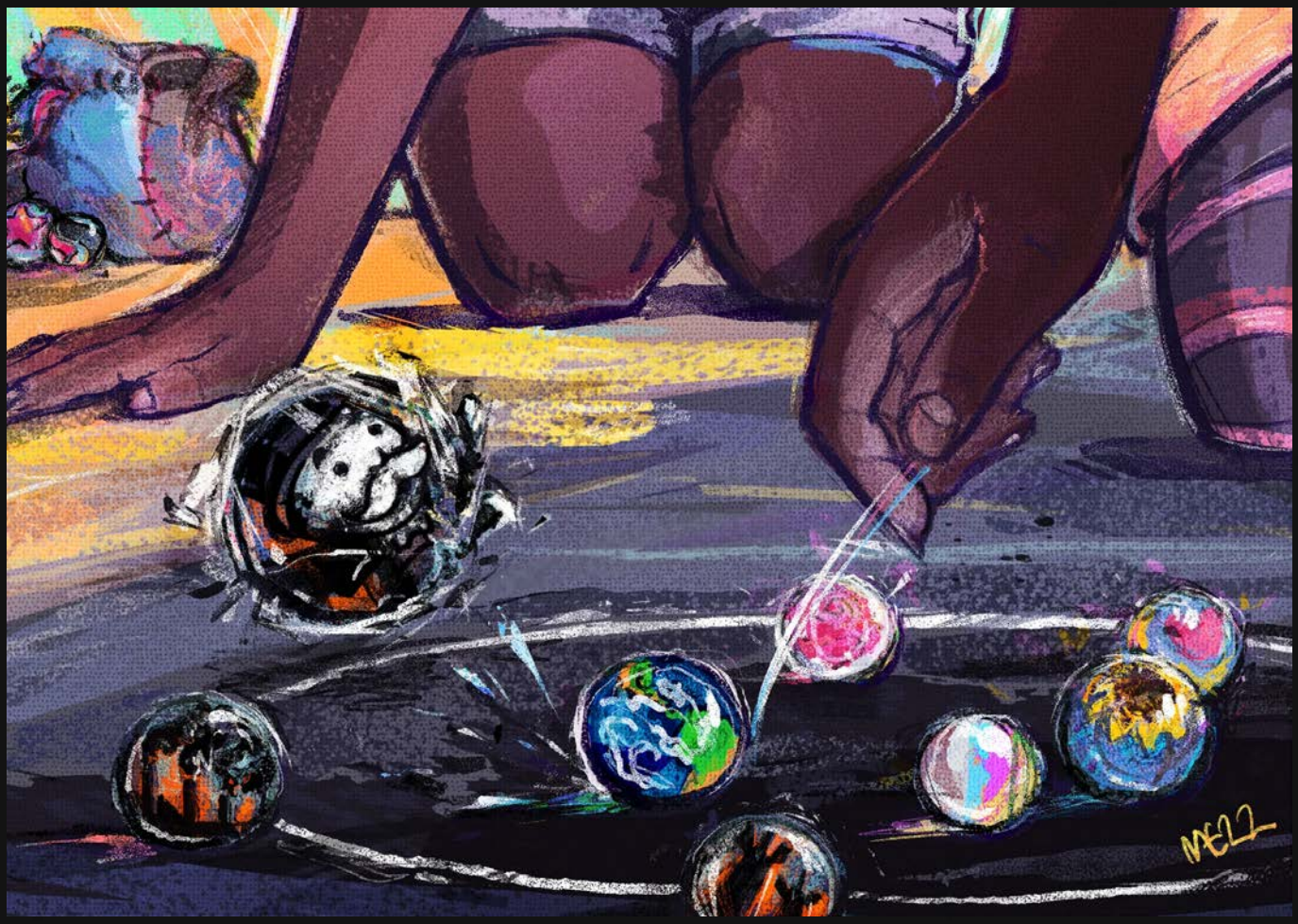
# Conformists



Untitled. Illustration by Mika Edström

Special Issue

# This Time it's for all the Marbles.

# Towards Social Justice in Digital Gaming

edited by

Patrick Prax

# Issue 17 (2022)

This Time it's for all the Marbles. Social Injustice in Digital Gaming. Introduction to the Special Issue

by Patrick Prax, 1-14

**articles**

From Political Economy to Identity Politics: A Forum Study of Political Discussions between Players

by Kristine Jørgensen and Ida Sekanina, 15-57

They Will Do Anything to Make You React: Deplatforming Racists from the Brazilian Gaming Community

by Mayara Araujo Caetano and Beatriz Blanco, 58-98

Cultural Production of Video Games: Conditions of Control and Resistance

by Sian Tomkinson and Tauel Harper, 99-140

International Solidarity Between Game Workers in the Global North and Global South: Reflections on the Challenges Posed by Labor Aristocracy

by Emil Lundedal Hammar, 141-182

From Talking about Loot Boxes to Discussing Political Economy: Conceptualizing Critical Game Literacy

by Patrick Prax, 183-221

Critical Game Literacies and Critical Speculative Imagination: A Theoretical and Conceptual Review
by Matthew Coopilton, 222-273

Gaming against Violence: An Exploration of Video Games as Tools for Sexual Violence Prevention Education
by Kenzie Gordon, 274-313

Counterspace Game Elements for This Pansexual Pilipina-American Player's Joy, Rest, and Healing: An Autethnographic Case Study of *Playing Stardew Valley*
by Erica Cruz, 314-354

Learning About Ourselves: Communicating, Connecting and Contemplating Trans Experience through Play
by Josephine Baird, 355-402

**reports**

Not Space-Ninjas Again! Transmedia Worldbuilding for Social Justice
by Ian Sturrock, 403-427

Seven Levers for Social Change through Games: From *Settlers of Catan* to *Autonomía Zapatista*
by Cati Hernández, Noemí Blanch, Pablo Garaizar, Emiliano Labrador, 428-448

**review**

*Far Cry* 5: Refusing its Own Politics

by Thomas Grønvoll, 449-455

**interview**

Interview with Amanda Warner, designer of *Influence, Inc.*

by Patrick Prax, 455-481

Review

# *Far Cry* 5: Refusing its Own Politics

Thomas Grønvoll

**Abstract**
*Far Cry 5* (2018) gives the *Far Cry* series a well-deserved break from colonial and oriental tropes about the savage barbarians and the western saviour. The game delivers a rural, right-wing power fantasy that leans into MAGA and conspiracy discourse. It is *Red Dawn* (1984) for the modern American culture war and paints the conservative right as the heroes and the left as the villains. You play the role of a police deputy who must defend their home and their neighbours from The Project at Eden's Gate cult, who takes over the county after a failed arrest of the cult's leader. But this game review argues that it is a problematic game, which refuses to reflect and comment upon the political message it sends and the political landscape it places itself into.



**Keywords:** Orientalism, Montana, Racism, Ubisoft, Cult, Conservative, Right-wing, Cultural Imperialism, First Person Shooter, gamevironments

**To cite this article:** Grønvoll. T., 2021. *Far Cry 5*: Refusing its Own Politics. *gamevironments* 17, 449-455. Available at http://www.gamevironments.uni-bremen.de.

## Who Gets to be the Hero?

The *Far Cry* series are action-packed, FPS adventures set in exotic locations that are fictional analogues to formerly colonized cultures. While previous entries to the *Far Cry* series have you take on the role of insurgents and guerrillas, fighting against an oppressive authority, in *Far Cry 5* you play the opposite. You are a police deputy, an enforcer of authority, tasked with defending the local population and the status quo, rather than liberating them. The play-action is the same as in previous games, but the

motivations and the message behind them are dramatically changed.

The player is supposed to take on the role of the hero, but *Far Cry 5* shows that there are limits to whom the series will allow wearing the mantle of a hero. And that perpetuates an occidental vs colonial paradigm, of the oriental/colonial as less than the occidental/colonizing. In a western setting, being the hero means you play the part of the authorities. While in a colonial setting, the hero can never represent the authorities.

In previous games, the player takes on the role of part Indiana Jones, part Colonel Walter E. Kurtz, travelling up the river into the *Heart of Darkness* (Conrad 1902) to escape the savage lands and return to civilization. The status quo of the oriental settings in the *Far Cry* games is always one of chaos and conflict. One which the player, as a representative of the occidental, must escape or dominate. Peace and stability can only be achieved by subjugating the local culture through violence. These are the Janus faces of colonialism; one face worshipping the exotic Otherness, while the other seeking to destroy the Otherness. Thus, the player is both the swashbuckling Indiana Jones – exploring the exotic cultures amidst breathtaking vistas while fighting against tyranny – while also succumbing to violence and darkness as Kurtz, aiming to destroy everything and everyone.



Cultural imperialism becomes apparent and striking. *Far Cry 5* is the only entry where the occidental gaze is turned towards itself, and it refuses to comment upon what it sees.

## Real Life Fantasy

*Far Cry 5* is the series' first entry to not only be placed in an occidental setting, but also a real setting. Hope County might be fictional, but it is a believable enough representation of Montana that Southwest Montana used in their tourism promotions (Usher 2019). The previous games have been excused for playing to their genre conventions, but seeing the same sentiments perpetuated as we leave the fetishizing of the exotic, the problematic issue becomes clear. The series is created by an occidental gaze that makes use of colonial cultures as scenery and props, and not a living culture; safe from criticism through the distance of using a fictional analogue. *Far Cry 5* approaches its setting in the same manner as previous games have approached their fictional settings, but there is no longer the excuse of fictionality. Through the use of a real setting, the game entrenches itself in the political landscape of that setting, making the excuse impossible.



## Political Reality

*Far Cry 5* makes heavy use of the discourse, humour, aesthetics, and tropes of American right-wing conservatives, rednecks, hunters, doomsday preppers, and MAGA devotees, and plays heavily into the political landscape of the United States. But refuses to comment upon or challenge the beliefs that are put into context through this use.

The game does not overtly make racist or right-wing statements, but through the use of these aesthetics, cultural identity markers, and the discourse of the groups used for inspiration, it does so by omission. This makes it stand out that much more. It is akin to building a house and forgoing to build the walls, hoping it will not be noticed and refusing to admit there is something missing when it ultimately is.

The chatter of the locals reflects negative attitudes towards left-wing and progressive beliefs and promote propaganda and conspiracy theories. Statements like *They earned every inch of this land with blood and sweat, and now I gotta lose it to some man-buned little twerp and his posse of inbreeds?* show disdain towards cultural markers that are attributed to the American left-wing demographic, and hints at the sovereign citizen movement's beliefs. And *Yeah, it takes a certain kind of man to defend his home* shows an admiration towards a right-wing view of masculinity. *If the liberals couldn't take my guns these Peggies sure as hell won't!* (Peggies being in-game slang for the game's antagonists; the Project at Eden's Gate cult) perpetuates the American right-wing belief that liberal and democratic voices are coming for their guns. And we are directly told the enemy is *hunting people just like you* (i.e., preppers and sovereign citizens), that American liberals are after their guns and the government is lying to the population.



It is reminiscent of a MAGA or NRA rally, but *Far Cry 5* fails to make any reflections or commentary towards this. And the attempted defence of this as irony, falls flat as the representation is never taken to an extreme that feels out of place with regular expectations of this demographic. *Far Cry 5* also makes the MAGA devotees, the preppers, and the conspiracy theorists *right*. People *were* coming for their guns, for their liberty and their freedom, and thus the game justifies their attitudes.

## Identity Markers

While the game's villains, the Project at Eden's Gate cult, and its leaders take their inspiration from cults such as Jonestown, Branch Davidians, and the Westboro Baptist Church, they are visually inspired by fashion and cultural signifiers that are more often than not associated with an American left-wing demographic and urban youth,

which forms a strange internal dissonance; they inhabit traits of both conservatives – by being a Christianity based extremist cult – and of a culture that is mostly perceived as left-leaning and progressive and often vilified by the conservative voices upon which the *good guys* in the game is based upon. It plays into the political and populist discourse established in American mass media.

By drawing on these cultural identity markers in the design of the opposing forces, in the context of who is given the role of hero and villain, *Far Cry 5* delivers a problematic political commentary. Especially considering the insurrection at Capitol Hill on 6 January 2021, the mass shooting in Buffalo, NY, on 14 May, and the numerous attacks by QAnon conspiracy believers in later years. *Far Cry 5* allows right-wing attitudes to take ownership of the role of the good guy, and it is troubling to see the game failing to reflect upon the beliefs, values, and political views that make up the backdrop for the game's events and story.



This one-sided approach also breaks with the previous entries in the series, where both sides of a conflict are criticized and shown to be morally ambiguous. In *Far Cry 5* the villains are truly horrendous monsters, engaging in torture and acts straight out of snuff and horror films, but the locals are not never presented as problematic or suggested to be in the wrong. After all, you take on the role of one of them.

## Conclusion

*Far Cry 5* uncritically furthers right-wing conservative beliefs and feels like an odd mix; Parts *Smokey and the Bandit* (1977), parts Ted Nugent rock show, parts *Deliverance* (1972). The game also fails to reflect upon the colonial and racist tropes from previous entries to the series.

The rhetoric of defending liberty and the American way of life from the political left and the government, sends a dangerous message, in a game which is unsure about what it wants to be. *Far Cry 5* refuses to address the use of racist and colonial tropes perpetuated in the series previous entries, but instead enforces them through the differential treatment of occidental setting and colonized setting.

The series at large does not know whether to fetishize the exotic or destroy it, and here it paints the political opposition to the message it sends as *the other*. By giving the player an authoritarian role in that context and in a political landscape where that role is increasingly criticized for being a tool of conservative values, *Far Cry 5* neglects to address both the legacy of the series and to reflect upon what it is and what it tells the player.



## References

Conrad, J., 1902. *Heart of Darkness*. Edinburgh, Blackwood's Magazine.

*Deliverance*, 1972. [Film] Directed by John Boorman. USA: Warner Bros.

*Far Cry 6*, 2021. [Video game] (Multiplatform) Ubisoft Toronto, Ubisoft.

*Far Cry 5*, 2018. [Video game] (Multiplatform) Ubisoft Montreal and Ubisoft Toronto, Ubisoft.

*Far Cry 4*, 2014. [Video game] (Multiplatform) Ubisoft Montreal, Ubisoft.

*Far Cry 3*, 2012. [Video game] (Multiplatform) Ubisoft Montreal, Ubisoft.

*Far Cry 2*, 2008. [Video game] (Multiplatform) Ubisoft Montreal, Ubisoft.

*Red Dawn*, 1984. [Film] Directed by John Milius. USA: MGM/UA Entertainment.

Said, E., 2003. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books.

*Smokey and the Bandit*, 1977. [Film] Directed by Hal Needham. USA: Universal Pictures.

Usher, W. 2019. Montana is Using Far Cry 5 To Promote Tourism. *Cinemablend*. Available at https://www.cinemablend.com/games/2465855/montana-is-using-far-cry-5-to-promote-tourism, accessed 28 April 2022.