Posthumanist postapocalyptic postanthropocentrism:
Morals and Multiplicities in *My Friend is a Raven*

Poppy Wilde
Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research
Birmingham City University
UK
poppy.wilde@bcu.ac.uk

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INTRODUCTION

There is a variety of research currently within game studies that explores posthumanism in games, postapocalyptic games, and postanthropocentric games. For example, posthumanism in games has been explored through games as posthuman systems (Boulter 2015), the relationship between the avatar and gamer as one of posthuman subjectivity (Wilde 2018; Wilde and Evans 2019), and issues of posthuman agency in videogames (Giddings 2005; Gallagher 2022). Elsewhere, games with postapocalyptic narratives proliferate, with *The Last of Us* (Naughty Dog 2013), *Fallout 4* (Bethesda Game Studios 2015), *The Walking Dead* (Telltale Games 2012), and *DayZ* (Bohemia Interactive 2013) all analysed as postapocalyptic games that 'harbour potentially metaphorical resonances of the hardships of the Great Recession' (Pe´rez-Latorre et al. 2019). Recently, scholars have begun to explore games that not only have a postanthropocentric theme, but themselves displace the centrality of the human, with Ruffino (2018) arguing that 'human beings are becoming peripheral in the act of playing games' and Ruberg (2022) exploring 'the queer potential of games that are unplayable and of refusing – rather than doggedly pursuing – the supposed capacity of video games to place human players in control.'

In light of these related considerations in game studies, this paper will analyse *My Friend is a Raven* (Two Star Games 2019), a short postapocalyptic game with four potential endings. The beauty of the game lies within its stark, monochromatic aesthetic (mirrored in another Two Star Games title, *My Beautiful Paper Smile* (2020), and its accompanying story *Night in Riverager* (2021)), but also in its multifaceted yet deep consideration of how humankind faces the end of the world, and their existence. Playing as Lutum, a lanky individual wearing a plague doctor mask and accompanying trench coat, we arrive at our apartment with the intent of speaking with "the Raven". By interacting with the minimal environment, and uncovering items to offer the Raven, different dialogues are unlocked and alternative endings are uncovered, as well as flashbacks of the past and opportunities for the future. We discover that it is due to a past altercation with Lutum that the Raven has brought down a deadly plague, leaving Lutum the last man alive. The endings, labelled as "the bad ending" (Extinction), "the

good ending" (Friends), "the passive ending" (Unforgiven), and "the aggressive ending" (Venomous), each suggest different ways that Lutum – and, by proxy, all of humanity – faces their demise. The Raven can save us from "crumbling into the soil of the earth", we can bring about the demise of the Raven, or else we become extinct with either ignorance or insight into the past deeds that brought the plague upon us.

Depending on the navigation through the game, I argue that Lutum either demonstrates anthropocentric disregard for the Raven, or a posthumanist ethic of viewing the Raven as a friend and equal (which might also be extended through themes of transhumanism). Through my analysis, I, therefore, demonstrate that the gameplay offers a potentially posthuman perspective on postapocalyptic scenarios, with the titled endings suggesting fable-like moral codes, which we might deem lessons for a postanthropocentric future.

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