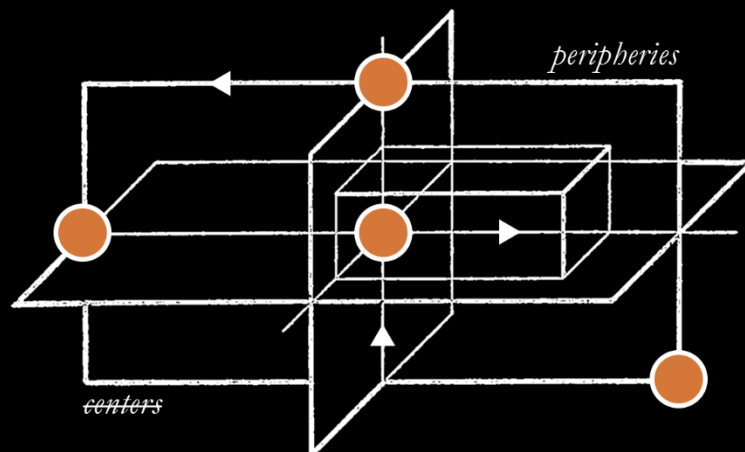


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Peripheries – Title Image. Image by Aska Mayer. CC BY-NC.

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Long past are the days when video games were dismissed as simplistic entertainment reserved for a niche audience. Today, they represent one of the most influential cultural and economic forces worldwide. With an annual revenue exceeding \$390 billion globally,<sup>iii</sup> the video game industry has solidified itself as a dominant medium, continuously evolving through technological advancements, artistic experimentation, and player engagement. From independent passion projects to massive AAA productions employing hundreds of professionals across multiple disciplines, video games continue to shape modern entertainment, offering experiences that no other medium can replicate.

Among their most compelling aspects is the ability to depict complex, fictional worlds, many of which are deeply intertwined with magic systems. Since the early days of game development, magic has played a significant role in narrative design, gameplay mechanics, and world-building. Legendary role-playing game (RPG) series such as *Wizardry* (1981-2024), *Dungeon Master* (1987-1994), *Ultima* (1981-2018), and *Might and Magic* (1986-2014) established early frameworks where magic was a core aspect of game cosmology, defining interactions between characters, environments, and overarching lore. As technological capabilities expanded, so too did the artistic ambitions behind these magical worlds. Magic systems, once confined to traditional elemental-based combat spells, have evolved into intricate, reality-bending abilities shaped by esoteric knowledge, philosophical foundations, and cosmological rules.



discussions. This complexity captures the attention of players, transforming magic into a subject of academic analysis, fan theories, and philosophical debates within gaming communities. In some cases, fictional magic systems even influence real-world magical practices, with practitioners drawing parallels between digital representations and real esoteric teachings or incorporating video game-inspired symbols into modern ritual design.

Given the increasing intersection between gaming, philosophy, and real-world magical traditions, the study of magic in RPGs is no longer confined to gaming discussions alone, it has become a topic of interest for scholars of digital culture, mysticism, and interactive storytelling. Video game magic is analyzed not just for its mechanics and narrative, but also for its cognitive, symbolic, and ritualistic applications. The engagement of players with magic goes beyond entertainment, blurring the lines between fiction and belief, between digital enchantment and philosophical exploration.

This article follows in the footsteps of recent arguments urging game designers and scholars alike to examine magical systems not merely as gameplay mechanics, but as cultural and philosophical expressions (Kumari, Deterding and Kuhn 2018). Within the scope of this study, I examine both the depiction and reception of magic in RPGs, focusing on how game design, player interpretation, and real-world esoteric engagement interact. By analyzing chosen RPG examples containing unique magical systems, this research explores the evolving role of magic in video games and its broader impact on digital and spiritual communities alike. Through this approach, I aim to highlight not only the mechanical and aesthetic significance of video game magic but also its profound cultural resonance and philosophical relevance.



## Methodology

This study primarily examines the narrative and mechanical representations of magic within RPG worlds, focusing on how these systems are narratively, symbolically and philosophically constructed within game design. To contextualize this analysis, I also draw on exploratory observations of player interpretations and adaptations of video game magic, particularly among practicing magicians and esoteric communities. While this secondary ethnographic perspective is not the central methodological focus, it serves to show the cultural implications of digital magic systems beyond the games themselves.

### Qualitative Narrative Analysis – Examining Magic in RPG Worlds

For the analysis of game content, I apply qualitative narrative analysis (Riessman 2007), exploring how magic is structured within RPGs in respect to its connection to esoteric traditions, philosophy, and world-building. Magic in video games often fulfills a dual function – a gameplay mechanic shaping character abilities and a narrative force embedded within the lore and mythology of game worlds. Given the broad range of magical systems appearing in contemporary video games, I adopt a broader definition of magic as an ability or knowledge that transcends rational or natural laws, altering reality beyond conventional understanding (Hutton 2017, x).<sup>iv</sup>

143

To anchor this research focus, this study is determined by two primary questions:

- How does video game magic relate to real-world esoteric teachings and philosophies?

Here, I examine references to historical occult traditions, figures, literature, and mystical concepts incorporated into game narratives. I also identify parallels between digital magic systems and established esoteric teachings.

- What is the function of magic within the game world?

I analyze how magic operates within the game mechanics, lore, and character development (e.g., sacred relics, divine blessings, reality manipulation, cosmic forces). I investigate its role in world-building, including religious structures, philosophical dilemmas, or supernatural hierarchies that shape the player's interaction with magical systems.

To ensure a structured and meaningful analysis, this study focuses primarily on RPGs, a genre that provides the most complex examples of implemented magic systems, both in mechanical and narrative terms (Ryan 2015, 85). While some case studies from other genres are referenced for comparative purposes, their inclusion is kept to a minimum to maintain a focused scope. The study imposes several selection criteria to refine its approach:

- Focus is placed on narrative-driven RPGs, where magic is a firm part world-building, character progression, and lore explanation rather than functioning solely as a gameplay mechanic.
- The primary lore surrounding magic must be contained within the game itself, rather than requiring supplementary external materials such as novels, movies, or developer interviews.
- Spinoff games (narrative works that are derived from an already existing work, but with their own cosmology, story, and characters) are included if

their narratives can function as self-standing wholes within the established game world, ensuring thematic coherence even when borrowing elements from broader franchises.

This approach ensures a structured examination of how magic is represented within RPGs, focusing on its philosophical, mechanical, and cultural significance rather than treating it as merely an aesthetic element.

### **Supplementary Digital Anthropological Approach – Player Perceptions and Engagement**

To contextualize the findings from narrative analysis, I incorporated an exploratory digital anthropological approach focusing on how players (particularly those engaged with esoteric or spiritual practices) interpret, adapt, and sometimes ritualize video game magic. This secondary inquiry employed elements of participant observation (Boellstorff et al. 2024, 65) and qualitative discourse analysis (Jones, Chik and Hafner 2015, 18), adapted to online spaces such as Reddit, Discord, and *VRChat* (2014).

145

While my initial aim was to conduct face-to-face interviews with practicing magicians, logistical and privacy constraints made direct encounters rare. Instead, online communities provided more active and willing participants, albeit with the common preference for anonymity and pseudonymous interaction.

Three modes of engagement were employed:

1. Personal one-on-one digital conversations: Private text-based chats with approximately ten participants, providing in-depth insights into their experiences with video game magic.

2. Forum-based participant observation: Active participation in discussion threads, analyzing organic debates and, where appropriate, asking direct questions about magic in RPGs.
3. Virtual reality participation: Occasional observation and participation in *VRChat* sessions focused on occultism, gaming, and digital spirituality.

Given the anonymity of online gaming communities, quantifying the exact number of respondents proved challenging. Many users operate multiple accounts, some participate only once and never return, while others engage in long-term discussions over weeks or even months. As a result, the study includes a fluid participant range, estimated to be between ten and 30 individuals, depending on the level of engagement. Personal one-on-one chats involved approximately ten participants, who provided extended insights into their experiences with gaming magic. *VRChat* group interactions included ten to 15 individuals, contributing perspectives on virtual spaces and digital spirituality.

Forum discussions varied widely, ranging from brief responses to complex dialogues, making precise respondent numbers difficult to determine.

### *An Unexpected Challenge. Forum Ban Over Data Theft Accusations*

Conducting research in anonymous online spaces comes with unique obstacles, as demonstrated by one particularly unexpected incident. In one gaming forum on Reddit, a participant falsely accused me of attempting to steal personal data, suspecting that my research inquiries were part of a scam targeting users' bank information. Despite my efforts to clarify my academic intent, referencing publicly available research credentials, I was met with escalating distrust, culminating in a permanent ban from the forum. Ironically, the individual insisted that I had stolen my

own online profile, claiming that I was impersonating myself. The episode highlights the sensitivity surrounding data privacy in online communities, where anonymity and distrust often shape interactions, creating unforeseen barriers to ethnographic research.

While these digital ethnographic insights are not exhaustive or representative in a statistical sense, they serve to illustrate how some players actively incorporate or reimagine digital magic systems within their personal esoteric practice. This complementary perspective enriches the narrative analysis by providing cultural, as well as practical interpretations emerging from gaming communities.

### *Reflections on Digital Ethnography*

Through this interdisciplinary approach, this study aims to provide insight into both the structural complexity of magic within RPG narratives and its broader influence on gaming communities, digital culture, and esoteric engagement. This approach is inspired by the idea that games, like theatre or literature, function through structured symbolic systems that create meaning through participation and performance (Bogost 2008, 55, Laurel 2014, xii). It also aligns with Catherine Bell's (1992, 67) understanding of ritual as a "strategic way of acting" that generates meaning through culturally embedded symbolic practices.

In the case of gaming, magic systems function similarly – not just as mechanics, but as rituals enacted by players within symbolic worlds. Such frameworks allow us to read game magic not only as a mechanical function but as a unit of cultural and expressive logic. The evolving interpretations of game magic demonstrate how video game narratives can extend beyond their creators, becoming subject to reinterpretation, academic inquiry, and even practical esoteric application. For many



magic practitioners, video games serve as a modern source of esoteric knowledge, transforming traditional teachings into new, aesthetically engaging forms that can be reintegrated into spiritual practices.

This dynamic exemplifies the growing intersection between interactive media and mystical traditions. It demonstrates that magic in RPGs is not merely a mechanic or storytelling device but a subject of exploration, experimentation, and reinterpretation within digital and spiritual communities alike.

# Magic in Video Games. A History of the Origins

Since the earliest days of game development, fantastic worlds filled with supernatural forces have been among the primary themes of game design. Magic, whether conceptualized as a narrative device or a functional gameplay mechanic, has played a pivotal role in shaping player experiences, allowing for interactions beyond the limitations of our reality. Its gradual evolution in games mirrors broader cultural shifts in how fiction and spirituality are entwined (Marcato and Schniz 2023, 183).

Magic in video games can be defined in various ways, ranging from a learned ability that enhances a character's power to a fundamental force shaping the world and its events. Unlike magic in tabletop role-playing games, where spells function within strict rule sets dictated by player choices and dice rolls, video game magic follows more flexible paradigms that adapt to technological evolution, narrative demands, and gameplay mechanics. According to Jesper Juul (2005, 36), video games exist within rule-based worlds, yet they differ from traditional media by allowing player agency within fictional settings. Magic systems exemplify this distinction, as they

provide interactive supernatural experiences, reinforcing player immersion and engagement.

In this section, I highlight key milestones in the history of video game magic, focusing on early titles where magic was introduced either as a skillset for playable characters or a fundamental element of world-building and storytelling. Many of these games were the beginning of long-running franchises, with later sequels often expanded or redefined their magical systems. Nonetheless, to illustrate the origins of magic implementation within gaming narratives, I primarily focus on the first title in each series, analyzing the early conceptual frameworks behind magical mechanics.

### *The Birth of RPG Magic: Akalabeth - World of Doom*

In 1979, game designer Richard Garriott, better known in the gaming community as Lord British, developed *Akalabeth: World of Doom* (1979), a title often regarded as *Ultima 0*, the precursor to the influential *Ultima* RPG series. The game takes place in an underground dungeon, where players are tasked with cleansing the land of evil monsters. Players may choose between two professions – a warrior or a mage, with the latter employing a rudimentary magical system.

149

Rather than spells or incantations, magic in *Akalabeth* is channeled through magical amulets with three different effects:

- Teleportation: Ascending and descending between dungeon floors.
- Instant enemy defeat: A direct combat advantage.
- Randomized magical effects: Introducing an element of unpredictability.





A defining innovation in *Wizardry's* magic system was its fictional spell language, requiring players to memorize incantations composed of root words and prefixes, a system that mirrored linguistic structures in real-world occult traditions (Howard 2014, 56). Unlike later RPGs where spells were selected from menus, *Wizardry* required manual input, reinforcing difficulty and immersion. Due to technical

limitations, much of the game's lore was explained in printed manuals, where spells were framed as magical formulas capable of bending the laws of reality.

Similarly, *Dungeon Master* (1987) expanded magic systems through rune-based spellcasting, where each spell was constructed by combining symbols from four categories: Power (intensity), Elemental Influence (element), Form, Class/Alignment.

According to the game's in-universe explanation, magic (written as Magick<sup>vi</sup>) is deeply intertwined with Mana, described as the power of nature, harnessed by the mind. The manual connects Magick to philosophical concepts, echoing Plato's Theory of Forms, where true understanding of an element grants the ability to shape reality (Adler 1952, 526-536). At the same time, Mana can be gained only from somebody who is already skilled in the art of Magick and cannot be learned on its own, pointing either to the necessity of initiation, or the hereditary nature of spellcasting (Bell, Newton and Walker 1987, 19).

152

### **Narrative Integration. *Stonekeep* and *Heavy on the Magick***

While many RPGs treated magic as a practical tool, *Stonekeep* (1995) framed magic as an integral force shaping world history. The game was bundled with an extensive novel, *Thera Awakening* (Jackson and Pulver 1995), providing extensive background on the game's universe, characters, and magical philosophy. This approach differed from earlier RPGs, where story elements were confined to in-game manuals due to technical limitations.

Magic in *Stonekeep* (again, spelled as Magick in-game) follows a rune-based spellcasting system, requiring the use of runecasters (magical wands) to harness supernatural abilities. However, its narrative approach to magic was particularly



to himself as The Great Beast or Master Therion (Gargoyles 1986, 2). As punishment, Axil is trapped in a vast dungeon, forced to invoke demons to aid in his escape.

What makes *Heavy on the Magick* particularly unique are its cryptic and esoteric references, many of which were misunderstood or overlooked by players and reviewers at the time of release. The game includes:

- Renamed demons from historical grimoires, including Asmodee (Asmodeus), Astarot (Astaroth), and Belezeebar (Beelzebub) (Gargoyles 1986, 6, Shaw 2017, Weyer 2017, Kelly 2019).
- Character progression based on the ranking system of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, mirroring its initiation structure (Neophyte 0=0, Zelator 1=10, Theoricus 2=9, etc.).
- Occult symbols scattered throughout the game, including the SATOR square, a well-documented magical palindrome (Sheldon 2003, 233).
- Direct references to Crowley's (1929) *Magick in Theory and Practice* including the use of ritual gestures and sigils.

154

Acknowledgment of occult influences within the printed manual, where developers explicitly cite *The Complete Golden Dawn System of Magick* (Regardie 1985) and *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage* (Mathers 1975) as recommended reading for players intrigued by the game's themes.

Unlike other RPGs of the era, which framed magic in mythical or fantastical terms, *Heavy on the Magick* directly presents Western occultism as a core influence. Despite its innovative concept, the game remained a niche title, largely overshadowed by more conventional fantasy RPGs. Nonetheless, it represents an early example of



esoteric themes being incorporated into gaming, an approach later refined in series such as *Shin Megami Tensei* (1987-2025) or *Persona* (1996-2024), which extensively explore real-world mystical traditions.

Some game historians (e.g., Sotamaa 2014, 6, Wolf 2014, 49) suggest that early video games often relied on symbolic meaning making rather than explicit narrative depth, as technological limitations constrained developers from fully fleshing out philosophical themes. However, *Heavy on the Magick* serves as a precursor to the growing trend of integrating real-world mystical systems into gaming, a phenomenon that would gain prominence in later decades.

## Magic's Increasing Importance in Game Design and Player Interaction

The early implementation of magic in video games reveals a gradual evolution from basic mechanical enhancements to fully fledged narrative elements. While games such as *Akalabeth* and *Final Fantasy* treat magic as an indisputable, fixed force, later titles such as *Wizardry* and *Dungeon Master* introduce more elaborate casting systems, emphasizing player interaction through spell memorization and linguistic structures. Meanwhile, games such as *Stonekeep* move toward historical and narrative integration, positioning magic as a force shaping civilizations and conflict.

Additionally, titles such as *Heavy on the Magick* demonstrate early experimental attempts to incorporate real-world mystical philosophies into gaming, setting the foundation for future titles that explore esoteric traditions in greater depth. These developments align with broader trends in interactive media, where symbolism, player agency, and philosophical engagement intersect to create complex magic systems that extend beyond simple gameplay mechanics.

The technological and artistic advancements in gaming have not only enabled new, more sophisticated experiences, but also revived interest in retro gaming, where players rediscover classic titles from the past decades. Digital distribution platforms such as Steam,<sup>viii</sup> GOG (Good Old Games), and Epic Games allow both large-scale publishers and independent developers to release their games more easily, contributing to an unprecedented expansion in the volume of annual game releases.

These depictions of magic in video games do not follow a single pattern but instead exist along a spectrum ranging from entirely fictional representations to strictly referential depictions based on historical esoteric practices. This results in three primary categories, which, even though often overlapping, provide a framework for understanding the different approaches to magic in contemporary gaming (cf. Table 1).

Purely Fictional	Semi-Referential	Strictly Referential
Magic is described in general, fantasy-based terms, often without reference to real-world traditions.	Magic draws influence from real-world esoteric teachings but is reinterpreted or reimagined in a new narrative or aesthetic form.	Magic is depicted accurately, referencing existing practices, rituals, historical figures, or real-world magical belief systems.
Existence of magic is intrinsic to the game world, often gifted by gods, nature, or cosmic forces.	Magic is ambiguous, blending fictional lore with historical or philosophical influences.	Magic follows real-world esoteric methodologies, including ceremonial rituals, grimoires, occult practices, or astrological principles.
Examples: <i>Middle-Earth</i> series (1982-2025), <i>Dragon Age</i> series, <i>Dragon's Dogma</i> series (2012-2024), <i>Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning</i> (2012).	Examples: <i>Elden Ring</i> (2022), <i>Blasphemous</i> (2019) and <i>Blasphemous II</i> (2023), <i>Shin Megami Tensei</i> series, <i>Dark Souls</i> series (2011-2018).	Examples: <i>Goetia</i> (2016) and <i>Goetia 2</i> (2022), <i>Taboo: The Sixth Sense</i> (1989), <i>Virtual Temple: Order of the Golden Dawn</i> (2017), <i>Ayahuasca: Kosmik Journey</i> (2020).

Table 1. Categorization of magical representations in video games based on their reference to real-life practices.

It is important to note that these categories are not rigid, as many video games blend elements of different categories. While a strictly referential game may include fictional reinterpretations, a semi-referential game may fluctuate between symbolic references and purely fantastical elements. Understanding where games fall within these categories requires analyzing the depth of magical references, the complexity of symbolism, and the level of historical accuracy present within the narrative and mechanics.

### Understanding the Categories in Detail

#### 1. Purely Fictional Representations

Games within this category depict magic in broad, fantasy-based terms (high and low<sup>ix</sup> fantasy alike), often without referencing any real-world traditions. The existence of magic is an intrinsic part of the game world, but its origin, meaning, and functionality typically remain unexplored beyond a basic narrative framework (e.g., magic as a gift from nature or magic comes from divine sources).



These representations of magic primarily serve gameplay mechanics, allowing players to cast spells, wield enchanted weapons, and manipulate supernatural forces without questioning their presence. However, they do not mirror real-world spiritual philosophies or esoteric traditions. Their purpose is to enhance player abilities rather than engage with symbolism or belief systems.

Examples:

- *Middle-Earth* series: Magic operates as an extension of Tolkien's fantasy universe, reinforcing concepts of divine power and corrupted sorcery.
- *Kingdoms of Amalur*: Magic is a structured combat mechanic, devoid of philosophical significance or symbolic resonance with real-world traditions.
- *Dragon's Dogma* and *Dragon Age* series: Magic serves narrative functions, but remains within standard high-fantasy tropes, rarely engaging with deeper metaphysical themes.

159

## 2. Strictly Referential Representations

This probably the least common category contains games that directly represent real-world magical practices, often with high levels of accuracy. These titles do not simply reinterpret mystical traditions, but rather they actively preserve historical methodologies, rituals, and esoteric philosophies within their narratives.

Examples:

- *Goetia* and *Goetia 2* - Incorporates Western demonology, mirroring practices from historical grimoires such as *Ars Goetia* (Shaw 2017).



The story and setting of a video game serve as foundational elements that define the origin of magic, its societal role, and its broader impact within the game world. Unlike purely mechanical implementations of magic, where spells exist solely as abilities for players to use, magic embedded within the lore follows social, economic, philosophical, and cosmological frameworks, contributing to immersive world-building. As other scholars of game studies have pointed out (e.g., Marcato and Schniz 2023, 413), the consistent and structured presence of magic across video game narratives often reflects deeper symbolic and world-building logics,

transforming magical systems into coherent cosmologies that shape player experience and meaning-making.

A well-crafted magical system integrates history, belief structures, and environmental interactions, reinforcing the consistency and logic of the game's universe. Three key categories are central to understanding how magic manifests within game settings:

- *Origins of magic*: How does magic appear in the world? What are its sources and governing principles?
- *Magic's societal role*: Is magic respected, feared, or restricted within the game's world?
- *Story setting*: Does the game take place in a high fantasy, futuristic, contemporary, or mixed setting?

162

Analyzing these aspects provides insight into how games construct magical cosmologies, shaping player interactions, narrative depth, and philosophical themes.

## Origins of Magic. Three Core Categories

The origins of magic in video game worlds vary significantly, ranging from devotional systems tied to deities to environmental forces that operate independently. While some games portray magic as an innate part of existence, others present it as a rare phenomenon, often tied to historical events, divine influence, or supernatural awakenings.

### 1. Devotional Magic

Devotional magic originates from a connection to specific entities, be it gods, celestial bodies, sacred locations, or other supernatural forces. This form of magic is

Environmental magic operates independently of deities, instead deriving its power from natural or cosmic forces. Rather than stemming from divine intervention, magic is portrayed as a fundamental aspect of reality, waiting to be harnessed by those who understand its mechanics. This model closely parallels real-world esoteric traditions, particularly chaos magick,<sup>xi</sup> where practitioners seek to channel omnipresent energies to achieve results (Woodman 2003, 12).

Examples:

- *Dungeon Master*: Magic is tied to Mana, an ever-present force accessible through knowledge and discipline. Spells operate through structured rune combinations, aligning with esoteric traditions of sigil-based spellcasting.
- *Arx Fatalis* (2002): Magic exists as an omnipresent energy, requiring ritualistic channeling through incantations. The game's system reflects traditional occult practices, where symbols and sounds unlock latent magical forces.
- *The Witcher* series (2007-2022): Magic is harnessed from Chaos, portrayed as the primordial form of creation. Certain characters can manipulate Chaos, shaping reality through ritualistic invocation.

Unlike devotional magic, where supernatural forces actively dictate magical interactions, environmental magic allows for experimentation and mastery, reinforcing player agency in shaping their magical abilities.

164

### 3. Adaptational Magic

Adaptational magic follows a transformative framework, where its existence stems from a specific event, leading to biological or metaphysical changes in those capable of wielding it. Rather than being eternal or omnipresent, magic appears at a distinct moment, fundamentally altering societal structures and individual abilities.

Examples:

- *Shadowrun* series (1989-2019): Magic returns to the world after an event called the Awakening, triggering mutations in certain individuals who become magically gifted.



## 2. Futuristic Settings

Magic appears in advanced civilizations, often coexisting with technology and artificial intelligence.

- *Warhammer 40,000* series: Magic manifests through psychic phenomena, blending occult rituals with futuristic warfare.
- *Shadowrun* series: Combines cybernetic enhancements with magical abilities, reflecting transhumanist philosophies.

### 3. Contemporary Settings

Magic exists within modern civilization, often hidden from public knowledge or controlled by secret organizations.

- *The Secret World & Secret World Legends*: Magic remains concealed, available only to those initiated into mystical traditions.
- *Persona* series: Magic functions as a psychological force, where supernatural abilities are linked to inner struggles and subconscious influences.

#### 4. Mixed Settings

Some games blend multiple eras, merging historical, fantasy, or industrial elements into hybridized worlds.

- *Arcanum: Of Steamworks and Magick Obscura* (2001): Magic coexists (and directly competes) with early industrial technology, creating a Victorian-era fantasy landscape.
- *Lionheart: Legacy of the Crusader* (2003): Magic enters 16<sup>th</sup>-century Europe, altering historical events and societal structures.





## Magic in Video Games. Practice and Philosophy

The intersection of magic, gaming mechanics, and esoteric philosophy reveals a fascinating area of study, one where player expectations, interactive systems, and symbolic knowledge converge. My primary engagement with the gaming community revolved around two key questions:

- What makes magic in a game appealing?
- Which games contain esoteric or occult elements beyond entertainment value?

While the first question focused on mechanical complexity, the second overlapped into studies of occultism and esotericism, examining which games transcend standard entertainment and incorporate occult/hidden knowledge or symbolic interpretations. This could be also described as something *spiritual* that has impact on the players life also outside the game. This does not necessarily need to correlate with the intentions of the game developer, as the player is free to interpret the symbols contained within according to his ideas and knowledge.

168

Through my interactions on online message boards, forums, and private conversations, three fundamental aspects emerged as key to an appealing magic system.

### Interactivity

Positioning magic as a dynamic force of the narrative. Among the most frequently discussed aspects of game magic was its level of interactivity, if spells served as environmental manipulators, tactical tools, or storytelling devices. Many players argued that magic should be more than simply a different kind of ammo for combat.

Instead, magic should be able to alter environments, influence characters, and dynamically shape gameplay outcomes. For example, players cited *The Legend of Zelda* series, where magic-related items such as the Lens of Truth or the Ocarina serve as gateways to hidden knowledge, unlocking secrets beyond combat utility. Similarly, in *Dishonored*, magical abilities allow for stealth-based interactions, reinforcing the narrative theme of supernatural espionage.

Some games integrate interactive magic through symbolic lore, requiring players to analyze spell effects within the game's cosmological framework. In *Planescape: Torment* (1999), magic is tied to philosophical and existential themes, where spellcasting serves as a reflection of the protagonist's journey and evolving identity.

Players overwhelmingly preferred games that allowed them to experiment and manipulate magic freely, rather than simply casting spells from a predetermined list without deeper engagement.

## Experimentation

Closely related to interactivity, experimentation enhances the player's relationship with magic, encouraging trial-and-error discovery, combinatory spell effects, and puzzle-solving elements. Games such as *Dungeon Master* and *Wizardry* introduced early versions of linguistic-based spellcasting, where players needed to memorize runes or incantations to successfully perform magic. This mechanic reflects traditional ritual design in real-world mystical practices, where symbols, chants, and gestures dictate spell efficacy.

Among modern examples, players frequently mentioned:

Players praised games such as *Elden Ring* and *Dark Souls* (2011), where magic follows established cosmological principles. There, spells are not merely attacks, but insights into hidden realities. Magic originates from the Primeval Current, an esoteric force that requires contemplation, study, and intelligence to harness. Unlike traditional spell-based RPG mechanics, magic in these games is tied to the sorcerer's ability to understand mystical truths, reflecting real-world metaphysical traditions in which spiritual awakening grants access to hidden knowledge. This resonates with Sebag's



- *Cultist Simulator*: A Lovecraftian card game tied to gnostic ascension, featuring spiritual gateways, ritual magic, and knowledge progression through enlightenment.
- *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind* (2002): Includes The Thirty-Six Lessons of Vivec, directly referencing Aleister Crowley's (2022) *The Book of the Law*.
- The *Soulsborne* games (the *Dark Souls series*, *Bloodborne* and *Elden Ring*): All iterations contain various, appealing takes on Gnosticism, hidden knowledge and the origins of magic.
- *Bloodstained: Ritual of the Night* (2019): References demonic entities from *Ars Goetia* (Shaw 2017), integrating Western demonology into spell mechanics.

These examples are part of a larger set of suggestions, with many players admitting that their in-game experiences led them to explore real-world magic, studying esoteric texts and the history of Western occult traditions through game lore research. Interestingly, among one of the most often mentioned games invoking occult feelings was not an RPG game, but *The Stanley Parable* (2013) – a story driven walking simulator, exploring the themes of predestination, fate and free will. It often breaks the fourth wall, addressing the player directly, creating a unique feeling of existential immersion. As gaming continues to evolve, the relationship between magic, narrative, and player interaction will remain a dynamic and multifaceted area of exploration.

## Video Games as Magic

The use of video games in esoteric practice is highly heterodox, marginal, shaped by personal preference, symbolic interpretation, and creative experimentation, making







## 2. Digital Ritual Spaces and Symbolic Magic

Beyond visualization, respondents detailed creative approaches to magical practice within gaming environments, including:

- *Minecraft* (2011): Used by occultists to construct virtual temples, shrines, and sacred structures, reinforcing ritualistic engagement through digital architecture. According to some respondents, this practice serves as an affordable alternative for magical engagement, particularly for practitioners who lack resources or privacy to build physical ritual spaces.
- *Gacha games for divination*: Practitioners use randomized loot mechanics (Gacha<sup>xii</sup> systems) to interpret symbolic results, treating game-generated items or characters as answers to divinatory inquiries.
- *Sympathetic magic in gaming*: Some practitioners align in-game events with real-world outcomes. As an example, one respondent described ritually defeating a difficult in-game opponent, using the act as a proxy for overcoming personal challenges outside of the game world. This aligns with sympathetic magic principles, where symbolic actions in controlled environments influence external reality.

175

## 3. Games and Altered States of Consciousness

Some players engage in video game-induced altered states of consciousness, linking gaming mechanics with meditative, sigil-based, or trance practices.

- *Tetris (1985) as a meditative tool*: One respondent described using repetitive gameplay patterns to enter altered states of focus, reinforcing sigil activation techniques through trance-like engagement.

- *Virtual ritual work and mental invocation:* Players use harmonious game environments to conduct mental ritual work (such as ancestor worship), serving as spiritual substitutes when physical travel is impossible.

One particularly unconventional example involved a group of practitioners invoking RNJesus (Random Number Jesus), a semi-parodical deity associated with random number generation, luck, and astral travel. According to their reports, some members succeeded in dream-traveling to a world reminiscent of the *Pokémon* series (1996-2022), describing visions of landscapes resembling the franchise's fictional setting. This playful blend of parody, belief, and digital ritual mirrors what Davis (1998, 148) describes as the gnostic parody of the information age, where digital culture produces spaces of both irony and sincerity in mystical exploration.

Despite skepticism from traditional occultists (and even some chaos magicians) video game magic is becoming a noteworthy avenue of experimentation within digital-age esoteric practice. Chaos magick, known for its syncretic, heterogenous, and often self-parodic nature, readily embraces playful, personalized systems of belief. In this context, video games offer fertile ground for magical engagement, providing immersive environments for ritual, visualization, and symbolic exploration.

While video game magic is unlikely to become a dominant paradigm in contemporary occultism, its growing digital presence signals continued innovation. For chaotes, magical power stems from individual energy and personal meaning rather than adherence to established systems. Thus, the use of video games as magical tools fits properly into their ethos.

Games today serve as more than entertainment; they act as platforms for philosophical inquiry and ritual play. They can reinforce mystical traditions, inspire new practices, or function as alternative ritual spaces in virtual worlds. As digital environments expand, new generations of practitioners will likely reshape esoteric frameworks to include video games as tools for creative, symbolic, and deeply personal magical work. Despite criticism, the influence of video games in occult experimentation is both present and persistent.

## Conclusion

From their inception, video games have been intertwined with the concept of magic, drawing inspiration from high fantasy literature and mythological traditions. Early titles from the 1980s, despite technical limitations, introduced players to rudimentary magic systems, often supplemented by external manuals and lore. These foundational games not only sparked the imagination of players but also laid the groundwork for enduring franchises that would shape entire gaming genres.

177

Initially, magic in games was portrayed through a binary lens - either as destructive black magic or restorative white magic. However, as technology advanced, so did the complexity of magical systems within games. Modern titles boast intricate narratives and expansive lore, rivaling the depth of literary works. This evolution has allowed for diverse representations of magic, ranging from purely fictional constructs to reinterpretations of real-world esoteric practices.

The gaming industry's exponential growth, fueled by both major studios and independent developers, has facilitated this diversification. While AAA titles benefit from substantial budgets, indie games often prioritize creative freedom, leading to









*Final Fantasy VI*, 1994. [video game] (Super Nintendo Entertainment System) Square, Square.







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