

## **Cold War Heroics**

*A study of narrative in FPS games based on the Cold War (2000 – Present).*

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## **Abstract**

The Cold War is a dominant period that historically inspired video games choose to depict. However, the narratives that these video games are offering, is unfortunately underexplored in the field of historical video game studies. Whilst scholars have explored certain events in these video games individually, there is a gap in analysing how when analysed together, games can formulate entire narratives about the Cold War which are then presented to players. As many people engaging in video games are not necessarily interested in history, it is important in understanding what themes and ideas these games put forward about the Cold War as they may offer biased or overly simplistic representations of what was a multifaceted and complex global conflict. This thesis aims to fill in this scholarly gap and serve as a starting point from which a more general consensus can be built around how historical video game portray narratives of the Cold War. By studying two titles from different developers and regions, an understanding about how FPS games generally construct narratives around the Cold War can begin to be formulated.

## **Key Acronyms and Initialisms**

FPS: First Person Shooter

COBOW: Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War

HUD: Heads Up Display

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the past three decades, the global games industry has witnessed significant growth. As demonstrated by figures provided by *Truelist*, in the past seven years alone the number of people playing video games has grown from 1.99 billion in 2015, to an estimated 3.07 billion by the end of 2023.<sup>1</sup> Changes can also be seen in the target audience of video games. The stereotype of the teenage male ‘gamer’ is also being challenged, with there being a significantly more even split across the gender of players.<sup>2</sup> With such large growth in the player base, the industry itself, and diversification in terms of gender, it is becoming increasingly important to investigate which narratives these games create and show to players. Particularly as many popular game franchises are set in historical periods. When looking at the best-selling franchises of all time, the list is scattered with franchises that base their games in historical settings.<sup>3</sup>

For my MA Thesis I intend to analyse what narratives video games based on the Cold War and released in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, predominantly portray. Whilst the field of historical game studies has already received a lot of attention, there are still many periods that remain underexplored and as new games are released, there is a constant stream of new sources that can be analysed. One of these periods that is underexplored is that of the Cold War. When compared to periods such as the Middle Ages, World War One, or World War Two, the Cold War is still rather unexplored in the field.

I will be conducting a single genre analysis in which I am aiming to illustrate if / how games in the genre support different narratives about the Cold War. The significance of studying narrative in historical video games lies in understanding what conflicts or events are depicted in video games, and how these are framed to the players and audience.

Unfortunately, in the field of historical game studies there is a lack of literature written about the Cold War when compared to the First World War, the Second World War, or more modern 21<sup>st</sup> century conflicts. Furthermore, when scholars analyse games about the Cold War they tend to focus on individual games, rather than performing a comparative analysis. This presents the opportunity for my research to contribute to a gap in the existing literature and

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<sup>1</sup> Marko Dimitrievski, “Gaming Statistics,” *Truelist* (blog), May 24, 2022, <https://truelist.co/blog/gaming-statistics/>.

<sup>2</sup> “45+ Otherworldly Video Games Industry Statistics in 2023,” *Techjury*, accessed June 17, 2023, <https://techjury.net/blog/video-games-industry-statistics/>.

<sup>3</sup> “The Top 50 Highest-Grossing Video Game Franchises | TitleMax,” February 24, 2020, <https://www.titlemax.com/discovery-center/lifestyle/the-top-50-highest-grossing-video-game-franchises/>.

potentially act as a starting point for future research into video game narratives about the Cold War.

In order to guide my research and subsequent analysis, I will be aiming to answer the following question.

- How do contemporary US American / British first-person shooter (FPS) games narratively represent the Cold War?

In order to successfully answer this main question, three sub questions have been developed that relate to how these games show present narratives about the Cold War.

- How is the Cold War narratively represented in the FPS-game 'Rogue Warrior'?
- How is the Cold War narratively represented in the FPS-game 'Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War'?
- How do contemporary US American / British FPS-games narratively represent the Cold War?

## Literature Review

The first written pieces about video games were generally scientific / psychological in nature and were written about the potential impact that gaming has on the development of children and teenagers, however as the popular perception of video games has shifted, so too have the writings and discussions around them.<sup>4</sup> What followed is quite reflective of the current state of video game studies. In its short history, video game studies have evolved from defending its existence as a topic for research, to performing in depth analysis' of historical accuracy, historical narratives and themes, and their place in academia and teaching.<sup>5</sup> The origin of video game studies is contested, with different scholars claiming its origin in different fields. Some believe that video game studies emerged from the study of classical hermeneutics.

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<sup>4</sup> Kristen J. Nyitray, "Game On to Game After: Sources for Video Game History," *Reference and User Services Association* 59, no. 1 (2019), <https://journals.ala.org/index.php/rusq/article/view/7219/9867>.

<sup>5</sup> Frans Mäyrä, "Introduction: What Is Game Studies?," in *An Introduction to Game Studies* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008), 1–13; Adam Chapman, Anna Foka, and Jonathan Westin, "Introduction: What Is Historical Game Studies?," *The Journal of Theory and Practice* 21 (2016): 358–71.

However due to the difference in sources and ways they were experienced, there was a need for a distinct field of study to be developed.<sup>6</sup> Those that believe in this origin also argue that many of the ideas related to video game studies are variations of ideas from classical hermeneutics and the discipline owes its origin to this field.<sup>7</sup> Other video game scholars believe that the emergence of video game studies was a natural progression from game studies but one that needed different theories as a result of the different way that these two types of games are experienced, (digitally vs physically).<sup>8</sup> What both schools of thought agree on, is the uniqueness of video games, and the need for them to have their own field of study. Despite this general acceptance that they are unique, there are some that argue that video games can fall under film or art studies, as opposed to needing their own distinct field. This is still somewhat prevalent and can be seen in a general lack of institutions and faculties that are dedicated to video game studies.<sup>9</sup> A popular challenge to this rhetoric is that of the ‘replayability’, and subjective interpretation of video games.<sup>10</sup> What separates video games from film, and art, is that players can have a very direct impact on the medium. When completing different playthroughs of the same game, players can consciously or subconsciously make different decisions, some of which can significantly alter the outcome of the narrative of the game.<sup>11</sup>

Within video game studies there are different areas of interest. For my thesis, the relevant area is that of historical game studies. Although several early studies focused on assessing the historical accuracy of how video games depict the past, historical game studies has mostly gravitated away from this topic.<sup>12</sup> For the purposes of my thesis, the topic within historical games studies that is most relevant, is the one which focuses on the depiction of the past, and the narratives that games tend to perpetuate about past events.<sup>13</sup> This sub section of historical game studies puts focus on the subjective narratives that players create in video games, rather than looking at the objective history of the event that is being explored.<sup>14</sup> Whilst it is still and emergent area of study, this is also the main direction that historical video game

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<sup>6</sup> Jonne Arjoranta, “How Are Games Interpreted? Hermeneutics for Game Studies,” *The International Journal of Computer Game Research* 22, no. 3 (2022).

<sup>7</sup> Arjoranta "How are Games Interpreted?"

<sup>8</sup> Mäyrä, “Introduction: What Is Game Studies?,” p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Mäyrä, “Introduction: What Is Game Studies?,” p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Jeremiah McCall, “Genres of Historical Games and Academic Standards of History and Social Studies,” in *Gaming the Past: Using Video Games to Teach Secondary History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2023), 43–75.

<sup>11</sup> McCall, "Genres of Historical Games and Academic Standards of History and Social Studies," p. 45.

<sup>12</sup> Chapman, Foka, and Westin, “Introduction: What Is Historical Game Studies?,” p. 360.

<sup>13</sup> Chapman, Foka, and Westin, "Introduction: What Is Historical Game Studies?," p. 360-361.

<sup>14</sup> Dawn Spring, “Gaming History: Computer and Video Games as Historical Scholarship,” *Rethinking History* 19, no. 2 (2015), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13642529.2014.973714>.



studies is taking, as those in the field are becoming more interested in studying the way that video games construct history, and can influence a player's knowledge of historical periods.<sup>15</sup> In the field of video game studies two focal points are ludology and narratology. Both of which can be tied to historical game studies. Ludology is focused on the player and the agency that they have within the rules of the game to perform different actions.<sup>16</sup> Narratology on the other hand focuses more on the narrative elements that contain these rules and contextualize the player's experiences in the game.<sup>17</sup> Another important concept within video game studies is that of *Persuasive Games*. The work done on *Persuasive Games* was important in advocating for supporting video game studies as a field. *Persuasive Games* argue that games and software can make arguments about the world through their mechanics, due to both games and the world being comprised of similar parts, all of which interact.<sup>18</sup> *Persuasive Games* are powerful in showing and helping players to better understand how various topics are depicted in games. The same can be said for historical games, as the latter not only introduces people to historical events in a general manner, but also allow them to actively participate in them in a fictionalized manner.

The study of narrative in historical video games is suggested to have emerged in the year 2000 and originated in Europe, North America, and Australia, but is now slowly spreading across the globe and can be found in a number of Asian countries such as South Korea, China, and Japan.<sup>19</sup> The narrative study of historical video games draws heavily from literature studies and has grown as the perception of video games' ability to express narratives has changed. Upon their release and in their early development, video games were regarded purely as a source of surface level entertainment. Initially, video games were not viewed as having the ability to tell stories. Over time, this view has shifted into a general acknowledgement that rather than just being games, video games clearly follow the structure of traditional narratives and can portray these in a complex and nuanced fashion.<sup>20</sup> Proof of this changing perception of video game studies can be seen in the journals dedicated to video game studies such as

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<sup>15</sup> Spring, "Gaming History".

<sup>16</sup> Shawn Graham, review of *Review of Playing with the Past: Digital Games and the Simulation of History*, by Matthew Wilhelm Kapell and Andrew B. R. Elliott, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 45, no. 3 (2015): 423–24.

<sup>17</sup> Graham.

<sup>18</sup> Ian Bogost, "Persuasive Games, A Decade Later," in *Persuasive Gaming in Context*, ed. Teresa de la Hera et al. (Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 29–40, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1hw3z1d.5>.

<sup>19</sup> Mäyrä, "Introduction: What Is Game Studies?," p. 8-10.

<sup>20</sup> Mäyrä, "Introduction: What Is Game Studies?," p. 10.

*Games and Culture* and *The International Journal of Computer Games Research*. This development, accompanied by the publication of articles on historical games in journals such as *Rethinking History*, is illustrative of a growing scholarly interest in the field. Although it is growing, the scope of video game studies is still somewhat limited with most scholars choosing to focus on the First and Second World Wars, the Middle Ages and antiquity.<sup>21</sup> Of the aforementioned periods, the Second World War is unsurprisingly the most saturated with sources and therefore has been given a lot of focus. The writings on the Second World War cover topics varying from how certain countries are represented and how certain games maintain common narratives about the conflict, and about righteousness more generally, all the way to how these games fail to accurately convey the artistic concept of social realism.<sup>22</sup> The Middle Ages have been given similar scholarly focus with authors performing deep-dives into the Crusades and exploring how games oversimplify and create arbitrary explanations of this series of conflicts.<sup>23</sup> This area of study also expands into how these periods of history have inspired fantasy and mythological video games stylistically and thematically.<sup>24</sup> As for the First World War, there is less written, however the corpus is still denser than that of the Cold War. When looking at the First World War, video game historians are presented with a unique opportunity in that games about the First World War rarely reflect realistic aspects of the conflict.<sup>25</sup> This being due to the style of warfare in World War One; trench warfare, not being conducive to an exciting video game. As such video game historians have studied how games produced by western developers differ from games produced by eastern developers, and how these portrayals frame and position both the actors, and the actions that took place during the Cold War.<sup>26</sup> This has led to scholars studying how games portraying the First World War offer contradicting and often inaccurate experiences of the conflict and what this means for the formation of national memory, something which historians have also looked at when analysing the numerous different stories and accounts about the First World War outside of video game

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<sup>21</sup> Chapman, Foka, and Westin, "Introduction: What Is Historical Game Studies?," p. 361.

<sup>22</sup> Maxim Tvorun-Dunn, "Social Realism in *Red Orchestra 2* (2011)," *Games and Culture* 18, no. 4 (June 1, 2023): 524–34, <https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120221109128>; Pieter Van den Heede, "Engaging with the Second World War through Digital Gaming," February 11, 2021, <https://repub.eur.nl/pub/134918>.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Houghton, "Crusader Kings Too? (Mis)Representations of the Crusades in Strategy Games," in *Playing the Crusades: Engaging the Crusades*, 1st ed., vol. 5 (New York: Routledge, 2021), 71–92.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Houghton, "Introduction: Crusades and Crusading in Modern Games," in *Playing the Crusades: Engaging the Crusades*, 1st ed., vol. 5 (New York: Routledge, 2021), 1–11.

<sup>25</sup> Chris Kempshall, "Introduction: Opening Up a Digital Front," in *The First World War in Computer Games* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1–16.

<sup>26</sup> Regina Seiwald and Alex Wade, "The Cold War Will Not Take Place: The Cold War in Non-Western Videogames," *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* 14, no. 1 (January 2, 2023): 53–68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2040350X.2022.2071521>.

studies.<sup>27</sup> Whilst the Cold War is less represented than the aforementioned periods, there is still a solid foundation of sources that can be analysed. Despite this, the Cold War is severely underrepresented in the field of historical video game studies. For FPS games specifically this is definitely the case as the overwhelming proportion focusing on the Second World War or on contemporary or futuristic conflicts.<sup>28</sup> Yet when these works do focus on the Cold War, they predominantly focus on how the conflict was experienced in Vietnam, and not the conflict more globally, meaning that a very limited lens of the Cold War is shown to consumers.

## Theoretical Concepts

There are several key theoretical concepts that will be important in my analysis and in answering my Research Questions. For the most part these concepts are related to how video games present stories, and how what a game focuses on can change the way that a story can be experienced and understood.

In his book on digital games as a historical format, historian Adam Chapman identifies four core features of a game narrative. The first feature is that of the *Framing narrative*. The *framing narrative* is the narrative of the game as written by the game developers and can be seen as the general storyline of the game as imposed on the player.<sup>29</sup> The second feature is the *ludonarrative*. Where the *framing narrative* is the storyline imposed on the player, the *ludonarrative* is the story that the player imposes on the game.<sup>30</sup> It is dictated by the decisions that the player makes in the game and the impact that these decisions have on the story.

In light of the aforementioned distinction, Chapman argues that both the *framing narrative* and the *ludonarrative* are controlled by two narrative building blocks: *lexia* and *framing controls*.<sup>31</sup> The *lexia* can be seen as the building blocks of the game, things such as the sound, character, and level design, or the rules that apply in the game world. The *framing controls* dictate how the player interacts with the different *lexia* they are presented with. If a non-playable character is used as an example of a *lexia*, then the interactive options that they player has with this non-playable character can be seen as the *framing controls*.<sup>32</sup> In all games

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<sup>27</sup> Kempshall, "Introduction."

<sup>28</sup> McCall, "Genres of Historical Games," p. 57-59.

<sup>29</sup> Adam Chapman, "Narrative in Games," in *Digital Games as History: How Videogames Represent the Past and Offer Access to Historical Practice*. (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 119–35.

<sup>30</sup> Chapman, "Narratives in Games," p. 122.

<sup>31</sup> Chapman, "Narratives in Games," p. 122.

<sup>32</sup> Chapman, "Narratives in Games," p. 125.

there is a balance between the *framing narrative* and *ludonarrative*, and the *lexia* and *framing controls*. This balance is what determines the structure that the story in the game takes.

Games that skew towards a heavier *framing narrative* than *ludonarrative* are called *deterministic story structure* games.<sup>33</sup> In these games, the *framing narrative* heavily dictates the direction of the story. These stories are often quite linear and are very commonly seen in FPS games, and games based on historical events. In these games the *ludonarrative* decisions that the player makes do not seriously challenge the game's narrative. The opposite to *deterministic story structure* is *open-ontological story-structure* games.

These games can be characterised as having very weak *framing narratives* and the *ludonarrative* being very important to the story of the game. These games often take the form of simulation games that may not have a specific ending that the players can reach. The middle ground between the two former structure is the *open story structure*. In these games, there is a relatively even balance between the *framing narrative* and the *ludonarrative*. The player has the choice of certain decisions and how a story plays out, but the developers have created restrictions for the player and have set endings that the player can experience. Games with this structure commonly feature optional side missions that may add more context to the story or create other storylines within the game. However, it is the players prerogative whether or not they choose to engage in these storylines and missions. Through understanding how these concepts relate to the type of narrative that a video game offers, and then identifying the video game narratives as belonging to a type of video game narrative, further distinction and a more in-depth comparison and discussion can be made.

### **Contribution and Innovation**

As video games become more popular, the narratives that they portray can also influence popular collective memory around the events that they depict. Despite video games still being a relatively new digital medium (when compared to film), there is a growing base of literature that discusses their role in sharing and representing history, the general consensus of this literature is as follows, “[video games]are amongst the most successful contemporary popular historical products” and that “the connection people have with the past is partly or even primarily shaped by video games, including how they learn or teach others about it”.<sup>34</sup> In light

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<sup>33</sup> Chapman, p. 128.

<sup>34</sup> Adam Chapman, “It’s Hard to Play in the Trenches: World War I, Collective Memory and Videogames,” *The International Journal of Computer Game Research* 16, no. 2 (2016); Krijn H.J. Boom et al., “Teaching through Play: Using Video Games as a Platform to Teach about the Past,” in *Communicating the Past in the Digital Age* (London: Ubiquity Press, 2020), 27–44.

of this, research into narratives of historical video games is becoming more important, particularly for conflicts and events which are contested. By analysing the narratives of these games, further study can be performed that analyses what beliefs about these conflicts and events are being created. However, before this can be done, research on the narratives themselves must be conducted. My research will not be advocating for a particular stance or argument about these narratives, rather I am aiming to illustrate what narratives about the Cold War players are commonly being exposed when they play games about the Cold War.

There is a strong foundation of literature based on video game analysis, particularly for video games that are based around and inspired by historic events. As previously discussed, when exploring the field of historical video game studies, the Cold War is a much under-represented period. Whilst my research will not necessarily be providing new insights into the existing literature, it will be adding to a comparably small literature base on academic writings about Cold War video games. What makes this approach to research innovative is the comparative analysis that I am conducting, as performing research in this style is significantly less common than performing research on one game.

## Sources

In order to find games that are suitable for my research I used the popular Personal Computer (PC) gaming store *Steam* and filtered results in order to find games that were relevant to my topic of study. The first step was to search the *Steam* store for games about the Cold War. The general criterion for selecting games from the list compiled by *Steam* is made up of a combination of the following factors. Each game must have a campaign and there must be two full playthroughs of the campaign on YouTube or another streaming platform that is accessible. It should be aimed to select games that were released in different years and were created by different developers, so as to avoid potential biases with respect to narratives being produced from certain developers or time periods.

For my primary sources I will be analysing the following games.

*Title (Release year, developer, developer origin).*

Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War (2020, Treyarch, USA).

Rogue Warrior (2009, Rebellion, UK).

The *Call of Duty Black Ops* series has been heavily analysed; however, the newest instalment *Black Ops Cold War* has received less attention and as such I believe it is a good source for analysis. The popularity of the game means that it will be easy to find playthroughs of the game on YouTube. Coming from a triple A / AAA studio and having sold over 5.5 million copies in the first month of its release. *Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War* (CODBOCW) not only can be used as a representation of recent narratives about the Cold War in video games, but also of the narratives put forward by large game studios.<sup>35</sup> The popularity of the game is also important as the narrative put forward by the game is experienced by a wider audience. The recency of this game also contrasts well with the older game that I am analysing, *Rogue Warrior*. This game differs from the CODBOCW in that it focuses on a sole soldier as opposed to a task force or small unit. This different concept for a game should offer an interesting narrative that can complement the narrative in CODBOCW. Although *Rogue Warrior* did not receive the same critical acclaim or commercial success as the CODBOCW it has still sold a little under 100,000 units on the Steam Store, making it a decently popular game.<sup>36</sup> A key reason for selecting this game is the involvement of military celebrity Richard Marcinko in the development and design process. Where CODBOCW may have had military personnel providing advice to developers, *Rogue Warrior*'s main character is based off of a real person and draws inspiration from the real missions, and books published by the real-life counterpart to the main character. In order to perform a full analysis of both narratives it is important that for each selected playthrough, key narrative elements in the campaign are not skipped through. These elements include cutscenes, dialogues, and any diegetic content that the game offers to the player.

The analysis will be quite holistic with all aspects related to narrative in these games being included in the analysis. The more technical side of video games such as their accessibility and graphics will not be discussed as whilst they may enhance the players experience and offer greater immersion, they do not have an impact on the narrative itself. These sources will not be played directly as a result of not having access to the resources needed to play through these games. Rather playthroughs on either YouTube or Twitch (a popular video game streaming website) of the selected games will be the indirect sources from which

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<sup>35</sup> A triple A / AAA studio is a mid to major size publishing company that produces high-selling and commercially successful video games.

<sup>36</sup> "Rogue Warrior - Steam Stats," *VG Insights* (blog), 2023, <https://vginsights.com/game/22310>.

information will be gathered. As other people will be playing the games there are important considerations and potential challenges that come with this, they are discussed later in this proposal.

## Methodology

My methodology draws from three main scholars, Clara Fernández-Vara, Óliver Pérez Latorre, and Adam Chapman. My general methodology is that of a formal analysis and is grounded in the combined approaches from Fernández-Vara and Latorre. Latorre's approach is general and breaks the process down into three reference points, the character / player, the game world, and the game play activities.<sup>37</sup> By combining this with the approach of Fernández-Vara, the first stage will involve observing and taking note of the aspects of the video game relevant to my framework.<sup>38</sup> These aspects may manifest in games through dialogue decisions given to the player, or the mechanics that a player can perform. After taking stock of these aspects, I will then filter the information into what is relevant to analysing the narrative of the studied games. This second stage is where the formal analysis shifts slightly into a more narrative based analysis by including Chapman's concepts of ludonarrative, framing narrative, framing controls and lexia. For this I will be assessing how the building blocks as identified in the first stage, interact with the concepts defined by Chapman, and how they impact and ultimately form the narrative of the games. These concepts may be visible in the developers forcing the player into playing a certain way so as to reach the imposed narrative ending, or through what options players have for solving certain problems or overcoming obstacles. Where the work of Latorre and Fernández-Vara informs the general methods that I will use, Chapman's concepts highlight how I will analyse narrative specifically. Using the concepts of lexia, and framing controls I intend to identify the framing narrative, and ludonarrative in the games, before finally using the latter mentioned concepts to identify the type of story structure that the game takes. Whilst on their own these methods and concepts are not enough to perform a narrative analysis, when combined they provide a strong methodology that can be applied to the games I am analysing.

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<sup>37</sup> Óliver Pérez Latorre, "The Social Discourse of Video Games Analysis Model and Case Study: GTA IV," *Games and Culture* 10, no. 5 (2015): 415–37.

<sup>38</sup> Clara Fernández-Vara, "The Whys and Wherefores of Game Analysis," in *Introduction to Game Analysis*, Second (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), 1–54.

Fernández-Vara's definition of 'building blocks' is what makes up "the formal elements of a game".<sup>39</sup> Formal elements are useful distinctions for what is included in a game and allows for further classification of different phenomena and may include things such as the rules of the game world, the presence of real rules and phenomenon in the fictional world, the dynamics of the game, and representation of themes in the game.<sup>40</sup> Whilst Fernández-Vara offers a useful introduction to studying video games, it is best used as a scaffold from which the works of other scholars can supplement. For this study, Fernández-Vara's introduction will be supplemented by the work of Latorre. In their work, Latorre defines three different 'Ludic Designs' of a game. These three designs are,

*The Ludic Design of the Character / Player and its Meaning Potential.*<sup>41</sup>

*The Ludic Design of the Game World and its Meaning Potential.*<sup>42</sup>

*The Ludic Design of the Game Play Activities and its Meaning Potential.*<sup>43</sup>

For each of these designs there are specific concepts that add more meaning and relate to certain aspects within the game. The 'Character / Player' Ludic Design, focuses on how the design of a game influences and portrays the actions of the character in the game, the most relevant concepts to my study are 'Performance rules', 'rules for inducing behaviours', and 'game mechanics'.<sup>44</sup> Performance rules are concerned predominantly with the specific actions available to the player, the outcome of certain actions in game, and the impact these outcomes have in the game. Rules for inducing behaviours guide the behaviour of the player through systems such as reward and punishment. These rules can telegraph to the player reasons for and against performing certain actions and may influence the behaviour of the player and guide them to play in a certain way. Game mechanics can be understood as the broader systems and set of rules which govern a player's gameplay experience.

The 'Game World' Ludic Design focuses on the environment in which the game exists, on the 'inhabitants' of the game world, and the objects and other natural elements within the game.<sup>45</sup> Within this design the most relevant concepts for my study are 'Spatiotemporal

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<sup>39</sup> Clara Fernández-Vara, "Areas of Analysis 3: Formal Elements," in *Introduction to Game Analysis*, Second (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), 117–72.

<sup>40</sup> Fernández-Vara, "The Whys and Wherefores of Game Analysis," p. 122.

<sup>41</sup> Pérez Latorre, "The Social Discourse of Video Games.," p. 420.

<sup>42</sup> Pérez Latorre, p. 422.

<sup>43</sup> Pérez Latorre, p.424.

<sup>44</sup> Pérez Latorre, p. 420.

<sup>45</sup> Pérez Latorre, p. 422.



design’, and ‘Patterns of behaviour of nonplayer characters’. Spatiotemporal design relates to the environment of the game and the spaces within it. According to Latorre these spaces can either be active; progresses and exist without the player, or reactive; only exists and progresses in relation to the player.<sup>46</sup> The patterns of behaviour of nonplayer characters defines the rules and behaviours of nonplayer characters, what game conditions and actions cause them to act in certain ways or perform their own unique actions.

The final Ludic Design ‘Game Play Activities’, has two concepts that are important to my study, ‘degree of redundancy versus variability of the game play’, and ‘strategic / tactical dilemmas’. The first of these explains the way in which in-game objectives can be achieved, and how certain goals can be reached. This can further be understood by breaking down what actions a player needs to perform to reach certain parts of the game. Some parts of a game may require the player to perform very specific set of actions to reach, where others can be reached through a variety of different actions. The second related concept is similar to the first, however instead of illustrating the actions needed to achieve certain objectives, it illustrates the strategy that the player will choose to play through a game. For each strategy a player chooses there is inherent advantages and disadvantages related to the player’s ability, and to what the game design enforces onto the game world.

When combined, the works of these two authors creates a strong framework for analysing video games, Chapman’s work provides the missing link between the analysis of the video games and the analysis of their narratives. As such the key benefit to utilising Chapman’s concepts is both the depth of definition for each concept, and the specificity they have in relation to performing narrative analysis. Where Fernández-Vara’s and Latorre’s definition of the building blocks of games is important for formal analysis of video games, it is not well-enough equipped for performing narrative analysis.

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<sup>46</sup> Pérez Latorre, p. 423.

## Chapter 2: Rogue Warrior

*How is the Cold War narratively represented in the FPS-game 'Rogue Warrior'?*

Rogue Warrior follows the fictional missions of real-life Navy SEAL Richard Marcinko in North Korea and the Soviet Union as he attempts to stop a Soviet nuclear attack on the United States. The game was poorly received by both critics and players with a mean score of 28 on Metacritic (mean across the three platforms it was released on).<sup>47</sup> The game features 8 main story missions and takes roughly 1.5 to 2 hours to complete. Prior to analysing the game, it is important to point out that there is a book of the same title published by Richard Marcinko, but the two mediums do not follow the same narrative. In an interview with the lead developer, it was revealed that the books are “just reference materials”, and that they had their own “ideas about the kind of story that we wanted to put in place”.<sup>48</sup>

To analyse Rogue Warrior, I watched two playthroughs of the game on YouTube. The first was performed by Lacry and the second by World of Longplays (WOL). In order to perform the analysis, the chapter has been broken into subsections, each relating to a specific aspect of the game that can influence the narrative. There are three difficulty options in the game that the player can select prior to beginning the campaign. The first is *'Recruits: If you're a pussy, select this one'*, the second is *'Regulars: Bring it on motherfuckers'*, the final is *'Elites: Think you're fucking special, huh?'*. The difficulty description of each selection immediately shows a clear element of machismo that the game contains. In the years leading up to the game's release there were significantly more males than females playing video games, something which suggests that the game was targeted primarily at a male audience. Aside from this, the difficulty descriptors can be interpreted in two ways. It could be interpreted as an attempt at humour by being intentionally over the top and aggressive towards the player depending on their choice. Or it could be interpreted as the developers simulating the stereotypical 'drill sergeant', loud, aggressive, and as relying on negative reinforcement to push and inspire people. It is more likely that the second is the case as the real life Marcinko was known for his unconventional service style and somewhat toxic method of running his unit,

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<sup>47</sup> Metacritic, “Rogue Warrior,” Metacritic, April 6, 2023, <https://www.metacritic.com/game/xbox-360/rogue-warrior>.

<sup>48</sup> “Rogue Warrior Senior Producer, Sean Griffiths - Interview,” accessed May 4, 2023, <https://spong.com/feature/10109905/Interview-Rogue-Warrior-Senior-Producer-Sean-Griffiths>.

Seal Team 6.<sup>49</sup> This toxicity is reflected in the difficulty menu to the player by influencing which difficulty they select. Players are guilted from selecting the easiest difficulty through it accusing them of being “a pussy” if they select this. The *Regulars* difficulty is more neutral and does not guilt the player, but rather comes across as the encouraged difficulty. The *Elites* difficulty challenges the player to select it but does so in a manner that also deters them from selecting it by accusing the player of being over-confident in their ability. As the player selects the difficulty prior to actually playing the game, they are shown before they play that the game has a strong undertone and theme of machismo. Where Lacry did not include the difficulty they selected, WOL chose the *Regulars* difficulty.

Rogue Warrior allows players to take the role of Richard Marcinko as he is sent on a classified mission to Unggi, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) with two other Navy SEALs to gather intelligence from a mole. The game escalates as Marcinko’s teammates are killed and the intelligence leads Marcinko on a mission to disrupt a Soviet program that is developing Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM).<sup>50</sup> Against the orders of his superior officer he continues on with his mission. As more intelligence is gathered Marcinko travels through North Korean military compounds to destroy these missiles before ultimately entering Eastern Russia and destroying a large stockpile of ICBMs that the Soviets have built. In Soviet Territory, Marcinko finds evidence pointing towards a Soviet missile prevention system, inspired by the US Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI); colloquially named Star Wars, that would protect them against any attacks from the US.<sup>51</sup> With this new technology prepared it is revealed that there is a top-secret plan to launch an attack on the US. Against the orders of his superior officer, Marcinko continues his mission alone and destroys the remaining missiles and the database that holds the code for the missile prevention system.

Whilst the Cold War is not a clear-cut conflict with neither side having acted objectively or morally right, Rogue Warrior frames it as such a conflict. The Soviet Union are the ones instigating the conflict and the US are reacting to the instigation. Marcinko and his team’s presence in the DPRK at the start of the game is not for combat reasons, but they (Marcinko) are forced into going deeper after he learns of the aggressive plans of the Soviet Union.

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<sup>49</sup> “Richard Marcinko, First Commanding Officer of SEAL Team Six, Dies,” accessed May 8, 2023, <https://www.armytimes.com/breaking-news/2021/12/26/richard-marcinko-first-commanding-officer-of-seal-team-six-dies/>.

<sup>50</sup> ICBMs are primarily designed for nuclear powered weapons.

<sup>51</sup> “Rogue Warrior Senior Producer, Sean Griffiths - Interview.”

## Character / Player Rules

### Mechanics

#### *Combat Mechanics*

Due to the storyline of the game as well as the identity of the character, the vast majority of performable actions are related to the combat scenarios that the player will find themselves in throughout the game, this results in a restricted view of the conflict in which participants primarily facilitate violence.



**Figure 2.1.1, *Changing Weapon, PC Longplay [645] Rogue Warrior*, Video Recording (YouTube, 2016).**

The player is introduced to all basic weapon and movement mechanics in the first level with small dialogue prompts that appear on the player's screen and indicate to them which button corresponds to an in-game mechanic.

The most discussion worthy combat mechanic is that of the takedown, or kill move, that the player can perform on hostile NPCs. Once in close proximity with an enemy, the player can press the button or key that is bound to the action and a small animation plays that shows the player character violently killing the enemy. In *Rogue Warrior* takedown kills have a greater cinematic, than functional nature. Whilst the mechanic can be useful to subdue individual enemies when other enemies are not nearby, the impact of the action on the game world is sidelined due to the associated cinematics. With all takedown kills being viewed in third person, gameplay is temporarily suspended, and the player relinquishes some agency at the benefit of being awarded a cinematic depiction of violence. Despite being a riskier move

to try and perform, players are incentivized to do so. Through cinematizing this violence, the reality of the action and its associated brutality are diminished and instead it is something the player is taught to strive for. The move represents a more personal and intimate method of enacting violence due to their only being one recipient for each repetition. The kill often involves a combination of brute force, a tactical knife, and a pistol.



**Figure 2.1.2: Takedown Kill, Rogue Warrior Full Walkthrough Gameplay - No Commentary (PC Longplay), Video Recording (YouTube, 2022), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vp1BD0XXpZ8>.**

This move was given a lot of attention by developers, evident through the 25 different takedown animations that the player can see. The wide array of animations avoids making the move feel repetitive and through repeatedly performing the action the player is rewarded with new content in the form of a new animation for the kill move. The volume of different potential kill moves that Marcinko has reflects the championing of traditional masculinity and physicality within the game. The brutality of each of these also supports this idea and glorifies close quarters physical combat.

As there are no friendly NPCs in the game, there are no mechanics related to teamwork or support that the player can perform. Any interactions with friendly characters in the game are relegated to cutscenes which the player has no input in or control over. The lack of friendly NPCs gives further glory to the actions of the main character and emphasizes the impact that an individual soldier can have on the battlefield. As the real-life Richard Marcinko was involved in the development of the game narrative, it is possible that the lack

of teammates was a conscious choice made by either himself, or the developers, to maintain focus on his character, without it being diverted by the actions of other friendly NPCs.<sup>52</sup>

An important aspect of the combat mechanics is that they are all lethal actions. Whilst shooting an enemy is not in itself lethal, the intended outcome of the action is to kill the enemy. The player is given no weapon or equipment that is capable of only wounding or subduing the enemy non-lethally, this includes the takedowns, all of which are both lethal and acutely violent as previously discussed. When looking at the real life Marcinko, some of the in-game choices become easier to understand. As Marcinko was an incredibly successful soldier and military celebrity, the lack of friendly NPCs does suggest that there was a desire for his character to be the focal point and have as little attention drawn away from him as possible.<sup>53</sup> This is further supported when factoring in the 22 books that Marcinko has written, all of which feature himself as the main character.<sup>54</sup> When Marcinko's real life quote "War is about killing", is used in conjunction with studying the game, the focus on violence-based mechanics has a strong grounding and clearly shows not only how Marcinko views war, but results in the game reducing what was a complex geopolitical conflict, to one that could be solved by violence.<sup>55</sup> This view is then reflected in the intense focus that the game has on performing lethal combat mechanics, as opposed to non-lethal or espionage mechanics.

### *Movement Mechanics*

The movement mechanics are quite simple, sprinting, using ladders, and descending on what is called a 'fast rope'. Where sprinting can be used at any time, the fast rope and ladders can only be interacted with when present. Interestingly both of these lexia are also mandatory for the player to interact with when present. Rather than the player being able to use these to take a different path through a level, the player is forced to interact with these to progress through the level. Despite the majority of the player used mechanics being combat related, it is theoretically possible for the player to progress through almost the entire game without needing to perform the aforementioned combat mechanics. This strategy is however not feasible, as in each portion of a level there is a point where all NPCs are aware of the player's

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<sup>52</sup> "Rogue Warrior Senior Producer, Sean Griffiths - Interview."

<sup>53</sup> "Richard Marcinko," Navy SEALs, accessed May 8, 2023, <https://navyseals.com/ns-overview/notable-seals/richard-marcinko/>.

<sup>54</sup> "Books by Richard Marcinko and Complete Book Reviews," PublishersWeekly.com, accessed May 30, 2023, <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/authorpage/richard-marcinko.html>.

<sup>55</sup> "Richard Marcinko."

presence, and the player does not have the ability to perform any non-lethal actions to subdue enemies. This strategy being unfeasible again reflects a narrative which cannot be resolved without the use of lethal force. Something which indicates to the player that success of war is dependent upon one's ability to kill. Despite this, the level objectives and mission objectives do not require the player to kill anyone to be completed. This of course is not possible as previously discussed however there is no narrative or objective requirement for the player to do kill any NPCs. The only mechanic that the player must perform to complete the game, are the use of ladders and the fast rope, interacting with doors, and planting C4. As the mechanics related to planting C4 are related to objectives, they will be discussed later in the chapter. Although cutscenes do depict the player character performing non-violent actions such as hacking into computer databases and extracting data from servers, the decision to only feature these in cutscenes and not provide the player with a mechanic to instigate or perform these actions creates a very combat-centric depiction of the Cold War conflict and puts emphasis on the violence rather than the other aspects of the conflict.

## **NPCs**

### *Friendly*

Friendly NPCs only appear visually in the first and last cutscenes of the game. Their initial appearance is very positive with lines relating to the camaraderie that the player character feels to their fellow soldiers, however both of these characters are not only unnamed but are also killed off in this cutscene. The lack of teammates places the onus on the player to kill all enemies and requires the player to become more proficient in combat than if they had teammates. Additionally, the lack of teammates heroizes the actions of individuals rather than the championing of teamwork. The final portrayal of friendly NPCs shows them as being passive characters that were not there to help Marcinko during his mission. Whilst not portrayed visually, the game does feature dialogue from the player character's commanding officer. Rogue Warrior utilises this character to amplify its focus on the individual efforts in war through a theme of less competent superior officers, and the idea that soldiers on the ground know better than those in offices. This theme results in the actions of the individual being held even more highly as they are their own, rather than the orders of someone else. This dialogue is often only surface level and feels not only distant from the game setting, but also with the character only appearing sporadically, further distance is created, and so too is the sense that the player is alone in their mission.

A secondary impact that the lack of teammates in *Rogue Warrior* has, is manifesting a potent element of machismo. With the main character displaying extreme calm under pressure, being unemotive, having a strong sense of self-assuredness, and displaying what is framed in game as selfless bravery when in the face of danger, this personality is the only one that players are exposed to in the game. The character archetype in *Rogue Warrior* is most clearly aligned with what can be considered stereotypically masculine attributes of a soldier. The championing of the aforementioned characteristics also results in attributes that do not align with this character archetype being perceived as non-useful in the narrative the game offers. This archetype being spotlighted forces an association between the Cold War, and this kind of soldier / person being at the forefront of the conflict and effectively saving the day.

### *Hostile*

The hostile NPCs vary between being North Korean and what can be assumed, from the location of some levels, as Russian. The identity of the NPCs corresponds to the location that the level takes place in, with no mixing of North Korean and Russian enemies. Whilst this is a minor feature, it does suggest that the two states, whilst cooperating, had a strong degree of separation. For levels in North Korea, the player fights against North Korean NPCs. As soon as the levels shift to being in Russia, the player then fights against enemies that are assumed to be Russian. For the most part NPCs are faceless enemies that have little substance or any meaningful aspect to their identity. This absence of identity suggests that the enemies are not individuals, but rather are representative of a larger foe that the player must overcome.

As all enemy NPCs are military personnel, they can perform many of the same combat mechanics that the player can (using weapons, taking cover). Despite occupying the same space, hostile NPCs will only interact with each other in cutscenes, these interactions revolve purely around physical actions, such as working on a computer together, and there are no audible verbal interactions between NPCs, further reducing them to one-dimensional combat characters.<sup>56</sup> The portrayal of enemy NPCs as these one-dimensional combat characters creates a separation between hostile NPCs and the player. Due to the player performing very similar actions to hostile NPCs, it is important for some distinction to be created. *Rogue Warrior* chooses to create this distinction through limiting the actions of NPCs and portraying them

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<sup>56</sup> *PC Longplay [645] Rogue Warrior*, 58.39mins.



only as combatants, a decision that creates a reflection of the Cold War which frames it as a conflict centred almost exclusively around violence.

### **Combat Rules and Stealth**

When in combat NPCs perform the aforementioned combat mechanics. Once combat begins most NPCs will leave their station and take cover behind a nearby object, those that do not do this, simply remain where they were but begin to shoot at the player. For enemies that are in cover, they will periodically pop out from cover and fire bursts of bullets at the player before returning to cover. Enemies in *Rogue Warrior* are not programmed to advance towards the player and instead will remain stationary forcing the player to move towards them. This allows the player to control the pace of the level and gives them the option of retreating if needed. A by-product of this is the agency being put on the player in controlling the pacing of combat and having them responsible for propelling the narrative. It also frames the Soviet Union and its allies as being somewhat passive actors in the conflict. Whilst according to the game narrative they are responsible for the aggression of the US, they are ultimately on the receiving end of violence rather than truly instigating it.

The stealth mechanic was briefly touched on before but will now be explored in greater detail. *Rogue Warrior* features a stealth mechanic that is the default mode of most levels. The player will begin all levels in stealth mode and will only exit this mode if they are spotted by an enemy, or if there is a narrative event that makes enemies aware of them. When in stealth mode, hostile NPCs will not attack the player unless they are in their direct line of sight, if the player shoots a weapon towards them, or if they spot the player killing another NPC. There is no stealth metre or awareness level of NPCs and often the switch from stealth mode to loud combat is instantaneous. NPC's actions when not in combat are tailored to encourage the player to play the game stealthily and to perform takedown kills, as they are programmed to act as guards, or engineers / technicians and often face away from the player. Once in combat there are no differences between the two types of NPCs, with both being able to perform the same set of actions and use the same weapons, something which further reduces their identity. The repetitive use of stealth appears to be an attempt to include some level of espionage in the game, as there are no mechanics related to these themes. From a narrative perspective, the focus on stealth provides the player with the sense that part of the mission is impossible when performed out of stealth, or that enemies being alerted to the player's position will have repercussions later in the narrative. This is somewhat negated by the game forcing the player

into active combat; however, this portrays the unpredictability of combat and the need for combatants to be proficient in both stealth and loud combat.

### **Time Sensitive**

The narrative within the game is framed as being time sensitive. Marcinko fighting by himself through the game is a key example of this as the mission is too urgent to wait for backup or reinforcements. The time pressure in the game is purely extra-diegetic and does not actually impact the player or influence how they must play the game. This time sensitivity varies between a macro and micro lens. The macro lens frames the narrative as something which needs to be resolved urgently and suggests that Marcinko needs to complete these missions before the Soviets decide to launch the ballistic missiles at the US. The micro lens manifests itself during the levels. It may cover things such as escaping an area in a level before an explosion goes off, or reaching a certain point in the level before the enemy activates the missiles. This time pressure adds a little to the narrative however ultimately fails to create a real sense of urgency for the player as there are no penalties or potential points of failure if they progress slowly. Whilst it does not offer a lot to the game itself the time sensitivity combined with the focus on technological advancements that the Soviet Union have made in the game adds the idea that the conflict was also a technological race and competition for technological superiority between the USSR and the US and not just the physical conflict that the rest of the game suggests the conflict was. With the player being able to impose their own ludonarrative on the game through having control of the pacing. There is a clash between the ludonarrative and the framing narrative with respects to the time sensitivity element of the narrative.

### **Level Setting and Game World**

The first three missions of the game take place in North Hamyong Province, which is the most north-east point of the DPRK. The remaining five are in the far east of Russia in the Primorsky Province. This information as well as the time at which the level takes place is delivered to the player in loading screens that have the style of a military briefing.

Rogue Warrior frames the Cold War conflict as existing predominantly external to civilian life with all missions bar one taking place in remote locations that feel very removed from populated areas. This could partially be due to the technical limitations on the equipment that the developers had access to at the time, however this isolation also aligns with the narrative that the game offers. The one exception to this isolation is the first mission that takes

place in an apartment complex in North Korea. Yet this too does not feel very connected to society as the apartment complex has no occupants and it appears to be very rundown, bordering on derelict. The choice to illustrate a civilian area of the DPRK in this way portrays to the player that either North Korea specifically, or countries aligned with the Soviet Union, were generally poor and suffering. This is intensified as it is the only residential area in the game meaning that the player has no other point of similar reference in game. The backdrop for most levels is either icy tundra, or mountain ranges, something which creates the feeling that the areas where the levels take place exists separately from the rest of the world. An example of this is the palace that the player breaks into in *Level 5, F.U.B.A.R* (military acronym standing for *Fucked Up Beyond All Recognition* or *Fucked Up Beyond Any Repair*). At the beginning of the level the player is outside the palace, and a brief look around indicates that the building is in an extremely isolated location but is still well maintained and has some level of strategic value. The only times when the settings for the levels somewhat connected to the rest of the world is in the third level *G.N.B.N* (Potentially military slang, but no definition could be found), and the fourth level *P.F.D.L* (Potentially military slang for *Potentially Friendly Down Location*). In *G.N.B.N*, there are diegetic sounds that indicate the player is in a fully functioning dock that receives and sends out cargo. This is only indicated to the player through the audio of machinery and other general workplace sounds. Visually the dock is sparsely occupied and very few machines actually appear to be working, despite the abundance of sounds. For the fourth level *P.F.D.L*, the player has boarded a train which has made a stop at a checkpoint on the border of the DPRK and the USSR. This simulation of movement as well as the shift from fighting North Korean enemies, to Soviet enemies somewhat brings two theatres of the Cold War together and is also the only point in the game which the player is made aware of how the player character has gotten from one space to another. The travel between all other levels and areas is not mentioned and how the player character moves around between levels is left to the player's imagination. By placing the levels in what can be seen as fairly regular settings, it is suggested to the player that whilst existing away from populated areas, the logistical side of the war was fought using everyday equipment and machinery, meaning that any similar sites could potentially have been involved in transporting military or intelligence goods.

Levels in *Rogue Warrior* do not offer the player chances for exploration, instead the player has one path that they can follow. This restriction on exploration means that the only discovery of the game world that the player has is that which is directly related to the mission objectives and progressing in the level. This means that all areas the player has access to are

directly related to the mission objectives and making progress in the level. Something that again limits the players ability to construct the world that the game takes place in. The limited exploration offered by the game forces the player to focus on the mechanics and framing narrative in the game, rather than allowing them to form a ludonarrative. Additionally, this may have been a choice to try and simulate a realistic; but ultimately fictional, mission experience for soldiers, as the player is forced to focus purely on the mission at hand, rather than on exploring the game world. This also limits the player's sense of agency and restricts them to a passive actor in the game-world, rather than as an active explorer.

Whilst the game is contextualised to the player temporally and by location in loading screens, there is very little contextualisation or reference to the broader world in the game. The only in-game contextualisation that the player is given is from a quip delivered by Marcinko in Level 4, *P.F.D.L.* Upon performing a stealth kill Marcinko says "President Reagan sends his regards".<sup>57</sup> This is also the only mention of a world leader in the entire game, it also ties strongly with the reference to Reagan's Star Wars initiative. With the SDI being announced in 1983, and the game taking place in 1986, the game aligns with the real world. In an interview it was revealed that the missile defence system designed by the Soviet's in *Rogue Warrior*, was directly inspired by this initiative.<sup>58</sup> As Reagan believed in having a strong military as a means to deter the Soviet Union, and was open to supporting anti-Communist movements, the actions of the player character in relation to the narrative could be seen as to align with how such a threat may have been reacted to during this time.

Although it is clear that Marcinko is fighting on behalf of the US, there is no individual enemy that the player is fighting against, rather, the enemy is the Soviet Union as a whole. Much of what Marcinko says is derogatory towards his enemies, however there are a few lines that directly reference his hatred of both Communism and the USSR, "Better dead than red assholes" and a comment about wishing he never had to return to "this fucking place".<sup>59</sup> The line "better dead than red assholes", not only suggests that Marcinko, and characters like him in the Cold War, held a deep hatred for their enemies but also creates an intrinsic link between the USSR and Communism by suggesting that the USSR was a truly Communist state and not just a Totalitarian state operating under the guise of Communism. Furthermore, it suggests that Marcinko has little to no remorse for his actions, as he jokingly suggests he is doing them a

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<sup>57</sup> *Rogue Warrior Full Walkthrough Gameplay - No Commentary (PC Longplay)*, Video Recording (YouTube, 2022), 32.54mins, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vp1BD0XXpZ8>.

<sup>58</sup> "Rogue Warrior Senior Producer, Sean Griffiths - Interview."

<sup>59</sup> *Rogue Warrior Full Walkthrough Gameplay - No Commentary (PC Longplay)*, 26.09mins.; *PC Longplay [645] Rogue Warrior*, Video Recording (YouTube, 2016), 33.19mins.

favour by freeing them from Communism. These quips appearing continuously throughout the game, even in points in the narrative that are supposed to be tense, could also serve to reflect the player character's coolness under pressure and in dangerous situations. Most likely this is intended to reflect the real-life counterpart as this similar style of person. These lines play an important role in creating narrative and giving Marcinko a clear element of machismo. Through these lines, and others, it can be observed that Marcinko is an ultra-patriotic individual with ideas relating to the Western ideals of freedom and as acting morally right. These character traits related to the inability of the player to be able to perform non-lethal takedowns and combat related actions creates the idea that it is a kill or be killed conflict which is unable to be resolved through negotiation or less violent means.

### **Mission Goals and In-Game Objectives**

The mission goals in *Rogue Warrior* revolve predominantly around finding and destroying an objective. In order to progress through these missions, the player must perform the same actions in varying settings. The basic level design sees the player enter the level in stealth and make their way through the level killing enemies that they come across before planting C4 explosive on the mission objective and then destroying it and moving on to the next level. The only exception to this is the first two levels where the player instead needs to make it to a certain point in order to gather intelligence. The loading screens between levels inform the player of what the main mission objective of the level is going to be, some examples of these are as follows.

*Infiltrate and destroy the factory, locate, and destroy the missiles, exfil.*<sup>60</sup>

*Infiltrate the shipyard and track down the missile consignment before it departs.*<sup>61</sup>

*Infiltrate the palace and locate the control centre. Destroy the facility and escape.*<sup>62</sup>

*Infiltrate the Ryazanovka Dam, destroy the turbines and exfiltrate.*<sup>63</sup>

Whilst this is not an exhaustive list of all mission goals, the selected goals are a good representation of all the mission goals. Common terms that can be found are, 'infiltrate', 'locate', 'destroy', and 'exfil' or 'escape'. The generic nature of these objectives somewhat

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<sup>60</sup> *Rogue Warrior Full Walkthrough Gameplay - No Commentary (PC Longplay).*

<sup>61</sup> *PC Longplay [645] Rogue Warrior.*

<sup>62</sup> *PC Longplay [645] Rogue Warrior.*

<sup>63</sup> *Rogue Warrior Full Walkthrough Gameplay - No Commentary (PC Longplay).*

suggests that the player will have autonomy in choosing how they complete the objective, however as previously discussed they do not.

There is slightly more variation for the in-level objectives than there is for the mission goals. These objectives appear during the level in the top left corner of the player's screen and vary in frequency depending on the level. Some examples are as follows.

*Gain entry into the warehouse.*<sup>64</sup>

*Get to the train.*<sup>65</sup>

*Get the hell outta dodge.*<sup>66</sup>

*Place charges on the bridges support beams.*<sup>67</sup>

*Place charges on the missiles.*<sup>68</sup>

*Place charges on the remaining missiles.*<sup>69</sup>

*Locate and receive the missile guidance system.*<sup>70</sup>

These level objectives are far more specific than the mission goals and often relate to actions that the player can perform. The objective that sees the player most actively involved in its completion are those relating to using explosives. In order for the player to complete these objectives, they must interact with the object they are being instructed to destroy. The only objective that the player must perform a mechanic to complete is the use of C4. Where some of the previously discussed mechanics are necessary in order to advance through the level, they are not directly related to the narrative offered by the game. Planting C4 however is the only objective related mechanic that the player needs to perform. This mechanic is quite self-explanatory and simply involves the player moving towards the object or structure that needs to be destroyed and then pressing the button or key that is mapped to planting C4. When the player interacts with the object, a C4 charge appears, and the player is given a new objective. Interestingly, the player is never given an objective to detonate the C4, instead this happens automatically, and the explosions occurs in cutscenes, with the player sometimes needing to escape through the wreckage afterwards. The focus on C4, particularly when it comes to using

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<sup>64</sup> *Rogue Warrior Full Walkthrough Gameplay - No Commentary (PC Longplay).*

<sup>65</sup> *Rogue Warrior Full Walkthrough Gameplay - No Commentary (PC Longplay).*

<sup>66</sup> *PC Longplay [645] Rogue Warrior.*

<sup>67</sup> *PC Longplay [645] Rogue Warrior.*

<sup>68</sup> *Rogue Warrior Full Walkthrough Gameplay - No Commentary (PC Longplay).*

<sup>69</sup> *PC Longplay [645] Rogue Warrior.*

<sup>70</sup> *PC Longplay [645] Rogue Warrior.*

it to destroy technology creates a clear view of how the narrative portrays the Cold War. Despite being less technologically advanced than the USSR, the player character does not take any time to gather any real information or knowledge that could further aid the US in the Cold War. Rather they choose to destroy the technology completely. The repetitive use of violence; including C4, and lack of focus on more espionage-based actions reinforces the rhetoric that war is won through the use of force, and violence. Despite the heavy focus on physical combat, there are no in-game objectives related to enacting violence. Rather this is indicated to the player simply through gameplay, by presenting obstacles that the player learns to overcome through the use of violence. This indicates to the player that at its most fundamental level, the Cold War was about killing the enemy, rather than performing intelligence gathering objectives.

The level titles in *Rogue Warrior* are military acronyms and initialisms. Some level titles such as *F.U.B.A.R* would be recognisable to many players, initialism's such as *G.N.D.N*, have no clear definition even after performing research into the term. For the terminology that definitions could be found for, it is clear that they relate to the progression of the story at that point. The opening level is titled *S.N.A.F.U*, meaning *Situational Normal: All Fucked Up*, something that reflects the seemingly routine mission that the player embarks on immediately going pear shaped with his two teammates dying. Similarly, the penultimate level titled *F.U.B.A.R*, reflects Marcinko's actions in completely obliterating the Soviet SDI equivalent.<sup>71</sup> The choice to title levels after military terminology generally relates back to the involvement of Richard Marcinko in the game, but also tries to evoke a sense of realism into the game by mimicking the real terminology that military organizations use. For some players this may add a sense of realism and immersion to the game due to the game further simulating a military operation, however it also risks alienating many players due to the obscure nature of some of the terms.

## Game Play Activities

### Tropes

Despite having a real-life protagonist, the premise of *Rogue Warrior* and depiction of the player character does not come across as representing a real-life combat scenario. When combining the general narrative of a rogue soldier single-handedly foiling a Soviet plan to bomb the US,

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<sup>71</sup> *PC Longplay [645] Rogue Warrior.*

with mechanics such as takedown kills, and frequent quips, the game portrays itself more as an action movie produced during the Cold War, than as a series of events that would have taken place during the Cold War. This dramatization does allow certain tropes to manifest themselves in the game quite clearly. The first is that the Cold War was fought by hardened veterans rather than young recruits. Particularly at this stage of the Cold War (mid-late 1980s), the game creates the idea that Marcinko has been involved in the Cold War and has been fighting against the Soviet Union for an extended period of time, something that has harboured his resentment for the enemy. This of course was true in real life with Marcinko performing two tours of Vietnam, and later being involved in the failed attempt to retrieve US hostages in Iran.<sup>72</sup> The second trope is that of everyone being a potential enemy. Whether an intentional inclusion or not, there is a complete lack of neutral NPCs and instead having engineers and mechanics double as enemy soldiers.<sup>73</sup> Whilst this could reflect that there was a blurred line in the Cold War between combatants and civilians it is equally likely a way in which the developers have chosen to put further emphasis on the combat and violence in the game, by allowing the player to engage in combat with every NPC that they encounter. This decision to have all in-game NPCs as being combatants creates a representation that focuses purely on a soldier's point of view of the Cold War and does not represent any non-combatant roles that people may have played in the conflict. It restricts the game world as existing in a space of pure conflict, rather than in a populated area with civilians as previously said.

Whilst only being a passing remark there is a very important line that the C.O says to Marcinko. In a discussion where Marcinko is telling the C.O that he must continue with the mission as if he doesn't it means certain doom for the US, the C.O says to keep a low profile and "not make any headlines".<sup>74</sup> At a passing listen this line may appear to not hold much weight, however when broken down is extremely important. The C.O's acceptance and support of Marcinko's actions reflects understanding of the decision and suggests that it is indeed extremely important, however it also acknowledges that they are aware of the illegality of the mission and the fact that if the actions of Marcinko were to become publicly known then it would severely damage the image of the US and create challenges for future covert operations. This line shows the need that powers felt to act, but also their trepidation towards acting and

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<sup>72</sup> Stavros Atlamazoglou, "The Story of Richard Marcinko, Who Was Rejected by the Marines, Created SEAL Team 6, and Spent 15 Months in Jail," accessed May 8, 2023, <https://www.businessinsider.nl/the-story-of-richard-marcinko-who-was-rejected-by-the-marines-created-seal-team-6-and-spent-15-months-in-jail/>.

<sup>73</sup> *Rogue Warrior Full Walkthrough Gameplay - No Commentary (PC Longplay)*, 26.34mins; *PC Longplay [645] Rogue Warrior*, 14.29mins.

<sup>74</sup> *Rogue Warrior Full Walkthrough Gameplay - No Commentary (PC Longplay)*, 28mins.



potentially risking escalating conflict or damaging their image on the global stage. Thus, this line is indicative of both global power's involvement in covert operations but also their need to keep very little evidence of these, particularly if they are engaging directly with each other and not through a proxy state.

### **Narrative**

The narrative offered by the game is fixed and will end the same with repeated playthroughs. There are no real opportunities for the player to impose their own views on the narrative, meaning that the framing narrative is significantly outweighs the ludonarrative. The only parts of the game that are open to the formation of a ludonarrative are related to combat. The player has total control over the weapons that they use, as they can pick up any weapon that an enemy drops as well as access storage lockers with similar weapons. Another narrative element that the player has control over is how much they use stealth. Each level begins with the player in stealth and will remain this way until the player is seen or until a scripted scenario takes place that exposes the player to the enemy. If the player chooses, they can avoid using stealth; despite this being a more difficult method, for the entire game and instead use loud combat, however this does not go in reverse. A key overarching theme of the narrative is that of the rebellious but just soldier doing what is necessary. This theme manifests through the repeated calls for Marcinko to abort his mission from his authorities but his continuous refusal as the mission is too urgent.

### **Game Cues and Immersion**

The game provides some general guidance to the player on what they should do, however largely the player is left to figure out how to complete objectives by themselves. The most obvious example of provided direction is that the game indicates to the player where to plant the C4 charges. This is detailed to the player through an extra-diegetic golden outline of the C4 charge on the object that needs to be detonated (see Figure 2.1.3).



**Figure 2.1.3: C4 Charge Outline, Rogue Warrior Full Walkthrough Gameplay - No Commentary (PC Longplay), Video Recording (YouTube, 2022), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vp1BD0XXpZ8>.**

An example of a diegetic cue can be seen in Figure 2.1.4, with the green button next to the door being an indicator that the player is able to interact with said door.



**Figure 2.1.4: Green Button, Rogue Warrior Full Walkthrough Gameplay - No Commentary (PC Longplay), Video Recording (YouTube, 2022), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vp1BD0XXpZ8>.**

What can also be seen in Figure 2.1.4, is a small minimap on the bottom left corner, and a prompt to reload in the bottom centre. Despite as previously mentioned the game being not

quite having an exploratory element, the minimap features a small white arrow that indicates to the player the general direction that they should go towards. As there are no friendly NPCs that the player character works with, there are no diegetic cues from teammates about enemy positions or the status of objectives. The player does however occasionally receive updates from their C.O about intel they have received that can indicate what the next phase of the mission will be. Although there is no clear impact of the minimap other than its intended purpose, it could serve as an indicator of the player-character having somewhat in-depth prior intel about the details of the mission. With the minimap serving as an extra-diegetic guide it may be reflective of the preparation that a real soldier would perform prior to entering into combat in an unknown area.

### **General findings**

The key takeaways from the analysis on *Rogue Warrior* are the glorification of violence through the acute focus the game places on violence being a driving force of the in-game narrative. *Rogue Warrior* positions the conflict in isolated areas with minimal reference to the geopolitical climate of the world during the Cold War, something which emphasises the role of concentrated violence maintaining a larger global peace. The lack of friendly NPCs and the minimal representation of hostile NPCs leads the player to focus entirely on the actions of the player-character and heroizes the efforts and impacts of individuals in conflict. This focus on the player-character in combination with the player-character portraying a strong sense of machismo results in a specific representation about the actors of the Cold War being created. By using a simple narrative, *Rogue Warrior* illustrates the conflict through the perspective of a soldier and highlights the intensity and risk of performing high stake covert operations. The specificity of *Rogue Warrior*'s representation results in a narrow perspective of the conflict being portrayed to players with little room for players to formulate their own opinions or explore alternate avenues of interpreting the narrative offered by the game.

### Chapter 3: Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War

*How is the Cold War narratively represented in the FPS-game 'Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War'?*

Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War (CODBOCW) is an FPS game developed primarily by Treyarch (US), and Raven Software (US) but with assistance from Beenox (Canadian), and High Moon Studios (US), and published by Activision (US), in November of 2020. The popular reception to the game was positive, with favourable reviews on Metacritic and an overall score of 76 (out of 100).<sup>75</sup> The game features 10 main story missions along with a number of optional side missions that the player can unlock through gathering additional in-game content. Whilst CODBOCW is its own individual title, and features a standalone story, it does have characters that feature in prior instalments of the Black Ops series from Call of Duty.

In order to analyse CODBOCW I used the same method as was used for Rogue Warrior. The two playthroughs that I watched were played and uploaded to YouTube by *DraKulis Cinematic Gaming*, and *theRadBrad*. Both playthroughs cover the entire game, with DraKulis Cinematic Gaming's recording including both possible endings that the player can get. CODBOCW allows the player to choose from 5 possible difficulties which from easiest to most difficult are as follows, *Recruit; Regular; Hardened; Veteran; Realism*. Higher difficulties result in enemies being more accurate with their weapons and dealing more damage to the player. For *Veteran* and *Realism* there is no difference between the damage dealt by enemies, rather, *Realism* differs in that it restricts what appears on the player's HUD. DraKulis Cinematic Gaming did not indicate which difficulty they selected however theRadBrad opted for the Regular difficulty.

CODBOCW features a non-linear narrative that sees frequent location and temporal changes, as well as two playable characters that the player switches between. The player performs a mix of espionage and combat based missions in Amsterdam, the Zakarplatska Oblast in Ukraine, the Ural Mountains, East Berlin, Moscow, the Solovetsky islands in Russia, Havana, and Turkey, as well as memory exercises which take the player back to Vietnam during the Vietnam War. Throughout the game the player is tasked with performing clandestine

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<sup>75</sup> Metacritic, "Call of Duty: Black Ops Cold War," Metacritic, April 2023, <https://www.metacritic.com/game/playstation-4/call-of-duty-black-ops-cold-war>.

activities such as intelligence gathering and reconnaissance, as well as open combat and target acquisition and execution. Both controllable characters are part of CIA agent Russel Adler's small team to stop the Soviet Agent known only as *Perseus*. As the story progresses the player learns that Perseus has a plan to launch American made nuclear weapons at major cities around Europe in order to destroy the US's reputation and shift the balance of the Cold War. Whilst Adler's team is a standalone unit, they work in unison with FBI agent Jason Hudson who provides intelligence assistance to the unit and directs them to where they must go.

## Character / Player Rules

### Mechanics

In COBBOCW the player alternates between two playable characters, the less played character is Alex Mason, a predesigned character from previous games in the same series. Apart from Mason, the player primarily controls 'Bell', a character that has minor customisable elements. These customisation options are limited to allowing the player to choose the intelligence organisation the character is affiliated to, i.e., CIA, MI6, KGB, or an unknown organisation marked as 'Classified'. The player also chooses what is called the *psychological profile* of their character. This is a list of active and passive buff's that the player can choose based on how they wish to play the game. There are a total of 14 choices, each with their own unique name and buff.<sup>76</sup>

#### Active

- Paranoid: Aiming Speed Increased by 100% (ADS Time Halved)
- Aggressive Behaviour [Sic]: Reloading Speed Increased by 50%
- Violent Tendencies: Bullet Damage Increased by 25%
- Lone Wolf: Initial Sprint Boost Duration 3x As Long
- Methodical: Weapon Kick Reduced by 25%

- Relentless: Rate of Fire Increased by 25%

#### Passive

- Survivor: Health Increased by 25%
- Calm Under Pressure: Pain Flinch Reduced by 90%
- Fearless: Received Explosive Damage Reduced by 50%
- Dependable: Damage Taken When Stationary Reduced by 30%

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<sup>76</sup> Diego Perez, "Black Ops Cold War Character Creation Guide - Best Psychological Profiles," Attack of the Fanboy, November 13, 2020, <https://attackofthefanboy.com/guides/call-of-duty-black-ops-cold-war-character-creation-guide-best-psychological-profiles/>.

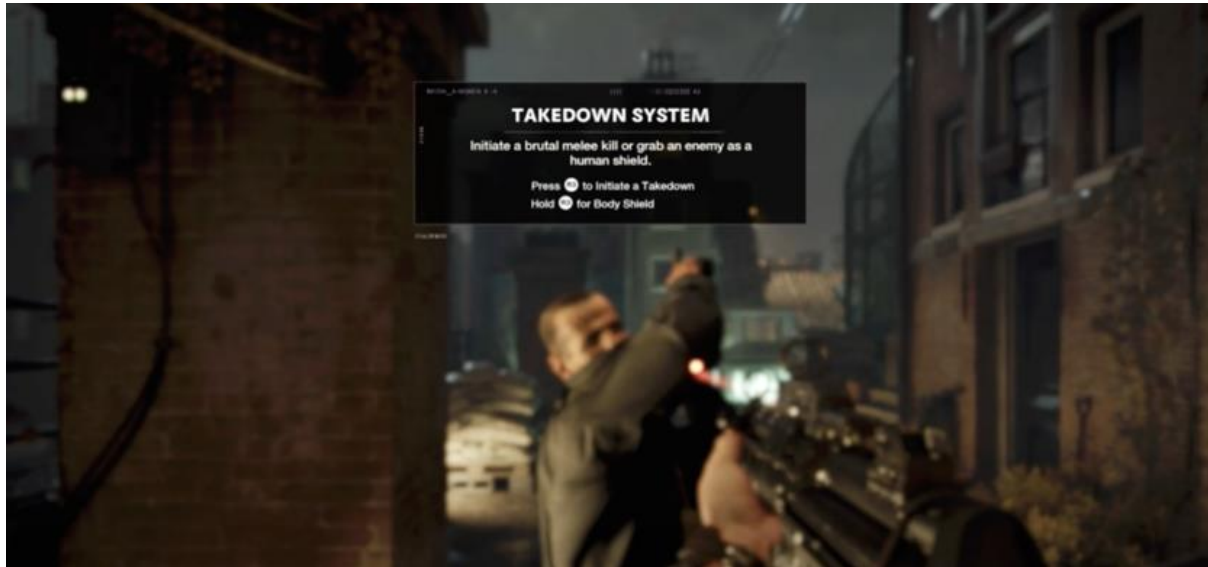
- Impatient: Hip Firing More Accurate While Moving
- Professional: Full Movement Speed When Using ADS
- Reliable: Ammo Capacity Increased by 1 Clip
- Tormented: Lethal & Tactical Equipment Capacity Increased by 2

The different buffs offered to the player allows them to provide their created character with slightly more of an identity and specialisation. Whilst none of the buffs will create a significant change to the narrative it does allow the player to formulate their own opinion of how the Cold War would best be fought. Players can opt to give their character more aggressive ability through selecting a buff such as ‘Tormented’, or alternatively they can choose to receive a more tactical buff such as ‘Methodical’. Choosing more aggressive buffs could suggest that the conflict would best be resolved through force and strength, where more tactical buffs may suggest that ability and precision are ultimately more important due to the para-military and special operations context that much of the fighting took place in.

### **Combat Mechanics**

The core gameplay actions are largely combat based. Aside from the basic combat actions that feature in any FPS game (firing a weapon, reloading a weapon) the player also has two non-lethal combat options, the first being non-lethal takedowns that the player can perform when they are in stealth, or when NPC characters are not aware of the player’s identity (See Figure 2.2.2). The second only features in one level and is the use of a sleeper dart gun that the player can optionally use on a civilian NPC. This existence of this non-lethal method of subduing civilians reflects that certain theatres of the Cold War were fought in populated areas meaning that civilians were likely to be indirectly involved in the conflict, and operatives needed to have options to remove them from the conflict in a non-lethal manner. Whilst the option to perform non-lethal takedowns does not necessarily result in a different outcome as the enemy is still subdued, it does assert that non-lethal violence is a viable strategy and has a role in combat. Alongside non-lethal takedowns the player can also perform lethal takedowns at any point in the game when they are in close proximity of a hostile NPC. The player is

introduced to the takedown mechanic in the first level of the game when the player is forced into a close-quarters interaction with a hostile NPC (See Figure 2.2.1). In CODBOCW,



*Figure 2.2.1: Takedown System Controls. Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War PS5 Walkthrough Gameplay Part 1 - Intro (COD Campaign), Video Recording (YouTube, 2020), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLhxoncGWDA&list=PLs1-UdHIwbo5t\\_tkrMPA0t-cM-8pzjyiu&index=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLhxoncGWDA&list=PLs1-UdHIwbo5t_tkrMPA0t-cM-8pzjyiu&index=1)*

takedown moves serve an equally functional, and cinematic purpose. The key to this is in the camera perspective remaining in first person during this mechanic. Retaining the same camera angle maintains the agency of the player and does not offer the player a more cinematic depiction of the violence due to the limited view that is shown. Through maintaining this camera angle the player is not incentivized to perform takedown kills and as such are more likely to do so only when they are naturally close to an enemy, making it a simply an element of close-quarter combat, as opposed to an action players should put themselves in danger to perform.



**Figure 2.2.2: Non-Lethal Takedown Instruction.** *Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War PS5 Walkthrough Gameplay Part 4 - KGB (COD Campaign)*, Video Recording (YouTube, 2020), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLhxoncGWDA&list=PLs1-UdHIwbo5t\\_tkrMPA0t-cM-8pzjyu&index=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLhxoncGWDA&list=PLs1-UdHIwbo5t_tkrMPA0t-cM-8pzjyu&index=1).

When prompted with the lethal takedown option the player can choose to initiate the takedown and kill the enemy or take the enemy as a human shield. When the enemy is used as a human shield they are given a health bar and the player can use them until their health runs out, or can attach a live grenade to the NPC and push them away, using them as a human explosive device.<sup>77</sup> The option to take enemies as a human shield is an interesting inclusion, as it could potentially be seen as a war crime.<sup>78</sup> The ability for players to commit such acts could reflect a sense of urgency in the mission, and of the conflict existing under special conditions. As the combat in some theatres took place behind closed doors it could suggest that those fighting had a form of immunity from the law as their fighting and specific actions were not known, or not supposed to be public knowledge. It also suggests that the urgency of the mission at hand was ultimately more important than following rules of international law, and that there was a strong mentality of doing whatever was necessary to succeed. Alongside the physical combat mechanics, the player also uses more elaborate military technology. Each of these has different controls, but all are lethal and vary from the player controlling a Remote-Control Explosive Device (RCXD) to the player controlling an attack helicopter or an AC-130 (an

<sup>77</sup> *Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War - Full Game Playthrough - 4K 1.28.30.*

<sup>78</sup> "Doctors without Borders | The Practical Guide to Humanitarian Law," accessed June 10, 2023, <https://guide-humanitarian-law.org/content/article/3/human-shields/>.



aerial gunship). When looked at in isolation, these are not enough to evoke a strong image of military fetishism, however they do contribute to a general sense of this in the game. Similar to the takedown system, the first time a player controls one of these they are shown a control box on the screen (See Figure 2.2.3).



**Figure: 2.2.3: RC Car Controls.** *Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War PS5 Walkthrough Gameplay Part 1 - Intro (COD Campaign)*, Video Recording (YouTube, 2020), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLhxoncGWDA&list=PLs1-UdHIwbo5t\\_tkrMPA0t-cM-8pzjyiu&index=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLhxoncGWDA&list=PLs1-UdHIwbo5t_tkrMPA0t-cM-8pzjyiu&index=1).

The other important gameplay mechanics can be broken down into the following categories: Dialogue Mechanics, and Espionage and Equipment Mechanics.

### Dialogue Mechanics

CODBOCW allows the player to interact with other NPCs when the player is not in active combat. This may be when the player is in the Safehouse, or at certain points in levels where the player is forced to enter dialogue with other NPCs. When the player voluntarily enters dialogue, they always have the option of leaving, however this option is not available to them when the dialogue is forced on the player. The player can choose to engage in dialogue with nearly all friendly characters meaning that the identities of enemy characters are not able to be developed through dialogue (excluding the *Desperate Measures* mission). This character filter limits what identity a player can be assigned to certain characters. Where friendly characters can be given an identity alongside that of combatant, this is restricted for enemy

characters through the players lack of ability in entering conversation with them.<sup>79</sup> In all dialogue situations the player has at least two dialogue options that they can choose from. These range from what can further be separated as action / story options, extra-narrative options. The difference is indicated to the player by the inclusion of yellow text appearing in the action / story options, and the extra-narrative options being white, in Figure 2.2.4 the exit dialogue option is the same as the extra-narrative option in other dialogues.



**Figure 2.2.4: Dialogue Options.** *Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War PS5 Walkthrough Gameplay Part 4 - KGB (COD Campaign)*, Video Recording (YouTube, 2020), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLhxoncGWDA&list=PLs1-UdHIwbo5t\\_tkrMPA0t-cM-8pzjyu&index=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLhxoncGWDA&list=PLs1-UdHIwbo5t_tkrMPA0t-cM-8pzjyu&index=1).

Through providing the player with this agency it is suggested that actors in the Cold War also had a degree of agency and control in how their missions played out. Although it is limited, it reflects that for the type of missions portrayed in the game, the soldiers conducting them were at a high enough rank were trusted to act independently so long as it worked towards the general goal of the mission.

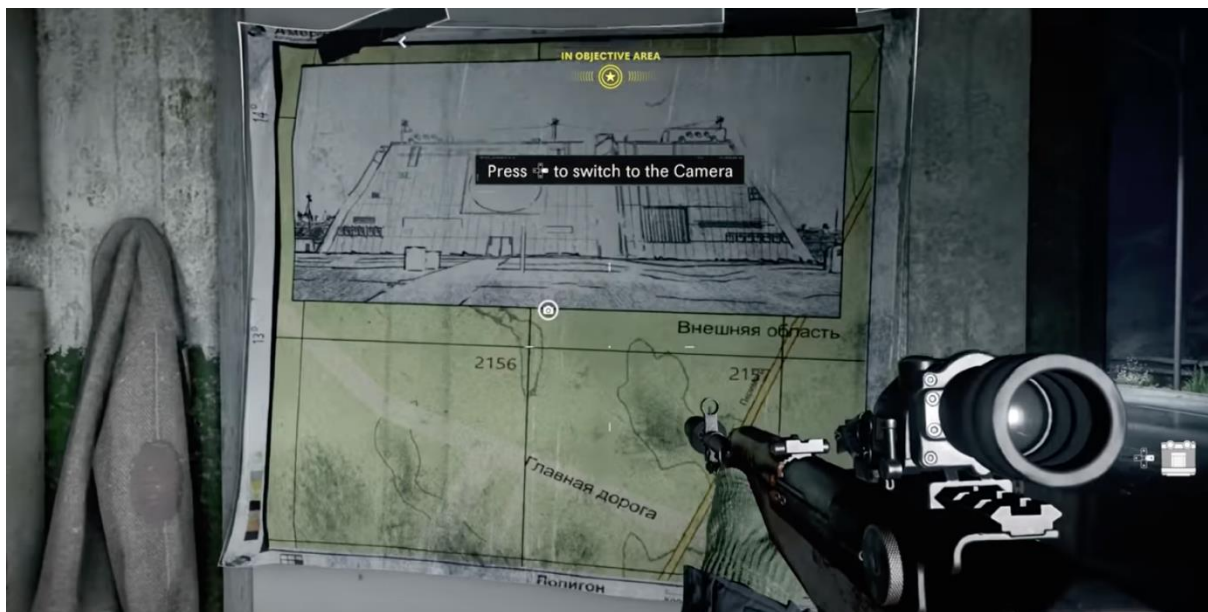
### **Espionage and Equipment Mechanics**

The list of espionage and tactical equipment mechanics includes lockpicking, hacking computers, using binoculars, torches, cameras, and blacklights. All of these are essential

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<sup>79</sup> Holger Pötzsch, "Selective Realism: Filtering Experiences of War and Violence in First- and Third-Person Shooters," *Games and Culture* 12, no. 2 (March 1, 2017): 156–78, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412015587802>.

mechanics that the player must perform in order to complete the game, and much like vehicle mechanics the player is informed when they can perform these actions, and it is ultimately up to the player how much they rely on them (See Figure 2.2.5). Espionage equipment is used both separately from, and in conjunction with violence. When used separately it clearly shows that many parts of the Cold War revolved not only around direct violence, but around espionage. When used in conjunction with violence it also reflects an important idea that whilst violence was integral to many parts of the conflict, it did not exist separately to other parts of the conflict, and often espionage and the related equipment were a starting point from which violence originated. The inclusion of these espionage mechanics is important in reducing the focus on the combat mechanics as it provides the player with other non-violent actions that are important in progressing both the mission and the narrative. The recurring nature of these mechanics across multiple levels is important in representing the Cold War as being fought also by intelligence, and in highlighting the need for those fighting to be intelligence operatives as well as military operatives, as only being one or the other, would not be sufficient to garner success.



**Figure 2.2.5: Espionage and Equipment Mechanics.** *Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War PS5 Walkthrough Gameplay Part 2 - Woods (COD Campaign)*, Video Recording (YouTube, 2020), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLhxoncGWDA&list=PLs1-UdHIwbo5t\\_tkrMPA0t-cM-8pzjyu&index=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLhxoncGWDA&list=PLs1-UdHIwbo5t_tkrMPA0t-cM-8pzjyu&index=1).

## NPCs

### *Friendly*

In all levels the player is nearly constantly surrounded by friendly NPCs. During levels this interaction is limited in terms of physical interaction. However, there is a lot of verbal interaction between friendly NPCs, and between friendly NPCs and the player. Friendly NPCs will frequently call out to the player to provide them with cover fire whilst they reposition, to inform them that they are reloading, or identify where enemies are, all of which make the combat feel more collaborative. This combat chatter also helps simulate a small squadron of soldiers and how they may interact with each other when in battle. Whilst it does contribute somewhat to forming a sense of camaraderie, it is surface level, as the player cannot actually react or respond to anything that their teammates say. If a teammate requests cover fire and the player does not provide them with cover fire, there are no penalties or consequences for doing so.

When in the safehouse the player is able to have conversations with friendly NPCs using dialogue mechanics. These conversations are exhaustive but are refreshed after the player completes a level. An example of the dialogue options presented to the player can be seen in figure 2.2.7 and are generally a mix of some questions about the character's history, or their thoughts on the progress of the team's missions and achievements.



**Figure 2.2.7: Dialogue with friendly NPC, *Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War* - Full Game Playthrough - 4K, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0YzQhZd7kcE>.**

These interactions allow the player to learn more about their teammates and the narrative however are not mandatory, and do not provide the player with anything other than

some context and additional information. Through performing these interactions, the game does encourage building a sense of camaraderie with each of the friendly NPCs, as they become more than just soldiers that the player is working with, but individual people that have their own history and personality. Through forming these interactions, the player also forms relationships with each character, something that makes adds weight to certain narrative events. In *End of the Line* the player is forced to choose if they rescue the character *Park* or *Lazar*. As the player has completed multiple missions and has interacted with both characters somewhat extensively at this late point in the game, the decision of whom to save becomes more difficult for the player as they now have this relationship. As can be expected, this event forces the player to make a quick-time decision about which of their teammates they are going to save, something that could easily occur in a real-life combat scenario. Similarly, if the player chooses to betray Adler and align with Perseus, they then in the final level kill all of their former teammates and execute Adler. If the player has engaged in conversation with their teammates prior to this, they have learnt about them and may have formed a relationship, something that potentially makes killing them more difficult. If the player chooses to help Adler and stop Perseus, the relationship that is formed also evokes emotions in the player as they are ultimately betrayed by Adler and killed after the level is complete. The impact of this betrayal from either the player or from Adler, contributes to the sense of uncertainty surrounding loyalty in a conflict. Something that was particularly present in the Cold War as it was one that was fought largely with intelligence and through heavily utilising double agents.

An alternate function of the array of friendly NPCs is that of reducing the sense of machismo that is commonly associated with video games, but violence centric video games in particular.<sup>80</sup> Whilst *CODBOCW* does have its own element of machismo, the multiple characters and variation in their personalities results in it being less pronounced. When present, it can be seen through characters having a propensity towards violence or aggression, unwilling to compromise, and being unemotive. Yet it's diffusion throughout multiple characters results in it not coming across as strong. The conscious inclusion of these other characters; and them having a similar role to that of characters with the traditionally masculine stereotypes, means that a broader representation of who was involved in the Cold War is portrayed. Furthermore, by avoiding the exaggerated inclusion of these stereotypical

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<sup>80</sup> Kathy Sanford and Leanna Madill, "Resistance through Video Game Play: It's a Boy Thing," *Canadian Journal of Education / Revue Canadienne de l'éducation* 29, no. 1 (2006): 287–306, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20054157>.

characteristics, CODBOCW reduces the sense of machismo that is commonly associated with the narrative of the game.

### *Neutral*

Neutral NPCs appear infrequently throughout the campaign depending largely on the location of the level. These neutral NPCs are predominantly civilians but may also be administrative staff or scientists in certain levels. The player is only able to interact with NPCs with combat mechanics, however the player is punished for doing so by the game. It is possible for the player to attack neutral NPCs but upon doing so a line of text appears on the player's HUD informing them to not shoot civilians, and they will be told by their teammates to watch their fire. If the player repeatedly attacks civilians, it will cause them to fail the level and they will restart at the last checkpoint. In combat, neutral NPCs will run away from the gunfire towards the periphery of the level and either disappear completely or hide in corners or empty rooms.<sup>81</sup> Often the NPCs will run in the direction that the player has come from.

The inclusion of neutral NPCs in some levels forces the player to change their playstyle as they must be more careful of who they shoot at and interact with. Without neutral NPCs, the vast majority of NPCs that the player sees are targets and the player is free to engage them, however with neutral NPCs an underrepresented but important part of war must be considered as well. Often in war video games, civilians are omitted from the game, however by including them not only are they being represented, but the impact of war and violence on those that aren't directly involved in the conflict is in the clear view of the player.

### *Hostile*

Hostile NPCs make up the largest NPC base in the game. The identity of these NPCs varies depending upon the location of the level, meaning there is a mix of Vietnamese, Cuban, and Soviet NPCs. Whilst Vietnamese and Cuban NPCs only feature in levels that take place in those countries, Soviet NPCs are found throughout the entire game in every level. Vietnamese NPCs appear almost exclusively as farmers rather than military personnel, where Cuban NPCs appear as military personnel rather than civilians.<sup>82</sup> Soviet NPCs always appear as military personnel, which importantly reflects the idea that whilst many smaller nations were involved

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<sup>81</sup> *Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War PS5 Walkthrough Gameplay Part 1 - Intro (COD Campaign)*, Video Recording (YouTube, 2020), 1, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLhxoncGWDA&list=PLs1-UdHIwbo5t\\_tkrMPA0t-cM-8pzjyiu&index=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLhxoncGWDA&list=PLs1-UdHIwbo5t_tkrMPA0t-cM-8pzjyiu&index=1), 1.03.25.

<sup>82</sup> *Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War PS5 Walkthrough Gameplay Part 1 - Intro (COD Campaign)*, Video Recording (YouTube, 2020), 1, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLhxoncGWDA&list=PLs1-UdHIwbo5t\\_tkrMPA0t-cM-8pzjyiu&index=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLhxoncGWDA&list=PLs1-UdHIwbo5t_tkrMPA0t-cM-8pzjyiu&index=1), 32.36.

in the Cold War, it was ultimately the USSR that was the main enemy of the US. Through having all Soviet NPC's as military personnel it reinforces this idea and does not allow them to be considered as being even semi-neutral in the conflict. However, with Cuban and Vietnamese NPCs being more neutrally portrayed it leaves room for these actors to be interpreted as civilians rather than as combatants. Alternatively, it suggests that these actors operated in a less traditional military fashion and relied on guerrilla warfare as opposed to more traditional forms of warfare. Despite the player mainly interacting with these NPCs through combat mechanics, they are given some substance through the narrative and some other mechanics. Named NPCs that are important to the narrative are given lines of dialogue and are discussed in the third person by friendly NPCs throughout the game, and in almost all cases the player interacts with these characters, or they at least feature in a cutscene. The best representation of unnamed NPCs is in the *Desperate Measures* level that takes place in the Lubyanka in the USSR and the player controls Belikov, a Soviet double agent assisting Adler's team. Throughout this level the player can interact with hostile NPCs much like they would interact with friendly NPCs; having conversations and seeing them perform tasks and responsibilities relating to their role. Each hostile NPC in this level is also given a name that the player can see when they are approached. Alongside this if the player stands near two hostile NPCs, they are able to hear small conversations between the NPCs about generic details of their life or their job. Between being able to interact with the hostile NPCs, them having names, and them interacting with each other, these characters shift from simply being military personnel without any identity, to having an identity exterior to their role and being represented more like the friendly NPCs.

### **Combat Rules and Stealth**

During combat, friendly NPCs will stay nearby and slowly advance alongside the player. Hostile and friendly NPCs function in a very similar way during combat, hiding behind cover, and periodically firing short bursts of fire predominantly in the player's direction, but also towards the player's teammates. Hostile NPCs will not advance towards the player unless the objective is for the player to defend a certain area of point, as the player advances towards the enemies, some of them will retreat whilst others hold their ground.<sup>83</sup> The minimal movement from enemies allows the player to control the pacing of the levels. By allowing the

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<sup>83</sup> *Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War Part 1*, 1.16.50.

player to control the pacing of levels they are given more agency and the US are framed as launching a pre-emptive strike against the USSR, as opposed to them having a more passive role, they are seen as the ones ensuring and creating a global peace.

COBBOCW features a stealth mechanic that is introduced to the player much like the controls of the RCXD are (See Figure 2.2.8).



**Figure 2.2.8, Stealth Metre, Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War - Full Game Playthrough - 4K,** 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0YzQhZd7kcE>.

As explained in figure 2.2.8, certain actions will cause hostile NPCs to become suspicious of the player, as the suspicion grows so too does the stealth metre, before eventually an exclamation mark appears that signals to the player that they are no longer in stealth and have been caught. Upon being caught, the player will be attacked by any hostile NPCs in the area and fighting will break out. Stealth is only part of set levels and parts of these levels that are predetermined by the game. Often when the player is in stealth there are a large number of enemies in the area, or the player is not equipped with a weapon that is suitable for taking on a group of enemies and as such completing that stage of the mission whilst not in stealth is



significantly more difficult for the player than had they remained in stealth. The lack of equipment forces the player to consider possible solutions to the level through non-violent means and slightly detracts from violence as the main method of acquiring success.

### **Time Sensitive**

Time sensitivity only appears in the final two missions, however the narrative reaching its climax at this point adds considerable weight and importance to the time sensitivity. In the penultimate mission *End of the Line* the player and their teammates must make their way through a Cuban mansion in order to get Perseus before he makes it to the final stage of his plan. Whilst this time pressure is purely extra-diegetic, the urgency of the friendly NPCs alongside the aforementioned climax of the game, puts slight pressure on the player to make their way through the level faster than they may normally have without this time sensitivity. Despite being an extra-diegetic feature in this level, it does not feel superficial. If the player chooses to side with Adler and stop Perseus, the time sensitivity then becomes diegetic with an in-game timer forcing the player to rush through the final parts of the level. The player is also only given a thirty second timer and as the level is designed in a way that they cannot see the objective, it forces the player to rush and play through this part of the level faster in order to complete the objective. Through including time pressure in both a diegetic and extra-diegetic manner, the consequences of failure in the narrative are brought to the forefront, and the pressure that would be felt by those performing such a mission in real-life is also highlighted.

### **Level Setting and Game World**

Levels in CODBOCW are set in a variety of countries and environments, ranging from densely populated cities to remote mountain military bases. This range of settings positions the Cold War as a conflict that took place globally, rather than in isolation. Each level has some form of introduction that indicates to the player how their character has reached the area, this is especially important if it is a remote location. The introduction into the level *Echoes of a Cold War* is a good example as it shows the player character arriving nearby the mountain base with a helicopter that will also serve as their means of departure.<sup>84</sup> This small detail provides important context and helps in indicating to the player some small details of the game world and helps indicate to the player how the team travels between the Safehouse and the mission destinations. Levels that take place in similar environments appear to follow a similar style or

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<sup>84</sup> *Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War - Full Game Playthrough - 4K, 1.35.05.*

theme, with levels in populated areas focusing more on stealth and espionage, and levels taking place in remote locations or less populated locations focusing more on direct combat. By following this level design, the game suggests and illustrates their interpretation of how different settings experienced the Cold War. For cities and populated areas, the Cold War was much more related to spies, informants, and small-scale combat. Whereas in more remote locations the Cold War was much more violent and saw more all-out combat. This can be visualised by contrasting two levels, *Brick in the Wall* and *Break on Through*. The first of these levels takes place on the streets of East Berlin and throughout the entire level the player can see Stasi officers interrogating and searching civilians on the street as they attempt to find the player.<sup>85</sup> In this level the equipment and weapons that the player has access to also reflects the different style of conflict. Excluding a short stretch at the beginning of the level, the only weapon the player has access to is a silenced pistol, as using or carrying any other weapon would draw too much attention to the player. In this same level the player uses a listening device hidden in a cigarette packet to gather information on a target and uses a blacklight to find a hidden room in the same target's apartment.<sup>86</sup> The level also features the previously mentioned sleeper dart gun, a tracking device, and a medium range listening device. Whilst none of these devices are particularly hi-tech, they are an interpretation of what espionage devices may have been used at the time, and through allowing the player to actively use these devices rather than them being limited to cutscenes supports the players immersion into both the game and their character.

Despite having a closed level design, CODBOCW encourages exploration during the levels in a number of ways. The primary way that this is done is by including optional extras that the player can collect in order to learn more about certain targets or places in the game. In the game these are called 'Intel', and by collecting them more details relating to the narrative are revealed to the player. In the level *Operation Chaos*, the player must correctly identify three sleeper agents and subsequently eliminate them.<sup>87</sup> In order to identify the sleeper agents, the player must use the pieces of intel they have gathered relating to each suspect. In order to play these side missions, the player must have collected a minimum amount of intel; most of which the player will naturally collect by playing through the game, but by collecting more intel the mission becomes easier as the player has access to more information. Whilst there are no other objective based items in the levels, the 'empty' rooms and spaces are detailed enough to still

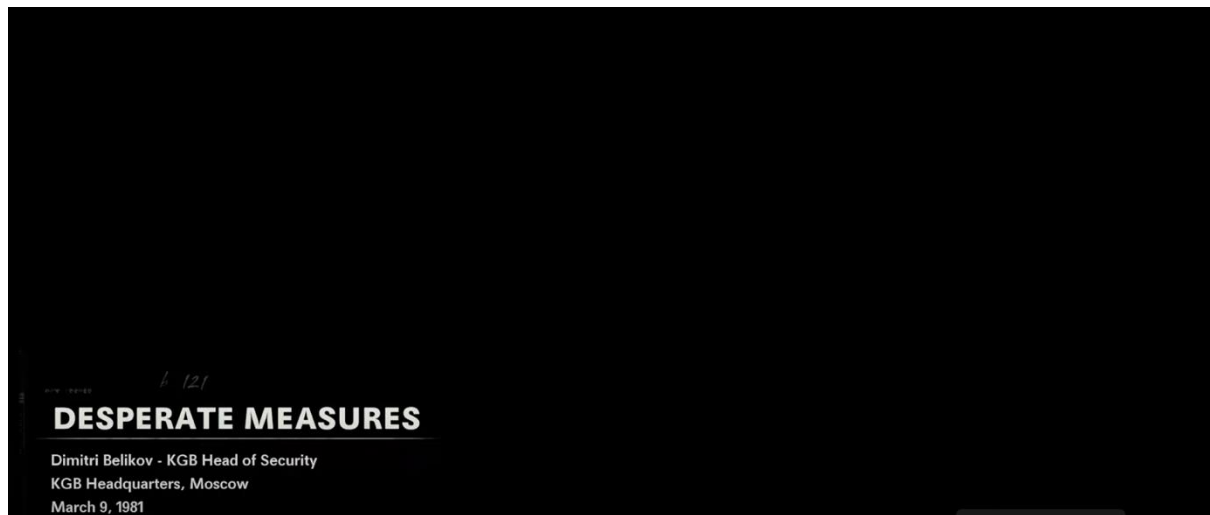
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<sup>85</sup> *Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War Part 1*, 1, 55.00.

<sup>86</sup> *Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War Part 1*, 1, 57.35; 1.11.29.

<sup>87</sup> *Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War - Full Game Playthrough - 4K*, 3.02.14.

feel as if they are part of the game world and add value to the immersion of the game through building the world that the game takes place in. The majority of contextualisation comes from extra-diegetic information that is given to the player in the pre level cutscenes that provide information about the level, with extra information appearing as a mission briefing on the player's HUD at the beginning of the level (See Figure 2.2.9).<sup>88</sup>



**Figure 2.2.9: Extra-Diegetic HUD information, Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War - Full Game Playthrough - 4K, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0YzQhZd7kcE>.**

In the opening cutscene to the game, then US President Ronald Reagan gives a speech to part of Adler's team about the importance of stopping Perseus and defending the "free world".<sup>89</sup> Whilst the initial outcome of this speech is to set-up Perseus and frame the missions that the team will carry out as ultra-important, additional meaning is added later in the game. In *Desperate Measures* the player hears a speech delivered by then USSR President Mikhail Gorbachev that follows the same structure and delivers the same message as the speech delivered by Reagan.<sup>90</sup> This same speech structure is then delivered in *Break on Through* by Perseus.<sup>91</sup> As Perseus is later revealed to be working independently of the Soviet Union with a number of different people from around Europe and the Middle East, all three of them can be

<sup>88</sup> *Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War - Full Game Playthrough - 4K*, 2.00.30; pre level cutscene.

<sup>89</sup> *Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War Part 1*, 1, 17.48.

<sup>90</sup> *Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War PS5 Walkthrough Gameplay Part 4 - KGB (COD Campaign)*, Video Recording (YouTube, 2020), 4, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLhxoncGWDA&list=PLs1-UdHIwbo5t\\_tkrMPA0t-cM-8pzjyiu&index=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLhxoncGWDA&list=PLs1-UdHIwbo5t_tkrMPA0t-cM-8pzjyiu&index=1), 10.36.

<sup>91</sup> *Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War PS5 Walkthrough Gameplay Part 8 - Perseus (COD Campaign)*, Video Recording (YouTube, 2020), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLhxoncGWDA&list=PLs1-UdHIwbo5t\\_tkrMPA0t-cM-8pzjyiu&index=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLhxoncGWDA&list=PLs1-UdHIwbo5t_tkrMPA0t-cM-8pzjyiu&index=1), .

considered ideological leaders in the narrative. Whilst Reagan and Gorbachev are of a higher class, all three of them delivering a similar speech that mentions the phrase “our very way of life” illustrates that despite their differing political stances and opinions, all three characters believe what they are doing is the morally correct thing and is for the greater good. Gorbachev’s view is the only one of the three that is not entirely explained, however for Reagan and Adler’s team this takes the form of performing illegal operations out of their jurisdiction in order to stop Perseus. For Perseus this takes the form of detonating nuclear weapons in major European cities and framing the US so as to shift the tide of the Cold War in favour of the USSR. This belief in acting for the greater good, can be clearly translated to the actions of political actors and states during the Cold War, as despite the illegality of many operations, they were continued as in their belief it was the correct and morally right way in which the conflict could be resolved.

### **Mission Goals and In-Game Objectives**

In COBOW mission goals have variation depending upon what the setting of the level is. For levels based in remote locations the missions tend to be more related to combat scenarios, where levels in populated areas are more geared towards espionage. Whilst not true for all levels, the basic level structure sees the player enter the level via a transport vehicle and sneak towards the main setting of the level taking out some stray guards, and then entering gunfights once in the main setting.

In-game objectives have a great deal of variety and may take the form of something more general such as ‘Escape the Lubyanka, to something more specific like ‘Frame Charkov by hacking the call logs’. For general objectives the player does not need to perform any specific actions and can simply play through the level in order to complete them, however for the specific objectives the player needs to perform a unique action in order to complete them. Alongside these objectives, there are other objectives that require the player to explore the level in order to complete them. These are often related to finding someone or something, however no guidance is offered to the player as to where the object or person might be. In saying this, some of these objectives can be completed by simply playing through the level. For the example ‘Frame Charkov by hacking the call logs’, the player must hack into a computer and solve a small puzzle in order to complete the objective. All in-game objectives require the player to perform some form of action for them to be completed. As a result, the player is exposed to more game mechanics and the game itself has a broader focus than being solely combat oriented and encompasses other aspects of the conflict, which in this case includes

general espionage and interrogation. Alongside these in-game objectives, each level has small optional goals that challenge the player to complete the part of a level in a certain way. These goals are often quite small and can be missed easily as the player is not informed of them.<sup>92</sup> By imposing a number of objectives both mandatory and optional on the player, missions are depicted as having multiple goals and purposes, as opposed to being purely linear. This indicates to the player that in order for success to occur in this context, it is not enough for only one objective to be achieved, and rather multiple objectives and goals must be completed. As a result, the conflict is shown to not be resolvable only through violence or combat, and rather multiple approaches are required.

## Game Play Activities

### Tropes

Although CODBOCW's narrative varies slightly from this, it does follow a popular media trope of the Cold War in that a Soviet Agent formulates a plan to use nuclear weapons to escalate the conflict. The most obvious theme in the game is that a large threat to the 'free world' must be stopped by a small group of combatants from intelligence organisations through waging a mini covert war. As all characters are given backstory that the player can uncover through conversations and generally playing the game, all members of the team have been involved in the Cold War in either a boots on the ground or intelligence capacity. This being something that explains why they are held in such high regard by Reagan and why they have access to so much equipment. Another key element of CODBOCW is the focus on double agents and the psychological aspect of the conflict. Particularly through Belikov, but also Bell, the game has a focus on the importance of double agents in gathering intelligence and gaining access to certain areas and information. Whilst there is no clear indicator of how Belikov began being a double agent, the risk associated with using double agents can be seen prior to the *Desperate Measures* level in a conversation that the player can have with Adler where he explains that relying on Belikov is their only hope of completing the mission, regardless of the risk.<sup>93</sup> The risk associated with being a double agent is also touched upon in the penultimate mission, where the player is required to track down an American double agent who is assisting Perseus. Despite helping the USSR, the double agent is assassinated by Perseus after

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<sup>92</sup> *Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War PS5 Walkthrough Gameplay Part 2 - Woods (COD Campaign)*, Video Recording (YouTube, 2020), 2, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLhxoncGWDA&list=PLs1-UdHIwbo5t\\_tkrMPA0t-cM-8pzjyiu&index=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLhxoncGWDA&list=PLs1-UdHIwbo5t_tkrMPA0t-cM-8pzjyiu&index=1), 8.46.

<sup>93</sup> *Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War Part 4*, 4, 1.51.

completing his task.<sup>94</sup> When juxtaposed with the case of Belikov who is saved after he is caught by the Soviets it does give some moral righteousness to the US over the Soviet Union but can be seen as a representation of the two possible endings for double agents during this time. This psychological aspect of the Cold War features as one of the key narrative elements and provides the largest twist in the game. As the player learns that Bell is actually one of Perseus' agents who was brainwashed and given a new identity so as to help stop Perseus, they then learn of a number of parts of the game that may not have been noticed, such as Adler's repeated phrase, "We have a job to do", being a command phrase to trigger implanted memories. Whilst it is not directly linked to the CIA's MK-Ultra program it does vaguely suggest to the player that it is part of the game due to the focus on intelligence agencies that the game does have. The visceral reaction that the player-character has to being brainwashed allows for players to explore the moral dilemmas and challenges associated with performing such an invasive technique.

The final trope to be discussed is that of the semi-legal sphere in which the missions take place. The lines "every mission we go on is illegal" delivered by Frank Woods, and "plausible deniability is the backbone of our work" said by former US Secretary of State Alexander Haig.<sup>95</sup> What first must be noted is that the inclusion of real high profile figures from the time period being included not only provides context, but also serves to reflect the nature of some illegal operations undertaken by the US, and the approval that they were given by officials in the US government. The illegal nature of these missions also serves to reflect the nature of the Cold War conflict. As it was officially not a hot war, operations in other states were seen as necessary to continue the ideological and intelligence war that was occurring but were not legal due to the countries not being traditionally at war with each other.

### **Narrative**

In almost every level the player is able to mix their own ludonarrative with the framing narrative of the game. This mixing is manifested through decisions such as killing or capturing a target, and whether Perseus or Adler succeed in their mission. The more minor elements are all mentioned after completing the final level with whoever the player sides with explaining the status of the targets and their current suspected locations if they are still alive. The majority of these narrative elements are controlled by the dialogue mechanics, and the dialogue decisions that the player makes in the game. In the first level the player is tasked with capturing

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<sup>94</sup> *Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War Part 7*, 7, 11.44.

<sup>95</sup> *Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War Part 1*, 1, 18.08.

Qasim Javadi, and after gathering the necessary information from him, is given the option to either throw Javadi off the building or capture him and take him into custody.<sup>96</sup> In some instances, the player is also able to control this narrative element by simply shooting the target in game. The input into the fixed narrative that the player has offers a surprising amount of control for an FPS game and allows them to craft their own perception of the conflict and be part of the creation of the game narrative. The player also has near total control over what weapons they use and how they move through the digital space. The player is free to pick up weapons dropped by the enemies or rely solely on the weapons given to them at the beginning of the level. The player's control over the stealth in the game only goes to the point that they exit stealth as it is not possible for them to re-activate stealth mode. The mix of ludonarrative and framing narrative affords the player with the option to partially craft the narrative of the game, but also illustrates that the conflict is not totally malleable and that in some cases they must be a passive actor.

### Game Cues and Immersion

CODBOCW utilises the HUD feature to provide general information to the player such as how much ammunition they have, as well as some more guidance-based displays indicating where the player should go to, which targets are friendly, neutral, or hostile, and if the player



is taking too much damage.

<sup>96</sup> *Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War Part 1*, 1, 9.27.

**Figure 2.2.10: AC-130 Overlay, Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War PS5 Walkthrough Gameplay Part 6 - Red Circus (COD Campaign),** Video Recording (YouTube, 2020), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLhxoncGWDA&list=PLs1-UdHIwbo5t\\_tkrMPA0t-cM-8pzjyiu&index=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLhxoncGWDA&list=PLs1-UdHIwbo5t_tkrMPA0t-cM-8pzjyiu&index=1).

Figure 2.2.10 incorporates multiple features that appear on the HUD at various points throughout the game. On the bottom of the image the basic controls that appear whenever the player is operation a vehicle can be seen. The image also features a number of red and blue diamonds that indicate to the player whether the target is friendly or hostile, with blue indicating friendly, and red indicating hostile. This colour key also translates to lines of dialogue as can be seen with the word ‘Pilot’ written in blue. For hostile NPCs speaking this name appears in red, and for neutral it appears in a light grey. The HUD is also used for helping the player when they are in stealth, by indicating the stealth metre and alerting the player if they are in a restricted area, something that will cause them to be immediately caught if they are seen there (See Figure 2.2.11).



**Figure 2.2.11: Restricted Area on HUD, Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War PS5 Walkthrough Gameplay Part 4 - KGB (COD Campaign),** Video Recording (YouTube, 2020), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLhxoncGWDA&list=PLs1-UdHIwbo5t\\_tkrMPA0t-cM-8pzjyiu&index=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLhxoncGWDA&list=PLs1-UdHIwbo5t_tkrMPA0t-cM-8pzjyiu&index=1).

As previously mentioned, if players select the *Realism* difficulty, the HUD is much more limited than other difficulties and features very few indicators. This is also part of other difficulties with friendly NPCs providing players with guidance during levels on where to search for things or what equipment they should use. This can be seen in the level *Redlight*, *Greenlight* where the player needs to find the password to a computer, and Woods periodically gives tips on where the player should look to try and find the password. The secondary function of these diegetic cues serves to create the sense of camaraderie between the player and their



teammates by these small but useful tips being given to the player if they are struggling to complete something.

## **General Findings**

The key takeaways from CODBOCW are the intertwining of combat and violence in propelling the narrative. With the importance of both aspects being relatively evenly split, CODBOCW manages to portray a narrative of the Cold War that can include multiple aspects of the conflict, such as the presence of the conflict in populated areas which consequently allows for the role and presence of civilians in the conflict to be explored. CODBOCW places an emphasis on the impact that small groups of intelligence operatives had in maintaining what was considered a large-scale global peace when compared to other global conflicts. Whilst the impact that individuals had on the conflict is represented, it is ultimately framed as less than what could be achieved through collaboration and teamwork. The in-game narrative is one that explores the role of deception and surprise that states required in order to maintain a tactical edge. Some ways in which themes are presented are through the game's inclusion of double-agents, informants, and psychological warfare. CODBOCW offers players with a relatively complex narrative that allows the player to formulate their own ideas and perceptions about the Cold War, whilst still providing firm guidelines and ideas that these ideas and perceptions can be formulated within.

## Chapter 4: Findings

### *How do contemporary US American / British FPS-games narratively represent the Cold War?*

Despite there being a decent collection of FPS games set during the Cold War conflict, they offer a very specific and somewhat limited representation of the conflict. This representation is characterised by a hyper-fixation on violence, which often pushes the complicated geopolitical aspects of the conflict to the periphery. Where games set during World War One or World War Two can often position their narratives around real events, the limited theatres of violence in the Cold War forces games to try position a high stakes narrative outside the context of real events. This can result in the Cold War feeling like a placeholder within which games explore a narrative, rather than the context of the conflict contributing significantly to the narrative of the game. When positioning themselves around real events, Cold War FPS games often will select a small number of iconic locations related to the conflict, Berlin, Moscow, Vietnam, and occasionally Cuba. Similarly, they will reference the more infamous events or icons such as the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Vietnam War, the Berlin Wall, Ronald Reagan, or Mikhail Gorbachev, in order to position themselves within the general narrative of the Cold War. For events such as the Vietnam War this can be done quite easily as the player can be inserted into the conflict with little difficulty. For others such as The Cuban Missile Crisis, it is more difficult to insert the player into this whilst maintaining the historical truth. As a result, a game will either create an alternate history for the event, or create a fictional event occurring temporally close or simultaneously to the real event.

The nature of the gameplay in the FPS genre forces developers to create an engaging narrative in order to avoid the gameplay feeling overly repetitive. Naturally, some games do this better than others. *Rogue Warrior* and *CODBOCW* are strong examples of this. Where the narrative of *Rogue Warrior* is very much a secondary feature of the game and is given little to no attention, *CODBOCW* does a decent job of drawing the player into the narrative through providing them with the ability to dictate certain story-paths and by creating characters that the player is forced to interact with and form a connection to.

The typically simple gameplay that FPS games offer places an extra level of importance on the quality of the narrative. Where games with complex mechanics can engage the player through gameplay and larger game worlds which allow the player a greater

opportunity for exploration and discovery, the FPS genre is considerably more limited in both of the aforementioned categories. Whilst this may generally appear to be a limitation, it does put more emphasis on the narrative as the straightforward game mechanics do not draw the player's attention away from the narrative. From one perspective, for games that develop an engaging narrative this works in their favour, on the contrary, games with poorly developed narratives serve as an example of the shortcomings of the genre in portraying narratives and often the simplicity works against the favour of the game. From another perspective it can be argued that FPS games like *Rogue Warrior* which offer a simple narrative propelled purely by violence are reflective of many combat situations for the individuals that are in them. By focusing on the simplicity of conflict, it can be argued that *Rogue Warrior* and similar games, portray a stripped-down narrative and highlight what is at the base of a soldier's experience in war; kill or be killed.

Whilst FPS games may not be able to portray complex narratives as consistently as adventure and Role-Playing Games (RPG), they are not incapable of doing so. FPS games are capable of portraying interesting and detailed narratives however they are ultimately restricted by the confines of the genre. The narratives offered by FPS games may not appear as multifaceted as those in other genres, but this is not necessarily a criticism. Narratives that revolve around and which are driven by violence do exist and should not necessarily be ignored. Although the FPS market may be saturated with straightforward games with simple narratives, it does not mean that the narratives are unimportant. Of the two games analysed, *CODBOCW* is significantly more complex, and it is quite possible that if another genre of game was to take the same narrative it could successfully highlight and bring to the forefront other aspects of the narrative that an FPS game simply cannot. It is also equally possible, that a game in another genre could fail to adequately portray the violent nature of specific parts of the narrative.

Whilst it may appear unfair to comment on the differences in complexity of *Rogue Warrior* and *CODBOCW*, looking at other games released at the same time as *Rogue Warrior* clearly indicates that the era in which *Rogue Warrior* was released is not the reason for its minimalist game style. In the same year as *Rogue Warrior*'s release (2009) there were numerous games with in-depth narratives (*Modern Warfare II*, *Borderlands*, *Batman: Arkham Asylum*). Where the more minimalist FPS games fail (see *Rogue Warrior*), is in creating attachment to other characters in the game and establishing a sense of empathy and resonance with these characters and their stories. In order for FPS games to do this, they are required to

incorporate other aspects which may not commonly be associated with the genre, such as dialogue mechanics, that do nothing other than provide background information about a certain character (see CODBOCW). Alternatively, if a dialogue mechanic is not used, the narrative again must be well-constructed enough for the player to become invested in the characters that are in the narrative, as well as the narrative itself.

It is no surprise that in a genre that features the word ‘shooter’, the narratives of games in this genre are centred around violence. Although the games are restricted by the characteristics of the genre, there is still room for the games to design the way in which they portray the intrinsic violence of the genre to the player. For *Rogue Warrior*, the design and portrayal of violence is quite simple and does not offer a lot of nuances. Violence is shown to be at the crux of the narrative, both the cause of and the solution to the problem, all the while maintaining the idea that another solution is not possible. This reflects a simplistic but not necessarily inaccurate representation of conflict in the Cold War. *CODBOCW* offers slightly more variation to this idea and superimposes espionage on top of the violence to reflect a more multifaceted portrayal of combat whilst still existing firmly within the confines of the genre, allowing for a representation of both a soldier’s perspective and the perspective of an intelligence operative to be experienced by players.

## Conclusion

Within the FPS genre specifically, Rogue Warrior and CODBOCW are two significantly different games with different mechanics, themes, and ultimately narrative. However, their depiction of the Cold War ultimately only shows one side of what was a multifaceted conflict. This view of the Cold War is one which champions violence and pushes conflict resolution and political negotiations into disrepute, at least in as far as resolving the core issues of the in-game narratives.

### Answering the Research Questions

With the analysis performed the Research Questions can now be answered.

*How is the Cold War narratively represented in the FPS-game 'Rogue Warrior'?*

Rogue Warrior fixates on the combat element of conflict in order to portray a soldier's perspective of war. Rogue Warrior's Cold War narrative features an intense focus on violence and conflict. In Rogue Warrior, the Cold War exists externally from populated areas and out of sight of the general public. This can be seen through the game world not including populated areas as well as the setting of the levels being remote and seemingly isolated. The violence of the Cold War is glorified and the efforts of the individual in combat are given a great deal of emphasis in Rogue Warrior, something which reflects to the player the importance of violence in resolving the Cold War and instils the importance of soldiers and their role in the Cold War.

*How is the Cold War narratively represented in the FPS-game 'Call of Duty Black Ops Cold War'?*

CODBOCW portrays the narrative of the Cold War from the perspective of an intelligence operative through the intertwining of combat and espionage, as well as the focus on subterfuge and the psychological elements that were present during the conflict. The intensely geopolitical nature of the conflict is somewhat explored throughout the narrative of the Cold War and represents neither side as acting in the objective moral right, but rather explores the way in which actors (both individual and state) operated within a grey area in order to achieve their ultimate goals. With violence not being the core driving force in the game, CODBOCW displays a more nuanced narrative of the Cold War as one which was

fought through both intelligence and proxy wars and combat. The game world of CODBOCW reflects the Cold War as taking place both in remote regions and in densely populated areas, showcasing the pervasive nature that both the conflict, and intelligence agencies had during this time.

Through combining the portrayals of the Cold War an answer to the main research question can be created.

*How do contemporary US American / British FPS-games narratively represent the Cold War?*

Video games produced in the US and Britain represent the global peace of the Cold War being maintained through geographically contained violence and a globally pervasive element of espionage and intelligence gathering.<sup>97</sup> These games showcase the experience of soldiers and intelligence operatives during the Cold War and portray the majority of their actions taking place away from populated areas and instead being performed in isolated locations. The general narrative of these games often revolves around a threat of nuclear war which must be prevented by an individual or group of elite operatives who perform their actions off the record and are not officially recognised as heroes due to the covert nature of the operations. The experience of civilians and the role of non-combatants is not very represented in these game as they appear to focus instead on actors that were voluntarily involved in the conflict rather than those that were unwillingly dragged into it. Although the narrative shows the conflict as being fought between Western Capitalist, and Eastern Communist nations, the ideological element of the conflict; Capitalism vs. Socialism, is not explored in any significant detail. Instead, both sides are simply framed as being incompatible to coexist.

## Weaknesses

Whilst the methodology was generally sound, one potential weakness was the limited number of games to be selected from due to only using the Steam database. Whilst Steam is very widely used, and is the largest game distribution platform on computer, by only using this

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<sup>97</sup> This global peace is in reference to the conflict being seen as ‘Cold’ due to what many thought was the absence of conflict. This is of course not entirely true as there was a great deal of conflict however it often occurred outside of Europe and North America; see the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Soviet War in Afghanistan, and the Congo Crisis, the Dirty War in Mexico and Argentina amongst others.

database the entire corpus of potential games is not fully included, as games that are released on different databases, or on different platforms (predominantly Xbox and PlayStation) are not considered. Fortunately for the different platforms, there is a lot of overlap with what is released, however there are a number of platform specific games that were not considered as a result of this limitation.

The key weakness of the research design is the lack of sources that were analysed in order to formulate an answer to the main research question. Whilst the analysis of two games is enough to partially answer the research question, ultimately it does not create a full picture of how FPS games from the US and Britain narratively represent the Cold War. Whilst this is a weakness, it is also a limitation imposed by the time restraints of the thesis itself.

### **Avenues for Future Research**

Fortunately, this aforementioned weakness also gives rise to the possibility for future research avenues. This thesis easily lends itself to being supported through the study of additional games which would help formulate a more complete picture of how this genre presents narratives about the Cold War. Another possible avenue would be to perform a cross genre analysis of FPS games and Real-Time Strategy (RTS) games. This cross-genre analysis is something which has not been explored in the Cold War field of historical game studies, making it an interesting opportunity to further contribute to the field. A final avenue for future research would be to perform either a separate analysis, or a comparative analysis of FPS games created by developers from Asia or Central and Eastern Europe to explore how the origins of the developers influence the way in which narratives of the Cold War are portrayed.

### **Scientific and Societal contribution**

Within the field of historical game studies this research contributes to the study of both narratives in historical video games, and the study of video games based around the Cold War specifically. When these two fields of research are combined, the research looks to help fill a gap that exists about how video games narratively represent the Cold War.

As video games are becoming an increasingly popular medium with which people choose to entertain themselves, the cultural importance and impact that video games have on constructing ideas about issues must also be explored. One pathway into this is through

studying the narratives that video games present to their audiences. For FPS games specifically there is a lot of overlap with what conflicts and time periods the games represent, meaning that through playing multiple games, players can formulate entire perceptions and ideas about these conflicts. Whether out of interest or concern, it is important for there to be a general awareness of what kind of narratives video games predominantly show, and what their weaknesses and strengths in presenting certain themes and ideas to players are. Through analysing topics such as the narrative of video games, it can further be explored how this medium is impacting society, culture, and ideas about important events and topics.



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