Narrative Design and Authorship in Bloodborne

An Analysis of the Horror Videogame

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This book has undergone peer review.

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Introduction

The blind man hovers over you, telling you about something called Paleblood. He says you have reached the home of blood ministration, and it is in this moment that you realize that you are not simply lying down, but are strapped to a table. He asks you to sign a contract, to tell him about yourself, your name, your origin. What you are agreeing to, you do not know, but to the stranger, it is an invitation to start a blood transfusion. One by one, drop by drop, the blood starts falling, seeping into your veins, dragging you down into a vision of fire and beasts. When you come to, you find yourself in an old clinic. The building is in ruins, its rooms in disrepair, their contents broken and scattered. You start to wander around, searching for another person, but the place appears deserted, and as you make your way outside, all you find is decay, empty streets littered with bodies and madmen. Lost and close to despair, you remember the blind man's words: "Whatever happens, you may think it all a mere bad dream."

Project Beast. For fans of the games by FromSoftware, these two words became their focus in May 2014 when screenshots appeared on various forums, apparently taken from videos that showed a new project from the developer. Discussions were rife: was the project real? The screenshots were supposedly based on gameplay footage, but had they been photoshopped, one of the many elaborate hoaxes that appear online? What the images showed, though, left people thrilled: a dark landscape, a Gothic city, filled with grotesque enemies. The words in the trailer, orange on black, a fire in the dark, are equally intriguing: "This curse. This nightmare. This battle. How will it end?" (Project Beast trailer, 2014[1]). After the initial news, the community did not have long to wait: on June 9, 2014, an official announcement was made, its title revealed as *Bloodborne*. Released in March 2015, the final game keeps many of the promises made by the Project Beast trailers, if only with the description on the box, asking players to "hunt [their] nightmares":

A lone traveller. A cursed town. A deadly mystery that swallows everything it touches. Face your fears as you enter the decaying city of Yharnam, a forsaken place ravaged by a terrible, all-consuming illness. Scour its darkest shadows, fight for your life with blades and guns and discover secrets that will make your blood run cold—but just might save your skin … [*Bloodborne* game case, EU standard edition].

The title cast its players into the role of a hunter, a foreigner in a hostile land, who has arrived in the shadowy city of Yharnam in search of Paleblood. In their quest for this mysterious substance, players are asked to not just face, but actively hunt their worst nightmares. Unlike its previous titles *Demon's Souls* (2009) and the *Dark Souls* franchise (2011; 2014; 2016), *Bloodborne* is somewhat of a departure for FromSoftware, but within its relatively short lifespan, the game has already achieved an iconic status, similar to that of its predecessors. An action role-playing title played from third person perspective, *Bloodborne* uses a setting of Gothic horror to convey its dark themes. As is noted by MacDonald, "thematically, [*Bloodborne*] is a very different beast. If *Dark Souls* was about dying, *Bloodborne* is about killing. [It] is so much more overtly a horror game than *Dark Souls*, a game about bloodlust and madness and transformation and the dark, awful things at the fringes of human understanding" (2016: 277). It is the difference in genre, in particular, that marks a change between the Souls games and *Bloodborne*. The former leads its players to the distant realms of Lordran, Drangleic and Lothric, once great kingdoms that have fallen into ruin. Each setting is a medieval fantasy, a land filled with warriors and knights, castles and kings, dragons and monsters, mages and spells. It should be noted that although the narrative of the Souls games can be typified as fantasy, it deals with the darker themes inherent in the genre, and ideas of the loss of humanity, and ultimately a loss of self, underpin each entry in the franchise. Perhaps following from these subject matters, *Bloodborne* brings a focus that is darker still, moving into the realm of horror proper and questions of humanity's (potentially meaningless) place in the universe. Director for the game and CEO of FromSoftware Hidetaka Miyazaki discusses *Bloodborne* as having "aspects of both Gothic and Cthulhu-style horror, but it's the former that's depicted from the start and provides a guide for the game's visual feel" (Strategy Guide,[2] 2015: 538). In Miyazaki's words, the game's setting is "a world of grotesque scary horror" (SG, 2015: 538), and followed by the release of *Dark Souls 3* in 2016 and *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice*, set in feudal Japan, in 2019, this tale of Gothic terror remains somewhat of an anomaly among the Soulsborne games. At the same time, Miyazaki's use of the horror genre creates a fascinating interplay between narrative, authorship and genre. Form and content combine in the design of *Bloodborne*, constructing a tale of forbidden knowledge and the

inevitable downfall of those who pursue it. This book will closely examine the game's lore, reading it against its story, world, and mechanics, to map the intricacies of Miyazaki's creation. In order to do so, attention first needs to be paid to three key concepts, those of narrative, authorship, and genre, to provide a rationale for the significance of *Bloodborne*'s design.

The Soulsborne franchise has become known for its rather unique form of narrative delivery, and *Bloodborne* is no exception. Moving away from more traditional, linear models, the game's narrative is instead dispersed, found in cutscenes and dialogue, hidden within item descriptions and visual details, scattered around its world. It is an approach of which MacDonald notes:

> An especially interesting aspect of *Dark Souls*' story is that it could *only* be told through a video game, making it almost unique. It tells us very little through the mediums of text or film, and vast amounts through context, exploration and environmental storytelling that simply would not be possible in any other format. Nowadays it's widely regarded as a masterclass in interactive narrative design, despite the fact that any given player could bypass the story entirely if they weren't inclined to investigate [2016: 283–284; author's emphasis].

Such a relationship between medium and narrative delivery has been discussed extensively in the work of Marie-Laure Ryan, who, in her 2014 essay "Story/Worlds/Media: Tuning the Instruments of a Media-Conscious Narratology," argues that "the choice of media makes a difference as to what stories can be told, how they are told, and why they are told. By shaping narrative, media shape nothing less than human experience" (25). In its purest sense, narrative is concerned with the telling of events: "At their simplest, all narratives are the movement from a beginning point to a finishing point. Narrative is just a sequence which starts and moves inexorably to its end" (Cobley, 2001: 9). Yet this is not the only component of the concept, as Cobley explains: "'Narrative' is the showing or the telling of these events and the mode selected for that to take place" (2001: 5–6). Narrative is story, but it is also representation, it is *how* a story is being told, and in a discussion of videogames in particular, it will be helpful to make this distinction. As Salen and Zimmerman argue, games are ultimately concerned with representation: "Game play takes place within a *representational* universe, filled with depictions of objects, interactions, and ideas out of which a player makes meaning" (2003: 364; author's emphasis). Where traditional media such as novels and film guide their audiences through the storyline, a player actively participates in the creation of meaning. Through playing the game and interacting with its components and systems, players are able to make sense of the world they find themselves in: "Rules guide this interaction, establishing relationships

between signs that tell a player what things might mean. Meaning emerges as a player actively interprets the system established by the rules" (Salen and Zimmerman, 2003: 368). Each game will use different strategies to facilitate this process, and narrative is one of those strategies.

Numerous strands of research within game studies have focused on the construction and role of story within digital games. Citing the concept of interactivity as central to the experience of this medium, early texts called into question the ability of games to tell stories (Aarseth, 1997 and 2004; Eskelinen, 2004; Juul, 2001). Others, such as Murray (1997) and Ryan (2001; 2006), have argued for new approaches to help understand and analyze the role of narrative within these media.[3] Subsequent publications have focused on similarities with other narrative modes, such as literature (Enslinn, 2014; Mukherjee, 2015) or film (Brown and Krzywinska, 2009; King and Krzywinska, 2002; Krzywinska, 2013), or on notions of fan made narratives and paratext (Glas, 2016; Jenkins, 2006; Newman, 2005). In my treatment of *Bloodborne*, my focus will be on the narrative information contained within the game and how it is represented within its world. This is then discussed in light of how it might be interpreted by players when read in correlation with other narrative data, both contained within *Bloodborne*'s universe and taken from outside influences. In particular, attention will be drawn to Miyazaki's use of inter- and intratextual elements, pointing both back into this world of Gothic horror and outwards to existing narrative structures. Intertextual components provide "[t]he various links in form and content which bind any text to other texts. […] Each text exists in relation to others, and textual meanings are dependent on such relations" (Chandler and Murray, 2011: online edition), whereas intratextuality refers to "[i]nternal relations within a text" (Chandler and Murray, 2011: online edition), creating a network of connections within a single narrative. Miyazaki accomplishes both, repeatedly referencing cutscenes, dialogue and item descriptions inside his texts, while also drawing on larger contexts outside of *Bloodborne*'s game world. Both processes are important for player understanding, aiding them in their efforts to make meaning from the narrative information they have been presented with. Alongside these formal structures, it is genre, form and content that impact on the game's delivery and reception, but its construction of authorship needs to be discussed first.

To fully understand the process of meaning-making within a Soulsborne title, we need to turn to Miyazaki and his ideas on the storytelling used in FromSoftware's titles. As the director of each of the Soulsborne games, Miyazaki is a strong influence on all aspects of the final product, including visual design, gameplay, and narrative content. MacDonald draws attention

to his particular role in the creation of these titles, especially when compared to other practices of game development: "Where most games are composite creations, influenced and guided by hundreds of pairs of hands, *Dark Souls*' singularity and consistency of vision owes much to Miyazaki's detailed, hands-on style of direction. [...] Simply put, without Miyazaki, there would be no *Dark Souls* at all" (2016: 139). Throughout their book, MacDonald and Killingsworth refer to Miyazaki as an auteur, further solidifying his influence on the development process of each of the games.

Most commonly associated with film, the term auteur is primarily used to indicate a single figure as the unifying point and vision of a production. As film scholars Bordwell and Thompson explain, an auteur is "the presumed or actual author of a film, usually identified as the director" (2016: 493). Although "an auteur usually did not literally write scripts [they] managed nonetheless to stamp his or her personality on studio products, transcending the constraints of Hollywood's standardised system" (Bordwell and Thompson, 2016: 480), and the term is commonly associated with a value judgement on the artistic merit of the creative output. Increasingly, the concept has been used to refer to certain game designers, where the work of individuals such as Hideo Kojima (*Metal Gear Solid* series) and Yoko Taro (*Drakengard* and *NIER* series) is discussed in light of auteur status; Miyazaki is often counted among them. Generally, the term auteur implies not just a unity of vision, but often points to a sense of dominating authorial control in games. When applied to Miyazaki and the Soulsborne franchise, however, a different picture emerges.

As displayed in numerous interviews, Miyazaki's approach to design focuses on player agency and on their role in the exploration of the games and their worlds as opposed to what I will call overt linear storytelling. Although the Soulsborne titles do use dialogue and cutscenes, these moments are often brief and delivered without much context, leaving it to the player to connect the dots. Furthermore, these sequences are not the only means by which the story is conveyed to the player. Rather than framed as story moments and exposition, the narrative in *Bloodborne*, and indeed in *Dark Souls* and *Sekiro*, is contained within the formal structure of the game. Item descriptions, details of the environment and game mechanics are as important in piecing together the story as the scripted elements are. The result is a narrative that is as cryptic as it is compelling, and which has since become synonymous with the FromSoftware brand. This process of meaning-making appears central to Miyazaki, and in a piece for the *Guardian* newspaper, Parkin draws attention to this approach: "Miyazaki's games may be rich in lore, but nothing is made explicit. Your character is always a nameless warrior

lost in an inscrutable, archaic realm; the friendly characters you encounter speak in riddles or grunts; everything is arcane, much is hidden" (2015: n.pag.). The philosophy behind this is briefly discussed by Parkin:

> When Hidetaka Miyazaki was a child, he was a keen reader, though not a talented one. Often he'd reach passages of text he couldn't understand, and so would allow his imagination to fill in the blanks, using the accompanying illustrations. In this way, he felt he was co-writing the fiction alongside its original author [2015: n.pag.].

When discussing his approach to narrative with Donaldson for VG247, Miyazaki sheds some light on this process: "First of all, yes, there is a perfect storyline in my head. […] However, […] I have no intention at all of enforcing that storyline to the players out there" (2016: n.pag.). He continues:

> Only those storyline elements that actually make it into the game are something that I need to force players to accept as a base for building up their own interpretation of the world. There are things in my head that aren't in the games, after all—so after that, it's all up to the players. I have no intention in forcing any of the storyline upon any of the players out there, and there will be no official statements made about the "true" story of the game [Donaldson, 2016: n.pag.].

This idea of co-authoring is repeated in the interview with Parkin, where it is noted that "the story [of Bloodborne] is hazy. You, like young Miyazaki, must fill in the blanks with your imagination, co-authoring the narrative as you trudge the streets in ragged trenchcoat [sic] and blood-slicked boots, fending off the city's deranged inhabitants" (2015: n.pag.). In this dark and hostile world, everything is connected. Players become explorers as they try to make links and construct a story alongside Miyazaki, and it allows those who delve into the lore's depths to become more involved with the game world. In terms of the reception of both *Bloodborne* and the *Dark Souls* games, it appears that this approach is one of the enduring pulls for the Soulsborne franchise. The online community is large and websites like YouTube and Reddit are rife with discussions of the games' lore. Miyazaki has commented on this:

> I don't think that [my storytelling method] necessarily blocks that game from having wider commercial success. […] Whatever the case is, I feel enabling the player to find something new within the game and its world or storyline—or even other things, such as a shortcut or a boss weakness—gives very high value to the product thanks to the feeling that it creates among players when they make those discoveries [Donaldson, 2016: n.pag.].

And within *Bloodborne*, there is much to be found. Miyazaki's Gothic nightmare offers players a journey of discovery to unearth the secrets of Yharnam, but a journey that may end with the player finding out more than they wanted to know.

This willingness to co-author his narrative through the eyes of the players seems to place Miyazaki outside of the traditional conceptions of the controlling auteur. Indeed, the term has not been without criticism, where certain theorists have regarded the application of the label of "auteur" as reductionist and limiting. As Roland Barthes has noted in his seminal essay "The Death of the Author" (1977), the author is often regarded as the sole unifying factor of the work, where "the *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it" (143; author's emphasis). However, there is a danger in awarding such a status to a single person, Barthes warns: "To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (1977: 147). Instead, he argues that "a text's unity lies not in its origin, but in its destination. [The reader] is simply that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted" (1977: 148; author's emphasis), an approach that arguably resonates with Miyazaki's emphasis on co-authoring. When seen in this light, Miyazaki's authorial role can best be defined with the use of Michel Foucault's author-function. A term coined in Foucault's 1969 essay "What is an Author," it represents a construct where the author is regarded as "a principle of a certain unity of writing" (1992: 308). Rather than a single source of meaning creation, the author-function should be regarded as one of multiple signifiers that aid in the understanding of a text. The author is no longer an individual, but rather a construct, a figure that represents a possibility of interpretation.

When reviewing Miyazaki's discussions of his design process, it is in combining the ideas of Barthes and Foucault that a means to describe his role as game director can be found. Despite showing authorial influence over so many aspects of a game's design, Miyazaki equally acknowledges the input of the teams he works with on each title. Furthermore, in relinquishing control to his players upon the release of his games and notoriously failing to provide answers to most queries regarding the lore of any of the Soulsborne titles, Miyazaki fulfills his author-function as central figure and representative of FromSoftware (especially in his current role as CEO), without presenting himself as the sole author and source of meaning-making within his texts.

This interplay between perceptions of authorial control and freedom of interpretation is emphasized in *Bloodborne* in the duality of its genre. Whereas the classification of films by genre is primarily defined by content and setting, genre in videogames cannot be approached in the same way. In his taxonomy of the topic, Wolf notes: "Video game genre study differs markedly from literary or film genre study due to the direct and active participation of the audience" (2002: 114). Instead, it is gameplay which is often at the center of classifying the game experience, which leads Adams and Rollings

to the following definition: "A genre is a category of games characterized by a particular set of challenges, regardless of setting or game-world content" (2007: 81). Read against such a typology, *Bloodborne* should firstly be defined as an action-adventure game. Players get the opportunity to create a character, which they control from a third person perspective; within the world, they will find items and experience points (referred to as "echoes") to level up their character and make them stronger, and they are tasked with fighting hordes of adversaries to advance the game. Miyazaki himself describes the gameplay as follows: "You defeat powerful enemies, discover hidden locations and shortcuts, gain an understanding of the game's structure, and use the window you're given to imagine the game's world and story" (SG, 2015: 547), highlighting this cycle of combat, exploration and progress.

More importantly, most reviews describe *Bloodborne* as a horror game, a genre that is primarily concerned with player affect, its appearance in games most commonly linked to survival horror. A term originating from journalistic discourse and making its way into scholarly works, its formal definition remains nebulous at best, as argued by Perron (2018: 31–65). For the sake of clarity, I will be using the definition coined by Kirkland:

> Survival horror might be understood as: an action adventure game employing a third person perspective, and drawing on horror film iconography, in which a typically average character navigates a mazelike landscape, solving puzzles and fighting of monsters with limited ammunition, energy and means of replenishing it [2005: 172; emphasis removed].

Of interest here is the implied lack of control and mastery on the part of the player: the player character is "average" and thus not necessarily capable of handling the threats that beset them; not only that, but their resources (both physical and material) are "limited." In order to highlight these limitations, "survival horror games unfold in static game spaces [and are] characterized by closed systems, limited participation, dichotomized worlds divided between good and evil, a sense of centralized authorship, and moral certainties" (Kirkland, 2009: 63–64). Plot, character and setting are predetermined and often rely on restricted interactivity so as to invoke "the sense of helplessness, entrapment and pre-determination" (Kirkland, 2009: 64). This understanding of survival horror and, in particular, the limitations it places on the player experience, stands as an interesting counterpoint to *Bloodborne*'s gameplay design. Whereas the restrictions of survival horror help to create a particular narrative experience, one which builds incrementally towards larger threats and the possible resolution of a central mystery, *Bloodborne*'s semi-open world and hidden narrative allow for greater freedom for the player. Arguably, this approach is to the detriment of the scares and sensations

of loss of control found in the tighter structure of most survival horror titles. The use of action-adventure tropes in Miyazaki's game further erodes the experience of limitations to health and firepower when compared to the combative capabilities of the player character in *Bloodborne*. However, as will become clear during my close reading of the game, here, the horrors reside elsewhere.

Part of the reason for this is the fact that *Bloodborne* makes heavy use of the Gothic tradition, as confirmed by Miyazaki (SG, 2015: 538). The themes often found in the Gothic mode, of mortality, monstrosity and madness, inform the game's story, but also its delivery. Tales of forbidden knowledge, mad scientists and cultist religions abound in the city of Yharnam, and are reflected not only in the narrative, but also in the game spaces and mechanics, further cementing its status as a horror title. Although the Souls games employ a similar approach, these ideas become more pronounced when read against *Bloodborne*'s horrors and, in particular, when comparing Miyazaki's efforts to other genre games. Many recent horror titles opt for a shorter duration and tighter control, using story and atmosphere to deliver an orchestrated scare experience. By contrast, *Bloodborne*'s openness in its world and narrative offers an experience that is distinctly Gothic in nature. In his book *The Literature of Terror* (1996), David Punter describes how the Gothic places "an emphasis on portraying the terrifying, a common insistence on archaic settings, a prominent use of the supernatural" (1) whereas Jerrold Hogle has noted the importance of location to Gothic fiction (2002: 2), culminating in a city which is overrun by monsters and weighed down by its past. Concerned with emotion and affect over narrative complexity, the structure of many Gothic fictions is worth noting. As Kilgour explains in *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (1995), the mode "feeds upon and mixes the wide range of literary sources out of which it emerges and from which it never fully disentangles itself," and as a result, "the form is thus itself a Frankenstein's monster, assembled out of the bits and pieces of the past" (4). The narrative that emerges appears to its audiences as a monstrosity in itself and "[m]ade up of these assorted bits and pieces, gothic novels often seem to disintegrate into fragments, irrelevant digressions, set-pieces of landscape description which never refer back to the central point" (1995: 5). Kilgour's description of this fragmented narrative is reminiscent of the tactics employed by Miyazaki in the design of his games, where, instead of presenting a collection of scenes and tropes, it is up to the players to build their own monster from the pieces of the story that they are able to unearth. Yet beyond plot, themes, setting and structure, Miyazaki's connection to the influences of the Gothic is more deepseated, as described by Martin:

> Miyazaki is known for bringing literature to design meetings, circling passages and handing them over to artists, asking them for their own interpretation. […] For Miyazaki, it's clear that these are not just style references, but the seeds of his world. After all, the focus of these iconic gothic texts is not a sense of horror but a sense of humanity lost, and of the darkness that lies in the subjective spaces of human experience [n.pag.].

The result is a tapestry of imagery and secrets which permeates *Bloodborne*'s game world, resulting in a game where process of playing is, in itself, Gothic, following Fred Botting's description of modern incarnations of the mode:

> Disorientation: multiple interlinked networks of signs, images, bits, flows. Disruption: all spatial, temporal, physical and subjective coordinates diffuse, conflate, expand and enmesh. Where does it begin and end? How is it animated? What can it mean? In digital and virtual contexts, what are its frames, anchors, material supports? Who—or what—writes, reads, projects, imagines, perceives? Are the ghosts it generates actual, hallucinatory or medial? Are they effects of unconscious, textual or technical processes? [2013: 197].

These notions of disorientation and disruption, of transgression and fragmentation, undoubtedly inform and complicate any reading of *Bloodborne*, but that is what I wish to attempt here. Drawing on both the main game[4] and the contents of *The Old Hunters* DLC, released in November 2015, the present work aims to explore the game through a variety of lenses, looking at theories of narrative and genre and their relation to *Bloodborne*. The aim, then, is to investigate the modes of storytelling employed by Miyazaki and, in particular, how these work as a demonstration of the game's underlying themes.

A few words need to be said about the scope of this book. Despite their popularity and impact on contemporary game design paradigms, the Soulsborne games have so far received little attention from the academic community. Aside from a handful of papers that discuss various aspects of both *Bloodborne* and the *Dark Souls* games, it is in the book *You Died. A Dark Souls Companion* by Keza MacDonald and Jason Killingsworth that one can find a more detailed discussion of the first *Dark Souls* game. This work is more journalistic in its aims, focusing on the game and its development and celebrating the community it has fostered.

My aim in this book is very different. Rather than the reviews and discussions surrounding *Bloodborne*, the game itself will be regarded as the primary text, one that I wish to analyze through the lens of existing academic research. Drawing on game studies texts, Gothic and Lovecraftian scholarship, and cultural histories of particular themes (for example, imagery of blood and of the night), the current work will offer a new perspective on Miyazaki's creation. Although this book is not intended as a walkthrough of

the game or a strategy guide, descriptions of the lore and game world will form part of this discussion. A spoiler warning needs to be given for these sections of the work, which can be recognized by their mode of address, using a second person viewpoint. Furthermore, I wish to point out that the interpretations and readings offered here are my own. Each of FromSoftware's games has a rich online community, where elements of the story and the world are examined and re-examined, with many players deeply dedicated to the games' mysteries. Here, I wish to offer my analysis of the game from the perspective of an academic and researcher, as well as a gamer. As a result, not all lore may be discussed, and the conclusions I reach may not be accepted by all. Rather, they will be based on my reading of the game and its connections to wider academic discussions and theories. Underpinning such an analysis is an approach informed by Gillen's notion of New Games Journalism. In his brief manifesto, published in 2005, Gillen protests the assumption that "the worth of a videogame lies in the videogame, and by examining it like a twitching insect fixed on a slide, we can understand it" (n.pag.). Instead, he advocates a style of writing that he terms New Games Journalism, which "argues that the worth of a videogame lies not in the game, but in the gamer" (2005: n.pag.). Writing about videogames, for Gillen, is about reporting a journey: "This makes us Travel Journalists to Imaginary places. Our job is to describe what it's like to visit a place that doesn't exist outside of the gamer's head" (2005: n.pag.), and it is in exactly this role that Miyazaki casts the player, as described by Martin:

> In this sharpened and blood-soaked guise there is no chance of the player being mistaken for a hero, just as the crippled crows and crawling corpses of Yharnam cannot be mistaken for all-powerful enemies. Every creature, not just the player, is fighting to keep a desperate grip on its ugly, bloody life. This desperation gives a minor tone to the violence that makes things very clear: Miyazaki has cast the player as both witness and executioner, and our task is to see Yharnam's rasping lifeless end [n.pag.].

The narrative of *Bloodborne* relies on the interplay between player and developer and a process of co-authoring and discovery that can best be described as a journey. As a result, the approach to writing about the game should be similar, and Gillen's concept of New Games Journalism allows me to emphasize this aspect of *Bloodborne* and the experience of playing it. After obtaining the game in May 2015, at first warned off by the legendary difficulty of the Soulsborne titles, as I played, I found that I had become the Hunter. For a period of several months, *Bloodborne* consumed my life, taking over my days and ruling my nights, filling them with dreams and feverish nightmares. In writing this book, I wish to recreate this initial journey of discovery. I will once more become the outsider from a foreign land, a lousy offcomer,

returning to Yharnam to prowl its dark streets, to scale the heights and plumbs the depths of the cursed city and the nightmarish world it is in. All that is left is to invite you to sign the contract, accept the transfusion, and join me.

The work is divided into three parts, each of which draws attention to a particular part of the journey: the lore, the world, and the mechanics. The first part offers a close reading of the game's story and its themes. Particular attention will be paid to content, situating events within the wider framework of the game's lore and the characters who inhabit this world. In analyzing the role of cutscenes, dialogue and item descriptions in the construction of a narrative, the game's story will be positioned alongside its genre. At its core, *Bloodborne* shows strong ties with the traditions of Gothic and horror literature, drawing both on themes and on the work of specific authors such as H.P. Lovecraft. Research from these fields, as well as an examination of modes of storytelling and narrative in games, will form the basis for this part of the study. The section will consist of three chapters, each of which focuses on one of the three main factions within the game (the Hunters, the Healing Church, and the Kin) to explore the lore associated with them, how their stories interweave, and how this lore affects the experience of players exploring and making judgments about the in-game world.

The second part will focus on the game's setting and the locations visited by the players. Only through the exploration of the city of Yharnam and its environs does the story of *Bloodborne* reveal all its secrets, and the sense of "being in a place" strongly informs the gameplay experience. The importance ascribed to certain locations, as well as their accessibility and the way in which game areas interconnect, provides additional information and adds levels of depth to the already rich lore of the game. The work of Carson and Jenkins on environmental storytelling and of Wolf on world building will function as a starting point for this discussion. As is the case with the lore, the design of *Bloodborne*'s game world invites a similar process of co-authorship, allowing players to draw conclusions based on the areas they visit and what they find within. Each of three chapters of this section will focus on a set of connected areas of the game, linked either physically or thematically, in much the same way as the factions identified in Part I.

Like the world of *Bloodborne*, the game's mechanics are often as vital to understanding the narrative as cutscenes and dialogue, and it is these processes that form the focus of the third part. Within the parameters of *Bloodborne*'s world, actions are not without consequences, even if the player does not realize this until much later (or, indeed, until it is too late). The effects of certain core game mechanics gain significance when viewed in the

light of *Bloodborne*'s lore, further deepening the themes of the game. An analysis of these systems will once more incorporate a close reading of the game, as well as sources on meaningful game design and procedural rhetoric. Each chapter of Part III will be centered on a particular game mechanic, covering Insight, the representation of blood, and the role of the Hunter's Dream. Each of these is strongly indicative of the intricate entanglement of game design and narrative within the game's world, and like the two previous elements they simultaneously offer players gameplay possibilities and story insights.

The final chapter will function as a summary of the previous chapters and their content, drawing together the different modes of storytelling offered by *Bloodborne* and how they inform the reception of the game and its narrative, particularly in relation to its genre. In doing so, it will place the game into a wider context of similar titles, as well as its potential to influence future games.

Part I.

Lore

1

Hunters

A figure in a crow's mask and a feathered cape turns to face you as you come out onto the balcony. "Oh, a hunter, are ya? And an outsider?" From her voice, you can tell she is female, but an introduction is not forthcoming. She is not the first to ask you if you are a hunter. It is the role you have been assigned in Yharnam, the role you have assumed for the time you will spend here. You wish to listen to what she has to say, and she warns you: "Prepare yourself for the worst. There are no humans left. They're all flesh-hungry beasts now." Still you stay, hoping for more information, not wanting to lose sight of the first friendly face you have seen in a while. Soon, though, she starts chiding you: "What's wrong? A hunter, unnerved by a few beasts?" Yet you linger, until she sends you on your way: "What are you still doing here? Enough trembling in your boots. A hunter must hunt." And so it is. A hunter must hunt. You turn away and set off once more.

There is little the player knows about *Bloodborne* and its world when they first enter the game. As described in the introduction, Miyazaki's brand of storytelling focuses itself on exploration and co-authorship to uncover the secrets of this world. The result of this process is a journey of discovery for those who enter Yharnam, but more interestingly, it is often a journey of self-discovery. As will become clear over the next three chapters, monstrosity and the transformation and transcendence of the physical body inform much of *Bloodborne*'s story, both for the people that players meet during their time spend in Yharnam, and for the fate of their own character.

The lore of *Bloodborne* will be the focus of the first part of this book, and as a topic, it is a large and complicated beast. As I hinted at in the introduction, although the game can undoubtedly be described as containing a narrative, the elements of the story are less overt. Combining traditional sources such as cutscenes, dialogue and written notes with an emphasis on the descriptions and even the placement of items or the clothing of NPCs,

Miyazaki creates a wealth of material that needs to be unpicked with care. Due to this fragmented nature, "a semiotic approach, which investigates the narrative power of language, image, sound, movement, face-to-face interaction, and the various combinations of these features" (2014: 30), as suggested by Ryan, will be the most fruitful way to fully explore *Bloodborne* and its components, and throughout the book, I will be drawing on a variety of materials to demonstrate the process of meaning-making found within the game. In using texts related to the construction and delivery of videogame narratives, as well as Gothic and horror scholarship to illuminate specific themes, these first three chapters will set out the complex story of *Bloodborne* and the ways in which it might be received by players.

As will become clear throughout this work, the universe of *Bloodborne* is a tapestry of narrative fragments and enigmatic details, which create a complex story of the human quest for knowledge and the danger inherent in uncovering such secrets. Within Yharnam and its environs, different institutions and organizations have set up their homes, each influencing events in a particular way, and it is these factions that are the focus of the opening part of this book. It is the Hunters, the Healing Church and the Kin who have become the key players in the city, and each will be examined in turn. It is worth noting, however, that a large part of this story concerns itself with history, with the past events that lead to the current situation, and the events that started the hunt and the scourge, resulting in a city that is diseased and deceased. It is about the people of the city, those who have founded it and its institutions, and about their legacy. The story of the Hunters, however, is still ongoing. It is not just any tale, retold; it is *your* story, the player's story, and it is the story with which I begin the journey through Yharnam.

Within the narrative experience of many games, the onus is on the player to engage with the game and its systems to uncover a storyline of sorts, and the concepts of embedded and emergent narrative in videogames can aid an understanding of this process: "Embedded elements are narrative structures directly authored by game designers that serve as a frame for interaction. Emergent narrative approaches emphasize the ways that players interact with a game system to produce a narrative experience unique to each player" (Salen and Zimmerman, 2003: 384). These definitions draw attention to the connection between the narrative left by the game designers for the players to find (and the ease with which these can be located), and the story beats that are uncovered by the player. Story within games thus "connects two narrative levels: the story to be discovered, and the story of their discovery" (Ryan, 2005: 16). It is this active role of the player in the creation of any kind of narrative that is of importance here, where "in an interactive environment,

the user becomes the detective, and it falls to him to reconstruct the embedded story" (Ryan, 2005: 16). Salen and Zimmerman similarly draw attention to this process of making meaning from the setting, the characters and the content that players are presented with:

> Recognizing games as narrative experience means considering them not just as bits of plot that are arranged and rearranged through interaction, but instead considering them as an ongoing *activity* in which a player engages with a core mechanic to make meaningful choices and explore a space of possibility [2003: 389; author's emphasis].

Miyazaki himself corroborates this: "I like reading about how gamers interpret or think about the story and world of my games. So I don't want to rob them of that space for open interpretation" (SG, 2015: 537). Given this approach to narrative and the aforementioned process of co-authoring, this active role of the player in uncovering and piecing together the story of Yharnam gains even more prominence. Interestingly, this sense of control slowly erodes in the second and third acts of the game as players gain a deeper understanding of their role (and insignificance) within the events of the game world. I will revisit this in the following two chapters, but it is the introduction of the player into Yharnam that will be the starting point for my reading.

As in many adventure games, and in the other Souls games, players do not start *Bloodborne* with a clearly identified character. Instead, as part of the opening cutscene of the game, they are invited to sign a contract by the Blood Minister, taking them to the character creation screen. Aside from choosing a name and building a detailed physical appearance, including body type, they can select an age for their character (young, mature, or old). Where players are usually asked to pick a class for their character, *Bloodborne* offers a list of origins instead, together with a brief description of a possible background for the player character:

Milquetoast: "Ordinary happy upbringing. All attributes average."
Lone Survivor: "Lone survivor of a lost hamlet. High life essence and vigor."
Troubled Childhood: "Suffered misfortune in youth. Highly resilient as a result."
Violent Past: "Terribly violent past. Rash, but stronger for it."
Professional: "Born specialist, fit for sleuthing or academia."
Military Veteran: "Experienced in war. A soldier with strength and skill."
Noble Scion: "Scion to a respectable line with faith in your pedigree."
Cruel Fate: "Faced terrible hardships, but now confident in your purpose."
Waste of Skin: "You are nothing. Talentless. You should not have been born."[1]

In this system, upbringing defines the capabilities of the onscreen avatar. Characters with a violent background, such as the Military Veteran, Troubled

Childhood and Violent Past, will have better statistics for physical traits such as strength and endurance, and will therefore be better fighters. By contrast, the Milquetoast, the Noble Scion and the Professional, who have had a more privileged upbringing, are more refined in their abilities and score higher in specialized skills. Although this reinterpretation of the class mechanic allows players some influence over a potential backstory for their character, it is the first of only three choices they will make to define themselves within *Bloodborne*'s world. The other two are found in the selection of the tools of the hunter: a melee weapon, to be wielded with the right hand, and a firearm for the left, with little information available as to their statistics or capabilities. What adds to this lack of control is that players are unable to pick their clothing in the early stages of the game, as everyone starts with the same Foreign Attire:

> Clothing worn upon awakening to the nightmare of blood and beasts. The hood suggests that its wearer had to stay out of sight, and travel by cover of darkness. The bandage looks terribly worn and unsanitary. A faint memory recalls blood ministration, involving the transfusion of unknown blood. Not long after, the nightmare began. Not typical clothing for Yharnam, perhaps it is of foreign origin. It is said, after all, the traveler came to Yharnam from afar. Without memory, who will ever know? [SG, 2015: 491].[2]

This description offers additional insights into the player character: they are an outsider, originally from a foreign land, and they have traveled here, but where from, and for what, is unknown. In addition, the notes recall the opening cutscene of the game in which the player undergoes blood ministration under the auspices of the Blood Minister, but at the same time, these become more confused by the details found in the item description, as the memory and, by extension, the reality of the episode is called into question. In many ways, the wording here recalls the final words of the Blood Minister: "Whatever happens, you may think it all a mere bad dream." These words of wisdom are imparted to the player, yet there is no way for them to respond. Aside from grunts of exertion and moans of agony, the player character remains voiceless throughout the game. When conversing with NPCs, other characters react *as if* spoken to, but no intelligible words are ever uttered by the player character, creating further tension with regards to the control players have within this world.

    After the opening cutscene and the initial blood ministration, you awaken in an old clinic. A handwritten scrawl on a piece of paper tells you of your purpose: "Seek Paleblood to transcend the hunt." Yet you know nothing of these things: what is Paleblood, and what is the hunt? Others around you might know more, and you wish to find them; surely you cannot be alone

here. You remember a soft female voice as you drifted up from the depths of the delirious treatment: "You have found yourself a hunter." Is this hunter you, and are you part of the hunt that the note refers to? You leave the safety of the clinic with more questions than answers as you make your way into the city. Once you enter the streets of Yharnam, however, these queries are no longer important. Only steps away from the building, you are confronted by a tall man dragging an axe and carrying a burning torch. He shouts at you, angry words and inarticulate groans, and it is not long before he takes a swing at you. The only option available is to respond in kind and to attack him with your newly acquired weapon, once, twice, three times, until he stumbles, falls forward, his dying words as ominous as his previous mumbles: "We're finished…" When you round the corner, you realize that he may have been the first, but he will not be the last: two more figures slowly stumble to their feet and make their way towards you. As you continue your journey through Yharnam, you will leave more bodies in your wake, adding to the burning pyres that litter the streets. You see yourself transformed, brandishing your weapon, drenched in the blood of those you have slain. Whoever they are, they seem to be both hostile and unfortunate. Transformed by some unknown agent, they clearly are, or once were, human, and with each body that falls, you become more uncertain of your cause. Each final mumbled curse speaks of a tragic end: "Away away! You are not wanted here! It's all your fault! Die!"

They are not the only ones left in Yharnam, however, and you soon discover that people still reside behind some of the doors. You knock repeatedly, perhaps looking for shelter, or for help, but none is forthcoming. Your presence in the town and your status as a foreigner seem to be widely known: "Are you that outsider? Well, I don't want nothing to do with you. Trot along, will ya?" "Lousy offcomer! Who'd open the door on the night of the hunt? Away with you. Now!" Still others regard your plight with mirth: mad laughter rings out from behind a door, and when you try to speak to whoever is inside, they have little to say to you: "Stuck outside on a night of the hunt. Ah, you poor, poor thing!" There it is again, that phrase: they speak of the night of the hunt, this event that you appear to be part of, yet know nothing about. Not all of those stuck inside are ready to leave you to your own devices, however. When you return to the clinic, you are able to speak to Iosefka, the owner of the facility. She does not offer much in terms of explanations, instead asking if you are out on the hunt and subsequently denying you access to her chambers: "The patients here in my clinic must not be exposed to infection. I know that you hunt for us, for our town, but I'm sorry." Instead, she entrusts you with a small token, a vial of her blood, to heal any injury you sustain on your journey: "Now, go. And good hunting." With this, she falls silent, and

you set off to find others. Gilbert, "a fellow outsider" holed up behind a window in Central Yharnam, is one of them. Recognizing you as both a foreigner and a hunter, he seems sympathetic to your plight and is willing to help in any way he can. His words do little to reassure you, however: "This town is cursed. Whatever your reasons might be, you should plan a swift exit. Whatever can be gained from this place, it will do more harm than good." Armed with directions and precious information, he sends you on your way.

An encounter within the Hunter's Dream, the safe haven you were introduced to upon death, proves more enlightening. Inside the workshop you find Gehrman, who seems rather pleased at the sight of the new hunter. He says he, and this Dream, are here to help you, a friend to the hunters, but although it is clear he knows more, he is not yet ready to share this information with you. Instead, he offers some kindly advice: "You're sure to be in a fine haze about now, but don't think too hard about all of this. Just go out and kill a few beasts, it's for your own good. You know, it's just what hunters do. You'll get used to it." It is clear he means well, and perhaps he means to protect you, but his words are no comfort to you. Although each of them, Iosefka, Gilbert, and Gehrman, try to assist you as best they can, each conversation has left you with more questions than answers. Here in Yharnam, you are a hunter; it is how everyone addresses and approaches you, yet you are unsure of its implications, or if it is a positive development. If nothing else, the attacks and abuse you suffered within the city seem to indicate you are not welcome. How did you get this role, and is the blood ministration you received something to do with it? What is this infection Iosefka referred to, and who are the beasts mentioned by Gehrman? After spending some time in Yharnam, it seems that no one is particularly keen to share information, and the only way to get it is to discover it for yourself. Armed with new resolve, you make your way back onto the streets, searching for others, and searching for answers.

Little is known to the player in the early stages of *Bloodborne*, and as Parkin notes, "unlike most adventure games, which are overloaded with backstory and cinematic narratives, it's never entirely clear what you're fighting for" (2015: n.pag.). The usual model for videogames might be one in which players simply enter the world and are able to piece together the narrative, and their role within it, quickly and with some authority, yet Miyazaki's design shies away from such exposition. From Salen and Zimmerman's concepts of embedded and emergent narrative, the active role of the player has already been established: without engaging with the world, there is precious little to be found out. If players remain passive, they will never truly enter

the game world and thus never encounter its stories. In Yharnam, however, the stakes are higher still: where other games will often feature triggered narrative events, or even bottlenecks where players will not be able to progress until a part of the story has been uncovered, *Bloodborne* requires much more involvement. The game does not present its story to its players in an obvious way, and most, if not all, of the encounters outlined here could be missed. Even when NPCs are found, the information they have is not necessarily enlightening, and *Bloodborne* contains little exposition in the classic sense. Rather than spoon-feeding the story to the players, the citizens of Yharnam tell you just enough to make your own connections, creating a web of information and requiring players to connect the dots: "[E]ven the most 'simple' of stories is embedded in a network of relations that are sometimes astounding in their complexity" (Cobley, 2001: 2). As Parkin explains, "Bloodborne is defined by obfuscation. It takes place in the ruined city of Yharnam, a fever-dream of spindly cathedrals set upon chinked cobblestones, recently devastated by plague. But the story is hazy" (2015: n.pag.). The game seems to ask that players uncover every last nugget of information to be able to fully comprehend *Bloodborne*'s intricate narrative.

In order to fully understand this process, it will be helpful to further unpack this notion of narrative. For Ryan, "[a] narrative is the use of signs, or of a medium, that evokes in the mind of the recipient the image of a concrete world that evolves in time, partly because of random happenings, and partly because of the intentional actions of individuated intelligent agents" (2005: 9). What is key in Ryan's definition is its attention to a network of connections which are made by the recipient, rather than the more traditional view of a story which moves inexorably from beginning to end in a single direction. Furthermore, what Ryan refers to are signs, thus including all components which contribute to the overall narrative experience, moving beyond words and visuals to address elements such as (game) space and mechanics. Another way of approaching this problem is Salen and Zimmerman's concept of narrative descriptors, "depictions of one or more aspects of the game world. […] Each type of narrative descriptor plays a different storytelling role in explicating the game universe, creating a narrative context for events and actions" (2004: 399). The authors note that "everything in a game is potentially a kind of narrative descriptor" and point to a number of elements inside and outside of the game "as objects that communicate the story" (2004: 399):

> Every element of a game brims with narrative potential. The narrative components of a game are not just the backstory and cutscenes. *Any* representational element can be a narrative descriptor…. Nothing is irrelevant: every piece helps tell the story … [Salen and Zimmerman, 2004: 401; author's emphasis].

It is only through considering every aspect of the game as a potential for narrative that the full story can be uncovered. This can be seen in *Bloodborne*'s insistence on interaction and exploration, as well as how aspects of its design invite those activities by rewarding players with new information, useful items, or a shortcut between areas. Miyazaki's approach to storytelling does not merely ask players to be more attentive and to catch subtle details; it invites a particular engagement with the game altogether.

Firstly, Yharnam itself creates an evocative and affective space for players to traverse, and it is this use of environment that will be the focus of the second part of this book. In addition to this, *Bloodborne* fosters a new relationship between players and the items they find. After the opening cutscene and the first appearance of the player character in the Hunter's Dream, players are asked to choose the weapon they wish to use. If these weapons are examined more closely, it is soon found that their item descriptions reveal additional information about the status of the player in the world. Each of the three choices of Saw Cleaver, Hunter Axe and Threaded Cane, has been created in a workshop and is described as a trick weapon, capable of transforming and offering a wider range of attacks. Furthermore, each description offers additional context as to the weapon's capabilities and significance:

> *Saw Cleaver:* "This saw, effective at drawing the blood of beasts, transforms into a long cleaver that makes use of centrifugal force. The saw, with its set of blood-letting teeth, has become a symbol of the hunt, and only grows in effectiveness the more grotesquely transformed the beast" [SG, 2015: 398].
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> *Hunter Axe:* "Retains the qualities of an axe, but offers a wider palette of attacks by transforming. Boasts a heavy blunt attack, leading to high rally potential. No matter their pasts, beasts are no more than beasts. Some choose this axe to play the part of executioner" [SG, 2015: 404].
>
> *Threaded Cane:* "Sufficiently deadly as a rigid bladed cane, but also serves as a whip when its blade is split into many. Concealing the weapon inside the cane and flogging the beasts with the whip is partly an act of ceremony, an attempt to demonstrate to oneself that the bloodlust of the hunt will never encroach upon the soul" [SG, 2015: 407].

These notes divulge a range of information. Firstly, they reinforce the idea of the player-as-hunter, as it is only hunters who have access to these trick weapons. Each of the weapons is "commonly used" by hunters, thus positing the ubiquity of both hunter and weapon and acknowledging a larger context. *Bloodborne* tells us that hunters hunt beasts with little information as to what these are, yet when read in correlation to the note from the Hunter Axe, that these creatures are no more than beasts, "no matter their past," this raises some questions as to their origin. Both Axe and Cane refer to the ritual nature of the hunt, of "play[ing] the part of executioner" and "an act of ceremony,"

whereas the Cleaver is "the symbol of the hunt." It also tells players something about their foes, as the weapon changes "the more grotesquely transformed the beast," supposing a progression of an infection of sorts. Ultimately, it might lead players to consider their role within this hostile city, and the danger that they might be in, at the mercy of beasts and, perhaps, forces greater still.

After the initial encounters with both the hostile Yharnamites and the assistance of Iosefka, Gilbert and Gehrman, it is clear that to get any real information, you will need to continue your quest. Gilbert seems to know a little about the Paleblood you seek and has advised you to go to the Cathedral Ward. The path ahead barred by a locked gate, however, Gilbert sends you into another part of the city to try and find passage through the aqueduct, and it is here you stumble across another soul who has barricaded herself in for the night. Despite requesting your help, the Old Woman is downright hostile in how she addresses you: "If you hunters got off your arses, we wouldn't be in this mess. You're obligated to help me, you hear?" It is not the first time you have suffered similar abuse, and yet again you are intrigued by the blame that is placed with you, as a hunter. What exactly has been the role of this group, and why is their presence met with such hostility? As you pause, considering these questions, you examine the items you scavenged from the dark streets of Yharnam; they may offer some clues. The Molotov Cocktail and Oil Urn, rudimentary devices of fire and flame, speak of burning, of fear and purification (SG, 2015: 448, 451). The clothes you have found allow you to "to stalk beasts unannounced, by cover of night" (SG, 2015: 493), and tell of a man called Ludwig, a name you have not yet come across. Apparently, he was part of the Healing Church, an organization mentioned by Gilbert, who "once recruited Yharnamites to serve as hunters. This hunter's attire was made for new recruits, and has excellent straightforward defense. But not nearly enough to allow an ordinary man to stand any real chance against the beasts" (SG, 2015: 497). Were ordinary townsfolk recruited as hunters, and if so, why do the Yharnamites now loathe you? There is one bit of information you find that is more worrying still, a top hat with a sinister message, where "formality, beauty, and justice are the very essence of our humanity, and precisely what keeps hunters from becoming something else" (SG, 2015: 493). You have encountered this idea of transformation before, and it seems hunters are especially at risk; should you fear for your safety, too? You need answers, and you need them now.

As you make your way through the aqueduct you come across the first person in the city who has not hidden themselves behind a locked door. Dressed in a feathered coat, pointed hat and a distinctive beak mask, the

woman does not introduce herself, but like all others, she recognizes you as a hunter. Like Gehrman, however, she addresses you as one of her own, a fellow hunter, offering you a welcome and some advice as well as items to help you survive the night. Her advice to "prepare for the worst" does little to alleviate your misgivings. More interestingly, she, like Iosefka, has some knowledge about the infection that plagues the city: "There are no humans left. They're all flesh-hungry beasts, now." Once more, the idea of illness and horrible transformation is brought to your attention, but you are more intrigued by the woman's status as a fellow hunter. Gehrman's words and the description of your weapon said that you are not alone. Is this woman, this Eileen the Crow, the only one, or are there still others scattered around this hostile world? Before too long, some of these questions are answered when you stumble across a man at the back of an old chapel, now long deserted. He introduces himself as Alfred: "You're a beast hunter, aren't you? I knew it. That's precisely how I started out!" Unlike so many others, Alfred is eager to talk: "Why not co-operate, and discuss the things we have learned?" When prompted, he tells you of the Healing Church, and of a place called Byrgenwerth, "an old place of learning," but he seems to know little of the infection and the beasts. You do, however, get a sense of his feelings on the matter. Where those you have spoken to so far appear to make the best of the situation they are in, Alfred seems almost exuberant. He speaks of beast hunting as "a sacred practice," and is excited about your meeting: "There must be oodles for us to share." Rather than resignation, Alfred's response is one of enthusiasm: "We are, after all, fellow hunters, and tonight we must hunt!" Although his welcome is heartening, you are unsure if it offers much relief. A new resident of the Hunter's Dream proves more helpful: alongside Gehrman, often found to offer some words of solace or advice, you encounter a strange mechanical doll. She is able to transfer the strength of the enemies you have slain into you and to support you on your journey: "I am a doll, here in this dream to look after you. […] You will hunt beasts … and I will be here for you, to embolden your sickly spirit." With each subsequent visit to this safe haven, the Doll is there for you, welcoming you home, and she seems to know about the Dream. Talking about Gehrman, she tells you that "he was a hunter long, long ago, but now serves only to advise them," and you are not the first the two of them are here to assist: "Over time, countless hunters have visited this dream. The graves here stand in their memory." The history of the scourge of beasts, which people are wont to call it, and of the hunt, is long, and you are now part of it, yet you feel as if you are deliberately kept in the dark, as if there are secrets you are not supposed to find out.

Returning to Yharnam, you have already noticed not all your enemies

are identical: there are a variety of animals, crows, dogs and pigs, as well as human-like figures, often ranting and raving, in various stages of this transformation you fail to understand. They seem to have grown hair, taken leave from their senses, and been reduced to the mumblings of madmen as they patrol the streets. At other times, you have stumbled across another human, another hunter, only for them to attack you on sight. You do not know why they would be hostile to a fellow hunter: they still seem human, yet somehow captured by some frenzy. Is this the peculiar Yharnam madness you have heard about? When Eileen told you the city's residents are "all flesh-hungry beasts," was she referring to something besides their form and appearance? One of her remarks suddenly gains new weight: "Without fear in our hearts, we're little different from the beasts themselves." Just how close is the connection between the hunters and this madness? Terror grips your heart, one which runs deeper than a simple fear for your flesh; it is a fear for your very soul and sanity. Yet you know there is no choice, nothing for you to do but press on and find out more. As it turns out, a visit to a new part of the city will have much to reveal.

You have been told of a disease, an infection, the scourge of beasts which ravaged Yharnam long ago, resulting in the appearance of these animalistic enemies and the need for the city to be cleansed on the night of the hunt. Iosefka told you of this when she turned you away, and it seems that the same illness has affected Gilbert, causing the coughing fits that first alerted you to his presence. Gehrman spoke of a part of town that is "burned and abandoned, for fear of the scourge, home now only to beasts," and you have found it. It has been hidden from you well, behind a wooden door, tucked away in the catacombs of a deserted chapel, with a crude sign: "This town is long abandoned. Hunters not wanted here." You ignore the notice and push open the door, entering Old Yharnam, the part of the city ruined by fire and by the scourge. The streets here are quiet, and you startle when you hear a voice ring out, seemingly from nowhere: "You there, hunter. Didn't you see the warning? Turn back at once. Old Yharnam, burned and abandoned by men, is now home only to beasts. They are of no harm to those above. Turn back … or the hunter will face the hunt…" Unsure, you pause, and it is then that the first shots ring out, bullets plowing into the cobblestones at your feet, forcing you to beat a hasty retreat. You lose yourself once more in the town, and somehow find your way to the top of a tall tower within this ruined quarter. Here is the source of the voice, and the bullets: Djura, armed with a Gatling gun, surrounded by fire, ash, and beasts. He knows of your kind, referring to you as "adept, merciless, half-cut with blood. As the best hunters are." Djura himself was a hunter once, he tells you, but he found a different

path than most, asking that you do not disturb this part of the city: "The beasts do not venture above, and mean no harm to anyone. If you still insist on hunting them, then I will hunt you first. You understand me?" He pauses, then continues: "There's nothing more horrific than a hunt. In case you've failed to realize…. The things you hunt, they're not beasts. They're people. One day, you will see…" His words do little to dispel the memory of shouts and bullets, and you find it difficult to trust this strange, solitary man. The weapon in your right hand moves as if of its own accord, connecting with his flesh, and the anger within him rises swiftly: "Is it the blood, or are you just raving mad? […] Very well. Then there's no need to hold back! The beasts will feast tonight!" He attacks you in return, quickly, mercilessly, leaving you no time to think. Weapons fly, blood is spilt, until, finally, Djura cries out and falls. You kneel beside him to hear his dying words: "It's you…. You're the beast. Just think about what you're doing. It's utter madness…" The old man's revelations have left you shaken. If these creatures are not just beasts, then what is your role in all this? Who, exactly, are the beasts here?

The significance of the scourge and the beasts, their origins and their place within *Bloodborne*'s lore requires more attention, specifically when seen in light of the centrality of the figure of the monster within the horror genre. Indeed, in *The Philosophy of Horror* (1990), Noël Carroll argues that "a monster or monstrous entity is a necessary condition for horror" (16), where said monsters are "abnormal" and "disturbances of the natural order" (16); in short, Carroll posits that "the monster is an extraordinary character in our ordinary world" (16). Not only are these beings unnatural, according to Carroll they need to be typified as "unclean and disgusting" (1990: 21) since "horrific monsters often involve a mixture of what is normally distinct" (1990: 33); they blur the boundaries between human and animal, living and dead, and so on. This lack of categorization has been addressed by other authors. In his influential essay "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," Cohen echoes Carroll's concerns of the monster as an interstitial being:

> This refusal to participate in the classificatory "order of things" is true of monsters generally: they are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions [1996: 6].

In the introduction to *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous* (2012), Mittman argues that this blurring of boundaries, this transgression, is part of the hold monsters have over us: "[T]he monster is outside of [our] definitions; it defies the human desire to subjugate through categorization. This is the source, in many ways, of their power" (7). The reason for this is not just a lack of categorization, but also our inability to under-

stand them: "[Monsters] are un-natural relative to a culture's conceptual scheme of nature. They do not fit the scheme; they violate it. Thus, monsters are not only physically threatening; they are cognitively threatening. They are threats to common knowledge" (Carroll, 1990: 34). Ultimately, according to Mittman, "the monstrous does not lie solely in its embodiment […] nor its location […], nor in the process(es) through which it enacts its being, but also (indeed, perhaps primarily) in its *impact*" (2012: 7; author's emphasis). Monsters are scary and loathsome; they exist outside of reality, or at least, outside of the way we see it. They terrify and threaten us, and in doing so, impact on our emotions and understanding of the world, and it is here that their power lies.

Due to this status, not only do monsters elicit a particular emotional response from those who come into contact with them, but there is a behavioral response that follows in how this being should be dealt with. More often than not, this response is one of violence and destruction, and *Bloodborne* is no different in this respect: the scourge has created the beasts, which need to be wiped out, and on each night of the hunt, it is the hunters who step up and attempt to do so. Yet what exactly these beasts are, and what, or perhaps *who*, you are fighting, remains opaque for most of the game. If Djura is to be believed, the beasts are human, or at least were human, reduced to this hideously violent form by an illness known as Ashen Blood. Interestingly, Cohen draws attention to this notion of creation in relation to the monster's role: "Every monster is in this way a double narrative, two living stories: one that describes how the monster came to be and another, its testimony, detailing what cultural use the monster serves" (1996: 13). Although the origins of the scourge remain unclear to the player for most of the game, the connection between infection and monstrosity is made early on. In addition, the content of the Old Hunter DLC adds certain layers to the role of the hunters and their superstitions with regards to these events, as the description of the Decorative Old Hunter Attire describes how "[t]he garb is decorated with brass trinkets. The gauntlets are made of brass to protect their weapon-bearing hands. At the time, some hunters believed that certain metals would ward off beast blood" (Old Hunters Strategy Guide,[3] 2015: 152). The standard Old Hunter Attire includes trousers with braces for the leg, because "[a] widespread belief of the period was that 'beast blood crept up the right leg,' and this lead to the double-wrapped belt" (OHSG, 2015: 153). What is implied here is that the scourge and its consequences of transformation were a real possibility for those out on the hunt, and protective measures were seen as vital. It remains doubtful, however, how successful these are as players encounter scores of Yharnamites, at varying stages of infection, ready to

attack their character. It is not just the townsfolk who have become infected: despite the superstition, prevalent amongst hunters, the first boss in the game is one of your own. Upon encountering Father Gascoigne, players see him hacking into the body of his latest victim, and, as he turns towards them, his whispered words are enough to unsettle: "Beasts all over the shop…. You'll be one of them, sooner or later…" The warning for the player character should be heeded as, over the course of the fight, Gascoigne himself changes into a hideous beast, his humanity evaporated in light of his monstrous urges at the mercy of the infection. Miyazaki himself comments on this:

> The urge to transform into a beast is in conflict with the basic sense of humanity we all have. That humanity serves as a kind of shackle, keeping the transformation in its place. The stronger the shackle keeping that urge to transform in place is, the larger the recoil once that shackle is finally broken. The results cause you to transform into a larger creature, or a more twisted one. The struggle between these two urges is one concept here [SG, 2015: 544].

It is a struggle that you see in the Yharnamites, and in Gascoigne. It is a struggle Djura is only too aware of, and it is one that you yourself are going through as you spend more time in this diseased city. As was implied by Djura's dying words, there is a deeper concern here, beyond infection and the nature of the beasts, and it is one to which you are not immune. The words of the Afflicted Beggar you encounter in the woods near the city are a clear testament to this: "You hunters have got more blood on your hands. Die! Die, die! Hunters are killers, nothing less! […] And you talk of beasts? You hunters are the real killers!" His words remind you of an item you now have in your possession, the Beast Roar: "Borrow the strength of the terrible undead darkbeasts, if only for a moment, to blast surrounding foes back with the force of a roaring beast. The indescribable sound is broadcast with the caster's own vocal cords, which begs the question, what terrible things lurk deep within the frames of men?" (SG, 2015: 460) The message is clear: is it truly possible to escape what you are hunting?

Infection and monstrosity are not the only possible fates that await a hunter, and the Old Hunters DLC in particular sheds light on this. In your activities on this night, you are at risk of more than just infection: "In Yharnam, there are whispered rumors of hunters who go drunk with blood—they are whisked away into a horrible nightmare, where they engage in an eternal hunt" (OHSG, 2015: 21). It is, however, not the first time you hear of this madness. When you first encountered Iosefka in her clinic, after you spoke to her, you panicked. You wanted to get out of the city, into the sickroom, to safety, taking out your weapon and banging the door, once, twice, three times. The response from the gentle doctor was immediate: "Stop. Please, stop! It's

beasts you hunt. Why are you behaving like one? This can't be the real you…. Please, stop…" Her voice softened, pleading with you, so soothing: "You mustn't let the hunt overcome you. Remember yourself. You are not a beast." You did not realize what she was referring to at the time, but now you see there is a madness in this city, a possibility to go from hunter to beast, whether lost to the scourge or to the bloodlust of the hunt. You have seen the other hunters, the relentlessness with which they attacked, and you remember your second encounter with Eileen, when she spoke with you about Father Gascoigne and the end he suffered at your hands: "He was falling apart…. I'm sure it had to be done. But try to keep your hands clean…. The Hunter should hunt Beasts. Leave the hunting of Hunters, to me." There it is, the night of the hunt, a night when hunters hunt beasts, and hunters hunt hunters, where hunters fight and kill and fill the streets with blood. It is an endeavor which is not without risk, as Eileen explains: "Few hunters can resist the intoxication of the hunt. […] The hunt makes hunters mad." Upon leaving you, she entrusts with you with an object, and a task she is now handing over. It is the Crow Hunter Badge, the "[b]adge of a hunter of hunters, who hunts those who have intoxicated by their bloodlust. […] To be entrusted with this cursed badge, one must be strong, resilient to the seduction of blood, and gracious when taking a comrade's life" (SG, 2015: 468). Beasthood is not the only risk a hunter runs, as on this night, their brains can get addled with the stench of blood, and they lose themselves not to the scourge, but to the intoxication of their bloodlust. You may wish to deny your own role in all of this madness, but each of your forays into the city remind you of it. The body of each enemy that suffers your blade remains where it falls, covering the ground and your attire with its blood until you appear soaked through, leaving red footsteps in your wake. You have had enough, you wish to leave, before infection or mania can take you. You have learned a lot in the time you have spent in Yharnam, more than you wanted to know, about yourself, and your role, and the risks to your body and your very sanity, and yet you know this is not the end, and there is more to be revealed.

Upon your return to the Hunter's Dream, another item has been left for you. It is the Eye of the Blood-Drunk Hunter, "[i]ts pupil […] collapsed and turned to mush, indicating the onset of the scourge of beasts. A hunter who goes drunk with blood is said to be taken by the Nightmare, destined to wander forever, engaged in an endless hunt. It is a fate that no Hunter can escape" (OHSG, 2015: 147). Your future is not just madness and death; there is a possibility of something much worse. Disturbed, you wander back into the city, into the Cathedral Ward, but suddenly, you find yourself lifted, taken. When you come to, you still seem to be in Yharnam, but it is not the city you have

come to recognize. The light is different, and everything around you appears warped and twisted. It is the Hunter's Nightmare, domain of beasts and hunters, an endless battle where peace cannot be found. Carefully, you make your way through this alien landscape, until you come across a man who still has his wits about him, hidden beneath the place you know as Oedon Chapel: "You're a hunter with your sanity, aren't you? […] This is the Hunter's Nightmare, where hunters end up when drunk with blood. You've seen them before. Aimless, wandering hunters, slavering like beasts. This is what the poor fools have to look forward to." Could he be referring to the human enemies you have encountered, the ones, hunters like you, who attack on sight? You have seen them here and in Yharnam, and they are the ones hunted by the likes of Eileen. Is this really the fate that awaits you? Then you remember the gossip you heard, the strange tales: "One day, the hunters disappeared, and Yharnamites began to whisper of the hunters' sin. Drunk with blood, chasing after beasts, they would pass on to the Nightmare, every last one of them" (OHSG, 2015: 153).

The transformation from man to beast, and from man to madman, shows itself as a possibility. The monster is no longer just impure, terrifying and disgusting; the monster looks like you, and is a reflection of your actions. As Baldick argues, monstrosity becomes a measure of morality: "The monster is one who has so far transgressed the bounds of nature as to become a moral advertisement" (1987: 12). Having sinned and partaken in vice, the individual himself has transgressed not only in law, but in appearance, turning himself monstrous by his actions. It is the same path available to hunters: sent out to deal with the results of the scourge, they will become monstrous whatever their path. Pain and disease will turn them to monsters, whereas the bloodlust will prey on their brain and condemn them to the Nightmare. The scourge of beasts has left Yharnam in need of heroes, of vigilantes, of someone to try to protect its inhabitants. The disease created a need for the night of the hunt, and yet this night is not without risk. These people who cast you in this role, the townsfolk, Iosefka, Gilbert, Gehrman, the Doll, Eileen, those who called you a hunter and called you to arms; what they did not tell you was what is at stake. You are hunting, and are hunted, beset by enemies, and you may come to physical harm. You may be cut, bitten, infected, and hideously transformed, but what is ultimately at issue is your sanity. Even if you survive, survive the injuries and the illness, will you ever wake up and live to be the same? The revelations have been many, and yet there is so much you do not know; you need to discover the secrets. The man in the Nightmare has warned you of this, telling you to "beware, secrets are secrets for a reason. And some do not wish to see them uncovered. Especially when the secrets are particu-

larly unseemly…" Yet with your life and sanity at stake, you cannot bear to let them lie, and so you enter Yharnam once more.

What has become clear over the course of this chapter is the role of the player and the journey of discovery they partake in when entering *Bloodborne*'s world. There is a narrative to be found, but it is often hidden and obscure, an important element in Miyazaki's designs. He explains: "Of course, I'm sure we may get some criticism that gamers aren't given enough explanations, and I'll gladly accept that if so. But I think the fun of imagining things for yourself is one of the core tenets I follow. I like trying to focus on the fun of exploring this really dark place, then attempting to shine a light upon it" (SG, 2015: 541). Allowing the embedded and emergent narratives to run together in this way, Miyazaki places the emphasis on the player, offering them a sense of accomplishment for each new detail they find. Furthermore, the new information uncovered often has implications for the players themselves, revealing their role within the world, for good or for ill. Perhaps more used to taking on the role of a hero, the players of *Bloodborne* find themselves cast as a monster, a potential danger to themselves and to others. Drawing on this central theme of much horror fiction, the implications for the player character soon become clear. As this chapter has shown, this process of exploration requires players to truly engage with the affordances they are given by the designers, and it is likely to have a distinct effect on them as a result. They are asked to be active and invest; only by mining cutscenes, dialogue, and item descriptions does *Bloodborne*'s story emerge for their scrutiny, yet players may find out more than they would like to know. In this regard, the lore of the hunters is quite direct: it is the role the player is pushed into at the start of the game, and it is the one they adopt throughout their journey. It is one which they share with many of the NPCs, whose words, choices and possessions act as a guide to those who wish to survive this hostile landscape. Yet it is only part of the story: where the tale of the hunters is still ongoing, there is much left to uncover about the history of Yharnam, the scourge, and the role of the good blood. The story is led by the Healing Church, the organization mentioned in passing by so many of the characters, and their knowledge of blood and blood ministration.

2

Healers

The splendor of the Grand Cathedral overwhelms you as you finally make your way inside. Only able to push its enormous doors open a fraction, your eyes follow the stone steps upwards, lined by odd-looking statues, unlike any you have encountered so far. Gingerly, you climb the stairs, where the sheer size of the building overshadows both you and the lone, frail figure in front of the altar. A woman of indeterminate age, head bowed in prayer, speaking softly, feverishly, desperately imploring some unseen force. You can only make out some of her words: "Let us pray, let us wish … to partake in communion. Let us partake in communion … and feast upon the old blood. Our thirst for blood satiates us, soothes our fears. Seek the old blood." As you approach her, she falls silent, before letting out a bloodcurdling scream. You can only stand and watch as she transforms into a hideous beast, still clutching the gold pendant that was the object of her prayers. Finally, she turns to you, and attacks.

In this second chapter, I will continue the journey through Yharnam and its institutions. As mentioned in the previous chapter, it is only the story of the hunters, or, to be more specific, of one hunter, the player character, which appears to take place in real time. As players traverse the hostile realms that make up *Bloodborne*'s world, they find that there is much to learn, even if they may wish that this knowledge had been kept hidden. In order to fully understand Yharnam and the horrors that took place and are still taking place, the city and its inhabitants trapped in an endless cycle of night and day, players have to delve deeply into its cursed history, and it is here that the ties between themes and genre emerge more strongly. As mentioned in the introduction, *Bloodborne* relies on a number of ideas and motifs from the Gothic and horror, one of which is its insistence on reliving history to find out what has happened before. Yharnam is an old city, a Gothic city, built on remnants of the past, and as Mighall argues in his work on the urban Gothic, "The 'Gothic' by definition is about history and geography" (1999:

xiv). It is a form which "dwells in the historical past, or identifies 'pastness' in the present, to reinforce a distance between the enlightened now and the repressive or misguided then" (Mighall, 1999: xviii). The blood that once ran through the streets of Yharnam still affects its reality today, even if this past is covered by layers of stone and earth. The waves created by historical events resonate within the present of the player as they realize the past through gameplay.

In his meditation on the application of time in games, Jesper Juul comments on the different structures of time as they appear in videogames. In the representation of the game world, Juul argues, players are framed in two ways: "[Y]ou are both 'yourself', and you have another role in the game world" (2004: 131). He continues: "This duality is reflected in the *game time*, which can be described as a basic duality of *play time* (the time the player takes to play) and *event time* (the time taken in the game world)" (2004: 131; author's emphasis). A separation exists between the real time of the game and the real time of the player, a gap which is bridged by a process Juul calls mapping: "Mapping means that the player's time and actions are projected into a game world. […] The moment of mapping is one that has a basic sense of happening *now*, when you play. Pressing a key influences the game world, which then logically (and intuitively) has to be happening in the same *now*" (Juul, 2004: 134; author's emphasis). This dichotomy impacts on the game experience, Juul argues:

> It is clear that the events represented cannot be *past* or *prior*, since we as players can influence them. […] In this way, the game constructs the story time as *synchronous* with narrative time and reading/viewing time: the story time is *now*. Now, not just in the sense that the viewer witnesses events now, but in the sense that the events are *happening* now, and that what comes next is not yet determined [Juul, 2001: n.pag.; author's emphasis].

Juul presents the viewpoint that, due to the role and influence of the player on the outcome, the narrative of a game is too fluid to be called a story at all. Within the Gothic mode, however, this role of time takes on a different meaning. Rather than seeing the duality outlined by Juul as a separation, it is a way of marrying the past and the present, often through haunting. The past still influences that which is taking place now, and can therefore never be truly *prior*, to use Juul's term, particularly within a Gothic context: "In seeing one time and its values cross into another, both periods are disturbed" (Botting, 2013: 3). The influence of the past is not simply past, but current; what has happened has returned to impact on the present, and indeed on the real time of the player. As Simon, the Seeker of Secrets, whispers to us in the Hunter's Nightmare: "Secrets are secrets for a reason. And some do not wish

to see them uncovered. Especially when the secrets are particularly unseemly…" And yet, these secrets are there, these histories are what Yharnam has been built on. It is the city's rich history, stained in blood, where there is much for an inquisitive hunter to uncover, and perhaps make their mark on Yharnam's future. In *Bloodborne*, the past is not simply told, but emerges once more, realized through player actions, as it affects the present and even the future of Yharnam and its inhabitants. The Gothic tropes of history and geography are materialized as players travel through the city and unlock its stories, long left buried. Similar to their own journey and confrontation with their potential for monstrosity, it is the uncovering of Yharnam's history which shows the players the monstrosity of so many others. There is no telling just how far these riddles might take us, but as Gilbert tells us, the Healing Church is the place to start.

It is upon awakening in Iosefka's Clinic that you receive your only clue as to your mission, a small scrap of paper that instructs you to "seek Paleblood to transcend the hunt." In the dream, or vision, you have just woken from, the old man spoke of the city of Yharnam and the importance of blood ministration; you can only surmise that there is a connection between this surgical procedure and the note that has been left for you. Setting out to explore the city, you come across others, and it is Gilbert who tells you something about this Paleblood: "…if it's blood you're interested in, you should try the Healing Church. The Church controls all knowledge on blood ministrations and all varieties of blood. [The Grand Cathedral is] the birthplace of the Healing Church's special blood, or so they say." When prompted for further details, he emphasizes the Church's knowledge of "unique types of blood," and utters words that fill you with both hope and dread: "Yharnamites don't share much with outsiders. Normally, they wouldn't let you near the place, but … the hunt is on tonight. This might be your chance…" The Healing Church possesses this knowledge of blood, and of healing, and its influence in Yharnam is clear, as the Cathedral Ward and the Grand Cathedral at its center tower over the rest of the town's areas. You follow Gilbert's advice and wander deeper into the maze of streets and alleys, where the hunter Alfred, crouched at a grave near a deserted chapel in Cathedral Ward, is able to reveal more to you. Wishing to share his knowledge, Alfred intimates that:

> The Healing Church is the fountainhead of blood healing. Well, I'm a simple hunter, quite unfamiliar with the ins and outs of the institution. I have heard that the holy medium of blood healing is venerated in the main cathedral. And that councilors of the old church reside in the high stratum of the Cathedral Ward. If you seek blood healing, and the church is willing, you should pay them a visit.

Alfred is also able to impart some older information, referring to the first days of the institution: "Once a group of young Byrgenwerth scholars dis-

covered a holy medium deep within the tomb. This led to the founding of the Healing Church, and the establishment of blood healing. In this sense, everything sacred in Yharnam can be traced back to Byrgenwerth," yet he continues that "today, the college lies deep within a tangled wood, abandoned and decrepit. And furthermore, the Healing Church has declared Byrgenwerth forbidden ground." The Church seems to concern itself not just with matters of religion, but also with scientific discovery and research. The scholars of Byrgenwerth were able to obtain some arcane secret, and this underpins the teachings and practices of the Church. As you explore more of Yharnam, you happen upon some of those who inhabit the Cathedral Ward. Like those living in Central Yharnam, they have shut their doors tight, but they seem less concerned about your presence. Where those you encountered before were distrustful and hostile, those in the Cathedral Ward are content to voice their love for the Church: "Ohh, we've the deepest gratitude. For the church, and all they do for us…. The deepest, widest gratitude, yes…" You even encounter a well-wisher, "Praise you! Praise the whole damn church! And best of luck hunting. Best luck of all…" Most, however, simply ignore you, engaged in some religious activity. Behind these closed doors, you hear prayers, sounds of chastisement and self-flagellation, as numerous desperate voices whisper the same words over and over: "Bless us with blood…. Bless us with blood…" The importance of the Healing Church is obvious; their involvement in both religious and healing practices is not.

Although little seems to be known of the Church's exact activities (at least, those who tell you about the Church's existence have little to add), some of the items collected on your journey shed a bit of light on the core tenets of the institution and its ideas of transcendence and transformation, specifically in relation to blood and communion.[1] Interestingly, many of these practices are kept sacred, hidden from view inside the Cathedral Ward. Instead, it is in Old Yharnam, the abandoned part of the city, that light can be shed upon some of the Church's more unsavory practices through the discovery of several artifacts. As you traverse the old part of town, you find a number of buildings that appear to have been used for religious purposes. Now haunted by all manner of beasts, and used for rituals which are less than holy, both the Ritual Hall and the Church of the Good Chalice hold items relevant to your search in the form of Ritual Blood and the Phtumeru Chalice, the description of which tells you to "Let the chalice reveal the tomb of the gods; let blood be the hunter's nourishment. …And let ye partake in communion" (SG, 2015: 325). The Phtumeru Chalice is obtained after slaying the Blood-Starved Beast, and this victory opens up additional paths to information, including the Communion rune. Allowing the bearer to carry more blood

vials, "[t]his rune represents the Healing Church and its ministers. Blood ministration is, of course, the pursuit of communion" (SG, 2015: 475). These phrases harken back to a piece of advice Gehrman imparted on you: "If the beasts loom large, and threaten to crush your spirits, seek a Holy Chalice. As every hunter before you has. A Holy Chalice will reveal the tomb of the gods … where hunters partake in communion." The tomb of the gods mentioned by Gehrman appears to bear a relation to Alfred's mention of the "holy medium discovered deep within the tomb" by Byrgenwerth scholars, leading you back to the Phtumeru Chalice you now have in your possession. The Chalice may open a pathway to another realm with which you are not yet familiar, but primarily, it will allow you to heed Gehrman's words and partake in communion, connecting yourself to the other hunters through the sharing and imbibing of the blood. You are left wondering, however, whose blood may be used for this ritual. As you walk, you recall the notes you received about that one item so vital to you, carried by so many of your enemies, a glimmer of health and hope in Yharnam's encroaching darkness, the Blood Vial: "Once a patient has had their blood ministered, a unique but common treatment in Yharnam, successive infusions recall the first, and are all the more invigorating for it. No surprise that most Yharnamites are heavy users of blood" (SG, 2015: 446). When considered in connection to the Pungent Blood Cocktail, a "[m]ature blood cocktail that releases a pungent odor when thrown that attracts blood-thirsty beasts. A precious tool in sadly short supply. In Yharnam, they produce more blood than alcohol, as the former is more intoxicating" (SG, 2015: 452), it leaves you wondering just what exactly the role of blood is in this city. What you have uncovered so far implies both an act of religion, through the use of the chalice and communion, as well as an act of healing, in the form of the blood ministration, as the blood vials you are using to heal yourself are injected rather than administered in a ritual ceremony. You also remember the treatment you received, the drip overseen by the old man upon your arrival in Yharnam; you remember awaking in the clinic, surrounded by medical equipment and empty beds, a dirty bandage around your arm following a procedure you never asked for.

You soon uncover further clues. A scribbled note tucked away inside a dark house somewhere in Yharnam serves only to unsettle you: "When the hunt began, the Healing Church abandoned us, blocking the great bridge to the Cathedral Ward, as they burned Old Yharnam to the ground on that moonlit night." Similarly, a chance encounter in Yahar'gul, the Unseen Village, does not help to dispel these feelings. In this dark and unsettling place, you find Sister Adella, a member of the Church, captured by the same Kidnappers who overpowered and took you to this place, now cowering in a basement,

trying to hide between the debris stored there. Kneeling, head bowed, she is quietly praying to herself: "Oh merciful gods, help me…. In the name of the Healing Church, cleanse us of this horrible dream…" Although a servant of the Church, she has found herself in a situation beyond her control and she is now reliant on you for aid. When you meet her again inside Oedon Chapel, she expresses her gratitude, as well as her faith in the institution: "The town is in disarray, but there are still people here. Together, we await the help of the Healing Church." These brief encounters show the importance of the Church within Yharnam, its role as figurehead and protector, although much is left unsaid about its doctrine and practices. Yet Adella, in her innocence, reveals some pertinent information: when you help her, she awards you Madman's Knowledge as a thank you gift for aiding her, the details of which are unsettling: "Skull of a madman touched by the wisdom of the Great Ones. Making contact with eldritch wisdom is a blessing, for even if it drives one mad, it allows one to serve a grander purpose, for posterity" (SG, 2015: 467). The nun's words, when she hands over the gift, only emphasize your discomfort: "You could take this, at least. It is sure to please an upstanding member of the church like you." What would the Healing Church want with knowledge which could drive one to madness, and how can such an organization have such high standing within the city? Does the Church concern itself with research to help the people of Yharnam, or is their aim altogether different, and what might be the consequences of their actions? There is nothing you can do but to accept the gift, but you resolve that, however influential and respected the Church may be, you wish to learn more before submitting yourself to whatever they have to offer.

It is through these channels that players first get introduced to the story of the Healing Church, an institution which can be considered to be at the center of life in Yharnam. Its presence can be felt on every street of the city, in the words of those who live here, and in the religious artifacts and statues that make up much of the decor. Despite this ubiquity, its practices remain hidden from view; perhaps Gilbert's note about the Church's secrecy when it comes to outsiders is not unfounded. The role of the Church, both within Yharnam and as part of the main plot of *Bloodborne*, is pivotal, yet obscured. Whereas the story of the hunters, lived and realized by the player, may be scattered over multiple sources, the events surrounding the Healing Church are primarily located in the past, its fall now inevitable.

In his portrayal of the Healing Church and its practices, Miyazaki seems to draw on the portrayals of science and medicine within the Gothic mode. The development of this type of fiction in the 18th and 19th centuries coincides with the myriad developments and discoveries in the fields of medical

and natural science, and soon became a source of inspiration of many of the Gothic's novels. As Wasson notes, "many Gothic classics are fantastical depictions of the ethical perils of medical ambition" (2015: 1), and he links this primarily to the representation of medical institutions:

> Medicine is about healing: its practitioners enter medicine to help others, to preserve and enhance life and to ease suffering. Yet the canon of Gothic literary classics is rich in texts which imagine medicine gone wrong, in which knowledge of human anatomy is bent to terrible ends warped by human ambition [2015: 4].

Botting similarly argues that many of these texts signal "the effects of human aspirations for natural and physical powers beyond the limits of humanity" (2013: 94), listing a number of ideas which found their way into the novels of the time: "The scientific replacement of nature and humanity, the various means of producing and reproducing the material world and the creation of entities that threaten human existence, is a recurrent horror" (2013: 94). In addition, he notes the tension between those procedures made possible by science and the human element in dealing with these new influences: "Fears about the existence of both natural and artificial mechanisms that not only exceed the boundaries of a humanised world but also emerge, transgressively and destructively, from uncontrollable desires and imaginings in the individual mind" (2013: 94). As Botting makes clear, the obsession of the Gothic with scientific discovery and progress hinges on newly introduced procedures and their unknown repercussions, as well as on the hands of those who have access to and control over said developments and their use. Expanding on these ideas, Wasson notes the importance of not just the dangers inherent within science, or the ambitions of those involved in the field, but also the effects of this progress on others, as "the mysteries and power of medicine and law have been rich material for fantasies of bodies and minds constrained. Gothic literature and film has long had an interest in the way medical practice controls, classifies and torments the body in the service of healing" (2015: 1). Science, when examined in the Gothic mode, possesses the ability both to unveil and to suppress.

Interestingly, these tensions have found their way into both fictional plots and descriptions found in scientific literature. As Wasson argues, "In multiple ways, the Gothic mode and representations of medical practice and experience have long been entangled" (2015: 2) in a practice Kennedy terms Gothic medicine, a style of writing where the literature of medical science employs Gothic rhetoric to describe what she calls "the curious" and incorporating the "interested" stance of the physician (Kennedy, 2004: 346) in describing the more bizarre cases physicians are confronted with. This position creates a blend of the curious and the clinical, of melodrama and science

(2004: 346), resulting in a situation where "medical knowledge is … imperiled by either a fraudulent or a sensationalistic record, for if the first lacks authenticity, the second lacks the authority implied by a pose of objective distance" (2004: 330). Kennedy terms this process "the ghost in the clinic" (2004: 345), the hovering specter of Gothic sensationalism preying on what should be objective scientific discourse, and concludes with the remark that "if Gothic medicine […] reveals the ghost in the clinic, it also demands that we recognize the clinic in the Gothic" (2004: 346). The appearance of the mad doctor and scientist within Gothic texts is tied closely together with the language that was employed in scientific texts at the time, creating a symbiotic bond between theme and text, fictionalizing the research and bringing legitimacy to the possibility of the plots employed by its writers.

Within *Bloodborne*, each of these connections between science and the Gothic is explored, specifically focusing on notions of transcendence and transformation. As was noted in the previous chapter, the game finds new ways to investigate the concept of monstrosity and the position of the player in relation to it. Rather than simply framing the player as a protagonist, tasked with vanquishing the deformed, evil beings set on their destruction, the line between human and monster is blurred. Furthermore, it is clearly signposted to the player that the line can be crossed; both the appearance of hunters gone mad in the main game and within the Hunter's Nightmare signal the possible fate of the player character. This obsession with the possibilities inherent in the body continues with the story of the Healing Church. Drawing on narratives of corrupt medical institutions and individual ambition, and the repercussions for those on the receiving end of these practices, players soon find out that the Church and its motivations, for all its importance to Yharnam society, are much darker than they might think, and *Bloodborne* includes hints to this fact from early in the game.

Once more, it is those you meet within Yharnam who serve as your initial guide. Your first meeting with Alfred takes place outside a chapel in the Cathedral Ward where you find him praying at an elaborate grave, he himself decked in impressive robes which you do not recognize. Although he is never explicit, it does not take much imagination to recognize Alfred as a religious man—his stance to the hunt so different to the one held by the others you have met, his affiliation with the Church clear early on. Upon your return from Old Yharnam, Gehrman is able to confirm this information as he draws your attention to the role of the Church:

> The Healing Church and the Blood Ministers who belong to it were once guardians of the hunters, in the times of the hunter … Ludwig. They worked … and forged

weapons, in their unique workshop. Today, most ministers don't recall the hunters. But they have much to offer you. And so, heed the message of your forebears. Ascend to Oedon Chapel.

This confirms the link between the hunters and the Church, in which the institution protected the hunters in their activities, even if that bond has now been severed. Yet in this moment, as you listen to the words of this old hunter, leading you back to the Cathedral Ward, you cannot help but recall your initial journey to this part of Yharnam. After being sent to the Great Bridge by Gilbert as a means to gain access to the Cathedral Ward and the Healing Church, you were attacked by some manner of beast. It appeared suddenly, leaping down from somewhere inside the Cathedral Ward, a giant thing, deformed, its body covered in coarse hair, warped limbs and long claws, horns adorning its head, a piercing howl escaping from its snout. After the defeat of this Cleric Beast, you discover the Sword Hunter Badge has been left behind. The text accompanying it confirms the doubts you have about the Church: "The silver sword is a symbol of a Church hunter. Ludwig was the first of many Healing Church hunters to come, many of whom were clerics. As it was, clerics transformed into the most hideous beasts" (SG, 2015: 469). Led by Ludwig, the Church employed a number of hunters of their own, to dispatch their own, a notion which is confirmed when you follow Gehrman's advice and make your way to the Healing Church workshop, where you find the Radiant Sword Hunter Badge: "The radiant sword indicates the heirs to the will of Ludwig. These hunters, also known as Holy Blades, are what remains of an ancient line of heroes that date back to the very early age of honour and chivalry" (SG, 2015: 469). Both badges give you access to additional items related to the Church and allow you to add a number of weapons your arsenal, each offering additional clues to the workings of the institution. Both the Repeating Pistol and the Kirkhammer are "typically used by Healing Church hunters" (SG, 2015: 416, 442), and the description of the latter further informs you how "trick hunter weapons forged in the Healing Church workshop, said to be hidden somewhere in the Grand Cathedral, were made to the tenets of a rival school of craftsmanship" (SG, 2015: 416). More interesting perhaps is the Hunter Chief Emblem,

> A cloth emblem that belonged to the captain of the Church hunters long ago. Opens the main gate that leads to the round plaza of the Great Cathedral. The main gate is shut tight on nights of the hunt, and could only be opened from the other side with this emblem. In other words, the captain's return, and this emblem, determined the end of the hunt [SG, 2015: 464].

The description hints at the sheer scale of the operation, and reminds you of the Yharnam hunter attire, of how "Ludwig, the first hunter of the Healing

Church, […] recruited Yharnamites to serve as hunters" (SG, 2015: 497). It also brings to mind that scribbled note you found in the dark house, and the Church's apparent involvement in the burning of Old Yharnam as a means to curtail the spread of Ashen Blood. Perhaps more worrying is the fact that the Radiant Sword Hunter Badge gives you access to the weapons of Ludwig himself, his sword and firearm, each a clue to just what might still be waiting for you within the city:

> *Ludwig's Holy Blade*: "It is said that the silver sword was employed by Ludwig, the first hunter of the church. When transformed, it combines with its sheath to form a greatsword. The Healing Church workshop began with Ludwig, and departed from old Gehrman's techniques to provide hunters with the means to hunt more terrifying beasts, and perhaps things worse still" [SG, 2015: 419].
>
> *Ludwig's Rifle*: "It is said that this rifle was employed by Ludwig, the first hunter of the Church. Its long, heavy barrel makes up in range for what it lacks in reload speed. Ludwig's Rifle exhibits several departures from the workshop's design, suggesting that the Church anticipated much larger inhuman beasts" [SG, 2015: 442].[2]

It becomes clear that the Healing Church is not just a victim of the scourge, like so many of the Yharnamites, training hunters in a desperate attempt to stay safe. Instead, these weapons seem to point to a much more direct involvement of the institution in the creation of the beasts, perhaps even the advent of the Ashen Blood, or at the very least, a knowledge of just *what* their hunters would have to combat. In light of this information, the enduring power of the Church, its influence and the comfort that it brings to Sister Adella and those within the Ward only serves to unsettle you. It is once you have made your way to the Grand Cathedral itself that these worries turn into certainties. Inside, you find Vicar Amelia, the current head of the Healing Church; she is a slight woman who, when you encounter her, is kneeling in front of the great altar at the back of the Cathedral, lost in prayer. As you approach, however, she seems to rise, then grow, transform, deform, as her clothes rip and a howl of agony escapes her small body. Clerics, indeed, transform into the most hideous of beasts, and it has been up to so many other hunters, and now up to you, to deal with the aftermath. As the Vicar, too, falls to your blade, you are left the locket she was clutching so tightly, this small Gold Pendant locked in a giant hairy claw. The piece of jewelry, "passed down among vicars who head the Healing Church, is a reminder of the cautionary adage, words that will open the gates of Byrgenwerth" (SG, 2015: 462),[3] and inside, you find the password to access the path to the old college. The Grand Cathedral now stands empty, your footsteps echoing eerily as you wander around its great hall. You have no more business here, yet as you approach the altar, your eye is drawn to its splendor of glittering gold, punctuated by

the skull of a beast which sits prominently at the center of the Church's religious artifacts. There was a note near the Cathedral's door, mentioning the "heir of the ritual of blood, purveyor of ministration" and instructing you to "place your hand on the altar's sacred covering, and inscribe Master Laurence's adage upon your flesh." The words have readied you for this moment and you reach for the skull. The moment your fingers connect with the old bone, a vision is triggered. A conversation between two men in a location unknown to you; one is addressed as Master Willem, the other as Laurence. Some words pass between them, an adage, a caution: "We are born of the blood, made men by the blood, undone by the blood. Our eyes are yet to open…. Fear the old blood," before the younger man departs, and the older issues a final plea: "By the gods, fear it, Laurence." You have some idea of who these men are, of Master Willem as the head of forbidden Byrgenwerth, and Laurence's position as the first Vicar of the Healing Church, and its founder. Based on the exchange you have witnessed, it would seem that your suspicions are right, and that the Church's involvement in the scourge of beasts is as direct as you feared. The blood, this substance that sustains you, so ubiquitous here, is tainted, and the Church is at the center of this process. You know there is much left to learn, and so you press on.

With this new knowledge firmly planted in your head, you find yourself reexamining the certainties you thought you had, specifically where the blood is concerned. What, exactly, were Willem and Laurence discussing, and what is the relationship of the Healing Church to this process? You remember the early information you found, about treatment, about blood ministration, and about communion, and you recall your meeting with Iosefka. When you saw her, she entrusted you with an item, a vial of her blood: "Blood vial acquired from Iosefka's clinic. This refined blood, highly invigorating, restores a larger amount of HP. The product of a slow and careful refinement process, this rare blood vial appears to be a clinic original" (SG, 2015: 446).[4] There is little here that points to religion, a substance instead obtained through research and experimentation, in aid of the Church and its worshippers. Interestingly, Iosefka's is not the only special blood vial that you obtain. After rescuing Sister Adella, she too offers you a vial of her blood: "The Healing Church nuns are chosen for their merit as vessels of blood, and groomed as Blood Saints. The mere chance of being treated with their blood lends legitimacy to the Healing Church and communion" (SG, 2015: 447). Adella appears to be a Blood Saint, one of many, her blood one of multiple sources used by the Church; yet the number of followers who could train to be a Saint, and are given this opportunity to show their worth by sacrificing their essence to those in need, is unclear. Arianna, a woman of pleasure who can be found

in one of the alleyways in the Cathedral Ward, is similarly able to offer you
her blood, but hers is different to what Adella is supplying: "A member of the
old Healing Church would know that her blood is similar indeed, to precisely
what was once forbidden" (SG, 2015: 446). Different kinds of blood exist,
some good, some bad, their quality measured by virtue of purity. Alongside
the substances provided by these women, you remember the Blood Cocktail,
as well as the Beast Blood Pellets: "Large medicinal pellets, supposedly formed
of coagulated beast blood. Banned by the Healing Church due to their unclear
origin. Grants a spurt of beasthood" (SG, 2015: 450). These types of blood
are forbidden, unclean, their effects uncertain, perhaps dangerous for the
user. Yet the origins of all types of blood are murky, at best: Adella has become
a Blood Saint, but what is the procedure, and what does the ritual entail?
Specifically, what does it take out of the person who is providing the blood,
as each woman is unable to offer multiple treatments at the same time? Once
more, you wonder what exactly you have been injecting into your veins, and
what has been injected into you by others, since your arrival in Yharnam.

     Although many activities of the Healing Church remain shrouded in
mystery, the notion of being trained as a Blood Saint offers you a new lead
with regards to the medicinal practices and research. The Church, in
Gehrman's words, initially held the role of guardian to the hunters, providing
them with weapons and other necessities. Soon, however, they started to
recruit for themselves, their captains leading the night of the hunt and the
return to the Cathedral Ward. At first, it was Ludwig, the First Hunter of the
Healing Church, with others following in his footsteps, in an attempt to com-
bat the scourge of the beasts. Yet from what you have gathered, the institution
is not innocent in this turn of events: the conversation between Willem and
Laurence points to cautions which were not followed, and the thirst for blood
which led, at the very least, to the discovery of clean and unclean blood, and
at worst, the creation or distillation of such substances. As you examine your
belongings, you are able to find further evidence in the description of the
Black Church Attire:

> The Church engages in the hunt in a medical capacity. When a cancer is discovered,
> one must pinpoint its location, reach in, and wrench it from the host's bosom. Most
> Healing Church hunters are elementary doctors who understand the importance of
> early prevention of the scourge, achieved by disposing of victims, and even potential
> victims, before signs of sickness manifest themselves. Their black attire is synonymous
> with fear, and that peculiar Yharnam madness [SG, 2015: 488].

It emphasizes all you have learned so far, and decisively the Church hunters
to the practice of medicine, and the role of physician. In this context, the act
of hunting is one of cleansing, of the detection and containment of the scourge

by killing those who are infected, or even those who are merely at risk. The Healing Church has proven itself to be the corrupt institution, fed by the ambition of a single man who failed to follow the warnings of his elders and peers, and the repercussions of whose actions can be seen and felt throughout Yharnam, the old city burned to cinders, the other wards deceased and deserted.

The presence of the Healing Church is established primarily inside Yharnam and centered on the Cathedral Ward and Upper Cathedral Ward. As a result, a lot of the evidence pertaining to its origins are found within these early parts of the game, yet as players explore the Forbidden Woods, they are able to find the White Church Attire:

> Attire of special Church doctors. These doctors are superiors to the black preventative hunters, and specialists in experimentally backed blood ministration and the scourge of the beast. They believe that medicine is not a means of treatment but rather a method for research, and that some knowledge can only be obtained by exposing oneself to sickness [SG, 2015: 496].

Several elements of this description are of interest, especially in relation to the Black Hunter Attire. As the item explains, the white garb relates to a higher rank of Church doctors, engaged in medical research of an apparently questionable source. The sentence regarding the belief that medicine may not merely be used as a treatment, but rather as "a method for research" with "knowledge [only being] obtained by exposing oneself to sickness" once more raises questions regarding the nature of the Church as an institution and its effects on the citizens of Yharnam. Both sets seem to raise questions as to whether the interference of the Church physicians is for reasons of medicine, or merely a ruse to detect and remove certain harmful elements inside Yharnam. This impression is heightened when players locate the Harrowed Attire inside the Fishing Hamlet, the third and final area of the Old Hunters DLC:

> Certain Church hunters obfuscate their identities and slip into the nooks and crannies of the city. This is the garb that allows these harrowed individuals to go unnoticed. These hunters are keen to early signs of the scourge, serving as a first line of defence against its outbreak. Or perhaps, when the time is ripe, they find signs of the scourge where there are none. It just goes to show, the corner beggar is not always who he seems [OHSG, 2015: 152].

These references to research, exposure and (premature) prevention, recall the note found in that dark house in Yharnam, about the actions of the Healing Church when the hunt first began, when the institution "abandoned us, blocking the great bridge to the Cathedral Ward, as they burned Old Yharnam to the ground on that moonlit night." One is left to wonder whether this was indeed a way of protecting the city, or whether it is more closely related to an act of protection of the Church itself.

Within Yharnam, information can also be found on the Choir and the School of Mensis, factions related to the Healing Church, and these clues take the player closer to the eldritch truth and the secrets hidden by the Church, the focus of the next chapter. However, little evidence can be found of this questionable research on the streets of Yharnam, except for one location: Iosefka's Clinic. Worried about the hunt, the beasts and the infection, the doctor has locked herself and her patients away to await sunrise. Although the door remains sealed, players are able to glimpse her through a crack in one of the panels, revealing her to be wearing the White Church Attire described above, marking her as a member of the Healing Church. Players never meet Iosefka: later in the game, when they gain access to the Clinic through a back entrance connected to the Forbidden Woods, they will not find her inside. Instead, a Small Celestial Emissary, from a race of "small alien creatures with squid-like heads and mottled blue skin" (2015: 199), is found in her place. This Emissary is not hostile and will not attack unless the player strikes first; upon death, the creature will drop Iosefka's Blood Vial, identifying it as a transformed version of the kind doctor. Furthermore, players will encounter a number of other NPCs throughout the game (the Old Woman, the Bigoted Man, Sister Adella and Arianna), asking for a safe haven to spend the night. If players choose to send them to the Clinic, players will discover they have met the same fate as Iosefka herself, altered beyond recognition.

These events do not take place randomly, however: at some point in this endless night, Iosefka is replaced by another NPC, known as Impostor Iosefka. Still largely invisible to the player, she appears similar to her real counterpart; it is only her agenda which is different. Where the original Iosefka is clearly invested in the wellbeing and containment of her patients, Impostor Iosefka actively asks the player to send any survivors to her, stating that she "will look after them. Perhaps, even cure them" and that "This sickness, these beasts … they are not to be feared." Once NPCs start to arrive at the Clinic, she continues to refer to their treatment, but it appears that the mask starts to slip as she notes how "we must find a way to surpass our own stupidity," and how the player is "really making a difference," followed by an eerie giggle. When all NPCs have reached her, Impostor Iosefka offers some additional details about her treatment: "I've received another patient. This time, I'll be trying old blood." It is upon discovering the back entrance to the Clinic that the extent of her actions is revealed, and that each of the Yharnamites has been turned into an Emissary by her hand. No acts of protection or healing have taken place here, but rather of experimentation, perhaps even suffering. The response of Impostor Iosefka to your findings, however, is rather matter

of fact: "Well, I won't make any excuses. Would you mind leaving us alone? Things need not change…. You'll do the rescuing, and I'll do the saving." Through these comments and her actions, Impostor Iosefka is the first direct evidence of the more questionable practices of the Healing Church, of their research and human experiments. Dressed in the garb of a "special Church doctor," Impostor Iosefka shows what members of the institution may be engaged in beyond the sacred hunting of beasts, the healing of the populace, and religious acts of communion. A clear counterpoint to the care and altruism displayed by the real Iosefka, the Impostor offers a glimpse at the true face of the Church, but it is in the Old Hunters DLC that its histories and the fate of those responsible are brought to light.

Making your way through the Hunter's Nightmare, there are elements here that you recognize: a warped version of Yharnam and the Cathedral Ward, you find that certain buildings have been preserved, including the Grand Cathedral. A great hall of the scope of its Yharnam counterpart with an altar at the far end, the image presented here is rather different: where the Grand Cathedral within the city is a collection of statues, candles, and the skull of a beast, the one within the Nightmare offers a pieta-like image of a giant, fiery Cleric Beast, cradled on a wooden throne. From its claws, you retrieve the Eye Pendant, the description of which refers to "two cathedrals in the Hunter's Dream" (OHSG, 2015: 146). In one of these, at the source of the River of Blood, you will find Ludwig the Accursed, the Holy Blade, the First Hunter of the Healing Church, now huge, deformed, so far removed from his human form, and saddened by the fate that has befallen him and his hunters. Climbing up from his underground cell, you find the Recovery Room, a grand space lined with beds and ministration equipment, clearly reserved for the most highly regarded patients of the Church. It is in a hidden alcove underneath this space that Laurence's Skull can be located, part of the human remains of "Laurence, first vicar of the Healing Church. In reality he became the first cleric beast, and his human skull only exists within the Nightmare. The skull is a symbol of Laurence's past, and what he failed to protect" (OHSG, 2015: 146).[5] Once obtained, it can be returned to the Nightmare Grand Cathedral, initiating a fight with Laurence, the First Vicar, the blazing beast you saw during your previous visit. Within this Hunter's Nightmare, evidence abounds of the fate reserved for these figureheads of the Healing Church, its first vicar and first hunter, both now hideously transformed into the beasts they tried to fight. The warning of Master Willem was not heeded, and it is through the actions and ambitions of these men that Yharnam has encountered its enduring nightmare and never-ending night.

The real revelation, however, is found above the Recovery Room, in the

second cathedral mentioned by the Eye Pendant description, which makes reference to "the private research hall of the Healing Church. Only chosen members of the Healing Church, or their lamentable patients, can enter the research hall, using this eye" (OHSG, 2015: 146). Here you see Simon again, the Seeker of Secrets, who speaks of the "particularly unseemly [secrets]" hidden within. His notes are brief, but pertinent: "Not a pretty sight, is it? The true face of the blood-worshipping, beast-purging Healing Church." Within the Research Hall, the results of the Church's actions are finally laid bare. Its rooms and walkways are teeming with beds and ministration equipment, hinting at the volume of experimentation that took place here. The patients, too, are still present, strapped to tables and pinned down with needles and other medical devices. Others are aimlessly wandering the Hall in gowns which resemble straightjackets, their heads grown beyond proportion and into an enlarged, bulbous mass. Their demeanor differs from one to the next: some will speak to you, or simply go about their business, seemingly impervious to the changes their body has undergone; others will attack you on sight, the failing of their arms accompanied by hideous screams. Others still you find hidden in the dark, curled up in their sickbeds, begging you to kill them, pleading for their release from this fate. Between the effects of the bad blood that has made its way into Yharnam, the cause of the Ashen Blood and the rise in beast transformations, it seems that inside these chambers, the transformation of the body was encouraged in an effort to obtain new knowledge and new methods to facilitate the transcendence that the Church and its followers so crave.

Particularly pertinent is your meeting with Adeline, one of the few remaining patients. Strapped into a chair, a syringe embedded in her right arm, she seems to have retained her faculties in a way other patients have not. When engaging her in conversation, she informs you that she "was once a Blood Saint, too," warning you to "fear the thirst for blood," yet offering you a vial of hers: "Adeline was originally one of the Blood Saints who received treatment by the Church to cultivate worthy blood. Adeline's was one of the few cases that turned out favourably" (OHSG, 2015: 140). Although her words hint that the treatment has altered her body in more ways than one, the revelation attached to her blood is one you have feared for some time. It is clear that the process of becoming a Blood Saint is not without dangers, and that many who undergo the ritual suffer some kind of damage or deformity. One can only assume that the research of the Healing Church intensified in light of the tainted blood which caused the scourge of beasts to materialize, leaving behind this hall of patients; no longer human, lost, angry, suffering. The quest for healing, for transcendence, by a corrupt institution, by ambitious men

ignoring the warnings of others, has resulted in hideous transformations, of themselves, and of so many others. There is nothing left for you to do here, except to wonder if it has all been worthwhile.

This tension between transformation and transcendence is played out in the story of the Healing Church and, as I will discuss in the next chapter, within the third act of the game, which focuses on the Choir and the School of Mensis. In doing so, the themes of *Bloodborne* expand beyond the inclusion of the readings of the Church in relation to Gothic medicine, incorporating a specific interpretation regarding the place of the body within horror and the Gothic mode. Drawing on classic themes of mad doctors and scientists, of ambition and insanity, what is discovered within the Hunter's Nightmare and the Research Hall both confirms and subverts the notions of monstrosity discussed in the previous chapter. The Research Hall, specifically, is a display of the Gothic body, examined in depth by Kelly Hurley and Xavier Aldana Reyes in their respective works. In *The Gothic Body* (1996), Hurley uses the term "abhuman," or "the ruination of the human subject" (3) to discuss such transformations. In Hurley's words, the Gothic often "offers the spectacle of a body metamorphic and undifferentiated," a process in which "one may witness the relentless destruction of the human" (1996: 3). Although connected to interpretations of the monstrous, the abhuman is more concerned with a distinction between self and Other. As Hurley explains, the concept focuses on perceptions of the human, where "[t]he abhuman subject is a not-quite-human subject, characterized by its morphic variability, continually in danger of becoming not-itself, becoming other" (1996: 3–4), a process which is enacted through "the defamiliarization and violent reconstitution of the human subject" (Hurley, 1996: 4). In this process of deconstruction, "the boundary between science and supernaturalism [is] permeable, and the 'normal' human subject [is] liable to contamination, affective, moral, and physical, by the gothicized subject" (Hurley, 1996: 13). Rather than drawing on the distinction between human and monster, the human itself is deconstructed and becomes ultimately meaningless as a term of discussion. Similar to Hurley, Aldana Reyes in *Body Gothic* (2014) draws attention to the centrality of the body within the Gothic mode, arguing that "the gothic is […] inherently somatic and corporeal. It relies on the readers'/viewers' awareness of their own bodies, particularly of their vulnerability and shared experience of projected pain through vicarious feelings" (2014: 2). He insists that this focus on the physical is not merely related to violence and the infliction of pain, but that "extension, transformation or deformation" can have a similar role, resulting in "images of bodies that have been modified and no longer appear strictly human" (2014: 4). Like monstrous bodies, "Gothic bodies produce

fear through their interstitiality: they are scary because they either refuse absolute human taxonomies or destabilise received notions of what constitutes a 'normal' or socially intelligible body" (Aldana Reyes, 2014: 5), displaying a body which is both self and Other.

Although the arguments of both Hurley and Aldana Reyes draw on readings of the monstrous Other, they equally expand the idea of what a body can be. Moving away from the negative connotations encountered in most discussions of the monstrous, both of their works touch on the hope inherent in the promises of transformation. Indeed, Hurley notes that the abhuman allows for a process wherein "the human body collapses and is reshapen across an astonishing range of morphic possibilities" (1996: 4), where "[t]he prefix 'ab-' signals a movement away from a site or condition, and thus a loss. But a movement away from is also a movement towards—towards a site or condition as yet unspecified—and thus entails both a threat and a promise" (1996: 4). Equally, Aldana Reyes notes that the body and "its destruction and mutilation may provide for a temporary and imaginary escape or release from the constraints of embodiment via fantastic reshapings, transformations or hybridisations" (2014: 16), where the somatic horror becomes "a celebration of corporeal instability, mutability or capacity for transformation" (Aldana Reyes, 2014: 56). He explains:

> The corporeal nightmares of body horror seek to generate a physical reaction through extreme representations of the body, yet they remain hopeful. They are an exploration, not of the nihilistic conception of the body as the limit of existence, but of the innovative possibilities to be found in its explosion [2014: 56].

Rather than the threats of contamination, infection and destruction, tied to the scourge of beasts that is so central to *Bloodborne*'s story, the efforts of the Healing Church move beyond these limitations. I have used the word "transcendence" throughout this chapter to delineate between the transformation from man to beast, from human to monstrous, into a new type of body with additional capabilities. The tenets of the Healing Church center on blood and communion, on the sharing of this vital fluid between individuals so as to heal, gain strength and foster community. Within these principles is housed the attempt to provide medicine and solace to the people of Yharnam, to use special blood to cure their ills. In the Research Hall and other locations around the city, experiments and training have taken place to produce Blood Saints or to transform into higher beings such as the Emissaries, yet taint and dilution ultimately led to the disease that became known as Ashen Blood. With continued use, it would infect the subject, drawing out the nature of the beast, leaving the Church to search for a cure, through medicine and through the establishing of the night of the hunt. Their quest for a special

body, a transcendent body, and the promise of greatness held within, is an effort of hope and of knowledge. It is the knowledge that finds its origins in Byrgenwerth, the old seat of learning, hidden deep within the Forbidden Woods. It is here that the underground labyrinths were discovered, and the secrets and artifacts found deep within. It is these tombs that are the source for the actions of the Choir and the School of Mensis, where their quest for knowledge and enlightenment has opened a door to the potential of greatness, and of dangers untold.

This chapter has described the importance and influence of the Healing Church on Yharnam's history. Rather than the lived story of the hunters, of those last few who remain, this thread allows players to delve more deeply into the city's history, uncovering the events that have led to Yharnam's decline, perhaps even its demise. The secrets hidden by the Church, their role in what took place within the walls of both Old and Central Yharnam, and the consequences of their research and experiments, have left their mark on the city and its inhabitants. In addition, a greater role can be observed for an intertextual reading as Miyazaki's depiction of the Healing Church draws on certain classic elements of the Gothic mode: of knowledge and pride, a quest for what is forbidden, of dangerous experiments and catastrophic failures. They are plots familiar to many from numerous classic texts, glimpses of the potential and hideous failures of scientific advancement. It is clear from what the player can uncover that many of the Church's experiments have failed, leaving a trail of bodies in its wake, but, interestingly, this is not the full story. The Gothic medicine as depicted by Miyazaki includes the ambition and fall, and the horrors of transformation as the victim of so many mad doctors. At the same time, *Bloodborne* moves away from the classic image of the monsters, instead drawing on the notion of the potential of the Othered, Gothic body and the promise inherent in it to investigate themes of enlightenment and transcendence, as described by Hurley and Aldana Reyes. It is at this point that the more supernatural aspects of *Bloodborne*'s lore come into play, and where the game's indebtedness to the weird fiction of H.P. Lovecraft is revealed. The next chapter, then, is set to investigate the activities of those organizations connected to the Healing Church, their purpose and goals more secretive than even those of the Church: the Choir and the School of Mensis.

3

Kin

High above the Grand Cathedral, you have found another walk-way. Carefully, you pick your way across the tiled floor, occa-sionally distracted by more of the deformed beings you have seen before. Small worm-like creatures with what appear to be unformed wings; blue, human-like beings the size of a child. They block your way to another lift, which moves you from human architecture to an altogether different space: the chaos of a dank cave rather than a manmade structure. It is here, at the Altar of Despair, that you encounter Ebrietas, Daughter of the Cosmos. She is the left behind Great One of which you have heard so much, captured and kept here. You look up in awe as you approach her, a grey mass of wings and tendrils and ten-tacles and eyes and mouths, unlike anything you have ever seen. It is only when the first blow of your weapon lands that you realize you were the one who initiated this fight. She did not attack, did not even seem to notice you. Perhaps, you tell your-self, you might be doing her a service, somehow putting an end to her suffering?

Throughout the game, I have followed the player-as-detective in their efforts to uncover the narrative hidden within Yharnam, amongst its items and inhabitants. When entering the city, players are given the freedom to move around and explore, and they are required to do so in order to fully experience the richness of what *Bloodborne* has to offer. Although these activ-ities rely on player agency, this level of engagement remains a double-edged sword within the game. As was noted in the previous chapter, the story of the Healing Church, of Byrgenwerth, the Choir and the School of Mensis, is a narrative that has already taken place. These are events which have been committed to history, yet remain unresolved and still swirl somewhere within the endless night. As players set out to uncover these secrets and those who had their part in Yharnam's tragedy, they slowly seem to lose control; as *Bloodborne* moves towards its conclusion, the game appears to move away

from its action-adventure elements. Although gameplay does not change, the sense of agency players may have had disappears when confronted with dominant otherworldly forces which do nothing but highlight the insignificance of Yharnam's inhabitants, their actions, and the player's role in it all. Furthermore, while the final section of the game retains its Gothic roots, as it were, it is here that the game moves away from ideas of research and science and into the realms of the weird, showing its indebtedness to the work of H.P. Lovecraft (1890–1937). In an interview included in the strategy guide, Miyazaki comments on the fact that *Bloodborne* includes "aspects of both Gothic and Cthulhu-style horror," yet notes that it is the former that is "depicted from the start and provides a guide for the game's visual feel" (SG, 2015: 538). He explains: "That's because Gothic horror is based more in the world of reality. Of course, that doesn't mean it's real—it's a world of grotesque, scary horror. And here, you have a world like that which is gradually being eroded away by Cthulhu-style horror" (SG, 2015: 538). Although questions of what might be "real" underpin many of the themes of the game and can be felt throughout an entire playthrough, it is within the third act that these aspects gain center stage. As players move closer to the revelation, they move further away from action; in order to understand the present, and influence the future, they find themselves connecting with the past, or rather, with locations and people who seem to be stuck in time, or even outside of time. There is much yet to learn, and the night grows darker.

You have become aware of the rumors of what might be out there long before you reach Byrgenwerth. The first hint is a note, found in the basement of Oedon Chapel: "The Byrgenwerth spider hides all manner of rituals and keeps our lost master from us. A terrible shame. It makes my head shudder uncontrollably." Within Yahar'gul, you find notes of a similar nature, their content hinting at the rituals mentioned in the earlier missive. In the prison basement, where you awaken after the ordeal of being kidnapped, the scrawl informs you that "Madmen toil surreptitiously in rituals to beckon the moon. Uncover their secrets," and closer to the lamp is another: "Nightmarish rituals crave a newborn. Find one, and silence its harrowing cry." Finally, just outside the chapel in this Unseen Village, another one, only brief: "Behold! A Paleblood sky!" The importance of the blood and of the moon have become more apparent the longer you have been in this strange place, but you cannot help but wonder how one might be able to, and why one might wish to "beckon" the moon. And what is the role of a newborn infant? What further horrors might be waiting on your path? Where did it begin, and where will it end?

As with the other clues you have gathered, Alfred once more proves a valuable source of information. Enthusiastic and eager to talk, he appears to

you now as a reliable ally, one with an intimate knowledge of what is hidden to you. He seems to know little about the Byrgenwerth spider of which the note speaks, but does impart something of interest:

> The tomb of the gods, carved out below Yharnam, should be familiar to every hunter. Well, once a group of young Byrgenwerth scholars discovered a holy medium deep within the tomb. This led to the founding of the Healing Church, and the establishment of blood healing. In this sense, everything sacred in Yharnam can be traced back to Byrgenwerth.

The labyrinths, and what may have been hidden within, appear to be the key, and is the holy medium an item which you have found already, perhaps the Phtumeru Chalice uncovered in Old Yharnam? It would seem so, as you recall Gehrman's words on the matter: "A Holy Chalice will reveal the tomb of the gods, where hunters partake in communion." The act of communion, then, and the use of a Chalice, allows one access to these underground labyrinths, bringing one closer to the gods. Yet although you have been able to piece together some facts about the Healing Church, their practices and rituals, much remains unclear, specifically the nature of the "gods" of which each of them speaks. The altar within the Grand Cathedral mimics the depictions of crouching, shrouded women, praying to an unseen entity. Yet it is the line of statues on either side of the Cathedral steps that has drawn your attention: they seem somewhat human in nature, in possession of four limbs, of arms and legs, but with grotesque heads, bulbous and unnatural, unlike anything you have seen before. Are they depictions of these gods found within the tombs? It is through the discovery of the Radiant Hunter Badge in the Upper Cathedral Ward and the attainment of the Tomb Prospector Attire that you are able to learn more:

> Attire of tomb prospectors who explore the old labyrinth on behalf of the Healing Church. The Healing Church traces its roots to Byrgenwerth, and is therefore aware of the ruins' true importance. They contain much more than mere hunter trinkets, indeed, they hide the very secrets of the old Great Ones, sought after by those with the insight to imagine greatness [SG, 2015: 496].

Both Byrgenwerth and the Church took it upon themselves to explore these tombs, hidden below Yharnam, discovering further mysteries within their depths. You have uncovered at least one of the trinkets mentioned, that Chalice, as well as ritual materials, and if you wanted, you yourself could gain access to the labyrinths and whatever might be found within. You have spent enough time in Yharnam, however, to know that caution is advisable, and to know that you may well uncover more than you bargained for.

It is with your visit to Byrgenwerth that the revelations truly begin. Here, too, you find statues of an alien nature, depicting beings different to those in

the Grand Cathedral. Here, you search for the spider, the one who hides the rituals, and most likely, the truth. Here, as in numerous other locations you are yet to visit, it starts with a key, granting you access to the Lunarium, "to the lookout, and the rocking chair that [Master Willem] kept there for meditation. In the end, it is said, he left his secret with the lake" (SG, 2015: 462). It is on this balcony that you find Willem, old and frail, hidden within his bulging robes, and unable to speak. You prompt him, so eager to know of his work, of his past, the history of the institution, yet he only utters a sigh, a moan, pointing his staff towards the lake. With nowhere left for you to go, you follow his guidance, and plunge into the dark waters, only to find yourself once more on what appears to be solid ground. Inside this Moonside Lake, which seems unconnected to any location you have visited so far, an expanse of white and water stretches unhindered as far as the eye can see. You turn, searching a landmark to try and stave off the feeling of disorientation and the fear that accompanies it. A shape catches your eye: insect-like in nature, its head white and covered in eyes; its body a gray sack supported by numerous tiny legs and covered in what appear to be luminous white flowers. You slowly approach her, unsure whether she is friend or foe, but no response is forthcoming; whatever it is you have found, she does not seem aware of your presence and is unable to communicate with you. This must be the Byrgenwerth spider of which the note in Oedon Chapel spoke, described as the barrier against the hidden rituals and the lost master. You stand for a moment, unsure of how to proceed. There is more to be discovered, this much you know, and it would appear that this creature is what stands between you and these revelations. And yet she does not attack or protect these secrets in the way that others have done; is the knowledge that she hides of a kind that is best left untouched? With a deep breath, you raise your weapon and strike. Whatever might be locked behind this boundary, maybe it is something that you can still change, perhaps even stop.

The fight is lengthy, and brutal. Each time you try to hit her, she turns and disappears, able to teleport away, thrashing with each of your attacks. She was not hostile to you earlier, and now she seems evasive rather than aggressive, a fact which does not help to settle your worries about what might happen if she should be defeated. When she finally falls, it is Kin Coldblood which she leaves behind, an item containing Blood Echoes, that which sustains you within this world. You have encountered items like it before, but this description feels more like a warning: "Coldblood of inhuman kin of the cosmos, brethren of the Great Ones. Dare not to delve into the world beyond humanity, the eldritch Truth touched upon long ago at Byrgenwerth" (SG, 2015: 457). Once more, a mention of an eldritch Truth, of the forbidden

knowledge sought by each of Yharnam's institutions. Not too far off, you see a woman dressed in white, crying, the air reverberating with the sounds of her pain. Her calls of grief are answered by the plaintive cry of an infant, and as you listen to them both, a Blood Moon rises, and the words of a note found inside Byrgenwerth flash into your mind: "When the red moon hangs low, the line between man and beast is blurred. And when the Great Ones descend, a womb will be blessed with child." You wonder what you have done as the red moon grows and fills your field of vision, threatening to crush you. You welcome the darkness as you finally lose consciousness.

When you awaken, you find yourself in the shrouded church that lies near the Cathedral Ward and the Grand Cathedral itself. A brief note appears to you: "Ritual secret broken. Seek the nightmare newborn." Before you looms a giant creature, spindly and spider-like, its bulbous head and shape reminiscent of the statues inside the Cathedral, and beneath its form, an open door beckons you forward. Hesitantly, steeled for an attack, you step, then run forward. Somewhere far off, you hear a baby crying, and behind you, a whooshing sound, the movement of long, otherworldly limbs that have tried to grab you, but have missed. Through the door and down a flight of stairs, you find yourself once more in Yahar'gul, the Unseen Village, a location you have visited before, but one that seems transformed as a result of the Blood Moon. Here, you find statues like the ones inside the Cathedral, and of other weird-looking creatures, smaller and slug-like, but with what appear to be tentacles curving around their bowed heads. Clinging to the buildings are more of the creatures you saw inside the church, and you find yourself running and dodging to evade their grasp. Dotted around small plazas and lookouts you see solitary chairs, a mummified body placed in each, bound and shackled to its seat, with a tall, metal cage propped on their head. You have no understanding of what it might mean, and instead feel frantic as you try to evade whatever is out here. A prison cell inside one of the village's dark buildings holds another note: "The Mensis ritual must be stopped, lest we all become beasts." Inside a prison cell, you find another body, sat in a chair, yet lacking the cage; its clothing is different, in part resembling the religious garb worn by Alfred. Clutched in its withered hand is a key linked to the Upper Cathedral Ward, and as you are only too eager to leave this nightmarish vision behind, you decide to retrace your steps and make your way back to the relative safety of Yharnam.

For the second time, you find yourself ascending from Oedon Chapel, making your way to the highest reaches of the Cathedral Ward. With this key in hand, you know you will be able to unlock the tiny door you found on your first visit, sat at the back of a small room on the top floor of this tower.

Before using it, however, you stop to examine it more closely: "The upper echelons of the Healing Church are formed by the School of Mensis, based in the Unseen Village, and the Choir occupying the Upper Cathedral Ward. This key brings one a step closer to the Choir" (SG, 2015: 463). You have heard these names before, Mensis and the Choir, but only on small notes left around the city. A scrawl in Yahar'gul spoke of the "Mensis ritual," whereas a scrap found close to your current location tells you that "The sky and the cosmos are one. 'The Choir.'" Now, you have finally gained access to their quarters. Inside, you find small, worm-like creatures, their appearance closely resembling the statues you saw in Yahar'gul. Church Servants patrol the bridge leading to the main building, enemies you recognize from your exploration of the Cathedral Ward, marking this as the territory of the Healing Church. The forecourt is literally swarming with Celestial Children, resembling slugs in shape and movement, with tendrils and small, wing-like protrusions on their face and back. Making your way inside, you find yourself in darkness, beset by large beasts and the dreaded Brainsuckers, oddly gelatinous in appearance, wetly grey in color, dressed in rags, their faces covered in slow-moving tentacles.

Once you are sure the space is safe, you explore the hall more thoroughly, with several otherworldly items as your prize. First is another key, this one labelled as leading to the Orphanage, the "birth place of the Choir":

> …shadowed by the Grand Cathedral, was a place of scholarship and experimentation, where young orphans become potent unseen thinkers for the Healing Church. The Choir, that would later split from the Healing Church, was a creation of the Orphanage [SG, 2015: 463].

It is another confirmation of what you have learned about the Church and their practices, and their use of innocents for their own ends. You can only conclude that the Celestial Children found outside are the remnants, or rather, the current form, of these orphans, and you shudder to think what else you may find.

Here you also find the Choir Attire and the Cosmic Eye Watcher Badge, providing you with access to equipment used by this faction of the Healing Church. More information can be found in each; the Attire tells you that "Members of the Choir are both the highest-ranking clerics of the Healing Church, and scholars who continue the work that began at Byrgenwerth" (SG, 2015: 490). More specifically, the researchers here have focused on something which is described as "the left behind Great One," prompting them "to look to the skies, in search of astral signs, that may lead them to the redis-covery of true greatness" (SG, 2015: 490). The Badge notes that the eye con-

tained in its design "signifies the very cosmos" and describes how "The Choir stumbled upon an epiphany, very suddenly and quite by accident. Here we stand, feet planted in the earth, but might the cosmos be very near us, only just above our heads?" (SG, 2015: 469). The revelations are not unexpected: if your acts of delving into the Healing Church and its history have told you anything, it is that bigger machinations are at work here. At the same time, the new information has left you reeling, unsure of what it might all mean, and what your place is in all of this. Your arrival here may have seemed accidental, a journey undertaken of your own volition, yet you cannot shake the sensation that larger forces are at work, guiding you, using you as a pawn in some otherworldly game. The mere fact that the possession of the Cosmic Eye Badge has made it easier to obtain Sedatives, a healing item meant to "calm the frayed nerves of [the] inquisitive minds" of "those who delve into the arcane" (SG, 2015: 447) does little to steady you. The connection between the Choir and the arcane has become clear from a number of artifacts you are carrying, found within the different institutions: in Byrgenwerth, its lecture building, and here within the Upper Cathedral Ward. The Empty Phantasm Shell, the Augur of Ebrietas, and A Call Beyond each speak of the Choir's discoveries, and the secret rites that were born from it. Relying on "a great variety of invertebrates, or phantasms," the Church was able to harness their arcane power, allowing them "to imbue weapons with their strength" and "to directly utilize the power of the Great Ones" in order to "partially summon Ebrietas" (SG, 2015: 459). The rites are described as "evidence that the Choir had approached the eldritch Truth" (SG, 2015: 459), although you have yet to learn what this truth is.

With the Orphanage Key, you can unlock the front door of the building, creating a path that both leads back the way you came, and reveals another staircase. Indecisive for a moment, you are driven forward by your quest for knowledge, your feet almost automatically carrying you up the steps and deeper into this realm of experimentation and suffering. As you cross a stone bridge, you are met by a Celestial Emissary, running headlong at you. It is a clear reminder of your discoveries in Iosefka's Clinic, and as you press on and into an eerily beautiful, but seemingly deserted garden, you are confronted with the scale of the Choir's work. The space slowly fills with a mass of blue bodies, their numbers ever increasing. This time, they are hostile, actively following and attacking you, requiring you to keep retaliating, until finally, they are slain and disappear. Upon closer inspection, their garden is walled off, the only exit leading you back the way you came. Instead, it is the large window that beckons you, and as you tumble through the glass, an unexpected vista is revealed to you. During your exploration of the Upper

Cathedral Ward, you have lost sight of where you are in relation to Yharnam itself, the unnatural encounters inside the Choir's residences only serving to make you feel more distant from the relative normality of the city. Now, you suddenly regain your awareness as you find yourself on a stone walkway and looking down into the Grand Cathedral and its altar, a realization which only emphasizes the relationship between the Choir and the Church. A small lift transports you downwards, past more Children and Emissaries, and into a place which appears below the Cathedral itself. The room speaks of long-lost splendor, a once magnificent space that is now in ruins, its walls and statues collapsed, its flooring broken and partially covered in water, now known only as the Altar of Despair. At its center is a huge shape, hunched over and seemingly unaware of your presence. Like Rom, the Vacuous Spider of Byrgenwerth, this creature, too, fails to attack until you draw first blood. Its flesh a pale grey, its entire form decidedly alien with the presence of tendrils, ill-formed but large wings, and a head, lined with tube-like protrusions that can open down the middle to reveal a fleshy pink interior lined with eyes. It feels as if the mere sight of Ebrietas, Daughter of the Cosmos, has left you stunned. Parts of her anatomy remind you of the other creatures you have encountered here, her movement and wings a clear reference to the Celestial Children; her color and attacks providing a link to the Celestial Emissaries. The item left by her upon defeat is another chalice, and it helps to shed some light on what you have discovered:

> *Great Isz Chalice*: "A chalice that breaks a labyrinth seal. Great chalices unlock deeper reaches of the labyrinth. The Great Isz Chalice became the cornerstone of the Choir, the elite delegation of the Healing Church. It was also the first Great Chalice brought back to the surface since the time of Byrgenwerth, and allowed the Choir to have audience with Ebrietas" [SG, 2015: 327].

It would seem that what you have encountered here, hidden below the Grand Cathedral, is the left behind Great One of which the Choir Attire spoke. Delving into the labyrinths below the city, the scholars of Byrgenwerth and of the Church were able to discover not just the Phtumeru Chalice. You are holding evidence of additional artifacts that granted access to ever deeper and more alien tombs, and it is this Chalice that allowed the scholars to meet with a true Great One. Undoubtedly part of the eldritch Truth that the Choir had discovered, Ebrietas was not left inside the labyrinths, but instead, was somehow brought and kept here, relegated from the status of a god to that of a servant of the Church. The cry uttered upon her demise appears to be one of both pain and of release.

It is in the third act of *Bloodborne* that the connection to the work of H.P. Lovecraft comes into focus.[1] As I mentioned in the introduction to this

chapter, Miyazaki has made reference to the author, and in particular, to Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos, as a source of inspiration for the game's narrative. A key influence in the genre of weird fiction, Lovecraft remains an enduring name, not in the least for his efforts in the creation of a pantheon of Old Ones, as well as the wider philosophy that underpins so much of his work. Opening his treatise on *Supernatural Horror in Literature* with the assertion that "the oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown," Lovecraft explores his interest in what he calls "weirdly horrible tales" (1973: 12). In the work, he acknowledges that this form of writing requires a specific audience since "the appeal of the spectrally macabre is generally narrow because it demands from the reader a certain degree of imagination and a capacity for detachment from everyday life" (1973: 12). Briefly tracing the role and impact of the unknown on more primitive societies, Lovecraft notes the changes to mankind's relationship to the weird. Stating that "the area of the unknown has been steadily contracting for thousands of years" due to the development of humanity and its scientific prowess, Lovecraft argues that "an infinite reservoir of mystery still engulfs most of the outer cosmos" (1973: 14). He continues by stating that "a vast residuum of powerful inherited associations clings round all the objects and processes that were once mysterious, however well they may now be explained" (1973: 14). Although research and the dissemination of knowledge have reduced the realm of the unknown, Lovecraft argues, it has not fully disappeared, nor does the factual evidence regarding such discoveries fully remove any primitive fears. Despite the unknown being reduced, it has not and never truly will disappear, leaving room for writers and other artists to experiment and indulge themselves and their readers with stories of just what might be lurking in the shadows. It is this thinking that underpins much of Lovecraft's fiction, and is perhaps best evidenced in his definition of that concept which has become almost synonymous with his stories: cosmic fear. According to Lovecraft,

> The true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain—a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space [1973: 15].

In addition, Lovecraft notes that, rather than details of plot or character, "atmosphere is the all-important thing" (1973: 16), and that "the one test of the really weird is simply this—whether or not there be excited in the reader

a profound sense of dread, and of contact with unknown spheres and powers"
(1973: 16). In his own efforts of exploring the weird tale, Lovecraft often relies
on dreams, both for inspiration and as a site for the horror to take place.
Many of the terrors thought up by Lovecraft which are situated in the real
world feature a connection to other dimensions, inhabited by god-like beings
which he termed "the Old Ones," and who have become the source for the
often adapted and revisited Cthulhu mythos. Roughly speaking, then, there
are two ways to approach the work of Lovecraft: to either focus on the worlds
he creates in his fiction and on the otherworldly beings who inhabit it, or to
look to the philosophy of weird fiction explored in his writing. In a close
reading of *Bloodborne*, both approaches are worthwhile, but it is the latter
category I wish to discuss first.

The horror in the majority of Lovecraft's fiction is born from the moment
in which humans gain access to a certain level of knowledge, thus gaining an
insight into the existence of these other planes, as well as the beings that
dwell within them. More so, Lovecraft's writing is concerned with humanity's
place within this newly discovered order, focusing on the idea of cosmic
indifferentism, where "Humanity, in Lovecraft's vision, is falsely convinced
of its own importance on a universal scale" (Smith, 2011: 835). As Smith
explains, "The fundamental horror of Lovecraft's world is this sense of
humanity's utter insignificance, this realization produces a terrible enlight-
enment and madness in his characters" (2011: 835). A similar description is
found in Burleson's essay on Lovecraftian themes, which draws attention to
the importance of "the nature of self-knowledge, the effects of learning one's
own nature and one's place in the scheme of things" (1991: 135) when inter-
preting Lovecraft's work, and isolates five recurring ideas:

1. The theme of denied primacy: the theme that as human beings on this planet we
were not first, will not be last, and have never really been foremost.
2. The theme of forbidden knowledge, or merciful ignorance: the theme that there
are some types of knowledge only by the avoidance or suppression of which can
humankind maintain a semblance of well-being.
3. The theme of illusory surface appearances: the theme that things are not as they
seem, that surface appearances mask a deeper and more terrible reality.
4. The theme of unwholesome survival: the theme that some things, and some
beings, outlive what would be from the ordinary human viewpoint their rightful exis-
tence, producing circumstances in which it must be concluded that the present is no
place where we can hide from an encroaching past that can reach forward to find us.
5. The theme of oneiric objectivism: the theme that there is at best an ambiguous
distinction between dreaming and reality—that the world of deep dream may be as
real as, or more real than, the waking world; the suggestion is strongly present that
the shared dream-world of humankind holds awesome secrets about the ultimate nature
of things (Burleson, 1991: 136).

Echoes of each of Burleson's points can be found in *Bloodborne*, with a particular emphasis on the incorporation of Lovecraft's deeper themes as opposed to the inclusion of specific beings from his Cthulhu mythos. These notions do not just inform story elements of otherworldly monstrosities, dream states and forbidden knowledge; they influence the gameplay on a deeper level, as *Bloodborne*'s true horror does not lie in players confronting wave upon wave of enemies, nor in the encounter with unearthly, incomprehensible monstrosities that tower over them. It is found within the third act of the game, after the fight with Rom and the rise of the Blood Moon, when players could fully realize the insignificance of their character and their actions within this world. The passivity of the player character, as addressed in Chapter 1, may assist them to figure out their place within Yharnam, but within the final stages of the game it only serves to make them feel utterly out of control, unable to influence any of the events that have taken place in the city, and are still happening now. Each of Burleson's themes is evidenced within *Bloodborne*: the lack of distinction between dreams and reality, most clearly found in the presence of the Hunter's Dream and the Nightmare Realms; the presence of other, greater beings, who are ultimately unconcerned with humanity's plight; gaining insight and access to that which may not be as it appears to be, thus discovering secret spaces and knowledge that were never meant to be discovered, let alone used. Most prominent, however, is the sensation of true insignificance, in the face of enemies, of bosses, of the game world, of those acting within it, leaving the player unable to control, let alone master, *Bloodborne*'s universe.

This lack of agency is further highlighted by the context of genre. As discussed in the introduction, the use of (survival) horror in games is largely typified by limitations to player behavior, resources and narrative information. Finding oneself overcome and, essentially, stuck on a path to destruction, the player of horror games will often be confronted with an (apparent) loss of control. In her essay "Hands-On Horror" (2002), Krzywinska explains how such a player experience is arguably central to horror games: "In contrast to film, games place a strong emphasis on the act of *doing* that extends beyond the kinetic and emotional responses that are common in cinema" (2002: 207; author's emphasis). As I have argued here, the experience of any videogame hinges on player activity, on their presence in and engagement with the game world in order to uncover the story, characters, and enemies hidden within. Interestingly, Krzywinska argues that these rules change, and indeed should be changed, for horror games. Games of this genre often include a "manichean moral duality" (2002: 207), a battle

between good and evil forces, and players are thrown into the middle of this conflict. As Krzywinska explains, "In each game there are periods in which the player is in control of gameplay and at others not, creating a dynamic rhythm between self-determination and pre-determination" (2002: 207). In many games, the rhythm described by Krzywinska is dictated by the ebb and flow of gameplay, offering players 'up' and 'down' time, shifts between agency in killing enemies or solving puzzles and watching narrative delivery through cutscenes. Within horror games, however, this dynamic becomes more significant:

> Throughout the game the effects of a higher power are always in evidence. The element of pre-determination, which lies outside the player's sphere of agency, is therefore linked to the metaphysical dimension in which manicheanism operates. The concept of the moral occult plays a central role in my argument that horror-based videogames are strongly dependent on their capacity to allow players to experience a dynamic between states of *being in control* and *out of control* [2002: 208; author's emphasis].

Players find themselves not simply out of control due to the demands of narrative, gameplay or level design; rather, within the context of horror, they are at the mercy of the evil forces that frame the game's experience: "All horror-based videogames are resolutely dependent on a hidden 'occulted' or metaphysical dimension that shapes gameplay" (Krzywinska, 2002: 208). In using the dynamic of being in and out of control in such a way, games of this genre are able to deliver the desired play experience: "This evocation of helplessness in the face of an inexorable predetermined force is crucial in maintaining horror-based suspense, in that the game world often operates outside the player's control" (Krzywinska, 2002: 211). It is the loss of control, the inability to truly understand the environment and master it that is responsible for many of the scares found in horror games. More specifically, as Krzywinska has shown, this tension of agency and forced passivity is framed by the context of these games, appearing as evidence of the battle of good and evil, where otherworldly forces are taking control of the player, leaving them incapable of acting.

It is this type of fear, this sense of dread, which is so prevalent in *Bloodborne*. Not tied to limitations of narrative, resources or the routes available to players in many survival horror titles, Yharnam's semi-open world and ability to replay sections allow access to a wealth of health items, weapons and ammunition. The action-adventure elements of the game give players certain freedoms in combat and in their ability to roam around the world, removing the restrictions of other horror titles. Yet this freedom does not preclude a lack of agency within *Bloodborne*'s story: although players are at

liberty to discover, experience and piece together a wide variety of narrative descriptors, they will still find themselves at the center of a battle between the factions at work in Yharnam, a battle between earthly and otherworldly forces. The visit to the Choir is part of this realization, as is the existence of the Hunter's Nightmare and the Research Hall, each contributing to the slow, but inevitable discovery of just what these secrets are, and how deeply they have affected, and still affect, Yharnam and its inhabitants. It is found when players find out more about the Healing Church and their inhuman activities, about the cause and effect of Ashen Blood and the burning of Old Yharnam. It is found in Byrgenwerth, the seat of learning, and its pivotal role in the exploration of the labyrinths underneath Yharnam, where Ebrietas was found. Most notably, it comes with the realization of the player's insignificance, and their lack of ability to make any real difference to this world. In the world of *Bloodborne*, the player is not the hero; they are not here to save the day. More specifically, they are simply unable to: the die has been cast, the events have taken place and progressed too far for it to be stopped now. Never does this become clearer than when players return to Yahar'gul for a final time.

By finding the key to the Upper Cathedral Ward, you have been able to gain new knowledge about the true secrets of Yharnam, yet there is more to be discovered within the Unseen Village. Picking your way between its spires and partially destroyed walkways, you find yourself once more at the Yahar'gul Chapel, that dreaded place where you were imprisoned before. It was during that part of your journey that you found some clothes, old and torn, and although you did not fully understand it then, the significance of their message is clear to you now: "Black attire worn by hunters of the Unseen Village. The hunters of Yahar'gul answer to the village's founders, the School of Mensis. Hunters in name only, these kidnappers wear their black hoods low to shadow their eyes. [...] They blend into the night wearing this attire" (SG, 2015: 495). Outside, the area is crawling with strange new enemies, each of which seems put together out of so many bodies. Caskets running over with a multitude of human forms. Beasts like those in Yharnam, made up of nothing but skin and bone. Other things have changed, too: the gate to Main Street, closed before, now gapes wide open, revealing further nightmares. As in the rest of Yahar'gul, blacked out carriages and horse-drawn cages, now empty, line the streets, evidence of the kidnappings that brought you and so many others to the village. Yet some elements of this area are different. Here, the walls of each building are covered with human forms, reaching, praying, climbing, their eyes and mouths wide in a clear display of terror. They appear

to be fleeing, but from what? Their bodies are kept here, petrified, part of the architecture, and part of Yahar'gul, innocent Yharnamites, perhaps, victims of kidnapping, imprisoned now within the very walls themselves. You make your way underneath an archway and into the plaza beyond. Now in full view of the ominous Blood Moon, a dark cloud suddenly removes it from your view, black smoke swirling, then oozing, a sickly green fluid dripping out onto the flagstones. A shape emerges from inside it and you fear you have discovered what these people might have been fleeing from: a gigantic form, a composite body, grotesque organic matter constructed of so many half-formed human shapes. Its death reveals only more evidence of the suffering that took place here. In a small room behind the plaza, you come across rows and rows of bodies, each sat in a chair, each mummified, their clothes long gone, a tall iron cage on their heads. They are identical to those you have seen dotted around Yahar'gul upon your return here, engaged in rituals you do not understand. At the far end of the room, one of them has been singled out, set apart, his clothes still intact, chains around his hands and feet. Invited to inspect the mummy, you place your hand upon his shoulder, and find yourself pulled in a direction you did not even know existed.

Once you come to, you find yourself inside a place of learning. A lecture building, each room filled with rows of chairs or specimens, ready to be examined. The students still linger here, their faces drawn, their bodies inhuman, possessed by knowledge they should never have found. Someone, however, has created a record of their discoveries, and notes are dotted around this part of the building, each adding to the next: "Master Willem was right. Evolution without courage will be the ruin of our race." "Hunt the Great Ones. Hunt the Great Ones." "The nameless moon presence beckoned by Laurence and his associates. Paleblood." "Three third cords." You linger a while, puzzling over this new information. The note about Master Willem, you know, is related to the work at Byrgenwerth, the ideas of transformation so important to both this institution, and to the Healing Church. It provides a justification for their acts, but one must wonder whether anything can justify the things you have seen. Perhaps the second note holds more truth, bidding you to eliminate the Great Ones, beings like Ebrietas, who appear to be the source for this quest for knowledge and transcendence; it is what you have been doing so far. The other two notes only raise new questions. You heard of Paleblood upon your arrival to Yharnam, yet what you thought was a substance, a form of blood, here seems to be referring to a creature of some kind, as if it were a name. As for the cords, you can only guess.

It is clear that, through contact with the mummy, you have somehow entered another world. The initial act transported you to the Lecture Building,

and as you pass through the doors at the far end of this floor, your journey takes you further still, to the source of the School: the Nightmare of Mensis. Here, your very surroundings seem hostile, expressing the anger and fear of hundreds, perhaps thousands of men and women, their distorted faces captured within the rock itself. Amidst this inhospitable landscape sits a building, a light shining from one of its many towers, beckoning you to come closer. Once inside, you can only marvel at the unreality of the place, the entire environment appearing to you as if it were a dream, or indeed a nightmare. Spiders with human faces; giant pigs, their bodies lined with eyes; critters that are a hybrid of crows and dogs; strange women, their heads overly large and covered in eyes; humanoid figures, some bigger, some smaller than you, each clad in a form of metal armor, appearing as if they, too, are mechanical; each of them unlike anything you have encountered before. Somewhere inside, in one of the many rooms and walkways lined with eyes, you find yourself face to face with another human being. The man appears tall, mostly because of the large metal cage he wears on his head. He strikes you as a researcher, as one of so many who have tried to find answers within this hostile world. His surroundings, made up of stairs and walls and mirrors covered in eyes and rows and rows of books seem to support this idea, as does his clothing, his robes resembling the attire of the scholars you have found in Byrgenwerth and in the Lecture Building. He speaks to you, words of which you can only vaguely glean the meaning: "Ah, Kos, or some say Kosm…. Do you hear our prayers? No, we shall not abandon the dream. No one can catch us! No one can stop us now!" Laughing mockingly, he bows to you, before turning and running off, leaving you with no other option to follow, to try and catch up with him. When you finally corner him in a small balcony room, he does not hesitate to do battle with you, his attacks marked by their arcane qualities. By using items that you yourself have acquired inside the Lecture Building and the Orphanage, his allegiance with those who have done so much to find the eldritch Truth is clear. Despite your efforts, Micolash manages to escape from you after your first few hits, his mocking comments following you inside this maze: "Ah hah hah ha! Ooh! Majestic! A hunter is a hunter, even in a dream. But, alas, not too fast! The nightmare swirls and churns unending!" Puzzled by his cryptic comments, you try to put your questions aside for now, instead renewing your efforts to locate him within his labyrinthine domain. Running up and down stairs, you manage to trace him back to that same room, the both of you renewing your efforts to spell the destruction of the other, yet his commentary continues: "As you once did for the vacuous Rom, grant us eyes, grant us eyes. Plant eyes on our brains, to cleanse our beastly idiocy."

He invites you to "sit about, and speak feverishly. Chatting into the wee hours of…. New ideas, of the higher plane!" Yet you are in no position to stop, wait, to give him the upper hand, to lose to this man, this mummy, the remains of whom you found in Yahar'gul, the contact with which brought you here. When Micolash finally collapses before you, his agonized screams seem to rend your very soul: "Ahh! Now I'm waking up, I'll forget everything…." There is little he leaves behind, except for granting you a head piece like his, the Mensis Cage, the description of which gives you some assistance in understanding his riddles:

> The School of Mensis controls the Unseen Village. The hexagonal iron cage suggests their strange ways. The cage is a device that restrains the will of the self, allowing one to see the profane world for what it is. It also serves as an antenna that facilitates contact with the Great Ones of the dream. But to an observer, the iron cage appears to be precisely what delivered them to their harrowing nightmare [SG, 2015: 487].

Whether Micolash's cryptic speeches should be considered as a means to access the eldritch wisdom, you have yet to discern, but some of his comments make a strange form of sense based on your experiences in Yharnam so far. Each of the institutions you have encountered seem to be related in their wish to contact the Great Ones, a possibility that was discovered inside the labyrinths below the city by scholars from Byrgenwerth. It is here that Ebrietas, Daughter of the Cosmos, the left behind Great One, was found, and it is here that the first scholars learned of Oedon, the formless Great One who "exists only in voice" and whose essence is "the oozing blood" (SG, 2015: 475). It is this importance of blood that Master Willem warned Laurence against, when he told the other man to "fear the old blood," and it is this adage that Laurence did not follow, as "both Oedon, and Oedon's inadvertent worshippers, surreptitiously seek the precious blood" (SG, 2015: 472). The Healing Church regarded these Great Ones as gods, revering them inside the Cathedral, trying to get closer to their greatness through prayer and the use of blood. The Choir similarly approached the Great Ones through the lens of religion, but one which was fed by a much more aggressive form of experimentation: the crafting of arcane items, and ultimately the wish for transcendence. By contrast, Mensis attacked the problem with more force, finding and kidnapping so many, bringing them to Yahar'gul only to become the victims of a variety of hideous rituals. Their center is here, in the Nightmare, separate from both the city and any form of reality, and you can only wonder what further damage their actions have wrought. Yet it all started at Byrgenwerth. For the college, it was study and the gaining of insight that was seen as key to this process. The notes on Great One's Wisdom explain the epiphany Master Willem had here: "We are thinking on the basest of planes. What we

need, are more eyes" (SG, 2015: 467), and you recall the Eye rune, found with Master Willem in the Lunarium, which "symbolize[s] the truth Master Willem sought in his research. Disillusioned by the limits of human intellect, Master Willem looked to beings from higher planes for guidance, and sought to line his brains with eyes in order to elevate his thoughts" (SG, 2015: 470). The connection to the wish of Micolash, and the prayer to be granted eyes, could not be clearer. Each of the factions, upon the discovery of the Great Ones, sought contact, knowledge, and greatness, yet through differences in method and opinion, the schisms were inevitable. Although, as Micolash testified, the hope was that the knowledge thus gained would elevate humanity, transform it into something greater than itself, "to cure us of our beastly idiocy." However, the experiments that followed only helped to unleash a plague that has spelled the destruction of all. The scourge of beasts, of beastly idiocy, the result of the research of the Healing Church, has cost the lives of so many, and those who have not fallen to the Ashen Blood have gone mad and become lost in the Nightmare. The insights found within the labyrinth should, perhaps, never have been found, the secrets and chalices buried for eternity. As so many times before, the price of knowledge, of ambition, and of pride, has been unimaginably high.

And yet, despite these explanations, despite your ability to piece together so much of what has happened, you feel that this is not the end. You have learned much from Micolash, yet his domain contains another door, leading you deeper into the Nightmare to answer your final questions. As you climb the stairs to the next level of Mensis, the cries of an infant break the silence, and you remember the notes you found, instructing you to "seek the nightmare newborn" and "silence its harrowing cry" in an attempt to stop "nightmarish rituals." The realization makes you ever more aware of just what you might be expected to do in order to leave this hellish world, when suddenly, you stop, digging into your bag for something you know you had found, information about the child: pieces of an Umbilical Cord. Your hand closes around each of the three segments you have found so far, and you examine them closely:

> A great relic, also known as the Cord of the Eye. Every infant Great One has this precursor to the umbilical cord. Every Great One loses its child, and then yearns for a surrogate. The Third Umbilical Cord precipitated the encounter with the pale moon, which beckoned the hunters and conceived the hunter's dream. Use to gain Insight and, so they say, eyes on the inside, although no one remembers what that truly entails.
> [...] Every Great One loses its child, and then yearns for a surrogate, and Oedon, the formless Great One, is no different. To think, it was corrupted blood that began this eldritch liaison.
> [...] Provost Willem sought the Cord in order to elevate his being and thoughts to

those of a Great One, by lining his brain with eyes. The only choice, he knew, if man were ever to match Their greatness.[2]

Once more, you see the importance of eyes, and of insight, confirmed in the information about Willem, evidence of a quest for knowledge in order to attain greatness. You wonder, however, about "the encounter with the pale moon," which seems to be the origin of the existence of the hunters, and your role here. More importantly, there is information here about the child, about a meeting between men and the Great Ones, of a woman bearing child. You remember the image of the lady in white, seen in the Moonside Lake, the marks of blood on her abdomen, the sound of her weeping, and the small cries of an infant in response. The Umbilical Cords seem to imply there have been children before; is it this woman's child that you are here to kill? It is not long until you encounter her again, the sound of her crying audible even before you can see her. When you approach her, she does not respond, lost in her outpouring of grief, looking up to this single tower. The door at its base beckons you, and a lift, its metal casing warped and twisted, whisks you upwards. You follow a short hallway, lined with more mummified bodies, long dead, their Mensis cages testament to their role in the School's hideous rituals, moving ever closer to the child and the plaza of the Wet Nurse's Lunarium. The infant's cries are deafening here, perhaps in an effort to persuade you to stop, leave, to not harm the innocent. Yet can that which is brought forth of the union of woman and Great One be innocent, or harmless, or even normal? With newfound resolve, you approach the pram in the middle of the space, the bones of the dead crunching beneath your feet and the white light of a gigantic moon illuminating your every move. Before you can strike, however, there is a swooshing sound, a soft sigh, as a large figure, draped in so many black robes and so many pieces of silver jewelry and armed with so many sharp blades, lands before you. The soft tune of a music box fills your head as, once more, you do battle with this otherworldly being, a feeling close to tiredness washing over you. She falls, and as she does, the wailing of the child intensifies, then dies away, the nightmare slain. When you come back down, you see the same woman, and as she registers your return, she bows, and disappears. You do not know whether she means to thank you, but you decide to accept the gesture as if it were a token of gratitude, a small ray of light within the darkest nightmare. There is nothing else left for you to do here, and it is with a heavy tread that you return to the Hunter's Dream, perhaps for the last time, to find the final answers. If there are any.

There are some truths still to be discovered inside this endless dream, but it is in Chapter 9 that I will focus on these in detail. Instead, getting to this near-ending of *Bloodborne* shows further connections to the cosmic hor-

ror of Lovecraft. Each of the main themes, as identified by Burleson, is present and deepened in the final area: the insignificance of humanity in the face of greater forces, which they felt they could possess; the effects of inhuman knowledge on oneself and one's world; the appearance of other, dreamlike, realms, hidden from view, yet always watching us, and those beings who have made their home there. The powerlessness revealed to and experienced by the player in the face of these forces, of the Great Ones and the historical actions of Byrgenwerth, the Healing Church, the Choir and the School of Mensis, can only leave one with a feeling of despair. And yet, their efforts, hampered by ambition and pride, still reveal studiousness, and hope. The cycle has repeated, and will repeat; the night itself is endless, and yet there are still people searching for greatness, to be elevated beyond themselves. It is a testament to the hopeful physical transgression, discussed in the previous chapter in relation to Aldana Reyes and Hurley. As the latter notes, the use of the term abhuman, whilst pointing to a total destruction of self, also evidences that "the human body collapses and is reshapen across an astonishing range of morphic possibilities" (1996: 4). Similarly, Aldana Reyes focuses on the possibilities of the body, of "exceeding itself or falling apart, either opening up or being altered" (2014: 11), where the horror of the body becomes a celebration. The recurrent comments in dialogue and item descriptions as to the gaining of insight, of eyes lining the brain, of seeing further and being more, are a testament to this. The quest for transcendence, like the night in Yharnam, is never-ending.

Yet the beings encountered in the third act of *Bloodborne* also offer a commentary on a new type of monstrosity. Where the bodies of the Yharnamites and the hunters show the descent into beastly idiocy, their brains taken over and hampered by a lust for blood, the player's journey back to Yahar'gul and the visits to the Orphanage and the Nightmare of Mensis reveal a new class of enemies. As I discussed earlier on in this chapter, one of the reasons for Lovecraft's enduring appeal is the creation of the Cthulhu mythos: the presence of a pantheon of what he terms "Old Ones" and their potential influence on humanity. Although much of the dread in Lovecraft's fiction hinges on what is *not* described to the reader, as opposed to providing a clear image of what might be lurking in the dark, his monsters possess certain distinguishable qualities. Levy explains the central role of the concept of the monster within Lovecraft's writing:

> To enter Lovecraft's fantastic universe is to be brutally dislodged from the familiar, disposed of all criteria or systems of reference, violently thrown into an abnormal space amid beings of which the least one can say is that they transgress the common order. The monster plays no negligible role in this basic bewilderment; it surprises, it frightens, it shocks [1988: 55].

As Lovecraft himself explained, his approach to fear is borne from a confrontation with the unknown and the disorientation and disruption that result from it. Rather than drawing on the classic forms of werewolves and vampires, Lovecraft's creations appeared wholly original, whilst still exhibiting certain human features:

> Lovecraft's monsters do not stray radically from the human form. They keep its general aspect, its silhouette, but are endowed at the same time with attributes that belong to a different animal species. They are characterized above all by their *hybridism*—a hybridism that is not the simple juxtaposition of disparate elements as in some monsters of antiquity, but a result of a sort of contamination or collective pollution [Levy, 1988: 56; author's emphasis].

It is this quality, perhaps, that makes Lovecraft's brand of monstrosity both relatable and particularly unseemly: if these beings so closely resemble humans, perhaps they once were humans. Not only do these creatures offer an example of a possible end, but their form also allows them to come and go as they please: "Such are the beings we encounter in the Lovecraftian universe: monsters that under their clothing hide singular anomalies and are all the more dangerous because they come and go amid men without usually being bothered" (Levy, 1988: 58). Although evidence of this hybridity can be seen in many of the enemies found in *Bloodborne* (particularly with the Yharnamites and Ashen Blood Patients, described in Chapter 1), the relationship changes in the latter part of the game. Each of the regular and strong Kin enemies[3] exhibits these features: the Small Emissaries are clearly human-like in appearance, and, as discussed in the previous chapter, their positioning within the game strongly hints at a process of creation, or more specifically, of transformation. The Emissaries encountered in Iosefka's Clinic, for example, are clearly framed as *having been* human, and the same can be said about the Celestial Children found in the Orphanage (the naming alone is a clue here). As with the Blood Saints in the Research Hall, the Children appear to have become the victim of the research efforts of the Healing Church and the Choir, transformed beyond recognition. The same can be said for certain Kin bosses, with both the Celestial Emissary and the Living Failures displaying human traits in both appearance and movement, perhaps (as the name of the latter implies) another failed experiment. It should be noted, however, that numerous other enemies can be found within *Bloodborne* that appear to share traits with Kin, if only in appearance. Both the Brainsucker, a small, grey, humanoid creature whose head is covered in tentacles, and the Winter Lantern, a singing woman-like figure with an abnormally large head covered in eyes, share in the hybridism described by Levy, as do the Garden of Eyes, the insectoid creatures found prowling around Byrgenwerth, and the Fishmen

of the Old Hunters DLC. However, themes of transformation and transgression are rife within *Bloodborne*, making it difficult to isolate pure examples of Lovecraftian hybridity outside of the way the enemies are represented within the game.

Beyond the enemies which appear as transformed humanoids, the game contains a number of beings which appear more closely related to Lovecraft's pantheon of Old Ones, one of which is also classed as Kin: Ebrietas, Daughter of the Cosmos, found in a room below the Grand Cathedral. Described in item descriptions as a "left behind Great One" (Choir Garb, SG, 2015: 490), a being which the Choir were able to "have audience with" (Great Isz Chalice, SG, 2015: 327). Rather than an example of Lovecraft's hybrid monsters, Ebrietas appears as an example of a god-like creature, of higher importance than the transcended human Kin, discussed in the previous paragraph, yet classed alongside them. This interpretation becomes even more complex when considering the references to other Great Ones, combining to form a system similar to that of Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos. A number of other boss enemies within both the main game and the DLC, arguably, form part of the pantheon of Great Ones found in *Bloodborne*'s universe. Rom, the Vacuous Spider (of the Moonside Lake), Amygdala (found in the Nightmare Frontier, as well as in the form of Lesser Amygdalas that appear within the Cathedral Ward and Yahar'gul, the Unseen Village in the latter part of the game), the Brain of Mensis[4] and Mergo's Wet Nurse (a strong enemy and boss located in the Nightmare of Mensis), the Moon Presence (the final boss of the game, in the Hunter's Dream), and the Orphan of Kos (the final boss of the Old Hunters DLC) appear to fulfil a role of similar importance, yet are not classed as Kin, and are thus marked as separate from Ebrietas. In addition, numerous items make reference to the Formless Oedon as a Great One (in particular, the Oedon Writhe and Formless Oedon runes) (SG, 2015: 472, 475), yet this being is never encountered by the player. The game's lore remains hazy as to what is implied by these differences; arguably, the classifications of these enemies are linked to their position within the game world. Ebrietas, classed as Kin, can be found within Yharnam itself, whereas the other creatures listed here only exist within the Nightmare Realms, *Bloodborne*'s version of Lovecraft's otherworldly spaces.

Lovecraft's pantheon of old gods tells of extradimensional beings who exist on other planes, often aware of humanity, but largely indifferent to our activities: "Lovecraft's world is populated with creatures far older than humanity which, rather than seeking to manipulate, frighten or otherwise interact with humans, are utterly indifferent to them" (Smith, 2011: 835). This state of affairs offers two specific reactions. Firstly, as previously discussed, the realization of insignificance often results in madness. The other is outlined

by Price and concerns the reaction to and relationship with the Old Ones: "Extradimensional and extraterrestrial entities are called 'gods and devils' by humans *who cannot understand them* and so either worship their greatness as divinity or exorcise their threat to human security and peace of mind by calling them devils" (1991: 249; author's emphasis). The perspective of these elder gods is clear: "The Old Ones are as indifferent to puny humanity as humans are to insects. But since their greater power is either coveted or feared, humans worship or anathematize them" (Price, 1991: 249). It is this process that can be seen in *Bloodborne*, and in particular in the activities of both the Choir and the School of Mensis, and even of the Healing Church and Byrgenwerth. The discovery of, and later, the audience with, the Great Ones offered a new kind of knowledge and the promise of transcendence, of a cosmos that is "only just above our heads" (SG, 2015: 469), and of beings who might be able to grant us eyes, as Micolash tells the player. As Price explains, however, these perceptions are fundamentally erroneous:

> When Lovecraft's characters see the Old Ones as gods or devils it is because they refuse to see the terrible truth that the Old Ones are simply beings who do not care about humans (though they may in fact be dangerous to us). Gods and devils, by definition, *do* care about us, whether to save or tempt us [1991: 249].

The core reason behind this is found in Lovecraft's philosophy behind his writing, and in particular his relationship to religion. Rather than creating a new set of gods, Lovecraft's intent is that "the Old Ones were purely natural and scientifically explicable aliens or forces, not divine and supernatural gods" (Price, 1991: 250). The worship of the Old Ones, or indeed the Great Ones, is fundamentally futile as humanity is trying to beseech and gain knowledge from and proximity to beings who are not what they seem and, more importantly, do not care about us. The situation in Yharnam is testament to this as any attempts of humanity to communicate with and become closer to the Great Ones have proved to be disastrous, resulting in many of the events that have turned the city into the shell it is now. Yet the cycle has not ended, and as Price points out, "If the existence of the Old Ones lays bare humanity's pathetic limitations, it also points the way to surpass those limitations and become, like the Old Ones, superior beings" (1991: 251). This drive is ongoing, as is proven by each of the endings of *Bloodborne*, as well as the way in which the game handles what happens next. Although players are able to leave their playthrough and create a new hunter character, if opting for what is commonly known as New Game Plus, the game simply picks up where it left off, starting another night cycle. A closer examination of each of the game's three endings, found in Chapter 9, further highlights this feeling of endless suffering and uncaring gods.
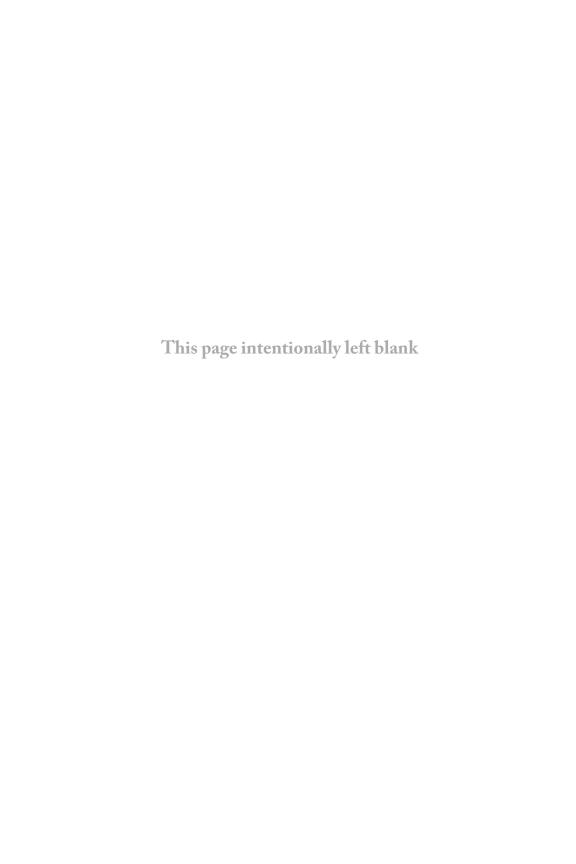
What has become clear of the course of this chapter, and in all three chapters within this part on *Bloodborne*'s lore, is the intricacy of its narrative. It is only through discoveries made by the player, and through their efforts of exploration, of finding each last piece of the puzzle, that a full story emerges. Although this has not been stated explicitly, a large number of the game's areas and even boss encounters are classed as optional, requiring a particularly strong effort on the part of the player to make sure that all content is experienced. *Bloodborne* has many secrets, and the game does not divulge them easily, embedding and hiding its narrative descriptors in order to create a particularly rich play experience. In the construction of its story, *Bloodborne* relies on both intra- and intertextual sources, creating connections between seemingly unrelated characters and events, as well as pointing to a larger body of preexisting texts. Some of these references are obvious, and the game's indebtedness to the fiction of H.P. Lovecraft is writ large. Yet, as I have demonstrated in each chapter, the game also points more subtly to the horror genre and the Gothic mode. Themes from so many classic texts, of religious pride and scientific ambition, of perceptions of monstrosity, the division and connections between self and other, or even, simply, of dangerous men and nightmarish creatures.

Ultimately, though, it is not only the subject matter that links *Bloodborne* to its horrific origins. As was discussed in the introduction, Gothic texts have a tendency to appear as if they are "hardly a unified narrative at all" (Kilgour, 1995: 5). This becomes apparent from the way in which narrative descriptors are embedded, or rather scattered, spurring players to find every last clue. However, it is a convention which is realized within the very essence of the game's design and the player's experience. As I have explained, the character of the player is constructed as passive, lacking an iconic appearance or a clear goal when they first arrive in Yharnam. It is through discovery and interaction that their role is slowly revealed, leaving players no choice but to press on and to find the meaning of their presence, to see if they can make a difference. As the game goes on, and in particular in the second and third acts, this process of exploration draws players further and further into the past, a space of meetings and encounters, rather than decisive action. The Gothic, as Kilgour notes, "assembled out of the bits and pieces of the past" (1995: 4), transforms the game space into a historical space. Mighall has argued that "[h]istory reveals itself to be central to the Gothic mode even when it depicts a contemporary setting," noting the form's obsession with a sense of what he terms "pastness" (1999: xviii). The information gained by players shows the errors of the past, the heinous acts that were conducted within the walls of Yharnam and its institutions, and the effects of these warring factions on so

many innocents. Yet, adopting Krzywinska's reading of control in horror games, it is these forces, of both Yharnam's institutions and of the Great Ones beyond, that still hold the reins. An action-adventure game, asking players to create a character, to explore, discover, to attack, kill, survive, indeed, to *play*, the story of *Bloodborne* only serves to highlight the despair and meaninglessness of these actions. The player is not a hero, and nothing here can truly be changed. The Gothic's obsession with history has created a loop, an endless night, which can never be truly broken. The ghosts of these characters, of Gehrman, Laurence, Willem, and Micolash, of Eileen, Djura and Gascoigne, of each of the Yharnamites, and of the player themselves, can do nothing but remain here, at the mercy of their history, and perhaps at the mercy of powers greater still.

Part II.

World

4

City

When you enter the room, the figure in white whips around, immediately aware of your presence. Something tells you that you have seen this woman before, but there is no time to consider this in detail. She attacks you, aggressively, able to inflict devastating injuries as she laughs at your agony. Her hands are bound, her white dress stained with blood, the veil pulled back from her face. In the background, you hear a baby crying, and you notice the perceptible swelling of her abdomen. Might she be pregnant? Blood spurts from her, flying across the room to hit you, poisoning you instantly. Suddenly, she breaks her shackles and produces a sword, continuing her relentless assault. Wildly you look around the room, and she appears to be in two places at once, coming at you from all sides. Reduced to sheer panic, you swing for her, and each impact of your weapon is followed by a breath, a small sigh of relief on your part, the tiniest victory, until finally she cries out and falls. It is only then that you notice her name: Yharnam, Pthumerian Queen.

Upon leaving the first location of Iosefka's Clinic and entering Yharnam proper, players are confronted with a grand vista of the city. A great bridge stands out against the orange sunset, framed by pinnacles and spires, rising higher and higher, towering over you. Yet the immediate impression is of a city that has breathed its last. As Martin describes,

> The magnificent city of Yharnam began its slow and endless descent into ruin long ago. When you take your first cautious steps into its cobbled streets, you are not stepping into a teeming world, but a corpse of a city, locked in the throes of death. When one of its psychopathic residents, all wild-eyed and shock-haired, lying in a pool of his own blood, mutters, "This town is finished," it's difficult not to agree [n.pag.].

The splendor of the buildings which surround you belie the horrors you are witnessing in the spaces between, an urban sprawl whose labyrinthine streets rise and fall, wind and spiral until even the most apt of hunters lose their way. As the strategy guide promises, "[t]he areas you'll stalk in Blood-

borne are rich in complexity and filled with unseen paths, clever shortcuts and obscure dead ends" (2015: 27), and the game does not disappoint. Yet studying *Bloodborne* as an exercise of level design presents some difficulties, as Totten points out, since "level design is so often overlooked as a topic of serious study" (2014: xxi), with the majority of literature presented as a "how-to" guide, focusing on practical elements of building levels. This is, however, not the only approach, and in his work, Totten notes the importance of levels as a "designed space" (2014: xxii). He isolates three elements that are important to level design: functional requirements, the fact that "your game must work" (2014: 6); usability, which focuses on "how players see gamespace […] and how one navigates levels" (2014: 7); and finally, delight, defined as the notion that "our gamespaces should be rewarding to go through" (2014: 7). It is the third which is most relevant to the current work, as the intention of Part II is not to focus on function and usability of level design, but rather on narrative and aesthetics. As Totten states, "Level design is the thoughtful execution of game*play* into game*space* for players to dwell in" (2014: xxiv; author's emphasis), and it is the meanings of this game space that concerns me here.

For the next three chapters, the onus will be on the game space as a vehicle for the delivery of *Bloodborne*'s story, thus including the game world as one of the narrative descriptors that informs the player's understanding and interpretation of the game events. As was noted in the first part of this book, "in an interactive environment, the user becomes the detective, and it falls to him to reconstruct the embedded story" (Ryan, 2005: 16). Ryan explains this process in more detail with reference to narrative architecture, which is

> The design of a fictional world with a diversified geography composed of various locations. Each of these locations offers its own opportunities for experiences, adventures, discoveries, and meaningful action. As the player explores this geography, she meets different characters, receives different missions, forms different goals, and faces different dangers [2005: 14].

Not only does this point to the connection between narrative and space, but it also takes the active role of the player into account when discovering the world. As I have shown, the narrative fragments players are asked to unpick within *Bloodborne*'s world are often few and far between, requiring a particular engagement from those who enter the dark streets of Yharnam. What is noteworthy, however, is that these places do not simply serve as a backdrop to the action; instead, each winding alley and rising spire adds to both the atmosphere and the narrative of the game, which will inform much of my approach in this second part. Each of the three chapters included here will deal with a particular set of the game's areas, what can be found there, and how they are connected to one another. Drawing primarily on texts dealing

with the form and function of game spaces, this second part will set out the role of *Bloodborne*'s various areas in the construction of its story. By looking at the narrative descriptors of the appearance of spaces, as well as the unique items found within, the interplay between location, items and events will be shown. The information thus obtained will demonstrate how the game's central themes are realized not only in dialogue and item descriptions, but are further emphasized through the aesthetics and connections of its spaces. The starting point for such a discussion is, naturally, the cobbled streets of Yharnam itself, the city which has become synonymous with *Bloodborne*'s current horrors and terrible past.

In order to fully understand the importance of the game space as narrative descriptor within *Bloodborne*, and within games in general, I need to introduce the concept of environmental storytelling. First coined by Carson in his influential piece "Environmental Storytelling: Creating Immersive 3D Worlds Using Lessons Learned from the Theme Park Industry," the term relates to the use of space to convey narrative in (primarily) videogames, and how this guides the experience of the audience:

> Whether it's a 100 million dollar Disney ride, a 3D shooter, or a kid's entertainment title, it is my objective to tell a story through the experience of traveling through a real, or imagined physical space. Unlike a linear movie, my audience will have choices along their journey. They will have to make decisions based on their relationship to the virtual world I have created, as well as their everyday knowledge of the physical world. Most important of all, their experience is going to be a "spatial" one [2000: n.pag.].

Using this notion of spatial experience as his starting point, Carson maps a journey for the participants and pays special attention to the design elements that are important for such an interaction: "In many respects, it is the physical space that does much of the work of conveying the story the designers are trying to tell. Color, lighting and even the texture of a place can fill an audience with excitement or dread" (2000: n.pag.). What is poignant here is not just Carson's attention to the information and atmosphere a space can convey, but his insistence on a certain level of familiarity in the audience. The spaces one is to create are likely to be locations visitors have seen before in another form: "Armed with only their own knowledge of the world, and those visions collected from movies and books, the audience is ripe to be dropped into your adventure" (2000: n.pag.). As will become clear, this notion of familiarity is particularly relevant in *Bloodborne* due to its thematic and aesthetic connections to horror and the Gothic and will be discussed in more detail later on.

In the essay "Game Design as Narrative Architecture," Jenkins develops Carson's ideas on environmental storytelling further. Following on from Car-

son's assertion that these types of experiences are spatial, Jenkins posits that "[g]ame designers don't simply tell stories; they design worlds and sculpt spaces" (2004: 121). Jenkins further emphasizes the importance of space within videogames to convey narrative, and he puts forward some ways in which players are able to construct meaning from these clues:

> Environmental storytelling creates the preconditions for an immersive narrative experience in at least one of four ways: spatial stories can evoke pre-existing narrative associations; they can provide a staging ground where narrative events are enacted; they may embed narrative information within their mise-en-scène; or they provide resources for emergent narratives [2004: 123].

There are a number of ideas which are of interest here. Firstly, like Carson, Jenkins draws attention to the familiarity of a potential audience with the space and the clues hidden within. An abandoned house will always be haunted, whereas a colorful forest is likely to be magical and an old castle will probably contain a princess. Game spaces often act on the preexisting ideas players have as to what may take place there, and this idea is echoed in Jenkins' other points: the use of space as staging ground for events and as a resource for emergent narrative. Playing with the audience's familiarity, videogames are able to construct spaces for players to play in and to build their own narrative from a combination of embedded (staged events) and emergent (player-driven) story elements. Acknowledging the potential criticism against such a position, Jenkins argues that "Spatial stories are not badly constructed stories; rather, they are stories that respond to alternative aesthetic principles, privileging spatial exploration over plot development. Spatial stories are held together by broadly defined goals and conflicts and pushed forward by the character's movement across the map" (2004: 124). This emphasis on space and its role within the construction of meaning creates specific demands for both designers and players: "Within an open-ended and exploratory narrative structure like a game, essential narrative information must be presented redundantly across a range of spaces and artifacts, because one cannot assume the player will necessarily locate or recognize the significance of any given element" (Jenkins, 2004: 126). Designers will need to create such a narrative structure and build their levels accordingly; for players, there is now the possibility to mine the game spaces for information about the world they are in. Within these spaces, players can find what Jenkins calls a "micronarrative" (2004: 125), little snippets of story which are created using a combination of location, items and textual data. These clues allow the player to reconstruct the events which took place within a specific site. However, this does mean that micronarratives are often limited in scope, their content tied to a single room or building rather than the game world as a whole. This

is further enforced by a model of linear progression: players are able to navigate game spaces and make choices along the way, but (aside from examples such as open world games) they will often find only one path is available to them to advance within the game.

A more recent response to these essays comes from designers Smith and Worch, who, like Carson and Jenkins, posit that "[t]he environment provides narrative context" (2010: 13). They identify four core principles as underlying this type of narrative structure, where environmental storytelling:

- Relies on the player to associate disparate elements, interpreting them as a meaningful whole.
- Fundamentally integrates player perception and active problem solving, which builds investment.
- Invites interpretation of situations and meaning according to players' views and experience.
- Can help the player navigate an area by telegraphing (2010: 34).

By requiring the player to combine various narrative descriptors into a coherent whole, they are more likely to invest in the world and thus the game on a deeper level, and if designed well, the game world extends an invitation for players to do so. This process is acknowledged by Worch and Smith:

> We've said "The player *interprets* disparate elements as a meaningful whole," and "Environmental storytelling invites *interpretation* of a situation based on the player's personal views." So the question we really have to answer is why that act of interpretation is compelling to us. What that really comes down to is the fact that environmental storytelling is active [2010: 35; author's emphasis].

Like Ryan's detective and the investment in emergent narrative, player discovery is at the core of the experience of environmental storytelling and thus aligns with Miyazaki's overall aims of player agency. In the interview included in the strategy guide, Miyazaki explores this sense of activity and achievement he wishes players to experience:

> That's how the battles and exploration elements work, and it applies to the world setting and story as well. You defeat powerful enemies, discover hidden locations and shortcuts, gain an understanding of the game's structure, and use the window you're given to imagine the game's world and story. My intention here is that every aspect of game design either creates or enhances the joy, or the sense of achievement, you feel as a result of these actions [SG, 2015: 547].

He continues by discussing his involvement within the map design of the game, stating that "[a]dding flow and meaning to the map structure helps to provide a sort of joy to the player, the fun of drawing up a map of the land in your mind. That adds value to player actions" (SG, 2015: 547). What

Miyazaki's design shows is the interplay between each of these elements, a landscape where traditional storytelling devices have the same status as more obscure elements (such as item descriptions and map design) to tell players about the world. Within this approach, environmental storytelling and the use of Jenkins' micronarratives influence the players' experience and their reading of Yharnam's spaces, creating additional layers of meaning. This use of game space and level design to explain and highlight aspects of the game's universe and its history is one of the features that defines each of the Soulsborne games. This process of reading game space will help create an understanding of the game and its lore; the player's journey will have much to tell them.

Your awakening in the Clinic is a rude one, an entry into a world unknown. The scrawled note has told you to "seek Paleblood to transcend the hunt," yet you know not what this is or where to find it. All you can do is move forward, off the surgery table and into the next room. This small building sets the scene for most of your journey: it is barely lit, deserted, in ruins, with blood and bodies littering the floor. Somber wood paneling, ornate furniture and delicate chandeliers speak of a decadent interior, as do the large gravestones and multitude of statues outside its doors. After the dark interior of the clinic and the quiet of the cemetery in its courtyard, your first sight of the city is overwhelming. Pushing open the iron gate, you see buildings everywhere, shooting up towards the sky, higher than the eye can see, and plunging down into the depths below the great bridge in front of you. You suspect it has once been lively here, but there is only one word to describe your surroundings now: dead. The streets and alleyways are deserted, frequented only by madmen with weapons, and so you proceed carefully, clearing the area of those who wish you dead, until you find yourself standing in a small square, your weapon and your coat dripping with blood, gazing up at a rude wooden crucifix at the center of a pyre. Staring into the blaze, you can just make out a wolf-like figure, deformed and covered in coarse hair, tied to the cross and set alight. You have encountered figures like it, but smaller, more human-like, similarly tied up and burning, scattered around the main street leading up to this plaza. Along this route, evidence of the scourge piles up as you are surrounded by the remains of those who once lived here, of their bodies and their belongings. Coaches are strewn across the city's landscape and its winding streets, the horses who once pulled them long dead. Stacks of boxes, bags, and wooden crates testify to the efforts of those who wished to leave but were unable to get out. More worryingly, you see caskets among the luggage, one, two, at least a dozen, some made of crude wood, others more ornate and bound by chains. Is it to ward of those who would try to get in, looking for

valuables, or to keep someone, or something, inside? After the beasts and the horrors you have seen, you cannot be sure. Yet people still live here, in this central area of Yharnam, its residential heart. Little red incense lanterns line the street, their scent warding off the beasts and keeping those inside safe during this night. You knock, try to speak to them, but their doors remain locked, so you press on, into a courtyard, an elaborate fountain at its center, its edges lined with the same statues you have seen everywhere: shrouded women in long gowns, kneeling, standing, their hands and eyes lifted to the heavens, imploring some unseen and unknown force, but for what? For help, perhaps salvation? You can only guess. The labyrinthine streets wind up and down, turn into each other, stairs rising and falling until you feel thoroughly lost. You reach one iron gate, then another, and upon opening each, you realize you have visited these places before, are once more able to recognize your surroundings, unlocking a shortcut but making no real progress. Gilbert, one of the few townsfolk willing to assist, advised you to go to Cathedral Ward and to use the Great Bridge, but you have found it closed and barred. He tells you of the warren of the aqueduct, running low under the city, and its waterway leads you to a second bridge. It is guarded by many, but you manage to push your way across, into a graveyard at the back of a small chapel, and into the Cathedral Ward.

Like Central Yharnam, the Cathedral Ward is defined by its verticality, its buildings and spires. The architecture is ornate, opulent, dominated by archways and gargoyles. Statues, similar in design to the ones you have encountered already, line each street, candles set about them and in their raised hands. As the name of this quarter implies, it is the home of the Healing Church and forms the city's religious heart. Although you discover a few more incense lamps, a single alleyway where Yharnamites still live, it is clear that this part of town is not residential. Where Central Yharnam is cramped, its streets narrow, lined with houses, the Cathedral Ward is more spacious, open, offering views of wide plazas, grand staircases and impressive edifices. The quarter stands on ceremony: it contains numerous places of worship and has evidently been the site for the religious services in which the townsfolk took part. Here, too, caskets are strewn about the streets, but it is here that they were to be laid to rest and on your journey, you come across a number of carts, clearly drawn by hand, stacked high with coffins. Again, you see a mixture of basic wooden boxes and ornate designs, made of dark wood and decorated with intricate inlays, and again, you notice the chains. In the residential part, a small street riddled with litter and steaming fog, you see coffins stacked high and chained to the walls, keeping those within captive on their way to the graveyards, connected to the places of worship found within the

Ward. The building you first entered, Oedon Chapel, appears to still be in use, and the Chapel Samaritan you find inside has tried to make the chapel into a safe haven, covering its interior with incense urns to ward off the beasts as best he can, imploring you to guide others here. As you make your way out of the chapel and follow the stairs down, down, further down, there is another little church, much smaller, containing a flight of stone steps hidden underneath an old stone sarcophagus. For now, you will leave this behind: you know your destination is the Grand Cathedral, and you know this building is not it; Gilbert described the Cathedral as "the birthplace of the Healing Church's special blood," the religious heart of all of Yharnam. It rises higher than the highest spires, a grand staircase leading up to its heavy wooden doors, yet here, too, you find nothing but beasts, the remainders of the last Vicar and head of the Healing Church. The Paleblood you seek is nowhere in sight, and you feel that there is nothing left for you in the Cathedral Ward. And yet…. When you return to Oedon Chapel, there is a small door, locked before, now open, beckoning you to come in. A lift takes you higher still, until you reach a small room, a stone bridge linking to a tower which spirals up towards the sky. You are not sure about the building's origins, or its function, as you slowly make your way to the top, to a small room lined with urns burning incense and a locked door. Although you feel there is some promise in whatever lies beyond it, there is no way for you to access it now, and all that is left is to return to the streets of Cathedral Ward.

With no other route available to you, you return to the abandoned church and its hidden stairway. In the catacombs below, you find ornate rooms and private chambers, and on the lowest level, a large room, overgrown with plants and weeds, a few incense urns still remaining, and in the far corner, a door, emblazoned with a warning: "This town is long abandoned. Hunters not wanted here." Behind it, all is quiet, deserted; the old village hamlet, that which Gehrman once described to you: "[T]he town is in disarray…. It was burned and abandoned, for fear of the scourge, home now only to beasts. The perfect place for a hunter, wouldn't you say?" No townsfolk remain except the Hunter Djura, first shouting at you from his perch atop one of the few remaining spires. The area has been abandoned, he tells you: "Old Yharnam, burned and abandoned by men, is now home only to beasts. They are of no harm to those above." This place still exists, but it has long been forgotten, secluded and slowly disappearing as the new city was built above it, hiding it from sight and mind. The vista that spreads out before you is one of ruin and decay, of things long left and long dead, yet clinging to life. Here, too, you encounter beasts, but they are human-like, hideously transformed, some covering themselves in rough cloth, the same creatures burned

at the crucifixes on the streets of Central Yharnam. The streets of Old Yharnam are overgrown with weeds, their leaves pushing up between the cobbles. Most of the buildings still stand, but have been gutted by the flames; you notice holes in walls and roofs, piles of bricks and other materials. There used to be houses here, places of worship. A hideous beast lurks in a church with a missing roof, and in another chapel, the flayed corpse of something unrecognizable has been chained to a crucifix in front of an altar. Most of the streets are long gone, replaced by makeshift walkways constructed from wood, with crude structures supporting what remains of the buildings. The structures and shapes are similar to those you saw in Central Yharnam, but so little here is left. When the scourge raged here, the town was abandoned and set alight in an attempt to halt the illness and the onset of the scourge. This part of Yharnam should be dead, and yet some still make their lives here. The beasts have made this place their home, and there is Djura to protect them. You suspect that it is him, together with the other hunter who prowls these streets, who have constructed the struts and walkways, making Old Yharnam habitable for themselves and their charges. Despite its state of ruin and disrepair, Old Yharnam is still a home, and in some ways more so than the places you have visited so far. You turn your back on the area, choosing to leave this retired hunter and the beasts in peace.

As you return to Cathedral Ward, you sense a change in the air. The sky is darker, the night presses closer, and the wind is colder. You gingerly leave Oedon Chapel; although you have visited the area before, something tells you to be careful, but as you step forward, a gaunt figure suddenly appears behind you, carrying a massive sack over its shoulder. You realize it is about to attack, and although you strike out against it, it is to no avail. The figure punches, kicks, using its sack to slam you to the ground and knock you out. When you come to, you find yourself inside this burlap prison, roughly dumped onto the floor of a cell.[1] Where you are, you do not know, but the name of the area is soon revealed to you: Yahar'gul, the Unseen Village. As you leave the room and climb the stairs, you find a dilapidated chapel above the rooms you were dumped in, but it is not a place you recognize. You are unsure if it is still part of the city, or how you can get back. Carefully, you start exploring the building, and you soon find more cells and others like you. Most of them have perished or gone mad already, but one woman still retains her sanity. She introduces herself as Adella, a nun of the Healing Church, and tells you how she and others were kidnapped and brought here in a manner much like your own. When you make your way outside, you see evidence of these practices littering the streets: there are coaches here, like in Central Yharnam, but where the ones in the city were meant for trans-

portation, perhaps even leisure, the vehicles in Yahar'gul are testament to a more sinister purpose. There are cages on wheels and huge wooden structures shaped like coffins, large enough to hold dozens of people. Religious symbols line these streets too, but they appear somehow tainted and twisted. The statues mimic the shapes of those in Yharnam, but they are warped and covered in cloth. Inside the chapel, you encounter a hideous altar, flanked by statues of creatures you do not recognize. A skeleton in a chair sits in front of it, a weird cage-like helmet resting on its shoulders and encasing the grinning skull. Notes scattered around the area speak of madmen and rituals, and hint at the unspeakable events that have taken place here. It is an area unseen, hidden, a place of kidnapping, of lunacy and unholy knowledge. You start to run, but the way out of the area appears to be locked, trapping you here in this village. The little lamp, this beacon of light, beckons you, transporting you back to the Hunter's Dream.

What should become clear from the descriptions offered here is how much the design of these areas illuminate the story. As was shown in the first part of this work, players are able to piece together the story of the Hunters, the Healing Church and the Great Ones from cutscenes, dialogue, item descriptions and notes, from hidden clues and their own interpretations. These four areas, Central Yharnam, the Cathedral Ward, Old Yharnam and Yahar'gul, have borne witness to these events and show the impact they have had on the city and its people, the devastation brought by the scourge, the lives lost, and the evidence of those still clinging to their existence. The winding residential streets of Central Yharnam, the open plazas of Cathedral Ward, the burnt shells of Old Yharnam, and the twisted depravities of Yahar'gul, each comment on and add to the narrative, providing detail where the more traditional story elements offer none. The caskets and chains are an interesting example of this: players may simply register these bits of the décor when they are first encountered, yet when the severity and the impact of the infection become clear, the presence of these coffins raises and answers more questions as to who, or what, might be locked inside, and why. Furthermore, once players learn the involvement of the Healing Church in how the scourge began, and the fate of many of its followers, the additional chains found on the coffins in the Cathedral Ward become testament to the hideous transformations of the clerics and the impact the Church's actions have had on the lives of the Yharnamites. The same can be said for Old Yharnam: as players get to visit the site of the scourge and see the result of the Church's attempt at containment, it leaves one to wonder how many lived and how many died; how many were beast, and how many were man. In his designs, Miyazaki follows the tenets of environmental storytelling, using the role and impact of

the game space in order to offer further detail to the narrative and allowing players to interact and discover at their own pace, a practice which can be found in many videogames besides *Bloodborne*. Echoes can be found here of the approaches advocated by Carson, Jenkins, Worch and Smith, yet there is more to be found than details and micronarratives. What is of interest is not just how the small moments and encounters such as the ones described here expand on the game's story, but rather how the city of Yharnam is able to convey larger themes and ideas about its narrative.

Aside from interactivity, one of the core principles behind videogames is design. Due to its nature as a digital artifact, a game has been created from nothing, and every detail needs to be decided on. The world of a game, and of *Bloodborne*, is built from the ground up, with every element of story, space and gameplay considered throughout the design process. In an interview, Miyazaki details some of this approach as to what did and did not make it into the game:

> At the start of development, we had this forum where I'd write whatever came to mind on a daily basis and the rest of the team could browse through it. I'd write about things like the meaning of the mind's eye and its limitations upon people, or discussions about blood and beast transformations, and a really large amount of other meaningless stuff like that. Most of which really never made it into the game [SG, 2015: 539–540].

If done well, layers of meaning can be added to a game through the use of these kinds of details, and both the concept of environmental storytelling and Jenkins' notion of the micronarrative are an example of this. Yet there is more to be found in Yharnam than these miniature stories; aside from reading the details to illuminate the game's story, the overall design of the city and its different quarters are equally meaningful. To understand this process, it will be helpful to address some ideas on the use of architecture and world-building in games.

In his work, Totten highlights the importance of architecture within level design:

> Using architectural language that the player recognizes but may associate with exotic places is one way to enhance the experience of your game. These experiences enhance a game's ability to bring players into its make-believe world and provide the feeling that the player's actions have some sort of effect on important events [2014: 1].

Of particular relevance to the current study is Totten's assertion regarding the impact of this design approach, as "historical spaces have many lessons to teach about how space is composed. While form has always been a consideration of architects, historic buildings were also built with a great focus on the experience they created for visitors" (2014: 1). Totten continues by addressing

what he calls "the evolution of architectural experiences" (2014: 4): "These can be closely related to cultural factors of the times and places in which they were built. They often most closely reflect the ideas of the designers and builders of space. Experientially-focused buildings utilize space to create specific experiences or evoke some idea broader than the architecture itself" (2014: 4–5). Later in the book, Totten interestingly draws attention to the limitations of the approaches advocated by Carson, Jenkins, and Worch and Smith: "When a story becomes more specific, however, subtle environmental storytelling may not be enough" (2014: 278) Instead, he advocates the use of four different types of spaces, each of which adds to the narrative in a particular way:

- Evocative spaces "work because of our understanding of the *vernacular*, the architectural language of certain locales, established through symbol building" (2014: 276; author's emphasis) and Totten describes this vernacular as "vital for establishing story, tone, and giving the player some idea of what has happened in a place" (2014: 278);
- Staging spaces "are often unique and of large scale. They are easy to see as a player approaches them and often call attention to themselves through monumental architecture or unique features" (2014: 278);
- Embedded narrative spaces "contain narrative information in the architecture itself" (2014: 279) and "can be created with environment art by leaving evidence of use by characters or events that previously transpired in the space" (2014: 280);
- Resource-providing spaces play on the fact that "both architecture and gamespace have the advantage of interactivity—user interaction gives them meaning" (2014: 281) and these spaces "provide resources for emergent narrative [in that] they have some identifiable quality and […] inherently interactive features" (2014: 282).

Although there are parallels with the theories on environmental storytelling, Totten is more concerned with a higher-level approach to narrative. Rather than focusing on individual items and micronarratives, he asserts that the architecture and the resulting "feel" of a location as a whole impacts the player and thereby the story and their interpretation of it. The game spaces can be, for example, resource-providing spaces, filled with notes and detail, but the design of the building itself has a presence and equally demands to be read as part of the narrative. *Bloodborne* offers players a wealth of spaces in each of the categories, from its evocative Gothic architecture to the staging spaces of the often-imposing boss arenas, to areas like Old Yharnam where the history of this part of the city is embedded into each ruined wall.

In doing so, the game emphasizes elements of world-building over micronarrative, which presents a different framework for narrative descriptors:

> For works in which world-building occurs, there may be a wealth of details and events (or mere mentions of them) which do not advance the story but which provide background richness and verisimilitude to the imaginary world. Sometimes this material even appears out of the story itself, in the form of appendices, maps, timelines, glossaries of invented languages, and so forth. Such additional information can change the audience's experience, understanding, and immersion in a story, giving a deeper significance to characters, events, and details [Wolf, 2012: 2].

Furthermore, Wolf argues that "imaginary worlds may depend relatively little on narrative, and even when they do, they often rely on other kinds of structures for their form and organization" (2012: 3). Instead, the building of a universe requires different approaches, connecting seemingly disparate strands of narrative into a coherent story: "Whether through verbal description, visual design, sound design, or virtual spaces revealed through interaction, it is the world (sometimes referred to as the storyworld or diegetic world) that supports all the narratives set in it and that is constantly present during the audience's experience" (Wolf, 2012: 16–17). For Wolf, there is a separation between the world and the stories that occur within it, and he argues for a clear distinction between these elements: "Recognizing that the experience of a *world* is different and distinct from that of merely a *narrative* is crucial to seeing how worlds function apart from the narrative set within them, even though the narratives have much to do with the worlds in which they occur, and are usually the means by which the worlds are experienced" (2012: 11; author's emphasis). Acknowledging these differences allows one to be more aware of the impact and effect of the resulting narrative, and of the elements and processes underpinning this experience:

> How imaginary worlds work (when they are successful) depends on how they are constructed and how they invoke the imagination of the audience experiencing them. Worlds, unlike stories, need not rely on narrative structures, though stories are always dependent on the worlds in which they take place. Worlds extend beyond the stories that occur in them, inviting speculation and exploration through imaginative means [Wolf, 2012: 17].

Rather than offering a single story in their own right, worlds function as the site for stories to occur, illuminating and informing the more traditional narrative elements. Within Yharnam, many histories are running their course: of the Hunters and of the Healing Church; of Byrgenwerth and of Mensis. These larger legacies are framed by the stories of those who lived them: Gehrman, Willem, Ludwig, Laurence; of people like Gascoigne, Djura and

Eileen, and the few remaining old hunters; of the townsfolk like Gilbert and
Iosefka; and the story of the players themselves as they unravel the city's mys-
teries. Furthermore, viewing Yharnam as a world and a site for stories reveals
a number of larger themes and ideologies; in particular, it shows evidence of
the Gothic horrors Miyazaki drew his inspiration from.

In interviews, Miyazaki has acknowledged the inspiration he found in
both the Gothic and horror genres for the tone and feel of the game: "I think
Bloodborne has aspects of both Gothic and Cthulhu-style horror, but it's the
former that's depicted from the start and provides a guide for the game's
visual feel. […] And here, you have a world like that which is gradually being
eroded away by Cthulhu-style horror" (SG, 2015: 538). As was mentioned
previously, the Gothic is primarily concerned with the creation of an emo-
tional response in the reader, employing a number of narrative tactics to
achieve this affect. As Botting explains, "[k]nowledge and understanding do
not constitute the primary aim of gothic texts: what counts is the production
of affects and emotions, often extreme and negative: fear, anxiety, terror, hor-
ror, disgust and revulsion are staple emotional responses" (2013: 6). He argues,
"Gothic texts are, overtly but ambiguously, not rational, depicting distur-
bances of sanity and security, from superstitious belief in ghosts and demons,
displays of uncontrolled passion, violent emotion or flights of fancy to por-
trayals of perversion and obsession" (2013: 2). The mode uses numerous
strategies to influence the readers' experiences, and the use of space is one
of these. As Hogle explains, this can take the form of specific locations, spaces
which audiences are likely to recognize and which, in many ways, have come
to define the horror genre:

> [A] Gothic tale usually takes place (at least some of the time) in an antiquated or seem-
> ingly antiquated space … or some new recreation of an older venue…. Within this
> space, or a combination of such spaces, are hidden some secrets from the past (some-
> times the recent past) that haunt the characters, psychologically, physically, or other-
> wise at the main time of the story [2002: 2].

However, it is not just the materiality of the space that is of importance. As
Botting states, "[p]hysical locations and settings manifest disturbance and
ambivalence in spatial terms" (2013: 4), and any space is not simply a location:
"Physical space and material things seem thoroughly inter-penetrated with
fragmented, pathological and feverish forms of consciousness" (2013: 111).
These spaces may be the ruined castle, the graveyard at night, or the lonely
house on the hilltop, but over the years, the form has also made its way into
the cities, manifesting itself as urban Gothic. According to Warwick, "[u]rban
gothic has its roots in the close connection between architectural structure
and the psychological experience of characters in the earliest Gothic litera-

ture" (1998: 288). The architecture, then, forms not merely a background to the experiences of characters, but rather, it is capable of affecting them on a deeper level. This impact can be created by the types of structures described by Hogle, but the city proved to be a particular fertile ground as the setting for these emotional responses: "The city is seen as uncanny, constructed by people yet unknowable by the individual. […] The city is also a place of ruins, paradoxically always new but always decaying, a state of death-in-life" (Warwick, 1998: 288–289). Mighall offers a more specific definition of the form, describing how: "For Gothic *of* a city rather than just in a city, that city needs a concentration of memories and historical associations. Ideally these would be expressed in an extant architectural or topographical heritage…" (2007: 57; author's emphasis). Much like Totten's ideas on how architecture provides a meaningful game space which can aid in the creation of narrative, the urban Gothic becomes the site for histories, hauntings and anxieties, of events long past that once took place and continue to linger. In a more lyrical description of Yharnam, Martin offers exactly such a reading of Miyazaki's Gothic city:

> This is a city that feels like a nightmare vision of old Europe, with its bridges and spires, squares and alleys. There is a distinctive atmosphere that is carried through each area with a sense of restraint and an unflinching eye for detail. Statues and carvings each tell their own story and Yharnam feels like the most storied of cities—its strata made up of alternating layers of bricks and bodies [n.pag.].

There is a feeling of past-ness within the city, a clear sensation of what has come before, and of how it still impacts the lives of those who reside here now. And yet, much remains hidden: one of the main distinctions within Yharnam is its use of public and private spaces, of places which are hidden, or locked away, from prying eyes, and from the uninitiated. Although both Central Yharnam and Cathedral Ward include residential areas, these are often enclosed by locked gates and hidden ladders, perhaps in a vain bid for safety from the scourge and the beasts. Yet in Yahar'gul, the Unseen Village, even the name speaks of greater mysteries and of secrets best left alone, with some of these themes reflected in the very fabric of the city, where the architecture:

> as a collective entity clamors for space, so eager to become something absolute and grand that it threatens to collapse into nonsense. As spires are piled onto innumerable balustrades, arches, and buttresses, Yharnam reaches a plane of feverish obsession that echoes the cosmic communion this civilization pursued to its ruin. Order has been sacrificed for contact with the sublime and a chance to explore the mind's uncharted labyrinths [Barzan, 2015: n.pag.].

Martin corroborates this view and comments that "*Bloodborne* is the epitome of gothic revival—where subjectivity replaces spirituality, and man strives to

plumb the depths of human experience. Its Victorian trappings are not simply window dressing, but the marks of a distinct gothic worldview" (n.pag.). Yharnam is dead, decaying, limping towards its inevitable end. Once a great city, it has been corrupted by its inhabitants, their unbridled aspirations and otherworldly dealings, and every aspect of its design emphasizes this. Within *Bloodborne*'s universe, the narrative devices of the Gothic become embedded in the landscape, signifying layers of meaning within the buildings, the areas, as well as their respective locations and connections. The fragmented narrative that is so typical of the form finds expression within Miyazaki's storytelling, with narrative descriptors found in the most unlikely of places.

Earlier in this chapter, I quoted Miyazaki's involvement in and views on map (and level) design. *Bloodborne*'s architecture, its arches and spires, communicate and reinforce the themes of the game, but so do the placements of the areas themselves. As Parkin writes, the Soulsborne games "place [players] in terrifying, intricate worlds that work like a series of fiendish clockwork traps, complete with spike pits, poison mists and falling masonry" (2015: n.pag.). The result of this is twofold: it offers a particular experience to players, allowing them to get lost, to fill them with fear as to what could be around each corner, and to locate hidden shortcuts. Furthermore, the intricacy of Miyazaki's map design becomes a narrative descriptor in the organization and relationship between areas. Like the details of environmental storytelling that can be found within the city, the location of each quarter and the connections between them offer an additional layer to *Bloodborne*'s narrative. Within such a reading, Central Yharnam functions as a baseline of sorts. It is the player's first encounter with the city and its design, showing them the towers and arches, bridges and cobbles, stairs and gates. Unlike other games, which may be more linear, *Bloodborne* uses a design approach known as semi-open world. Players will often have more than one option as to where to explore next, without losing themselves in additional quests or side missions. Within this structure, *Bloodborne* is arguably self-referential in its layout: its spaces connect in meaningful ways through numerous shortcuts and offer players a view of places they have visited or are yet to visit. The starting location in Central Yharnam, for example, just outside Iosefka's clinic, gives players a view of the Great Bridge in the distance. Once they have progressed far enough to reach the bridge itself, players will be able to make out the clinic and the streets where they started their journey, creating both a sense of achievement at how far they have come, as well as the experience of being in a real city. This sensation carries on throughout the city, and the game as a whole, where its design is not just consistent within an area, but between areas.

Interestingly, it is not just the visual connections which are of note within *Bloodborne*, but also the physical routes. As the starting area, Central Yharnam offers much to players in terms of how they situate themselves within the world. As they discover more of the city, they will find that Cathedral Ward, the religious heart, so concerned with themes of higher powers, higher knowledge and ascension, is perched above the residential center of Yharnam. To reach the Ward, players will find themselves climbing stairs, moving upwards until they reach the pinnacle of the Grand Cathedral. The normal connection between Central Yharnam and the Ward, the Great Bridge, is found blocked by the first optional boss players can encounter, the Cleric Beast. Evidencing the hideous transformation that was the fate of so many members of the Healing Church, the Cleric Beast itself and its position (jumping onto the Bridge from inside Cathedral Ward) aids players in their process of meaning-making. Finding the bridge blocked, the aqueduct which runs underneath the city becomes the means through which players enter the Ward, where, after traveling across a second bridge, through a graveyard and a locked gate, up a ladder and through a deserted library underneath Oedon Chapel, players enter Cathedral Ward through the back entrance, as it were. Their access to the Ward and the knowledge it holds, the ordinary route, is blocked, and there is a need for them to seemingly sneak their way into the district instead, out of sight of the Church which holds so much power. In contrast to the height and verticality of Cathedral Ward, Old Yharnam is found at the bottom of an abandoned chapel, down several flights of steps. It is the past that the Church has left behind and tried to hide. Interestingly, players can only access this area via Cathedral Ward, positioning the Healing Church as a gatekeeper of sorts, thus emphasizing its attempts to hide the evidence of the burning of the old city. The destroyed buildings and wooden walkways offer interesting routes within Old Yharnam itself, allowing players to wind their way through its ruined streets. However, due to its position underneath the Ward and the city proper, little else can be seen from this vantage point. The vista that stretches before the players is one of ruin and decay, an old town, burnt and abandoned, further heightening its sense of isolation from Yharnam itself. This disconnect is realized both in terms of physical location and in the narrative arc which unfolds: Djura is a Retired Hunter who has turned his back on the practices of the hunt, instead making his home here and protecting the beasts within the district from those who wish them harm. He has distanced himself physically from the city and its practices, isolating himself in this deserted place, unwilling to partake in the hunt and leaving that part of his past, and of the city, far behind.

A similar sense of disconnect is apparent in the design of Yahar'gul, and

particularly the way in which players are introduced to this area. This story event can be missed, but it is clear that the intention of the designers is for players to come upon the Kidnappers by accident, and without the ability to defeat them. This encounter, of being knocked out and transported to an area of the game not previously visited, with no knowledge and no way to return to safety, surrounded by strong enemies, is a particularly frightening one. Although *Bloodborne* offers players a prompt, defining the area as Yahar'gul, the Unseen Village, this does little to alleviate one's fear. The name and its location, seemingly outside of Yharnam, frame the area as hidden, unknown, and unknowable. It is the place for twisted religion and unholy acts, a place of secrets and ritual, and initially, the Unseen Village appears like its name: unseen and unconnected, isolated from Yharnam. Interestingly, there are connections into the city, but these physical passageways into Yahar'gul are not unlocked until much later in the game. A door connecting the Unseen Village to Old Yharnam can only be accessed after defeating Darkbeast Paarl, an optional boss which resides outside the village walls, and players have to drop down several walkways to reach him. Although a door into Old Yharnam can be unlocked here, the path runs in one direction only: players can drop down from Yahar'gul to reach Old Yharnam, but the village cannot be entered via this route. Upon a second visit to the Unseen Village at a later point in the game, a previously locked door is opened to the player, revealing a route running from Yahar'gul into an abandoned chapel in the Cathedral Ward. It is a place which players are likely to be aware of, as they will have encountered it during their exploration of the city. The use of this door is not made obvious, and the pathway between Cathedral Ward and Yahar'gul can go unnoticed, but upon closer consideration, its presence offers pertinent information to the player. The practices of the Healing Church, they have learned, have led to specific events and consequences within the city, with the destruction of Old Yharnam as the pinnacle of these actions. Despite this, Cathedral Ward remains at the center of Yharnam's religion and many of the townsfolk continue to sing the praises of the Church. Yet what does this pathway between the two districts signify? Are the twisted rituals and dark practices of Yahar'gul known to the Church, perhaps even condoned by them? What else does the Church know, and to what extent is the organization responsible for what has taken place within the village, and the city? Whatever the answer, these four districts and the way they are situated in relation to one another helps to define player experience, both in terms of gameplay and narrative. The themes of darkness and decay, of forbidden knowledge and humanity's collapse, find their way into every step players take within Yharnam.

These ideas are consolidated into a single character, present at the edges of *Bloodborne*'s world. It is the figure of the woman dressed in white, a white veil covering her face. You first encounter her in a cutscene after the fight with Rom, the Vacuous Spider, at the Moonside Lake. After Rom's defeat, as you look across the vast whiteness that surrounds you, she will appear to you. Her hands cover her face and you hear a desperate sobbing, the crying of a woman and of an infant. Blood stains the front of her dress, around her abdomen; was she pregnant, and has she lost the baby? You can only guess as she removes her hands and stares up at the sky before disappearing into the distance. A second meeting happens much later, in the Nightmare of Mensis. You can see her closer to you and approach her, but she is unable, or unwilling, to talk to you. Once more, you find her crying, looking up at the sky, but his time, her face is visible, white and gaunt, the same shade as her dress, again stained with blood. Her hands are clasped together as if in prayer, but when you carefully approach her, you can see they are bound by shackles. Although you try to engage her, she does not respond, and you move on, to the top of the tower she is facing, up to Mergo's Loft, where you encounter Mergo's Wet Nurse. Returning to the woman in the white dress after defeating this foe, you quickly run to her, but you are not fast enough: she simply bows to you, as if in thanks, and fades out. Who is she, and what is her purpose here? She has shown herself to you twice, and twice, she has disappeared, and yet you know she has some business with you.

You will meet her again within the Chalice Dungeons,[2] those labyrinths running underneath the city. Uncovering the passageways and rituals that once brought forth the Great Ones, you travel down, ever deeper, until you reach that final room. Within it, an altar, and the woman in white. This time, she does not remain passive, attacking you on sight. Her appearance is as you remember: the white dress, the bound hands, the stained abdomen, but the swelling of her stomach is more pronounced. The cries of a newborn punctuate the battle, and you wonder whether she might be pregnant. Blood is at the source of many of her attacks, and where this substance ordinarily heals and sustains, hers is poisonous to you. When you finally manage to defeat her, she leaves behind a single item, the Yharnam Stone, evidence of who she is: "A sacred heirloom left by Yharnam, Pthumerian Queen. The Queen lies dead, but her horrific consciousness is only asleep, and it stirs in unsettling motions" (SG, 2015: 465).

Despite its attention to its histories, the people and their legacies, *Bloodborne* offers little information in terms of the origins and founding of Yharnam. The name could be construed that it is a mere word, a flicker of sound, passed down without meaning until it became the city, but the appearance

of Queen Yharnam hints at other readings. She can be perceived as the double of Yharnam, its personification, a weird reflection of the city and its histories. As a ghostly figure, she still shows herself to the player, and within the Chalice Dungeons, players are tasked to fight her and the corruption within the town. The blood, distilled by the Healing Church, which has sustained and condemned so many to a terrible fate, and which in turn sustains the player character, in her hands becomes diseased, dangerous. The bleed attacks Queen Yharnam inflicts during the boss encounter are poisonous to the player, evidence of the corruption that ravaged the city. She is the very last boss of the Chalice Dungeons, a final stand, a fateful encounter with Yharnam that is decaying before the players' eyes. In defeating Queen Yharnam, have players wrought their ultimate revenge upon this unholy place and all it brought forth? The Yharnam Stone begs to differ: "The Queen lies dead, but her horrific consciousness is only asleep, and it stirs in unsettling motions" (SG, 2015: 465). This Queen, this place, may be dead, but the cycle appears unending. Its legacy lives on, still stirring, its spaces a testament to the atrocities that were committed here, where simply walking its streets does not leave players unaffected, or unharmed, its corruption ever present.

In contrast to the first part of this work, which discussed the intricate fabric of *Bloodborne*'s more traditional story elements, it is the game's spaces which are the focus here. The city of Yharnam, its design and its architecture, impact on the narrative in a variety of ways and aid in the creation of meaning and interpretation by the player. Not only does Bloodborne offer players a deeper insight into its plot through the objects and scenes left within the world, but the choices on the map and level design and the connections between areas further draw attention to the overarching themes and ideologies underpinning the game world and those who reside within it. It is a site of history and a stage for current events, a place of residence and of lives lost. Each winding street, towering spire, and hidden staircase draws the player into the space and the stories contained within it, providing evidence of the city's ultimate decay. Barzan typifies Yharnam as "the environmental protagonist in Miyazaki's evolving theme of humanity's collapse" (2015: n.pag.), where the game space becomes part of the fragmented Gothic narrative that Miyazaki wishes to convey, plumbing the very depths of corruption and inviting players to fight Yharnam itself. Within the city, players can find evidence of the micronarratives emphasized by environmental storytelling as envisaged in the texts from Carson, Jenkins and Worch and Smith that have been cited here. In addition, there is a bigger concern here in terms of form and genre. As has been explained previously, Miyazaki himself sees *Bloodborne* as a specifically Gothic text, and much is revealed by reading the game in this light.

The use of the Gothic mode is evidenced by the traditional story elements and the ideas that can be found there, of a quest for forbidden knowledge and, in Barzan's words, humanity's collapse. However, it is not just content which defines *Bloodborne* as a Gothic text, but also its form. The use of specific devices such as the fragmented narrative further emphasize this connection where architecture and world-building, as discussed by Totten and Wolf, invite specific readings in a way that is unique to the Soulsborne games. Like *Dark Souls* before it, *Bloodborne*'s universe is diseased, deceased, evidencing a worldview that is ultimately bleak in its outlook. And yet, as Martin tells us, there is a strange beauty here: "Hours after you drag yourself out of the dingy corners of central Yharnam to the heights of the Cathedral Ward, buffeted by the winds that tell of a coming storm, you'll gaze down on the spires and spindly alleys and almost think it looks peaceful. Almost beautiful" (n.pag.). Although these themes persist throughout the game, they become more apparent in the areas of the Nightmare, to be discussed in the third chapter of Part II. The topic of the next chapter, Yharnam's environs, leans more heavily on the tropes of the Gothic and horror. Players are led to an abandoned town, a dark wood, a haunted castle and a seat of scholars and forbidden knowledge, serving to highlight Miyazaki's indebtedness not just to more deep-seated terrors, but also to the more classic scenes and settings of the form. Like Yharnam before it, they each have a story to tell, isolated scenes in a larger context of despair and depravity.

5

Environs

You are careful as you venture down the path; apprehensive, even. It was only with a password that you could gain access to these forbidden woods to make your way to that old institution. Many have told you of this place, but no one seems to know anything for certain. Its role, its legacy, in the history of Yharnam and the founding of the Healing Church are well-documented, yet this ancient place of learning is now forbidden territory, guarded by codes and ciphers and the dangers that lurk between the trees. You have just defeated the final three guardians, three dark figures shrouded in black. Following the path, you are aware of the sound of your footsteps amidst the trees, and of the weird rustlings and cries from the abominations hiding nearby. Human-like figures with wings and feelers and covered in eyes; other creatures like giant, luminous insects, nothing human about them at all. Yet finally, you are here, at the place that holds so many unspoken secrets: Byrgenwerth.

In the previous chapter, I started to explore the world of *Bloodborne*, examining the cityscape of Yharnam. Elements of game design and environment can often help and, in the case of the Soulsborne series, are vital in the construction of the game world and its history, and the construction of the levels and the game world is one of the tools used by Miyazaki to put together his enticing, but opaque, narratives. Here, I wish to investigate the outlying areas that make up the second act of the game, before moving on to the more surreal and nightmarish realms in the next chapter. Yharnam is, in many ways, the centerpiece of *Bloodborne*. It is the first location visited by the player, and it is on its streets that the sad lives of the Yharnamites have played themselves out. This city, so grand in its day, heralded for its scientific advances, ruled by its Healing Church, oft visited by outsiders in search of a cure, is empty, its streets overrun with coffins and tormented beings that may once have been human. Its great heights and disconcerting depths, from the Grand Cathedral down to Old Yharnam, paint a picture of a layered history, steeped

in blood and built on the bones of those who have passed. It is not in Yharnam, however, that the revelations of the game take place. The Healing Church and its affiliated institutions, its experiments, their origins and horrifying results, can be found elsewhere, in places that at times are real, and at times may not be. Yharnam is the site of many of the events, the seat of the past. It is a place of exploration, where players can discover the first clues as to what might have taken place. In turn, the nightmares are the spaces that help in answering these questions. In between the two lie the areas that are the focus of this chapter: Hemwick Charnel Lane; Cainhurst Castle; the Forbidden Woods; and Byrgenwerth. Each of these presents an interesting relationship to the main game: two of the areas are optional, and although Byrgenwerth is pivotal to the narrative from a lore perspective (as discussed in Part I of this book), its appearance in the game serves purposes beyond those concerned with story and content. Both the woods and the college are mentioned often, and in many ways serve as the source of both the nightmare and the dream, yet their portrayal in the game situates them almost as a footnote, a place of history lost in time. In addition, it is worthwhile to point out the ways in which these locations are accessed. Within the city, all areas are available to the player from the start of the game: gaining access requires exploration, the finding of pathways, and is often rewarded through the unlocking of shortcuts, making it easier to navigate the perilous streets. Hemwick, and more specifically Cainhurst, the Forbidden Woods and Byrgenwerth, require specific items or actions for players to gain access to them. Through traveling to them, players move into Yharnam's past, accessing not only a physical location, but rather the symbolic representation of history. As will be explained in more detail later in this chapter, each of the areas harks back to those familiar spaces of the Gothic mode: the cultist village, dark forest, medieval castle and deserted academic institution. These incarnations may be seen as mere tropes, but through their reinvention in light of *Bloodborne*'s narrative their apparent familiarity only serves to make their traversal more unnerving.

In order to understand the position of these four areas in relation to the rest of the game, it will be helpful to both return to and expand on some of the ideas presented in the previous chapter. As in Yharnam, the environs offer a combination of larger themes and micronarratives; rather than presenting wholly new strands of story, Hemwick, Cainhurst, the Woods and Byrgenwerth help to deepen certain themes of *Bloodborne*'s lore. As Wolf explains, "for works in which world-building occurs, there may be a wealth of details and events (or mere mentions of them) which do not advance the story but which provide background richness and verisimilitude to the imag-

inary world" (2012: 2), and I propose to frame these areas in such a way. Although players are required to traverse two of them to progress in the game (the Forbidden Woods and Byrgenwerth), and at least one of these is significant within the wider lore of the game, namely the old college, the locations themselves do little to directly advance the knowledge of the player regarding the institution, its history, and the events which took place there. In addition, the four types of spaces put forward by Totten will help to provide some framework for the analysis of the areas. As he argues, game spaces can be divided into four categories: evocative spaces, staging spaces, embedded narrative spaces, and resource-providing spaces. The latter two are closest to the function of environmental storytelling, whereby certain elements of the game world, and in particular items found within the game space, are used to provide players with narrative information or usable items to help them progress and to facilitate emergent gameplay, and the areas discussed here combine some of Totten's categories. The locations are, first and foremost, examples of evocative spaces, which "work because of our understanding of the *vernacular*" (2014: 276; author's emphasis), as in their design, they draw upon a preexisting language of place. Specifically, the environs invoke certain genre conventions, depicting the classic Gothic spaces of old villages, dark woodlands, corrupted academia and medieval castles. In using these locations, *Bloodborne* points to a wider legacy, whilst using items and encounters to incorporate them into its specific interpretation of these places, and in doing so, turns the areas into resource-providing spaces. As Totten explains, "In games, landmarks and interactive elements give users incentives to utilize level spaces for more than just travel" (2014: 282), and in this section of the game, it is through a variety of carefully placed items that narrative detail is added. Hemwick, Cainhurst, the Woods and Byrgenwerth each draw on Gothic conventions whilst presenting a part of the game world which is unique in its scope and contents, adding their story to the game's narrative. This process will become clearer when each location is examined in turn.

It is when you approach the Grand Cathedral that you become aware of the existence of Hemwick Charnel Lane, by following a path to the left, where a few stone steps bring you to the small churchyard. Whereas most cathedrals would seem proud to display the graves of their followers who have found their final resting place near the safety of its walls, this dark plot of land feels hidden, tucked away. Most of all, it feels too small to hold the dead of Yharnam, where generations have lived and prayed at the Cathedral. Surely, its graveyard would be more prominent, and more importantly, larger? A path that has been trodden between the grave markers brings you to a tunnel, roughly hewn from dense rock, its path littered with headstones, the dead

spilling over from the Cathedral and into these surroundings. When you emerge from the cavern, a clearing sprawls in front of you, where dry trees push towards the sky, their roots masking the multitude of graves set at their base. You walk forward, slowly, in reverence for those who are buried here, but not all have the same decorum: a shot rings out, a dog's vicious bark, and the next moment, you are running for cover. A group of men armed with shotguns steps out from behind the gravestones as you weave your way between them, with no choice but to take out each in turn, before running down the trail that leads away from this clearing, ending at a small gate.

Mad cackling greets you as you push it open, and after descending a few stone steps, you are confronted with a terrifying vista: a number of women, some crouching, some dancing, all revering a pyre, a statue at its center. Each is carrying a weapon of some kind, basic tools like sickles, hammers, and cleavers. They seem enraptured as they swirl between the gravestones that here, too, are ubiquitous. You will see them appear throughout the area, sometimes alone, often in groups or accompanied by some form of guard dog. Like the Yharnamites, the movement of the women is purposeful as they go about their business. The ever present fire and smoke, billowing from underground pipes and out through the hamlet's towers, hint at the furnaces buried inside and underneath, and each of these foes seems to be carrying a particular type of item: small stone pebbles, carved to resemble an eye, with a select few even holding actual Bloodshot Eyeballs, "an exquisite eyeball removed quickly after death, or perhaps even before" (SG, 2015: 324). The reference to Hemwick as a Charnel Lane is rather apt: a village away from Yharnam devoted to the disposal of the dead. The steps and paths you have followed down from the Grand Cathedral were lined with graves, and it is here the bodies seem to end up, either in shallow graves or on stretchers, to be treated and harvested. The final enemy in this area is further testament to this: the Witch of Hemwick, a crooked old crone covered in eyes, coveting eyes, her room lined with corpses suspended from the ceiling. What happens to the bodies afterwards is not difficult to guess when you remember the smoke and flames, especially when seen in connection with another item, the Bone Marrow Ash: "Additional medium that strengthens Quicksilver Bullets. According to the workshop, this is special bone marrow ash collected from Hemwick Charnel Lane" (SG, 2015: 454). It would appear that the bodies transported here are not given proper burial rites; rather, they are used for other ends. Hemwick appears as a place to dispose of those who have fallen victim to the beasts or the Ashen Blood, operating in symbiosis with the Church: those who inhabit the hamlet dispose of Yharnam's diseased bodies, but not until they have been harvested. With the Witch slain, all you can do

is hope that this might be the end of Hemwick and its practices, and that you have dealt another blow to that which the Healing Church so desperately tries to hide. There is nothing left for you to do here except to retrace your steps to Yharnam, and to follow the instructions found in the locket of Vicar Amelia.

It is only with a password that you are able to enter among the dark trees of the Forbidden Woods. A small alleyway, hidden at one of the plazas in the Cathedral Ward, brings you to a set of stairs and a locked door. When you knock, a wheezing voice asks you for the words that will grant you access, the words obtained from the gold pendant, and glimpsed from the conversation between Master Willem and Laurence. You answer the voice, "Fear the Old Blood," and the door opens before you, revealing no one behind it, the voice apparently originating from the skeleton perched behind the gate. Unsettled, you continue down more stairs, until you suddenly come out into the woods themselves. Aside from the shrubs dotted around Hemwick Charnel Lane, it is the first natural environment you have encountered since your arrival in Yharnam. Some paths are carved out, yet you soon find yourself disappearing amidst rock and trees, a number of tumble-down huts and an old windmill punctuating your search for a way through. Guided by the small lanterns scattered along the path, you wander over wet earth and between low grasses and a mass of gravestones, finding patches of flowers, which lend a stillness, even a beauty, to the area. Danger is never far away, though, as you feel the ground give way underneath you and you fall down a slope, into a pit, or are nearly missed by one of the many traps strewn around these Woods. At first, the enemies here are ones you recognize: huntsmen and their dogs in various stages of beasthood and decay. They seem to have made their home here, outside of Yharnam, and you even encounter some who still have their senses: one, who offers you an item; the other, an old woman, desperate for you to leave her alone. Near her cottage, a pathway is revealed to you, hewn into the rock. Covered in strange, bulbous flowers and more than a few piles of bones, the soil a mixture of rocks and sand, and the path ending in a pool of stagnant, poisonous water, this small cave is guarded by several Church Giants. Unarmed, and lacking the distinctive dress that makes them recognizable in Cathedral Ward, the Giants still carry the characteristic bell around their neck, slowly patrolling the area. Able to dodge their swipes, you dart towards the back of the cave, where you find an inlet, and a ladder. Curiosity drives you as you climb higher, then higher still, the rock face morphing into bricks and mortar and wooden struts, the inside of a building. Another ladder leads to Yharnam proper, to a courtyard and the locked gate, next to Iosefka's Clinic. Further investigation reveals a back entrance to the

Clinic itself and the room in which you woke up. On the bed where you received your treatment, a letter has been left for you.

Part of the Woods is still waiting, so you leave the city behind and return to the cave and the trees. They seem to be closer together, the woods darker now. The huntsmen, enemies yet at the same time almost like old friends, are nowhere to be found, replaced instead by weird hybrids, hissing abominations known as Snake Balls, some so large they tower over you. Others appear human, only revealing their sibilant nature when you approach them, their snake-like appendages lunging at you from great distances. Dropping down into a canyon of some kind in an attempt to get away, you find yourself on a silent and seemingly deserted path. It is the noise that first alerts you, and you whip around, weapon poised, only to see someone, something, vaguely human, yet nothing like it. A head, arms and legs, and you think can even detect eyes, its body formed by a blue gelatinous mass, which emits a strangely soothing warbling noise: Celestial Emissaries. They run at you and seem to deflate when you strike them down. Shaken, you run, dodging under trees, running through puddles that appear the size of lakes, until you finally arrive in a clearing, punctuated by giant tombstones and guarded by three hooded figures: the Shadows of Yharnam, protectors of the city, and perhaps of its Queen. You use the obstacles in this clearing to hide, then strike, taking them down. Once gone, their absence reveals a door and the pathway to that forbidden institution: Byrgenwerth.

Before visiting the college, however, you take out the letter you found inside Iosefka's Clinic, an invitation for "an honoured guest to the forsaken Castle Cainhurst. Rather bafflingly, it is addressed to you" (SG, 2015: 464), which guides you back to Hemwick. It is not without trepidation that you approach the obelisk at the crossing in the village. Who knows of your presence here, and who may have written the letter, is beyond your understanding, but you have made your way to this spot to honor the invitation. There is not long to wait: as soon you arrive, a carriage announces itself with a rumble of hoofs and wheels. The door of the coach, emblazoned with an unknown coat of arms, swings open; whether invitingly or menacingly, you are not sure. Yet without hesitation you clamber into the carriage, ignoring the feeling of being watched, and you take off. Howling winds, a snowstorm, and finally, the outline of the majestic castle that you had spotted across the lake. The coach halts and you alight, confronting the ornate edifice, but as you turn, you discover that the road you travelled to get here ends in rubble and a sheer drop; as for the carriage, its horses are long dead, rotting and decayed, preserved by the frost. With a shiver, you turn around and walk through the gate. Once inside the castle walls, you are soon beset by weird new creatures: giant spider-

like women, crawling around on four legs, feasting on blood. Hunchbacked servants, desperately scrubbing the floors and features of the castle's empty chambers. Winged beings, grey as the stone of the walls, hiding between the statues. Dozens of ghostly women, aimlessly wandering the halls, appearing to you out of thin air, their cries piercing the silence as they attack. Once safe, each room and hall you enter breathes history and splendor, its furnishings lavish, its walls covered in tapestries and paintings, its library stretching over several floors, gold and brass ornaments gleaming at you from the shadows. Aside from those who wish you harm, you have met no one inside the castle, yet everything is kept as if the lord or lady who rules these halls will return at any moment.

The items you find reveal more of the history of this place, telling of Cainhurst and its knights, and of the ancient line of Vilebloods. It confirms the stories that Alfred told you, of how a Byrgenwerth scholar brought forbidden blood to this forsaken castle, where "the first of the inhuman Vilebloods was born, […] fiendish creatures who threaten the purity of the Church's blood healing." Alfred, too, told you of the Executioners, hunters from the Church established to cleanse Cainhurst of its defiled inhabitants, and that their leader, Master Logarius, was left behind here, "abandoned in the accursed domain of the Vilebloods." As you walk the castle walls and climb onto the rooftops, you eventually come upon Logarius. Haltingly rising from his stone throne, the old executioner attacks with impunity, soaring over your head as his sword and scythe find purchase again and again. Strange magical attacks are fired, and you find yourself dodging between skulls, screaming death's heads made of smoke, summoned by this hunter. When he falls, Logarius leaves behind the Crown of Illusions, "the old king's crown […] said to reveal illusions, and expose a mirage that hides a secret" (SG, 2015: 487), and, unsure what to do, you place it on your head. The biting wind and whirling snow seem to intensify, causing you to shield your face and stumble to the ground. When the air clears, another section of the castle is revealed to you, a large structure of additional chambers filled with statues, and at the far end, the lady of the castle. She asks you to show her the respect she deserves, only willing to talk when you kneel and address her correctly. Surrounded by candlelight, a rich carpet underneath your feet, you bow before her, and hear her words: "Visitor…. Moon-scented hunter…. I am Annalise, Queen of Castle Cainhurst. Ruler of the Vilebloods, and sworn enemy of the church." Reaching out, she offers you the option to join her, to "take oath against the church"; although you are unsure of the implications, you have learned enough about the Healing Church to be willing to join her. Her response is immediate, but simple: "If thou wouldst this path walk…. I

prithee partake of my rotted blood. […] Drink deep of Our blood. Feel the spreading corruption burn. Now, thou'rt too a Vileblood. We two, the very last on this earth." You nod, and with a bow, you take leave of your Queen.

After Cainhurst, you know, there is still more to explore: Byrgenwerth, the old seat of learning. The path behind the door, guarded by the Shadows of Yharnam, appears to be well-kept, lanterns lighting your way, yet it is not without dangers. The moment you see the abomination jump out behind you, part human, part insect, its head covered in eyes, you are startled, but not surprised; the stories about this place have prepared you for the worst. In the gardens surrounding the college, punctuated by oddly hunched statues, and on the steps and patio out front, closer to the lake, you find similar enemies, but you cannot be sure whether they are actively patrolling or simply wandering around, left to their fate. There is little time to muse their movement, however, as a bright bolt of energy lands nearby, and you turn to see an insect-like being, crawling around on more legs than you are able to count, a maw of teeth visible underneath it, its entire being vaguely luminous. When it attacks a second time, fireballs missing you by inches, you know it is time to take action, and it does not take long before its form has crumbled before you. With a moment to catch your breath, you survey the lake, and are reminded of the Lake rune from Hemwick and the Arcane Lake rune found here, close to the water's edge: "Great volumes of water serve as a bulwark guarding sleep, and an augur of the eldritch Truth. Overcome this hindrance, and seek what is yours" (SG, 2015: 473). Musing over another cryptic hint, you finally find an open door and enter the building. Amongst old furniture and equipment, you find books and documents strewn on the floor as if the place has been raided, and the disarray gives you pause. Perhaps this sense of unease and caution is not unfounded, as it is not long before a hunter hurries down the stairs. Dressed in the attire associated with the Choir, in possession of arcane weapons, she is a formidable opponent, but in-between exchanging blows, you wonder why she is here, and what information she may have been in the process of uncovering before you showed up. Access to Byrgenwerth may be forbidden, but it is clear that the higher strata of the Church are not only aware of, but still visit the college; the direct route from Cathedral Ward to the Forbidden Woods and the password obtained from Vicar Amelia confirm this fact.

As you search the upper floors of the college, you encounter a locked door, and certain items you have not yet seen before, each linked to the arcane arts: a Pearl Slug, used in Chalice rituals; Blue Elixir, "a type of anesthetic that numbs the brain," which is useful to hunters for "a secondary effect of the medicine, which dilutes their presence while standing still" (SG, 2015:

451); and hidden in a chest in the rafters, the Empty Phantasm Shell, which may "still harbour arcane power, and can be rubbed on weapons to imbue them with their strength" (SG, 2015: 458). Perhaps this explains the presence of the Choir hunter: she may have attempted to gain access to these valuables, or perhaps, like so many, she has gone insane. The discovery of two new items, Great One's Wisdom, "fragments of the lost wisdom of the Great Ones" (SG, 2015: 467), and the Sedatives, a concoction to calm the nerves as "those who delve into the arcane fall all-too-easily into madness" (SG, 2015: 447), implies the proximity of lunacy. Your search has uncovered a final trinket: the key to unlock the one closed door you have found, which leads to the Lunarium, a space "facing the lake on the second floor of Byrgenwerth College," said to be favored by Master Willem, "fond of the lookout, and the rocking chair he kept there for meditation" (SG, 2015: 463). It is upon unlocking the door and stepping out into the night air that you find the Provost himself, surveying the Moonside Lake gleaming in the pale moonlight. Slowly, you approach him, but this time, there is no need to fear; old and wizened, barely able to move, Master Willem poses no threat. You try to converse with him, but he is unable to speak, powerless to utter more than a plaintive sigh. He seems to understand your purpose, however, as he raises his staff and points to the lake, reminding you of the final piece of information connected to the Lunarium Key, informing you that "he left his secret with the lake" (SG, 2015: 463), this body of water, an augur of the eldritch Truth. Still you hesitate, and try to speak to Willem once more, but no other words are forthcoming. Turning towards the water, towards the pale full moon above it, you slowly repeat the final descriptor of the Lake rune: "Overcome this hindrance, and seek what is yours" (SG, 2015: 473). With a deep breath, you step forward, off the platform, and plunge into the depths below.

As can be seen from the previous section, each of the areas discussed displays a different approach to the concept of world-building when compared to the exploration of Yharnam itself. Where the city is one of a few core locations, consisting of multiple districts and packed with significant details, the setup of Hemwick, Cainhurst, the Forbidden Woods and Byrgenwerth requires a slightly different approach, as the city's environs represent a more advanced style of constructing and, more specifically, fleshing out the world of *Bloodborne*. Each has a story to add to the main framework of lore, yet these elements are presented in interesting new ways. The journey of the hunter is central in *Bloodborne*, but primarily from the perspective of gameplay. It is the position players take when they enter this world, and it is how they interact with enemies, other characters, and the environment. As explained across previous chapters, the initial hours spent within the city

help to frame the player and their function, whilst the second and third act of the game are a way into the history of Yharnam. It is in these parts that the player is less able to influence the world directly, but rather, their experience becomes focused on the discovery of the town's past, and the way in which it affects the current situation. Whereas the Nightmare areas, the topic for the following chapter, are as important as the city, the environs are more concerned with providing depth and expansion of the world as described by Wolf. Although narrative information is added, it could be argued that the stories discovered in each location feed into the main lore in a different way than Yharnam and the Nightmare. The framework presented by Wolf to chart such a process will be helpful to better understand the construction and significance of these narratives:

> Worlds are built up as more and more stories are set in them, and if a world's consistency is to be maintained, each additional story to be added to a world must take into account all of the narrative material already present in the world. Often stories are related chronologically to each other and can be arranged in a sequence, fitting together the stories' events on the timelines of the world. Additional stories can recontextualize the works that appear before them: new information can change our frame of reference; characters can be revealed to have different motivations or even to be lying; and different points of view can change how we understand characters and story events [2012: 205].

It is the function and development of these "additional stories" that are relevant here, in that each of the environs helps to frame the overarching narrative of *Bloodborne* in a particular way. Seen as a counterpoint to Yharnam's organized architecture, these areas move into elements of nature, of age and decay, of old buildings and old bloodlines. Each location adds its footnote to Yharnam's history, reflecting and refracting the struggles that have gone on, and casting a light on certain details of the game's events. The individual strands help to enrich the game by adding to what Wolf terms the narrative fabric of the world. As he explains, "we can broadly define narrative as a series of events which are causally connected, and narrative units as the events themselves," and he continues: "Such a chain of events, often referred to as a *narrative thread*, typically revolves around the experiences of a particular character, place, or even an inanimate object" (2012: 199; author's emphasis). In the case of *Bloodborne*, this narrative thread consists primarily of the journey of the player character and the stories they tell about their actions and victories within the game's hostile world. However, this is not the only thread to be found, either in this game, or in many other media like it, as "[many stories] bring together multiple narrative threads which run concurrently, with events that happen simultaneously in multiple threads.

As multiple threads share the same diegetic materials, themes, or events, the individual threads can become tightly woven together into what we might call *narrative braids*" (2012: 199; author's emphasis). As Wolf explains, each thread adds further detail and depth to the story, and by extension, to the story world. As a result, "[a]s more information is added, the narrative material of the world grows more complex than that of a set of braids, and becomes what we might call a *narrative fabric*" (2012: 200; author's emphasis). This fabric may include the intertwining of storylines, as well as external elements such as timelines and genealogies, and as Wolf argues, "[b]y allowing the audience to assemble narrative threads from world material, narrative fabric greatly increases a world's illusion of completeness, as well as the audience's engagement in the world" (2012: 201). The use of threads, braids and fabric creates detail within a narrative and in doing so, fleshes out the world. Rather than focusing on the protagonist and their story, the presence of information outside of traditional narrative descriptors will aid feelings of player agency and discovery.

As I have tried to show, Yharnam's environs focus on the building of such a narrative fabric as their function is to provide this kind of story detail by adding to existing braids, rather than creating new threads. As opposed to the streets of Yharnam, which, although far from crowded, house a fair share of NPCs, the environs are largely deserted, with only four NPCs present across all four areas, one of whom, Provost Willem, is essentially mute. Similarly, each area is less direct in the information it conveys. In Yharnam, players are able to hear firsthand accounts, and to visit the places and buildings that have played such a key role in the development and downfall of the city. Aside from Byrgenwerth, the environs are outliers of Yharnam, and of Yharnam's stories, but each area supports *Bloodborne*'s world in other ways: firstly, by offering clues that are more obtuse than those found in Yharnam, relying more on the discoveries of the player and their ability to piece together the information left by Miyazaki and his team. Secondly, they help to build atmosphere, establishing genre and mood, an idea which I will discuss in more detail at the end of this chapter. First, however, it will be worthwhile to focus on what clues *can* be found in these areas, and I will once more start with Hemwick Charnel Lane.

Within the game, Hemwick arguably exists as a footnote, where a visit to the area and defeating its boss are optional. No NPCs reside within the hamlet, nor does it display an overt connection to *Bloodborne*'s lore. Although the area contains several unique enemies such as Hemwick Grave Women in their various guises, accompanied by Hunting Dogs, their behavior and choice of weapons resemble the Yharnam Huntsmen and their Rabid Dogs.[1] The

overall level design of this section differs from the areas the player has seen so far, moving away from the city into a more rural area with architecture reminiscent of medieval villages, but there are no buildings that stand out in the way that, for example, Oedon Chapel and the Grand Cathedral do. It is not through large set pieces that Hemwick divulges its story, but rather in its details, revealing two threads: the connection between Hemwick Charnel Lane and the Healing Church, and the Caryll Runes, and it is the former I will start with.

The area is scattered with items, yet only one description mentions Hemwick, the "special Bone Marrow Ash collected from Hemwick Charnel Lane" (SG, 2015: 454). Although inconspicuous at first, the item, when seen in connection with its location of a charnel lane, a place that even in name is connected to ideas of death and burial, the Bone Marrow Ash becomes a central clue to the function of this hamlet. In order to fully understand its significance, it is worthwhile to point out the ubiquity of the Ash here, with a total of 25 units left for players to find. Furthermore, its description helps to link it to other items, specifically the Bloodshot Eyeball and the Pebbles. The image of the Pebbles used within the game, portrayed as a perfectly round stone with a small circle carved into it, resembles an eyeball and is presented as a stand-in, as it were, for the more valuable Bloodshot Eyeball item. This idea is confirmed by the fact that many of the enemies found in Hemwick drop pebbles upon being killed, giving the impression that it is the Bloodshot Eyeball they wish to obtain, yet it is the Pebbles that are confused with the live tissues. More specifically, both the Eyeballs and the Bone Marrow Ash signify parts of dead (or, as the description of the Eyeball reminds us, living) bodies being used for other purposes. Rather than simply burying the bodies in the graveyard around Oedon Chapel, the Grand Cathedral, and in the clearing before Hemwick, it would appear that the corpses are not just disposed of, but rather harvested for useful materials. This is further supported by the design of the location: several buildings, inaccessible to the player, light up as if fires are burning deep inside, whereas some clearings reveal smoking pipes, syphoning off the noxious fumes that are the result of the cremation process. At first glance appearing as an old, small village, situated close to Yharnam, Hemwick might well have been constructed with the sole purpose of the disposal and harvesting of bodies to supply the Healing Church with much needed materials. The discovery of the Radiant Sword Hunter badge, which allows players to buy a number of new items in the Hunter's Dream, confirms this as, alongside weapons and attire, the badge allows players to buy Bone Marrow Ash in exchange for blood echoes, presenting this item as a resource for the Church. This reading of Hemwick as

a site for harvesting and disposing of bodies only serves to reinforce the horrors perpetuated by the Healing Church.

Following the defeat of the Witch of Hemwick boss, players are able to uncover another narrative thread within the village. At the top of Hemwick Charnel Lane stands an old building, the Witch's Abode, its main room located down a long flight of stairs, where players will fight the Witch and, upon killing her, gain access to another small room. Inside, there are piles of manuscripts and books, and in the center, the body of a dead hunter tied to a chair. The corpse has no distinguishing features, but upon it, players find the Rune Workshop Tool, to be used inside the Hunter's Dream and providing new lore information:

> Runesmith Caryll, student of Byrgenwerth, transcribed the inhuman utterings of the Great Ones into what are now called Caryll Runes. The hunter who retrieves this workshop tool can etch Caryll Runes into the mind to attain their wondrous strength. Provost Willem would have been proud of Caryll's runes, as they do not rely upon blood in any measure [SG, 2015: 477].

Once again, the potential dangers of blood are emphasized by discussing Willem's feelings about the runes as opposed to other methods to gain strength. Specifically, this item is the main source of information regarding the life of the mysterious Caryll. Players will now be able to use similar arcane knowledge, the origins of which are connected to the Great Ones. It would appear that Caryll was able to gain the eyes Willem so desperately wanted, and to communicate on a higher plane so as to hear the "inhuman utterings" and transcribe them. Furthermore, the first rune found within Hemwick, the Lake rune, which tells of "Great volumes of water serve as a bulwark guarding sleep, and an augur of the eldritch Truth. Overcome this hindrance, and seek what is yours" (SG, 2015: 472). This description arguably points to the player's encounter with Rom, the Vacuous Spider, inside the Moonside Lake. Defeating Rom triggers the Blood Moon and grants access to the Nightmare. The presence of the Lake rune in Hemwick offers an early reference to these events, foreshadowing the culmination of terror that will occur within the third act.

The Forbidden Woods similarly offers two narrative threads which are realized through item placement and enemies. The first half of the Woods signifies a proximity to Yharnam: most of its enemies are huntsmen and will be familiar to the player from the time they spend inside the city. Between the trees, the presence of the Healing Church can still be felt. As players have learned, the Church recruited ordinary Yharnamites to act as hunters, and the patrols here are identical to those found in Central Yharnam. Furthermore, players can discover the White Church Attire, belonging to "special

Church doctors […], superiors to the black preventative hunters" (SG, 2015: 496) as well as their tools: the Poison Knives, which are "often used for self-defense by special doctors of the Healing Church" (SG, 2015: 449), a weapon only found in Cathedral Ward and in the Forbidden Woods. The presence of the White Church Attire, especially when read in relation to other items found within the Woods, reveals more about the practices of the Church. As the attire description states, white Church doctors are "specialists in experimentally backed blood ministration and the scourge of the beast," believing that "medicine is a method for research, and that some knowledge can only be obtained by exposing oneself to sickness" (SG, 2015: 496). It is here, between these dark trees, unseen and undisturbed, that some of these experiments took place; the early parts of the Woods are littered with items related to the use of beast blood, from the Thick Coldblood and Frenzied Coldblood, described as "the product of obsession" and a "manifestation of madness" (SG, 2015: 457), to the Pungent Blood Cocktail and Beast Blood Pellets, which are "intoxicating" (SG, 2015: 452) and of "unclean origin" (SG, 2015: 450). Curious players may even discover the Beast Roar:

> One of the forbidden hunter tools made by Irreverent Izzy. Borrow the strength of the terrible undead darkbeasts, if only for a moment, to blast surrounding foes back with the force of a roaring beast. The indescribable sound is broadcast with the caster's own vocal cords, which begs the question, what terrible things lurk deep within the frames of men? [SG, 2015: 460].

Each of these items hint not so much at the scourge, but rather to other uses of beasthood, with the description of the Pellets pointing to the idea that tapping into one's inner beast may be a liberating, empowering process: "Ripping apart the flesh of one's enemies and being rained upon by their splattering blood invigorates one's sense of beasthood, feeding strength and euphoric feeling alike" (SG, 2015: 450).

   One of three NPCs found in the Woods, the Afflicted Beggar, offers further evidence of such an interpretation. When players first encounter him, he is feeding on a corpse, but he is happy to talk. If attacked, the Beggar will immediately transform into the Abhorrent Beast, but if spoken to, like other NPCs before him, he asks if the player knows a safe place, and can be sent to either Oedon Chapel or Iosefka's Clinic. If players choose the Clinic, the Beggar will be transformed into an Emissary, like the others; when sent to the Chapel, the Beggar will prey on and murder any NPCs present. Between kills, players can speak to him in Oedon Chapel to receive items: a Pungent Blood Cocktail upon first meeting him, followed by Beast Blood Pellets after the death of each of his victims. When killed, the Beggar drops the Beast rune, the description of which tells of the ambivalent relationship of the

Church to this transformation: "Beast is one of the early Caryll Runes, as well as one of the first to be deemed forbidden. The discovery of blood entailed the discovery of undesirable beasts" (SG, 2015: 475). These items cement the Beggar's connection to his beasthood, but it is worth pointing out that this status has affected him differently. His appearance is human, rather than evidencing a partial transformation, and he has not lost his faculties in the way others have. Furthermore, his attire, consisting of Madman's Leggings and the Harrowed Hood, link him to the Healing Church: the former point to the "tomb prospectors, member of the Healing Church chosen to explore the old labyrinth" who "go mad" and are described as "lost souls" (SG, 2015: 494), whereas the latter, found in the Old Hunter's DLC, discusses how "certain Church hunters obfuscate their identities and slip into the nooks and crannies of the city" (OHSG, 2015: 152). This frames the Beggar as a (former) member of the Healing Church, perhaps even a spy. It is not only in his behavior and attire that the Beggar stands out, and dialogue with the Chapel Samaritan confirms his anomalous role. Before encountering the Beggar, the Samaritan notes that he does not "suppose there's anybody out there worth savin' anymore," classing him as different to other NPCs. The Beggar evidences the Church's influences within the Woods, hinting at their experiments with beasthood and unclean blood; he cannot be classed as an innocent Yharnamite, caught up in the night of the hunt, but proves himself to be a danger to the city's inhabitants.

The second part of the Forbidden Woods moves away from beasthood and closer to Byrgenwerth and its arcane research. Here, players will encounter new enemies, hybrids of snake and men, or simply balls of various sizes, consisting of these same serpents. Unless they have found their way to the back entrance to Iosefka's Clinic, it is the first place where players will encounter Kin enemies in the form of Small Celestial Emissaries. Once more, Thick Coldblood and Frenzied Coldblood are ubiquitous, as well as Madman's Knowledge; more importantly, the Graveguard Attire, found deep within the Woods, links the forest closely to Byrgenwerth and Provost Willem:

> Clothing of Dores, graveguard of the Forbidden Woods. […] Willem kept two loyal servants back at Byrgenwerth. When they were sent into the labyrinth, they encountered the eldritch Truth, and went mad. One became the password gatekeeper, while Dores became a graveguard of the forest. Both remained loyal, even in madness [SG, 2015: 492].

Both of Willem's servants became guards of the Forbidden Woods, one as gatekeeper, the other as a graveguard, although it is unclear which graves Dores was responsible for.[2] When continuing towards the college, players will encounter more hybridized enemies, ones which appear more alien than those seen in the Woods. Both the Garden of Eyes, part human, part insect,

their huge heads covered in eyes, and the Fluorescent Flower, insect-like, scuttling, all legs and tendrils, seem otherworldly, offering players a first glimpse into the eldritch Truth, hinted at by Great One's Wisdom: "Fragments of the lost wisdom of the Great Ones, beings that might be described as gods. At Byrgenwerth, Master Willem had an epiphany: 'We are thinking on the basest of planes. What we need, are more eyes'" (SG, 2015: 467). Albeit small, the college prefaces the final act of the game and the exposure of the player to these supernatural tenets, but here, too, the presence of the Healing Church can be felt. The Sedative, first found here, may have been concocted at Byrgenwerth, yet it makes reference to blood ministration (SG, 2015: 447). Similarly, the Empty Phantasm Shell, an item which imbues weapons with arcane power, is linked directly to a discovery by the Healing Church (SG, 2015: 458), whereas the Student Attire discusses the detrimental influence of the other institution: "The Healing Church has its roots in Byrgenwerth, and naturally borrows heavily from its uniform design. The focus not on knowledge, or thought, but on pure pretension would surely bring Master Willem to despair, if only he knew" (SG, 2015: 495). In these details, Byrgenwerth is framed no longer as a site of knowledge and research, but rather a battleground between the college and the Church, harking back to the dialogue between Willem and Laurence, and their ideological separation. It is here that the schism happened, and in many ways, where the groundwork was laid for so much suffering. Unlike Yharnam, Byrgenwerth does not stand as a testament to what is, or what was, but to what could have been.

Rather than connecting to Yharnam's history and warring factions, Cainhurst presents a different way of life. Although reference is made to the Healing Church (in the mass execution of the Vilebloods by Logarius and his Executioners) and to the hunters (with the Knights of Cainhurst), the location and its inhabitants appear isolated. Cainhurst is perhaps best understood as a short story within *Bloodborne*'s game world, filled with unique enemies and items. The courtyard of the castle is littered with Parasite Larva and Bloodlickers, giant spider-like creatures who fill themselves with blood, their stomach distended and discolored as a result. Inside the castle proper, players find ghostly women and servants roaming the empty halls, the signs of opulence and decadence clearly visible. The entrance hall, the waiting room, the library, each is decked out in finery, from the glossy wood of high-quality furniture to rich fabrics and a collection of family paintings depicting the elders of the line of Cainhurst, their nobility highlighted in the descriptions of weapons and attire. The Cainhurst badge draws attention to "the royal guards of Cainhurst, loyal guardians of the Vileblood Queen Annalise" (SG, 2015: 469), and their standing and finery is discussed by the Knight Attire:

Adornment prized by the knights of Cainhurst. The wig resembles a ponytail of silver hair. The garb is a regal piece graced by intricate goldwork, the gloves graced with goldwork on red fabric. The dress is made with the finest leather. The Cainhurst way is a mix of nostalgia and bombast. They take great pride even in the blood-stained corpses of beasts that they leave behind, confident that they will stand as examples of decadent art [SG, 2015: 494].

The Vilebloods are presented as another faction of hunters, alongside those tied to the Healing Church, Byrgenwerth and the workshop. As the Cainhurst Badge tells us, "The Vilebloods are hunters of blood, and hunt prey as they search for blood dregs" (SG, 2015: 469). Together with the sword Chikage and the Evelyn firearm, the Reiterpallasch completes the arsenal of the Cainhurst knights; it is a weapon which "combines an elegant knight's sword with the peculiar firearm wielded by the Cainhurst order. The old nobles, long-time imbibers of blood, are no strangers to the sanguine plague, and the disposal of beasts was a discrete task left to their servants, or knights, as they were called for the sake of appearances" (SG, 2015: 422). However, it is made clear that beasts are not all the Vilebloods hunt, with the Cainhurst Armor pointing to the need to "capture prey for their beloved Queen, so that one day, she may bear a Child of Blood" (SG, 2015: 489). When read in relation to other items, their style of hunting involves the chase of human targets: the Vileblood Register notes that the Vilebloods "seek blood dregs of their prey" (SG, 2015: 456), described as the "frightful things" seen by these hunters in coldblood: "They often appear in the blood of echo fiends, that is to say, the blood of hunters" (SG, 2015: 467). One of the special support items found in Cainhurst, the Numbing Mist, highlights their tactics for the hunting of hunters: "Throw to create a mist cloud that numbs a hunter's life essence and prevents restoration of HP. Said to be used by the blood hunters of Cainhurst, its recipe is a secret closely guarded by the line of nobles inhabiting the castle" (SG, 2015: 452). These efforts to gather Blood Dregs center on the loyalty to Annalise, the Vileblood Queen, as she "partakes in these blood dregs offerings, so that she may one day bear the Child of Blood, the next Vileblood heir" (SG, 2015: 467), with Cainhurst as the first location where players find Kin Coldblood, "coldblood of inhuman kin of the cosmos, brethren of the Great Ones. Dare not to delve into the world beyond humanity, the eldritch Truth touched upon long ago at Byrgenwerth" (SG, 2015: 457), thus cementing the role of Cainhurst and Annalise as part of the bloodline of the Great Ones.

It is perhaps for this reason that the history of Cainhurst unfolded the way it has. Upon exploring the area, players will eventually meet Queen Annalise, who explains she is the last of her kind, the "ruler of the Vilebloods, and sworn enemy of the church." She gives players the opportunity to sign

the Vileblood Register, to "partake in [her] rotted blood" and thus join her line. It is only by donning the Crown of Illusions, received upon defeating Martyr Logarius, that players are able to see "the vile secret" (SG, 2015: 487) that he was guarding, yet it is through Alfred, met so early in the game, that the full story emerges. Part of the Executioners, tied to a workshop that "was a secret enclave of mystical beliefs and heady fanaticism" (SG, 2015: 469), he is a member of a particularly old faction of the Healing Church. As he tells the player, it was due to "a scholar who betrayed his fellows at Byrgenwerth and brought forbidden blood back with him to Cainhurst Castle" that the Vilebloods were born, and with them the lifetime goal of Master Logarius: to eradicate these fiends. Alfred's weapon, the Logarius Wheel, explains how this particular piece was "used to slaughter the Vilebloods in Cainhurst" (SG, 2015: 436). It is through this act of mass killing that Annalise became the last remaining of her line, locked inside an illusion and guarded by her old enemy. Throughout the area, the story of Annalise and the Vilebloods is woven intricately into the space and into *Bloodborne*'s overall lore. Hunted by the Executioners, a fanatical part of the Healing Church, and home to a unique faction of hunters, their aim to protect and aid their Queen, Cainhurst provides an interesting side note to the game's story. A complete narrative of the founding of their order through the stolen, forbidden blood to the slaughter of all of their kind, the castle now stands as a silent testament to their existence, adding a further dark chapter to *Bloodborne*'s horrors.

In addition to their role in enhancing the narrative fabric of *Bloodborne*'s game world, the environs hearken back to their functions as a game space. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the four areas discussed act as both evocative and resource-providing space. Beyond the micronarratives and elements of environmental storytelling that form the basis for each location, Hemwick, Cainhurst, the Forbidden Woods and Byrgenwerth rely on the qualities of both of Totten's categories, drawing on prior knowledge of these kinds of spaces and what may happen in them, and using specific items and their descriptions to guide players' understanding of each locality. The classic Gothic settings of the abandoned village, the forsaken castle, the dark woods, and the corrupted seat of learning thus help to stage and enhance the themes of *Bloodborne*'s lore. As discussed in relation to the work of Wolf, this second act establishes the depth of the corruption that has destroyed Yharnam, and provides plentiful hints for what is to come. By drawing on conventions of the Gothic form, the environs help to frame the player, positioning them in spaces that are traditionally coded as dangerous. As Botting argues, "physical locations and settings [of the Gothic] manifest disturbance and ambivalence in spatial terms" (2013: 4). He continues:

Conjoining ideas of home and prison, protection and fear, old buildings in gothic fiction are never secure or free from shadows, disorientation or danger. […] Nature appears hostile, untamed and threatening: again, darkness, obscurity and barely contained malevolent energy reinforce atmospheres of disorientation and fear [2013: 4].

The locations discussed here, while drawing on these traditions, each have their dark history. The evidence of the research of the Healing Church and its results in Hemwick, the Forbidden Woods and Byrgenwerth, as well as the institution's role in what took place at Cainhurst, adds further horrifying details to the stories of Yharnam, and in doing so, enriches *Bloodborne*'s narrative fabric.

Aside from their role as evocative Gothic spaces, the environs function as a gateway, where each demonstrates a complex process of accessing, entering and leaving the space. Guarded by doors, locks and passwords, Hemwick, Cainhurst, the Forbidden Woods and Byrgenwerth act as a threshold, away from Yharnam, and into the Nightmare, relying on another classic element of the horror narrative. In Salomon's work on the features of horror narratives, he notes that "the invocation of two worlds is ubiquitous in horror narrative" (2002: 9) as these types of stories involve "thresholds—a narrative in which two worlds, settings, environments impinge, where crossing (and the resulting experience of horror) is the basic action. Movement (at least in many explicitly fictional contexts) can be in either direction in these mirror worlds" (Salomon, 2002: 9). He continues, "This pattern—the delineation of two apparently alternative spaces, the violation of boundaries between them, the overwhelming power of the more negative and destructive environment—is widely, almost universally shared by horror narratives, explicitly or inferentially" (2002: 10). The threshold reflects ideas of crossing over, and of intrusion, where elements from one world can move across into the other. A visit to each of the spaces discussed in this chapter requires an effort on the part of the player: Hemwick, an optional space, needs to be found through exploration; for Cainhurst, players need to obtain the Summons from Iosefka's Clinic to call the coach; the Forbidden Woods and Byrgenwerth are locked and guarded with doors, passwords, and boss fights, and both protect another gateway: the Moonside Lake and access to the Nightmare. This, like the narrative threads found in these locations, prefaces the third act of the game. The secrets hidden in the environs have been obscured in some way, placed behind locks and doors and passwords. Each point of entry and subsequent traversal of an area brings players closer to the eldritch truth, with elements such as Great One's Wisdom hinting at the madness held within such knowledge. The second act of the game, in many ways, is an invitation as well as a warning.

In framing the third part of the game in such a way, the environs call attention to the centrality of transgression within the Gothic mode. Salomon's notion of the threshold acts as a border, but he represents the crossing of such a boundary as a relatively neutral act. The negative effects of this process, however, are often obvious, as the act of crossing boundaries "demonstrates the protection they offer. The excesses of gothic fictions […] displays transgression and brings norms and limits more sharply into focus" (Botting, 2013: 9). The ability to cross a boundary, then, "shows that it is neither impermeable nor unchangeable. Universal or natural guarantees seem to vanish; norms are sustained only by the conjoined and opposed forces of limit and transgression" (Botting, 2013: 9). In the act of crossing two points are proven: one, that it is possible to do so, and that what we held to be a truth of natural science, or of our own beliefs about the world is no longer a certainty; monsters may well exist, and there may be people who are capable of unspeakable, immoral acts. Secondly, following Levy, "all thresholds are, in essence, forbidden" (1988: 39), so that the act of crossing itself counts as a transgression, of gaining access to what cannot and should not be known. It is here that we see a return to Lovecraft, discussed in Chapter 3, and, in relation to the environs, a foreshadowing of the secrets yet to be uncovered. As Salomon notes, "In one way or another horror narrative reminds us of the unspeakable, usually as something we have attempted to ignore, deny, or otherwise rationalize away" (2002: 15), and it is only through transgression that one gains access to that which is forbidden. The city of Yharnam, this centerpiece within *Bloodborne*'s world, acts as a central hub, as well as a way of grounding the player in this location. With every step into Hemwick and into the Woods, heading towards Byrgenwerth and its lake, players move closer to inhuman knowledge, and to the truth hidden in the Nightmare.

Within this chapter, the aim was to examine the environs of Yharnam, areas which in many ways are optional, although iconic and instrumental in their own right. They serve to enrich the stories found within the city, as opposed to offering a glut of new information. In Wolf's discussion of narrative threads, braids, and fabric, he draws attention to the function of such a framework in how it allows the fictional world to engage its audience, bringing them closer as the narrative keeps growing around them. It is this function that is primary for the environs, where each area helps to deepen the lore that is established within Yharnam itself, by its buildings and inhabitants, before moving into the Nightmare and the revelations contained within. Furthermore, Wolf notes that "a narrative fabric also allows the audience a synchronic way to slice the events of a world, since a dense fabric contains many simultaneous events" (2012: 201). Perhaps this is the best way to describe

these areas, drawing on and adding to the city's history, and simultaneously drawing on the history of the genre that *Bloodborne* so clearly connects with. In relation to notions of space, as discussed in the previous section, the concept of the threshold will return in relation to both nightmares and dreams and the way that they appear within the game. It is the nightmare, marking the end of this endless night, which will be visited in the next chapter.

6

Nightmare

You have met with the Vacuous Rom, the Byrgenwerth Spider, and it is by defeating her that you have been transported to Yahar'Gul, the Unseen Village, for a second time. The eerie light of the Blood Moon illuminates your surroundings, as well as the strange, many legged creatures with their bulbous heads that cling to so many of the edifices. It is now that the true nature of this place is revealed. Rather than rough stone, its walls appear clad with reliefs, forms of so many desperate souls, climbing on top of one another, the terror etched on their faces and into the stone. At the far end of a plaza, inside a small room, you find walls lined with desiccated corpses, each wearing a weird metal cage that encases their head. One is singled out, sat regally at the far end of the room. When you slowly approach, unable to stop yourself from touching the mummified hand, you feel a sudden pull, an unmaking, as you are transported to deeper nightmares still.

As discussed across previous chapters, both the second and third act of *Bloodborne* signify a move: away from Yharnam, its buildings and streets, signifiers of a certain level of order. Despite its labyrinthine appearance, the city is a space that can be mapped, understood, and perhaps even mastered. As expected, this state of affairs is only temporary when players plunge deeper into *Bloodborne*'s game world. The first move, to the environs, is a move away from the structure of the urban and into the disorder of history and nature. From the tall buildings and the depth of the aqueduct, from the splendor and grandeur of the Cathedral Ward, players make their way to a dilapidated village, dark woods, a deserted college and an empty castle. Access to each of these locations needs to be earned, somehow: through exploration, or through obtaining a password, a key, a summons. As I noted near the end of the previous chapter, each of these areas are marked by the crossing of a threshold, thus reinforcing the move away from the order and familiarity of an urban setting towards places which are normally inaccessible. In the final

section of the game, in visiting the Lecture Building, the Nightmare Frontier, and the Nightmare of Mensis, the concept and significance of the threshold is pushed further still. The move made here is not simply one from order to chaos, but from reality to pandemonium, leaving one to question whether these spaces are even real. More so than at any part in the game, the Nightmare spaces are disconnected, a process which is facilitated both in their visual design and through their position in relation to other levels. An attempt to visualize Lovecraftian spaces and the creatures which dwell within, finally bringing the player to the places in which the eldritch Truth might be discovered, the Nightmare areas visualize the escalation of the supernatural, creating a map that is as fantastical as it is unnerving.

It is with Salomon that I concluded the previous chapter, and it is with him that I wish to open this one. In his work, Salomon defines the idea of the threshold and its centrality to horror as a genre. This idea is echoed by Garcia in her work on fantastic spaces:

> In the vast majority of cases, the primary function of the threshold is to frame the access into the supernatural: the function of this form of boundary is to provide a stable spatial frame that separates the realistic and the fantastic domains but in itself there is nothing physically impossible about it [2015: 26–27].

Interestingly, both definitions show a certain level of neutrality, where a movement between the two worlds is "the basic action" (Salomon, 2002: 9), an act with "nothing physically impossible about it." However, as briefly noted in the previous chapter, it is difficult to regard such a transgression as neutral. As Shaw explains, it is by passing this threshold that the monstrous Other in one of its many forms impinges on our world: "Normality comes in conflict with the monstrous, and it is the relationship between normality and the monster that constitutes the essential subject of the horror film" (2001: n.pag.). Interestingly, Salomon moves away from the dichotomy advocated by Shaw, explaining that, in his view, "at issue here is not some true Manichaeanism, some true equality of opposites. Rather, like a terrible disease or malignant growth (a key metaphor), horror intrudes, encompasses, overwhelms" (2002: 10). The threshold is a divide, but it is not an equal one. Whatever is behind it can find a foothold, and if it does, it can grow and subsume the normal state of the world. Even if the threshold cannot be defined as a barrier with the ability to keep out whatever supernatural horrors might be lurking behind it, it does need to be regarded as a boundary of sorts, as Garcia explains, "[t]he threshold means as much a departure 'from' as an access 'into'. Crossing that limit symbolizes going through or across what should be impenetrable" (2015: 27–28), a move which makes the transgression itself meaningful. She

continues, "[t]he threshold either separates and connects the natural from and to the supernatural domain or acts as a limit against which the transgression operates" (2015: 29). The presence of the threshold offers the ability to transgress, whether it is the horror entering our world, or for us to gain access to other planes of existence, a process which is loaded with significance.

In addition to offering a definition of the concept of the threshold, Salomon discusses the relationship between the worlds, noting that in most horror narratives, the presence of alternate worlds is affirmed as much as it is denied: "In one way or another horror narrative reminds us of the unspeakable, usually as something we have attempted to ignore, deny, or otherwise rationalize away" (2002: 15). Efforts are made to ignore the existence of the world behind the threshold, yet these attempts are ultimately futile: "Horror narrative in whatever form affirms their existence, albeit our instincts, for obvious reasons, almost always lean towards hope, forgetfulness, even outright denial" (Salomon, 2002: 23). In addition, Salomon outlines some of the qualities of both the boundary itself, as well as of the worlds beyond, drawing attention to the fact that "[f]or the horror writer, the place or mysterious center of malignity must be vividly localized to be credible; at the same time, its manifestations (and the interferences drawn from these manifestations) must be potentially everywhere" (2002: 23). More specifically, "the setting of horror narrative always conveys only one simple message. These places […] are outside of time and geography, everywhere and nowhere, now, then, and hereafter" (Salomon, 2002: 103). In short, the places defined within horror literature must be truly otherworldly, creating a situation where these spaces "are more monstrous than any monsters they might contain—spaces that in themselves express the essence of monstrosity" (Salomon, 2002: 107), a point to which I will return later in this chapter. For now, it will be worthwhile to point out the nature of these Nightmare spaces, and in particular, their relationship to the worlds created in Lovecraftian fiction. As was explained in Chapter 3 in relation to the game's lore, it is within the third act that *Bloodborne* truly moves into the realms of the unknown and the otherworldly, taking the players to areas unlike any they have seen before. As Levy explains, "[o]nly when the familiar setting collapses can the fantastic adventure begin" (1988: 53), and it is this journey I wish to start here.

This time, too, it starts with a church. Somewhere in the Forbidden Woods, you find a row of cottages, and from behind one of the windows, a faceless voice calls out to you. They recognize you as a hunter and praise you for your work: "Glory be. You know not the value you possess." What follows, however, are words similar to those you have heard from others, a warning

and a promise, that "not even death offers solace," yet whoever is behind the window is "willing to do you a kindness." They press an object into your hand and send you on your way. Examining this Tonsil Stone, you discover it to be "a latticed, deformed rock, or perhaps a meteorite. Appears useless, but possesses some odd gravitational force that prevents its riddance. A dubious soul once said: Step lightly round to the right of the great cathedral, and seek an ancient, shrouded church…. The gift of the godhead will grant you strength…" (SG, 2015: 465). You think you know the place, and quickly make your way to the cliff area, close to the Grand Cathedral, the rocks masking what appears to be another building of worship. This one, you find empty, a large, metal bath positioned at its center. Left with no other options, you step into it, and suddenly you are grabbed by one of the insect-like monstrosities that you have seen in other locations around Yharnam. Somewhere, perhaps inside your head, you hear the mocking voice of the man who first gave you the stone: "Oh Amygdala, oh Amygdala…. Have mercy on the poor bastard…" You find yourself with a feeling as if you are crushed, even going insane, yet when you come to, you have simply been displaced. As you look around, you can see you are inside a building, surrounded by ornate furniture and items of a scientific nature. Cages and jars filled with specimens, beakers and flasks, books and notes are scattered around, as if left in a hurry, but the Lecture Building itself is empty. Although the means by which you got here have left you shaken, you know there is little you can do except to set off and find a way out. Each of the rooms you visit here confirms the role of this place as a seat of learning, a place of research, where even the students remain, now pale, stretched and almost liquid. There are some items to be found, many of which are of an arcane nature, while others give you some clue as to where you have been transported to. Here, like in Byrgenwerth, you find a set of Student Attire, linking the Lecture Building to the college and, indeed, the Church. The note attached to the key to the Lecture Theatre is more worrying still: "Today, the two-story Lecture Building is adrift in the nightmare, but once it was a place of reflection, where scholars learned of history and archaeology. Perhaps it still is, as the students in the lecture theatre appear to await the return of their professor" (2015: 463). It is the first clue you have found about your location, which seems to exist somewhere outside of space and time. As you press on, you find a set of double doors at the far end of this first floor, and, curious now to find out where they lead, you push them open. Ignoring the swirling void behind the doors, you step forward.

Again, you find yourself transported, yet with less violence than your first experience. Instead, it feels as if you simply stepped in and out of the void, finding yourself in a completely different environment with no hints as

to how you got here, or how it might be connected to your previous location. You are inside a cave, its walls lined with candles and what appear to be rocks, perhaps even gravestones, cut in strange, rounded shapes. As you examine them more closely, it seems the consistency of the stone itself is unfamiliar, its insides organic, apparently constructed of blood and tissue. Outside the cave, the landscape is completely alien, inhospitable. The ledge you are perched on looks out over nothingness, a void of pale grey mist stretching as far as the eye can see. Close by, you see a ruin emerging from the fog, and beyond it, you can detect some shapes, as if of ships lost at sea, and further still, a large building. Whereas Yharnam and its environs were growing progressively darker as the night wore on, with even the Lecture Building appearing as if darkness was crowding in outside, this Nightmare Frontier is bathed in a strange, greenish light, the dominating Blood Moon invisible here. Everything about the environment appears weird to you, the odd shapes of the rocky surface underfoot, and the stones, some of them split open, to reveal the animate matter inside. There is little greenery, except for some grasses and flowers, which appear to be Coldblood Flowers, "pale vegetation that commonly grows on coldblood in a place long abandoned" (SG, 2015: 323). Familiar now with coldblood, part of what sustains you here, you wonder whether this entire area is made up of blood, bodies, tissue; if you were to carve away a layer of rock, would you uncover muscle, veins, aspects of a living form? Absently, you note how all you have found so far are examples of coldblood, waiting for you to collect them; there is no evidence of shards, "the substance in blood [that] hardens" (SG, 2015: 461), the materials you have been using to strengthen your weapon. These forms are absent from this Nightmare; perhaps it is the atmosphere that stops the blood from crystalizing in this way. What qualities does this place have, and what else might it sustain? Aside from two hunters, like yourself, but hostile to you, there are no other human beings here. Instead, you find a number of Wandering Nightmares, small scuttling creatures made up of so many body parts. The Loran Silverbeast, towering, covered in grey fur, their eyes invisible above a mouth that appears to be placed sideways within their faces, alongside the Giant Lost Children, giants whose very body seems made of stone, are somewhat recognizable, in possession of four limbs, walking on two legs. Inside a lake, the water itself poisonous, you find the Crawlers, pale and white, no more than a gelatinous mass, covered in octopus-like protrusions. Then there are the Winter Lanterns: accompanied by the sound of a woman's singing voice, they appear well-dressed, their skin flayed, their heads grown beyond proportion, covered in tentacles and eyes. The mere sight of them hurts you, is enough to drive you mad. Alongside these enemies, there are items to be

found, one of which is unfamiliar to you: the Lead Elixir, "A heavy, syrupy liquid medicine. […] Its recipe for this mysterious concoction is unknown, but some postulate that it materializes only within the most desperate nightmares" (SG, 2015: 451). It gives you pause, wondering just how far you have lost yourself within this unnatural realm, where only inhuman creatures can thrive; where the light is strange, and the moon invisible; where the very water is poisonous, and stone is made flesh.

More worrying is the layout of this place, its paths and ledges twisting, meeting, splitting, contorting, over bridges and through caves, each turn plunging you into more danger. The back alleys of Yharnam had confused you at first, and when you lost your way between the trees of the Forbidden Woods, beset by enemies on all sides, you thought you had seen the worst. Navigating this dreaded Nightmare Frontier, however, teaches you the true meaning of panic: the fear of losing your way. Enclosed by mountainous walls, each surface and gravestone and patch of grass so similar to the one before, you have never been this lost. Wandering aimlessly, doubling back, hoping to find a difference in the landscape, something to hold onto, you stumble through another cave. When you emerge from its winding path, you once more find yourself on a ledge, overlooking a foggy expanse. In the distance, there is a building, what seems to be a small tower, elevated above the mist. It is the first manmade structure you have seen in this inhospitable place. To reach it, you find yourself picking your way from platform to platform, connected by what appear to be giant gravestones, as the world itself has fallen away. Another lake of poison runs into small cave, large, luminous flowers growing on its walls. A stone bridge, appearing as if it has grown out of the rock itself, brings you to the structure you saw earlier, embedded within the alien rock face. A stone arch, sprouting from the surrounding landscape, is carved with spiraling patterns, with some familiar details which denote the shape of heads, tentacles, the suckers found on octopi. The utter strangeness of this place makes you wonder whether this relief was created by human hands, or simply formed of its own accord. The thought alone makes you shudder, a sensation made worse by the bas-relief found on the front of the tower. A simple building, its architectural style similar to what you observed in Yharnam, the front of this edifice is covered in a carving, exhibiting patterns similar to the archway and with odd-looking statues adorning its roof. Inside this circle, this arena, you encounter Amygdala, a being like the one which transported you to the Lecture Building. A sense of circularity, of a mission completed, comes over you as you slay the fiend and its huge form crumbles around you. The prey is slaughtered, and you can leave this Nightmare Frontier, to return to the darkness that has overtaken Yharnam.

Although the Lecture Building, found within the Nightmare, is recognizable for players, echoing the stately architecture and interior of Byrgenwerth, the Frontier is a notable departure from the spaces encountered in the game so far. Framed as completely unnatural in both its aesthetics and location, this move away from urban order and familiar horror spaces spells a new direction in terms of *Bloodborne*'s story. As the game goes on, its narrative veers towards elements of supernatural and Lovecraftian weird fiction, introducing strange rituals of transformation and transcendence, of contact with otherworldly beings. Within the Nightmare spaces, of the Lecture Building, the Nightmare Frontier and, as I will discuss later, the Nightmare of Mensis, the environment for these rituals has been made real, allowing players to make their way through what might be seen as both the origins and the consequence of the efforts of the Choir and the School of Mensis. This part of the journey outlines the horror of the spaces that one would see, if one were able to make contact with the Great Ones, a fate which seems less and less desirable. Aside from their significance within the game world and its narrative, the areas of the Nightmare offer numerous points of interest. Firstly, read against their visual design, it is one of the few examples of Lovecraft's universe made visible, a translation of the author's descriptions of otherworldliness into a game space to be explored by the player. As Kneale explains in his investigation of Lovecraftian space, "Lovecraft's stories are centrally concerned with the paradox of representing entities, things and places that are beyond representation" (2006: 106). A paradox indeed, especially when read in the light of *Bloodborne*, or any video game, in which designers are required to not only show a space, but one which has some internal logic and can be navigated by players, a topic that I will return to later in this section. First, I wish to focus on the qualities of the space, in particular in relation to Lovecraft's visions of other planes of existence, of unknown and unknowable worlds. In *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, Lovecraft speaks of man's fear "at the thought of the hidden and fathomless worlds of strange life which may pulsate in the gulfs beyond the stars," which may "press hideously upon our own globe in unholy dimensions which only the dead and the moonstruck can glimpse" (1973: 14). In the same text, he discusses "a malign or particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature" (1973: 15), hinting at the myriad terrifying forms these fathomless worlds might take, places where there might be "the scratching of outside shapes and entities on the known universe's utmost rim" (1973: 16). The spaces of Lovecraft's cosmic fear are, first and foremost, spaces of possibility, of wild imaginings as to their appearance and inhabitants: "Kaleidoscopic visions, weird sounds, alien rhythms, disturbing outlines and proportions, geometrical figures and patterns, asymmetry, and Ultimate Chaos and the black void

beyond: all are motifs he wove through his fiction to convey cosmic horror" (Mariconda, 1991: 197). In his essay on cosmic imagery, Mariconda explains how Lovecraft's stories contain "unlimited speculation as to the vistas that lie forever beyond our ken," setting him the challenge "to envision and describe such vistas" (1991: 197), leaving both Lovecraft himself and any of those who wish to imagine his fiction in new ways with a similar challenge.

Keeping in mind the fact that *Bloodborne*, in its application of Lovecraft's work, is more concerned with overarching themes and the philosophy behind his concept of cosmic fear, it will not be pertinent to consider the Nightmare areas as direct adaptations of his fiction. Instead, I wish to focus on the inherent qualities of the spaces described by Lovecraft, and how these features may be found in (perceptions of) *Bloodborne*'s Nightmare. The starting point for this will be Kneale's argument regarding the existence of two main themes within Lovecraft's treatment of the universe, termed "shadows out of space" and "shadows out of time," where "the first relates to metaphors of invasion and contamination, the second to metaphors of transmission" (2006: 113). This incorporates ideas of both contact and contamination, and the degeneration brought about by the act of transgression. Kneale bases these comments on the work of Levy on the connection between Lovecraft and the fantastic, which comments on the blending of the real and unreal. The starting point for this type of movement, Levy posits, is the familiar, as it "is well known that the truly fantastic exists only where the impossible can make an irruption, through time and space, into an objectively familiar locale" (1988: 36–37), offering his take on the notion of the threshold. Such a disruption not only crosses a boundary, but significantly alters the qualities of at least one side of the divide: "[F]or a paltry instant, the imperceptible silhouettes of Lovecraft's characters move. It is a setting strangely familiar and fabulously faraway, where a dream-topography is superimposed on the real topography" (Levy, 1988: 41). When read within the frame of producing horror narratives, this process needs to be represented in some way, and Levy argues that "[a] suspension of natural laws can be manifested, as far as space is concerned, only by an alteration of perspective and proportion" (1988: 45). It also creates a situation where ordinary perceptions of space are no longer valid:

> Beyond a blind wall or under the familiar pavement of streets, incommensurable abysms are opened for those who have heard the call. Space, suddenly, is decomposed. The familiar panorama of planes and axes around which Euclid of old organized space is dissolved. The hero plunges into this chaos of forms, surfaces, and masses, falling at the same time into the foul and the unholy [Levy, 1988: 48–49].

Levy insists on a process of distortion, of space becoming altered, where one can no longer trust one's senses to perceive how the world works, and

concludes that "Lovecraft's tales are, in a way, only a vast attempt at the drama-tization of space, rendered agonizing by his dynamics, and fantastic insofar as its unforeseeable metamorphoses come to trouble the Euclidean order of things" (1988: 52). Not only have the laws of nature disappeared, showing us creatures and knowledge beyond our imagination and understanding, but the world itself has become unstable. One may even question whether they are still within what can be considered our known world at all:

> In Lovecraft, space is most profoundly altered by his oneiric vision of the world. The disordering of perspective is a phenomenon that affects the *surface*, an anomaly which above all concerns the art of the etcher or painter. When the space of the dreamer breaks down, it becomes far more alarming; its very substance is broken, its profound reality is affected [Levy, 1988: 46; author's emphasis].

One explanation for the otherworldly features found within the Nightmare Frontier is to focus on its name and regard the area as dream-like in quality, and perhaps in origin. The movement of the player into the Lecture Building and the Frontier is markedly different from previous modes of exploration, as the game simply picks up the player character and inserts them into this new reality. The supernatural qualities of each area belie its status as real, instead introducing a layer of what Joshi calls a "supra-reality" (2014: 108), where knowledge gathered (often forbidden, inhuman, or both) that grants characters enough insight to become aware of and break into this supra-reality (Joshi, 2014: 108). Although characters may try to dismiss these realms as illusory, Lovecraft gives them little chance to do so as he "always [asserts] the brutal, objective reality of these sights of supra-reality: although in some instances no concrete evidence is available as proof, it is precisely because the narrators cannot pass off their adventures as dreams or hallucinations that their minds are shattered" (Joshi, 2014: 108). In the context of *Bloodborne*, these spaces may appear dream-like, perhaps even nightmarish, yet players are able to traverse and interact with them in much the same way as they are able to explore Yharnam. The Nightmare areas, revealed through insight and discoveries, simply expand their view, creating a situation where, arguably, "[i]t is only logical to believe that supra-reality is 'truer' than the illusory reality that we normally perceive through our senses" (Joshi, 2014: 109), leaving players to question which side of the coin is more real: the order of the city, or the chaos of the nightmare.

This questioning of (supra-)reality is realized within the functional level design, as the Lecture Building, Frontier and Nightmare of Mensis form an exception in relation to the rest of the game. Games retain a focus on visual and interactive features, including in their realization of the game world and how the player moves through it. As Aarseth explains: "The defin-

ing element in computer games is spatiality. Computer games are essentially concerned with spatial representation and negotiation, and therefore a classification of computer games can be based on how they represent—or, perhaps, *implement*—space" (2000: 154; author's emphasis). Although, as I have explained, the three Nightmare areas behave in much the same way as the game spaces preceding it (for example, there is no sudden inversion of gravity), the realization of the threshold is much more pronounced, and it is when considering these locations as navigable game space that this becomes apparent. In his effort to provide a taxonomy of space and movement within video games, Wolf describes the importance of interaction between player and game space. Echoing Aarseth's assertion of the centrality of space to the game experience, Wolf notes that "interaction within and with a space is the means by which space is best understood […] as spatial design is an indication of movement options [and is] typically the basis for the indication of interactive possibilities" (2011: 18–19), making the concept of navigable space, "space through which one must find one's way around" (2011: 19), central to his discussion. Wolf explains how game worlds are navigated, offering "a space made of interconnected spatial cells through which the player's avatar moves, a network often organized like a maze. [Much] of the space resides off-screen, and the accessibility, and even the discovery of off-screen areas, relies on a player's navigational ability" (2011: 22). Each game world can be divided into such spatial cells, defined by "their boundaries, which may exist diegetically as walls, doorways, thresholds, or changes of terrain, or extradiegetically, such as screen edges or level changes which move a player to another space" (Wolf, 2011: 23). For Wolf, then, the creation of meaning does not so much lie within the content of each cell, but rather in the connections between them, with an analysis focusing on the possibilities of whether players can move from one cell to another (passability); whether the next cell is visible (visibility); whether players can move back and forth between cells indiscriminately (reversibility); whether a connection between cells always brings players to the same place (contingency); and whether any of these passages are open or closed (or can be opened) at any time (2011: 25–28). Based on this model, Wolf proposes four criteria for what he terms navigational logic:

1. What spaces exist in the game's world […];
2. How those spaces are interconnected […];
3. How interconnections between spaces work […];
4. How spaces and their configurations change over time, if they do (2011: 40).

This concept of navigational logic is particularly interesting when examining the connections between *Bloodborne*'s areas. Constructed as a semiopen world, giving the player a certain amount of freedom to traverse multiple game spaces whilst guiding them towards new narrative revelations, *Bloodborne*'s world is defined by forward movement. As players explore different areas, they are able to discover shortcuts and hidden pathways, unlocking doors to display hitherto inaccessible routes to new locations, or to safety. These maps are not linear, but positioned in relation to one another, allowing players to see locations where they have been, or where they will be going next. They can look back into Central Yharnam from inside the Cathedral Ward, and Old Yharnam and Hemwick provide additional vantage points, showing a new perspective on the city and even the ruins of Castle Cainhurst, visible across the lake. It allows players to create a mental map, not just of the particular area that they find themselves in, but also of spatial relations between these locations, with the unlocking of shortcuts revealing new narrative information. Spatial cells may not always be passable (yet), but they are shown as connected: although players are able to use the lamp system to warp between the Hunter's Dream and locations around the game world, pathways exist between the majority of *Bloodborne*'s locations. If they wish, players could walk from Central Yharnam, through Old Yharnam and (Upper) Cathedral Ward, passing into Hemwick, or descend the stairs to follow the route through the Forbidden Woods to Byrgenwerth. Although specific events precede a visit to Yahar'gul (through kidnapping) and Cainhurst (by using the summons), these locations are clearly linked to the game's mapping. The castle is visible from Hemwick Charnel Lane, and by progressing through the main campaign, players will unlock pathways leading from the Cathedral Ward and Old Yharnam into the Unseen Village.

The Nightmare areas, however, do not comply with this logic.[1] Whereas they clearly exist within the game world (players can visit and explore each location at their leisure), and the same rules apply to player movement, it is the navigational logic of the connections between spaces that is significantly altered. Although thresholds are crossed within Yharnam through unlocking shortcuts and creating new pathways, and the environs are reached through the use of a variety of gateway artifacts, the Nightmare spaces insist on a more supernatural approach. By obtaining and employing an arcane item or (as is true for the Nightmare of Mensis) by inspecting a mummified corpse, players are transported to new locations which, subsequently, can only be reached through the use of lamps, lacking the paths evident between Yharnam's different wards and its environs. It is unclear how players have accessed the Nightmare; instead of a visible pathway, they are faced with a blank wall,

the method of their travel obscured to them. Although connections can be made between the spaces within the Nightmare (for example, the building of the School of Mensis can be seen from the Frontier), this break in navigational logic helps to cement the otherworldly qualities of the realms players are visiting. Moving away from the order of the urban into the untamed spaces of nature and ruin, a visit to these realms of supra-reality present a different kind of chaos altogether, and a closer examination of that final area, the School of Mensis, will provide further evidence of this.

Your return from the Nightmare Frontier, this first confrontation with true horror, has left you shaking. You have encountered many fears and wonders upon your journey to this point, yet nothing could have prepared you for this. It seems as if parts of the city have transformed, or perhaps it is you who has become more aware of the terrors embedded in Yharnam; the mangled, tortured bodies of those who wish you harm, as well as the pressing death of so many innocent people. It is in Yahar'gul that these horrors are felt most acutely, this ruinous place of ritual and ungodly acts. It is unsurprising that access to deeper nightmares can be found here, with an invitation to inspect the remains of one of many victims of the practices of Mensis. You feel a tug, a pull, almost familiar now, as is the location where you find yourself: the second floor of the Lecture Building. Here, you find the same book cases, the same specimens and equipment, the same students, but with one change: a Church Giant with flaming fists, and a Communion rune, signaling the influence of the Healing Church. There are also notes, speaking of Master Willem, of Great Ones, of evolution and Paleblood and cords, hasty scribbles that tell you nothing of this building, its history or its location. At the far end of the corridor, there is a double door, its presence accompanied by billowing purple mist. Without hesitation, you force it open, bravely stepping into that swirling, unending void.

When you arrive, you are once more inside a cave, but rather than gravestones, it is a collection of faces, contorted in screams of anger, despair and fear, and immortalized in the rocks, that greets you. Somewhere far away, you hear a baby crying, leaving you to wonder at the suffering that took place here. As in the Frontier, little grows here, the ground unable to nourish any plants; perhaps the darkness that reigns here is a part of that. Once outside, you discover the same bizarre enemies encountered in the Frontier, yet there are other dangers to be reckoned with. The first promise of this comes when you discover a corpse, its body run through with bizarre, spear-like projectiles. As you stop to inspect it more closely, you hear a whooshing sound and similar lances pierce your body. You look up, your eyes drawn to the colossal building that looms over this inhospitable landscape, a window near one of

its towers lighting up, a beacon in this night. As soon as the light comes up, however, the sound returns, thoughts of pain and insanity entering your body, and you rush to get out of sight. The multitude of corpses testify to a simple fact: whatever is up there, exposure to its gaze will surely kill if you are not careful. As you do battle with the monsters hiding amongst these rocks, it seems they are not immune to the power behind that window, a force greater than any you have encountered so far. Still, entering the building should bring some kind of safety. The mere size of the structure serves to unnerve you, however. With eyes appearing on every wall, ceilings that are so high they become invisible, collections of so many cages and contraptions of torture, you shudder to think too much about what has taken place here. A lone hunter attacks you as you cross one of the many stone bridges, and the infant's wails are heard once more. Dressed in the attire of the scholars and armed with weapons that link him to the Church and the Choir, he may well be on a mission similar to yours. At this point, however, no one is asking any questions, and he, like Micolash after him, falls to your blade.

The architecture of the School of Mensis continues to alarm you. Moving inside a building seems to hint at a semblance of the manmade order you experienced in Yharnam, yet the supernatural details of organic matter, pinned down with spikes, or growing out of the wall, so many surfaces lined with eyes and mirrors, only serves to unsettle. Lifts like cages, the metal now broken and twisted, transport you through a structure that is as labyrinthine as the Frontier before it. Populated by enemies unlike any you have seen before, human in form, yet moving like automata, you feel the disgust rising within you. As you press on, you are confronted with the ruin of the place, entire sections of the floor which have fallen away, revealing nothing but a dark void beneath. Still, the splendor of this place is easily detected, its sheer scale a testament to the ambition of those who designed and built it. Like Byrgenwerth, it appears to be a college of sorts, with piles of documents and book cases scattered around many of the rooms. Underneath all this, the panicked sensation that you are lost abounds, this single building appearing as enormous as the entire city of Yharnam. When you once more find yourself outside, there is little here to remove these feelings as you look out over an alien landscape of mountains and fog, with only the other parts of this same building appearing to break up the endless vista. You travel higher still, pitting yourself against crow-dog hybrids and pigs covered in eyes, the sound of your footsteps and the occasional cries of an infant the only thing to break the silence. Advancing along the outside ramparts, you find yourself on a wide lane, almost a promenade, running between two rows of buildings. It is a strange experience, as both the size of these structures and their archi-

tecture seem to suggest a connection to Yharnam itself, as if you have returned to the city within this nightmare. More urgently, it serves as a reminder of how enormous the School of Mensis is, forcing you to ask ever more questions about its purpose, and the number of people privy to its secrets. Evidence of the kidnapped victims are seen all through Yahar'gul, the streets of the village littered with carriages and cages, the bodies of so many people encased within its very stone. Surely, they would not have been brought here; you have seen enough mummified bodies, each wearing the distinctive Mensis cage, scattered throughout Yharnam to suppose that there are others, so many others, enough to fill this School. Yet you have seen the cages here, the twisted metal bars, these captive structures now clumped together into warped testaments to suffering. You have seen the faces, so many faces, expressions of pure emotions, melded together as part of the landscape. It is death and madness which reign here, and even if these higher levels look more like the ordered city, you know the nightmare cannot be trusted. Aside from the lady in the white dress, so ghostly in her appearance and her grief, there is nothing remotely human here. You stand next to her, following her gaze, pointing you to the very summit of the School of Mensis. As you reach the loft of this building, the dark clouds have shifted, once more revealing the moon. Here, the Blood Moon cannot be seen; instead, you find yourself bathed within a milky white light, its presence almost soothing. Here, at the top of the nightmare, in the light of a full moon, and with the gaze of Queen Yharnam herself upon you, is where it will end. Where all the suffering will finally, maybe, end.

In order to fully appreciate the relevance and impact of the School of Mensis, I once more turn to Salomon's discussion of horror spaces, which he states "are more monstrous than any monsters they might contain—spaces that in themselves express the essence of monstrosity" (2002: 107). Moving away from identifiable sources in the fiction of Lovecraft and the navigational logic found in level design, the Nightmare areas, and the School of Mensis in particular, concern themselves first and foremost with the impact and experience of the player, where space itself becomes dangerous and unstable. As will have become clear from my discussion of the game in this and the two preceding chapters, the third act of *Bloodborne* evidences a clear shift in the way in which areas are laid out. The first half of the game is dominated by spaces which are constructed and ordered, often including landmarks and clearly delineated pathways to guide players to their goal, and providing them with a means to (mentally) map and ultimately master the space. Although the Lecture Building continues this trend by offering access to another architectural space, it is one which is enclosed, with no clear location or view to

the outside. The (partially) organic and labyrinthine qualities found in both the Nightmare Frontier and the Nightmare of Mensis provide a clear counterpoint to the architectural ordering of the earlier parts of the game. The organic masses and spiraling shapes of the Frontier, combined with the alien features of the enemies found within this area, reiterates and reinvents *Bloodborne*'s display of hybrid monstrosity. Although some of these elements are carried over into the Nightmare of Mensis, in particular when examining the landscape surrounding the home of the School, it is the building itself that is central in interpreting the effectiveness of this location in its realization of both a hostile and unreal environment.

Aside from some traps and the hazard of the poisonous water found in the Frontier, the world of *Bloodborne* contains very few examples of a harmful environment, with the danger to players posed primarily by enemies and ambushes. In the case of the School, it is the building itself that becomes hostile, the Brain of Mensis kept in that high tower continuously attacking the player as they try to move through the Nightmare. Although this hazard disappears as soon as players enter the main building of the School, the encounter sets the tone in more ways than one. Firstly, it casts Mensis firmly as a hostile environment, a space that can do physical harm to the player; secondly, the fact that it is possible for these attacks to be part of the gameplay experience is due to a design choice that has not been encountered before: the need to approach this building from afar, presenting a particular experience of space. As Totten explains, "[e]xperientally-focused buildings utilize space to create specific experiences or evoke some idea broader than the architecture itself" (2014: 5). Both the placement of the School within the Nightmare as well as its sheer size provide the player with the pure experience of a staging space, "unique and of large scale. They are easy to see as a player approaches them and often call attention to themselves through monumental architecture or unique features" (Totten, 2014: 278). Although several of these can be found throughout *Bloodborne*, none of the areas are presented the way that the School of Mensis is. Elements of architecture permeate the game world, but are framed in particular ways. The staging spaces inside Yharnam, such as the Grand Cathedral, appear amidst a glut of buildings, streets, and alleys, an approach which is mirrored in Yahar'gul. These urban spaces offer their share of nightmarish proportions, but each of the structures can only be seen in relation to the others. The features of Forsaken Castle Cainhurst similarly qualify it as a staging space, as do the boss arenas in Hemwick Charnel Lane and the Nightmare Frontier, where the Witch's Abode and Amygdala's Chamber are each displayed with some prominence through placement and use of lighting, Byrgenwerth, by contrast, is interestingly hidden, tucked

away within the Forbidden Woods, with players moving down towards its main building.[2] The School of Mensis, however, an edifice that appears to approximate Yharnam in size, is positioned as part of a larger, nightmarish landscape.[3] With the building set in such a way so as to dwarf and, I would argue, intimidate the player, a glowing window (or perhaps eye) at the center of its structure, the overall design of Mensis is set to inspire terror. This process continues once players get inside the School, where structural believability gives way to a depiction of impossible architecture. Although none of the Nightmare spaces ever challenge the game's core mechanics through the introduction of new ways of movement or non–Euclidean design, the dimensions and presentation of the interior and exterior of this vast structure create a space that is as otherworldly as the blood-filled gravestones found in the Frontier.

At this point, it will be helpful to invoke Garcia's delineation of fantastic places and spaces, positing elements of understanding and mastery at the center of such a divide. She explains the centrality of the construction of space, and in particular, the role of the architect in this process, stating that "architecture is a structuring principle of reality" (2015: 1). It is a means by which space can be designed, constructed, and controlled, allowing us to map and subsequently possess that which has been built. Garcia explains: "Space—in particular in the ways we articulate it—is a means by which we organise the world. This, in turn, introduces the category of space as a manmade construction. […] Space […] is constructed by the human for the human" (2015: 2). Any example of architecture, whether in real life or within the world of a video game, is underpinned by an effort of design, and, in Totten's words, an effort to create an experience, as a result of which no place can be considered as neutral. Within this understanding of space, Garcia introduces her concepts of the fantastic of place and the fantastic of space, each of which is typified by an intrusion of the supernatural, thus destabilizing the manmade order of a structure, noting how "the impossible supernatural element *does not take place in space* but is rather *an event of space*, bound to some architectural element or to the (normal, logical) physical laws governing this dimension" (2015: 2; author's emphasis). In Garcia's analysis of fantastical locations, "the impossible element is bound to space: space not as the scene of actions but as the impossible element in the story. This transgression of space disrupts the comforting notion of space as objective entity in favour of the idea of space as constructed and conventional" (2015: 7–8). A designed space with the potential for representation and meaning is complicated further by the occurrence of seemingly impossible events, which can be perceived in two ways:

> The Fantastic of Place (a site) acts as a receptacle of the supernatural. This contrasts with the Fantastic of Space, which, since it affects the laws of space, deal with a more complex phenomenon. Space here is what *causes*—and not what *hosts*—the fantastic transgression [Garcia, 2015: 21; author's emphasis].

The edifice may simply be host to an otherworldly transgression, providing a site for the threshold between one world and the next, or it can even cause the clashing of worlds to occur. She continues:

> In the corpus of the Fantastic of Place, the place of action plays a central role in the narrative, particularly due to the attributes attached to this enclave. However, it has to be born in mind that no matter how relevant its atmospheric function is in the story […] the place itself is physically normal and not impossible in accordance with our extraliterary law. Although the place of action might initially be presented as exceptional […] it is later revealed that this anomaly is due to the exceptional phenomenon it hosts and not to its own physical impossibility. Instead, […] it is another element […] that breaches the realistic laws [2015: 25].
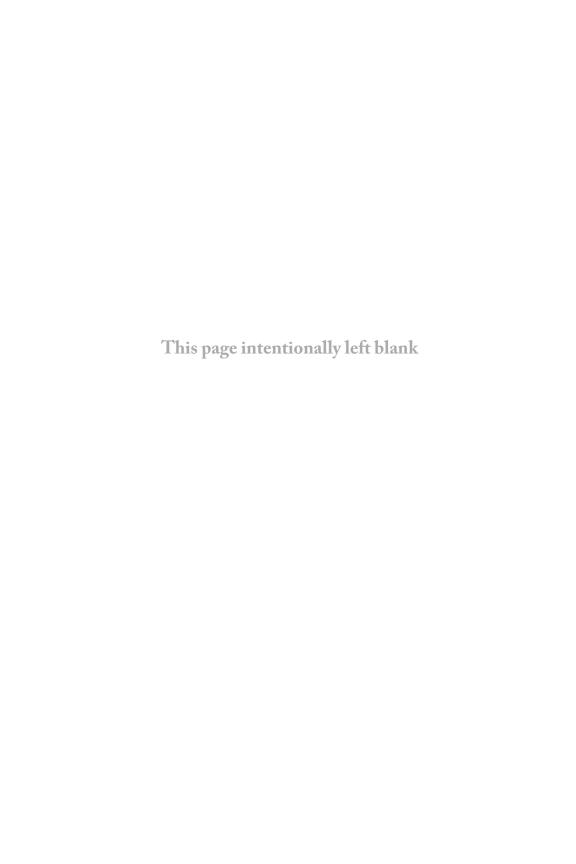
The Fantastic of Place is normal within itself; a house, for example, presented as home to a portal to another dimension, an impossible breach into the ordinary. This type of event helps to code both the space, and what takes place within or around it, as "the place of action [which] acts as a frame of reference of the real" (Garcia, 2015: 33). The Fantastic of Space, by contrast, focuses on space as the cause for the supernatural transgression:

> [I]n the Fantastic of Space, space is the *agent* of the transgression, provoking the breach of logical laws [where] space in itself is the transgressive element. Space is the fantastic monster, the element that questions the laws of reality established in the text and thus the tension is displaced from the particular place of action to the transgression undergone by this dimension [Garcia, 2015: 33; author's emphasis].

An argument can be made that the entirety of the game world represented in *Bloodborne* could be framed as a representation of otherworldly space (an idea which I will return to in chapter 9), but here, I wish to put forward that the Nightmare of Mensis can certainly be placed within this category. The impossible architecture shown through Mensis only serves to highlight this idea, presenting a location which is lost within an unstable supra-reality, reached through unlikely means, and set in a landscape warped by the faces of the long-suffering dead, an expression of, in Salomon's words, "the essence of monstrosity" (2002: 107). The depiction of terrifying space is created through distortion and instability, a structure that is too large to see, or even to picture and understand, as is showcased by the player's approach towards the School of Mensis. The impossible architecture they discover once inside, of ceilings and drops the end of which are invisible to them, combined with the ruinous and organic aspects, lend Mensis a number of qualities

which are decidedly otherworldly, despite their occurrence within an edifice that should be ordered and manmade. The journey to the Nightmare, and indeed the areas themselves, displays elements unlike any seen before, either within *Bloodborne*, or within real life. More pressingly, it is space itself which has become the agent of monstrosity and transgression, this swirling nightmare harboring the source of Yharnam's endless suffering. It is the full force of *Bloodborne*'s Gothic narrative realized within the game space.

The aim of this second part has been twofold. Firstly, I wished to show the importance of game space as a narrative descriptor within *Bloodborne*, taking into account the micro-narratives facilitated by environmental storytelling as well as larger concerns of world-building and the exposition of game lore. Secondly, the map design, and in particular its realization of navigable space and connections between areas further assists in this storytelling process. *Bloodborne*'s aesthetics help to reinforce its status as a horror game by drawing on the familiar conventions of old castles and dark forests, as well as a sense of history and Gothic splendor in its visualization of the wards of Yharnam. The otherworldly quality of the Nightmare is presented through its aesthetics as well as the scale and the properties of the location, showing the influence of Lovecraft in more than the presence of the Great Ones and so many hybrid monstrosities. Game space and narrative intertwine in a way where each reinforces the other, where location and lore become inseparable. The visual representation of urban and rural Gothic spaces and of Lovecraftian visions of chaos highlight *Bloodborne*'s themes of ambition, madness and decay, intrinsically linking form and content in its characterization of the city itself in the figure of Yharnam, Phtumerian Queen. It is this interlinking of gameplay and game story that continues when examining some of *Bloodborne*'s key mechanics, which is the focus of Part III of this work.

Part III.

Mechanics

7

Insight

It is evening in Yharnam, the sky pale yet bright, shining orange and red and dotted with soft purple clouds. Gingerly, you make your way through the Cathedral Ward, dodging up and down stairs and between gravestones and other monuments, weaving between the servants of the Church. By this point, you are used to the duties of the Hunter and your enemies succumb to your blade with relative ease. Yet it is late, and it is getting dark, and you feel a chill settle inside your heart. The buildings around you block out the light, and standing between the corpses of those who have fallen, you long for sanctuary, even a temporary one. You head back to Oedon Chapel, and as you look up, you stop in your tracks. Something is clinging to the building; a bulbous head, too many limbs, a monstrosity, slowly moving. You approach, unsure whether you should attack, or whether it will attack you. It seems not to have noticed you, however, so you quickly dash forward and run into the Chapel where you will hopefully be safe, if only for a moment.

Running through this book are themes of narrative, not simply those elements found within *Bloodborne*, but also wider notions of how stories can be told. Specifically, the focus has been on Miyazaki's interpretations and application of storytelling. In the previous parts, I have noted how tightly woven these plots are, how they intersect and, quite literally, permeate the world. Aside from more traditional methods of delivery, much of Miyazaki's stories are obscured, hidden in item descriptions or optional content, kept for only those players who fully mine Yharnam's depths. In Part III, I will continue to follow Cobley's comments that the narrative is not just the what, but also how the story is being told, by delving deeper into elements of gameplay and mechanics. Aside from clues related to characters, items and areas of the game world, one of the distinguishing features of *Bloodborne* is how its themes have seeped into the very fabric of the game's design. It is this process of meaning-making through game mechanics that is the focus of here.

At its core, *Bloodborne* is a 3D action RPG, allowing players to design a character which is shown to them on the screen as they play. With said character, or avatar, they enter the game world in the role of a hunter in hopes of slaying enemies, discovering secrets, and ultimately, to unravel the mystery of Yharnam and its haunted past. Unlike other games of this type, *Bloodborne* does not include a "skill tree," a system which allows players to unlock and upgrade specific skills and abilities. Instead, the game focuses on resource gathering, requiring players to find items and kill enemies in order to acquire Blood Echoes. These echoes function as the main currency in *Bloodborne*, allowing players to level up or buy items, as well as weapons and attire. Aside from components that players may recognize from other games, systems of attack and defense, of progress and movement, *Bloodborne* introduces a number of features which are unique to the game. Choices of names, descriptions, concepts, and their functions, help to explain the game world and those who inhabit it. Alongside the importance of more traditional storytelling elements, described in Part I, and the sense of place and being in the world, examined in Part II, it is these mechanics that I wish to highlight here. In the following three chapters, I will be taking a closer look at the two main resources available to the player, Insight and Blood Echoes, as well as examining the Hunter's Dream, the one (seemingly) safe place available to the player. Each will be discussed as a mechanic and in relation to its significance to the wider story of *Bloodborne*.

Before undertaking such a discussion, however, some words need to be said about the validity of studying the systems underpinning *Bloodborne*'s universe. Every game, digital or analogue, contains a form of rules or mechanics, related to its inner workings, as well as the fictional reality the game wishes to represent. As Salen and Zimmerman argue, "[g]ame play takes place within a *representational* universe, filled with depictions of objects, interactions, and ideas out of which a player makes meaning" (2004: 364, author's emphasis). It is up to the player to piece these together as they try to interpret the varying levels of complexity embedded within the game. As Salen and Zimmerman remind us, "Even the most basic set of game signs are always bound up in larger systems of meaning," (2004: 365) and "[r]epresentation in games emerges from the relationship between a rigid, underlying rule structure and the free play of meaning that occurs as players inhabit the system" (2004: 367). These rules are realized through certain design choices and manifest themselves as the mechanics of a game. In Schell's words, "[mechanics] are the procedures and rules of your game. Mechanics describe the goal of your game, how players can and cannot try to achieve it, and what happens when they try" (2008: 41). As can be gleaned from Schell's definition,

mechanics are instrumental to a game, both for its functionality, and in how it allows players to interact with its systems.

This emphasis on player agency can be found in Sicart's exploration of game mechanics, in which he specifically draws attention to the role of the player within the world, and their ability to act upon the game space. According to Sicart, "[g]ame mechanics are methods invoked by agents, designed for interaction with the game state" (2008: n.pag.). The actions of a player allow certain parts of the system to by triggered, thus altering the game state, a relationship which centers on (elements of) interaction: "A game mechanic […] is the action invoked by an agent to interact with the game world, as constrained by the game rules" (Sicart, 2008: n.pag.). Rather than simply representing a stationary game state, mechanics are presented as methods of agency, as actions either the player or the system AI can take within the space of possibility created by the rules that exist in the game world. As part of this definition, Sicart highlights the possible existence of what he terms core mechanics. Core mechanics are defined as "the game mechanics (repeatedly) used by agents to achieve a systemically rewarded end-game state" (2008: n.pag.), reminding one of Schell's words on the way in which mechanics help to set the goal for the players, as well as offering them means to achieve it. These core mechanics can be divided into two subsets, of primary and of secondary mechanics, where:

> Primary mechanics can be understood as core mechanics that can be directly applied to solving challenges that lead to the desired end state. Primary mechanics are readily available, explained in the early stages of the game, and consistent throughout the game experience. […] Secondary mechanics, on the other hand, are core mechanics that ease the player's interaction with the game towards reaching the end state. Secondary mechanics are either available occasionally or require their combination with a primary mechanic in order to be functional [Sicart, 2008: n.pag.].

As an example, Sicart points to the difference between the primary mechanic of "shooting a gun" versus a secondary mechanic such as "chest-high walls," which allow players to take cover, thus facilitating a sustained gunfight with a group of enemies. Each of these categories aids players in their interaction with the world, offering them means through which they can interact with the game state and, ultimately, achieve their goal.

There are, however, other ways in which one can approach game mechanics, moving away from a discussion which focuses primarily on their functionality. Schell advocates that designers "will want to choose mechanics that make players feel like they are in the world that the aesthetics have defined, and you will want a story with a set of events that let your aesthetics emerge at the right pace and have the most impact" (2008: 42). The game

system is unavoidable, and required for the functioning of the game. In choosing certain mechanics over others, however, designers are able to make statements about the game world, and even the characters who inhabit it. Salen and Zimmerman note that "[p]layers interact with a game in order to make sense of it. Rules guide this interaction, establishing relationships between signs that tell a player what things might mean. Meaning emerges as a player actively interprets the system established by the rules" (2004: 368), putting the mechanics in a position central to the interaction with and understanding of the game and the fictional world it wishes to portray. It is worth noting that not all games do so, as is noted by Totten: "Many games separate their mechanics and narratives in such a way that they can exist without one another: the story is ultimately a backdrop for game mechanics" (2014: 272), yet he explains that this can be a valuable asset: "More powerful are the games whose mechanics are an essential part of their narrative experience" (2014: 272). In using mechanics in this way, Totten argues, "designers develop game worlds by crafting the rules of how they work and communicate these rules to players through gameplay" (2014: 301), allowing for a play experience which adds depth beyond more traditional narrative and story beats. Juul similarly notes that "[t]o play a video game is therefore to interact with real rules while imagining a fictional world, and a video game is a set of rules as well as a fictional world," as "[t]he interaction between game rules and game fiction is one of the most important features of video games" (2004: 1). Such an implementation of mechanics also enables an exchange between player and designer:

> In the game design process, the game designer must select which aspects of the fictional world to actually implement in the game rules. The player then experiences the game as a two-way process where the fiction of the game cues him or her into understanding the rules of the game, and, again, the rules can cue the player to imagine the fictional world of the game [Juul, 2004: 163].

Throughout the work, Juul also draws attention to the interplay between rules and fiction, and the impact this has on the player: "fiction *matters* in games and it is important to remember the duality of the formal and the experiential perspectives on fiction in games" (2004: 199; author's emphasis). He continues:

> That the rules of a game are real and formally defined does not mean that the player's experience is also formally defined. However, the rules help create the player's informal experience. Though the fictional worlds of games are optional, subjective, and not real, they play a key role in video games. The player navigates these two levels, playing video games in the half-real zone between the fiction and the rules [2004: 202].

In many ways, the mechanics define (the experience of) the game world, perhaps in a more profound way than elements such as lore notes or cutscenes would. One way of describing this process is through the concept of procedural rhetoric, which was briefly mentioned in the introduction. First coined by Ian Bogost,

> Procedural rhetoric […] is a practice of using processes persuasively. More specifically, procedural rhetoric is the practice of persuading through processes in general and computational processes in particular. […] Procedural rhetoric is a technique for making arguments with computational systems and for unpacking computational arguments others have created [2010: 3].

As Totten notes, in drawing attention to this process, "Bogost highlights the communicative power of such cause-and-effect procedures, arguing that developing procedural literacy in players can not only allow them to be better players of a certain game, but also help in the creation of *procedural rhetoric*—using game rules as a system of communication" (2014: 317; author's emphasis). In his book, Bogost describes his ideas in more detail, starting with the notion that any computational interaction is concerned with elements that can only be hard-coded into the system. He explains: "Procedural systems generate behaviors based on rule-based models; they are machines capable of producing many outcomes, each conforming to the same overall guidelines. Procedurality is the principal value of the computer, which creates meaning through the interaction of algorithms" (2010: 4). Simply put, "computer software establishes rules of execution, tasks and actions that can and cannot be performed" (2010: 4), but perhaps despite this, "Computers run processes that invoke interpretations of processes in the material world. […] Computation is representation, and procedurality in the computational sense is a means to produce that expression" (2010: 5). Even if the systems are designed to perform only specific actions, these actions are representative of a real world process, and as such, can be read and interpreted. Although Bogost rightly notes that "[n]ot all procedures are expressive in the way that literature and art are expressive" (2010: 5), this does not mean that they lack symbolic meaning, but rather that they use a different means of expression altogether as "processes that might appear unexpressive, devoid of symbol manipulation, may actually have found expression of a higher order" (2010: 5). Instead, Bogost argues, "[p]rocedural representation explains processes *with other processes*. Procedural representation is a form of symbolic expression that uses process rather than language" (2010: 9; author's emphasis). Although the rules and systems underpinning a game use different channels of communication, that does not mean that they are devoid of expression or meaning; instead, they may be telling us more than we might even realize.

Like more traditional art forms, Bogost argues, "procedural rhetoric entails persuasion—to change opinion or action [and] expression—to convey ideas effectively" (2010: 29). Ultimately, Bogost aims to make both designers and players aware of the impact of mechanics. Not simply a backdrop, or a way to make the game function, the choice of actions available to players, or the visualization and implementation of these actions, can offer commentary on the game world and the narratives set within it. What I wish to accomplish in this chapter, as well as the next two, is to examine how some of *Bloodborne*'s core features help to deepen and reinforce the themes found in its story and world.

The mechanic I wish to focus on in this chapter, to further illuminate the ideas set out in the previous section, is that of Insight. Described by the Strategy Guide as "another form of resource for your character" (2015: 13), the construct is applied within the game in a number of ways. Like Blood Echoes, Insight can be used to buy certain items which are often more rare than those sold for Echoes. In addition, the resource is used to facilitate the multiplayer elements of the game,[1] where players are asked to spend one point of Insight to summon help from others, and where Insight can be gained by those entering another's world, either to assist or to hunt other players.[2] More interesting for my current argument, however, are the additional notes on this resource found in the Strategy Guide: "Your character may experience visual and auditory hallucinations at high levels of Insight. Or perhaps they are not hallucinations at all … either way, this is tied to the story, so we won't spoil it here" (2015: 13). It is in these few lines that the connection with Bogost's concept of procedural rhetoric becomes apparent. In addition to the straightforward function as a resource, the level of Insight also impacts the statistics of the player character and their resistance to certain influences. Furthermore, the connection between Insight and the game's story is made clear in the space of only a few words, with the authors of the Guide even noting that this element is at risk of spoilers, thus ruining the process of discovery for the player. It is clear that Insight influences the game world in ways as yet unknown to those who are entering Yharnam. The SG includes an additional section as part of the Hunter's Appendices, containing information about the purchasing of in-game items, as well as details about interactions with NPCs. It is here that more specifics are offered about what Insight represents within the game world, and it is worth quoting at length:

> Insight is inhuman knowledge and represents your awareness of the nightmare's effects. In addition to its use as a currency at the insight shop and during multiplayer, acquiring more insight provides certain benefits but also poses a few risks. High levels of Insight will decrease your Beasthood stat […]. Your Frenzy resistance is also heavily dependent

on how much Insight you have, and the more you have the more susceptible you will
be to getting Frenzied. Some enemies and aspects of the environment will also change
at particular insight thresholds, […]; with extremely high insight you'll also become
able to see things during the day which would otherwise only be visible when the
Blood Moon is out [2015: 522].

Again, the notion of Insight-as-resource is reiterated and there is more infor-
mation on its impact on player statistics (which I will examine more closely
later on in this chapter). Furthermore, it notes the impact of this mechanic
on the appearance of the game world, and the next page even includes a small
table titled "Insight Thresholds for Enemy and Environmental Changes" (SG,
2015: 523), which in itself is telling. It lists the value of Insight required, the
area of the game where the changes take place, and what is altered within the
game world:

- At 1 Insight, the Insight Shop becomes available in the Hunter's Dream.[3]
  In addition, the "Doll activates and allows you to channel blood echoes"
  so players can level up;
- At 15 Insight, the Church Servant enemies in the Cathedral Ward gain
  new attacks, and the appearance of their weapons change;
- At 15 Insight, "Mad Ones appear in Hemwick at night";
- At 40 Insight, players are able to see Lesser Amygdalas in Cathedral
  Ward and Yahar'gul[4];
- At 40 Insight, the music in the Hunter's Dream changes;
- At 60 Insight, throughout the game, the table lists "auditory hallucina-
  tions" as an effect, stating that "a baby's crying voice can be heard in all
  areas except the Hunter's Dream and Chalice Dungeons" (SG, 2015: 523).

The connection with the "inhuman knowledge [and] awareness," specified
above, is clear as players are not only given access to certain game functions,
but are shown elements of the world which are present, but invisible to them.
The appearance of the Lesser Amygdalas, for instance, presupposes their con-
tinued manifestation within Yharnam: even if players can see these mon-
strosities during the Blood Moon phase of the game, the amount of Insight
players possess may make them aware of the presence of these creatures well
before this point. It is an idea which corresponds with the emphasis of *Blood-
borne*'s overall themes of (the acquisition of) inhuman knowledge, as well as
the dangers inherent in learning these facts.

In the Hunter's Appendices of the Strategy Guide details can be found
as to how Insight is obtained by players, and the methods of doing so are
similarly linked ideas of knowledge and awareness. The resource is primarily
acquired through progression within the game, as players encounter and

defeat bosses, meet certain characters or trigger in-game events, such as entering a specific area (SG, 2015: 522–523). This is not the only way in which Insight can be obtained, however, as there are a number of specific items found within the game which grant additional points. These include the Blood Dregs, as well as the Umbilical Cord items (discussed in Chapter 5 and Chapter 3, respectively), but more relevant for the current discussion are Madman's Knowledge and Great One's Wisdom, the full descriptions of which are included below:

> *Madman's Knowledge*: "Skull of a madman touched by the wisdom of the Great Ones. Making contact with eldritch wisdom is a blessing, for even if it drives one mad, it allows one to serve a grander purpose, for posterity."

> *Great One's Wisdom*: "Fragments of the lost wisdom of the Great Ones, beings that might be described as gods. At Byrgenwerth, Master Willem had an epiphany: 'We are thinking on the basest of planes. What we need, are more eyes'" [SG, 2015: 467].

Both of these hint towards the existence of the Great Ones, inferred to be otherworldly beings, creatures who may have a lot to offer humanity. Knowledge is present, even available, but only if one is able to see it, and even then, it may well drive one mad. It is here that the connection to the deeper themes of Lovecraft become apparent.

The dual function of Insight as a resource, as well as an indication of the acquisition of inhuman knowledge, allows for an interesting reading of its application within the game. The changes caused by reaching certain Insight thresholds do not alter gameplay in a significant way; for example, players may come up against enemies with different attacks, but their weapons will still function in the same way. The effects of the amount of Insight held by the player are primarily focused on aesthetic changes to the game world. What was hidden, becomes visible; what was present, but unseen, is able to manifest itself. As the player gains Insight, they gain knowledge, as well as the capacity to perceive what is out there, no matter what the cost: their health, or their sanity. Gaining Insight offers players a hidden knowledge about the world, allowing them to see the unseeable and know the unknowable. It is here that *Bloodborne* connects perhaps most deeply with the work of Lovecraft. Relevant for the current discussion is that Insight employs the notion of dangerous knowledge and places it in a central position in the gameplay experience. Information is a necessity as *Bloodborne* relies on exploration, on its players' curiosity and their will to discover and piece together events. At the same time, Insight proves that such information is a dangerous commodity, its effects perilous to those who come into contact with it, yet its acquisition unavoidable when traversing Yharnam's streets and environs. As was discussed in Chapter 3, alongside the creation of a universe of ancient

beings, existing outside of time and (largely) outside of the knowledge of humanity, Lovecraft's fiction is underpinned by a number of core themes. It is worth repeating them here, at least in part, in relation to the topic of Insight. As Smith explains, "The fundamental horror of Lovecraft's world is this sense of humanity's utter insignificance, this realization produces a terrible enlightenment and madness in his characters" (2011: 835), which is echoed by Burleson, who argues that this fiction centers on "the nature of self-knowledge, the effects of learning one's own nature and one's place in the scheme of things" (1991: 135). Lovecraft's work is perhaps most famous for its use of the danger of (self) knowledge, often featuring protagonists who stumble across forbidden insights that change them forever.

Lovecraft himself has described his intentions in the writing of his fiction, most notably in the work *Supernatural Horror in Literature* from 1927. Alongside a discussion of the weird tales produced by the writers of his time, he sheds some light on what he considers the ingredients for the ideal supernatural tale, stories that are often set in a universe where knowledge, or the lack thereof, holds a central position. In many of his stories, it is the lack of information that functions as the catalyst for the horror, because, as he argues, "uncertainty and danger are always closely allied; thus making any kind of an unknown world a world of peril and evil possibilities" (1973: 14). The natural remedy for this state of fear and uncertainty, then, would seem to be to learn, to gain knowledge, and to educate oneself, yet as Lovecraft explains, there is a danger in this, as well: "[T]hough the area of the unknown has been steadily contracting for thousands of years, an infinite reservoir of mystery still engulfs most of the outer cosmos, whilst a vast residuum of powerful inherited associations clings round all the objects and processes that were once mysterious, however well they may now be explained" (1973: 14). As science and technology advanced, more of the world's mysteries have been investigated and dissected, their inner workings laid bare for society to scrutinize. This process of exploration and explanation is, as Lovecraft argues, not always enlightening: the universe still holds its fair share of mysteries, and even those ideas and inventions that can now explain certain phenomena and offer new knowledge cannot be truly understood. Ultimately, Lovecraft draws attention to the tension between what we, as humans, do and do not know, stating that "men with minds sensitive to hereditary impulse will always tremble at the thought of the hidden and fathomless worlds of strange life which may pulsate in the gulfs beyond the stars, or press hideously upon our own globe in unholy dimensions which only the dead and the moonstruck can glimpse" (1973: 14). The knowledge we seek is one which holds many dangers, and is about a world which may be closer than we think. And yet, what we do not know can still

hurt us, and there is a risk in finding out. Burleson has described these themes as being related to "forbidden knowledge, or merciful ignorance," pertaining to the fact that "there are some types of knowledge only by the avoidance or suppression of which can humankind maintain a semblance of well-being" (1991: 136). Not only is the knowledge difficult to obtain, and may speak of those things that are ordinarily hidden to us, nor does it simply relate to ideas or facts or concepts that put humans in danger. It is not the possession of a magic incantation and its use, with the usual unforeseen and unforeseeable consequences that is a threat to humanity. Rather, it is any exposure to the knowledge that, by its mere existence, may well doom mankind forever. Where many classic horror texts focus on the uses of the forbidden knowledge obtained, Lovecraft is concerned with the awareness that this knowledge exists. A mere inkling of what is out there may doom a simple man to madness, and by extension, may place the entirety of mankind in a position of peril, a danger to both their sanity and mortality.

Closely connected with this is what Burleson calls "the theme of illusory surface appearances," a state of the world where "things are not as they seem, that surface appearances mask a deeper and more terrible reality" (1991: 136). Often construed as being focused on mythical beings from outer space, Lovecraft instead placed an emphasis on just how close these other dimensions might exist in relation to our own. Located on a different plane of existence, which coexists with human reality, the Old Ones are close and can be seen if only one has the right tools. Many of Lovecraft's fictions focus on moments in which the two planes bleed into one another, or weave their narrative around a human who may have received a glimpse of this other reality, and is now caught in a loop of (often desperate) attempts to make contact once more. Joshi has described this existence of an alternate plane as supra-reality, noting that "it was important to Lovecraft that the characters experiencing visions of supra-reality could not explain them away by recourse to hallucination or (ordinary) dream" (2014: 108). Specifically, Joshi argues, it is "[k]nowledge that allows characters to break through into supra-reality" (2014: 108), where "supra-reality is 'truer' than the illusory reality that we normally perceive through our senses" (Joshi, 2014: 109). Indeed, Lovecraft's fiction contains elements of breach, of one plane of existence bleeding into and becoming visible to the other, an encounter which is sure to leave its marks. Ultimately, he notes,

> The one test for the really weird is simply this—whether or not there be excited in the reader a profound sense of dread, and of contact with unknown spheres and powers; a subtle attitude of awed listening, as if for the beating of black wings or the scratching of outside shapes and entities of the known universe's utmost rim [Lovecraft, 1973: 16].

Whether a fully realized other world filled with supernatural beings and perilous knowledge, or whether simply an impression, a brief glance, there may be more out there than humanity has so far realized. More importantly, whatever might be out there is so much closer than we think, and it will likely cause us harm.

Using these Lovecraftian themes to frame a close reading of Insight helps to explain the importance of this mechanic in relation to *Bloodborne*'s narrative and lore. As was noted in Part II, a large part of this experience comes down to the game's world. The feeling of "being in a place" is one of the key attractions of many types of video games. This place can be fantastical or founded in technology, it can be exotic or barren, but the experience is ultimately about wanting to be there, wanting to find out about who lives there and to hear their stories. There will be items to find and locations to visit. Developers want players to interact and to explore, to learn about the world they have created for them. They want them to *know* that place. Yet what if the game takes the player down a darker path? What if the world is hostile and its inhabitants do not want them to be there? What if the themes of the game inform both narrative and gameplay mechanics, creating an experience where exploration is still necessary, but not without risk? What if knowing about the world they are in could kill the player in an instant?

Not only does *Bloodborne* use Insight in two ways (as a resource, and as a marker of the game world), it also places players in a particular position in relation to its acquisition. The function of Insight is often discussed by the online communities in an attempt to identify how it is gained, and how it affects the game world. Most notably, the mechanic, as others like it, is not presented or explained to the player in any detail. As with other components of *Bloodborne*'s lore, players are able to experience its effects for themselves, but it is a journey of discovery that is framed as particularly perilous. The game's narrative repeatedly references the dangers inherent in the process of gaining knowledge, often pointing out the risks involved in what players might learn about the world. Through the implementation of Insight, this idea is expanded on, shaping the player's experience of the game world. Rather than being told about these risks, players are able to experience them for themselves: we wish to know the world and explore it, but we are hurt in the process, even brought to a place where we may question our own senses. As we play, we realize that something is out there, a something which is unknown, which cannot be known, but which can certainly harm us. It is a knowledge which is available, which we should not wish for, but which we covet all the same, and ultimately, it is knowledge which we cannot escape as the lure of exploration is too great, the world we find ourselves in too enticing to be left alone.

Interestingly, it is also a knowledge which is not without hope. As argued by many of the academics discussing his fiction, Lovecraft does not so much focus on the danger of the knowledge itself, but rather, humanity's ability to manage having it. Although exposure to these planes and ideas carries with it limitless dangers, both for the individual and for the rest of humanity, for both physical and mental health, it is a way of seeing that is considered more desirable than a normal existence. As Mosig argues, "Lovecraft is *not* deploring knowledge, but rather *man's inability to cope with it*" (quoted in: Smith, 2011: 835; author's emphasis). Instead, Lovecraft's fiction is a repeated attempt "to simulate the removal of the natural *limits on human perception* so as to provide a full view of the horribly empty (naturalistic) cosmos" (Price, 1991: 248; author's emphasis), a sentiment which is echoed by Joshi: "What Lovecraft, then, sought to do in his fiction was to hint of these other realms beyond 'reality' as we know it, and thereby to achieve that sense of liberation from the 'galling limitations' of the ordinary reality" (2014: 106). Like the quests of Master Willem, of the Choir and of the School of Mensis, the acquisition of knowledge is seen as a noble and perhaps even desirable goal. However, the consequences cannot be overseen. This is evidenced within the game world, clearly visible in the state of Yharnam and its inhabitants, and it is found in the changes brought about by Insight, bringing players into a new state of being over which they have little say. After all, Insight will simply continue to go up as players progress through the game, its total stacking with each new discovery, where the only means to stop this accumulation of inhuman knowledge is to stop playing altogether. The revelations in Yharnam are waiting to be discovered, yet their effects are more far-reaching than one might have imagined. It is these elements of inevitable progress that provide an interesting link with the negative aesthetic of Gothic fiction. Offering a close examination of themes present in the Gothic mode, Botting notes that "Gothic texts are, overtly but ambiguously, not rational, depicting disturbances of sanity and security, from superstitious belief in ghosts and demons, displays of uncontrolled passion, violent emotion or flights of fancy to portrayals of perversion and obsession" (2013: 2). In calling up this imagery, works of this type are able to "disturb the borders of knowing and conjure up obscure otherworldly phenomena" (2013: 2), presenting a collection of ideas, events and creatures that exist in, or even beyond, the darkness that surrounds and permeates our world. Knowledge of their presence, however, is twofold within the Gothic, focusing on both "deficiency, the absence, exclusion or negation of knowledge, facts or things; and excess, an overflow of words, feelings, ideas, imagining" (Botting, 2013: 6–7). Toeing the line between absence and glut, the tropes of the Gothic, including the recurring

plots related to the exposure to and possession and use of forbidden knowledge, may appear to be both positive and negative in their effects, a game between promise and realization. Botting continues: "One might lose reason and the clearly demarcated sense of self and world it sustains, but the loss might also entail the excitement of shedding the restraints of reason and being invigorated by passion" (2013: 7). At once filled with despair and a form of hope at the existence of another plane, or at the very least, another set of experiences, it is here that I wish to return to the representation of Insight in *Bloodborne*. Specifically, I wish to return to the two item descriptions, listed earlier in the chapter:

> *Madman's Knowledge*: "Skull of a madman touched by the wisdom of the Great Ones. Making contact with eldritch wisdom is a blessing, for even if it drives one mad, it allows one to serve a grander purpose, for posterity."

> *Great One's Wisdom*: "Fragments of the lost wisdom of the Great Ones, beings that might be described as gods. At Byrgenwerth, Master Willem had an epiphany: 'We are thinking on the basest of planes. What we need, are more eyes'" [SG, 2015: 467].

Although these descriptions draw attention to the negative aspects of the knowledge obtained, as does Lovecraft, they also note them as endeavors which are necessary, worthwhile, and ultimately rewarding. It is reminiscent of Mosig's appraisal of Lovecraft's themes, where it is not the knowledge in itself that is problematic, but rather one's inability to cope with this new understanding. There is a promise in discovery and uncovering information, and ultimately, the goals of both the Choir and Mensis (examined in Chapter 3): their quest for eyes, for access to and understanding of the Cosmos and those beings within it, links in with these sentiments. There is knowledge out there that humanity is not aware of, not yet, that it is unable to grasp with their current faculties, and yet they should strive to be better, to find a way to tap into this understanding, this supra-reality, expanding their minds and their beings, no matter the risks.

As has been mentioned briefly earlier in this chapter, Insight influences the game in a variety of ways; what is yet to be explored is the influence of, specifically, the amount of Insight held by the player on the statistics of their character. Within *Bloodborne*, as in most games of its type, the abilities of the player character are divided into a number of different categories: health and stamina, as well as stats related to offense, defense, special attacks and damage reduction. Some of these can be controlled directly by the player through levelling up, modifying their weapons, or equipping certain types of items. It is this process which allows players the chance to build their character, both in making them more powerful, more resilient against the dangers waiting in Yharnam, as well as allowing players to tailor their character to a

certain playstyle. Alongside these statistics, *Bloodborne*'s design includes certain status effects and the defenses against them. Often, these are related to types of damage and the ability of players to defend against physical or arcane attacks. Other status effects only come into play in relation to environmental effects or special enemy attacks; for example, the effects, duration and cure of being poisoned. It is this last category that the two statistics I wish to discuss here fall into: Beasthood and Frenzy.

A brief note early in the Strategy Guide describes the connection between these two values and Insight: "Insight also has other effects. High levels of Insight reduce your Beasthood and your Frenzy resistance; some enemies even become stronger if your Insight is high. Having a large stock of Insight is a double-edged sword!" (2015: 13) In the Hunter's Appendices section, this connection is described in more detail:

> High levels of Insight will decrease your Beasthood stat, and while that does mean that you will fill the Beast Gauge faster, you won't be able to reach the later damage modifiers that come with a bigger gauge. Your Frenzy resistance is also heavily dependent on how much Insight you have, and the more you have the more susceptible you will be to getting Frenzied [2015: 522].

When the level of Insight possessed by the player goes up, they move further away from any form of beastly transformation, instead becoming more susceptible to the Frenzy effect present in the Nightmare of Mensis area of the game, and inflicted by certain enemies. This side effect of the Insight mechanic further emphasizes the Lovecraftian themes discussed in the previous section, as a closer study of each stat will help to clarify.

Turning to Beasthood first, this effect is described in the Strategy Guide as the statistic which determines the player's Beast Transformation when using the Beast Claw weapon, or the Beast Blood Pellets. As the Guide explains, "You won't literally transform into a beast, but raising the Beast Gauge will give you a serious increase in attack power, at the cost of a similarly serious decrease in defense" (2015: 13).[5] The stat does have a wider implication, however: aside from its usefulness in combat, it is presented as a representational element, indicating the proximity of the player character to being a beast. As was explained in Chapter 1, ideas on beasthood and monstrosity inform the overall narrative, as well as the enemy design and many NPC encounters. Many of Yharnam's inhabitants, whether hostile or friendly, appear in varying stages of becoming a beast. Beasthood points to something impure, base and inhumane; it refers to the loss of self and reason, as evidenced by the descriptions of the Beast Claw ("As flesh is flayed and blood is sprayed, the beast within awakens" [SG, 2015: 438]), the Beast Blood Pellet ("Ripping apart the flesh of one's enemies and being rained upon by their

splattering blood invigorates one's sense of beasthood, feeding strength and euphoric feeling alike" [SG, 2015: 450]) and the Beast Roar ("The indescribable sound is broadcast with the caster's own vocal cords, which begs the question, what terrible things lurk deep within the frames of men?" [SG, 2015: 460]). The Guide further notes that the use of the Pellets "temporarily awaken[s] your inner beast," and recommends that "if you want to maximize your Beasthood, you'll want to keep 0 Insight. […]" (2015: 450). Inversely, the more Insight the player has, the lower their stat for Beasthood, positing a negative connection between knowledge and beasthood. The more a hunter knows about Yharnam, the more they have seen and experienced (or perhaps have been forced to see), the closer they are to some form of transcendence. The acquisition of knowledge, or, in terminology of the game itself, of Insight, of eyes, lifts one away from being a lowly beast, and up towards wondrous epiphanies.

It is this contrast that is expressed by Frenzy, a statistic tied directly to knowledge and its dangers. Being exposed to certain information, to enemies and environments that are perhaps beyond human comprehension, players may suffer from this status ailment. Although little can be found about their exact workings, the Guide notes that these types of ailments, of which Frenzy is one, are "often more deadly than normal attacks," and describes the process as follows: "When you are exposed to a status ailment, its associate bar will begin to fill up; when it is completely full, the status will be inflicted" (SG, 2015: 19). In the case of Frenzy, if the bar fills up completely, the player experiences an instantaneous loss of 70% of their total health bar, which will often result in the instant death of the player character and the loss of progress. Killing the enemy or disengaging from the encounter places the player in a better position, but the Guide does note that "Frenzy can continue to build up even after you escape from the source" (2015: 447), creating a big risk for an unsuspecting player. Although it is perhaps difficult to do so in the midst of battle, "[y]ou can cure it before the bar fills to prevent the ailment" (SG, 2015: 19) and *Bloodborne* offers items to cure the various status ailments, with Sedatives being used to combat the impact of Frenzy. Interestingly, the item description for this medication further enforces some of the themes discussed in this chapter, and is worth examining in detail: "Liquid medicine concocted at Byrgenwerth. Calms the nerves. Those who delve into the arcane fall all-too-easily into madness, and thick human blood serves to calm the frayed nerves of these inquisitive minds. Naturally, this often leads to a reliance on blood ministration" (SG, 2015: 447). These few sentences help to confirm the position of Insight within the game world, insisting on its connection to inhuman knowledge and understanding, and what might be gained from this, for

good or ill. It also, interestingly, links back the importance of blood within Yharnam society, where the substance is necessity, healing, addictive; it is at once helpful and the source of the city's problems and decline. Both Frenzy and the Sedatives that help to cure this mania are not found until later parts of the game. The medicine is first found on the grounds of Byrgenwerth and becomes more ubiquitous during the Blood Moon phase, when it can be purchased within the Hunter's Dream and appears in the Lecture Building and the Nightmare of Mensis. Similarly, enemies responsible for causing Frenzy do not become common until the third act, whereas beast enemies all but disappear in this stage of the game. These small details present another link to the eldritch Truth that is so central to this part of *Bloodborne*'s narrative and further enforces the connection and opposition between Insight, Frenzy, and Beasthood, and the player's position in relation to each statistic.

As has become clear, the Frenzy ailment, like Beasthood, is closely linked to the amount of Insight possessed by a player. The connection between Insight and Beasthood positions an understanding of the world as that what separates man and beast, and it is only when the player possesses minimal Insight that Beasthood can become truly effective. In the case of Frenzy, as is noted in the item description for the Sedative, "those who delve into the arcane fall all-too-easily into madness," a scenario where the possession of inhuman knowledge is more likely to produce an adverse effect on the sanity, and even physical health, of the player character, as evidenced by the loss of hit points when suffering from Frenzy build-up. The more Insight the player possesses, the more awareness and knowledge they have of the world they find themselves in, yet their resistance to Frenzy, that peculiar madness brought about by the same inhuman knowledge they seek (and indeed need) to have, is significantly lowered. In describing Insight as the player's knowledge of *Bloodborne*'s hostile environment, thus producing an understanding of its lore, its history, and those who reside within in, the game reinforces the Lovecraftian themes of knowledge as a risk. In its connection to Beasthood, however, it also positions the player who has more Insight as cultured and civilized. Through their process of learning and understanding about these important truths, they find themselves more man than beast, even if it addles their minds and affects their sanity. As the item description for Madman's Knowledge tells us, the possession of this wisdom "is a blessing, for even if it drives one mad, it allows one to serve a grander purpose, for posterity" (SG, 2015: 467). Considering its ties to both of these statistics, Insight not only affects the world, but also the body of the player character and, presumably, will have a similar effect on other characters encountered within the world. Despite being framed as "inhuman knowledge," the physical effects

are as far-reaching as the mental ones, creating an interesting connection to the mechanics surrounding blood, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

In this chapter, I introduced the concept of procedural rhetoric as a way of examining the importance of game mechanics as part of the narrative. Mechanics can simply be seen as the rules of the game system, which help to set the goal, and present the player with a range of actions and options that they may undertake in order to reach a positive end-game state. However, as is demonstrated by Salen and Zimmerman, Totten, and Bogost, when mechanics are seen as a process of representation, they can impact significantly on the process of meaning-making encountered within a game. Moving still further away from the more traditional notions of storytelling and world-building, examined in Parts I and II of this work, the choice and use of certain gameplay elements help to reinforce and deepen themes present in *Bloodborne*'s universe. Rather than a mere mention or adaptation of genre tropes, the Insight mechanic places players in a scenario where they experience the impact of these ideas firsthand: this inhuman knowledge, gathered through necessary progression and engagement with the game world, places them in a position of danger and knowledge. This symbolic representation of game mechanics can be found more strongly, still, in relation to the importance of blood within the game.

8

Echoes

Your arrival in Yharnam, preceded by a ritual of blood, left you feeling dirty. Your arms have barely healed, covered in filthy bandages, as you set off into the town. The streets outside appear similar to the interior of the Clinic, with crates of blood vials ubiquitous within the cityscape. It is clear that Yharnamites are used to this substance, and the frequency with which you are able to collect Blood Vials from the pockets of those you have killed only serves to reiterate this. Despite, or perhaps because of, the earlier treatment you received from the Blood Minister, you are reticent to use the Vials supplied to you. They have medicinal purposes, but the trust you have for them is little. When the axe strikes you, knocking you to the ground, your strength slowly disappearing as blood flows from a wound in your shoulder and chest, you have no choice, and with a sweeping gesture, you inject the contents of a Vial into your thigh. The effects are instantaneous, a feeling of vigor rushing through you, your wounds rapidly disappearing. With a swing of your blade, the offender falls before you, and you see the truth of the intoxicating blood.

In the previous chapter, I opened the discussion regarding the reception of game mechanics as meaningful, in that the underlying rules and systems of digital games can help to build the world and narrative of the game. Although it is possible to see mechanics as separate from story content, where, in Totten's words, "the story is ultimately a backdrop from game mechanics," he explains that it is more effective to see them as a whole: "More powerful are the games whose mechanics are an essential part of their narrative experience" (2014: 272). This process can be seen throughout *Bloodborne*, as discussed in relation to Insight, where the mechanic supports the themes of cosmic fear present in the game. It draws attention to the possibility that *something is out there*, and that we may wish to learn more about it. Perhaps we cannot help but find out more, as Insight builds simply by progressing

within the game, outside of the agency of the player. Within *Bloodborne*, Insight acts as a separate and unique mechanic, one which has not been seen in other games. It presents itself as a resource, alongside other resources available to the player, allowing them to perform specific gameplay actions through the purchase of special items and the summoning of other hunters.

In this chapter, and the following one, I will instead focus on mechanics that do exist in other games, but that have been realized within *Bloodborne* in a particular way to help support the themes of the game world. Such an argument hinges on the concept of representation and the realization, where "[g]ame play takes place within a *representational* universe, filled with depictions of objects, interactions, and ideas out of which a player makes meaning" (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004: 364, author's emphasis). Games create their own reality, but in doing so, they show what Crawford has termed "a subset of reality" (quoted in: Salen and Zimmerman, 2004: 77). A game like SimCity, for example, borrows real world examples (such as infrastructure and construction) to provide a representation of urban planning and, as Salen and Zimmerman explain, "*Games can represent* by creating depictions: of characters, stories, settings, ideas, and behaviors. Game representations gain meaning within the game universe, as they are experienced through play. [...] On the other hand, *games themselves are representations*" (2004: 364; author's emphasis). By applying the concept of representation in such a way, games can be regarded as containing internal depictions of Crawford's subsets of reality to depict people, places, events and actions.

For my argument here, what is important is how certain mechanics have been realized in *Bloodborne*. In addition to its more unique aspects, the game uses a number of systems that are conventional in action-adventure games, but the way in which these are represented has much to offer the player. Firstly, it continues to build the world, invoking new structures beyond traditional narrative to invoke parts of the universe (a step which is reminiscent of Wolf's commentary on world-building). Secondly, the structures related to them may impact on the lore more directly, either through the presence and use of items, or the appearance of certain characters. It is this aspect that this chapter and the next will focus on, starting with a discussion of that most central substance in Yharnam: blood.

In order to fully understand the significance of the representation of blood within Bloodborne, it will be beneficial to return to a discussion of videogame genres, as, in this context, specific genres are often associated with particular game mechanics. As Rollings and Morris state in their list of what they term "broad genres," action games are expected to contain "lots of frantic button pushing," whereas in adventure games, "the story matters"

(2004: 12). Adams and Rollings provide more detail, explaining how "action games include physical challenges" (2007: 81), whereas "adventure games chiefly provide exploration and puzzle-solving" (2007: 82). As a hybrid genre, "[a]ction-adventures are still mostly action, but they include a story and puzzles that give them some of the qualities of adventure games" (2007: 82). Within this classification, there are a number of actions one might associate with this type of game. As the name action implies, a lot of the mechanics will be geared around player agency, allowing them to interact with and act on the game space. Aspects of attack and defense will help to cover any combat that occurs in-game, which may also include a ruleset for the upgrading of weapons. Each of these is geared towards the elements of the physical challenge, in which players will need to overcome the obstacles posed by (primarily) AI adversaries to achieve a goal and win the game. In order to add to the challenge, it will likely contain a system to manage player health and/or stamina, as well as experience. This allows players to level up their character and, together with new weapons or weapon upgrades, will leave them better equipped to take on the challenges presented by the game. As for the adventure element, both definitions included above focus on the importance of world, story and exploration, presenting this aspect of the genre as a framing device as opposed to strongly informing the game mechanics.

At other points in the book, I have spoken of *Bloodborne* as a horror game, as well as discussing it in the context of action-adventure. Like the adventure elements, the horror elements of the game are primarily found within the game world and the visual design, as well as the narrative themes, as opposed to the mechanics. Although all Soulsborne games are famed for their difficulty, *Bloodborne* offers players many options to defend themselves, providing them with an array of weapons and items to give them a chance against Yharnam's beasts. By contrast, most (survival) horror titles are marked by their emphasis on player disempowerment, as discussed throughout this book. Drawing on Krzywinska's discussion of being in and out of control in horror games (see Chapter 3 for more detail), Habel and Kooyman establish what they call agency mechanics, "the interactive features of gameplay design that create or impinge upon the player/avatar's control over the game world" (2014: 7). The process focuses on granting and removing player autonomy, a strategy typical of horror games, whereby "agency mechanics produce not only a heightened experience of the game itself, but a heightened experience of survival horror elements, even of action games" (Habel and Kooyman, 2014: 11). Arguably, *Bloodborne* does not use this type of agency mechanics, instead placing its players in a position where they should feel powerful, as they are able to freely level up and upgrade their weapons as they see fit, its

mechanics geared more towards the action-adventure genre. By contrast, it is elements of the narrative that help to establish the desired feeling of disempowerment, and although the core mechanics (attack, defense, health, experience, weapon upgrades and modifications) allow for the building of specific characters and give players agency over the world, any sense of true power is mitigated by the difficulty for which the Soulsborne games have become known, displayed primarily in the power of enemies, both with regards to their hit points and the damage dealt per hit. Finally, *Bloodborne* includes some specific mechanics, such as Insight, which tie in with the wider lore; in other cases, as discussed in this chapter, it is through the representation of the mechanic within the world that the horror emerges. The underlying system may appear familiar, with its full implications only emerging when read against the wider context of the game world and narrative.

Within *Bloodborne*, a number of systems are represented by the medium of blood, including health and regain, gaining experience points, and the way in which players can upgrade and modify their weapons. Shown through a specific set of items, each of these elements can be said to represent power in some way, specifically in relation to the strength and growth of the player character, and their ability to master their environment and the enemies within it. Read in this light, each of these systems further complicates the portrayal of monstrosity, in particular the separation between self and Other, that was discussed in Chapter 1. Before exploring these meanings in more detail, it will be worthwhile to cover each category (health, experience, and weapons) as to how they function and are represented within the game.

The main statistic that sustains players in their journey through Yharnam is Vitality, which "determines the maximum amount of hit points (HP) you have" (SG, 2015: 11). The amount of HP will be diminished if players get hit by enemy attacks or by status effects (Slow and Rapid Poisoning, and the final effect of Frenzy), and can be restored by visiting the Hunter's Dream (discussed in more detail in the next chapter). In addition, players can make use of the Regain system when HP is lost in battle where, for a short time after taking damage, players may recover the health lost:

> A small white marker will appear on your health bar to illustrate the amount of HP you can recover. After a short period, roughly two and a half seconds, the amount of HP that you can recover will begin to decrease until it is gone. Striking an enemy before this happens will allow you to Regain your lost health [SG, 2015: 18].

A marked difference from the combat system in the *Dark Souls* games, which makes use of parrying and invites a more defensive playstyle, *Bloodborne* requires players to attack and presents them with benefits to such an aggres-

sive approach. Alongside these special in-game actions, *Bloodborne* provides Blood Vials as the primary source of healing within Yharnam. Players can carry 20 of these items at any time,[1] but the description in the Strategy Guide points them towards using Regain as a first port of call, as this system "is intended to help you heal without the use of Blood Vials, and it's easy to run out of Blood Vials if you don't make use of Regain at all" (SG, 2015: 18). The Guide also notes that, when players warp to the Hunter's Dream, the number of Blood Vials in the inventory is replenished, but "they are taken from your stock. These are not free refills" (SG, 2015: 18), so the relative scarcity of this resource is made explicit. The number of Blood Vials, like the other resources, will need to be managed by players, but the relatively high drop rates of Vials left behind by enemies emphasize the ubiquity of this treatment within Yharnam. Crates of blood can be seen throughout the city, and the description notes that "[o]nce a patient has had their blood ministered, a unique but common treatment in Yharnam, successive infusions recall the first, and are all the more invigorating for it. No surprise that most Yharnamites are heavy users of blood" (SG, 2015: 446), showing the importance of this substance. It is the blood which sustains the hunters, and the Yharnamites, within this world.

It is not just health points which are controlled by blood, but also experience points, represented by Blood Echoes. Functioning primarily as a currency, to be spent on items, to repair weapons inside the Hunter's Dream, to pay for upgrades, or to level up, Blood Echoes are obtained by defeating foes, or through the use of special items. Where leveling systems in most games are displayed as non-diegetic, with experience points tallied and spent through out-of-game menus, Blood Echoes have a presence within *Bloodborne*'s world. When Echoes are gained in combat, their acquisition is accompanied by a sound effect, as well as a red mist which is sucked towards and absorbed by the player character. Furthermore, when players die, the Echoes obtained are left behind within the game world and can be retrieved. They are displayed as a small puddle of blood on the ground, which players can interact with; alternatively, Blood Echoes lost in this way can be collected by nearby enemies, in which case the player will need to kill the carrier to claim back their Echoes. In either case, the retrieval of Echoes is accompanied by the same sound effect and animation, thus presenting the gaining of experience points as a diegetic system within the game world. This is further enhanced by certain in-game items known as Coldblood, which can be found throughout the world. These count as consumables, to be used once in exchange for a set amount of Blood Echoes. The items are divided into different types and ranks, increasing in value as the game progresses, with their descriptions offering some clues as to their origin:

Coldblood Dew: "Hunters sustained by the dream gain strength from Blood Echoes. They imbibe the blood with thoughts of reverence, indeed gratitude, for their victims."

Thick Coldblood: "A strong will produces thick blood. Doubtless, the product of obsession, a potent source of human strength."

Frenzied Coldblood: "This manifestation of madness comes from a mind teetering on the very brink, but has a sane mind ever produced anything of true significance?"

Kin Coldblood: "Coldblood of inhuman kin of the cosmos, brethren of the Great Ones. Dare not to delve into the world beyond humanity, the eldritch Truth touched upon long ago at Byrgenwerth" [SG, 2015: 457].[2]

The types are listed according to the number of Echoes gained, and it can easily be seen how the characteristics of each category and its strength are connected to *Bloodborne*'s lore. Again, we see the importance of knowledge and subsequent insanity, where the types of Coldblood can be said to be linked to Insight, with obsession, frenzy and madness yielding more potent results, and with Kin Coldblood, the pinnacle of inhuman knowledge, being the most powerful. Each of the Coldblood items, when used in-game, is held and then crushed by the player-character, followed by the same sound effect and animation to signify the absorption of Blood Echoes.

The final functionality of blood is tied to *Bloodborne*'s weapon system. By using the Workshop inside the Hunter's Dream, players can spend Blood Echoes to repair their weapons, which are subject to a durability stat that slowly goes down as the weapon is used in combat and affects the amount of damage dealt. In the same location, players can fortify their weapons for either a basic upgrade, or to modify it. The first action makes use of a +n system, with +10 as the maximum for any weapon. Blood Echoes are needed to facilitate these upgrades, as well as special items known as Blood Stones. They are found scattered around the game world, dropped by certain enemies, and can be collected from special creatures known as Wandering Nightmares. These critters flee on sight, and will always drop fortification materials when killed. There are four types of Blood Stones, each connected to a maximum level of upgrade:

Blood Stone Shard [+1 to +3]; *Twin Blood Stone Shard* [+4 to +6]: "A solid shard that forms in coldblood. After death, a substance in the blood hardens, and that which does not crystalize is called a blood stone. At the workshop, these bloodstones are embedded in weapons to fortify them."

Blood Stone Chunk [+7 to +9]: "[…] A chunk will never appear in the blood of an ordinary human. Seek deadlier foes if bloodstone chunks are needed."[3]

Blood Rock [+10]: "[…] This is no mere chunk, it is nearly a boulder. Few blood stones of such size have ever been discovered, even considering the combined experience of all hunters" [SG, 2015: 461].

In these descriptions, like those of the Blood Echo items, a connection is made between the strength of the blood, the power it affords the hunter (whether in experience points or potential weapon strength), and the origins of the blood. Whereas the Echo items focus on aspects related to Insight, the Blood Stones draw on the strength of the enemy to ascertain whether they would be able to leave an item of this size behind. This emphasis on force of life blood is echoed in the description of the other type of weapon fortification, through the use of Blood Gems. The variety of Blood Gems is too great to list here; it suffices to say that these items are defined by their shape, which dictates whether they can be used with a particular weapon, and by their trait, which can add special effects such as Fire or Poison to a weapon, affect the scaling of certain statistics, or produce specific in-game effects (for example, Lethal gems allow players to receive more HP when using the Regain system). To make use of this functionality, players need the Blood Gem Workshop Tool, found inside Oedon Chapel: "A misplaced workshop tool from the Hunter's Dream. The hunter who retrieves this can fortify weapons by kneading blood gems into them. Blood gems add properties to weapons when used to fortify them, as blood defines an organism" (2015: 467). The final comment, regarding the way in which blood defines an organism, is particularly significant, both in relation to Blood Gems, and to the Coldblood items and Blood Stones, each of which demonstrates a particular quality of (a type of) blood and its origins.

There are a number of ways in which these systems can be interpreted, and each will be covered in some detail in the sections that follow. First, however, it will be worthwhile to briefly discuss the symbolism of blood as a substance, and to highlight the potential implications of choosing this fluid to represent each of the mechanics discussed above. Throughout Part I of this book, in particular, the significance of blood within Yharnam will have become clear: through contact with the Great Ones, the healing propensities of the fluid were discovered, and it is the Healing Church who tried to harness these properties by training Blood Saints. Many of these experiments did not turn out favorably, however, leading to a situation in which diluted and impure blood became commonplace. The latter was the cause for a disease called Ashen Blood, which turned sufferers into hideous beasts, threatening the lives of those living in the city. Through a number of preventative measures, such as the burning of Old Yharnam and the introduction of the hunters, the Church tried to halt the scourge, yet blood is still used, and the cycle continues.

Beyond the context of *Bloodborne*, the symbolism of blood as it appears in Western culture is prevalent, most often relating to both a life force and a

force of passion and sacrifice. A comprehensive study of the subject was made by Camporesi, whose book draws on a large collection of sacred and medical texts from the 16th and 17th century to provide an overview of the different ways in which blood can be perceived. Camporesi describes blood as containing elements of life force, including procedures where blood can be replenished so as to restore youth and vitality (1995: 36–37). He explains how, "[b]y good blood, the flesh was renewed" (1995: 19); alternately, bad blood can have an opposite effect as each type carries within it the humors of the body in which it resides (1995: 38–39). Rather than representing a general, universal life force, blood is linked to one's passions: "Blood was the seat of the soul [...] that was deemed to ebb and flow in hiding, swelling and diffusing in the oily liquid of life" (1995: 32). In this context, blood is not a neutral liquid (an aspect which will be discussed in more detail later), instead "knotted to life—in fantastical wise—to its passions, to its commotions" (1995: 14). Interestingly, based on this division, Camporesi discusses a topic that is prevalent within *Bloodborne*, too: the presence and characteristics of human blood versus divine blood. He notes that "[i]n parallel fashion with human blood, but with unlimited miraculous content, the divine blood loomed over human beings' salvation and welfare" (1995: 14), where "[t]he cultic devotion to the divine sacrifice and a convulsive, obsessive, almost maniacal taste for blood, are profoundly interrelated" (1995: 59). The symbolic consumption of the divine blood by partaking in communion is ubiquitous within these texts, and the significance of this act is presented in a particular way: "The divine blood was a great and terrible reality, to be handled with extreme care, and with anything but a casual attitude" (1995: 63). The treatment of divine blood over human blood is markedly different, as is the way in which it is experienced. Where human blood is important in relation to the balance of the humors, as well as certain medical procedures, "[t]he divine blood is experienced as an inebriating drug" (1995: 73). Despite these differences, the sheer power of any kind of blood is felt in Camporesi's lyrical use of language: "Sacred or sacrilegious, pure or impure, exquisite or ominous, this hot, carmine-dyed liquid, internal and secret, but above all throbbing and mobile..." (1995: 101).

Throughout *Bloodborne*, the reading of blood as a sustaining fluid is most pertinent, as the substance is used to control both health and experience points, emboldening the hunter by granting strength, and allowing them to purchase items and upgrading weapons. Interestingly, this distinction between divine and human blood is one which can be felt throughout Yharnam. As previously discussed, issues of clean and impure, or more specifically, of worthy blood, inform much of the game's narrative and play out both in

big historical events as well as storylines between characters.[4] The significance of the Great Ones and their blood equals the importance of divine blood, as discussed by Camporesi, and even the response to the consumption of such special blood is resonant with certain item descriptions. Finally, the act of communion, central to the interaction with the divine blood, is echoed in the practices of the Healing Church. In addition to the distinctions between different types of blood, and indeed their purity, it is the act and the method of consumption which requires closer attention.

Alongside Lovecraft, it is Bram Stoker, the author of *Dracula* (1897), who is arguably an obvious influence on *Bloodborne*, as the centrality of the life-giving fluid within Yharnam seems to link with elements of vampirism. However, connecting the hunters and other Yharnamites to the figure of the vampire is not so easily done. As Meehan explains, audiences have come to expect certain "rules of vampires" (2014: 1), which include, but are not limited to, undead beings, with pale skin and sharp fangs, who feed on blood and reside in coffins, avoiding sunlight; who are capable of shapeshifting and in possession of eternal life; who lack a reflection but possess superhuman strength; who can be stopped by using religious objects (crucifixes and holy water) or herbs (garlic and wolfsbane), but killed only with a stake through the heart (2014: 1). Beresford offers a similar, more lyrical example, describing the familiar figure of the vampire as "a somewhat aristocratic and seductive male, complete with cape and fangs, and with the ability to transform himself into a bat" (2008: 8). Based on the notes from these authors, there is little that links the events in Yharnam to conceptions of vampirism aside from the obvious consumption of blood. Instead, Stoker's influence can be more keenly felt when bringing in the scientific aspects of his seminal novel. Within *Dracula*, the arcane and the medical coexist, where the garlic and the crucifix are as valid a method as the blood transfusions awarded to the character of Lucy Westenra as a means to protect her from the influence of the Count. As Stephanou explains in her essay on the representation of science and the supernatural in *Dracula*, the blood transfusion is a significant theme which shares characteristics with the direct imbibing and sucking of blood from a victim. This notion of the circulation of blood runs through the novel, both in the interaction between Dracula and his prey, and in the medical procedures that certain characters are required to undergo to try and stop the debilitating influence of the Count's visits. In this context, blood can be seen as "a material substance to facilitate the restoration of life" (Stephanou, 2013: 54), which sustains both the vampire and is needed for the victim to remain alive, rather than to cross over into an undead state. In this exchange, it is not so much the possession by the vampire that affects the victim; rather,

blood can be regarded "as an independent agent carrying vampiric viruses and transgressing the boundaries of bodies" (Stephanou, 2013: 54). Stephanou echoes the notion of blood as a defining life force, found in the texts examined by Camporesi:

> Blood, being inside the body, was believed to carry identity and the individual's temperament. Without the interference of scientific tools and knowledge, it was invested with magical and occult meanings as a vital rejuvenating fluid. In short, blood was a synecdoche of the body and of the embodied self [2013: 54].

Here, blood as a substance is not only linked to life force and rejuvenation, but to the individual body with its temperament, passions and specific qualities. The act of vampirism, then, in which blood is transferred and infected, alters these distinctive characteristics, yet it is in medical procedures that such a change can equally take place. Stephanou explains how the increase in the number of blood transfusions did not remove these connotations as "blood remained associated with symbolic meanings" (2013: 55):

> In the public imagination the idea of transfusing blood between bodies emphasised blood as a gift creating community. But as a carrier of one's vitality and identity, blood also drew attention to the danger of changing one's sense of selfhood with the blood of another [2013: 55–56].

It is both in the supernatural process of vampirism as in the medical procedure of transfusion that self can be lost to the influence of another, whether undead or living. Arguably, it is this distinction that is found within *Bloodborne*, where the notion of blood as life force, which contains the identifying aspects of a being that can be transferred to another, is most potent. Whether seen as a feeding on, or a feeding with, a relationship of victim and aggressor or of equals, it is in the use of blood that these passions are transferred and may lead to the conferring of greater powers of knowledge or strength, or of infection and decay.

There are some elements, however, which prevent a complete dismissal of the vampire influence. As Beresford explains, "[i]t is important to understand that there are two types of beings widely denoted as vampires; firstly, the supernatural, inhuman being such as demons or spectres; and secondly the revenant, a human who returns to the world of the living after death" (2008: 22), which points to an interesting link between the act of blood consumption and the eternal life which hunters seem to possess, caught in an endless cycle in which they are forced to infinitely die and return to this world. Furthermore, both Meehan and Beresford have pointed to ideas of infection and disease as a way to approach the figure of the vampire. As Beresford notes, "the traits of 'vampirism' can certainly be linked with natural examples of

decomposition, of disease or plague" (2008: 100), which is echoed by Meehan in his discussion of "a variety of diseases that mimic their appearance and habits" (2014: 12), offering a more scientific explanation to frame the vampire myth. Ultimately, Beresford argues, the vampire points to the connection between blood and life (as seen in Camporesi), "where the killer consumes the victim's blood in order to obtain their life" (2008: 195). He continues:

> [T]he process of drinking or using blood has been linked with life throughout history, but generally this idea is due to a belief in its healing or rejuvenating powers rather than its ability to prolong life. Consuming the blood of the enemy after battle would, it is believed in certain cultures, give the consumer his victim's power and strength and the emerging medical practice of blood transfusion that matured alongside the later vampire literature enforced the idea of the life-power of blood [2008: 196–197].

Here, a link is presented between the importance of medical procedures (in particular transfusion) in relation to vampirism, as can be found in Stephanou's essay. At the same time, Beresford points to another way to approach this problem, and one which, I would argue, is most relevant in a discussion of *Bloodborne*: the act of cannibalism.

In her book *Meat is Murder* (2001), Brottman lists four grounds for cannibalism, discussing how human flesh may be part of the diet of a particular group (7). Alternatively, the act of cannibalism may be borne out of necessity, when no other food sources are available (2001: 13), or it may be brought on by individual compulsion (2001: 18). Most relevant for my current argument is symbolic cannibalism, which involves "eating one another for ritualistic purposes" (2001: 9). In each of these instance, anthropophagy can be an act of exophagy, which involves "the eating of members of a foreign or enemy tribe," or of endophagy, "the eating of one's own family members or tribal group" (2001: 7). The former is tied to the most common concept of cannibalism, in which the act of eating is tied to a ritual "for the symbolic purpose of absorbing the strength of others" (2001: 10), in which a tribe is perceived to eat the bodies of enemy warriors left behind after battle in order to absorb some of their power. As Brottman explains, "[m]ore developed spirituality involved the belief that one could ingest the character and attributes of a respected foe by eating parts of him" (2001: 10). Overall, "cannibalism is generally associated with regenerative functions: the killer takes the substance of his enemies in order to recharge his own strength and power. Sometimes the very act of killing gives the killer the power of his victim" (Brottman, 2001: 54). When read in connection to firstly, the mechanic of Regain, and secondly, the way in which the absorption of Blood Echoes from combat is portrayed within *Bloodborne*, I would argue that a reading of ingested power is the most apt approach to this process.

It is also possible, however, to approach cannibalism from a more sym-bolic perspective by focusing on the incorporation that is part of this act. As Kilgour explains in her book *From Communion to Cannibalism* (1990), one is most likely to see cannibalism as part of a binary divide, between eater and eaten; hunter and prey; self and Other; inside and outside. However, she argues that "[t]he idea of incorporation […] depends upon and enforces an absolute divide between inside and outside; but in the act itself that opposition disappears, dissolving the structure it appears to produce" (1990: 4). Through the process of consumption, or incorporation, the divide between inside and outside is removed: through eating food, or human flesh, the Other becomes part of the self as it is first ingested, and then digested. Kilgour continues: "The most basic model for all forms of incorporation is the physical act of eating, and food is the most important symbol for other external substances that are absorbed" (1990: 6), an act which "assumes an absolute distinction between inside and outside, eater and eaten, which, however, breaks down, as the law 'you are what you eat' obscures identity and makes it impossible to say for certain who's who" (1990: 7). Through the act of incorporation, the division between self and Other is removed in favor of an act of transgression. As Guest points out in her discussion of the topic, the cannibal "may in fact be more productively read as a symbol of the permeability, or instability, of such boundaries" (2001: 2). Following on from the tenet of "you are what you eat," the act of cannibalism does not so much focus on the binary division, but rather on a shared essence (Guest, 2001: 4), since

> the idea of cannibalism prompts a visceral reaction among people precisely *because* it activates our horror of consuming others like ourselves. Ultimately, then, it is the shared humanness of cannibals and their victims that draws our attention to the problems raised by the notion of absolute difference [Guest, 2001: 3; author's emphasis].

As Guest notes, "if we look beyond the oppositional logic of cannibalism as a discourse, we see that as a taboo its efficacy relies not on its participation in differential systems of meaning but rather on its recognition of corporeal similarity" (2001: 3). The problem is not the incorporation of the Other into our bodies, through the act of consumption, but rather the fact that, in essence, we are consuming ourselves. Brottman's distinction between endophagy and exophagy, between eating the familiar and eating the other, falls down in favor of the incorporation of the shared features of fellow humans, an idea which is particularly potent when addressed in correlation with the origins of the blood.

When moving away from the consumption of human flesh, specifically, and towards a wider understanding of food consumption, a number of these concerns are repeated. Aside from the horrific connotations inherent in can-

nibalistic acts, food itself is compromised, as Lupton explains in her book *Food, the Body and the Self* (1996):

> Food intrudes into the "clean" purity of rational thought because of its organic nature. Food is unclean, a highly unstable substance: it is messy and dirty in its preparation, its disposal and its by-products; it inevitably decays, it has odour. Delicious food is only hours or days away from rotting matter, or excreta. As a result, disgust is never far from the pleasures of food and eating [3].

Food, despite being necessary for nourishment and life, is not of the body, and is unfamiliar, but becomes part of us, as Piatti-Farnell argues in *Consuming Gothic* (2017): "Food, an external, foreign matter, enters our bodies. In order to gather nourishment, we must process it, assimilate it: in short, we must make it part of ourselves" (4). A similar point can be found in Lupton, who explains this process as "source of great anxiety and risk. By incorporating a food into one's body, that food is made to become self" (1996: 17). Whilst held within our bodies, the delicious morsels that first entered our mouth are transformed beyond recognition into substances that are, by nature, examples of defilement: vomit and feces. The Other is incorporated, deconstructed, and excreted in the process where the unfamiliar is incorporated into the self, only to become unfamiliar once more. More specifically, Lupton argues,

> Food is a metonym of the mortality of human flesh, the inevitable entropy of living matter. Food is therefore a source of great ambivalence: it forever threatens contamination and bodily impurity, but is necessary for survival and is the source of great pleasure and contentment [1996: 3].

The horrors inherent in the consumption of human flesh are present in any act of incorporation, and concerns of purity are rife within *Bloodborne*'s representation of blood. Each of the descriptions of special blood vials, from Iosefka, Adella, Arianna, and Adeline, makes reference to the effects as well as the quality of the blood, and in this way, is placed as a counterpoint to items such as the Pungent Blood Cocktail, a "mature" substance with "a pungent odor" (SG, 2015: 452) and the Beast Blood Pellets, which are "formed of coagulated beast blood" and banned "due to their unclear origin" (SG, 2015: 450). Ashen Blood, spread through ministration of impure blood, looms large over any discussion of this topic, and, as discussed in Chapter 1, may leave players wondering just what they are injecting into themselves to help them stay alive. The blood gives power, the blood gives life, the blood sustains, but at the same time, the blood is wholly unfamiliar, the blood is of another (especially in the case of personalized blood vials); it holds a strength that may well be inhuman. Any contact with the substance, whether through the

use of Stones and Gems, the injection of Blood Vials, or even the absorption of Blood Echoes, may expose the user to a variety of dangers, their source unknown and untraceable.

Despite the game's obvious concerns with the origins of different types of blood, these are only hinted at obliquely. Blood Vials, including the personalized ones described above, are said to originate from the so called Blood Saints, special nuns tied to the Healing Church, yet, as discussed in Chapter 2, who they are, and how their blood is treated, is never made explicit. The main healing item, so central to survival on the streets of Yharnam, remains opaque and is quite possibly dangerous to the player. Aside from these concerns of healing and consumption, however, there are the other forms of blood, and the means by which they are acquired. The Blood Vials pose a risk of impurity and infection (it is the consumption of blood, after all, which was the source of the scourge of beasts), and hint at the characteristics of the provider, where blood becomes a vessel for the passions of its origin, each special Blood Vial carrying particular traits which link it to the Blood Saint who provided it. If the blood is seen in this way, as a carrier of life and of identity, can the same not be said for the other means by which the fluid is distributed within the game? If Blood Vials and indeed Stones and Gems carry one's essence, and one's identity, so clear from the item descriptions for each, my argument is that the same can be said for the Blood Echoes.

Used as currency to obtain items and levels, Blood Echoes are the main resource of *Bloodborne*, gained with every enemy killed. Within the game's endless night, most enemies will reappear after being killed, respawning after players have died or used one of the game's lamps to move to a different area. The cycle of the hunt is never-ending, made visible through endless streams of seemingly undying enemies that continue to lurk around every corner. This system provides a number of effects for the player: firstly, it raises the difficulty level, as players will never be able to truly clear an area, and enemies reappear with each subsequent player death. Contrary to this, it allows players to revisit sections of the game, their layout and enemy placement, ultimately giving them the opportunity to learn, perhaps master, particular areas. Finally, the respawning of enemies both adds a challenge and allows for a way to overcome it: should players wish, they can repeat sections of the game, gathering large amounts of Blood Echoes and spending these on levels or items to help them progress (a process known as farming). This notion of the endless enemy would appear to devaluate their significance within *Bloodborne*'s world: if these adversaries are simply encountered over and over again, and players can seek to kill them over and over again, even using it as a method to "game the game," as it were, it could be argued that these challenges ulti-

mately become meaningless. Yet, based on *Bloodborne*'s representation of blood and the mechanics associated with it, I put forward that the opposite is true: it is through the power of blood that these enemies gain and retain their significance.

In *The Art of Game Design*, Crawford identifies conflict as part of the game experience, stating that it "arises naturally from the interaction in a game: The player is actively pursuing some goal. Obstacles prevent him from easily achieving this goal" (1982: n.pag.). These obstacles can take a number of forms, such as traversing an environment or solving a puzzle, but the introduction of hostile agents is perhaps the most common way to obstruct player progress. As Bjork and Holopainen explain in their *Patterns of Game Design* (2005), "[e]nemies are Avatars and Units that hinder the players trying to complete the goals" (70), and are different from boss monsters, defined by them as "a more powerful enemy the players have to overcome to reach certain goals in the game" (Bjork and Holopainen, 2005: 73). Instead, basic enemies provide a different kind of challenge for the player. Like bosses, they are set to hinder the player, but their defeat does not have the same payoff in terms of narrative reward and instant progression. Instead, players may well find themselves fighting off hordes of similar enemies. Glas describes this type of enemy as "generic adversaries" which are "a key convention in genre games like action-adventure" (2017: 34). Whereas the essay by Glas provides a reading of the generic adversary as a moral object, and the relationship of the player (character) to the process of mindlessly mowing down wave upon wave of enemies, it is his comments on the generic adversary as dehumanized subject that I am interested in here. As Glas argues, "the generic adversary plays an important part on the level of the game system (as a challenge for the player) and game world (as an antagonist for the protagonist)" (2017: 35–36), giving them both a ludic and a narrative function. Within either paradigm, Glas posits, they often remain meaningless:

> We can say generic adversaries play a specific but at the same time trivial role in the hero's journey of games with explicit narratives. While being adversaries for the hero, they are not like the archetypical villain […] Rather, generic adversaries support the main villain or villains. In the story, they usually form potential threats for the hero to overcome in his/her efforts to save the day, displaying his/her growing strength or resourcefulness in the process [2017: 36].

Generic adversaries, or enemies, function as an obstacle, adding conflict and challenge to the gameplay and making for a more satisfying play experience (after all, simply walking in a straight line to the goal is unlikely to be as much fun as overcoming a challenge and receiving a reward). In addition, enemies can function as a touchstone for the player, to see how far they have

progressed in terms of strength and prowess, capable of taking on ever tougher challenges. Finally, these adversaries are designed to be a reflection of the world, where the enemies fit in with the overall aesthetic of the game and its narrative.

Within *Bloodborne*, the majority of monsters encountered by the player (with the exception of bosses and hunter enemies) fit this description. They function as an obstacle for the player, a challenge for them to overcome to progress through the game and discover new information or unlock additional content by moving into a new area. The ability of enemies to respawn adds some complexity to their interpretation: within Yharnam's endless night, monsters wait around every corner, and reappear when players fail to overcome this obstacle and die in combat. With each subsequent player death and reappearance within an area, enemies respawn and need to be defeated once more. Specifically, the respawning enemies in *Bloodborne* are the exact same enemies each time: they are the same type, appearing in the same place, following the same move set and, if moving, patrol the same route in the same way. From a design perspective, it allows players to master a section of the game as they learn what challenges await and how to overcome them. In addition, it may simplify the farming process, with players aware of what enemies they will be able to take on in a specific area, and how much of a reward they will reap if they do.

These points help to frame the ludic function of *Bloodborne*'s generic adversaries, but more can be said about their significance in relation to the game's lore. By far the most common enemy within the city are the Yharnamites, those who have remained, now in various stages of disease and decay. Encompassing a number of classes (Huntsmen, Beast Patients, Church Servants, and Grave Women), the townsfolk populate most of the game's first half, waiting to be slain by the player. As discussed in Chapter 1, *Bloodborne* not only informs the player of its history, of the scourge and the tainted blood, but uses this as a device to instill fear. Every hunter, every Yharnamite, is the destiny of the player character writ large, a testament to what becomes of users of blood. Whether blood-drunk and mad or infected and beastly, the use of this life-giving fluid is framed as ultimately detrimental to one's physical health and mental state. This is perhaps most obvious in the player's use of Blood Vials, where the one item that can help sustain one in this hostile world is presented as dangerous, the consequences of its use unknown, its source perhaps impure. Yet this is not the only form of blood consumption undertaken by players as, with each fallen enemy, they absorb their Blood Echoes. Players may well be infecting themselves with tainted blood with every injection of a Blood Vial, but the same can be said in relation to the Blood Echoes,

visibly absorbed with each subsequent kill, this mystical surge of strength obtained from each adversary.

It is here that I wish to return to the arguments surrounding vampirism and cannibalism: the Yharnamites shows evidence of the scourge of beasts, with each and every one of them displaying varying degrees of infection, madness and decay. Monstrosity, here, is tied to beasthood and a loss of humanity, which in turn is linked to the consumption of blood, something players happily indulge in. The only way to stay alive in Yharnam is to do battle with those who are hostile; to heal oneself when necessary with what is hopefully pure blood; and lastly, to take in the strength of those who have fallen to become more powerful as Blood Echoes are transformed into experience points. Although the distinction between self and Other, between hunter and beast, is made early in the game, the line is blurred just as easily, as many of the NPCs found in Yharnam point out. Furthermore, the need to gain Blood Echoes requires players to behave in a particular way, asking them to kill for power. This absorption of Echoes can be seen as an act of both vampirism and cannibalism, of the consumption of the essence of the Other to become stronger. Yet this raises further questions: if the Echoes of the Other can be absorbed, they may not be that different to the player. One may recall Djura's words that "[t]he things you hunt, they're not beasts. They're people," equating the Yharnamites to the hunter. The act of cannibalism undertaken here is not one of exophagy, the consumption of the Other, but rather of endophagy, the eating of the self. Throughout *Bloodborne*, the fate of any hunter is writ large, and with each subsequent kill, the writing on the wall becomes clearer. This is further supported by certain design choices within the game. As players progress and take down their enemies, the blood thus spilled does not simply disappear: the bodies lay where they fell, amidst the red streaks that cover the environment and the player character, until their clothes are drenched in blood. The Regain mechanics similarly draws attention to ideas of aggression and bloodlust, the possibility and need to keep attacking, to regain health, even after a foe has already fallen. Although *Bloodborne*'s enemies, arguably, fit into the category of the generic adversary, as described by Glas, their narrative function elevates them to a higher level of significance. Rather than a convention, or an obstacle, the Yharnamites, in particular, offer an insight into the other side of the hunter, of what they might become, or perhaps, what they already are. Infection and impurity is a constant risk, yet one which must be braved to stand any chance against Yharnam's beastly scourge. Guest's notion of shared essence (2001: 4) rings especially true in this context, where a transfusion of blood between player and enemy, between hunter and beast, is a necessity as well as a potential danger.

Whereas Insight offers a unique system that helps to construct and consolidate the themes of *Bloodborne*'s narrative, the mechanics associated with blood offer a different kind of experience. Here, conventional systems of leveling up and upgrading weapons are tied in to a specific representation that fits the world's lore and aesthetic, adding layers of meaning to an otherwise familiar, even static, system. Blood represents the essence of a person, their identity, and this process of personalization can be felt in each interpretation. The special Blood Vials, or even the normal version of this healing item, as well as the properties of Blood Echoes, Gems and Shards, inform and infect players in equal measures. The particular framing of these systems in gameplay further emphasizes the potential for the player as monster, desperately trying to gain power and sate their never-ending lust for blood. This connection between representation, narrative and mechanics will be explored further in the next chapter, which deals with the single safe haven found within Yharnam: the Hunter's Dream.

9

Dreams

You wake up inside Iosefka's Clinic, disoriented after the treatment and visions you experienced at the hand of the Blood Minister. With nothing to defend yourself, you get up to try to make your way outside, only to find a snarling wolf-like beast blocking your path. You try to run, but it gives chase, bringing you down with ease, its claws and teeth ripping into your flesh. Your life leaves you and a strange sensation comes over you, as if you become separate, your body slowly dissolving. When you come to, you find yourself in another place entirely, this one a peaceful garden brimming with white flowers, with a small building at its center, the space illuminated by a round, full moon and somehow filled with the sound of soothing music. The same little creatures that took you from inside that horrible vision are found here, ready with gifts of weapons and a notebook. The feelings of fear and distress slowly ebb away as, for the first time, someone is welcoming you into Yharnam.

So far in Part III, I have discussed one of *Bloodborne*'s unique mechanics, as well as the connection between mechanics and representation, which can inform their role in the narrative and in the game world. This treatment of mechanics as representation will be continued here, but on a larger scale. Whereas Chapter 8 focuses on the substance of blood and its significance in relation to *Bloodborne*'s gameplay systems, this last chapter is reserved for the discussion of a location, which acts as a system in its own right, while holding several other systems within it. It is an area which is central to the player's journey through Yharnam, inhabited by its own set of NPCs, and with its own narrative significance. It is the location that is both safe, and by the end of the game, revealed to be perhaps the most dangerous of all: the Hunter's Dream. Presented both as part of Yharnam and removed from it, the existence of the Dream and those who reside within it provides an interesting commentary on the game world, a haven of peace and tranquility afloat in Yharnam's nightmarish world. There are a number of ways in which a discussion of the Dream

can be approached. Here, I wish to look at its importance as a mechanic, as well as the narrative significance of the area, and its connection to the wider game world. Finally, the Dream will be examined in relation to the wider symbolic meaning of the night, using the work of Elizabeth Bronfen on this topic, and presented as an experience which is truly uncanny. As a location, the Dream offers players a safe haven, as well as a perspective, its NPCs connected to and commenting on the events within the world. Like the Nightmare, the Hunter's Dream presents another threshold, albeit one which appears benign in nature. As Salomon explains, "the setting of horror narrative always conveys only one simple message. These places (or should I say 'spaces'?), let me emphasize again, are outside of time and geography, everywhere and nowhere, now, then, and hereafter" (2002: 103). Like the Lecture Building, described as being "adrift in the Nightmare," the Hunter's Dream is placed in much the same way: alongside Yharnam, outside of space and time, yet real enough to the player. Aside from its narrative role, the Dream is indicative of two concepts that thread heavily through *Bloodborne*: the role of the night, and of the uncanny, each of which will be discussed in turn. First, however, the Dream itself and the systems within it need to be examined.

Players likely access the Hunter's Dream for the first time shortly after beginning their playthrough. After awakening in Iosefka's Clinic and still unarmed, it is doubtful that they will be able to win their first encounter with the Scourge Beast found within one of the treatment rooms. Instead, upon death, players are whisked away into the Dream, an event which is described in the Strategy Guide as follows:

> You awaken, drowsily, to the sight of an old graveyard chapel building, set among an idyllic garden. The drowsiness and the fog combine to make this feel like a dream. And if where you came from was reality, then this dream is a big improvement. There's much to learn here [SG, 2015: 30].

Although players are free to explore, little can be found on this initial visit. Some of the pathways are home to the Messengers, small, grey creatures which appear as helpful to the hunters. They are the same creatures that are seen after receiving the treatment from the Blood Minister upon the player's arrival in Yharnam, seeming to save the new hunter from the terrible visions they are experiencing. The messages they hold each explain one of the game's basic controls (how to attack, dodge, etcetera). In addition, some Messengers have gathered on the steps of the workshop, offering gifts to the new hunter, a melee weapon and a firearm, before sending the player, now armed, back into Yharnam. From this point, players can use the lamps at set locations around the game world to travel back to the Hunter's Dream, revealing one of its core functions as a warp point for in-game locations.

After the initial visit, in which players are provided with their starting weapon, the Hunter's Dream becomes fully functional, as it were, revealing itself as a safe hub for the player with a role similar to the Firelink Shrine of the *Dark Souls* games. Any visit to the Dream will help to restore the player: they regain any health lost, and the core resources of Blood Vials (for HP) and Quicksilver Bullets (ammunition for the firearm) are replenished from the stockpile.[1] Players can spend Blood Echoes with the Bath Messengers to purchase a number of items; with progression through the game, and primarily, the acquisition of badges related to specific (hunter) factions within Yharnam, more items become available. Inside the workshop, players can store or retrieve items in Storage and tend to their weapon using the Work Bench. With the acquisition of workshop tools (Blood Gem Tool; Rune Tool; Arcane Haze Extractor), players are able to not only repair and upgrade weapons, but to modify them using Blood Gems, to use Caryll Runes at the Rune Altar to boost their character, or to sacrifice items in exchange for ritual materials to access the Chalice Dungeons. Once players gain one point of Insight, the Insight Shop becomes available. Manned by Messengers, like the Bath, players can spend Insight here to buy rare or advanced items. Finally, after gaining a point of Insight, players are able to interact with the abandoned Doll found inside the Dream, which allows them to spend Blood Echoes to level up.[2] In addition to tending to themselves, their stock, and their weapons, the Hunter's Dream functions as a hub for players. A number of the many gravestones situated around the Dream act as warp points, allowing players to be transported to any lamp visited within the game world,[3] whereas others allow them to perform a Chalice Ritual to gain access to the Dungeons, the forgotten labyrinths underneath Yharnam, first discovered by the scholars of Byrgenwerth. Finally, it is here that players receive additional gifts from the Messengers: a Notebook, which allows them to leave messages for hunters in other worlds; the Beckoning Bell, which lets players call other hunters into their world for cooperation; and the Eye of a Blood-drunk Hunter, granting them access to the Hunter's Nightmare.

Connected to a list of in-game functionality, *Bloodborne*'s Hunter's Dream primarily acts as a place of rest and restoration. Players can replenish their health and stock up on items; they can spend their hard-earned Blood Echoes by levelling up, thus ensuring they cannot be lost within the world's hostile environment; and they can fix and upgrade their weapons. More important, perhaps, is the symbolic position of the Dream: represented within the game, and especially in the concept art (*Official Artworks*, 2017: 12–13) as small and homely, chairs and books scattered around, a fire burning in the grate, and accompanied by a soothing melody, the Dream provides a clear

counterpoint to the dangerous environment of Yharnam, where true rest is impossible. The Dream is quiet, in-tact, a building that appears to be in use, rather than in disrepair; a garden brimming with flowers, rather than littered with the bodies of the dead. The gravestones serve as a reminder of those who have passed, a mark of respect, instead of the coffins and bodies that litter the city's streets, no time for a ceremony. It is a space that hunters will come to know intimately as they become acquainted with the Dream, and with those who inhabit it: the abandoned Doll, and Gehrman, the First Hunter. Described by the Strategy Guide as "a kindly old man," "the workshop's founder and the very first hunter" (2015: 502), Gehrman's importance to the game's lore is instantly apparent. As players discover over the course of the game, Gehrman was the first hunter of the workshop, known to both Willem and Laurence. Brought in to help combat the scourge of the beast, Gehrman's dress and techniques became the template for those who followed:

> *Burial Blade:* "Trick weapon wielded by Gehrman, the first hunter. A masterpiece that defined the entire array of weapons crafted at the workshop" [SG, 2015: 410].

> *Gehrman's Hunter Attire*: "Created before the workshop existed by making adjustments to everyday clothing, and later became the basis of all hunter's garb. The hunter's emphasis on engaging beasts with speed, and therefore of selecting lightweight attire, no doubt traces back to Gehrman's own combat style" [SG, 2015: 492].

The first schism comes with the arrival of Ludwig, the first hunter of the Church, as he and his workshop had to prepare for battles with more terrifying beasts, as evidenced by the description of Ludwig's weapons (SG, 2015: 419) and the Sword Hunter badge (SG, 2015: 469). The other badges are a testament to the developments that sprang from the first workshop, inspiring others to follow the path of their specific preferences of weapons and combat styles. Within the Dream, it seems that it is the very first workshop that has been preserved, and it is here that Gehrman's legacy, and he himself live on.

Upon the first visit to the Dream, the Workshop is closed, but when players return, they are able to venture inside, where Gehrman waits to welcome them. He seems pleased to see you, and explains how the Dream "will be your home, for now. I am…. Gehrman, friend to you hunters." The workshop, he tells you, was "once a safe haven for hunters. A workshop where hunters used blood to enhance their weapons and flesh," and invites you to use any tools you may find inside, "even the doll, should it please you…" Gehrman remains in the Dream for the first act of the game, offering advice and instruction to players; although he moves around, appearing both in the garden and inside the workshop, he seems to disappear as the game progresses to evening, leaving players with only the Doll for company inside the Dream. The Doll herself is described in the Strategy Guide as "a soulless automaton,"

whose purpose is "to care for new hunters and to embolden their flesh with the power of blood echoes" (2015: 502). Activated when players possess one or more point of Insight, her primary function is to facilitate levelling up by channeling Blood Echoes. Players can also opt to talk to her, and she is one of the few characters who responds favorably to the player character, welcoming and looking after the hunter, as evidenced by her dialogue upon first awakening:

> Hello, good hunter. I am a doll, here in this dream to look after you. Honorable hunter, pursue the echoes of blood, and I will channel them into your strength. You will hunt beasts … and I will be here for you, to embolden your sickly spirit.

Despite this welcoming, the Hunter's Dream seems to hide a darker side. Like the Nightmare spaces (discussed in Chapter 6), the Hunter's Dream is the only other location that players need to warp to in order to access it, suggesting it exhibits a similar level of (un)reality as the Nightmare Frontier, the Lecture Building and Mensis. Interestingly, unlike these areas, a "real world" equivalent of the Hunter's Dream exists within Yharnam, hidden in the Upper Cathedral Ward. By carefully dropping down several wooden platforms, players can arrive at the door to the Abandoned Old Workshop, which, now deserted, still exists here. The description in the Strategy Guide sheds some light on its position and relation to the Hunter's Dream:

> This area is the real-world counterpart to the Hunter's Dream that hunters so frequently visit, so the layout should be immediately familiar. There are a number of items you can get in the grounds outside the workshop [...]. Inside you'll find the inactive remains of the Doll, and the Abandoned Old Workshop Lamp [SG, 2015: 71].

In this Workshop, players can find the Small Hair Ornament, which can be given to the Doll in the Hunter's Dream to be awarded the Tear Stone, which can be transformed into the Tear Gem, the description of which hints at the role of the Doll: "Created from a shining silver doll tear, this blood gem is a quiet but unfaltering friend that continually restores HP, the life essence of a hunter. Perhaps the doll's creator had wished for just such a friend, albeit in vain" (SG, 2015: 478).[4] It offers a glimpse into the relationship between Gehrman and the Doll, as well as a connection between the Dream and the real world. Much remains unclear, however, with both the source of the Hunter's Dream and the reason behind its creation unexplained within the game. Interestingly, despite its appearance and framing as home, both by the words uttered by Gehrman and the Doll, the Dream hides a darker side. Inside the workshop, as soon as it is opened to players for the first time, a note can be found that reads: "To escape this dreadful hunter's dream, halt the source of the spreading scourge of beasts, lest the night carry on forever."

The Hunter's Dream may be a home, but is described here as a dreadful place, perhaps even a prison. This is emphasized by some dialogue from Gehrman, which does not appear until later in the game. The old hunter can, at times, be found asleep in the garden of the Dream, lost in dreams, or nightmares, of his own, and murmuring to himself:

> Oh, Laurence…. What's taking you so long?
> …I've grown too old for this, or little use now, I'm afraid…
> Oh, Laurence…. Master Willem…. Somebody help me…
> Unshackle me please, anybody…
> I've had enough of this dream. The night blocks all sight…
> Oh, somebody please … (cries)[5]

It is a testament to his relationship to both Willem and Laurence, as well as an indication of his wish to be free from this Dream, the safe haven that may not be as welcoming as first assumed. Some lines of dialogue from the Doll about Gehrman's place and role within the Dream only serve to emphasize this: "Did you speak with Gehrman? He was a hunter long, long ago, but now serves only to advise them. He is obscure, unseen in the dreaming world. Still, he stays here, in this dream … such is his purpose…" The first hunter remains here, trapped inside the night of the hunt, left to serve any hunters who cross his path. Interestingly, as the Doll explains, this Hunter's Dream does not just serve the player: "Over time, countless hunters have visited this dream. The graves here stand in their memory. It all seems so long ago now…" Exchanges with both Eileen and Djura reveal their knowledge of the Dream's existence, presenting further evidence of the role of the Dream within the consciousness of fellow hunters.[6] At multiple points of interaction with Eileen, she shows knowledge of the Dream, and in particular, its ability to sustain hunters. When close to death herself, near the end of her questline, she tells the player that there are "no more dreams for me." By contrast, if players end up in battle with Eileen, and fall to her blade, she prompts them: "You still have dreams? Tell the little doll I said hello." Should Eileen be injured in combat, she rallies herself, wishing death to the hunters, and "enough of this terrible dream!" If players are friendly with Djura, he tells them that "I no longer dream, but I was once a hunter, too," and sends them on their way with some comforting parting words: "You have the whole night to dream. Make the best of it." However, in case Djura is made hostile, like Eileen, he guesses that the player character "still [has] dreams" and urges them to, "next time you dream, give some thought … to the hunt, and its purpose." The understanding in each of these exchanges is the ability to dream, to die and wake up, as opposed to simply perishing within Yharnam. It positions the Hunter's Dream as a place which directly sustains the hunters, allowing them to reappear and

make it through the night in a constant cycle of death and reawakening, an idea which is referred to throughout the game. In a way, it all starts with Bloodborne's opening and the encounter with the Blood Minister, with the signing of the contract, and the transfusion that follows. As he tells you, "[w]hatever happens, you may think it all a mere bad dream," and it is his treatments that arguably function as a rite of passage, a way for the player character to gain entry into the Hunter's Dream, and Yharnam's nightmare.

Within *Bloodborne*'s night, the Hunter's Dream stands as a bulwark, a space of peace and a safe haven for the hunters, away from Yharnam's chaos of blood, beasts, and an everlasting night. The cutscene signaling your arrival here hints at a level of homeliness, and the welcome you receive from the Doll each time you return helps to reiterate this. Ultimately, the Hunter's Dream is a counter site, a place of rest and respite, standing against the blackness of Yharnam's night. It is here that the game begins and ends, and where the final boss fight will take place. More specifically, although the relationship between the Hunter's Dream and the other locations of Yharnam remains unclear, it appears that, like the Nightmare spaces, the Dream exists outside of the passable areas of the city, raising questions regarding its status as a "dream" and its symbolism in relation to Yharnam and its endless night. An early hint of this is found when visiting the Dream for the first time, when players are asked to return to Yharnam. Each of the large gravestones which line the steps leading into the workshop are defined by the game as Awakening Headstones, either indicating to the player that there is "no place to awaken," or that they can use this stone to "awaken at a selected location in Yharnam," linking them back to the lamps found around the city, as a separate place of awakening (the first time a lamp is lit, it similarly indicates to players that "upon death, you will awaken at this lamp"). These notions of dream and nightmare, of sleep and awakening, are concepts that tie the Hunter's Dream to Yharnam's greater world.

The symbolism of the night, and of what might be experienced in its duration, is one of the key themes found within *Bloodborne*, and worthy of closer attention. In her book *Night Passages: Philosophy, Literature and Film* (2013) and an earlier essay on night and the uncanny, Elizabeth Bronfen collects the different aspects of nocturnal experiences, charting their significance in an understanding of the world in daytime. In particular, she investigates representations of this symbolism is a large variety of fictional texts, making her work an excellent starting point to help chart *Bloodborne*'s treatment of the concept of this kind of darkness. As Bronfen explains, the night is more often experienced as a counter site, "the double of the day, a comment on its activities," the advent of which invites "of a different way of thinking and behaving" (2008: 51):

As our sight diminishes, other senses—notably or faculties of hearing and of the imagination—come to be increased. Our sense of distance and measure changes, the contours of the persons or objects we meet become blurred, we encounter a sense of disorientation, which can be either fascinating or threatening [2008: 51].

Because of this play on the senses, this disorientation, the night is seen as dangerous. The world becomes strange, unreal, difficult to grasp, "it shifts between the familiar and the unfamiliar," yet as a counterpoint to this danger, "precisely because the night requires a higher degree of vigilance than the day, its darkness affords revelations" (Bronfen, 2008: 51). The night is a place that is unfamiliar and dangerous, yet necessary, a site of knowledge and revelations, where "night emerges as an outside to day, knowledge, rationality, and morality, even while also located inside human subjectivity—the site of creativity, desire for forbidden knowledge, resilience, and transgression" (Bronfen, 2013: 20). Two elements of Bronfen's reading are noteworthy: firstly, the fact that the night "always contains elements of the day that precedes and succeeds it" (2013: 15); and secondly, a space where night is a journey, albeit a limited one, since "a journey *into* the night is a journey *to the end* of a night, from which we wake up in a day that has been changed because of this passage" (2013: 22; author's emphasis). The presence of the night is often linked to "the stage and state of mind for scenes of moral temptation, often ending in violence and self-destruction [and its] external darkness corresponds to an inner darkness" (Bronfen, 2013: 23), giving way to an interpretation of the night as a site of transgression in which that which is unknown, unfamiliar, and ultimately forbidden can be accessed. As Bronfen explains,

Night is the more remarkable of the two, significant precisely because of its departure from the norm. Regardless whether one fears or adores the night, whether one seeks to praise or to repress its power, the night is that time of day about which we talk [2013: 109].

It is a site that may inspire terror as well as curiosity and desire, yet, at the same time, the night offers a necessary experience to contrast and complement the day, a site where the darkness may hide knowledge. These revelations may be presented through the vehicle of dreams, these strange visualizations of one's innermost thoughts, where "[t]he spiritual vision that night privileges can either culminate in demonic madness […], or in divine epiphany. It can bring forth either ecstatic visions or horrific nightmares" (Bronfen, 2013: 178). The night, then, appears as a double of the day, both differentiating itself and replicating elements of this safe, knowable space of light. Without day, there cannot be night, and without dark, there cannot be light: "To experience the night also means to live through it [and] the journey to the darkest part of the night must be distinguished from a journey through

to the other side. At the deepest end of the night, we find a turn to dawn" (Bronfen, 2013: 344). More specifically, Bronfen argues that it is ultimately impossible to separate the two: "What knowledge, what choice, what attitude toward the world is achieved upon awakening? How much night can be relinquished and how much night must be carried over *into* and borne *in* the day?" (2013: 347; author's emphasis) The revelations found within the night can, will, and should inform one's life during the day, as it is only through an experience of the dark that true enlightenment can be found. This nocturnal journey of revelation resonates with many of the themes found in *Bloodborne*, where much of its lore is informed by a quest for knowledge, one which takes its participants to dark and unfamiliar places. The dual nature of the night as a space of transgression and transformation similarly showcases *Bloodborne*'s obsession with the body, its promise of transcendence and its inevitable impurity and decay. The efforts of Byrgenwerth and of the Healing Church, their unsightly secrets hidden deep within the nightmare, represent an attempt to gain Insight, to be granted eyes, to see beyond the dark veil. The journey of the hunter, starting in Yharnam in the evening, and ending against the appearance of the Blood Moon, brings new discoveries at each moon phase, the realization of the true story only found within the dead of night. The nocturnal city presents the crossing of a threshold, into danger and the unfamiliar, yet much can be learned on this journey, leaving the player with their final choice as to their fate.

Within this night, the Hunter's Dream appears as a slice of dawn, a flicker of light within the endless dark. In the city, the sky grows progressively darker as the night wears on, yet a soft light continues to illuminate the Dream itself. Its first appearance enforces its dreamlike nature, presenting this safe haven as something unreal, ethereal, thus "blurring the boundary between diurnal knowledge and dream visions" (Bronfen, 2013: 138). Alongside the experience of the night itself, it is the dreamscapes hidden inside that are significant to any interpretation of *Bloodborne*. Firstly, it once more connects the game's themes to the work of Lovecraft, in whose fiction the significance of dream narratives is well-established. Although the Hunter's Dream displays little of the otherworldliness of some of *Bloodborne*'s location and creatures, its status as a dream is of interest. As Smith explains, "Dreams are [a] recurring theme in Lovecraft's work, particularly dream quests where the protagonist gains information from dreams" (2011: 836), one of many ways in which other planes can be accessed, where they are "windows into forbidden knowledge and forces beyond humanity's understanding" (Smith, 2011: 836). More specifically, Levy notes that "[d]ream is not an artifice; it is a mode of understanding, a means of exploring new worlds" (1988: 99). One of the many other

planes of existence, dreamscapes can comment on events of our own reality, where "dream gives space a supplementary dimension, a depth. Unknown perspectives are opened 'beyond the wall of sleep,' new spaces are developed" (Levy, 1988: 99). Like the night, dreams award deeper insights and "entering into dreamscapes involves seeing the everyday not simply in a darker light, but disfigured in such as [sic] way that the process of de-familiarization offers insights that are necessary for any return into the day" (Bronfen, 2013: 139). This is made concrete within the Hunter's Dream, as a place of regeneration, where the player character is able to restore themselves and their weapons, awarding them strength and knowledge of combat. As is demonstrated by the words of Gehrman, Djura and Eileen, it is the Dream which sustains the hunters, allowing them to gain strength of weapon and flesh, as well as the ability to die and reawaken, to continue on their journey. Yet, as Bronfen notes, "the dream does not want to be understood" (2013: 149), and as noted previously, the Hunter's Dream keeps its fair share of secrets. More specifically, it draws on Bronfen's final comments regarding the relationship of night and day: "Because the world after nightfall loses its distinct contours both in a phenomenological and a moral sense, it promises the possibility of change. […] The dawn that follows, and with it an awakening into and for the ordinary, must already have been planned in the night" (2013: 350). This notion of fate, of a loss of control, is one which has been addressed previously in this book, of the importance and lack of player agency which is facilitated by *Bloodborne*'s design as well as its incorporation of Gothic and Lovecraftian themes. The night may be a site where knowledge can be found, and although much is revealed to the player, they ultimately lack the ability to act on this dream and change this endless dark. Nowhere does this become clearer than at the game's end, which, suitably, takes place within the Hunter's Dream itself.

After defeating Mergo's Wet Nurse inside the Nightmare of Mensis, players return to a Hunter's Dream that has been utterly transformed:

> The workshop, home to the hunters and their tools, is an inferno. The Doll greets you calmly and informs you that Gehrman awaits by the great tree. As you draw near, you see his face. The lines of worry seem somehow deeper in the moonlight. You can barely hear his ancient voice over the rustling of flowers in the wind, but he speaks to you of mercy. He speaks to you of the end. The first hunter is here. You are here. The moon is present [SG, 2015: 160].

The Doll is still waiting for you, seemingly unaware of the destruction around her, and addresses you in her usual manner: "Good hunter, you have come. Dawn will soon break. This night and this dream will end. Gehrman awaits you, at the foot of the great tree. Go on, good hunter." This safe haven, now

ablaze, has lost any semblance of the home that players have become used to. Perhaps they may have seen the fight with the Wet Nurse as the final combat, yet it is clear the fight has been brought home. Gehrman, now located in a part of the garden that was previously locked behind a gate, awaits the player for the endgame: "Good Hunter, you've done well, the night is near its end. Now I will show you mercy. You will die, forget the dream, and awake under the morning sun. You will be freed from this terrible Hunter's Dream." After speaking these words, players are offered a choice which will define their experience of the end of the game.

Before giving a detailed reading of each of the three endings and their implications, it is worth noting that here *Bloodborne* turns its full attention to the realm of the uncanny. Most often associated with Freud's essay of the same name, the term refers to that which "belongs to the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread" (Freud, 2003: 123), representing "that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" (Freud, 2003: 124). Interpreted slightly differently by Bennett and Royle, "[t]he uncanny has to do with making things *uncertain*: it has to do with the sense that things are not as they have come to appear through habit and familiarity, that they may challenge all rationality and logic" (2009: 36; author's emphasis), or, as Royle explains, "the uncanny is not simply an experience of strangeness of alienation. More specifically, it is a peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar" (2003: 1). This notion of commingling points to one of the key aspects of the uncanny, namely its relationship to and insistence on repetition, since it "can be a matter of something gruesome or terrible, […] but it can also be a matter of something strangely beautiful, bordering on ecstasy […], or eerily reminding us of something" (Royle, 2003: 2). As Bennett and Royle explain, "[r]epetition is a key aspect of the uncanny, as Freud's essay makes clear. The uncanny is not simply a matter of the mysterious, bizarre or frightening: as we have tried to suggest, it involves a kind of *duplicity* (both doubling and deception) within the familiar" (2009: 41; author's emphasis). Punter offers a similar discussion of the concept, stating that:

> This remains the crucial point in the definition of the uncanny: namely, that it represents a feeling which relates to a dialectic between that which is *known* and that which is *unknown*. If we are afraid, then more often than not it is because we are experiencing fear of the unknown: but if we have a sense of the uncanny, it is because the barriers between the known and the unknown are teetering on the brink of collapse. We are afraid, certainly: but what we are afraid of is at least partly our own sense that we have *been here before* [2007: 130; author's emphasis].

Each of these interpretations highlights the connection between the familiar and unfamiliar, between memory and experience, and the sensation of rep-

etition, of having been here before. These themes can be found throughout *Bloodborne*, in its (re)presentation of genre elements, in the design and connections between different areas in-game, and in situating the narrative around the concept of an endless night, in which enemies consistently appear and reappear. It is most prominent, however, in relation to the Hunter's Dream, as the one location players will visit more than any other, their home, where they are welcomed back each time by the Doll. The change that occurs close to the game's end becomes all the more unsettling as a result, and, as Vidler explains: "For Freud, 'unhomeliness' was more than a simple sense of not belonging; it was the fundamental propensity of the familiar to turn on its owners, suddenly to become defamiliarized, derealized, as if in a dream" (1992: 7). After dealing with the secrets discovered, players are now confronted with the reality of what the Dream has become: a space that is as strange and dangerous as their experience of Yharnam has been, and where the final confrontation will take place.

During these stages of the game, the player's path splits into three options. As the Strategy Guide explains, "[a]fter talking to Gehrman for a while he'll present you with a question, and your answer will determine how the nightmare ends" (2015: 161). Players are asked whether they wish to submit their life, or to refuse; whether they want Gehrman to show them mercy, or to stand up against him. If the first option is chosen, the Yharnam Sunrise ending is triggered: Gehrman is seen to rise from his wheelchair, and, after wishing the hunter a farewell, uses his Burial Blade to remove their head. After a brief pause, the player character is seen to awaken on the streets of Yharnam as the sun rises, leaving the city behind. Within the Hunter's Dream, the Doll is found to be kneeling in front of a new gravestone that has appeared, and like Gehrman, she bids the hunter goodbye: "Farewell, good hunter. May you find your worth in the waking world." If players decide to refuse, Gehrman displays his surprise: "Dear, oh dear. What was it? The Hunt? The Blood? Or the horrible dream? Oh, it doesn't matter…. It always comes down to the Hunter's helper to clean up after these sorts of messes. Tonight, Gehrman joins the hunt…" For both remaining endings, players are indeed tasked with fighting Gehrman, the First Hunter, but the outcome will depend on their actions during the main campaign. If players have collected and consumed at least three of the four Third Umbilical Cords that can be found throughout the game, they will unlock the Childhood's Beginning ending, where, after defeating Gehrman, they are faced by the Moon Presence, which, as implied by one of the Cords, is the source of the Dream: "The Third Umbilical Cord precipitated the encounter with the pale moon, which beckoned the hunters and conceived the hunter's dream." If players manage to defeat

the Moon Presence, they find themselves transformed, an image of a Great One, a small, gelatinous being, where the Doll steps in to take care of the player: "Are you cold...? Oh, good Hunter." It is a demonstration of the transcendence so desired by the scholars of Byrgenwerth and the Healing Church, yet no comments are made as to the consequences of the appearance of this new Great One. Finally, if players did not collect or use the Cord items, but refuse to submit their life, they will reach the Honoring Wishes ending. Here, they will still combat Gehrman, but no fight with the Moon Presence will occur. Instead, the Presence arrives and seems to overcome the player, confining them to the Hunter's Dream. Seen inside the garden, sat in a wheelchair and tended to by the Doll, it appears that the player has replaced Gehrman, locked within this dreadful Dream until such time as a new hunter may arrive and release them, exemplified by the Doll's words: "And so, the hunt begins again." This ending is tied quite closely to the item, obtained from Gehrman when he is defeated by the player, the Old Hunter badge:

> This hunter's badge, crafted in Gehrman's time, has no practical purpose, except to assist in romanticizing about the past. The badge was a special privilege for the hunters of the past, and should not be dishonoured. It should be left in peace, unless one is truly prepared to assume the will of those gone before [SG, 2015: 468].

It points to Gehrman's role, as well as his struggle, and indicates his wish for the player. If they refuse to submit their life, their fate is uncertain, perhaps undesirable, the true consequences of becoming a Great One or the keeper of the Dream ultimately unknown. In many ways, the description of the Old Hunter badge implies how Gehrman would like the journey to end, by releasing the hunter from Yharnam's endless night. This will sever the connection of the player character to the Hunter's Dream, yet whether the night will truly end remains unclear.

Each ending serves as the ultimate narrative reward, in which *Bloodborne*'s story is seen through to its conclusion, but the game does not end here. More specifically, *Bloodborne*'s campaign ending does not necessarily spell the ending of the player experience through its use of New Game Plus, a term used for games which allow players to continue play after completing the main story or campaign. The player character is carried over into the new game and, most often, the experience or level gained in the previous playthrough, as well as weapons, upgrades, and items are kept. In the case of *Bloodborne*, as explained in the Strategy Guide, the statistics and most of the items (except Key Items) remain, and enemies become stronger with each subsequent playthrough (2015: 15, 161). This is presented quite clearly in the phrase, found in the Strategy Guide, to describe the game's ending: "Congratulations on making it through the night, but a new day is dawning, and

a new nightmare will surely follow…" (2015: 161). These elements of *Blood-borne*'s design only serve to reinforce the importance of the uncanny in relation to the Hunter's Dream and the events which take place within it. Vidler draws attention to the "the uncanny habit of history to repeat itself, to return at unexpected and unwanted moments" (1992: 5), and it is this type of repetition that the New Game Plus structure invites. As Freud explains, "[t]he factor of the repetition of the same thing will perhaps not be acknowledged by everyone as a source of the sense of the uncanny" (2003: 143), yet he also notes that it is unintended repetition that "transforms what would otherwise seem quite harmless into something uncanny and forces us to entertain the idea of the fateful and the inescapable, when we would normally speak of 'chance'" (2003: 144). In the case of *Bloodborne*, this repetition is not so much realized in the sense that Freud speaks of it, as a feeling of déjà vu which lends meaning to a situation in which, under normal circumstances, one would not be found. Rather, the game represents its night as an exercise in powerlessness and futility, where, despite one's best efforts, no real change is forthcoming.

Furthermore, repetition is visualized in the implied doubling of the player character. As becomes clear from the dialogue with Gehrman, Djura and Eileen, access to the Hunter's Dream allows hunters to dream, to die and reawaken after each subsequent defeat. With each death and reawakening, the cycle is repeated, where the player character exists once more, as do all enemies who respawn in their original location. This is emphasized by the game's endings, in each of which the hunter is transformed in some way: into a Great One, into the keeper of the Dream, and into one who, perhaps, has truly awakened. The existence of New Game Plus, which allows players to delve right back into *Bloodborne*'s campaign, nullifies the outcome of the original narrative, instead drawing attention to the endless repetition of Yharnam's night. This is acknowledged in dialogue, spoken by the Doll, following the Yharnam Sunrise ending. Within the cutscene which accompanies this outcome, the Doll is shown to kneel in front of a new grave, added to the Dream, dedicated to the hunter. Upon starting a New Game Plus, at times, the Doll can be seen to be rising to her feet, and, addressing the player, states that "This grave stands in memory of a hunter I once knew. Though enchanted by the dream, he/she remained strong, and eventually saw the light of dawn. I pray you have found meaning, and comfort, in the waking world." Effectively, the hunter referred to here is the same player character who is now present in the new playthrough, creating both a repetition of the story and character, and a confusion as to their identity. As Royle points out, "The uncanny involves feelings of uncertainty, in particular regarding the

reality of who one is and what is being experienced" (2003: 1), a scenario which is realized with each ending, each transformation, and each reawakening within the Hunter's Dream for another visit to Yharnam. The uncanny confuses that which is familiar and unknown, that which is repeated, and it has the potential to add a strangeness to frames and borders, where it may be "a feeling that happens only to oneself, within oneself, but it is never one's 'own': its meaning or significance may have to do, most of all, with what is not oneself, with others, with the world 'itself'" (Royle, 2003: 2). It is not just the world and events surrounding one that become uncertain, but even oneself can become unfamiliar and be replicated. With each playthrough, and each ending, nothing is resolved. With each movement through the world, the area returns to its previous states, its inhabitants reappearing in the exact same location, whereas the safe haven is transformed into the location of the ultimate horror as it facilitates this process: every death or voluntary visit to the Dream reinforces the loop or resurrection and nihilism. The certainties of rest and respite, of a home, which are so clearly tied to the Hunter's Dream, become uncertain, and this peaceful workshop is ultimately shown to be the nexus of Yharnam's endless night.

The aim of this third part has been, first and foremost, to demonstrate the ability of game mechanics to convey meaning in a way that is similar to other narrative descriptors. Whereas it may be easy to neglect a discussion of game systems, authors such as Salen and Zimmerman, Totten, and Bogost have drawn attention to the representational nature of videogames and the capabilities inherent in these aspects of game design. Bogost's concept of procedural rhetoric, in particular, helps to explain the relationship between mechanics and meaning creation. Alongside the more traditional elements of narrative, discussed in Part I and II of this work, *Bloodborne*'s mechanics help to cement its world. Each of the chapters here has drawn attention to a different aspect of these designed systems, from unique mechanics such as Insight, to systems that focus on elements of representation, where classic mechanics have been recast, as it were, to fit the game's aesthetic. As I have demonstrated, not only do these representations simply fit in with *Bloodborne*'s design, they actively inform and enforce aspects of the game's world and story. Interestingly, each mechanic shows the influence of wider source material. Where one might expect that it is the traditional embedded narrative which rests on the use and adaptation of Gothic literature, in many ways, it is the mechanics where these thematic connections are realized most strongly. Like its plot, *Bloodborne*'s systems draw on much older texts, specifically, the works of Lovecraft and Stoker, to help bring its world to life. Without adding new narrative information, each system acts as a descriptor which helps to

enrich the world's narrative fabric, deepening the horrors found within the world. As Gehrman notes within the game, "I've had enough of this dream," yet even the ending of the game offers no solace, drawing players into an endless loop of uncanny repetition. This is further embellished by the New Game Plus option, which allows players to jump right back into the game and relive their journey through *Bloodborne*'s Gothic horrors. The nightmare never ends, and Yharnam will always welcome you back.

Conclusion

Your final return to the Hunter's Dream has brought you to the gate to the side of the garden, which now stands open. The Doll has told you that Gehrman is waiting, and it is time to meet with him. Surrounded by a multitude of crosses and gravestones, amidst so many white flowers, the first hunter sits at the foot of the great tree. He looks frailer than you have ever seen him, his voice soft and pleading as he offers to show you mercy: "You will die, forget the dream, and awake under the morning sun." It is the only outcome you have wished for since you have been brought here, and eagerly, you submit yourself to his blade. With a brief farewell and a final warning, Gehrman stands and raises his Burial Blade. Against the light of the full moon, you submit your life to him, and find yourself transported to a plaza somewhere in the city, the sun slowly rising over the spires, waking you up and warming your face. It seems you have survived the night, and it is time for you to go, leaving nothing behind but another gravestone inside the Hunter's Dream.

Since its release in 2015, *Bloodborne* has received its fair share of accolades, excellent reviews from critics, and attention from the online community, with its world and lore being discussed as thoroughly as with the Souls games that preceded it. The game has received further attention since the release of both the main game and the DLC through the publication of auxiliary materials such as the Strategy Guides and art books. Other creators have taken up the baton of *Bloodborne*'s world. On March 15, 2016, board game designer Eric M. Lang announced his Project Dream via Twitter: a *Bloodborne* card game (released on November 11, 2016), which would take players into the Chalice Dungeons, where "players [would] compete to kill monsters and take their blood."[1] As Lang explains: "My goal with *Bloodborne* was to channel the intensity and frustration of the video game into a contest between players. Lots of death."[2] An Old Hunters expansion pack to the card game, based on the DLC, was announced on August 17, 2017, with a 2018 release.[3] Following

this came the announcement of a four part comic series, based within Yhar-
nam, at the end of 2017, describing a story where "A nameless Hunter awakens
in an ancient city where horrific beasts stalk the shadows and the streets run
slick with the blood of the damned. Seeking an escape from the endless Night
of the Hunt, the Hunter embarks upon a dangerous, gore-filled quest with
the hopes of ending Yharnam's twisted endemic."[4] Alongside these testaments
to the lure of *Bloodborne*'s universe, it turned out that the game itself still has
some secrets to reveal. Organized on the Reddit websites, a group of players
who call themselves Tomb Prospectors continue to explore the Chalice Dun-
geons looking for previously unseen aspects of the game. Near the end of
2017, their efforts yielded the discovery of the Flaming Undead Giant, an
enemy which had only been seen in a 2014 demonstration of the game, and
went undiscovered for over two years after the game's release.[5] Other users
have since taken to datamining *Bloodborne*, uncovering unused content,
bosses and NPCs,[6] with other websites offering a guide to players as to how
they can access this content themselves.[7] It seems the dark streets of Yharnam
have not yet lost their allure, or even divulged all their secrets, with many
continuously returning to this city, diseased and deceased, despite the horrors
that lurk within.

      The aim of this book has been to provide an overview of the modes of
storytelling employed by *Bloodborne* to construct its horrifying world. The
early chapters focused primarily on the more direct narrative descriptors, in
the form of cutscenes, dialogue and item descriptions, to piece together the
story of Yharnam and its institutions. Not only does Part I show the intricacy
of Miyazaki's narrative, and how carefully constructed each element is, pro-
viding a tapestry of interlocking information that helps to paint a picture of
otherworldly horror, it also emphasizes the role of the player within this
process. *Bloodborne*'s design places the onus on the game as a journey,
whereby players are required to invest into the game world. Embedded and
emergent narrative become intertwined as players travel through the areas,
finding the narrative clues left by the developers, which allow them to con-
struct their own story from the snippets they have found. Throughout its
campaign, *Bloodborne* uses a variety of narrative descriptors, of cutscenes,
dialogue, items, and the environment, to introduce players to its story. Spe-
cifically, the narrative straddles a divide between current events and history,
following the story of the hunter as they are exploring Yharnam, and in doing
so, revealing the secrets hidden within this dark world. These narratives are
further demonstrated by aspects of both horror and the Gothic, which inform
many of the themes as well as the form in which the game is represented.
Ultimately, *Bloodborne* uses its world to support a particular video game story

which "connects two narrative levels: the story to be discovered, and the story of their discovery" (Ryan, 2005: 16), placing the player in an active role, where "in an interactive environment, the user becomes the detective, and it falls to him to reconstruct the embedded story" (Ryan, 2005: 16). This becomes more important with each of the Soulsborne games, as it is only through discoveries made by the player, and through their efforts of exploration, that a full story emerges; as MacDonald has noted, "any given player could bypass the story entirely if they weren't inclined to investigate" (2016: 284). Its use of narrative descriptors as well as the incorporation of intra- and intertextual sources help to create a very particular story experience.

This is further supported by the world of *Bloodborne*, which offers its own attractions. Aside from the sensations of traversing new and unique landscapes, the areas inform both the narrative and act as a way to materialize the game's themes. Presenting locations which offer micro-narratives and stories to be discovered, alongside spaces which demonstrate a deeper understanding of world-building, the game's universe presents a particular interpretation of a Gothic narrative. Following from Wolf's theories of world-building, *Bloodborne* can be seen as an example of a world which integrates narrative threads and braids to create a fabric, consisting of each design element at its disposal. Alongside the ways in which environments can function as a direct representation of a story, the map design of *Bloodborne* further helps to cement these narrative connections. The ability of players to see the different game locations, as well as the game's use of navigational logic, help to establish the relationships between areas and the factions which inhabit them. The ability of players to open up shortcuts develops these connections, and the aesthetic of each presents a visual representation of the game's otherworldly aspects. Ultimately, the exploration of *Bloodborne*'s world reinforces the themes established by the narrative elements, and in the delivery of its story, this process of discovery is equated with rewards. In doing so, a game experience is created where narrative and exploration, as well as the bigger landmarks such as boss fights, help to establish a feeling of achievement.

Finally, the game's mechanics further support the narrative fabric of its world. Consisting of a combination of unique systems and conventional mechanics, the representation of these both expands and deepens the themes established by *Bloodborne*'s more traditional story elements. The systems of Insight, of blood, and the Hunter's Dream each act as a distinct narrative descriptor which helps to inform the game's story, adding to their commentary of knowledge, monstrosity and power. In addition, *Bloodborne*'s endings serve a similar purpose and are closely intertwined with the location of the Hunter's Dream, this safe haven that sustains the player character throughout

the game. Ultimately, then, each of the topics addressed here helps to build the world, using its particular features to explore the game's themes and genre in a variety of ways, creating a rich tapestry of narrative experience. As Salen and Zimmerman state, "[e]very element of a game brims with narrative potential. The narrative components of a game are not just the backstory and cutscenes. *Any* representational element can be a narrative descriptor…. Nothing is irrelevant: every piece helps tell the story" (2004: 401; author's emphasis), evidently one of the cornerstones behind *Bloodborne*'s design.

   The work presented here may appear narrow in scope due to its focus on a single game, yet the in-game examples, style of analysis and theory used will have wider applications, both in analyzing other videogames, as well as offering examples of practice for developers. Ultimately, *Bloodborne*'s significance can be identified on two levels: through its status as a videogame, and as a genre game. One of the key features of *Bloodborne*, and of Miyazaki's other games, is their position as games. As MacDonald explains, "*Dark Souls* didn't invent new rules, or set new technological standards, or change the conception of what a video game could be. What it did was make people think differently about *how* a game could be, and what would resonate with players" (2016: 262–263; author's emphasis). In part, this is due to Miyazaki's position in relation to the label of auteur, typified in the introduction as using the author-function. Whilst known for his influence and involvement in each aspect of a game's design, at the same time, Miyazaki leaves a large role for players in the meaning-making process.

   For this reason, I argue that *Bloodborne* should be regarded as an open work as discussed by Umberto Eco in his book of the same name. Eco's definition of the term supposes the presence of an author of sorts, but one with a different type of involvement than as the central defining factor for interpretation. Instead, in Eco's interpretation of the concept, the open work provides a frame for reception, but one where "the author seems to hand [his work] on to the performer more or less like the components of a construction kit" (1989: 4). The work is complete in the sense that all elements that one needs to make sense of it are provided by the original author: "The author is the one who proposed a number of possibilities which had already been rationally organized, oriented, and endowed with specifications for proper development" (1989: 19). While the work thus maintains the author's intention, it is to be completed by its audience. They are provided with a number of different possibilities for receiving and interpreting the text which "always work within a given *field of relations*" (1989: 19; author's emphasis), either in relation to previous work by the same author, or through inter- and intra-textual references. Seeing Miyazaki's designs in this light allows for an under-

standing of both his role as author/auteur as well as the efforts of players in reconstructing and understanding the narrative, and the different interpretations of the games based on what information is uncovered.

Bloodborne's status as an open work not only complicates Miyazaki's supposed position of authorial control, but also its relationship to its genre. Where the action-adventure aspects of the game highlight the ability of players to overcome challenges and get a sense of power and control, the use of horror elements would negate this position. As was explained in light of existing definitions of survival horror and discussions of this form from authors such as Kirkland and Krzywinska, the linearity and narrative control found in many horror titles is set to create a particular player experience. Left in a confined, labyrinthine world, pitted against challenging enemies and with only limited resources, survival horror games employ an interplay between player agency and restrictions, between being in and out of control, to deliver a particular tale of mystery and affect. By contrast, *Bloodborne*'s openness in both narrative descriptors and world-building, and the freedom players have in how they traverse the world and confront its challenges, should arguably negate the constricted terrors present in other genre titles. Instead, form and content intertwine in such a way that textual elements and the design choices of game space and mechanics help to solidify its dark themes. This is further emphasized by its Gothic setting and framing, of disjointed fragments of story dotted around the world, waiting for players to connect the dots and realize the full extent of the horror. Returning to Kilgour's description of the Gothic mode, in which she describes a form which "feeds upon and mixes the wide range of literary sources out of which it emerges and from which it never fully disentangles itself," (1995: 4), the Gothic is "[m]ade up of these assorted bits and pieces, gothic novels often seem to disintegrate into fragments" (1995: 5). *Bloodborne* uses varied narrative descriptors, where every element of story content, of the characters who inhabit its world and the items they carry, and where every location and game system adds to the overall lore. Each connection made, between events, timelines, in-game areas and intertextual sources, raises as many questions as it answers. The central theme of forbidden, otherworldly knowledge, and the desire to possess it, is threaded through each aspect of the game's world, until players themselves are left feeling terrified and insignificant in the face of the threats they have uncovered.

This ability to co-author and, more poignantly, to make their own meanings and realize for themselves, and in their own time, what is festering inside Yharnam, offers a particular pleasure to players. As previously noted, most video games possess some form of story, the role of which is often central, as Juul explains: "A narrative may be used for telling the player what to do

or as rewards for playing" (2001: n.pag.). The game's events are presented as both goal and prize, a sign of continuation and completion. Alongside the revealing of story beats, other reward systems in games play to more direct experiences of success, as outlined by Salen and Zimmerman. Prizes may be awarded in the form of substance, allowing players to stock up on items; by providing access to previously locked areas; or by granting players new abilities or upgrades to old ones (2004: 346). The structure of video games of offering players goals to achieve and challenges to overcome point to an inherent system of risk and reward, where both clear victories, such as the defeat of a boss, and smaller achievements of progress and discovery can count as a "win." Although players may experience bigger victories and access to new areas and items, the general sensation of accomplishment is often less tangible, a type of achievement which Salen and Zimmerman call glory rewards. They are "all the things you're going to give to the player that have absolutely no impact on the game play itself but will be things they end up taking away from the experience" (2004: 346), the personal accomplishments facilitated by the game world.

Arguably, the majority of *Bloodborne*'s gameplay is grounded within such glory rewards. The story can be missed, and many areas, NPC encounters and boss fights are optional and do not have to be completed in order to reach the game's ending. Instead, exploration and discovery provide access to details or shortcuts, to unknown areas and hideous monstrosities, and ultimately, to new revelations about Yharnam's history. As Miyazaki explains, he is concerned with the "meaning and value [placed] on the sense of achievement you can earn from playing" (SG, 2015: 547): "My intention here is that every aspect of game design either creates or enhances the joy, or the sense of achievement, you feel as a result of these actions" (SG, 2015: 547). Specifically, he cites the role of setting and story, and in particular the addition of "flow and meaning to the map structure" (SG, 2015: 547) as a way to enhance these feelings of achievement. By intertwining narrative and discovery so closely with sensations of victory and accomplishment, moving through the world of *Bloodborne* offers players a particular kind of reward, inviting the continued exploration of an ever darkening universe.

Using familiar motifs in terms of genre and gameplay, Miyazaki has presented a new interpretation of the Gothic. The journey into never-ending darkness and the fear of one's mortality and sanity underpin its larger meditations on transformation and transcendence. Yharnam's history still lingers in its streets and its environs, the Nightmare hidden, but ever present. Yet for all its revelations, *Bloodborne* does not divulge its secrets easily, and once more, I wish to quote Botting's description of modern incarnations of the Gothic:

Disorientation: multiple interlinked networks of signs, images, bits, flows. Disruption: all spatial, temporal, physical and subjective coordinates diffuse, conflate, expand and enmesh. Where does it begin and end? How is it animated? What can it mean? In digital and virtual contexts, what are its frames, anchors, material supports? Who—or what—writes, reads, projects, imagines, perceives? Are the ghosts it generates actual, hallucinatory or medial? Are they effects of unconscious, textual or technical processes? [2013: 197].

Botting's words simply add to a list of questions that *Bloodborne* fails to answer, but it does not keep you from returning to Yharnam to seek answers. The work presented here offers one way in which to approach and read the game's glut of material, and, as can be glimpsed from the myriad of discussions online, it is one of many. Ultimately, it is my reading of Miyazaki's work, a game that is able to present such a rich world and history. *Bloodborne* is a game which, in many ways, has become deeply personal to me, and a nightmare which, for me, and for many others, will never end. After all, the darkness is always so compelling.

Chapter Notes

Introduction

1. Trailer available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xx8KTIeSnzs [Accessed: February 1, 2017].

2. From this point onwards, the Strategy Guide will be referred to as SG when referencing.

3. Simons' 2007 essay "Narrative, Games, and Theory" provides an overview of these early debates and key texts.

4. The version of *Bloodborne* referred to throughout the book is the English language edition, rather than the original Japanese release. The reason for this lies both in difficulties of language and translation, as well as in sales: at the time of writing, the game has sold over 3 million copies worldwide, with North America heading this chart with 1.30 million copies sold (http://www.vgchartz.com/game/82937/bloodborne/sales; accessed: April 11, 2019). Although some have questioned the accuracy of the information provided by the website listed, it is the most concrete data available.

Chapter 1

1. Unless otherwise indicated, quotations will be taken from the main game, *Bloodborne* (FromSoftware, 2015). The version consulted includes the latest update released by FromSoftware which, at the time of writing, is patch 1.09 (released December 21, 2015).

2. Unless otherwise indicated, item descriptions are taken from the Strategy Guide and referenced accordingly. They may be redacted for the purpose of the argument and may differ from the descriptions in the game. All descriptions have been checked; if alterations are minor, the version provided by the SG is used. If there are marked differences, this will be

pointed out either in the main body of the text, or in an endnote.

3. From this point onwards, the Old Hunters Strategy Guide will be referred to as OHSG when referencing.

Chapter 2

1. Within a religious, and specifically a Christian context, the concept of communion refers to a bond or union, and to the relationship between churches, between fellow Christians, and with Jesus Christ. It is perhaps most commonly known through the rite of Holy Communion, in which bread and wine are consumed as the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ and as a way to remember His sacrifice on the cross. Although the concept of communion as used in *Bloodborne* has resonances of these additional meanings, its portrayal can be considered quite separate and here will be discussed within the confines of the game, as opposed to reading it in light of existing religious practices.

2. The description of Ludwig's Rifle differs in-game, with the phrase "Ludwig's Rifle exhibits several departures from the workshop's design, suggesting that the Church anticipated much larger inhuman beasts" replaced by "The Healing Church workshop began with Ludwig, and departed from old Gehrman's techniques to provide hunters with the means to hunt more terrifying beasts, and perhaps things worse still," mimicking the description of Ludwig's Holy Blade.

3. The description of the Gold Pendant differs in-game, with the phrase "words that will open the gates of Byrgenwerth" replaced by "to reveal the adage, touch the altar skull."

4. The description of Iosefka's Blood Vial differs in-game. The first sentence is altered to include that the vial is acquired "from the lady

doctor at Iosefka's Clinic," stating that the process used for refinement is "likely devised by the doctor herself."

5. The in-game description includes an additional phrase which states that "He [Laurence] is destined to seek his skull, but even if he found it, it could never restore his memories."

Chapter 3

1. Although I will discuss the impact of Lovecraft's work and ideas in relation to the argument I wish to make here, this treatment is by no means exhaustive. For readers who wish to know more about the author, his life and work, a good place to start is the writings of S.T. Joshi.

2. There are a total of four Third Umbilical Cord items that can be found within *Bloodborne*'s campaign: one is located in the Abandoned Workshop; two are obtained via NPC questlines, for Arianna and Impostor Iosefka; and the final one is left behind after defeating Mergo's Wet Nurse in the Nightmare of Mensis. The item descriptions listed in-text apply to the first three Cords, as those would have been obtained by the player at this point in the campaign. The description of the Cord dropped by Mergo's Wet Nurse offers some additional information about the School of Mensis and is offered here, rather than in the main body of the text: "A great relic, also known as the Cord of the Eye. Every infant Great One has this precursor to the umbilical cord. Every Great One loses its child, and then yearns for a surrogate. This Cord granted Mensis audience with Mergo, but resulted in the stillbirth of their brains. Use to gain Insight and, so they say, eyes on the inside, although no one remembers what that truly entails."

The descriptions of the Third Umbilical Cords given within the main body of the text are those found in-game. The information found in the Strategy Guide differs markedly from the in-game descriptions (as found in patch 1.09), and the full quotation for all four One Third Umbilical Cord items is included here:

> One of the heirlooms used to contact the Great Ones, originating in the child of the Vilebloods. Long ago, in an encounter with the Great Ones, a contract was established, establishing the hunters and the Hunter's Dream.
> A great relic, also known as the Cord of the Eye. Every infant Great One has this precursor to the umbilical cord. Keep one to

fend off foul spirits, or use it to obtain great Insight. Every Great One loses its child, and then yearns for a surrogate, and Oedon, the formless Great One, is no different. To think, it was corrupted blood that began this eldritch liaison.
> A great relic, also known as the Cord of the Eye. Every infant Great One has this precursor to the umbilical cord. Keep one to fend off foul spirits, or use it to obtain great Insight. Every Great One loses its child, and then yearns for a surrogate. Provost Willem sought the Cord in order to elevate his being and thoughts to those of a Great One, by lining his brain with eyes.
> A great relic, also known as the Cord of the Eye. Every infant Great One has this precursor to the umbilical cord. Keep one to fend off foul spirits, or use it to obtain great Insight. Every Great One loses its child, and then yearns for a surrogate. This Cord granted the Mensis audience with Mergo, but resulted in the stillbirth of their brains (SG, 2015: 467).

3. My consideration as to what enemies are considered Kin is based on their listing in the Strategy Guide: for regular enemies, Small Celestial Emissary and Celestial Child; for strong enemies, Small Celestial Emissary (Tendrils) and Fluorescent Flower; and for bosses, Celestial Emissary, Ebrietas, Daughter of the Cosmos, and the Living Failures in the Old Hunters DLC. Many online sources offer a different take on this topic, focusing on the appearance of certain enemies, the (type of) damage that an enemy is vulnerable to, as well as the lore-based distinction between the Great Ones (*Bloodborne*'s version of Lovecraft's Old Ones) and Kin (humans who have ascended as a result of the blessing of the Great Ones).

4. Alongside Ebrietas, the Brain of Mensis is the only other true Great One found within the game, as evidenced by the item obtained when players approach and kill the Brain, granting them Living String: "Special material used in a Holy Chalice ritual. The Immense brain that Mensis retrieved from the nightmare was indeed lined with eyes on the inside, but they were of an evil sort, and the brain itself was terribly rotten. But even still, it was a legitimate Great One, and left a relic. A living relic, at that, which is a precious thing indeed" (SG, 2015: 324).

Chapter 4

1. This encounter with an enemy known as a Kidnapper (SG, 2015: 80, 223) is optional. The

appearance of this foe is subject to specific game conditions: the player needs to beat the Blood-Starved Beast, an optional boss found in Old Yharnam, for Kidnappers to appear within the game. In addition, the level of the player is a factor as Kidnappers are normal enemies and can be beaten, in which case the event will not trigger.

2. The Chalice Dungeons are an optional part of *Bloodborne* and are accessed using chalices found within the game. Their existence and purpose is referenced by NPCs and item descriptions, and although the exploration of these spaces offers additional background narrative, they are not a vital component in the understanding of *Bloodborne*'s story.

Chapter 5

1. Arguably, the Mad Ones are another unique enemy type found within Hemwick. They do not appear in an ordinary playthrough, and will only spawn in Hemwick Charnel Lane when the player's Insight is above 15. Due to these conditions, the Mad Ones are here considered as optional enemies.

2. Within the *Bloodborne Official Artworks*, the boss arena in which players face the Shadows of Yharnam is referred to as containing "Great One's Tombstone" (2017: 94). It is with the defeat of the Shadows of Yharnam that the way to Byrgenwerth is opened, which would place Dores as the counterpart of the password gatekeeper in Cathedral Ward.

Chapter 6

1. The three areas of the Old Hunters DLC sit within a strange middle ground. Gaining access requires an arcane artifact (in the form of the Eye of a Blood-drunk Hunter, located within the Hunter's Dream) and replicating the spiral patterns and otherworldly distortions of proportion (primarily within the first area). Once inside, however, the locations of the Hunter's Nightmare, Research Hall and Fishing Hamlet then follow the pattern of passability, visibility and contingency as found in the main game.

2. The concept artwork for Byrgenwerth included in the *Official Artworks* shows the building of the college towering over the trees (2017: 94–95). Within the game itself, Byrgenwerth is not visible to the players until they have arrived inside its gardens, where they need to go down a number of steps to approach the building itself.

3. During gameplay, it is difficult for players to assess the full size of the building due to their diminutive size in relation to the scale of the School's architecture. The pieces included in the *Official Artworks* (2017: 126–128) offer some insight into the intended grandeur of Mensis.

Chapter 7

1. The multiplayer experience is not discussed in much detail in this book, as my main concern is in the set, rather than the variable components of the game.

2. Full details of the process of *Bloodborne*'s multiplayer system can be found on page 25 of the Strategy Guide.

3. The Strategy Guide actually details the opening of the Insight Shop as requiring 10 Insight. This was changed in the Patch 1.04 of the game, released on May 25, 2015, an update which is reflected here.

4. These figures are only invisible to the player until a certain point of normal play. Once Rom, the Vacuous Spider is defeated and the game has progressed to the Blood Moon stage, the Lesser Amygdalas become visible to all players. The same is true for the note regarding the Hunter's Dream soundtrack, which changes once the Blood Moon stage is reached.

5. The ability to physically turn into a beast was added in the Old Hunter's DLC through the introduction of the Beast Embrace rune, and the addition of further updates to the Beasthood mechanics (OHSG, 2015: 11).

Chapter 8

1. Notably, the Communion rune allows players to carry more Blood Vials, up to a maximum of 25.

2. In addition to the types listed here, which can be found in the main game, three additional types of Blood Echo items can be found in the Chalice Dungeons, namely Great One Coldblood, Old Great One Coldblood, and Revered Great One Coldblood, worth 40,000, 50,000 and 100,000 Echoes, respectively. The description for all three items reads: "Relic containing the Blood Echoes of a Great One. Use to gain cosmically nightmarish Blood Echoes. Like a true revelation, this uncanny relic defies understanding."

3. In the 1.09 version of the game, the description of the Blood Stone Chunk is identical to that of the Blood Stone Shards, and does not includes the reference to "deadlier foes."

4. Special blood vials can be obtained from specific NPCs within the game by interacting with them in specific ways. One questline includes the rivalry between the nun Adella, trained as a Blood Saint, and Arianna, a woman of the night found in the Cathedral Ward. If both are sent to Oedon Chapel as a safe place, the player can ask each woman for a vial of their blood, although only one (of either Adella or Arianna) can be carried at any given time. If players ask Arianna for a vial of her blood more than three times in the presence of Adella, the nun will kill the other woman out of jealousy.

Chapter 9

1. Players can hold a maximum of 20 Vials and 20 Bullets at any given point (although the use of the Communion and Formless Oedon runes bring this to 25). Any items gathered over this number are automatically stored within the Dream, and it is this stockpile which is used to replenish the player's resources when visiting the Dream. If no Vials or Bullets are available, the number is not restocked.

2. If Insight drops to zero, the Doll will not be available and players will be unable to level up.

3. Certain Lamps become unavailable at set points due to in-game events.

4. Connections can be made between the Doll and the character of Lady Maria, found within the Old Hunters DLC. Such a link is based on appearance and the likeness between the two characters, as well as additional dialogue from the Doll after Lady Maria is defeated. As this relationship is not relevant to the argument made in this chapter, it will not be explored in detail here.

5. The dialogue provided consists of two sets of lines, which have been combined here for ease of analysis.

6. Two other characters, namely Adella and Micolash, refer to the existence of dreams and nightmares in their dialogue. It is unclear, however, whether the planes referenced by them are the Hunter's Dream, or dreamscapes of a different nature, and therefore their words are not considered here.

Conclusion

1. https://twitter.com/eric_lang/status/709941629566619648?lang=en [Accessed: December 15, 2017].

2. https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/195856/bloodborne-card-game [Accessed: December 15, 2017].

3. https://cmon.com/news/announcing-bloodborne-the-card-game-the-hunter-s-nightmare [Accessed: December 15, 2017].

4. https://www.polygon.com/comics/2017/10/31/16586868/bloodborne-comic-book-titan-comics [Accessed: December 15, 2017].
http://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2017–12-05-heres-what-the-new-bloodborne-comic-looks-like [Accessed: December 15, 2017].

5. https://kotaku.com/bloodborne-enemy-went-undiscovered-until-2017–1820656029 [Accessed: December 15, 2017].

6. https://www.vg247.com/2017/12/01/bloodborne-datamining-has-revealed-some-cool-unused-bosses-and-npcs/ [Accessed: December 15, 2017].

7. http://www.playstationlifestyle.net/2017/12/27/now-you-can-experience-bloodborne-cut-content/ [Accessed: December 15, 2017].

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