"Bringing … Uncertain Geographies Under … Control"? Exploring the Lovecraftian 'Walking Simulator'.

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The last ten years have witnessed a spate of critically revered videogames that focus on exploration, object collection, and simple puzzle solving. Sometimes referred to as 'walking simulators,' examples of such games include *Gone Home* (2013), *Everybody's Gone to the Rapture* (2015), *Firewatch* (2016), and *What Remains of Edith Finch* (2017). Often made by smaller, independent studios, these games intentionally shun many of the usual mechanics involved in big budget, mainstream videogames (such as an emphasis upon combat and fast-paced action) in favour of something more cerebral. Indeed, if, as videogame scholar James Newman claims "space is key to videogames," (31) then 'walking simulators' take this centrality to its logical extreme by making the exploration of virtual space the only significant ludic task that the player needs to achieve. One of the earliest examples of the 'walking simulator,' *Dear Esther* (2008), involves the negotiation of an uninhabited Hebridean island, during which the player is unable to do anything other than perambulate the virtual landscape; "By removing other stimuli" Dylan Holmes suggests "*Dear Esther* foregrounds the space itself" (Holmes, 165). Indeed, the game ends when the player makes their way to the elevated centre of the island and then seems to gain the ability to fly, in effect freeing them from their previous physical constraints. The critically lauded *Gone Home* also places an emphasis on the exploration of a virtual space; in this case the player is confined to their character-avatar's childhood home, with the 'pleasures' of the gaming experience coming from the traversal of, and interaction with, the minutiae of this emotionally resonant, domestic environment.

At first glance, this apparent emphasis on the "mastery of space" (Newman, 115) makes it all the odder that an increasing number of contemporary 'walking simulator' games have drawn upon elements taken from the fiction of H.P. Lovecraft in their narratives. While Lovecraft's fiction is surprisingly varied in approach, one of the common themes in the author's work is the undermining of a sense of ontological mastery or control, with the narrator of one of the writer's perhaps best-

known stories famously exclaiming that "The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, *and it was not meant that we should voyage far*." [my italics] (Lovecraft,139). Similarly, scholar Tanya Krzywinska, in one of the few academic pieces on Lovecraftian videogames to date, notes of the author's inert protagonists: "the stories are marked by inaction and characters are frozen in terror; rather than act on their situation in an attempt to master it, they are more likely to be consumed by dread" (277).

Despite this apparent contradiction between the stasis of Lovecraft's protagonists and the agency of the videogame form, a growing number of 'walking simulators,' including *The Vanishing of Ethan Carter* (2014), *Conarium* (2017), *Call of Cthulhu* (2018), *The Sinking City (2019)*, and *Moons of Madness* (2019), employ recognisably Lovecraftian elements. Such games represent a significant part of a larger resurgence of Lovecraft influenced videogames that includes such diverse fare as *Sundered* (a 2D platform exploration game) *Darkest Dungeon* (a side scrolling dungeon crawler), *Sea Salt* (a top down action strategy game), *Cultist Simulator* (a card-based simulation), and *Gibbous: A Cthulhu Adventure* (a point and click adventure) to name but a few. Indeed, such is the growth of Lovecraft influenced videogames being released at the moment that several specialist websites have felt the need to publish articles on the subject, with many critiquing this current glut (see "Games Really Need to Fall Out of Love with Lovecraft" and "I Think We're All Set on Lovecraft Games For a While.").

Taking as its genesis the criticisms that 'walking simulators' deviate too far from the standard conventions of the videogame, this chapter will explore the reasons why and the ways in which selected examples of the form paradoxically seek to fuse the ontological uncertainty of Lovecraft's writing with the videogame format's conventional "eradication of the unknown and … bringing of uncertain geographies under the control and influence of the player." (Newman, 115). It will chart the historical precedents for the contemporary spate of Lovecraftian 'walking simulators,'

examine the formal characteristics of recent key examples of the form, and explore what the ludic and narrative benefits of such ideologically incongruous cross-medial appropriation might be.

Krzywinska's chapter "Reanimating Lovecraft: The Ludic Paradox of *Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth*" is instructive in examining this paradox. Functioning as a sort of template for many of the contemporary Lovecraftian walking simulators, Krzywinska notes that *Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth* (2005) is "played in first-person, yet it can hardly be described as a first-person shooter. In fact, much of the early part of the game is spent without any form of weapon" (279). There are two points to note here. Firstly, that the use of the first-person perspective - the player views the game as though they are looking through the eyes of the character they control – has become fundamental to the 'walking simulator' subgenre. While a few outliers exist (*To the Moon*, *Oxenfree*, *Death Stranding*) the vast majority of walking simulators use a first-person viewpoint. There is a neat correlation here with Lovecraft's stories, most of which are told through first person narration. Mark Fisher writes in his exploration of Weird fiction:

> That is one reason why [Lovecraft's stories] are so often written in the first person: if the outside gradually encroaches upon a human subject, its alien contours can be appreciated; whereas to attempt to capture "the boundless and hideous unknown" without any reference to the human world is to risk banality. (20)

Similarly, the 'walking simulator' frequently uses the first-person perspective to aid immersion in a verisimilitudinous virtual space before introducing more abstract, fantastical elements that gain emphasis through their incongruity with the otherwise quotidian environment. This can be seen in the way that *Dark Corners of the Earth* begins with the player exploring the Holt family mansion before introducing more esoteric elements (snatches of narrative found in documents and drawings) that suggest the cultists holed up there may have communicated with a higher power. Secondly, rather than empowering the player, *Dark Corners of the Earth* tends to present them with "many boundaries" (Krzywinska, 280), both physical and psychological, such as the "insanity

effects" that disempower the player and that significantly work "against the rhetorics of mastery that are intrinsic to … games" (283). In this manner, *Dark Corners of the Earth* follows many of the conventions of the subgenre known as survival horror. As many scholars have noted, survival horror involves "the subversion of gameplay norms" (Taylor, 50). In contrast to the typical "imperialistic impetus" and "macho militaristic masculinity" of many action orientated big budget videogames, Ewan Kirkland proposes that survival horror videogames are "much more strategic, driven by resource management, stealth, and the comparatively meek tactics of hiding and running away" (2011: 26). Perhaps more importantly given the frequent contemporary adoption of Lovecraftian elements by 'walking simulators,' long running survival horror videogame series such as *Silent Hill*, *Fatal Frame* and, most famously, *Resident Evil*, have long embodied the deterministic sentiment that "the ultimate horror … is … that, despite our strongest feelings to the contrary, we are not the masters of our own fate" (Kirkland 2009: 77).

In many of his more effective stories Lovecraft espouses the philosophy of "cosmic indifferentisim;" writing in a letter about this concept that "all my tales are based on the fundamental premise that common human laws and interests have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos-at-large." (1968: 150). The 'walking simulator,' as a form that tends to subvert many videogame conventions seems to echo, in ludic form, this anti-humanocentric pose. The disempowering of the player-avatar in the 'walking simulator' - the player can often only move forwards through a preordained narrative, interacting in a simplistic fashion with a limited range of objects in the environment – reflects the loss of agency inherent in the fatalism that form a recurrent part of Lovecraft's cosmic narratives. If, as Krzywinska proposes, horror-based videogames tend to offer the player "a complex interaction between bounded choice and determinism" (2002: 221) then the Lovecraftian 'walking simulator' seems to err towards determinism. Interestingly, these limitations have led some critics to decry 'walking simulators' as sufficiently interactive enough to be categorised as videogames, and, while the details of this debate lie outside the scope of this chapter, such criticisms do suggest that 'walking simulators' might well be suitable vehicles to

convey "the most radical and full-fledged form of determinism" (Joshi, 45) frequently espoused in Lovecraft's fiction.

The 2010 videogame *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* forms a bridge between *Dark Corners of the Earth* and the examples being considered in this chapter. The player controls Daniel, from a first-person perspective, as he attempts to escape from the horrors of Brennenburg Castle. The game's narrative is "heavily influenced by the writings of H.P. Lovecraft" (Perron, 235), involving an uncovered otherworldly item that exerts a malign influence on those who come into contact with it. Yet, *Amnesia*'s most significant impact on later examples of the Lovecraftian 'walking simulator' is in just how much it goes out of its way to disempower the player. Right from its opening screen *Amnesia* foregrounds its deviation from standard videogame tropes and ludic conventions, informing the player that: "*Amnesia* should not be played to win. Instead focus on immersing yourself in the game's world and story." As Bernard Perron notes, disempowerment is central to *Amnesia's* structure: "Nothing much is given to put a gamer at ease" (236). The player must navigate the darkness of the castle while desperately searching for oil to fill their lamp lest they be plunged into darkness and go 'mad.' The player must also run and hide from the monsters that inhabit the castle as they are given no weapons to use to confront them. Both features contribute to a constant sense of dread on the part of the player as they must push on through the shadow shrouded castle knowing that they are seriously ill-equipped to deal with what they may face.

The inability of the player to exert mastery over the gameworld is a significant element of the several recent examples of the Lovecraftian 'walking simulator.' *Conarium*, which is based most directly upon Lovecraft's novella *At the Mountains of Madness*, exemplifies this approach right from its opening sequence. *Conarium* begins with protagonist Frank Gilman negotiating a linear path along a bizarre alien landscape before meeting a mysterious non-player character called Dr. Faust who intones "I believe no more we can harbour ourselves on the safest shores for there are things that cannot be undone." Not only does this preamble point towards the deterministic nature of the

game and its narrative, suggesting that whatever the player does they will inevitably find themselves returning to a version of this horrifying moment with Faust, but the *in media res* framing immediately puts the player off balance foregrounding their lack of understanding and demanding that they frantically search out story fragments (littered throughout the gameworld) in order to have any idea of what is happening. These snippets of narrative usually come in the form of written documents; scientific records and diary entries distributed throughout the environment, as well as flashback sequences that Gilman experiences first hand. The retrospective nature of these story fragments further emphasises the impression that the player, as Gilman, is unwittingly moving towards the realisation of a fate that has already been decided for them by forces out of their control. On a more ludic level, Gilman lacks the special abilities frequently afforded to other videogame protagonists. He cannot "perform acts that [the average person] could not perform in real life" (Salmond, 87). Instead, in contrast to the typical videogame character, Gilman is "quite helpless" (Eker). The character is unable even to run for more than a few seconds, a fact that severely hampers him, and the player, in several chase sequences that can be found in the second half of the game. At times, *Conarium* almost seems to delight in confusing the player. It lacks any of the 'handholding' elements that feature in many contemporary videogames and, to make matters worse, repeatedly transports the player into new environments with little sense, initially, of what they should be doing. Numerous reviewers commented upon the "frustrating" (Eker) nature of play and at least a few of those writing about *Conarium* suggested that the lack of faculties afforded the player meant that it was "pushing at the limits of what constitutes being called a game" (Bolt).

Yet, these elements, while potentially frustrating, do successfully replicate, in ludological form, the sense of confusion that Lovecraft's protagonists frequently experience in his writing. In forcing the player to grapple with its often counter-intuitive mechanics, *Conarium* might be seen as an instance of cross medial adaptation, or what Bolter and Grusin (2000) might call "remediation," a refashioning of an older media form (Lovecraft's fiction) by a new media form (videogames). In this process of remediation, the idiomatic characteristics of the older form must be adapted and

transformed so that they work for the new form. Therefore, *Conarium* takes the epistemological and ontological collapses of Lovecraft's stories and refashions them into disempowering game mechanics which emphasise the player's inability to master their environment. Furthermore, the circular nature of the game's narrative, with Gilman's abnormal fate being foretold by Dr. Faust effectively evokes the determinist, cosmicist ideology underpinning stories such as *At The Mountains of Madness and "*The Shadow Over Innsmouth" in which narrator characters eventually realise "that every event in the cosmos is caused by the action of antecedent and circumjacent forces, so that whatever we do is unconsciously the inevitable product of [external forces] rather than our own volition" (Lovecraft qtd in Joshi, *Weird*: 171) .

While those playing *Conarium* may be denied the empowering levels of agency that are typically found in many videogames, what is evident are the lengths the game's designers have gone to incorporate the "atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread" (Lovecraft, 2000: 23) which permeates much of Lovecraft's writing. This ambiance is incorporated into both the narrative and ludic elements of the game. Noticeably, over the six to seven hours that it takes to finish *Conarium*, the player is almost continually isolated. Firstly, on an Antarctic base from which all the other scientists have disappeared, then in a dilapidated and deserted stately home (through a series of disturbing and disorientating visions), followed by a claustrophobic stint in a one-man submarine, and finally in the various tombs, subterranean caves and desert ruins which house the remains of the story's extra-terrestrial entities. Significantly, one of the earliest tasks that the player is faced with in the game is trying to ascertain whether there is anyone that Gilman can contact to come and rescue him. This involves the player interacting with the Antarctic base's broken radio equipment and exploring the surface level of the base itself. The size and scale of the deserted base quickly serve to accentuate the character's insignificance in the virtual space and it rapidly becomes clear that no-one is coming to find them. A further sense of dread is created with through the lack of lighting, as Stobart suggests: "For videogames … the use of darkness serves to heighten tension, as the player does not know what is in the gloom beyond the flashlight, leading to feelings of

apprehension and an acute awareness of noise and movement on the screen" (79). The poor and inconsistent lighting of many of the game's virtual environments – through the eerie luminescent glow of strange alien fauna, the underpowered headlamp of a submersible – also helps to unnerve the player by highlighting their weakness in navigating the gameworld. Without a torch or other similar lighting device, the player is frequently forced to explore scantly lit environments in which their vision is severely limited. Effective use of diegetic sound effects also adds to the sense of mounting anxiety, with judicious use of echoes underscoring the loneliness of the player-avatar.

The sense of remoteness that *Conarium* relies upon to create a recognisably Lovecraftian atmosphere may also be a direct result of its creation by Zoetrope Interactive, a mid-tier videogame studio based in Turkey. Many of the structural elements of the game such as the relatively small number of environments, their often-poor lighting, and the notable absence of multiple non-player characters allow for a reduced, and more manageable production budget for a smaller videogame company. While in his 2011 article Kirkland notes that survival horror is a "genre … in decline" due to an increasing demand for elements such as "expansive visual effects" and "non-linearity" (29), these self-same 'limitations' seem an apposite fit for the Lovecraftian 'walking simulator,' in which feelings of claustrophobia, isolation and sense of unjust linearity are a perfect fit for the author's oppressively indifferent vision.

Significantly, since Krzywinska's pioneering work of Lovecraftian videogames (and the initial release of *Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth*), changes in the industry have seen fundamental developments regarding the sale of videogames. The popularisation of online delivery platforms (most prominently Steam, Xbox Live, and PlayStation Network) have created a viable space for the production and distribution of so called 'indie' and mid-tier budgeted videogames, made by smaller studios who often lack the finances available to larger 'triple A' development companies (who are often themselves part of larger multinational media companies). As these larger studios have become increasingly focused on reiterating upon commercially proven formulas (such as the Call of

Duty or FIFA franchises) it has been suggested that smaller studios such as Zoetrope Interactive (with reduced overheads) can take more artistic risks, including releasing videogames that do not adhere to mainstream expectations of the form: "The indie creed is one of experimentation and innovation" (Pearce, 274). It is no coincidence that all the contemporary 'walking simulators' under discussion in this chapter were created and published by 'indie' or mid-tier studios. The recognisability of Lovecraft's iconography functions as an attractive means of pulling in a specialist but still sizeable audience eager to engage with a beloved narrative universe. Tellingly, on Zoetrope Interactive's official website for *Conarium*, the game is described in terms that position it as a niche product ("Lovecraftian", "Danse Macabre", "suspense filled") targeted at a specific audience of genre horror fans rather than everyone who might play videogames.

Like *Conarium*, the designers of *The Vanishing of Ethan Carter* (hereafter *Ethan Carter*) evidently recognise the importance of "setting and landscapes in videogames" (Stobart, 96). The game effectively depicts a near photorealistic recreation of rural Wisconsin. Though *Ethan Carter* is perhaps the least directly Lovecraftian of the 'walking simulators' discussed in this chapter (with the narrative also drawing from writers including Edgar Allan Poe, Stephen King, August Derleth and, most prominently, Ambrose Bierce) the game is still indebted to trends that have been identified as key to Lovecraft's fiction. This means that while the game's designers stated: "You cannot do a direct translation of Lovecraft to a movie or a videogame. You need to try to make your own equivalent" (Chmielarz qtd in Herbers) *Ethan Carter* still shares Lovecraft's "entangling of times and spaces" into what James Kneale calls his "weird geography" (45). Fisher notes that "Lovecraft's stories are obsessively fixated on the question of the outside" (16) and *Ethan Carter* exemplifies this fascination in its opening sequence. The sequence mirrors that of *Conarium*, in so much as it entails the player controlling the protagonist, in this case the occult detective Paul Prospero, as he walks down a narrow and linear virtual corridor. However, whereas Gilman emerges from his oppressive corridor only to be confronted by the machinations of Dr Faust, Prospero exits a murky (disused) train tunnel into the beauty of Red Creek Valley; a stunningly realised depiction of a small, bucolic area in the

Great Lakes region. Waning sunlight pokes through the autumnal forest canopy while dilapidated

bridges span expansive lakes in a pastoral environment that stretches as far as the player-avatar can

see. The contrast is profound and immediately highlights the emphasis the game's designers have

placed upon constructing a credible recreation of the natural environment.

The significance of achieving this level of verisimilitude is discussed in an online interview

with game developer, Adrian Chmielarz. Chmielarz suggests that "believability of the environment

[was] important" to the making of *Ethan Carter* to the extent that a new technique called

photogrammetry was invented for the game: "in short, you photograph the real world, and then

special software spits out a 3-D game-ready asset that looks exactly like the real thing."

Significantly, *Ethan Carter* differs from other Lovecraftian 'walking simulators' in offering the

player a near photorealistic environment to explore that is also structured as an open world. An

open world videogame is one in which "a player and their character are free to roam the created

landscape" (Salmond and Salmond, 154) Yet, notoriously, the non-linear nature of most open world

videogames can pose major problems for storytelling; as Steve Poole writes in *Trigger Happy:*

Videogames and the Entertainment Revolution: "[a game] cannot simply leave the whole story up to

the player" (101). While the freedom of the open world might empower the player to explore what

they want to, when they want to, this structure also risks the player getting 'lost' as they are not

forced to follow a prescriptive path, causing frustration and eventually, disengagement.

Consequently, *Ethan Carter* opens with the warning "*The Vanishing of Ethan Carter* is a narrative

game that doesn't hold your hand," yet the risks taken with the open world structure of *Ethan Carter*

could be considered necessary given how essential "irruption" (Fisher, 20) is to the game's

recreation of Lovecraft's fiction in ludic form. Fisher proposes that the centrality of irruption

"accounts for the supreme significance of Lovecraft setting so many of his stories in New England."

(19). Having established a sense of verisimilitude Lovecraft's stories then depict an "irruption into

this world of something from outside" (20), which gains its imaginative and ideological power from

the heightened sense of a transgression of the Real. In Lovecraft's fiction this transgression is frequently a catalyst for a broader cosmicist horror, with stories such as "The Call of Cthulhu" and *At The Mountains of Madness*, suggesting that there are indifferent forces beyond humanity's comprehension which have the potential to govern and shape what happens to mankind. The cognitive dissonance caused by the nascent realisation of this situation leads to the protagonist of many Lovecraft stories going mad; a process that *Ethan Carter*, and the other walking simulators discussed in this chapter, attempt to replicate.

Despite its opening warning, *Ethan Carter* does attempt to guide the player through visual cues, most notably a set of train tracks that act as a sort of ongoing waypoint, helping to orientate the player should they lose their bearings at any point. Indeed, these train tracks quickly become a vital tool for the player as Prospero is soon experiencing several ghostly visions, in which he is repeatedly and abruptly teleported to other parts of the game world as a means of revealing aspects of the titular character's backstory. These visions constitute one of the game's key devices for depicting an irruption into the Real. Prospero's supernatural abilities enable him to see into the past of other characters, positioning him as an interloper into other's memories. The player must then use this skill to piece together clues that tell the story of Ethan's tragic demise. *Ethan Carter* juxtaposes its photorealistic recreation of rural Wisconsin with such incongruous irruptions as a faceless astronaut who you chase through the forest, an interstellar journey to an unknown point in outer space, a house with teleporting rooms, and a brief sojourn into an underwater setting with a gigantic, tentacled 'Sea Thing.'

The narrative of the game gains its power from the irruption of these fantastical elements into what is, by contemporary standards, a very convincingly realised virtual environment. Ironically, this process is also key to the frustration many players felt concerning the vagueness of the game's plot. Because the 'meaning' of the story is never definitively explained, players have interpreted it in wildly differing ways. One interpretation of what is happening is that the memories that Prospero

witnesses tell the story of Ethan's family who irresponsibly summon 'The Sleeper,' a dormant entity whose malevolent power is such that, once summoned, it proceeds to their violent deaths. Such a reading, adheres to many of the narrative tropes of Lovecraft's writing, including the idea of "a monstrous race … [that] constantly threaten[s] to return through various fissures in our own world, bringing with them eternal chaos" (Wisker, 66). However, a second and equally valid interpretation supported by the closing scene of the game, suggests that the narrative outlined in the first interpretation is in fact nothing more than a story written by Ethan to try and cope with a set of 'real-life' issues caused by family discord.

The last example that I wish to discuss is both the most recent and the most traditionally game-like of the 'walking simulators' covered in this chapter. Funcom's 2019 release *Moons of Madness* tries to combine the Lovecraftian elements evident in *Conarium* and *Ethan Carter* with many of the ludological conventions of mainstream videogames to mixed success. Thus, in *Moons of Madness*, the player-avatar Shane Newehart is gifted with such standard videogame items as a crowbar and a spacesuit, tools which they can use to interact with and exert control over the virtual environment. Perhaps, most importantly, early in game, Newehart finds a working 'biogage,' a wristwatch type device that enables them to interact with electronic equipment, scan the environment for points of interest, and display waypoints indicating where to go to next. This device is significant because it marks a substantial deviation from the disorientating techniques of *Conarium* and *Ethan Carter*. While the biogage has undoubtedly been included to ease the player's journey through the game, to shift the balance back to what Krzywinska calls "bounded choice" (2002: 221), the result is that the device strips *Moons of Madness* of much of its tension. The ease with which the player can refer to the biogage's inbuilt compass whenever they want works against the sense of disorientation and disempowerment so central to the appeal of other Lovecraftian 'walking simulators.'

One area where *Moons of Madness* does have more success is in constructing an interesting visual aesthetic. The game is set on a remote, isolated outpost on Mars (with hallucinatory flashbacks set in environments related to Newehart's childhood). The extra-terrestrial setting proves both original and effective in conjuring up an existential sense of loneliness. The game manages to evoke a sense of Lovecraftian irruption by visually contrasting the clinical sterility of the Martian station with the viscosity of the tentacular horrors that are revealed as the narrative progresses. The game's look borrows liberally from cinematic science fiction tropes (most prominently the *Alien* series) that are themselves indebted to Lovecraft's stories. Newehart's mother's experiments for the malevolent Orochi corporation are revealed to have involved genetic manipulation of human and extra-terrestrial plant material creating biological mutations that are decidedly Giger-esque in appearance. Newehart eventually must blow up Mars' twin moons in a bombastic ending to the game that epitomises its cinematic leanings. *Moons of Madness*'s visuals create a sense of interest in the player, spurring them on to explore further in a manner that parallels Lovecraft's writing; as Fisher notes: "it is not horror but fascination – albeit a fascination usually mixed with a certain trepidation – that is integral to Lovecraft's rendition of the weird" (Fisher, 17).

In many ways *Moons of Madness* speaks to the limitations of the commercial videogame to effectively remediate a Lovecraftian aesthetic. *Moons of Madness* is the most game-like of the examples looked at in this chapter, the videogame targeting the widest audience, yet it was also the least successful in most reviewer's opinions. Called a "cosmic mess" (Hile) and "boring" (Peterson) *Moons of Madness* falls between two stools in its attempts to fuse Lovecraft's "profound sense of dread" (2000: 25) with videogame conventions like forced stealth segments and boss fights; as one reviewer noted "What transpires is an unsatisfactory blend of the two" (Eker).

In conclusion, with titles like *Old Gods Rising* (2020), *Cthulhu: Book of Ancients* (2020) and *Call of the Sea* (tbc) on the horizon the Lovecraftian videogame seems to be in rude health, whether the same can be said about the Lovecraftian 'walking simulator' seems less certain. In this chapter I

have found that, while the Lovecraftian 'walking simulator' shares elements in common with other videogames, notably their rendering of visually impressive, verisimilitudinous digital environments and the use of a first-person perspective to relate events, many of the more effective Lovecraftian 'walking simulators' work in a manner that runs counter to the mainstream conventions of the form (which promote the empowerment of the player and encourage the concomitant mastery of virtual space). Whether by serendipity or conscious design, the modest production budgets of examples such as *Conarium* and *Ethan Carter* change the player's expectations of what they might offer and, consequently, enable them to more closely emulate the formal and ideological elements of Lovecraft's fiction. Both *Conarium* and *Ethan Carter* (and *Moons of Madness*, albeit less successfully) seek to remediate the cosmicist determinism of Lovecraft's stories into the ludological mechanics underpinning the player's experience. The indifference of the cosmos towards humankind, embodied in so much of Lovecraft's fiction, is manifested in each game's deliberate disempowering of the player and their avatar. Each of the three examples uses advances in computer graphics to effectively present the irruption of something monstrous into a verisimilitudinous virtual environment, confronting the player with something "entirely foreign" (Fisher, 20) and disorientating to their experience. In debilitating the player to such an extent, the "walking simulator" pushes the "suitably Cthulhean comment" (Krzywinska, 286) to its extreme, bringing Lovecraft's ideas to a genre savvy audience eager to experience the horror of disempowerment.

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