Virtual Cities, Bigfoot and Eggs: Myth-Hunting as Hypermodern Folklore in the Grand Theft Auto Series

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Introduction

Acknowledging the supernatural in the contemporary Western world may appear absurd to many, when rationalist, materialist, and scientist frameworks largely dominate sense-making practices (Latour 1993). When digital technology stands tall as a product designed by, and for, humans, ruled by an encoded logic following 'if-then-else' statements, what space is there left for unpredicted, unexplainable possibilities? Nature becomes reframed as a perfectly knowable rule-based system, and much like software does not allow for contingencies beyond those admitted by its code, no supernatural possibilities breaking the code of nature are imaginable. Yet, as Jeannie Banks Thomas (2015: 11) writes, it is in this technological and hypermediated contemporary world that we find traces of the supernatural all around us. Supernatural accounts have not been completely trumped by techno-scientific narratives yet, and they still speak meaningfully to contemporary anxieties through the cultural truths they engender. Accordingly, supernatural legends centred around technology abound.

In this article I explore one of such instances, namely the act of myth-hunting in the videogame franchise *Grand Theft Auto* (*GTA*) (Rockstar). The *GTA* videogames are notorious for several reasons: the freedom they afford players; their controversial and violent themes; the scale of the cities where they are set. They are also filled with several 'Easter eggs' supernatural in character, including ghosts, aliens, cryptids, and haunted sites. Myth-hunters are players who search for supernatural Easter eggs, often recording their exploits and sharing them online with detailed instructions on how to replicate their findings. I argue that myth-hunters engage in a ludically mediated type of folkloric legend-tripping.

Myth-hunting may be considered what Thomas (2015: 17) calls *hypermodern folklore*, a term highlighting the co-workings of folk, popular, consumer and digital cultures. Hypermodern folklore is lore inherently connected to the contemporary technological landscape, 'often marked by the speed and pervasiveness of its proliferation and distribution (think memes on the Internet)' (Thomas 2015: 18). Examples are online legends, such as the

creepy-pasta of Slender Man (Blank and McNeill 2018; Kitta 2018; Peck 2018; Tolbert 2018), the Blue Whale suicide challenge (Tucker 2020), or the Incunabula Papers and Ong's hat legends (Kinsella 2014), but also the zombie, originally a lore figure in a number of African cultures, then carried to Haiti by enslaved populations of the African diaspora and successively co-opted and hypermediated by Hollywood films (Koven 2015: 84–86), and even a whole series of internet based folkloric practices going beyond legends, such as chain letters and e-mail hoaxes (Blank 2009: 9). Hypermodern folklore also refers to technology-mediated folkloric activities in places beyond cyberspace. Elizabeth Tucker (2017) for example writes about ghost-hunting apps, whereas Rachael Ironside (2018: 102) and Mikel Koven (2008: 158–156) write about ghost hunting reality shows remediating the experience of legend-tripping to physical locations.

Thomas (2015) suggests that hypermodern folklore is further characterized by the commodification and commercialization of supernatural places, including cities and towns. Here, typical examples are Salem, Massachusetts, where tourists visit sites with ties to media products, rather than any material or historical ones to legendary events (Thomas 2015: 61–62), or Lily Dale, New York, a popular destination for spiritualists and New Age practitioner. In these examples, the local economy relies on a type of supernatural tourism (Tucker 2015) or belief-tourism (Goldstein 2007: 194), like the one seen in ghost tours in cities such as Edinburgh (Ironside 2018), London (McEvoy 2016: 85), New Orleans (De Caro 2015) and Córdoba (Dancausa et al. 2020).

We find commodified hypermodern folklore practices also in the virtual cities of *GTA*. Myth-hunting, previously a fringe ludic form, has more recently been co-opted by the developer who made it a key element of newer entries in the series. Accordingly, myth-hunting is now regularly encompassed in the publisher's strategy to retain players post-launch, allowing for a prolonged extraction of value.

Videogame Cities, Easter Eggs and Myth-Hunters

Cities are popular locations in contemporary videogames, some having become iconic and beloved by many, yet despite this not much scholarship on videogame representation of cities exist (Murray 2018: 204). Perhaps the most well-known videogame cities are the ones featured in *GTA*, designed as satirical but recognizable, versions of major American cities, including

Liberty City (New York), Los Santos (Los Angeles), Las Venturas (Las Vegas), San Fierro (San Francisco), and Vice City (Miami). *GTA* is notorious for the hyperviolent freedoms it affords players, its crime-based narrative, its humorous and vulgar tone, and the vastness and detail of its gameworld and virtual cities, together providing a cutting satire of contemporary American culture to which it constantly alludes (Murray 2005: 95–96).

Much popular outrage about *GTA* concerns issues of representation and enaction of violence, yet often players simply engage in the navigation and exploration of the virtual cities and their surroundings, (Murray 2018: 152), one of the pleasures afforded by GTA's open world or sandbox videogame genre based on a design philosophy summarized in the maxim 'go anywhere, do anything'. In the case of *GTA*, many players simply enjoy visiting different parts of the gameworld, completing only the storyline quests necessary to unlock new areas and neighbourhoods (Atkinson and Willis 2009: 411), becoming *flâneur electroniques*, curiously wandering around the virtual city (Atkinson and Willis 2007: 842), in what could also be understood as a form of play-as-tourism foregoing goal-oriented gameplay (Schweizer 2021).

Beyond curiously visiting landmarks or playfully navigating the city as if it were a type of virtual theme park (Moralde 2013: n.p.), another activity players may engage in is searching for 'Easter eggs'. In videogame lingo, an Easter egg is a hidden feature present in a videogame, deliberately put there by the developers, sometimes as a gag, other times as a reward for exploration. Typically players must perform a special action, or a series of action, to discover an Easter egg, such as pressing a combination of buttons in a specific order, or looking for details in the videogame's textures hinting at something hiding (Bonenfant 2012: 177).

In videogames presenting a vast, explorable gameworld, such as *GTA*, Easter eggs may also be positioned in hard to reach areas. Easter eggs may be written texts, pictures, sounds, videos, minigames, or fully developed extra content (Bonenfant 2012: 177). For example, in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (*GTA:SA*) (Rockstsar North 2004), players can reach the top of the in-game version of the Golden Gate bridge, where they will find a sign that reads 'There are no Easter Eggs up here. Go away', a clear demonstration of the often transtextual (Mago 2019) and 'meta' qualities of Easter eggs (Conway 2010: 152)

Noticeably, Easter eggs do not serve instrumental purposes and are not necessary for gameplay. They are 'bonus' content, providing pleasure for their aforementioned transtextual qualities, and for their 'joyful parodic allusions that make different texts come together into a

web of relationships, increasing the pleasure derived from discovering this relationship (…)' (Uribe-Jongbloed et al. 2015: 1179). The reward for the player is found in the act of hunting and finding the egg itself (Mago 2019: 49).

One infamous Easter egg example is the 'Hot Coffee' minigame in *GTA: SA*. In *GTA:SA*, players can date several possible romantic partners. After a date, the protagonist CJ, may be invited in his current partner's house, while the camera remains pointed at the house, with a shaky cam animation and allusive sounds implying the consumption of a sexual act. 'Hot Coffee' was the name of a hidden game file, accessible through mods, that allowed player to 'follow CJ' in the house and engage in a sexually explicit minigame (Ruffin Bailey 2008: 84–86). When the word spread about Hot Coffee, moral panic ensued: the videogame's publisher, dragged into a class-action lawsuit, decided to recall all sold copies and relaunch it with solutions in place to make Hot Coffee effectively impossible to access (Parkin 2012: n.p.).

Several other Easter eggs exist, and entire player communities dedicate themselves to finding and sharing them, often through YouTube videos, but also through wikis such as the GTA Wiki[1] or the GTA Myths Wiki.[2] A popular type of Easter eggs are the 'supernatural' ones, often of a spooky or creepy kind, called myths or secrets by the *GTA* player community. Players who search for *GTA* myths are known in the community as myth-hunters. *GTA* myths are interesting for their ontological status. While the existence of most Easter eggs is not contested (they are 'there' in the gameworld, relatively easy to find, if one knows where to look), *GTA* myths are ontologically ambiguous: players are split on whether they exist or not. Examples are Piggsy, a deranged mass murder wearing a severed pig head as a mask and wielding a chainsaw, claimed to be wandering the outskirts of Los Santos in *GTA:SA,* Ratman, a rat-human hybrid, allegedly found in the subway system of Liberty City in *Grand Theft Auto IV* (*GTA4*) (Rockstar North 2008) or the Chainsaw Killer in *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* (Rockstar North 2002).

One of the most well-known *GTA* myths is probably Bigfoot, claimed to be found in the woodlands outside of Los Santos in *GTA:SA*. Bigfoot has become an icon for myth-hunters, and according to the GTA Myths Wiki[3] it was Bigfoot that kickstarted the discussion of myths in *GTA*.

Rumours about Bigfoot spread in the aftermath of the Hot Coffee scandal, with claims that the cryptid had been included in the original version of the videogame, but that after its rerelease, Rockstar, the developer and publisher, had removed the Bigfoot file, or perhaps made

it inaccessible, like they had done for Hot Coffee. Nevertheless, screenshots, videos and written reports of players allegedly encountering Bigfoot in the videogame appeared on forums and video hosting websites, many of them still accessible to this day. Most of these clips were in fact hoaxes produced by modders inspired by the rumours, who began including Bigfoot in the videogame, sparking more rumours in return.

The developer initially tried to dispel these reports. Terry Donovan, then-CEO of Rockstar, stated in an interview that 'there is no Bigfoot, just like in real life' (EGM 2005: 105), yet the legend of the Bigfoot persisted amongst myth-hunters, also encouraged by an unverified version of Donovan's quote circulating online which added: 'but there is something in the woods' (Zwiezen 2021: n.p.). To this day countless YouTube videos about the hunt for the Bigfoot (and many other *GTA* myths), as well as detailed instructions on how to find it, are available online, and a vibrant community of *GTA* myth-hunters exist, dedicated to discussing and searching for supernatural Easter eggs.

Ludic Legend Tripping as Hypermodern Ostension

I argue that players engaging in *GTA* myth-hunting take part in a form of *legend-tripping*. Bill Ellis (2018: 95) describes legend-tripping as a ritual visit to an allegedly haunted site, usually involving ostension, or the acting out of supernatural legends. Within folklore studies, ostension has been defined by Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi (1983: 6), who borrow the term from semiotics, where it is understood as 'presentation as contrasted to representation (showing the reality itself instead of using any kind of signification)'. Dégh and Vázsonyi (1983: 8) develop the concept of *ostensive action* to explore the tension between legendary narrative and experience, defining it as 'the showing of an action by showing the action itself or by another action'. Ostensive actions mediate legendary narratives and experiences, making the former real insofar as the acting out of the legend is real. Legend-tripping is a typical example of ostensive action (Ellis 2018: 97). Through the ritualistic 'acting-out' of the legend, legend-trippers move past the sign or narrative, going directly to the referent, that is, the legend-as-experienced. In this sense, the legend is not a text, but rather a behaviour and an experience, often including a strong play component derived from role-playing and the acting out of belief (Ellis 2018: 104).

Authors identify different subtypes of ostension (Dégh and Vázsonyi 1983: 18–21; Kinsella 2014: 12–15; Ellis 2018: 97–98): *proto-ostension*, or the claiming of a legendary narrative as one's own personal experience, regardless of the motive, also understood as 'intentional lies influenced and/or shaped by legends' (Kinsella 2014: 13); *quasi-ostention*, essentially a mistaken perception happening when trippers interpret a naturally occurring event as supernatural or legendary; *pseudo-ostension*, or the deliberate acting out of legend narratives, often as a prank. Researching ghost hunting activities through the use of smartphone apps, Elizabeth Tucker (2017: 28–30) writes also about *hypermodern ostension,* referring to those ostensive acts mediated by commercial digital technologies.

Myth-hunting in *GTA* is another example of hypermodern ostension. When players hunt for Bigfoot, they ostensively act out a legend, rather than just experiencing its narrative content. This ostension may be rightly considered hypermodern not only because digital technologies mediate the 'real world' experience of a legend, but also because the legend itself is part of the 'digital world'. Likewise, *GTA* videogames are consumer products, much like Tucker's ghost apps. Rockstar is aware of the supernatural allure of its series, marketing it to myth-hunters, as I will explain shortly.

Whether trippers actively hold supernatural beliefs is beside the point. What counts is an 'openness or intent to summon the supernatural experience itself', as Michael Kinsella (2011: 31) writes. Furthermore, the ritual themselves, may help to get sceptical trippers into an accommodating mindset allowing them to interpret the experience as supernatural following an interpretative drift: 'by establishing a ritual or ritual-like play frame in which the supernatural (…) may operate, legend-trippers (…) reframe their dimension of experience' (Kinsella 2011: 45).

Myth-Hunting Steps

Kinsella (2011: 30) presents a typical structure of a legend-trip: 1) initiation into the legend; 2) travel to a site and ritual performance; 3) encounter with the supernatural in the case of a successful legend-trip; 4) discussion, interpretation and integration of the legend-trip into an existing legend complex. All these steps are featured in myth-hunting.

1) Initiation into the legend

Contemporary legends often disseminate through the internet (Blank and McNeill: 2018). Myth-hunters are commonly exposed to *GTA* myths online, where various avenues exist, including wikis, videogame forums, subreddits, and YouTube videos. YouTube appears to be a privileged site of myth dissemination and exposure, given the possibility to share videoclips 'ostensibly revealing ghostly activities and other supernatural phenomena' (Kinsella, 2011: 39). The format of the clips is also noteworthy. In the early days of YouTube, myth-hunting videos sometimes featured spooky sounding music (often the *X-Files* theme), some other time just in-game ambience sounds, and usually no commentary apart from occasional pop-up text. Screenshots and freezeframes, or gameplay recorded off-screen, were common, imbuing the clips with a lo-fi character that added to their allure (Zwiezen 2021: n.p.).

The contemporary myth-hunting YouTube scene is quite different from the early days. Entire channels dedicate themselves solely to the production of compilation videos with relatively high-production value. Typically, a myth-hunting video will be recorded on-screen, in high-resolution, and will feature different editing techniques. Some channels offer text-only commentary, while others provide live commentary, remediating ghost hunting reality tv-shows. Effectively, many contemporary myth-hunting channels take part in the hypermodern commercialization of legends through the monetization of legend-trips shared on YouTube. Nevertheless, video sharing websites and other online platforms remain key sites of legend dissemination and exposure.

2) Travel and Ritual Performance

Once exposed to the myth, prospective myth-hunters may move on the next step of the legend-trip, traveling to the legendary in-game locations to perform the ostensive ritual. Different guides with detailed instructions are found online, either on wikis or on YouTube. As an example, we can look at the one written by the *GTA* Myths Wiki user, Caveman0093.[4] Here myth-hunters learn which gear is recommended (in order of importance), which vehicles to use to reach the legendary location, and which 'tactics' to use to, hopefully, witness the legend they are investigating. Cameras are key tools, as 'without your camera, you're not even a myth hunter' (Caveman0093 n.d: n.p.). Players can use in-game cameras to zoom in on distant objects and document their hunts by gathering photo evidence, mirroring the importance of cameras for visual evidence in 'real world' ghost investigations (Eaton 2018: 90). Another

important tool are thermal goggles allowing players to see heat signatures in the dark or through fog.

When reaching the legendary location, myth-hunters should try and complete the following actions: snapping pictures at random to be analysed afterwards; zooming in with the photo camera so as to instigate the game to spawn entities (as the game only spawns them in parts not looked at by the videogame's virtual camera); rotating the camera around for the same purpose of spawning potential entities behind one's position; or ordering a recruited NPC to wait in area, effectively serving as bait for potential myths. If the NPC is found dead upon one's return, that means they have been supposedly killed by a myth (though other explanations are possible as well).

3) *Supernatural encounter*

If the ritual is performed successfully, supposedly the myth-hunter will encounter the myth. However, because of the very nature of ostension, this is impossible to prove. If a legend-tripper acts out a legend and interprets the event from a 'possibilist' standpoint, they will be inclined to believe that the legend is true. If experienced first-hand, the truthfulness of an encounter (whatever that may be) will appear self-evident.

4) *Discussion, interpretation, and integration*

Readily accessible, the reports of myth-hunters who share their findings add to the existing *GTA* myths legend complex. Once again, the internet is a privileged site of discussion and interpretation.

Comments on wiki articles vigorously discuss the truthfulness of various myths. For example, the wiki entry[5] for Bigfoot in *GTA:SA* defines the status of the myth as 'POSSIBLE'. Ztormi1us, a commenter, posts the following message:

'Why is this marked as possible? There's not texture of bigfoot, if there's not texture, it isn't [sic] exist. That's it, unless someone finds a texture, which is something almost impossible to happen, this myth should be changed to UNLIKELY or FALSE'.

Another commenter, Vawtg, writes:

'as a myth hunter, I will conclude the myth is false, some videos will say bigfoot found without mod, they forget to remove the mod model of bigfoot of gta3.img, the myth is false, the sightings are mods, bugs, rock textures'.

Both these commenters believe that every documentation on Bigfoot sightings is fabricated using mods, in what would be a classic case of proto-ostention, or possibly pseudo-ostention.

As a further example, we can take this video[6] uploaded on YouTube by user DaviDustin in September 2016, viewed over 300 thousand times. It is a recording of a hunt for the Goatman myth in *Grand Theft Auto V (GTAV)* (Rockstar North 2013). One user comments:

> '18:23 Am I going crazy or I heard a laughter, or it was just a bird? And by the way, try and remove your character's shoes when you do investigations, I'm not sure if it helps but I think it makes less noise from footsteps, that's gonna help hear better I think'.

Replies to this comment include: 'It was a seagull'; 'I think it was the wind'; 'I think you're going crazy'; 'Thats [sic] the goatman'. Comments such as these, not only discuss the veracity of the legend but are also a display of how experiencing the legend vicariously through the viewing of the YouTube clip can be considered a form of mediated legend-tripping itself, affording a type of 'remote presence' (Kinsella 2011: 40).

In another video[7] documenting the hunt for Bigfoot in *GTA:SA* many comments refer to nostalgia or mention how much time has passed since the commenters went on a myth-hunt. One commenter for example writes: '2020 gang here, I remember my childhood was filled with GTA SA myth hunting and it was glorious. Thank you DaviDustin'. Other commenters acknowledge how they believe the clips are made possible by game mods, yet they still find them enjoyable. Comments such as these point out to some key aspects of legend-tripping. As Ellis (2018: 104) writes, legend-trips are ultimately about becoming engrossed in a legend following a playful logic, meaning it is not a necessary requirement to believe in the legend. Ellis (2018: 104) also argues that a capacity for becoming 'wilfully' engrossed in such a way is developed around the age of twelve, which explains why legend-tripping is particularly popular with adolescents. The same fact may also explain why myth-hunting appears to be particularly popular with the same age-group as demonstrated by commenters who nostalgically recall engaging in the activity during their early teenage years.

Myth-Hunting between Contingency and Necessity

While it is true that legend-trips are commonly conducted for entertainment, they do usually involve the testing of 'conventional, experiential, and metaphysical limits' (Kinsella 2011: 30). What limit is being tested with myth-hunting? I suggest that players are addressing anxieties pointing to the ontology of videogames as a digital medium and facing hard questions regarding matters of contingency versus necessity.

Videogames as digital artefacts are governed by code. Nothing within them can exist or happen that is not allowed by the parameters set by the code. This is a fact that resonates with those myth-hunters commenting of the fact that no texture for Bigfoot could be found within the videogame files. All present and future possibilities are accounted for by the code. This is the fundamental core of the whole videogame medium according to Patrick Crogan (2011: 36), who explains that it is born out of a military-entertainment complex whose primary objective is to predict future threats.

> 'Computer games play with the playing out of the war of contingency that has been an animating force through the course of the development of computers as simulation platforms capable of modelling the future as virtually accessible to preemption' (Crogan 2011: 36).

If everything is predicted by, and predicated on, the code, if every possible contingency and chance encounter is, in fact, accounted for, how can *GTA* myths remain ontologically dubious? They either exist as real and 'natural', because the code allows it, or they do not, as argued by data miners unable to locate relevant files. Accordingly, myths happening due to recognized glitches or quirks of the code are accepted as real. Such is the case of the 'ghost cars' found rolling down the hills in the forest with no driver in *GTA:SA* (Zwiezen 2019: n.p.), a case ultimately explained by code idiosyncrasies.

Different is the case of myths without explanations. Here we have the contingency of 'real life', with all its possibilities (even the frightening and spooky ones) seeping into the codified reality of the videogame, in a form of 'ontological bleed'. The supernatural in videogames is then reversed: the natural contingency of the 'real world' becomes supernatural and unsettling when present in the rule-bound, codified world of videogames. Game scholar Ian Bogost (2006: 106) writes about *simulation fever*, meaning the feeling players experience when comparing a simulation to its source system. When the simulation fails to meet the

player's experience of the source system and their expectations for the simulated model, this potentially causes a feeling of jarringness or uneasiness. By this definition, the hyperviolent crimes that a player commits in the 'realistic' city simulations of *GTA* may result in simulation fever, given the lack of any real consequences for their crimes. That simulation fever may happen in the first place is a consequence of the simulation being an exclusionary model of the source system, in the sense that a simulation always selectively includes aspects of that system while excluding others, resulting in an ideological representation of the source system via a less complex system (Bogost 2006: 98). Simulation fever may be then understood as arising from the simulation including 'too little' of the source system. *GTA* myths invert this dynamic by evoking simulation fever by signifying the 'too much' potentially included in the simulation.

Belief Tourism and Hypermodern Commodification

I conclude this article by considering the co-optation of myth-hunting practices by Rockstar, in a clear example of hypermodern commodification of folklore. While Rockstar representatives were initially adamant that no supernatural myth could be found in *GTA*, they eventually took a more ambiguous stance, apparently entertaining the idea (Parkin 2012: n.p.). Furthermore, Rockstar openly addressed myth-hunters and their practices by including Bigfoot in future videogames such in the expansion pack for *Red Dead Redemption* (Rockstar San Diego 2010) and in *GTAV* (both as an acknowledged Easter egg, and as part of a mission, though in the latter case it turns out to be nothing more than a human in a costume).

Several Easter eggs of the supernatural type (at least representationally, as these are fully allowed by the code) in addition to Bigfoot are found in *GTAV*. For example, if players travel to a certain location between 11 p.m. and 12 a.m. they can see the ghost of a woman, disappearing upon approaching her. Aliens and killer clowns are featured as part of bonus missions. The existence of ontologically supernatural Easter eggs, on the other hand, remains contested. Whether or not, these exist, I here want to bring attention to the fact that Rockstar deliberately included ambiguous and hard to find secrets and mysteries of a supernatural 'flavour' to keep players returning to the virtual worlds of *GTA Online* (the online game mode of *GTAV*) as potential customers of in-game products.

One case in point is the Mount Chiliad mystery, a myth-hunt that lasted for months (and according to some still ongoing) requiring the collective effort of the *GTA* myth-hunting

community, gathered in a dedicated subreddit.[8] There is not enough space left here to go into detail regarding the complexities of the lore involved, but the myth has to do with a cryptic mural, aliens, and possible locations for a jetpack, an iconic *GTA* item from *GTA:SA*, rumoured to be found in *GTAV*. In 2018, Rockstar added a mission to *GTA Online* featuring a jetpack, subsequently obtainable form the in-game store. For many myth-hunters the Mount Chiliad mystery ended with the overt inclusion of the jetpack in the game. Accordingly, many myth-hunters believe the whole mystery to have been nothing more than a ruse by Rockstar, a foreshadowing of the inclusion of the jetpack further down the post-launch cycle to keep players engaged. Other myth-hunters, however, believe that the mystery is not solved yet, and that there is more to uncover.

Regardless of who is right, the fact that Rockstar will not address explicitly the Mount Chiliad mystery reveals that it has in fact co-opted myth-hunting into their revenue model. Myth-hunters are now treated like tourists, that is, consumers travelling to a site in search of an authentic experience (MacCannell 1999: 29). Diane Goldstein (2007: 197) writes about belief tourism, where tourists travel to haunted sites. What matters for these tourists is not whether they will in fact experience supernatural occurrences, but rather that they will experience the potential for supernatural encounters by visiting the location. Myth-hunting for ontologically supernatural myths in *GTA* may be read much like a form of belief tourism: it does not matter whether players encounter Bigfoot or Goatman, what matters is that traveling to legendary sites in *GTA* maintains open the potential for their supernatural encounter. This potential is taken away once Rockstar confirms the inclusion of this or that Easter egg. Belief tourism thus becomes the playful postmodern tourism, described by John Urry (2002: 91) as 'a game with multiple texts and no single, authentic tourist experience'. Much like Urry's post-tourist knows that there is little authentic in the visited fishing village that would survive without tourist influx, myth-hunters, to an extent, know that they are in fact engaging in a manufactured experience ultimately designed to extract value from their remaining within the virtual worlds they tour through. By not explicitly addressing certain myths, Rockstar simply attempts to maintain a veneer of authenticity.

Conclusion

With this article I contextualized the phenomenon of Easter egg hunting, specifically in its manifestation in the *GTA* series in the form of myth-hunting, as a type of hypemodern folklore. I explained how *GTA* is notorious for the size and scope of their gameworld which feature realistic representations of major American cities. Indeed, one of the principal pleasures derived from playing *GTA* is travelling through and exploring the city. This activity often happens in the form of myth-hunting, or the hunt for ontologically ambiguous Easter eggs often centred around supernatural entities such as aliens, ghosts, or cryptids.

I suggested that myth-hunting may be understood as a form of videogame-based legend-tripping. Players become exposed to the legend through online avenues, such as forums, game wikis and YouTube clips. They may travel to in-game legendary locations following certain instructions, therefore engaging in ostensive action. They may finally come back online to discuss their experience and integrate it into the wider legend-complex. Legend-tripping is a playful activity at its core, yet it is conducted to test limits and address certain anxieties. In the case of videogame legend-tripping, these anxieties have to do with the ontology of code-ruled gameworlds and the exclusion of contingency. I then concluded with a consideration of how *GTA*'s producers engage in hypermodern folklore commodification by co-opting myth-hunting practices. By conducting this analysis, it is then shown that videogames may be rightly considered one of the technological avenues through which hypermodern folklore functions today.

Endnotes

[1] https://gta.fandom.com/wiki/Main_Page

[2] https://gta-myths.fandom.com/wiki/GTA_Myths_Wiki

[3] https://gta-myths.fandom.com/wiki/Bigfoot_(GTA_San_Andreas)

[4] https://gta-myths.fandom.com/wiki/Myth_Hunter_Guide

[5] https://gta-myths.fandom.com/wiki/Bigfoot_(GTA_San_Andreas)

[6] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qiocvlb0lxY&list=PL-p9DoJx7mt95e49LrltWj3toF5NKY8Qq&index=9

[7] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHztrOc7UxQ&list=PL551B1E5F658BF640&index=8

[8] https://www.reddit.com/r/chiliadmystery/

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