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THE CRITIQUE OF COLONIALISM IN WARHAMMER 40,000

Kulcsszavak: Kolonializmus; Videójátékok; Brit Birodalom; Transzmédia; Térbeliség

The present paper examines the connection between colonial logic and the Warhammer 40,000 transmedia universe, highlighting how it both reflects and critiques colonial logic. Warhammer is a vast cultural artefact rooted in British colonial history utilising imperialistic themes within its grimdark narratives.

First, the paper establishes its theoretical framework, which stand on three pillars. Primarily, it looks at the Warhammer 40,000 universe in the context of transmedia storytelling. The research also draws on Istvan Csicsery-Ronay's perspectives on the special relationship between science fiction and imperialism. Finally, the paper applies Henri Lefebvre's triad of space to video games and examining how the "conceived space" – the mechanics and narratives that influence players' interaction with the game world – represents and critiques colonial narratives.

The analysis focuses on two key media artefacts: the diorama "Massacre at Big Toof River" and the 2023 video game Rogue Trader. The diorama, inspired by the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, parallels British colonial history through its depiction of the events and factions, reflecting themes of racial superiority and dehumanisation. Despite its problematic depiction of a faction based on a group of indigenous people, the diorama also offers subtle a critique of the civilising faction through its dark depiction of their home world.

Rogue Trader, through its narrative and gameplay mechanics, critiques colonialism more explicitly. The conceived space incentivises territorial expansion, resource extraction and colonial development, mirroring colonial practices. However, the game's "conviction system" contrasts imperialistic dogmatism with iconoclasm. Iconoclast choices, the paper argues, offer a better alternative from a moral and mechanical perspective therefore promoting an anti-colonial gameplay. Iconoclast choices, gameplay benefits, and companion relationships incentivize players to question and reject colonial logic.

Ultimately, the media artefacts adjacent to the Warhammer 40,000 universe analysed in this paper critique colonial logic in general and British colonial logic in particular through visuals, and gameplay mechanisms, making players think of the fictional and real-world implications of colonialism through its narratives. This universe provides fertile ground for further academic research with its unique position as a medium for analysing colonial themes.