

I Passed Away, but I Can Live Again: The Narrative Contextualization of Death in Dead Cells and Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice

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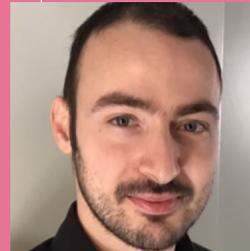
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Matteo Genovesi achieved his PhD in Art History and Audiovisual Studies at the University of Udine, where he developed a thesis focused on narrative seriality and interactive storytelling in digital games. He later expanded his dissertation in his monograph *Serial Games – Seriality and moral choices in interactive narrative* (original: *Serial Games – Serialità e scelte morali nella narrazione interattiva*), published in August 2020 by Idra Editing in the book series *Conscious Gaming. Manuals of video game culture* (original: *Conscious Gaming. Manuali di cultura del videogioco*). He has written essays on game studies in various peer-reviewed academic journals, such as *Cinergie*, *H-ermes*, *Elephant & Castle*, *Digra.org* and *Open Cultural Studies*. He has participated as a speaker in many national and international conferences. He has taught the theoretical and practical aspects of game writing at the University of Salento and in various high schools in Friuli Venezia Giulia. He is now an independent researcher, who continues to investigate storytelling techniques in digital games.

ABSTRACT:

In digital games, the player's activity often includes a necessary repetition to achieve an appropriate knowledge of the game's mechanics and dynamics. This process can involve various failures of the player. Even if a digital game can be theoretically completed without failures, the player must practically learn from every mistake, which often corresponds to the death of the main character. Every avatar constantly lives in a vulnerable existence that includes its death during the gameplay. If a character can be vulnerable, the player can be inadequate, but digital games always provide a chance of redemption, and a failure becomes a necessary step on the path to further growth. On the basis of various Italian and other international scientific contributions on the themes of failure and death in digital games, the following essay will analyse two different case studies: *Dead Cells* and *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice*. In these titles, death is not only a necessary part of the gameplay, but it also becomes a focal concept of the storytelling thanks to two different principles which will underline specific modes to emphasize the narrative importance of death and failure in the digital game medium.

KEY WORDS:

death, death in *Dead Cells*, digital games, emerging elements, environmental storytelling, failure, hidden fragments, *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice*.

Introduction

Game Over. Players usually read this phrase many times, knowing the game is not over at all. As J. Juul claims, "while games uniquely induce such feelings of being inadequate, they also motivate us to play more in order to escape the same inadequacy, and the feeling of escaping failure (often by improving our skills) is central to the enjoyment of games"¹. This statement underlines that even if players fail, again and again, they can be stimulated to play more to develop their skills and avoid potential future failures. J. Juul argues that failure is a core part of the overall experience of playing a game, which can have a paradoxical motivating power and can stimulate every player to continue in a 'failure improvement cycle'.² The implicit stimulation of learning by failing in playful activities has been discussed by other Italian and International experts, such as M. Bittanti,³ J. McGonigal⁴ and D. Melhart.⁵ Despite different methodologies, researchers agree that to achieve a detailed knowledge of a game, players must repeat their performance to master their skills. In digital games, specifically, the concept of failure often involves the death of the main character. Every avatar continually lives in a paradoxical existence condition that implies its death and resurrection during the gameplay. As R. F. Nohr argues, if

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- 1 JUUL, J.: *The Art of Failure: An Essay on the Pain of Playing Video Games*. Cambridge : MIT Press, 2013, p. 7.
 - 2 Ibidem, p. 60.
 - 3 ADOLGISO, A.: *Enterprise: Voci dallo Spazio*. [online]. [2021-10-12]. Available at: <https://www.adolgiso.it/enterprise/matteo_bittanti.asp>.
 - 4 MCGONIGAL, J.: *La realtà in gioco. Perché i giochi ci rendono migliori e come possono cambiare il mondo*. Milan : Apogeo, 2011, p. 69-82.
 - 5 See also: MELHART, D.: Towards a Comprehensive Model of Mediating Frustration in Videogames. In *Game Studies*, 2018, Vol. 18, No. 1. [online]. [2021-10-12]. Available at: <http://gamestudies.org/1801/articles/david_melhart>.

a character can be vulnerable, the player can be inadequate, but digital games always provide a chance of redemption, and the failure becomes a necessary step on a “self-optimisation” path.⁶

Despite the essential ludic ability improvement of the player, the concept of death in digital games can have many contextualised functions. This essay will consider two different video games, *Dead Cells*⁷ and *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice*⁸, in which death is not only a necessary part of their gameplay, but it also becomes a focal part of their storytelling. The focalisation on death is etymologically underlined in the titles of these digital games born in two different contexts: *Dead Cells* is an indie game⁹ by a small team of developers, while *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice* is a huge production from a massive Japanese studio. These two cases will be analysed through a textual approach focused on their structural configuration of spaces and the players' possibility to evoke narrative by moving inside them after every death. With a combination of pre-existing theories by academic researchers on spatial representation in the digital game medium and the developers' approach to level design of the two case studies, this essay will underline two different principles, namely *emerging elements*, and *hidden fragments*. The purpose is to demonstrate that these two principles can stimulate players to accept the event of death/failure in video games and overcome it to reinforce their knowledge.

The Procedural Generation of Emerging Elements in *Dead Cells*

Dead Cells is a two-dimensional side scroller action game based on a pixel art aesthetic and a procedural system for its level design: the player controls a mass of cells that occupy the body of a deceased and innominate warrior without memory, who must escape from a strange castle full of aggressive creatures. Every time the protagonist dies, the cells of its body can recreate the warrior in the prison, which is the first room of the castle; so, the player must begin from the start, and the structure of the castle changes with every new run for mysterious reasons. Even if the names of the macro zones do not change from one run to another, the progression is widely different, so as for the environmental composition of every zone, which can paradoxically be familiar and unknown after every death.

As the lead game designer, S. Bénard, explains, the small team decided to go for fully randomly generated spaces with some common structural aspects: for example, in a level, they know that at every generation there will be an entrance, eight rooms, and two exits, but the specific enemies, the environmental contents, and the usable weapons in each sin-

6 NOHR, R. F.: Restart after Death: Self-optimizing, Normalism and Re-entry in Computer Games. In OUELLETTE, M., THOMPSON, J. (eds.): *The Game Culture Reader*. Cambridge : Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012, p. 67.

7 MOTION TWIN: *Dead Cells*. [digital game]. Bordeaux : Motion Twin, 2017.

8 FROM SOFTWARE: *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice*. [digital game]. Tokyo : Activision, 2019.

9 Remark by the author: Even if the term 'indie game' is commonly related to a digital game created by a small number of developers without a publisher, the etymology of this terminology is more complex. For more information, see: GARDA, M. B., GRABARCZYK, P.: Is Every Indie Game Independent? Towards the Concept of Independent Game. In *Game Studies*, 2016, Vol. 16, No. 1. [online]. [2021-10-12]. Available at: <<http://gamestudies.org/1601/articles/gardagrabczyk>>.

gle room change each time.¹⁰ This procedural level design leads to what S. Bénard considers the gameplay's three pillars: *combat*, *progression*, and *replayability*.¹¹ In fact, even if players must start again from the beginning of the castle after the avatar's death, they can have a different experience every time because of the mutation of the environment and the different combination of weapons inside it. Death becomes a paradoxical opportunity to progress in the game since in every run count: when the protagonist kills a creature, it can collect the cells of the enemy, which can be used in a huge shop inside the first room of the castle. This shop is only reachable by dying since the game does not allow backtracking to previous levels. Unlike shops that the player can find during the progression, which contain a relatively small number of accessories, the shop in the first castle's room is full of a vast range of weapons and general upgrades capable of reinforcing the protagonist.

The collection of different and more powerful gadgets is fundamental to reaching the perfect run in which the warrior can kill the final boss. *Dead Cells* is a game in which the player's ability is mainly based on the capacity to combine different types of weapons to facilitate the progression with every new run. In fact, as S. Bénard explains, the mechanics of *Dead Cells* are designed to help the player with movements during exploration and the various fights, in which the warrior automatically reach ledges while jumping and attacks in the opponent's direction.¹² These hidden tips facilitate the dynamics throughout the entire game, so it is up to the players to figure out the best weapons to use and in what combination, depending on their actual equipment. The incessant death of the warrior and the mutation of the castle offer not only the possibility to collect more weapons and try to progress but also to try to imagine a global narrative context. S. Bénard argued in various interviews that the developers did not build a specific storyline for their game because it would have been so hard to fit in with the procedural generation of levels. Despite that, they wanted to implement some potential narrative aspects to create an overall story with some strange and non-explained events.¹³

In fact, on every run, it is possible to meet various characters who can talk to the warrior, and environmental elements which can represent potential clues to build a global narrative that can potentially explain the mysterious changes of the castle as well for the background of the protagonist and its constant resurrections. For example, after the first death, a woman appears near the prison of the castle, and she says to the main character: "Anyway, it must be strange to be back from the dead... [...] I don't really understand it. [...]. But you're not the first to find yourself in this situation, if that's what you want to know..."¹⁴ The protagonist is not able to answer since it cannot talk, but in the following progression, it can find various other clues and makes hypotheses about them. Another example: in a room, the main character can find a letter which talks about a mysterious plague, and it thinks "Maybe the guard who wrote this letter... and didn't survive".¹⁵

The procedural generation of spaces can evoke every possible clue in a random order, so the player has to collect and unify these clues to understand a global narrative context. In order to do that, the player has to interact with each possible clue in the virtual space by pressing a button when there is a contextual magnifier icon: in the previous two

10 *How Dead Cells Secretly Stops You From Dying | Audio Logs*. Released on 5th May 2019. [online]. [2021-10-12]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LtBNffzWhf4>>.

11 *Dead Cells: What the F*n!?*. Released on 12th June 2019. [online]. [2021-10-12]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfSpBoA6TWw>>.

12 *How Dead Cells Secretly Stops You From Dying | Audio Logs*. Released on 5th May 2019. [online]. [2021-10-12]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LtBNffzWhf4>>.

13 REINER, A.: *Dead Cells' Designer Discusses Scrapped Ideas, Roguelikes, and the Potential for a Sequel*. Released on 30th December 2018. [online]. [2021-10-12]. Available at: <<https://www.gameinformer.com/interview/2018/12/30/dead-cells-designer-discusses-scrapped-ideas-roguelikes-and-the-potential-for>>.

14 MOTION TWIN: *Dead Cells*. [digital game]. Bordeaux : Motion Twin, 2017.

15 Ibidem.

examples, so as for many other similar situations, the protagonist can discover something only if the player decides to press a button to have additional information from characters or environmental elements. Thus, many clues do not depend on pre-scripted cut-scenes, but on the player's willingness to navigate in the procedural spaces with the possibility to find new narrative suggestions on every new run.

As M. Nitsche argues, "game spaces can evoke narratives because the player is making sense of them in order to engage with them. Through a comprehension of signs and interaction with them, the player generates new meaning".¹⁶ The clues implemented in the space to assist the comprehension are what Nitsche calls evocative narrative elements, and their aim "is not to tell a linear story, but to provide evocative means for the interactor to comprehend the virtual space and the events within it, and generate context and significance in order to make the space and the experience of it more meaningful".¹⁷ M. Nitsche is fundamentally talking about environmental storytelling, a process where the narrative is basically incorporated in spaces, and the player has to explore to discover as many evocative narrative elements as possible. This argument is correlated with a reflection from H. Jenkins, who argues that game designers should think about levels as narrative architectures in which the player is free to explore and discover clues to subsequently imagine a story.¹⁸ Starting with H. Jenkins' essay and M. Nitsche's monograph, there have been other international and Italian researchers focused on the concept of environmental storytelling,¹⁹ and they have always emphasized the role of spatiality as a fundamental component for the narrative development of a game.

In *Dead Cells*, the space, as well for its procedural generation, is not only valuable for ludic purposes, but it contains different evocative narrative elements in casual order from one run to another and stimulates the player to collect and make sense of them through the mysterious resurrections of the protagonist. Even if the developers of *Dead Cells* did not think about a specific storyline, the game presents a global narrative context in which some details are discoverable only during the various runs, while other details do not have an implemented explanation. *Dead Cells* is a concrete example of what K. Salen and E. Zimmerman call emergent narrative,²⁰ which means that a huge part of the storyline can be built from the game through exploration and subsequently through single or collaborative imagination. In fact, players worldwide have created a huge ongoing wiki page and many videos in which they try to build an organic narrative by explaining every possible clue, demonstrating the innate propensity of users for immersion in stories, argued among others by F. Rose.²¹

So, *Dead Cells* is a game in which death represents a new possibility to collect new powerful weapons to improve survival chances and collect even more evocative narrative elements to imagine an emergent narrative. As a result, in this game the theme of death emphasizes *emerging elements*, both from a ludic and narrative perspective.

16 NITSCHKE, M.: *Video Game Spaces: Image, Play, and Structure in 3D Game Worlds: Image, Play, and Structure in 3D Worlds*. Cambridge : MIT Press, 2008, p. 3.

17 Ibidem, p. 45.

18 JENKINS, H.: *Game Design as Narrative Architecture*. In HARRIGAN, P., WARDRIP-FRUIIN, N. (eds.): *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*. Cambridge : MIT Press, 2004, p. 121-129.

19 FERNANDEZ-VARA, C.: *Game Spaces Speak Volumes: Indexical Storytelling*. In COPIER, M., WAERN, A., KENNEDY, H. W. (eds.): *DiGRA '11 – Proceedings of the 2011 DiGRA International Conference: Think Design Play*. Hilversum : Digital Games Research Association, 2011, p. 2-11. [online]. [2021-10-12]. Available at: <<http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/Game-Spaces-Speak-Volumes.pdf>>; D'ARMENIO, E.: *Mondi Paralleli. Ripensare l'interattività nei videogiochi*. Milan : Unicopli, 2014, p. 81-151.; PLANELLS DE LA MAZA, A. J.: *Possible Worlds in Video Games: From Classic Narrative to Meaningful Actions*. Pittsburgh : ETC Press, 2017, p. 99-182.

20 SALEN, K., ZIMMERMAN, E.: *Rules of Play. Game Design Fundamentals*. Cambridge : MIT Press, 2003, p. 377-379.

21 For more information, see: ROSE, F.: *The Art of Immersion. How the Digital Generation Is Remaking Hollywood, Madison Avenue, and the Way We Tell Stories*. London, New York : Norton & Company, 2010.

The Embedded Hidden Fragments in Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice

Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice is a third-person three-dimensional action-adventure game that is set in a re-imagined 16th century Sengoku period, with many references to Japanese folklore and Buddhist mythology. The storyline of the game is complex, and even if there is no space here to delve into the entire lore of this case study, it is important to analyse how it can be experienced as a player.

The main character is Wolf, a shinobi who must protect a young lord named Kuro, who has the gift of immortality thanks to a mysterious Dragon's heritage. A few minutes into the game, Wolf must fight against Genichiro, the grandson of a clan lord who wants to kidnap Kuro to take the gift of immortality from his blood so he can regain the Kingdom of Ashina after a tragic war. The fight, both for the protagonist and the player, is unwinnable since Genichiro in this part of the game is much more powerful and skilled than Wolf: as a result, in an inevitable cut-scene, the protagonist loses an arm, gets killed, and Kuro is kidnapped. After this inevitable failure, Wolf comes back from death in an abandoned temple, where an old shinobi gives him a prosthetic arm and explains that the protagonist had previously received the gift of immortality thanks to the Dragon's heritage of Kuro, but he has to pay attention since various resurrections can corrupt his blood with a plague named 'dragon root'. From now on, Wolf begins to search for his young lord in Ashina and other places near it, meeting various mysterious enemies and mystic creatures who want to stop him for initially unclear reasons. Those moments are important anticipators of the overall game, in which death is contextualised both in the gameplay and in the deep narrative. However, there are substantial differences from the overall playing experience of the previously discussed *Dead Cells*.

As the lead game designer M. Yamamura explains in an interview, the gameplay of *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice* is based on the mastery of each possible defence and the attack abilities of the protagonist, on the memorisation of the enemy's movements, and on the acquisition of experience points to learn more combat arts.²² Unlike *Dead Cells*, in this case, the game does not assist the player, who has to learn the dynamics in his/her own way, and it is not based on the collection of weapons, since Wolf can only use a main sword and some improvements for his prosthetic arm. In *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice*, the learning and habit of the combat system imply a necessary repetition of the failure improvement cycle stated by Juul, since even against minor enemies, the player feels constant vulnerability. This is part of the philosophy design of the developer's team, which is used to create very tough games due to the necessity to master the dynamics by patiently repeating some battles and feeling a sense of achievement in the case of victory.²³ In *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice*, the learning of movements and techniques is particularly stimulated by the mandatory fights with bosses, who can seem, like in the initial duel against Genichiro, unstoppable at first. When the protagonist dies in a fight, the player can push a button to resurrect immediately with limited vital resources, but in the case of another death, Wolf cannot come back instantly, and he wakes up near the nearest idol (a symbolic statue that by praying can connect the kingdom of living beings with the kingdom of death entities).

22 *New Gameplay and Details on Creating Sekiro's Combat*. Released on 6th January 2019. [online]. [2021-10-12]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ipBDs0gnPRg>>.

23 *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice Gameplay Interview – IGN Live E3 2018*. Released on 14th June 2018. [online]. [2021-10-12]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TyqZYvbxJLw>>.

As previously mentioned, each death is not without consequences. When Wolf dies many times, his blood can be corrupted by the 'dragon root'. This also afflicts some characters emotionally linked to him and lowers the chances of receiving upgrades for the player, who can remove the plague only by finding some special items through exploring the virtual world. This activity has a significant role in *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice*, both from a ludic and narrative perspective. When Wolf explores the environment, he can reach new zones where there are various optional enemies and bosses: even if they represent a concrete danger, the player is stimulated to engage in fights with them because he/she already knows the 'dragon root' has to be healed, and he/she can also obtain a considerable amount of experience by learning and mastering new techniques which can be potentially useful also against the mandatory bosses.

The exploration is also an integral and essential activity to comprehend the deep narrative: in this digital game, some cut-scenes highlight the main narrative nodes in chronological order, but they are not enough to understand all the lore of *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice*, which can be revealed only by observing clues and experiencing some hidden events in the virtual world. This is basically part of the previously mentioned principle of environmental storytelling. However, unlike the case of *Dead Cells*, in which there are a lot of evocative narrative elements potentially valuable for building an emergent narrative, in *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice*, there are entire areas, characters, and events that represent important integrations to the main narrative line. As the marketing manager Y. Kitao and the producer R. Conkey argue in an interview, the level design wants to build multiple interconnected environments with multiple paths to get to each other, in which the player always has the freedom to move inside it.²⁴ This assertion reflects a peculiar approach to level design by From Software, particularly in the last decade. As D. Vella argues in a most comprehensive reflection on his concept of the ludic sublime in *Dark Souls*²⁵, the Japanese company aims to create perpetual gameworlds, where the player has the impression to navigate inside a sort of labyrinth full of potential lore.²⁶

Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice features an interconnected narrative discoverable in a different order, which is mainly hidden in various optional areas. For example, in a secret cavern inside a sunken valley, there is a giant white sacred snake, and the player can avoid the battle against the creature. However, if the player decides to go deeper into the cavern, there is the possibility to discover a secret item, and pick it up to make the creature vulnerable to a deadly attack. Then, if the player kills the giant snake, there are two rewards: many experience points and another element that will be fundamental to reach one of the possible four endings. Another emblematic example is the location of Hirata Estate, in which Wolf can physically (re)live some of his forgotten memories. To reach this area, the player must find two hidden bells and offer them in the Ashina Outskirts to a Buddha statue, which has the power to transport the protagonist three years in the past. The player can visit Hirata Estate two times: on both occasions, the exploration in that environment and the motivation to face fierce opponents can reveal crucial narrative portions, as the situation in which Wolf dies for the first time, the origin of his power of immortality, and the purposes of his adoptive father. The exploration of Hirata Estate, and the possible victories against the two bosses at the end of each flashback, can give many experience points, and they are also crucial in the steps to reach the best possible epilogue.

24 *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice Gameplay Interview – IGN Live E3 2018*. Released on 14th June 2018. [online]. [2021-10-12]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TyqZYvbxJLw>>.

25 FROM SOFTWARE: *Dark Souls*. [digital game]. Tokyo : Namco Bandai, 2011.

26 VELLA, D.: No Mastery Without Mystery: Dark Souls and the Ludic Sublime. In *Game Studies*, 2015, Vol. 15, No. 1. [online]. [2021-10-12]. Available at: <<http://gamestudies.org/1501/articles/vella>>.

These circumstances emphasize the importance of exploration in Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice, and the sense of ludic and narrative achievement it can induce into a player who wants to discover more and more aspects of the virtual world. As a result, even if some details are capable of players' speculations, the game emphasises an embedded narrative,²⁷ which can be fully understood only by exploring all the huge environments. In fact, as the lead concept designer T. Takahashi confirms in an interview, one of the game's purposes is to stimulate players to look at the world around them and notice some details in places they do not expect and move deeper to discover the reasons behind those details.²⁸ The propensity to do this activity is crucial for the epilogues since the four different endings depend not only on a choice at a certain point of the adventure, but also on the interaction with specific characters in some areas, and on the possession of special items before the final duel. So, Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice is a game in which death represents the beginning of a ludic and narrative progression path, in which the player not only masters the techniques of Wolf but also discovers new areas that deepen the overall embedded and interconnected narrative. As a result, in this game the theme of death emphasizes *hidden fragments*, which give the opportunity to improve the combat abilities and integrate the main storyline with important narrative portions.

Conclusions

Dead Cells and Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice are two different games that contextualise the theme of death both from a ludic and a narrative perspective, but they do so in two different modes, depending on what the player is encouraged to do to avoid new failures and obtain a global sense of achievement. Thus, Dead Cells is mainly based on emerging elements that materialise both in weapons that can facilitate the ludic progression and potentially useful clues to imagine an emerging global narrative. In the other case, Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice is mainly based on hidden fragments that materialise both in dynamics to be learned and in areas that contain conspicuous portions of an environmentally embedded narrative. Even if the two case studies of this essay are important examples of the two above-mentioned principles for their correlation with the theme of death, it is important to state that the procedural creation of emerging elements or the design of spaces as useful narrative hidden fragments is not exclusively correlated to Dead Cells and Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice. They can relate to the development processes of many companies.

The procedural generation of levels and the creation of emerging elements are present in various games developed by independent teams; for example, one of them is *Neon Abyss*²⁹, in which the player controls a soldier who must go into a mutating structure to kill some crazy machines. Another example is the multi-awarded *Hades*³⁰, in which the player controls Zagreus, who repeatedly tries to escape from a mutating Underworld by fighting against other Gods to reach Mount Olympus and discover the truth about its family. The design of spaces as hidden fragments in the main storyline is a common trait of some games developed by From Software, as the previously mentioned Dark Souls (and the

27 SALEN, K., ZIMMERMAN, E.: *Rules of Play. Game Design Fundamentals*. Cambridge : MIT Press, 2003, p. 377-379.

28 *Exclusive Interview on Creating Sekiro's New World*. Released on 19th January 2019. [online]. [2021-06-16]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qKBSMBMFDm>>.

29 VEEWO GAMES: *Neon Abyss*. [digital game]. Xiamen : Team 17, 2020.

30 SUPERGIANT GAMES: *Hades*. [digital game]. San Francisco : Supergiant Games, 2020.

entire following saga) but also of games created by other companies. An example is *Nioh*³¹, which presents another complex narrative based on Japanese folklore; another example is *Remnant from the Ashes*³², which is set in a post-apocalyptic world where some mysterious machines enslave and kill human beings without mercy. Nevertheless, this essay has focused on *Dead Cells* and *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice* because they respectively emphasize the principles of emerging elements and hidden fragments inside virtual worlds in which death and resurrection represent a core concept, both for ludic and narrative purposes.

Therefore, the implementation of emerging elements through a procedural generation of contents can help the development of small teams of people since they do not have to think about a specific narrative to be integrated with the game dynamics, but instead to maintain a global balance during the procedural progression. This means that game programmers and gameplay designers must avoid the system generating the most powerful elements from the beginning, instead making them gradually discoverable to the user. In the other case, creating an embedded narrative through hidden fragments is more related to large companies since it often means metaphorical alchemy among many people specialised in many different areas of development, such as game designers, narrative designers, game writers, map designers, concept artists, environment artists, and more. Despite those differences, the implementation of emerging elements or hidden fragments and the stimulation to discover them after the main character's deaths can be a potential way to remember one of the main aspects of the digital game experience, which can be a sort of metaphor for our own lives: when we get involved in a challenge, we can fail, but failure is only part of a growth path by which we can discover more aspects of ourselves and the world around us, with the implicit promise that if we do not give up, sooner or later, success will come.

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31 KOEI TECMO GAMES: *Nioh*. [digital game]. Yokohama : Koei Tecmo Games, 2017.

32 GUNFIRE GAMES: *Remnant from the Ashes*. [digital game]. Austin : Perfect World Entertainment, 2019.

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