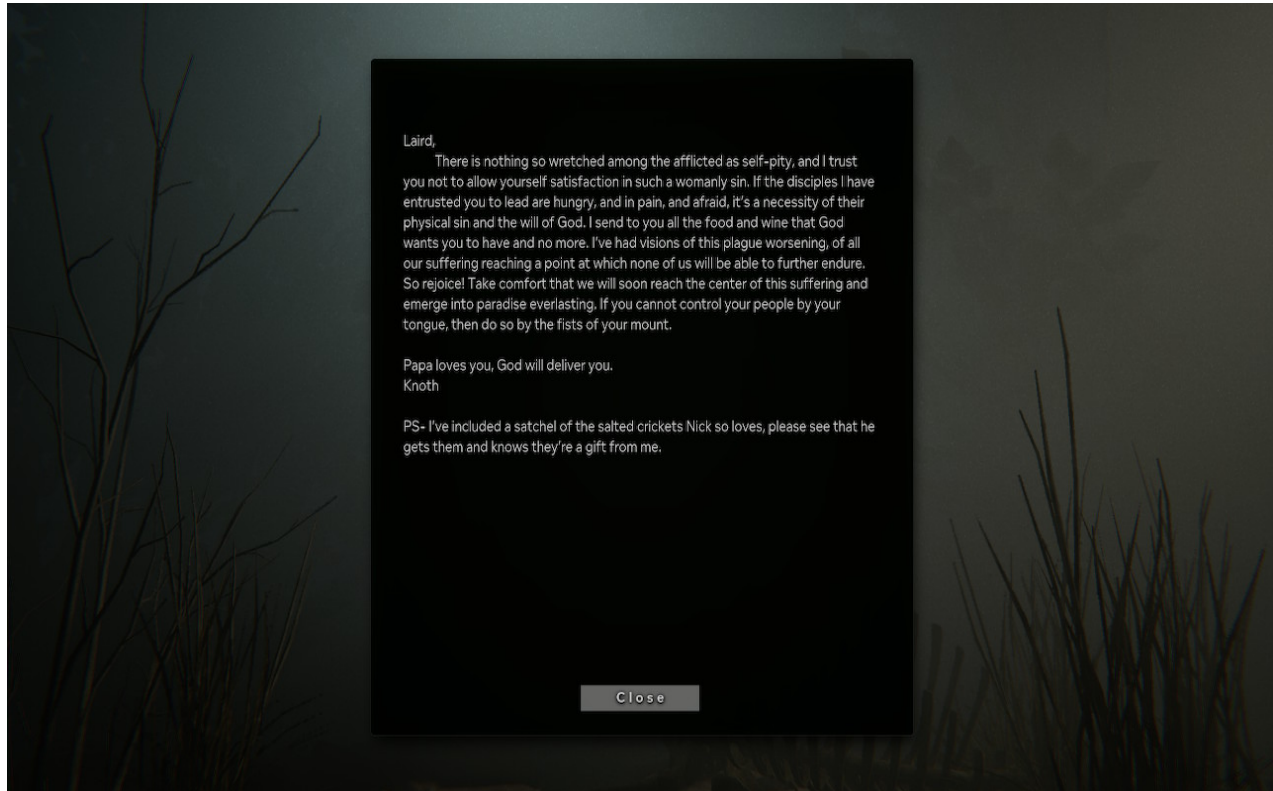
Document Transcript: “Welcome to this place of spiritual healing! You are scared and you are sick. As you should be. And you are filled with shame. As you should be. You know that you would not be here if not for your own sins. But I can make you wonderful and pure again. When all this sickness first erupted and crusted in Temple Gate, Papa Knoth in his wisdom and kindness recognized it for the spiritual affliction it was. Don't believe those crooked and frightened others if they tell you you're sick with the Syphilis or the Gonorrhea or any other outer world lie. This is a sickness of the soul, and only by purging your soul will you find health. Stay true, stay obedient, to God, and to Papa Knoth and especially to his Deacon, Laird. God and his prophet love you.”

Figure 17: Screenshot of the document “Gospel of The Scalled Christ (1/2).” From *Outlast II* [Nintendo Switch], Red Barrels, 2017. Screenshot taken by author.



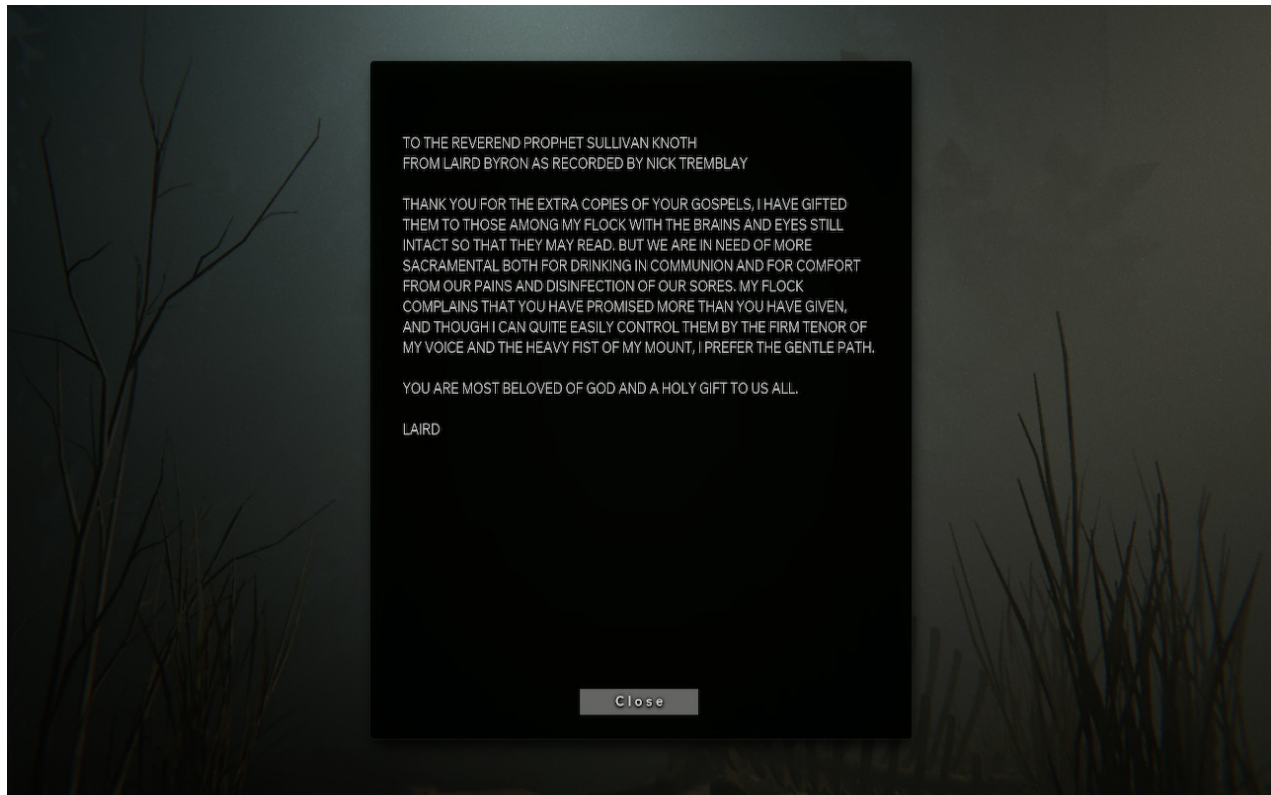
Document Transcript: “Rejoice greatly, O you scalled, you afflicted with boils and sores, all you whose sex cracks and weeps, your baptist comes to you astride a donkey in the shape of a man. That Baptist, proportioned as a child in all but the tools of a man, and therefore best beloved of the Prophet Sullivan Knoth. And Knoth said unto Laird, what desirest thou in your wretchedness? And Laird said: I desire to behold the things which The New Ezekiel saw. And Knoth said: Yea, thine mind is too tight an arbor for the girth of the Lord's message, and would split at its penetration; thou shall knowest only your own salvation. And Laird said: Yea, I believe all the words of my father. And Knoth cries: Hosanna in the highest! As thou love me, thou art blessed, and you shall behold the things which thou has desired. And Laird spoke: I see the heavens open! I see fly smoke in the sky, a cloud of insects bearing down a man, full grown yet virginal, most beautiful and fair above even the beauty of women. And I looked and new I beheld the Redeemer of the Scalled, of who Ezekiel had spoken. And Ezekiel spoke unto Laird again, saying: Look! The Lamb ministers the children of diseased cocks and festered wombs. And I beheld the multitudes who were sick, and who were afflicted with devils and unclean spirits, who would be healed by the power of the Lamb of God. And I, Laird, saw that he was lifted up upon the cross and slain for those whose lust delivered them to sin, and whose sin delivered them to lust. And as he hangs, there will be an abundance of milk and wine, such that butter and distilled liquor shall every one eat that is left in the land. And they shall proclaim the glory of Laird, who leads them to salvation.”

Figure 18: Screenshot of the document “Paradise Soon.” From *Outlast II* [Nintendo Switch], Red Barrels, 2017. Screenshot taken by author.



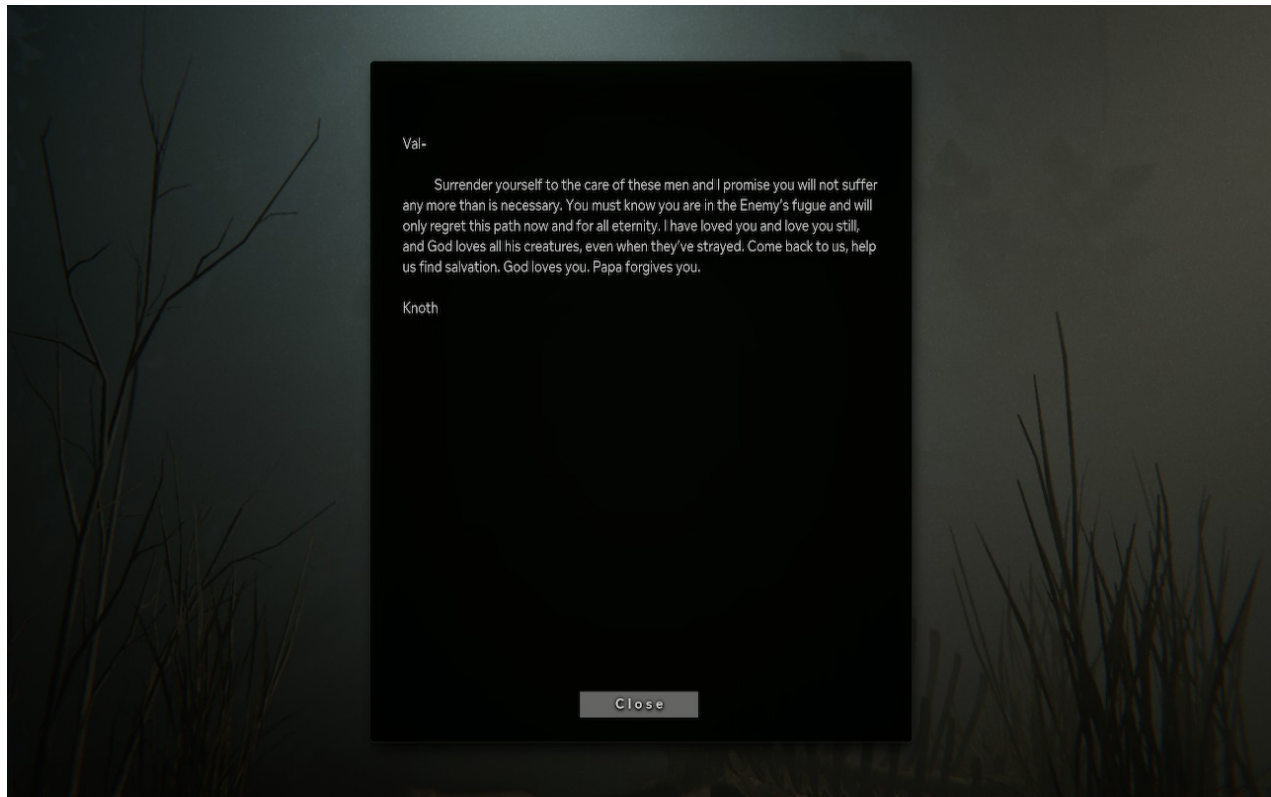
Document Transcript: “There is nothing so wretched among the afflicted as self-pity, and I trust you not to allow yourself satisfaction in such a womanly sin. If the disciples I have entrusted you to lead are hungry, and in pain, and afraid, it's a necessity of their physical sin and the will of God. I send to you all the food and wine that God wants you to have and no more. I've had visions of this plague worsening, of all our suffering reaching a point at which none of us will be able to further endure. So rejoice! Take comfort that we will soon reach the center of this suffering and emerge into paradise everlasting. If you cannot control your people by your tongue, then do so by the fists of your mount.”

Figure 19: Screenshot of the document “Letter from Nick to Knoth.” From *Outlast II* [Nintendo Switch], Red Barrels, 2017. Screenshot taken by author.



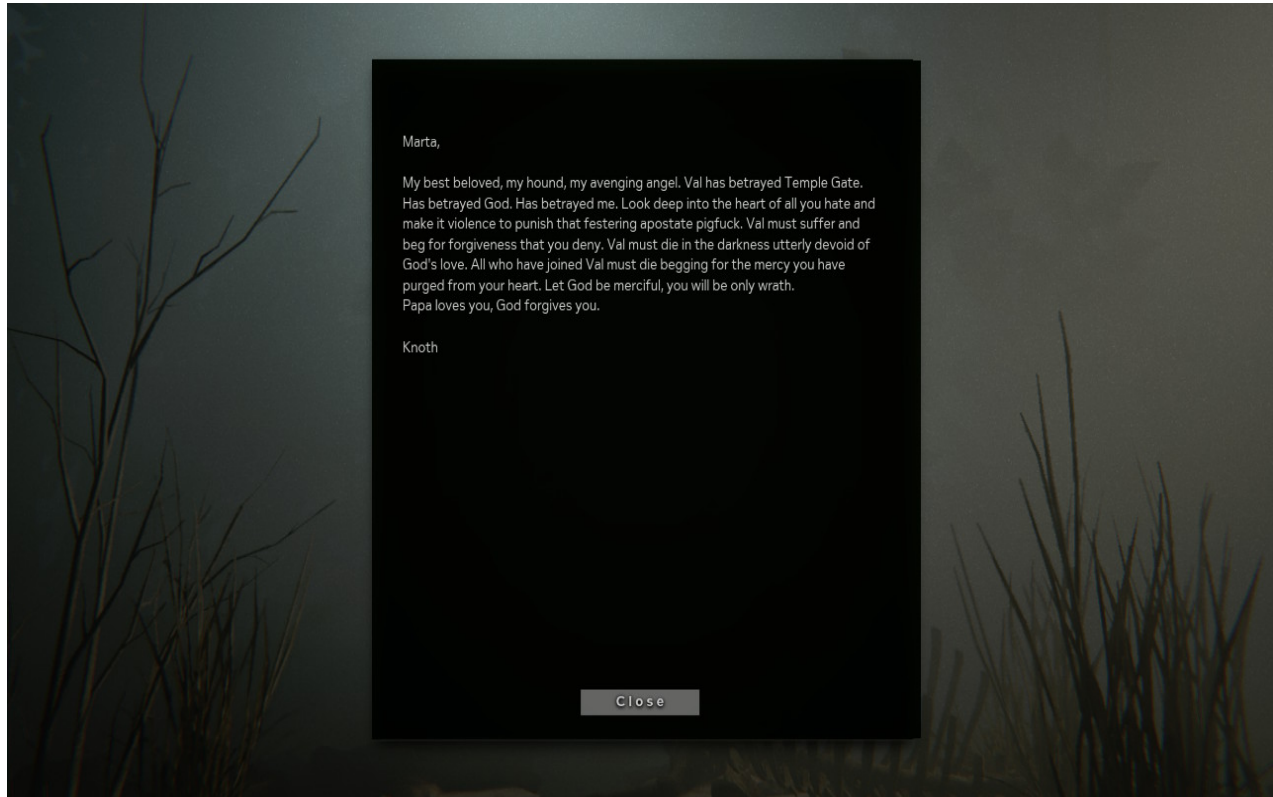
Document Transcript: “THANK YOU FOR THE EXTRA COPIES OF YOUR GOSPELS, I HAVE GIFTED THEM TO THOSE AMONG MY FLOCK WITH THE BRAINS AND EYES STILL INTACT SO THAT THEY MAY READ. BUT WE ARE IN NEED OF MORE SACRAMENTAL BOTH FOR DRINKING IN COMMUNION AND FOR COMFORT FROM OUR PAINS AND DISINFECTION OF OUR SORES. MY FLOCK COMPLAINS THAT YOU HAVE PROMISED MORE THAN GIVEN, AND THOUGH I CAN QUITE EASILY CONTROL THEM BY THE FIRM TENOR OF MY VOICE AND THE HEAVY FIST OF MY MOUNT, I PREFER THE GENTLE PATH. YOU ARE MOST BELOVED OF GOD AND A HOLY GIFT TO US ALL.”

Figure 20: Screenshot of the document “Come with These Men.” From *Outlast II* [Nintendo Switch], Red Barrels, 2017. Screenshot taken by author.



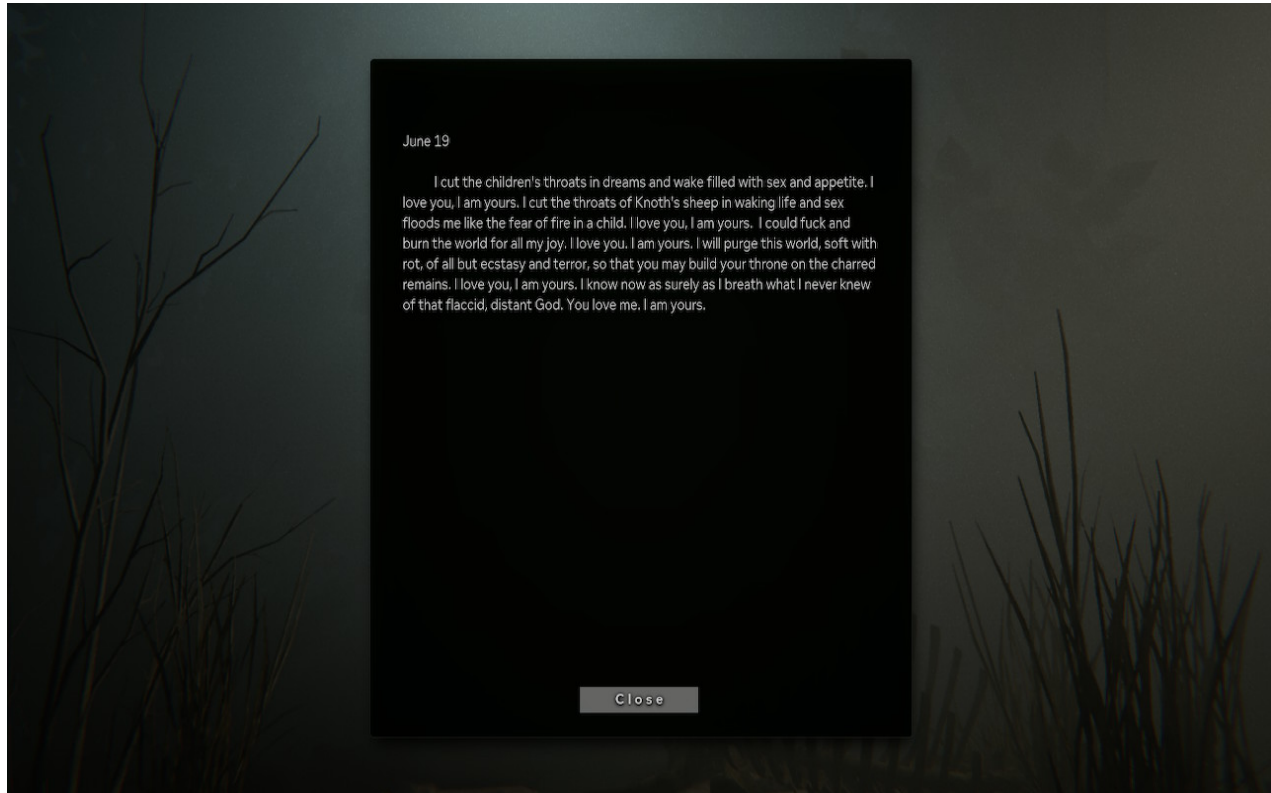
Document Transcript: “Surrender yourself to the care of these men and I promise you will not suffer any more than is necessary. You must know that you are in the Enemy's fugue and will only regret this path now and for all eternity. I have loved you and love you still, and God loves all his creatures, even when they've strayed. Come back to us, help us find salvation. God loves you. Papa forgives you.”

Figure 17: Screenshot of the document “To Marta, My Avenging Angel.” From *Outlast II* [Nintendo Switch], Red Barrels, 2017. Screenshot taken by author.



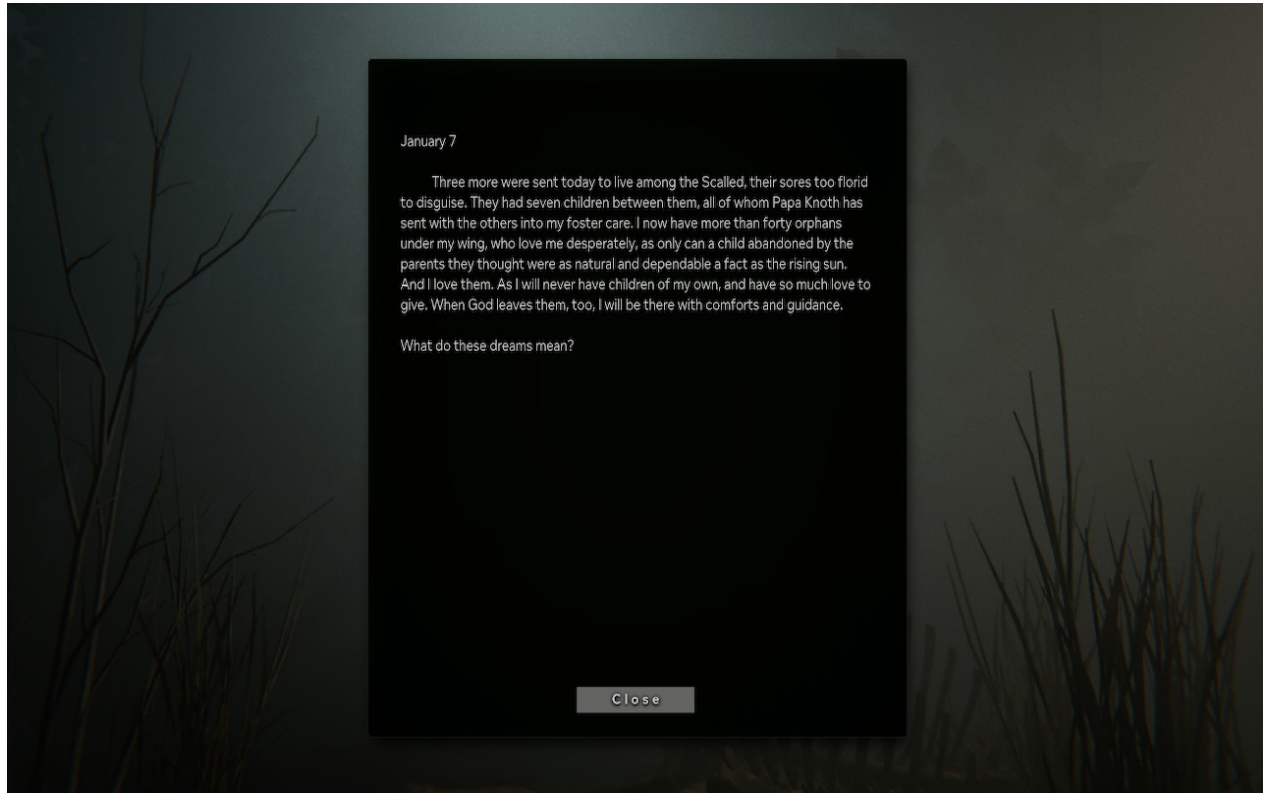
Document Transcript: “My best beloved, my hound, my avenging angel. Val has betrayed Temple Gate. Has betrayed God. Has betrayed me. Look deep into the heart of all you hate and make it violence to punish that festering apostate pigfuck. Val must suffer and beg for forgiveness that you deny. Val must die in the darkness utterly devoid of God’s love. All who have joined Val must die begging for mercy you have purged from your heart. Let God be merciful, you will be only wrath. Papa loves you, God forgives you.”

Figure 21: Screenshot of the document “Val’s Journal: Part 5.” From *Outlast II* [Nintendo Switch], Red Barrels, 2017. Screenshot taken by author.



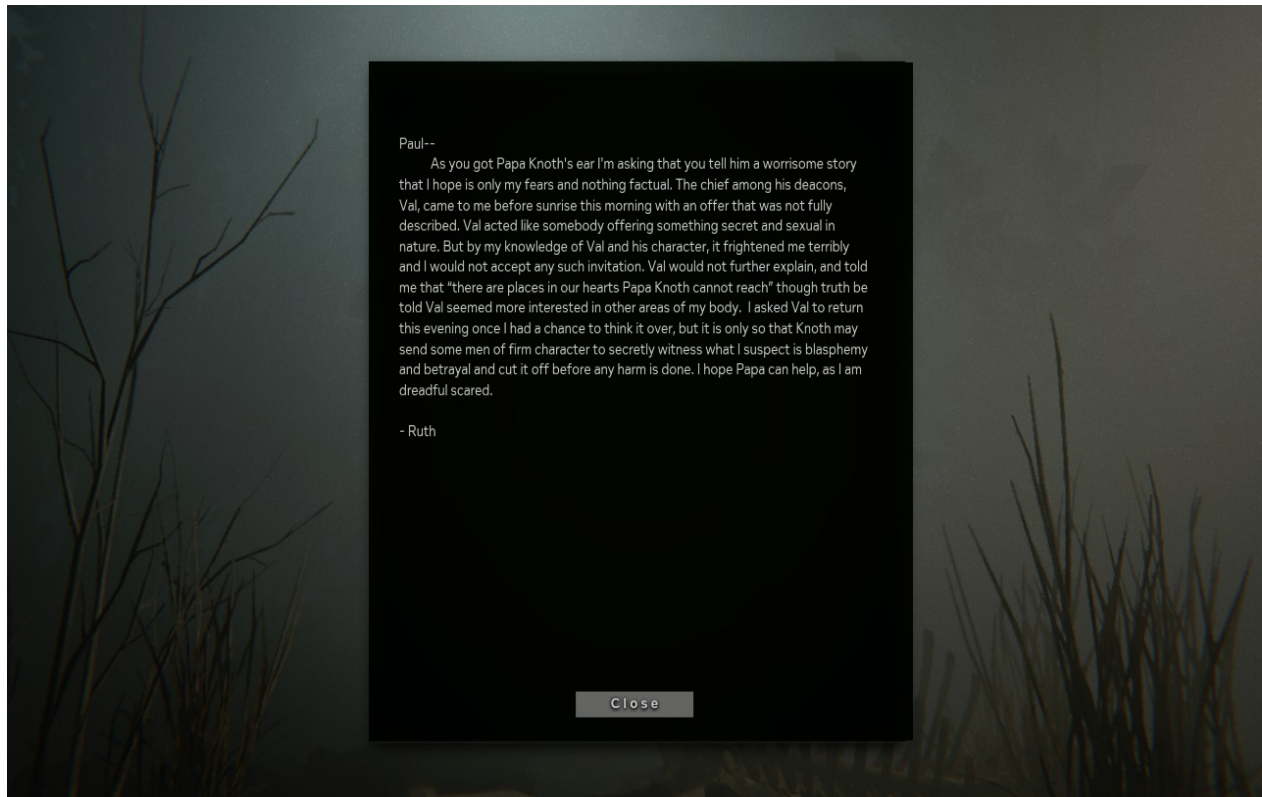
Document Transcript: “I cut the children's throats in dreams and wake filled with sex and appetite. I love you, I am yours. I cut the throats of Knoth's sheep in waking life and sex floods me like the fear of fire in a child. I love you, I am yours. I could fuck and burn the world for all my joy. I love you. I am yours. I will purge this world, soft with rot, of all but ecstasy and terror, so that you may build your throne on the charred remains. I love you, I am yours. I know now as surely as I breath what I never knew of that flaccid, distant God. You love me. I am yours.”

Figure 22: Screenshot of the document “Val’s Journal: Part 1.” From *Outlast II* [Nintendo Switch], Red Barrels, 2017. Screenshot taken by author.



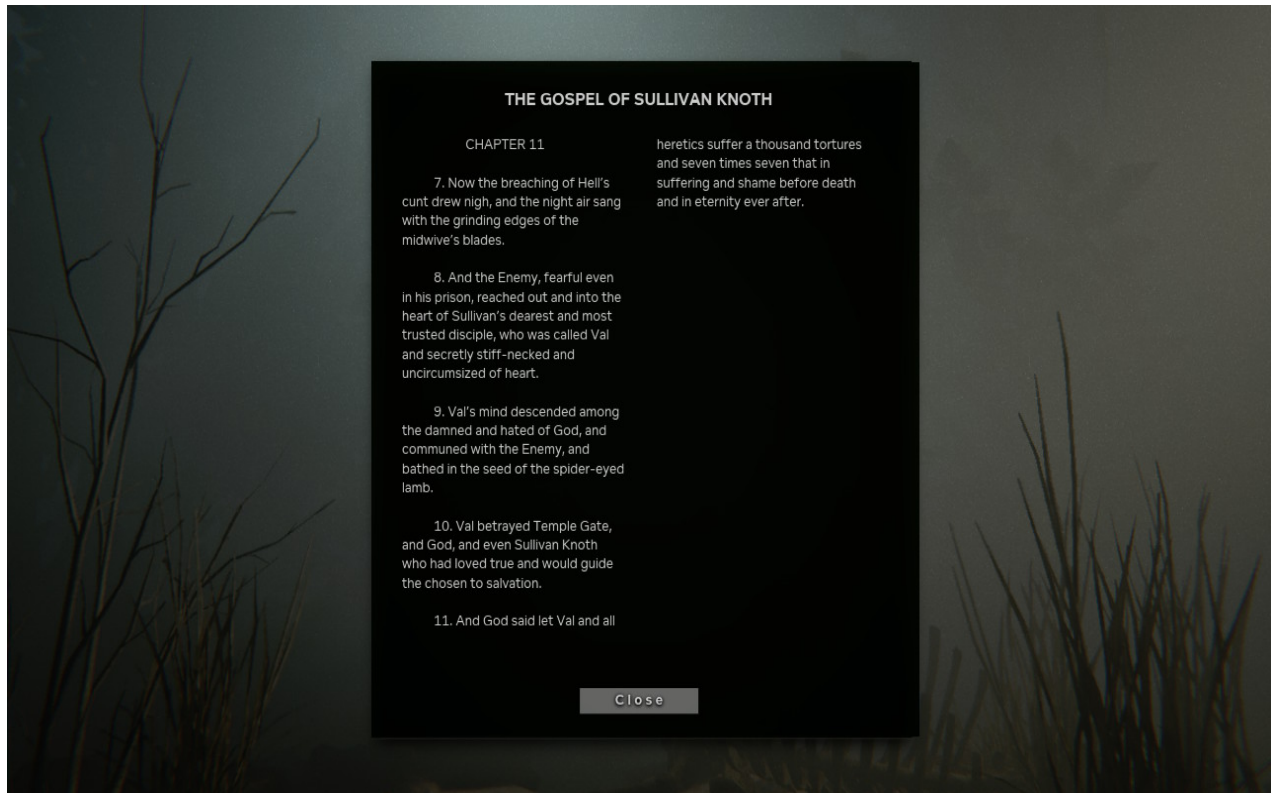
Document Transcript: “Three more were sent today to live among the Scalled, their sores too florid to disguise. They had seven children between them, all of whom Papa Knoth has sent with the others into my foster care. I now have more than forty orphans under my wing, who love me desperately, as only can a child abandoned by the parents they thought were as natural and dependable a fact as the rising sun. And I love them. As I will never have children of my own, and have so much love to give. When God leaves them, too, I will be there with comforts and guidance. What do these dreams mean?”

Figure 23: Screenshot of the document “Val’s Secret.” From *Outlast II* [Nintendo Switch], Red Barrels, 2017. Screenshot taken by author.



Document Transcript: “As you got Papa Knoth's ear I'm asking that you tell him a worrisome story that I hope is only my fears and nothing factual. The chief among his deacons, Val, came to me before sunrise this morning with an offer that was not fully described. Val acted like somebody offering something secret and sexual in nature. But my knowledge of Val and his character, it frightened me terribly and I would not accept any such invitation. Val would not further explain, and told me that "there are places in our hearts Papa Knoth cannot reach" though truth be told Val seemed more interested in other areas of my body. I asked Val to return this evening once I had a chance to think it over, but it is only so that Knoth may send some men of firm character to secretly witness what I suspect is blasphemy and betrayal and cut it off before any harm is done. I hope Papa can help, as I am dreadful scared.”

Figure 24: Screenshot of the document “The Gospel of Knoth: Chapter 11.” From *Outlast II* [Nintendo Switch], Red Barrels, 2017. Screenshot taken by author.



Document Transcript: “Now the breaching of Hell's cunt drew nigh, and the night air sang with the grinding edges of the midwife's blades. And the Enemy, fearful even in his prison, reached out and into the heart of Sullivan's dearest and most trusted disciple, who was called Val and secretly stiff-necked and uncircumsized of heart. Val's mind descended among the damned and hated of God, and communed with the Enemy, and bathed in the seed of the spider-eyed lamb. Val betrayed Temple Gate, and God, and even Sullivan Knoth who had loved true and would guide the chosen to salvation. And God said let Val and all heretics suffer a thousand tortures and seven times seven that in suffering and shame before death and in eternity ever after.”
