

**Decoding the Scars: A Multimodal Approach to Understanding the Seraphites' Identity,
Ideology, and Othering in the Video Game “The Last of Us Part II”**



Final Thesis

Submitted by

ADITYA RIZKY

21321230

BACHELOR OF COMMUNICATION SCIENCE

FACULTY OF SOCIO-CULTURAL SCIENCES

UNIVERSITAS ISLAM INDONESIA YOGYAKARTA

2025

AGREEMENT SHEET

THESIS

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THE SERAPHITES' IDENTITY, IDEOLOGY, AND OTHERING IN THE VIDEO
GAME "THE LAST OF US PART II"**

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ADITYA RIZKY

21321230

It has been given permission by the thesis supervisor to be tested and defended in front of the
thesis examiner team.

Approved:

Date: July 21st, 2025

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Supervising Lecturer


Dr. Zaki Habib, S.IP., M.Comms.

NIDN. 0517078109



VALIDITY SHEET

THESIS

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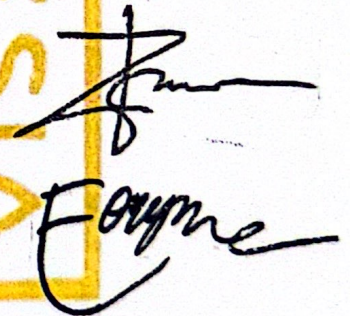
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Day: Thursday

Date: July 31st, 2025

Examiner Board:

1. **Head of Board** : Dr. Zaki Habibi, S.IP., M.Comms.
NIDN : 0517078101
2. **Examiner** : Iwan Awaluddin Yusuf, S.IP., M.Si., Ph.D
NIDN : 0506038201



Knowing,
Head of Communication Study Program
Faculty of Socio-Cultural Science
Universitas Islam Indonesia


Dr. Zaki Habibi, S.IP., M.Comms.
NIDN. 0517078101



STATEMENT OF ACADEMIC ETHICS

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I, the undersigned:

Name : Aditya Rizky

Student Number : 21321230

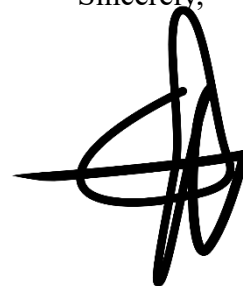
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2. This thesis is entirely the result of my own academic and scientific efforts, both as a student and as a researcher. It does not contain plagiarized content, or the work of others presented as my own.
3. I fully understand that if, at any point after the conferral of my degree by the Faculty of Social-Cultural Sciences, this thesis is found to contain evidence of academic dishonesty, I accept full responsibility and agree to any academic sanctions deemed appropriate by Universitas Islam Indonesia.

I affirm the truth of this statement without reservation.

Yogyakarta, April 17th 2025

Sincerely,

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Aditya Rizky

MOTTO

“Allah does not burden a soul beyond that it can bear...”

- Surah Al-Baqarah (2:286)

“Indeed, with hardship [will be] ease.”

- Surah Ash-Sharh (94:6)

“I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can rest only for a moment, for with freedom come responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not ended.”

- Nelson Mandela

“I know I'm smarter than an armadillo.”

- Jack Reacher

DEDICATION

“This thesis is dedicated to myself, in recognition of the perseverance and commitment invested in conducting this research independently. It is also dedicated to my beloved parents and loved ones, as a testament to the realization of our shared hopes and the successful completion of my academic journey.”

FOREWORD

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh.

All praise belongs to Allah Subhanahu wa Ta'ala, the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful, whose guidance, strength, and blessings have enabled the completion of this thesis. The journey of academic research is filled with both challenges and learning opportunities, and I am deeply aware that without His divine support, this thesis, titled “Decoding the Scars: A Multimodal Approach to Understanding the Seraphites’ Identity, Ideology, and Othering in the Video Game ‘The Last of Us Part II’”, would not have reached its final form. Every step in the process has been a reminder of the importance of patience, perseverance, and gratitude.

May shalawat and salam always be upon the Prophet Muhammad Sallallahu ‘Alaihi wa Sallam, a figure of compassion and wisdom whose teachings continue to inspire millions around the world. His life and legacy remind us of the value of knowledge, integrity, and service to others. May peace also be upon his family, his companions, and his followers throughout the ages.

This thesis is submitted as part of the requirements to obtain a bachelor’s degree in Communication Science at the Universitas Islam Indonesia. Throughout the preparation and writing process, I have received guidance, encouragement, and support from many individuals, each of whom played a meaningful role in helping me reach this point. I sincerely express my deepest appreciation for every contribution, no matter how small, that helped shape the outcome of this academic endeavor.

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1. To my beloved family, especially my parents, thank you for your endless love, prayers, and patience throughout this academic journey. Your unwavering support has been the foundation of my strength, and I am eternally grateful for the sacrifices you have made so that I could pursue my education wholeheartedly. I am also aware that the time and energy devoted to completing this thesis often came at the cost of moments we could have spent together. For that, I sincerely apologize. It was never my intention to be

distant, and I hope that this accomplishment can be a small return for all the love and understanding you have shown me.

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4. To the administrative staff and the entire big family of the Department of Communication Science at Universitas Islam Indonesia, thank you for creating a warm and supportive academic environment. Every lecture, discussion, and administrative help I received over the years contributed in some way to this final work. I have always felt welcomed and supported, and that sense of belonging made a significant difference in my educational experience. Your dedication to students' success does not go unnoticed.
5. To my friends in IPC 2021, thank you for walking this path with me, from the first days of lectures to the final days of thesis submissions. Each of you has contributed to this journey, whether through study sessions, late-night chats, shared struggles, or simple words of encouragement. I am proud to be part of such a resilient, diverse, and inspiring cohort. Our experiences together shaped not only my academic growth but also my personal understanding of community, culture, and friendship.
6. And finally, to the one who stood by me through all the highs and lows, my partner. Thank you for your presence, patience, and belief in me, especially during times when I struggled to believe in myself. Your quiet strength and unwavering support have meant more to me than words can fully express. This thesis is as much a result of your encouragement as it is my own effort.

To everyone who has supported me in ways big and small, through actions, words, and prayers, thank you. This achievement belongs not only to me, but to all of you who never stopped believing.

Wassalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh.

Yogyakarta, April 17th 2025

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a horizontal stroke extending to the left.

Aditya Rizky

ABSTRACT

Decoding the Scars: A Multimodal Approach to Understanding the Seraphites' Identity, Ideology, and Othering in the Video Game "The Last of Us Part II"

This study employs a multimodal framework, combining critical discourse analysis and Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, to examine how the Seraphites in "The Last of Us Part II" contribute to the game's narrative meaning. By analyzing their handcrafted artifacts, ritualized weaponry, distinct clothing, environmental choices, whistle-based communication, and public imagery of the Prophet, the research uncovers a neo-Luddite ideology characterized by a principled rejection of modern technology alongside pragmatic exceptions for survival, thereby enriching themes of purity, identity, and resistance. Critical discourse elements—including murals proclaiming "Feel Her Love!" and "May She Guide You," punitive religious language during executions, and dialogues revealing hypocritical technological allowances—demonstrate how the group's beliefs and practices enact Othering, sacralize violence, and legitimize hierarchical power. Spatial analyses of fortified forest enclaves and repurposed urban high-rises reveal a symbolic reclaiming of both nature and ruined civilization, reinforcing the Seraphites' dual narrative of isolation and dominion. Altogether, these findings show that the Seraphites' semiotic system and discursive strategies deepen the game's exploration of technology, faith, and community, answering the research question by illustrating how their portrayal constructs layered meanings that challenge players' assumptions and heighten moral complexity.

Keywords: *Seraphites, semiotic analysis, critical discourse analysis, game studies, multimodal analysis, The Last of Us Part II*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

AGREEMENT SHEET	i
VALIDITY SHEET.....	ii
STATEMENT OF ACADEMIC ETHICS	iii
MOTTO	iv
FOREWORD	v
ABSTRACT.....	viii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION.....	1
A. STUDY BACKGROUND	1
B. PROBLEM FORMULATION	3
C. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	4
D. RESEARCH BENEFITS	4
E. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	5
1. Previous Research.....	5
2. Theoretical Framework.....	9
a. Multimodality Approach to Game Studies	9
b. Game Design as Semiotic Mode.....	10
c. Critical Discourse Analysis in Video Games	11
d. Semiotic Analysis to Video Games.....	12
F. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	13
1. Research Approach	13
2. Research Object	14
3. Data Collection	14

a. Primary Data.....	14
b. Secondary Data.....	15
4. Data Analysis.....	15
a. Barthes' Semiotic Analysis.....	15
b. Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis.....	15
5. Unit of Analysis.....	15
 CHAPTER II OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH OBJECT	 17
A. NAUGHTY DOG AND THE LAST OF US SERIES.....	17
B. THE GAME OF THE LAST OF US PART II.....	18
1. The Narrative in The Last of Us Part II.....	18
2. Overview of the Goals, Mechanism, and Rules in The Last of Us Part II.....	19
C. THE FICTIONAL WORLD OF THE LAST OF US PART II.....	20
1. The Lore of The Last of Us Part II.....	20
2. The Factions in The Last of Us Series.....	22
 CHAPTER III FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION.....	 25
A. A Semiotic Exploration of The Seraphites.....	25
B. Semiotic Analysis Summary of the Seraphites.....	35
C. A Critical Discourse Analysis of The Seraphites.....	37
D. Critical Discourse Analysis Summary of the Seraphites.....	44
 CHAPTER IV CONCLUSION	 48
A. Summary.....	48
B. Research Limitations.....	50
C. Recommendations.....	51
 GLOSSARY.....	 53
 REFERENCES.....	 54

LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter I

- 1.1. *The Last of Us Part II* research objects 16

Chapter II

- 2.1. *Naughty Dog, LLC* logo..... 17
- 2.2. Official promotional poster for *The Last of Us Part II Remastered* 18
- 2.3. *The Washing Liberation Front (WLF)* logo 22
- 2.4. *The Seraphites* symbol..... 23
- 2.5. *The Rattlers* symbol 23
- 2.6. *The Federal Disaster Response Agency (FEDRA)* logo 24
- 2.7. *The Fireflies* logo 24

Chapter III

- 3.1. *The player inspecting a whittled statue*..... 25
- 3.2. *A collection of weapons the Seraphites uses* 26
- 3.3. *The Judge from the New Eden cult in ‘Roster’ menu of Far Cry New Dawn* 27
- 3.4. *The game poster depicting Seraphites in hooded attire*..... 29
- 3.5. *The clothing worn by The Judge (left) and a female Seraphite brute (right)* 30
- 3.6. *First encounter with The Seraphites in the woods* 31
- 3.7. *The shrouded environment The Seraphites mostly reside in* 31
- 3.8. *The whistles Seraphites used to communicate* 32
- 3.9. *A box truck with the Prophet painted on the back*..... 33
- 3.10. *A wall carved into a portrait of the Prophet*..... 33
- 3.11. *A shrine with a painting of the Prophet* 33
- 3.12. *A shrine featuring painting of the Prophet and the Seraphites symbol* 34

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background

The landscape of popular culture has witnessed a dramatic shift in the role of video games. No longer confined to the realm of mere entertainment, they have ascended to the position of a dominant media force, rivaling traditional forms with their intricate narratives and immersive storytelling capabilities. Video game-based interactive digital narratives excel as an especially immersive genre, combining advanced storytelling, gameplay mechanics, and multimodal digital media to create deeply engaging experiences (Khan, 2025).

The affordability and widespread availability of gaming consoles and platforms have also democratized the medium. This has led to a significant expansion of the gaming audience, attracting a broader and more diverse demographic than ever before. Previously, video games were often seen as a niche activity, but with greater accessibility, they have become a significant part of mainstream culture. Video games offer a unique blend of narrative elements and player agency. Unlike the passive consumption of films or books, video games allow players to actively participate in the story, shaping their experience through their choices and actions.

The advancements in video game graphics have revolutionized the storytelling experience. Developers can now craft hyper-realistic worlds that blur the lines between reality and simulation. Pixelated characters and rudimentary environments are now obsolete. Today's games offer a level of visual detail that allows players to become fully immersed in the narrative. These advancements in graphics are not merely aesthetic; they function as a powerful storytelling mechanism, enabling developers to convey complex emotions and nuanced details within the game world.

This newfound narrative complexity of video games has attracted the attention of communication scholars. Discourse analysis, a key area within communication science, delves into how meaning is constructed through various communication practices. This includes visual storytelling, character development, and even player interaction. Video games, with their rich signs, symbols, and interactive elements, provide a productive site for such analysis. The intricate narratives of games are no longer simply entertainment; they are complex systems of

meaning-making that offer valuable insights into human behavior, societal structures, and our relationship with technology.

“The Last of Us Part II” (TLOU2), a post-apocalyptic action-adventure game developed by Naughty Dog, serves as an example of this trend. Set in a brutal, post-pandemic world, TLOU2 received critical acclaim for its exploration of complex themes such as trauma, vengeance, and the cyclical nature of violence. The game has sold over 10 million copies in two years since it was released (Francis, 2022). In this game, players not only witness the brutality of the post-apocalyptic world but also grapple with complex moral dilemmas as they embody the characters. This level of engagement fosters a deeper connection with the narrative, making video games a powerful platform for exploring complex themes and human experiences. However, despite extensive academic inquiries into these thematic intricacies, an element of the game's narrative remains underexplored: the Seraphites.

The Seraphites, also referred to as the Scars, are a religious faction characterized by ritualistic scarring and a militant devotion to their enigmatic Prophet. They present a fascinating case study for scholars interested in meaning-making processes within video games. While the Seraphites play a significant role in the game's plot, their cultural practices, motivations, and belief systems remain shrouded in mystery. This lack of narrative exposition creates an opportunity for a deeper analysis that goes beyond the surface-level understanding of their role as antagonists.

This research aims to address this gap in understanding by employing a multimodal approach combining Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and a semiotic approach. CDA is an interdisciplinary approach that examines language use in various forms of discourse to uncover underlying power dynamics, ideologies, and social structures. Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols and how they create meaning within a particular system. Here, the system is the world of TLOU2, and the signs and symbols are the various elements associated with the Seraphites, including their clothing, rituals, and environmental choices. By analyzing these elements, this research seeks to unlock the deeper significance behind the Seraphites' actions and beliefs.

This research argues that a comprehensive understanding of the Seraphites' semiotic system is crucial for a more nuanced analysis of TLOU2's themes. Their unique way of life, characterized by a rejection of technology and their internal social hierarchy, offer a rich ground for semiotic exploration. By analyzing the symbolic language embedded in their clothing,

rituals, and interactions with their environment, this research seeks to shed light on their cultural practices and motivations. The stratified social order among the Seraphites, along with their rituals and visual symbolism, constitutes a valuable resource for semiotic analysis, potentially leading to a deeper understanding of their ideology.

By deciphering the Seraphites' symbolic language, this research aspires to illuminate their cultural practices and contribute to the ongoing critical discourse surrounding TLOU2's narrative. It aims to delve into their underexplored symbolism to understand how they perceive themselves and the world around them, ultimately enriching our understanding of the game's complex themes and the multifaceted world it portrays. This research not only fills a gap in the current discourse surrounding TLOU2 but also paves the way for further exploration of the game's rich symbolism. By establishing a framework for understanding the Seraphites' semiotic system, this research can serve as a springboard for future studies that delve into other under-analyzed aspects of the game, such as the environmental storytelling or the player's role in constructing meaning within the narrative.

B. Problem Formulation

While “The Last of Us Part II” (TLOU2) has been extensively analyzed for its thematic richness, a crucial element of the narrative—the Seraphites—remains underexplored. Their cultural practices, motivations, and belief systems are shrouded in mystery, presented through symbolism rather than explicit exposition. This lack of clarity hinders a deeper understanding of their role within the game's narrative and their contribution to the overall themes. This study addresses this gap by employing a multimodal approach. CDA is used to explore how power and ideology are represented within the game. Meanwhile, semiotics examines signs and symbols and how these elements construct meaning within a system. Within this context, the system is the world of TLOU2, and the signs and symbols are the various elements associated with the Seraphites, such as clothing, rituals, and environmental choices.

This study focuses on the symbolic communication of the Seraphites within TLOU2. It does not explore the game's broader narrative themes beyond their connection to the Seraphites' portrayal. Additionally, the research is limited to the in-game world and its constructed semiotic system and does not explore the actual real-world creators' intentions. The study will be conducted through analysis of the fictional world depicted in TLOU2, a video game accessible on Playstation platforms. The choice of location is due to the Seraphites being a unique element

specific to this game world. Analyzing them within this context allows for a focused examination of their symbolic representation.

This research not only fills a gap in the current discourse surrounding TLOU2 but also paves the way for further exploration of the game's symbolism. By establishing a framework for understanding the game's semiotic system, this research can serve as a springboard for future studies that delve into other under-analyzed aspects of the game. Therefore, this research seeks to answer the following question:

How does the semiotic and discursive representation of the Seraphites shape their group ideology and construct a narrative of othering in The Last of Us Part II?

C. Research Objectives

This research aims to decipher the symbolic language employed in the representation of the Seraphites within “The Last of Us Part II”. CDA is used to explore how power and ideology are represented within the game. Moreover, by analyzing their clothing, rituals, and environmental choices through a semiotic lens, this study seeks to uncover the deeper meaning behind their actions and belief systems. Ultimately, this research aspires to illuminate the Seraphites' cultural identity and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of TLOU2's narrative complexity.

D. Benefits of Research

Theoretical Benefits: This research contributes to the growing field of video game studies by demonstrating the value of multimodal analysis in unpacking the narrative complexities of video games. By deciphering the Seraphites' symbolic language, it establishes a framework for future studies that explore the deeper meanings embedded within video game worlds. This refined methodology can be applied to analyze other under-explored aspects of TLOU2 or even other video games, enriching our understanding of the multifaceted ways narratives are constructed and meaning is conveyed in this unique medium.

Practical Benefits: This research benefits players and game developers alike. By offering a deeper understanding of the Seraphites' motivations and cultural identity, it allows players to engage with TLOU2's narrative on a richer level. Additionally, by demonstrating the

effectiveness of multimodal analysis in uncovering hidden meanings, this research can inform game developers who wish to imbue their games with deeper layers of symbolism and encourage a more critical analysis from their audience.

E. Literature Review

1. Previous Research

1.1. Kwan's (2017) research, titled "What Are We Doing Here? This Is Not Us": A Critical Discourse Analysis of *The Last Of Us Remastered*," provides valuable insights into the critical analysis of video games and their role in perpetuating social norms. Her work highlights a significant gap in video game discourse – the lack of intersectional analyses that consider how gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity interact within the gaming narrative. Kwan employs critical discourse analysis to deconstruct the representations of these identity markers in "*The Last of Us Remastered*" and its accompanying story, "*Left Behind*." Through this approach, she reveals several key findings. First, she identifies a focus on masculinity, with female characters being underrepresented or hypersexualized, reinforcing patriarchal ideologies. Second, she points out the marginalization of LGBTQ+ identities, with heterosexuality presented as the norm and homophobic sentiments prevalent. Third, Kwan exposes the stereotypical portrayals of racial and ethnic minorities, often depicted as victims, villains, or athletes, while white characters occupy positions of power. Finally, she emphasizes the importance of intersectionality, arguing that these identity markers are interconnected and influence how power dynamics play out within the game.

Kwan's research offers a strong foundation for the current study. Her work demonstrates the value of critical analysis in uncovering the underlying messages conveyed through video games. However, her focus on identity politics does not address the symbolic construction of meaning within the narrative. My research delves deeper by also applying a semiotic approach to analyze the Seraphites in *TLOU2*. By examining their clothing, rituals, and environmental choices, the current study seeks to decipher the symbolic language employed in their representation and contribute to a more nuanced

understanding of the game's narrative complexity. While Kwan's research focused on the characters themselves and their representation, the current study shifts focus to the symbolic elements that contribute to the world-building and cultural identity of a specific faction within the game. This complementary approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of TLOU2's narrative on multiple levels.

1.2. Kurniawan and Ryan's (2017) study, "Representation of Power in a Smartphone: Semiotic Analysis of Smartphone Culture in Watch Dogs Game," provides a valuable model for analyzing the symbolic language within video games. Their research explores the central role of smartphones in Watch Dogs, utilizing semiotics to analyze the power dynamics embedded within this seemingly ordinary tool. The research employs a qualitative interpretative approach anchored in semiotic theory. This aligns perfectly with the current study, which similarly applies semiotic analysis to examine the representation of the Seraphites in TLOU2. Their methodology, which involves collecting screenshots as data, provides a practical framework that can be adapted to my research. Furthermore, their distinction between denotation and connotation in analyzing the smartphone's symbolism provides a valuable framework for deciphering the deeper meanings associated with the Seraphites' cultural markers.

While their research demonstrates the effectiveness of semiotic analysis in video games, it focuses on a single object – the smartphone. This study expands the scope by examining a multifaceted group, the Seraphites, analyzing their clothing, rituals, and environmental choices as a comprehensive system of signs and symbols. This shift allows for a more nuanced understanding of how game designers construct cultural identity and meaning within a specific faction. Their research establishes a strong foundation for the current study by demonstrating the potential of semiotics to reveal hidden layers of meaning within video games. Their focus on a familiar object, the smartphone, highlights the potential for symbolic interpretation in seemingly mundane elements. By applying a similar approach to the Seraphites' cultural markers, the current study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of TLOU2's narrative and the ways in which the game world is constructed.

The relevance of this prior research lies in its successful application of semiotics to a video game element. It establishes a precedent for using this methodology to explore the deeper meanings embedded within game design. The current study builds upon this foundation by applying semiotics to a different facet of the game world, offering a more comprehensive understanding of how meaning is constructed within TLOU2.

- 1.3. Aji's (2020) research, "From Scorching Desert to Tropical Paradise: New form of Video Game Orientalism in Far Cry 3," offers a critical lens for understanding how non-Western cultures are represented in open-world video games. The study employs a qualitative analysis grounded in Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, which posits that the "Orient" is a constructed concept produced by Western discourse to define itself against an exotic, mysterious, and often primitive "Other". Far Cry 3 perpetuates this dynamic by presenting its tropical island setting as an enigmatic and dangerous territory to be explored, cataloged, and ultimately conquered by the Western player-protagonist. The player acts as a "western mediator," interpreting the simulated Eastern world through a lens of adventure and peril, thereby reinforcing a power dynamic where the "East" is a passive stage for Western action and self-discovery.

The relevance of Aji's work to this study is profound, as his framework of video game Orientalism provides a powerful tool for analyzing the representation of the Seraphites. Although the Seraphites are not geographically "Eastern," they are constructed as a traditionalist, ritualistic, and inscrutable society whose world is presented as a "strange and mysterious territory" for the player to navigate. Aji's concept of the "western mediator" aligns with the objectives of this thesis by providing a lens to analyze how the player's perspective inherently frames the Seraphites as an exotic Other. However, the current study diverges from Aji's in its specific focus. Whereas Aji examines the representation of a geographically "Eastern" culture within a contemporary military shooter context, this thesis investigates a fictional, ideologically-defined group within a post-apocalyptic American landscape. This distinction is significant because it shifts the analysis from how existing cultural stereotypes are reproduced to how new forms of "otherness" are constructed from scratch within a speculative world. Therefore, Aji's

theoretical lens will be used to enable a deeper semiotic analysis of how the Seraphites' signifiers, such as their clothing, artifacts, and environments, contribute to their construction as an ideologically, rather than geographically, "Oriental" Other. This application will help reveal the underlying power dynamics at play in the player's encounter with this enigmatic faction.

- 1.4. Trattner's (2016) article, "Religion, Games, and Othering: An Intersectional Approach," argues that religion is a frequent and potent element of othering in video games, but its full complexity is often overlooked. Schmidt's framework provides a crucial theoretical justification for this thesis's focus on the Seraphites as a religious faction. His work directly supports an analysis that moves beyond a surface-level reading of the Seraphites as a generic "traditionalist cult" and instead examines them as a complex case of religious othering. The concept of intersectionality aligns perfectly with the research objectives of this study, which seeks to understand the multifaceted nature of the Seraphites' identity by examining how their religious beliefs interact with other social and cultural factors.

This study builds upon Schmidt's work but differs in its object of analysis. Schmidt's research centers on the representation of real-world religions, specifically Islam, within the context of contemporary military shooters. In contrast, this thesis examines a fictional, newly-formed religious group within a post-apocalyptic setting. This shift in focus allows for an investigation into how the mechanics of religious othering are constructed from the ground up within a speculative narrative, without direct reliance on pre-existing religious stereotypes, thus offering a unique contribution to the study of representation in games.

Therefore, Schmidt's intersectional approach will guide the analysis of how the Seraphites' identity is constructed not just by their faith, but at the intersection of that faith with their ideology and social hierarchy. This lens will be instrumental in both the semiotic and critical discourse analyses, enabling a more sophisticated interpretation that accounts for the contradictions and complexities within the Seraphite community and revealing how their "otherness" is a layered and multifaceted construction.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Multimodal Approach to Game Studies

According to De Paula (2023), multimodal approaches have been applied to various research subjects, ranging from graphic design and film to social media. However, social semiotic perspectives have rarely been employed to explore video games. Multimodality, as outlined by Jewitt (2013), recognizes that communication and the construction of meaning extend far beyond mere text. It acknowledges the crucial role played by a multitude of modes, each contributing to the overall experience and the understanding players develop. At the heart of the multimodal approach lie three interconnected theoretical assumptions proposed by Jewitt (2013). The first principle emphasizes the inherently multimodal nature of representation and communication. Video games, by their very design, are not solely reliant on spoken or written language. They incorporate a diverse range of modes, including visuals (environments, character design, animation), audio (sound effects, music, dialogue), and even haptics (controller feedback) to create a comprehensive and immersive experience. Each of these modes plays a vital role in conveying meaning and shaping players' understanding of the narrative, gameplay mechanics, and the world itself. The second assumption highlights the social construction of meaning-making resources. Jewitt (2013) argues that the various modes employed in video games are not static entities, but rather evolve over time within specific social contexts. These modes become imbued with cultural significance, transforming into tools for players to construct meaning based on their individual experiences and the broader social environment. For instance, the portrayal of weapons within a game might not simply represent their functionality, but could also evoke connotations of power, violence, or even heroism, depending on the cultural context in which the game is played. The third assumption emphasizes the dynamic interplay between modes as players actively participate in the meaning-making process. Jewitt (2013) emphasizes that meaning is not simply pre-determined and passively received by the player. Rather, players actively "orchestrate" meaning through their selection and configuration of these modes. Their choices within the game, how they interact with the environment, and how they engage with the narrative all influence how they interpret the various modes

presented. For example, a player's decision to explore a specific environment within a game might be shaped by visual cues like lighting or environmental details, leading them to discover hidden narratives or lore. Building upon these core assumptions, Toh (2015) delves deeper into the specific modes that comprise the multimodal perspective in game studies. Here, the focus lies on the intricate relationship between the linguistic and visual aspects of the game.

A multimodal analysis involves examining how these elements work together to convey meaning to the player across various levels - narrative, gameplay, and the overall ludonarrative experience (the fusion of narrative and gameplay mechanics). Linguistic resources encompass elements like character dialogue, quest objectives, and in-game descriptions triggered by player actions. These elements provide essential narrative information, character motivations, and gameplay instructions. Visual resources, on the other hand, encompass both cutscenes and the in-game environment itself. Through visuals, players encounter characters, objects, settings, and other elements that bring the game world to life. These visuals can be rich in symbolism, evoking emotions and shaping players' understanding of the narrative and the world they inhabit.

2.2. Game Design as a Semiotic Mode

Video games have transcended their reputation as mere entertainment, evolving into complex narrative and symbolic landscapes. Through the lens of semiotics, the study of signs and symbols, video games emerge as a powerful and multifaceted mode of communication. Understanding how games utilize signs and symbols is crucial for unlocking the deeper meanings embedded within their interactive experiences. Myers (2004) proposes that games themselves function as a type of icon, a simplified representation of reality. This concept highlights the ability of games to create condensed worlds that evoke real-life experiences or concepts. However, video games go beyond mere imitation. They establish intricate systems of signs and symbols that are unique to the medium. For instance, role-playing games (RPGs) heavily rely on context-dependent symbols. A single weapon, spell, or item might hold different meanings depending on the current situation, character class, or surrounding environment. This dynamic nature of meaning-making within

games underscores the limitations of focusing solely on individual signs. McDaniel et al. (2009) offer a broader perspective, viewing the entire gameplay experience as a potent semiotic system. Puzzles, for example, become testaments to the intimate connection between games and semiotics. Players are tasked with deciphering visual and narrative clues, essentially solving semiotic puzzles by matching signs and symbols together to unlock solutions and progress within the game world. Video games present a fascinating paradox when examined through a semiotic lens. Individual elements within a game, such as characters, objects, actions, and environments, all carry their own inherent meanings. These individual signs contribute to the overall experience, but the game itself adds another layer of meaning by weaving these elements together. Unlike a traditional narrative that might strive to convey a singular, unambiguous message, games do not necessarily represent something beyond the act of playing itself. This creates a duality: the individual signs and the holistic gameplay experience both contribute to the construction of meaning within the game. It is still important to acknowledge the potential role of creator intentionality. Game designers, much like storytellers, might have specific purposes in mind when crafting a game. These intentions can be seen as analogous to the moral or message embedded within a story. From this perspective, the game itself becomes a signifier, pointing towards a deeper, signified meaning – the intended message of the creator. This connection between design intent and interpreted meaning aligns with the fundamental aspects of storytelling, regardless of the medium.

2.3. Critical Discourse Analysis in Video Games

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a field that is used to analyze the written and spoken texts to explore the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality, and bias (Bukhari & Xiaoyang, 2013). Critical Discourse Analysis offers a powerful lens to examine the interplay between power, language, and representation within video games. It establishes a connection between texts, discourse (including text production, use, and distribution), and broader socio-cultural practices (Fairclough, 1995). Fairclough's CDA perspective argues that the ultimate aim of language analysis is to raise awareness of exploitative social relations (Fairclough, 1989, as cited in Liu & Guo, 2016). This aligns precisely

with the objective of this study; therefore, Fairclough's framework will be used as the basis for analysis. This framework acknowledges that social structures and events are not isolated occurrences but rather interconnected elements that shape our understanding of the world. Fairclough (2003, as cited in Aji, 2021) emphasizes the concept of "social practices" — the ongoing and relatively stable forms of social activity that constitute our social environment, institutions, and organizations. These social practices, including the creation and consumption of video games, are imbued with meaning-making systems. Language plays a crucial role, but CDA acknowledges the influence of other semiotic systems like visual elements and body language. Video games, with their rich visuals, narratives, and player interactions, function as a type of "semiotic visual text." By applying CDA to video games, researchers can understand the ideological messages embedded within these texts. This analysis goes beyond the surface-level of what is explicitly said or shown, delving into the underlying power dynamics and social commentary that video games can express through their design choices, character portrayals, and overall narrative structure. Ultimately, CDA allows us to see video games merely just as entertainment but as cultural pieces that reflect and potentially challenge the dominant ideologies. However, it is essential to consider contemporary and historical contexts, as discourse cannot be fully understood—or produced—outside its contextual framework (Fairclough, 2002 and Wodak & Ludwig, 1999,) as cited in Todoli, J., Postigo, M. L., & Dolón, R. (2006).

2.4. Semiotic Analysis to Video Games

This research employs semiotic analysis, specifically Roland Barthes's theory of signification, to decipher the symbolic language woven into the representation of the Seraphites within "The Last of Us Part II" (TLOU2). Semiotics, as explained by Chandler (2007, as cited in Jonna & Kasra, 2013), views all elements within a game—words, items, actions, and even visual elements—as signs that carry meaning. Barthes (1977, as cited in Ginting, 2021), as a prominent structuralist semiotician, emphasizes the process of signification, where signs are constructed through the relationship between signifier (the physical form of the sign) and signified (the concept or meaning

it represents). This process creates two key levels of meaning: denotation and connotation. Denotation refers to the literal, universally understood meaning of a sign. It is interpreted as a literal or written meaning (Ginting, 2021). For instance, a visual image of a hooded figure might denote someone wearing a hood. Roland Barthes argues that the denoted message inherently carries analogical qualities and constitutes the foundation upon which connotation builds in the process of signification (Bouzida, 2014). Connotation, however, delves deeper, exploring the cultural associations and emotional responses triggered by the sign. Roland Barthes argued that connotation functions both as a system, comprising the signifier and the signified, and as the very process that unites the two (Barthes, 1977). The hooded figure might connote ideas of mystery, danger, or religious affiliation, depending on players' cultural background and experiences. Barthes acknowledges connotation as a layered system itself, where the signifier and signified are linked through additional cultural references and subjective interpretations. By applying Barthes' framework, this research analyzes the various signs associated with the Seraphites (clothing, rituals, environments) to understand their denotative meanings and explore the more nuanced and subjective layer of connotations. This analysis will reveal how these signs interact to create a complex symbolic system that contributes to the overall portrayal of the Seraphites within TLOU2.

G. Research Methodology

1. Research Approach

This research employs a multifaceted qualitative approach, combining elements of semiotics and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyze the representation of the Seraphites within "The Last of Us Part II" (TLOU2). Roland Barthes's semiotics provides the foundation for deciphering the symbolic language associated with the Seraphites. This framework allows for an examination of the relationship between signifier (the physical elements we see) and signified (the deeper meanings they represent) within the game world. Norman Fairclough's CDA complements this approach by encouraging a critical examination of the power

dynamics embedded within the game's narrative and design choices. This combined approach fosters a deeper understanding of how the Seraphites are portrayed and the potential ideological messages conveyed through their representation. As this study employs a qualitative approach, it is important to acknowledge one of its inherent characteristics: its interpretative nature. This means that the researcher is often directly and repeatedly involved with the data, which in this context consists of visual and textual content of the game. While this allows for deeper insight, it also introduces potential limitations in the form of strategic, ethical, and personal challenges throughout the research process (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2016).

2. Research Object

The research object for this study is the representation of a group within TLOU2 known as the Seraphites, sometimes referred to as the Scars. This encompasses all in-game elements associated with the Seraphites, including their visual design (clothing, hairstyles, scars), cultural practices and rituals (as depicted in cutscenes or gameplay sequences), environmental choices (settlements, outposts, and other locations), collectibles (artifacts), and any dialogue or voice recordings that provide insights into their language, beliefs, or social structures.

3. Data Collection

According to Creswell (2017), there are four qualitative research techniques for data collection: field observation, interviews, documents, and audio-visual materials. This study employs the technique of collecting audio-visual materials. This research focuses on gathering and analyzing audio-visual documents such as photographs, videos, images, messages, sounds, films, and, in this case, video games.

a. Primary Data

The primary data for this research will be collected directly through gameplay of “The Last of Us Part II” (TLOU2) on the Playstation platform. This will involve meticulously playing through the game, focusing on sections that depict the Seraphites. Footage of relevant elements associated with the Seraphites’ representation will be captured during gameplay, including their visual design (clothing, hairstyles, scars), rituals (as depicted in cutscenes or gameplay sequences), environmental choices (settlements, outposts, and other locations), and collectibles (artifacts) mentioning the Seraphites. Additionally, any in-game

dialogue or voice recordings that offer insights into the Seraphites' language, beliefs, or social structures will be documented through note-taking.

b. Secondary Data

While the primary focus is on collecting data directly from gameplay, there may be instances where capturing specific details proves difficult. In such instances, YouTube footage is utilized as a supplementary resource to ensure a comprehensive data collection process. However, the use of secondary footage will only be considered after exhausting all efforts to capture the necessary information through firsthand gameplay.

4. Data Analysis

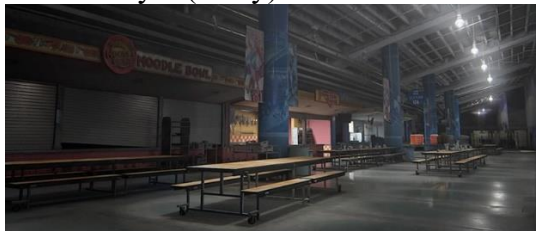


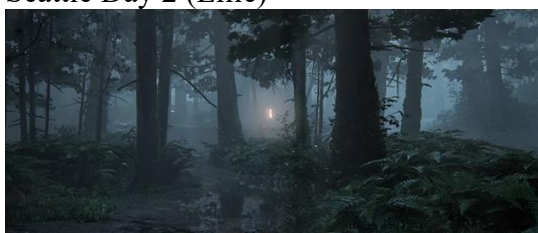


The collected data will be subjected to a two-pronged analysis:

- a. Barthes' Semiotic Analysis: This analysis will involve identifying signifiers (symbols) within the collected data (clothing, rituals, environments) and then applying Barthes' concept of denotation (literal meaning) and connotation (associated meanings) to decipher the signifieds (deeper meanings) these signs represent. This will involve unpacking the layers of meaning embedded within the Seraphites' representation.
- b. Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis: This analysis will focus on the power dynamics and ideological messages potentially embedded within the game's portrayal of the Seraphites. Fairclough's framework encourages examining how the narrative constructs the Seraphites and considering whose perspectives are privileged or marginalized within the game world. This will allow for a critical reflection on the potential social commentary embedded within TLOU2.

5. Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for this research will be all sections of "The Last of Us Part II" (TLOU2) where the Seraphites are present, either visually or through narrative mentions. This includes dedicated chapters featuring the Seraphites, as well as any cutscenes, gameplay sequences, or environmental details that depict them. Additionally, collectible artifacts within the game, such as notes or recordings, that offer information about the Seraphites' culture, beliefs, or history will also be incorporated into the analysis. By examining these various elements, the research aims to construct a comprehensive understanding of the Seraphites' representation within the game's narrative.

Table 1.1 The Last of Us Part II research objects

The Last of Us Part II		
No.	Description	Chapter
1	This is the sixth chapter of “The Last of Us Part II”. It contains the sections "The Stadium", "On Foot", "The Forward Base", "The Aquarium", "Hostile Territory", "Winter Visit", "The Forest", "The Coast", and "Return to the Coast".	Seattle Day 1 (Abby) 
2	This is the seventh chapter of “The Last of Us Part II”. It contains the sections "The Shortcut", "The Descent", "Ground Zero", and "Return to the Aquarium".	Seattle Day 2 (Abby) 
3	This is the second chapter of “The Last of Us Part II”. It contains the sections "The Gate", "Downtown", "Eastbrook Elementary", "Capitol Hill", "Channel 13", "The Tunnels", "The Theater", and "The Birthday Gift".	Seattle Day 1 (Ellie) 
4	This is the third chapter of “The Last of Us Part II”. It contains the sections "Hillcrest", "Finding Strings", "The Seraphites", and "St. Mary's Hospital".	Seattle Day 2 (Ellie) 
5	This is the fourth chapter of “The Last of Us Part II”. It contains the sections "Road to the Aquarium", "The Flooded City", and "Infiltration".	Seattle Day 3 (Ellie) 
No.	Description	Others
1	Artifacts are one of the four categories of collectible present in the game. Artifacts include mainly notes, pages, journals, maps, and diagrams.	Artifact 

CHAPTER II

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH OBJECT

A. Naughty Dog and The Last of Us Series



Figure 2.1. Naughty Dog, LLC logo

Naughty Dog, established in 1984 by Andy Gavin and Jason Rubin, is a prominent American video game developer headquartered in Santa Monica, California. Initially operating under the name JAM Software, the company underwent a rebranding to Naughty Dog in 1989. In its early years, the studio developed titles such as "Keef the Thief" and "Rings of Power." A pivotal collaboration with Universal Interactive Studios in the mid-1990s led to the creation of "Crash Bandicoot" for the PlayStation console in 1996, marking a significant milestone in the company's trajectory.

In 2001, Sony Computer Entertainment acquired Naughty Dog, integrating it as a first-party studio within PlayStation Studios. This acquisition facilitated the development of the "Jak and Daxter" series for the PlayStation 2, further establishing the studio's reputation for producing high-quality platformers. Subsequently, Naughty Dog expanded its portfolio with the "Uncharted" series, commencing with "Uncharted: Drake's Fortune" in 2007, which was acclaimed for its cinematic approach and engaging gameplay.

In 2013, Naughty Dog released "The Last of Us," an action-adventure game set in a post-apocalyptic United States. The narrative centers on Joel, a smuggler, and Ellie, a teenager immune to a fungal infection that has decimated humanity. The game was lauded for its storytelling, character development, and emotional depth, receiving numerous Game of the Year awards and selling over 17 million units by April 2018.

The sequel, "The Last of Us Part II," was released in 2020, continuing the story with a focus on themes of revenge and moral complexity. The game achieved significant commercial success, becoming one of the fastest-selling PlayStation 4 exclusives, with over four million

units sold in its release weekend. It also garnered critical acclaim, winning over 320 Game of the Year awards.



*Figure 2.2. Official promotional poster for *The Last of Us Part II Remastered**

The narrative's impact extended beyond gaming, leading to a television adaptation by HBO. The series premiered in 2023, featuring Pedro Pascal as Joel and Bella Ramsey as Ellie. It received positive reviews for its faithful adaptation and character portrayal. However, the scope of this research is restricted to “The Last of Us Part II”, excluding any material from the series adaptation.

B. The Game of “The Last of Us Part II”

1. The Narrative in “The Last of Us Part II”

“The Last of Us Part II” is set in a grim, post-apocalyptic world ravaged by the Cordyceps fungal pandemic, which has decimated humanity and turned the infected into monstrous, zombie-like creatures. The story takes place several years after the events of the first game and primarily follows two protagonists: Ellie, a young woman who grew up in this harsh reality, and Abby, a soldier with her own vendetta. The game's dual narrative intricately weaves their stories together, forcing players to grapple with their motivations, perspectives, and the repercussions of their actions.

The player's journey begins with Ellie, one of the protagonists from the first game, who is at the center of the game's emotional narrative. Ellie is now an adult,

having grown up in the aftermath of the pandemic when her surrogate father figure, Joel, was murdered by Abby who seeks revenge for Joel's actions in the first game. This event propels Ellie on a dangerous journey to Seattle, seeking retribution against Abby and her group. Midway through the game, the perspective shifts to Abby, revealing her backstory and the reasons behind her actions. The narrative delves into Abby's struggles with guilt, survival, and her attempt to find purpose in the chaos with the two characters eventually confronting each other.

The central theme of “The Last of Us Part II” is the destructive cycle of violence and the cost of vengeance. The game also delves into themes of grief, forgiveness, identity, and the lengths people go to protect those they love. It paints a bleak yet humanizing picture of a world where every choice has profound consequences. The world of “The Last of Us Part II” is morally gray, with every character harboring their own motivations, regrets, and scars. There is no clear "good guy" or "bad guy" here. Instead, the game presents players with complex, layered characters whose actions are driven by grief, anger, and the desperate need for justice.

The game challenges players to consider the psychological and emotional toll of living in such a broken world. How do individuals cope with loss? What does it mean to forgive, and is it even possible in a world filled with endless suffering? The narrative pushes players to question their own beliefs about right and wrong and confront the harsh reality that survival often requires making morally questionable decisions.

2. Overview of the Goals, Mechanism, and Rules in “The Last of Us Part II”

The goals of this game revolve around survival and the pursuit of justice in a post-apocalyptic world. Players assume control of characters who are tasked with navigating hostile environments, confronting dangerous factions, and scavenging resources to stay alive. The primary objectives often entail reaching specific locations, eliminating threats, and resolving immediate crises. Sub-goals include gathering materials to craft items, upgrading weapons and skills, and exploring the environment to uncover supplies and contextual lore. These goals encourage a combination of strategic planning and adaptive problem-solving. The game further incentivizes exploration by rewarding players with collectibles, which provide insights into the world and enhance immersion without disrupting the flow of gameplay.

The game integrates various interactive systems designed to immerse players in its survival and action-oriented experience. The crafting system is a key mechanism, allowing players to combine scavenged materials to create essential items like health kits, Molotov cocktails, or upgraded weapons. Another significant mechanism is the stealth and combat system, which encourages players to approach encounters thoughtfully, utilizing the environment, sound, and movement to outmaneuver or neutralize enemies. The skill progression mechanism lets players enhance Ellie's abilities by finding supplements and manuals, unlocking upgrades that improve her combat efficiency or survival capabilities. Additionally, the environmental design employs puzzles and traversal challenges that require players to interact with their surroundings dynamically, using ropes, ladders, or boats to advance. These mechanisms coalesce to create a coherent and engaging experience, demanding tactical thinking while fostering a sense of agency within the constraints of the game's narrative framework.

The game establishes constraints within the game's systems and guide player interactions. These rules dictate what actions are permissible, such as how players can move, interact with objects, or engage in combat. For instance, the game enforces resource scarcity, compelling players to carefully manage their inventory and make calculated decisions about crafting or weapon use. Combat mechanics adhere to rules governing stealth, melee attacks, and gunplay, where enemies have defined detection ranges and behaviors. Environmental traversal is also bounded by physical rules, such as climbable surfaces or areas accessible only through specific tools or sequences. These limitations heighten the tension, emphasizing the survival theme, and ensure that the player must adapt to the challenging conditions of the game's world.

C. The Fictional World of “The Last of Us Part II”

1. The Lore of “The Last of Us Part II”

The game continues the narrative of the first game, set in a post-apocalyptic United States ravaged by the Cordyceps Brain Infection (CBI), a catastrophic fungal pandemic. This fictional pathogen is inspired by the real-life genus *Cordyceps*, particularly *Ophiocordyceps unilateralis*, known for infecting insects like ants and

manipulating their behavior. In the game, the fungus has mutated to infect humans, leading to severe neurological and physiological transformations.

The game is primarily set in Seattle, Washington, and alternates between two protagonists: Ellie, who is one of the protagonists in the first game, now grown up, seeking retribution for the murder of her surrogate father, Joel; and Abby, a soldier affiliated with the Washington Liberation Front (WLF), whose life becomes intertwined with Ellie's through a complex web of vengeance and loss.

The narrative unfolds four years after the events of the first game. Joel confesses to his brother, Tommy, about his role in preventing the Fireflies from developing a cure for the Cordyceps infection by rescuing Ellie from a fatal surgical procedure. This act has strained Joel and Ellie's relationship, despite their efforts to build a life in Jackson, Wyoming. The story's inciting incident occurs when Joel and Tommy rescue Abby from an infected horde, only to be betrayed; Abby seeks revenge against Joel for killing her father, the Firefly surgeon who was to operate on Ellie. Ellie, devastated by Joel's brutal murder, embarks on a relentless quest for vengeance, traveling to Seattle alongside her girlfriend, Dina, to confront Abby and her associates.

As Ellie navigates the treacherous landscape of Seattle, she encounters various factions, including the WLF and the Seraphites, a religious cult engaged in a violent conflict over control of the city. Ellie's journey is marked by harrowing acts of violence, leading to the deaths of several of Abby's close allies, including the pregnant Mel and her partner, Owen. These actions take a psychological toll on Ellie, culminating in a confrontation where Abby overpowers her but ultimately spares her life at the insistence of Lev, a young Seraphite defector whom Abby has taken under her protection.

The game's perspective shifts to Abby, providing a nuanced exploration of her character and motivations. Abby's narrative reveals her internal struggle with the WLF's militaristic ethos and her burgeoning bond with Lev and his sister, Yara, who are fleeing persecution from their own people. This alliance leads Abby to question her beliefs and ultimately betray the WLF to protect Lev, highlighting the game's central theme of empathy and the moral complexities of revenge.

The climax transpires in Santa Barbara, California, where both Ellie and Abby are captured by a sadistic group known as the Rattlers. Ellie manages to free herself and rescues Abby and Lev, leading to a final confrontation between Ellie and Abby. Despite having the upper hand, Ellie experiences a moment of epiphany, recalling her last conversation with Joel, and chooses to break the cycle of violence by sparing Abby. The game concludes with Ellie returning to an empty farmhouse, symbolizing the personal cost of her vengeance and her struggle to find a semblance of peace in a world defined by loss and desolation.

2. The Factions in The Last of Us Series

There are five main factions that have been featured in this series:

a. The Washington Liberation Front (WLF)

Also known as the "Wolves," the WLF is a militaristic organization that overthrew FEDRA to control Seattle. Led by Isaac Dixon, they are known for their aggressive tactics and are in constant conflict with the Seraphites. Notable members include Abby Anderson, a central character seeking revenge for her father's death, and Manny Alvarez, a loyal soldier and Abby's close friend.



Figure 2.3 The Washing Liberation Front (WLF) logo

Images © Naughty Dog, obtained from The Last of Us Part II Wiki

b. The Seraphites

The Seraphites are a religious cult that shuns modern technology, favoring bows and melee weapons, and a unique communication system using whistles to maintain stealth and coordination. Founded by a woman referred to as the Prophet, they believe the pandemic was divine retribution for humanity's overreliance on technology. Embracing a return to simpler, pre-industrial ways, they reject modern technology and enforce strict societal roles within their community. After the Prophet's death, her teachings were interpreted by the group's Elders, leading to an

increasingly militant stance, particularly against the Washington Liberation Front (WLF), with whom they are engaged in a brutal conflict over control of Seattle. The Seraphites reside primarily on Seraphite Island, formerly the Queen Anne suburb of Seattle, which became isolated due to severe flooding. Key figures include siblings Yara and Lev, who become outcasts after defying the cult's strict doctrines.



Figure 2.4 The Seraphites symbol

c. The Rattlers

Introduced later in the game, the Rattlers are a ruthless group operating in Santa Barbara, California. They are heavily armed and notorious for enslaving both humans and infected individuals. Their brutal methods and exploitation make them formidable adversaries encountered by the protagonists in the game's climax.



Figure 2.5 The Rattlers symbol

d. The Federal Disaster Response Agency (FEDRA)

FEDRA initially established quarantine zones across the U.S. to manage the Cordyceps outbreak. Their authoritarian rule, characterized by strict rationing and

harsh enforcement, led to widespread dissent. Rebel groups like the Fireflies and the Washington Liberation Front (WLF) incited uprisings, resulting in the collapse of many QZs. By the events of the game, FEDRA's presence has largely vanished, with only a few strongholds remaining.



Figure 2.6 The Federal Disaster Response Agency (FEDRA) logo

e. The Fireflies

The Fireflies was a revolutionary militia that sought to overthrow FEDRA and restore government control. They also aimed to develop a vaccine for the Cordyceps infection, believing Ellie's immunity was key. However, after a catastrophic event at their Salt Lake City headquarters, including the death of their lead surgeon, the group disbanded. By the time the game took place, former members were scattered, with some attempting to regroup on Catalina Island.

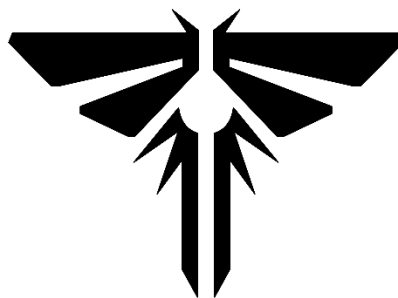


Figure 2.7 The Fireflies logo

CHAPTER III

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. A Semiotic Exploration of The Seraphites

The Seraphites are depicted through a series of signifiers that, when analyzed semiotically, reveal complex layers of meaning. Applying Roland Barthes' concepts of denotation and connotation allows for a deeper understanding of these elements.

1. Whittled Statue

The whittled statue is a small, hand-carved wooden figure representing the Seraphite Prophet. This statue is used by Seraphite members during prayer rituals. Notably, the Seraphite symbol is etched on the back of the statue.



Figure 3.1 The player inspecting a whittled statue

Figures in this chapter are in-game captures from The Last of Us Part II (PS5, Naughty Dog), except where noted, which are from Far Cry: New Dawn (Ubisoft)

Denotatively, the statue is a modest, handcrafted object serving a specific ritual function. However, its handcrafted nature connotes a deliberate renunciation of industrial mass production and modern fabrication methods. This act of carving is itself a ritual, a tactile, meditative process that transforms raw, natural material into an object of sacred significance. The texture and irregularities inherent in hand-carving evoke notions of authenticity and humility, mirroring the Seraphites' commitment to a simpler, more "pure" way of life. Furthermore, the presence of the Seraphite symbol on the back of the statue implies that veneration and identity are

inseparable; the symbol not only marks the object as belonging to the faith but also suggests that the Prophet's teachings are an intrinsic part of the followers' daily rituals. This layered use of the statue reinforces communal identity, continuity of tradition, and a symbolic bridge between the physical act of creation and the metaphysical realm of faith.

2. Weapons

The Seraphites predominantly utilize traditional, non-technological weapons. Their arsenal includes bows and arrows, machetes, sickles, hammers, staves, and pickaxes with only a select few among them made exceptions by using guns such as pistols and rifles.



Figure 3.2 A collection of weapons the Seraphites use

On a denotative level, the choice of weaponry reflects a pragmatic reliance on tools that are readily available and rooted in a pre-industrial tradition. Connotatively, the deliberate selection of primitive arms underscores an ideological rejection of modernity, symbolizing a belief that technological advancement contributed to societal downfall. Each weapon carries its own set of semiotic markers: the bow and arrow imply precision and long-term planning, while the machete and sickle evoke images of clearing away the old to cultivate the new. Even the sparse inclusion of modern firearms serves as a counterpoint, suggesting that while modern tools can occasionally be necessary, they are largely incompatible with the community's values. This martial aesthetic not only reinforces the Seraphites' commitment to an older, supposedly purer way of living but also instills a sense of discipline, self-reliance, and an almost ritualistic preparedness for conflict. In doing so, their arsenal becomes a potent symbol of resistance against the technological corruption of the old world, further solidifying their distinct cultural identity.

Weapons have long served as potent signifiers within video game narratives, and *Far Cry New Dawn*, released by Ubisoft in February 2019 as part of the renowned *Far Cry* series, is no exception, particularly in its portrayal of the New Eden cult. Set in a post-apocalyptic landscape reminiscent of its predecessor, *Far Cry 5*, where the cult originally operated as Project at Eden's Gate, *New Dawn* presents a group that has wholly renounced modern technology in favor of a more primitive, almost ritualistic way of life. This ideological shift is most strikingly conveyed through their deliberate use of traditional, non-technological weaponry, such as bows and arrows, which stands in stark contrast to the advanced firearms of previous eras. Much like the Seraphites from "The Last of Us Part II", the New Eden cult's arsenal serves not only a functional role in combat but also a symbolic one, reinforcing their rejection of industrial progress and technological dependency. Their reliance on archaic weaponry is imbued with both historical resonance and a conscious yearning for a purer, uncorrupted existence, an enduring motif that deepens the game's semiotic landscape.

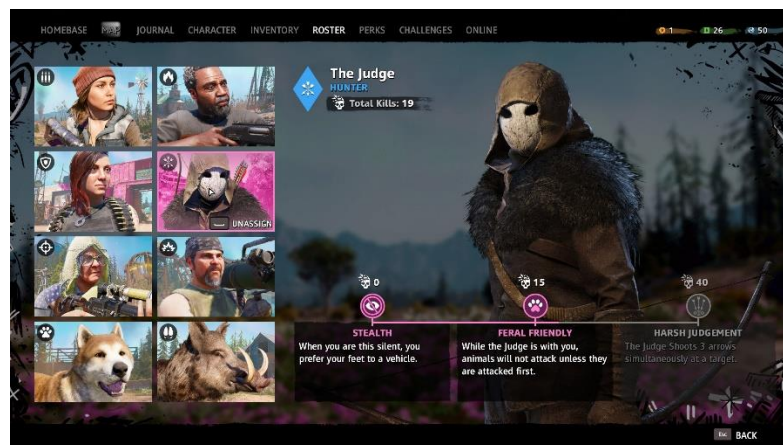


Figure 3.3 *The Judge* from the New Eden cult in 'Roster' menu of *Far Cry New Dawn*

Among the game's characters, *The Judge* emerges as a particularly compelling figure, embodying the cult's ethos while serving as a crucial ally in the narrative. As an NPC who can be recruited as a companion, *The Judge* plays a pivotal role in rallying the New Eden cult and is consistently depicted wielding weapons that emphasize simplicity and primal efficiency. His use of a bow and arrow, mirroring the broader tactical and symbolic choices of his peers, reinforces the cult's overarching commitment to forsaking modernity in favor of an austere, survivalist lifestyle. Similar to the Seraphites, whose carefully curated arsenal underscores their deliberate detachment from the technological excesses of the old world, the New Eden cult's

reliance on traditional weaponry becomes both a visual and ideological shorthand for their philosophy of discipline, self-sufficiency, and a return to nature's fundamentals.

However, it is important to note the contrast in weaponry usage between the Seraphites and New Eden highlights a fundamental difference in how each group negotiates their ideological rejection of modernity. While both factions cultivate a purist, anti-technological ethos, the Seraphites exhibit a level of pragmatism that New Eden entirely renounces. Certain Seraphite soldiers, particularly those engaged in direct combat with the Washington Liberation Front (WLF), still wield firearms, demonstrating that while their doctrine encourages a rejection of industrial-era advancements, survival and military advantage occasionally supersede dogma. This selective approach suggests an ideological flexibility within the Seraphite ranks, one that allows for deviation from core beliefs when tactical necessity dictates. The use of firearms by some members may also imply an internal hierarchy, wherein higher-ranking or more militant Seraphites are permitted access to restricted weaponry, reinforcing the group's structured, albeit rigid, social stratification.

In contrast, New Eden's commitment to traditional weaponry reflects a far more absolute rejection of the old world's technology. Their steadfast reliance on bows, arrows, and melee weapons is not merely a symbolic gesture but an enforced cultural directive. This is most clearly embodied in The Judge, who, despite his role and combat proficiency, adheres strictly to the cult's non-technological arsenal. The rigid nature of this rule indicates that New Eden's philosophy is far less adaptable than that of the Seraphites, suggesting a more insular and dogmatic worldview. Whereas the Seraphites allow some room for practical compromise, New Eden maintains an ideological purity so extreme that it could be viewed as self-limiting. This contrast in weapon usage between the two factions raises broader questions about their respective survival strategies: do the Seraphites' pragmatic leniency ultimately ensure greater longevity, or does New Eden's strict adherence to doctrine foster a more unified, if inflexible, communal identity.

3. Clothing

The hooded leather trench coats and ponchos worn by Seraphite members are practical adaptations to their environment, providing protection from Seattle's constant rain.



Figure 3.4 The game poster depicting Seraphites in hooded attire

While denotatively the clothing is chosen for its utility in a harsh, rainy environment, connotatively it communicates much deeper social and ideological messages. The dark, uniform colors and unadorned designs evoke an atmosphere of modesty and collective identity, deliberately minimizing individual expression in favor of communal solidarity. This uniformity suggests an ascetic approach to life, a visual renunciation of material excess and flamboyant modernity. The clothing, crafted from durable leather and fabrics, not only shields its wearers from the elements but also symbolizes a protective barrier against the moral decay and sensory overload of the outside world. In essence, these garments are both a literal and figurative armor: they camouflage the wearers within their environment while simultaneously marking them as adherents of a faith that prizes spiritual purity over the superficial allure of modernity.

Clothing, much like weaponry, serves as a powerful semiotic tool in video game narratives, encoding deeper ideological meanings within its materiality and design. Mirroring the Seraphites, in *Far Cry New Dawn*, the New Eden cult's attire reflects their wholesale rejection of modern civilization, and a visual marker of their ideological separation from modernity favoring handmade garments crafted from natural materials such as either leather, or burlap, and cloth. This aesthetic choice not only reinforces their detachment from industrialized society but also aligns with their spiritual doctrine, which sees technological progress as a corrupting force responsible for humanity's downfall. Unlike the high-tech armor or tactical gear worn by other factions in the game, New Eden's members embrace a deliberately rudimentary

appearance, emphasizing their self-sufficiency and commitment to an existence untainted by the sins of the past. Both groups use their attire to communicate a return to simplicity, purity, and faith, with every element of their dress reflecting a broader narrative of survivalism intertwined with religious devotion.

In the game, The Judge's clothing amplifies the cult's ideology while also establishing his unique status within the group. Unlike the standard New Eden cultists, The Judge is adorned in a full-body leather hooded armor, meticulously crafted from animal hides and accented with fur collars, reinforcing his role as a hunter and enforcer of the cult's will. His wooden mask, devoid of facial expression, transforms him into an almost spectral presence, an entity stripped of personal identity in favor of total subservience to New Eden's teachings.



Figure 3.5 The clothing worn by The Judge (left) and a female Seraphite brute (right)

This portrayal bears a striking resemblance to the way the Seraphites present their warriors, who are often hooded, faceless, and visually unified in their commitment to their Prophet's doctrine. In both cases, clothing functions as a means of erasing individuality, emphasizing the supremacy of the collective over the self. Moreover, the use of natural materials, leather, fur, and wood, positions both factions as antithetical to the technological advancements that define the societies they oppose. These aesthetic choices create a stark contrast between them and their more modern adversaries, reinforcing the games' overarching themes of resistance to progress and the allure of a return to a perceived golden age of human existence.

4. Environment

The Seraphites have established control over specific areas of Seattle, including dark, forested regions, city outskirts, and certain skyscrapers with interconnected bridges.



Figure 3.6 First encounter with The Seraphites in the woods



Figure 3.7 The shrouded environment The Seraphites mostly reside in

Denotatively, the selected environments provide strategic isolation and defense, yet their connotative resonance runs much deeper. The choice to inhabit shadowed forests and abandoned urban peripheries is a symbolic rejection of the old world's technological excess and moral disarray. The forest, with its organic, untamed quality, becomes a metaphor for the Seraphites' yearning for a return to nature and purity. In contrast, their occupation of interconnected skyscrapers via bridges signifies an ironic reclamation of urban decay: even within the relics of modern civilization, they construct sanctified spaces that echo their ideological ascent. These elevated and often labyrinthine structures serve not only as fortifications but also as a metaphorical staging ground for a higher spiritual plane, a space that is both physically removed from and

ideologically opposed to the corrupted ground-level reality of the old world. Thus, the environment is re-imagined as a living canvas where the community's values are inscribed upon the urban and natural landscapes alike.

5. Communication

The Seraphites employ a unique system of whistles for communication. These whistles serve various purposes, such as alerting others to ambushes, signaling movements, indicating enemy presence, and coordinating attacks.



Figure 3.8 The whistles Seraphites used to communicate

At a denotative level, the whistles function as a stealthy and efficient method for coordinating group movements without the need for modern, technology-dependent communication devices. Connotatively, this auditory system evokes an almost primal form of interaction that harks back to early human societies, where sound served as a crucial communal connector in the absence of written or electronic language. The varied tones and rhythms of the whistles suggest layers of meaning accessible only to those initiated in the community's code, a sonic language that reinforces group cohesion and disciplined silence. This method not only limits the risk of detection by adversaries but also symbolically represents a purification of communication: stripping away the verbosity and obfuscation often seen in modern discourse in favor of direct, instinctual signals. In this light, the whistles become both a tactical asset and a cultural emblem, encapsulating the Seraphites' broader rejection of modernity and their embrace of a more elemental, unified mode of expression.

6. Prophet Glorification

Within their territories, the Seraphites have incorporated environmental elements that glorify their Prophet. This includes murals, paintings, and stone carvings depicting the Prophet as a motherly figure, often portrayed with tenderness and reverence.



Figure 3.9 A box truck with the Prophet painted on the back



Figure 3.10 A wall carved into a portrait of the Prophet

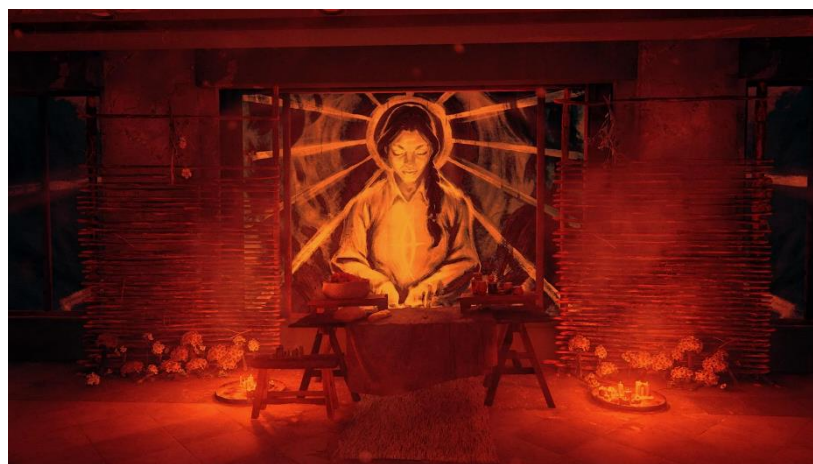


Figure 3.11 A shrine with a painting of the Prophet

Denotatively, these artistic representations serve to memorialize and exalt the Prophet, integrating her image into the very fabric of the community's environment. Connotatively, the portrayal of the Prophet as a maternal figure imbued with tenderness and moral authority serves multiple functions. It humanizes an otherwise distant spiritual leader, fostering an intimate and emotional connection between the followers and their guide. This recurring iconography transforms public spaces, whether on the sides of vehicles, carved into stone walls, or displayed in communal shrines, into constant reminders of her benevolent oversight and the sanctity of her teachings. The deliberate and pervasive glorification of the Prophet also functions as a form of social regulation, where the visual rhetoric of maternal care and protection is invoked to legitimize the community's hierarchical and ideological structure. In this way, art becomes a powerful tool for both spiritual inspiration and communal cohesion, ensuring that the collective memory of the Prophet remains a central, unifying force within Seraphite society.

7. Shrine (Martyr's Gate)

The Martyr's Gate is a significant shrine for the Seraphites. It is home to a painting of the Prophet surrounded by flowers, symbolizing mourning and worship. This site serves as a central place of devotion and holds substantial religious significance for the Seraphite community.



Figure 3.12 A shrine featuring painting of the Prophet and the Seraphites symbol

Denotatively, Martyr's Gate functions as a religious site designed for prayer, reflection, and the collective remembrance of sacrifice. Connotatively, the shrine is a carefully

curated space where the aesthetics of mourning and the celebration of life converge. The integration of floral motifs with the serene image of the Prophet creates a dynamic interplay between themes of loss and renewal, suggesting that sacrifice carries with it the promise of rebirth. The site operates as a tangible repository of the community's shared memory, a sacred landmark where individual grief is transmuted into collective resilience. The act of pilgrimage to Martyr's Gate, and the rituals performed there, become rites of passage that reinforce social bonds and reify the community's ideological commitments. Thus, the shrine is not merely a static monument but a living symbol of the Seraphites' ongoing process of healing, remembrance, and spiritual reaffirmation.

B. Semiotic Analysis Summary of the Seraphites

The artifacts such as the whittled statue demonstrates that what might appear as a simple religious icon is layered with both denotative and connotative meanings. As discussed by Barthes (1977, as cited in Ginting, 2021), the process of signification reveals that the literal form (a hand-carved prayer tool) is imbued with deeper cultural implications, specifically, a rejection of modern technological dependence and an embrace of primitive craftsmanship. This interpretation is echoed in Kurniawan & Ryan's (2017) study, which illustrates that even mundane objects, when viewed through a semiotic lens, can become potent symbols of ideological and cultural identity. Here, the whittled statue becomes emblematic not only of spiritual veneration but also of a conscious return to a purer, uncorrupted way of life.

Similarly, the examination of the Seraphites' weaponry, clothing, and environmental choices further underscores this duality of meaning. The traditional weapons, beyond their functional role, serve as signifiers of an ideological stance against modernity, a notion firmly rooted in Barthes' delineation of denotation versus connotation. Moreover, the visual cues provided by the Seraphites' practical, yet stark attire align with Jewitt's (2013) multimodal approach, where visual elements are integral to constructing narrative identity. Toh (2015) further emphasizes that the interplay of visual and linguistic modes creates a rich set of meaning, illustrating that even the choice of fabric and design speaks to the group's collective identity and values.

The spatial dynamics seen in the strategic occupation of isolated, natural, or architecturally complex urban spaces offer another layer of semiotic significance. These

environments are denotatively identifiable as territories, yet connotatively, they evoke notions of isolation, purity, and a deliberate distancing from a corrupted past. This spatial arrangement reinforces the Seraphites' ideological narrative, aligning with the multimodal perspectives detailed by Jewitt (2013) and Toh (2015), where environmental cues are as critical to meaning-making as the more overt symbolic objects.

Often, much like the Seraphites, those who repudiate the pervasive influence of modern technology, whether through retreating from digital platforms or embracing low-tech lifestyles, are cast as “luddites,” but this label obscures a more nuanced phenomenon better termed neo-Luddism. Neo-Luddism arises from the conviction that contemporary societies cannot escape the rigidities of the capitalist division of labour and officially sanctioned labour institutions (Kryszczuk & Wenzel, 2017). Unlike the original Luddite protests of 1811–1813, in which English craftsmen physically dismantled machines to defend their livelihoods (Griffin, 2025), neo-Luddism manifests as a heterogeneous ideological collage that spans economic, romantic pastoral, spiritual ideological, and anarchic strands (Kryszczuk & Wenzel, 2017). Its very name harks back to the legendary figure of Ned Ludd, a possibly apocryphal artisan whose frame breaking exploits were mythologized as a rallying cry for machine breakers (Jones, 2006; Griffin, 2025).

This modern critique extends well beyond nostalgic opposition to industrial machinery, encompassing ethical concerns about environmental harm, social fragmentation, and moral decay. Contemporary neo-Luddites often argue for a return to more human centered economies, promoting sustainable development, local food systems, or re agrarianization, while questioning the relentless pursuit of profit and efficiency (Kryszczuk & Wenzel, 2017). In the context of digital transformation, scholars have identified artificial intelligence, machine learning, and deep learning as chief catalysts for technological unemployment, thereby fueling neo-Luddite sentiments and even “robot-breaking” actions in sectors such as textiles (Öz et al., 2024). This ethical resistance can coexist with selective technology use, revealing the movement's inherent internal tensions.

In “The Last of Us Part II”, the Seraphites embody neo-Luddite ideals through their deliberate rejection of modern comforts, eschewing mass-produced garments and embracing ritualistic, nonverbal communication, yet juxtaposing this with occasional, tactical use of firearms. This pragmatic flexibility mirrors the broader neo-Luddite pattern of “moderate and/or inconsistent rejection” of technology, in which certain innovations are repudiated on

moral grounds while others are adopted for survival advantages (Kryszczuk & Wenzel, 2017). Such a stance resonates with the mixed method findings of digital transformation research, which show that even as AI triggers unemployment anxieties, it is nonetheless integrated where it enhances efficiency (Öz et al., 2024).

By contrast, the more rigid communal identity of New Eden in *Far Cry New Dawn* typifies the romantic pastoral strand, which wholly repudiates mass industrial production and upholds a self-limiting but cohesive way of life (Kryszczuk & Wenzel, 2017). Much like the agrarian machine breakers of early nineteenth-century England, where community solidarity across trades led miners and weavers to unite against threshing machines (Griffin, 2025), New Eden's inhabitants derive identity from an unwavering, if austere, purity of practice.

The Seraphites' internal hierarchy, where select warriors are granted access to firearms, underscores a critical neo-Luddite dilemma: whether ideological purity or practical exigency should prevail. Such strategic compromise echoes the anarchic strand's willingness to co-opt technological tools for resistance, paralleling historical tactics of sabotage borrowed from original Luddites (Kryszczuk & Wenzel, 2017). This tension between dogmatic rejection and tactical adoption is echoed in studies of lethal autonomous weapons discourse, where neo-Luddite voices both decry the dehumanization of warfare and negotiate the limited use of technology for moral ends (Blome, 2018).

Ultimately, the Seraphites' blend of ideological commitment and adaptive pragmatism prompts reflection on the resilience of communities in post-technological collapse. Neo Luddism's cultural legacy, shaped by myths of General Ludd and reinforced through science fiction narratives that warn of technology run amok, reveals a persistent interplay of fear, hope, and strategy in human-machine relations (Jones, 2006; Blome, 2018). In examining these dynamics, we confront whether such hybrid stances bolster communal survival or sow the seeds of internal discord in the world they seek to reclaim.

C. A Critical Discourse Analysis of The Seraphites

A critical discourse analysis of various elements associated with the Seraphites reveals underlying power dynamics and ideological messages, shedding light on how the game constructs this faction and whose perspectives are emphasized or marginalized as follows:

1. Murals and Graffiti

a. “Feel Her Love!”

The phrase “Feel Her Love!” painted across various locations serves as a succinct yet powerful ideological statement that encapsulates the Seraphites’ religious doctrine. This mural can be interpreted as a tool for both spiritual reinforcement and social control. The imperative verb “feel” suggests an emotional and experiential connection, encouraging individuals to internalize the Prophet’s teachings on a visceral level. This directive reflects the Seraphites’ focus on devotion through affective loyalty rather than rational discourse, underscoring their prioritization of faith and submission. The use of “love” as the central theme is paradoxical, as it contrasts starkly with the group’s violent practices, such as executions framed as spiritual liberation. This linguistic tension exposes the duality of their ideology: an outward message of compassion masking an inward culture of fear and discipline. By placing this mural prominently in public spaces, the Seraphite leadership asserts dominance over physical and mental landscapes, emphasizing their control while marginalizing dissenting voices or alternative belief systems. The repetition of this message further normalizes the Prophet’s authority, shaping collective consciousness and aligning individual identities with the community’s rigid dogma.

b. “May She Guide You”

The mural “May She Guide You” reflects the Seraphites’ ideology of dependence on the Prophet’s divine wisdom and omnipresent authority. This phrase can be understood as a linguistic marker of submission, where the subjunctive “may” implies both reverence and an acknowledgment of human limitation without her guidance. The word “guide” constructs the Prophet as an all-knowing, benevolent leader, aligning her with archetypes of maternal care and spiritual direction. This reinforces the Seraphites’ hierarchical power dynamics, wherein the Prophet’s teachings are presented as the singular path to righteousness. The phrase’s passive tone, combined with its frequent placement in highly visible areas, reflects its dual purpose as both a communal prayer and a behavioral prescription, subtly reminding followers of their moral and ideological obligations. Furthermore, its ubiquity in Seraphite-controlled spaces transforms it into a symbol of territorial dominance, asserting their presence while erasing or marginalizing competing narratives, such as those of the WLF. The mural thus functions as an ideological anchor,

perpetuating the Prophet's mythos while embedding her authority into the social fabric of the group's environment.

2. Key Dialogues

a. Abby, Lev, and Yara after escaping the Seraphites injured:

Abby: "Grab any supplies you find."

Lev: "We can't touch this stuff. It's Old World."

Lev's remark reflects the Seraphites' ideological rejection of pre-apocalyptic technology such as medical resources, perceived as sinful or corrupt. This stance signifies a deliberate distancing from the past, positioning the Seraphites as proponents of a purist lifestyle. However, this rejection also introduces practical limitations, potentially hindering their survival capabilities in a world where such resources could be advantageous.

b. Abby and Lev leaving the skyscraper elevator:

Abby: "I thought you're anti-electricity and all that sinful Old World stuff."

Lev: "There are exceptions... especially for soldiers."

Abby: "That's convenient."

This exchange highlights the tension between the Seraphites' ideological rejection of modernity and their pragmatic adaptations. The allowance of exceptions for soldiers exposes inconsistencies within their belief systems, suggesting that power and survival can lead to ideological compromises. Abby's remark, "That's convenient," underscores the hypocrisy in selectively applying their principles, revealing cracks in their moral absolutism and questioning the legitimacy of their authority.

c. Yara's punishment by the Seraphites:

After Lev's defiance through head-shaving, Yara's arm is broken with the phrase "*Clip her wings!*". The "wings" metaphor can be seen as a loss of freedom or autonomy, reflecting punitive measures tied to the Seraphites' strict dogma. This act of enforced conformity serves as a mechanism of control, deterring dissent and reinforcing hierarchical authority. The severity of the punishment also illustrates the

group's commitment to maintaining social order through coercive means, potentially critiquing the oppressive nature of extremist ideologies.

d. Seraphite execution of a WLF soldier:

Seraphite: "They are nested with sin. Free them..."

In this one particularly chilling scene, a Seraphite executes a WLF soldier with the utterance, "They are nested with sin. Free them..." This moment is emblematic of the way in which killing is reframed not as an act of senseless violence but as a form of spiritual liberation, a necessary purification process designed to free the sinner from the corrupt clutches of modernity. The Seraphites, through such rhetoric, construct a moral universe in which death is sacralized and violence is sanctified as an expression of divine will. This portrayal of execution as a sacramental act reinforces the cult's dogmatic focus on purity and sacrifice. It not only legitimizes brutality within the confines of its belief systems but also creates an environment where the use of violence becomes a ritualistic reaffirmation of their collective identity and a tool for enforcing social conformity.

The Seraphites' ritual of sanctified violence epitomizes a process of deliberate othering, in which the cult's members construct the WLF soldier as an irredeemably tainted outsider, thereby reinforcing their own purity and cohesion (Bandopadhyay, 2021; Jensen, 2011). By labeling the enemy as "nesting with sin," they invoke a binary worldview that casts the in-group as inherently sacred and the out-group as profane, a mechanism identified as essential to creating and maintaining social boundaries (AbdulMagied, 2022; Bandopadhyay, 2021). This vilification operates through discriminatory epistemic violence, stripping the Other of moral standing and excluding them from the community of reciprocal recognition (Bunch, 2015; Singh, 2019). Such dehumanization is not merely rhetorical: it primes members to accept, and even celebrate, extreme cruelty as a necessary act of purification (Jensen, 2011; AbdulMagied, 2022). Historical analogues abound, from colonial administrators' depiction of subjugated populations as "barbaric" and "unfit" to govern themselves (Singh, 2019; Bandopadhyay, 2021) to the caste-based segregation that branded Dalits "untouchable" and unworthy of basic rights (Bunch, 2015; AbdulMagied, 2022). In each case, a demonized Other becomes a rallying point, galvanizing group solidarity

around a shared mission to expunge impurity (Jensen, 2011; Singh, 2019). The Seraphites' invocation of sin as a tangible contaminant thus mirrors these real-world atrocities, revealing how dogmatic extremism weaponizes Othering to legitimize systemic oppression (Bandopadhyay, 2021; Bunch, 2015).

3. Artifacts (Notes) Related to Seraphites – Seattle Day 1

a. Prayer for Victory

"Prophet - I am a good soldier. I have freed two Wolves in your name. I will send you many more. Please honor me by letting me live long enough to see your salvation spread across this land."

The term "freed" refers to killing, conceptualizing violence as a means of releasing victims from perceived sins. This demonstrates the Seraphites' reliance on Old World teachings while rejecting its technologies, indicating a selective appropriation of past ideologies to serve contemporary objectives. Such selective adherence may critique the malleability of religious interpretations when leveraged for power consolidation.

b. Seraphite Prayer to Prophet – Respect

"My Prophet - my wants are few, my needs are simple. But my hands are clumsy, and I am unable to contribute to the efforts of our village: mending, forging, building. I ask you grant me these abilities, that I might be productive and respected."

This prayer reflects an individual's desire for societal acceptance through productivity, highlighting the Seraphites' emphasis on communal contribution. The supplicant's self-deprecation underscores internalized expectations of utility, suggesting a social structure that values individuals based on their functional roles. Such dynamics may critique societies that prioritize productivity over individual well-being.

c. Seraphite Prayer to Prophet – Steed

"My Prophet - I wish to rejoin the hunts. May you grant my wish for a new steed, swift and strong, a new saddle, and a new bridle."

The supplicant's request to rejoin the hunts indicates a desire to regain a position of active participation within the community. This reflects the Seraphites' valorization of hunting as a means of sustenance and communal bonding. The reliance on traditional methods, such as horseback hunting, further emphasizes their rejection of modern technologies.

d. Seraphite Prayer to Prophet – Prosperity

"My Prophet - May you bring your children prosperity and strength that we might cleanse the world of its sickness and start anew."

The plea for prosperity and strength to cleanse the world of its sickness indicates a mission-oriented mindset aimed at purging perceived corruption. This reflects a zealous commitment to their cause, justifying expansionist or aggressive actions as a form of purification, thereby legitimizing their dominance over others.

e. Seraphite Prayer to Prophet – Pairing

"My Prophet - May you grant the Elders the wisdom to pair me with Edmund. He is strong and capable, tender and kind. I long to bear his children."

This prayer reveals the role of elders in dictating personal relationships, signifying a rigid hierarchical structure within the Seraphite community. The emphasis on Edmund's strength and capability reflects societal values that prioritize physical and utilitarian attributes in potential partners. The supplicant's longing to bear children underscores the gendered expectations placed on women, reinforcing traditional family roles that align with their belief systems. This hierarchical matchmaking dynamic critiques the lack of personal agency, illustrating how the Seraphites' doctrines prioritize collective harmony over individual desires.

f. Seraphite Prayer to Prophet – Peace

"My Prophet - Perhaps what I ask is impossible, but I must ask: bless the Wolves with your insight, wisdom, and love, that they might renounce their selfish ways and lay down their arms. May you bring peace to this world."

Context: This prayer for peace contrasts sharply with the Seraphites' violent practices, highlighting a dissonance between their ideals and actions. While the supplicant expresses hope for reconciliation, the Seraphite leadership's actions, such

as executing perceived sinners, betray this aspiration. This tension critiques the inherent contradictions in ideologically driven communities, where lofty principles are often undermined by their implementation. The prayer also reflects the agency of individual members who might hold more nuanced or empathetic views compared to their leadership, emphasizing the diversity of thought even within dogmatic groups.

g. WLF Soldier Meets Prophet Letter

“Cam -

Thanks for the note, appreciate it. Can't wait to see you again. Meanwhile, I'm still stuck guarding the Scar "prophet."

I didn't tell you this... but on the last shift I talked to her! I asked her why is she doing this? Why doesn't she ask her people to lay down their arms?

She started off with the usual Scar bs - how we need to go back to nature, talked a bunch about the reliance we have on machines. But then she said she doesn't want a war. That Outbreak Day was a wake up call, but not all of us woke up. Or something like that.

It was just getting interesting when fucking Lewis walks in and gives me shit about talking to her. But when he started screaming at her, she just smiled back at him. Even when they moved her cells and the other guards were calling her names and pushing her around, she just kept that calm smile. It was spooky.

Everyone says she's crazy. But I'll tell you what: After hanging out with her, I get what she's saying. Don't get me wrong, I think her followers are fucking loons. But she has a way about her that draws you in.

I hear rumblings that they want to move her to a more secure location.

See you back home - be careful.

Sally”

The letter hints at the Prophet's charisma and ability to inspire devotion even in her captors. Her calm demeanor and persuasive words are indicative of a leader who wields influence not only through ideology but also through personal charm. This depiction complicates the narrative surrounding the Seraphites, suggesting that their power is rooted as much in the Prophet's magnetic presence as in their doctrines. The letter also underscores the relational dynamics between the WLF and the

Seraphites, highlighting mutual dehumanization through labels like "Scars," which perpetuates the cycle of violence and alienation.

4. Artifacts (Notes) Related to Seraphites – Seattle Day 3

a. Venison Distribution Note

“Marcus -

Distribute the venison as follows -

Tenderloin, rump - Elder Duncan

Sirloin, shank, round - Elder Constance

Backstrap - Walter. He's to be rewarded for his crop yield.

Brisket, ribs - Harper and her family. Elder Duncan wants her rewarded for leading the raid on the Wolf compound last month

Shoulder, remainder- Teacher Lyra and her family

Also, August requested the skin. He promised to have Ezra forge new boning knives for us in return, make sure he fulfills his end of the bargain. Give the antlers to whomever you feel deserves them.

May she guide you.

Lucia”

This note reveals the structured hierarchy within the Seraphite community, where resources are distributed based on status and contributions. Elders and contributors to communal success are prioritized, reflecting a meritocratic yet stratified system. The specificity in allocating food portions emphasizes the meticulous regulation of resources, likely a necessity in their survivalist context. However, this structured distribution also highlights power dynamics, where leadership and high-ranking members receive preferential treatment, reinforcing their authority. This hierarchy critiques how resource allocation often mirrors social inequalities, even in ideologically egalitarian societies.

D. Critical Discourse Analysis Summary of the Seraphites

The language and imagery employed, ranging from murals like “Feel Her Love!” and “May She Guide You” to the scripted dialogues among characters serve as instruments of both communal cohesion and control. Fairclough’s (2003, as cited in Aji, 2021) framework is

particularly instructive here, as it highlights how everyday linguistic practices can be harnessed to reinforce hierarchical power structures. The seemingly benign slogans are loaded with directive imperatives that not only encourage emotional submission but also normalize the Seraphites' radical ideologies.

Kwan's (2017) examination of identity politics in video games further enriches this analysis. Her insights into the marginalization of dissenting voices and the privileging of specific identities are evident in the selective application of doctrine within the Seraphite community. For instance, the discursive tension revealed in dialogues where pragmatic needs clash with ideological rigidity exposes the inherent contradictions of an extremist narrative. Such contradictions, when mapped onto the broader power dynamics of the game's narrative, suggest that the Seraphites are both a product of and a commentary on the socio-political forces that shape digital storytelling.

Throughout their narrative, the Seraphites enact a cultic ideology that sacralizes violence as a ritual of purification, thereby reaffirming group identity through shared participation in brutality. This framing aligns with Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence, where powerholders impose norms so deeply that they appear self-evident, here, the notion that outsiders embody sin is accepted without question (Bunch, 2015; Bunch, 2015). The cult's language employs testimonial epistemic violence, systematically undermining the credibility of any dissenting voice by casting outsiders as untrustworthy and voiceless (Bunch, 2015; Fricker, 2013).

By defining enemies as "ensnared by modern sins," the Seraphites construct an in-group bound by shared purity and an out-group defined solely by deficiency, echoing AbdulMagied's observation that Othering "creates the notion of becoming socially excluded" through stigmatization of identity (AbdulMagied, 2022). This exclusionary rhetoric not only rationalizes exclusion and violence but also fosters internal solidarity through a clear demarcation of belonging.

Bandopadhyay argues that genuine comparative thought prizes parity and mutual respect, yet the Seraphites invert this principle to forge an ideological monoculture, suppressing difference in service of sameness (Bandopadhyay, 2021). Their discourse exemplifies how fanatic movements can corrupt the comparative impulse, using it instead to entrench hierarchies.

Jensen's analysis of resistance highlights two forms of agency in the face of Othering, capitalization and refusal. While some might exploit stigmatized identities to gain leverage, others disidentify entirely, rejecting imposed roles (Jensen, 2011). The Seraphites' doctrine allows no such agency: disagreement equates to heresy, and so violence becomes both sanction and silencing.

Singh's work on colonial epistemologies underscores how dogmatic discourses erase alternative knowledge systems, portraying them as threats to a monolithic worldview (Singh, 2019). In mirroring these historical patterns, the Seraphites weaponize Othering to legitimate systemic oppression, demonstrating the inherent dangers of dogmatic extremism.

The artifacts and notes, including ritual prayers and resource distribution records, function as micro-texts that articulate the internal hierarchies and meritocratic yet stratified social order of the group. These documents not only mirror the ideological imperatives outlined by Fairclough (2003) but also resonate with Kwan's (2017) critique of how power and representation are constructed and contested within the gaming narrative. They reveal that the symbolic language of the Seraphites is a deliberate tool for both preserving cultural identity and legitimizing the authority of their leadership.

Focusing on how language and narrative structures work to privilege certain voices while marginalizing others, this analysis reveals that privilege is not an external imposition but an internally constructed phenomenon within the group. Ordinary members, while integral to the daily rituals and collective identity of the Seraphites, operate at a basic level of status; however, a clear hierarchical stratification emerges as one moves upward: soldiers are distinctly empowered by their sanctioned access to firearms, positioning them as the protectors and enforcers of the community's ideologies, and above all, the elders are granted preferential access to resources and decision-making power, thereby cementing their authority. This internal hierarchy, in turn, reinforces a system of exclusion whereby individuals outside the inner circle, those lacking the dual advantages of martial and administrative privilege, are systematically deprived of both protection and critical resources. Furthermore, the Seraphites sustain their social hierarchy through othering, systematically dehumanizing non-conformists to legitimize concentrated power. Discursively, dissenters are cast as morally deficient, unworthy of empathy or dialogue, a tactic akin to distributive epistemic violence, where resources of recognition and representation are withheld from the Other (Bunch, 2015; AbdulMagied, 2022). This process not only cements elite authority by portraying challengers

as threats to communal purity but also perpetuates rigid social orders, ensuring that dominance remains in the hands of the few. Comparable dynamics have been documented in ethnographic studies of marginalized groups who, when faced with intersectional Othering, either capitalize on stigmatized identities or refuse imposed roles through acts of disidentification (Jensen, 2011). By denying the humanity of the fringe, the Seraphites reinforce their ideological foundations of exclusion and control, highlighting how discursive mechanisms of Othering perpetuate power imbalances in both imagined cults and real-world societies (Bandopadhyay, 2021; Singh, 2019).

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

A. Summary

The findings of this study reveal that the representation of the Seraphites in “The Last of Us Part II” is a multifaceted narrative device that plays a crucial role in constructing the game’s meaning. Through a detailed semiotic analysis, the research demonstrates how the Seraphites’ visual and material culture, ranging from the hand-carved whittled statue, traditional weaponry, and austere clothing to the deliberately chosen environments, serves as a repository of both denotative and connotative meanings. As Barthes’ theory of signification (1977, as cited in Ginting, 2021) suggests, these signifiers not only convey literal functions but also encode deeper ideological stances. The deliberate rejection of modernity, evident in their primitive tools and muted aesthetic, underscores a broader cultural critique embedded in the game’s narrative. This approach aligns with the multimodal framework proposed by Jewitt (2013) and further expanded by Toh (2015), emphasizing that the integration of diverse visual and linguistic modes is essential to understand how meaning is constructed in video games.

In conjunction with the semiotic findings, the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) unveils how language and imagery function as mechanisms of power and control within the Seraphite community. Analysis of murals, graffiti, key dialogues, and ritualistic artifacts exposes a sophisticated interplay between ideological reinforcement and social regulation. For instance, slogans such as “Feel Her Love!” and “May She Guide You” not only act as communal mantras but also serve to assert the Prophet’s authority while marginalizing dissenting perspectives. These discursive elements reveal the inherent tensions and contradictions within the faction’s ideology, highlighting how selective adherence to anti-modernity rhetoric facilitates both solidarity and social control. This insight echoes Kwan’s (2017) critical examination of power dynamics in video game narratives, thereby situating the Seraphites as a pivotal element in the game’s broader discourse on identity and control.

The Seraphites’ rejection of modernity reveals a distinctly neo-Luddite orientation, in which the wholesale repudiation of industrial technology is tempered by selective, tactical exceptions. Denial of firearms to most members, alongside ritualistic use of primitive weaponry and handcrafted artifacts, underscores an ideological commitment to pre-industrial

craftsmanship and communal self-sufficiency, yet the allowance of firearms for designated “soldiers” exposes a pragmatic flexibility that echoes contemporary neo-Luddite movements’ “moderate and/or inconsistent rejection” of technology (Kryszczuk & Wenzel, 2017). This dual stance mobilizes traditional tools as symbols of purity and resistance while preserving the group’s survival capacity, an adaptive compromise that parallels digital-era anxieties about technological overreach even as certain innovations are retained for strategic gain.

Concurrently, the Seraphites enact a process of Othering that sacralizes violence and reinforces in-group cohesion through dehumanizing rhetoric. Labeling adversaries as “nested with sin” and framing executions as acts of “spiritual liberation” constructs a binary between the sacred community and a profane out-group, justifying extreme cruelty as a purifying necessity (Bandopadhyay, 2021; Jensen, 2011). Murals, whistles, and public declarations function not only as communicative tools but also as instruments of epistemic exclusion, erasing rival narratives and institutionalizing the Prophet’s authority in both physical and cognitive landscapes. This discursive Othering cements social boundaries and legitimizes coercive measures, illustrating how ideological purity and communal identity are maintained through systematic marginalization.

By integrating these analytical approaches, the study directly addresses the research question: *How does the semiotic and discursive representation of the Seraphites shape their group ideology and construct a narrative of othering in The Last of Us Part II?* The evidence shows that the Seraphites are not merely peripheral antagonists but serve as a critical counterpoint to the game’s other factions. Their symbolic representation, rich in both visual signifiers and discursive power, enriches the narrative by inviting players to question the underlying socio-cultural and ideological forces at play in the post-apocalyptic setting. This nuanced portrayal deepens the narrative complexity of “The Last of Us Part II”, compelling audiences to engage with themes of purity, resistance, and moral ambiguity, and thereby prompting a reflective examination of modernity and its discontents, as supported by studies like those of Kurniawan & Ryan (2017).

The Seraphites’ multifaceted representation plays an essential role in the game’s storytelling. Their symbolic language, crafted through a careful interplay of visual cues and critical discourse, not only reinforces communal identity and hierarchical power but also challenges players to critically interpret the intertwined narratives of survival, ideology, and resistance. These findings contribute to a growing body of literature that recognizes video

games as complex sites of meaning-making, providing a robust framework for future research into how interactive media use multimodal strategies to shape cultural and ideological narratives.

B. Research Limitations

This study's reliance on a multimodal framework that integrates both semiotic analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) introduces an inherent level of subjectivity. As noted by Barthes (1977, as cited in Ginting, 2021), the process of signification relies on the researcher's interpretative lens, which means that the identification and decoding of visual cues, ritualistic artifacts, and discursive elements may vary across different analysts. Armayanti (2019) argues that since CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis) is primarily concerned with the language environment, its success can be evaluated through a radical assessment of language. Speakers of a language use their beliefs, positions, and ideas to shape and convey spoken texts, such as conversations. This subjectivity can influence the consistency and replicability of the findings, as interpretations of symbols and language are inevitably colored by personal perspectives and contextual understandings. Furthermore, the extensive focus on the Seraphites, as a singular faction within "The Last of Us Part II", narrows the scope of the research, potentially limiting the broader applicability of the conclusions to other narrative elements or similar gaming environments.

In addition, the study's methodological choices constrain its ability to capture the full complexity of player experience and community interpretation. The data collection is primarily based on selected in-game footage and artifacts, which may not encompass the myriad ways in which diverse players engage with and interpret the symbolic language of the game. This limitation is compounded by the absence of quantitative measures or direct audience feedback, which could otherwise validate and enrich the qualitative insights derived from the analysis. As a result, while the study provides a deep dive into the cultural and ideological dimensions of the Seraphites' representation, its findings should be contextualized within these methodological boundaries and understood as part of a broader, ongoing discourse in video game studies.

C. Recommendations

To address these limitations and build upon the current findings, future research should consider adopting a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative analyses. Integrating direct audience engagement methods, such as player surveys, focus groups, or even ethnographic studies, would provide empirical data that can validate and complement the interpretative findings from semiotic and discourse analyses. Such a triangulated approach could offer a more nuanced picture of how players perceive the symbolic representations of factions like the Seraphites, thereby reducing the subjectivity inherent in purely qualitative research. Moreover, incorporating statistical analysis of player feedback could help identify patterns and correlations that enrich our understanding of the game's narrative impact. This could be paired with a developer-focused analysis, examining published interviews, art books, and behind-the-scenes documentaries from Naughty Dog to better understand the authorial intent behind the Seraphites' design and narrative function. Such a dual approach would create a richer understanding by bridging the gap between the game as a created text and a lived experience.

Expanding the scope of research to include comparative studies is also strongly advised. Future research could analyze multiple factions within "The Last of Us Part II" or extend similar analytical frameworks to other narrative-driven video games. This broader comparative approach would enhance the generalizability of the findings and allow researchers to explore whether similar symbolic and ideological constructions are at work across different contexts. Additionally, applying alternative theoretical perspectives, such as reception theory or post-structuralist frameworks, could uncover further dimensions of meaning-making, particularly in how narratives are experienced and reinterpreted over time. By embracing a more holistic research design, subsequent studies would not only validate the current study's conclusions but also contribute to a richer, more dynamic understanding of how interactive media construct and convey complex cultural and ideological narratives, extending the insights offered by Kwan (2017) and other scholars.

Given the release of the HBO adaptation mentioned at the start, a comparative study would be valuable. It could track how the depiction of the Seraphites changes across media (from game to television) and how audience interpretations evolve over time, offering rich data on transmedia storytelling and adaptation. It shows how narrative themes of othering and

ideological extremism are translated, altered, or emphasized when moving from an interactive to a passive medium.

GLOSSARY

Term	Definition
NPC (Non-Player Character)	A character in a game controlled by the software rather than by a human player.
Chapter	A self-contained segment or level of a game’s narrative, often with its own objectives and environment.
Menu	The screen that offers navigation to start a game, load a save, adjust settings, or access extras.
Crafting	A mechanic allowing players to combine resources to create items, such as weapons, tools, or health kits, necessary for survival or progression.
Collectible	An item scattered throughout the game world that players gather to unlock backstory, achievements, or gameplay bonuses.
Jackson Community	Peaceful survivor town where Ellie lives.
Washington Liberation Front (WLF)	Paramilitary group in Seattle, also called Wolves.
Seraphites (Scars)	Religious cult opposing modern technology.
Fireflies	Rebel group seeking to restore government.
Rattlers	Sadistic slavers found near Santa Barbara.
Federal Disaster Response Agency (FEDRA)	Military authority pre-outbreak; seen mostly in flashbacks.

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