Choose Your Path Quickly: The Many Crossroads of the Interactive Movie

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the interactive movie with full-motion video (FMV) as an artifact of the attempts to merge two media: videogames and cinema. As a hybrid struggling to combine gameplay with narrative, the interactive movie perhaps unsurprisingly did not garner much scholarly attention in the early years – and turf wars – of game studies. Nonetheless, FMV games in general were an important game form across the 1980s and 1990s, well deserving of deeper consideration, and interactive movies represent a key subcategory of this form. The present paper summarizes the discourse on FMV games, the core makeup and structure of the interactive movie, before zooming in to focus on three titles, *Dragon's Lair* (1983), *Mad Dog McCree* (1990), and *Night Trap* (1992). The authors analyze how these games leveraged, experimented with, and simultaneously were constrained by, then-new optical disc technology, and how the combination of FMV and CD-ROM shaped their gameplay mechanics. The paper concludes by situating these titles and their technologies in the evolutionary maze of the videogame and their continuing influence in the medium.

Keywords

Full-motion video, FMV, interactive movies, live-action video, CD-ROM, QTE, Dragon's Lair, Mad Dog McCree, Night Trap

INTRODUCTION

One of the formative discussions in the field of game studies revolved around the question of how games should be studied, and in particular, whether the study of narrative in games is warranted (the narratological perspective), or if instead the key focus should be on the study of gameplay mechanics (the ludological perspective). While ultimately both the ludological and narratological approach have found their place in game studies, a cursory glance at the publications of that time show that even the most ardent

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proponents of game narrative preferred to concentrate their explorations on games with complex gameplay. This has meant the neglect of a significant subset of early video games, specifically the interactive movie (c.f. Perron 2008). The interactive movie can be defined as a type of full-motion video (FMV) based game, where FMV cut-scenes (Klevjer 2009) are intercut with choice-based gameplay sequences of a kind that would many years later come to be described as quick-time events. Examples of the interactive movie include laserdisc titles such as *Dragon's Lair* (1983), *Mad Dog McCree* (1990), and early CD-ROM games such as *Night Trap* (1992) or *Sewer Shark* (1993). Descriptions and definitions of the interactive movie can be found in works cataloguing the early game industry's history and outputs (e.g. Kent 2001; Wolf 2008d; Donovan 2010; Russell 2012), where their development and technologies are contextualized in the broader history of games. For most such games, however, any attempt at in-depth game analysis is nowhere to be found. Two notable exceptions to this rule are a full, book-length study of *Dragon's Lair* (Clarke 2022), and Therrien, Poremba and Ray's (2020) broad analysis of design patterns in FMV games.

Admittedly, the interactive movies of the 1980s and early 1990s provide little in terms of mechanics for ludological analysis, and, in spite of what their marketing label and format might suggest, also remain quite simplistic in their narrative layer. It is certainly reasonable to argue from the perspective of practical constraints, that a game scholar's time might be better used on other titles of greater complexity and significance. Nonetheless, there are several reasons interactive movies do warrant a closer analysis. Foremost, in spite of their relatively short heyday and relatively uncomplicated gameplay, the fact remains that these titles pioneered the addition of interactivity to cut-scene sequences, doing so almost two decades before game designer Yu Suzuki would reintroduce this mechanic as the quick-time or quick-timer event (QTE) in *Shenmue* (1999) (Rogers 2011) - and as such, the manner in which these games introduced, developed and experimented with the QTE mechanic warrants attention. Secondly, while the crossroad encounter between cinema and videogames that led to the creation of the FMV game has largely been cast in negative light as a sort of evolutionary dead end, later games such as *Immortality* (2022) demonstrates that this path of evolution is anything but a dead end. More importantly, the aforementioned encounter is itself worthy of examination, both in its history and its outputs: having met at a crossroads, for a time game developers chose to travel together with filmmakers, creating works that neither side could have made without the other. Interactive movies are also interesting from the perspective of design analysis, representing examples of technological determinism, where the initial concept of the game is a reaction to technological affordances, and the game's final shape is as much the result of the affordances and constraints of the technology as it is of the designer's vision.

The final reason to examine these games is simply: because they deserve it. Of the three case studies under examination here, *Dragon's Lair*, *Mad Dog McCree* and *Night Trap*, the latter two certainly will not be rehabilitated in the pantheon of game art as "undiscovered gems" or "underrated classics"; their flaws, stemming both from the design choices of their creators, and the limitations of the chosen technology, are real, and prevent any such reconsideration. *Dragon's Lair* presents a different case, having been exhibited at the Smithsonian National Museum of Art History, indicating a certain high prestige status as a technological and cultural artifact. Yet, in spite of this recognition, and the distinction of having been the subject of a recent scholarly monograph (Clarke 2022), one may easily find strong criticism of *Dragon's Lair* as a game (e.g. Crawford 2005). Regardless, all three of these games remain favorites for fans of early videogames and have been the subject of numerous fan videos on YouTube. It seems appropriate, then, for game studies to

examine these titles not only as historical footnotes, but as interesting in their own right, particularly when examined within their appropriate context as experiments in the intersection / merging of videogames and cinema during the emergence of the 'multimedia' concept, itself closely tied to the CD-ROM, at the end of the 1980s and in the early 1990s (c.f. Therrien 2008).

CONTEXT: FMV, INTERACTIVE MOVIES, QUICK-TIME EVENTS

Within the present study, several terms need to be laid out to establish the context for game analysis. First among these are the two related, often overlapping terms: FMV and interactive movies. FMV, Full-Motion Video, is typically used in one of two senses: firstly, as in the present paper, FMV denotes any video partially or wholly produced without the use of computer-rendered graphics. Secondly, some authors (Lebowitz & Klug 2011) use this term to denote any animated sequence, including computer graphics, as long as it is not rendered in real-time, but instead pre-rendered and then loaded from a media file for playback. Because of the subject matter at hand, in this study, the former, narrower definition is used consistently. While the production technique used for FMV is not very significant in this study, it is worth noting that such sequences were recorded using a gamut of technologies, including magnetic videotape, 16mm and 35mm photochemical film, and could be either live-action, or based on traditional cel-based animation techniques. In the case of live action, either physical, constructed sets and props would be used, or instead pre-rendered computer graphics could be integrated by recording live-action against green screen backgrounds and subsequently digitally compositing computer graphics in the place of the green screens. While FMV games were generally the product of the digital era, it is worth noting as a point of curiosity that the first game known to use FMV was an electro-mechanical arcade game, *Wild Gunman* (1974), where footage wasn't even digitized, instead being displayed directly from a film reel using a projector (A Critical Hit! 2021).

The role played by FMV in early games was primarily as a way to augment the games' visual layer. At a time when most games were limited to pixelated 2D imagery, FMV was used to approximate 3D graphics (Wolf 2008c), and to provide a sense of photorealism. This was seen as especially valuable for human characters, and perhaps the frequent use of FMV in horror games can be attributed to the belief expressed by some game designers, e.g. Roberta Williams, that live-action footage is a prerequisite to achieve necessary emotional depth for a successful horror game (Williams 2020; see also Donovan 2010). This claim is dubious given the number of successful non-FMV horror games of the period (c.f. Perron 2018), but it is a documented perspective from that time.

In the 1980s, at a time when computers were incapable of rendering sophisticated graphics in real-time (Wolf 2008c), FMV was necessarily closely related to the second term invoked here - the interactive movie. The term interactive movie is one that has been used in a number of ways both in the industry and among game scholars. Among the latter, the term has often been used to denote simply any game reliant on FMV, regardless of its specific genre or subgenre (Perron 2003). In the game industry, the term's meaning experienced considerable inflation over the course of the 1990s and beyond. Effectively, it became a marketing-driven label used by creators who wished to signal to the audience that the game in question assigned premium value to telling a story whose format, style, or ambitions somehow related to cinema - without actually saying anything about the method used to convey that story. Thus, some non-FMV games were designated

interactive movies, while some FMV-based games eschewed this label (Majewski & Knight forthcoming). In turn, with the seeming demise of FMV, some scholars (Lessard 2009) reappropriated the term to denote a story-driven, cut-scene-heavy game where the player has limited possibilities of interacting with a pre-designed narrative, even if the cut-scenes rely not on live-action footage, but real-time game engine graphics.

Terms as broadly defined as this have little utility; as such, for the purpose of the present paper, the authors employ the narrower definition implied by both Lessard (2009) and Perron's later discussions of the form (Perron 2008): the interactive movie is thus a narrative-driven game form, limited in interactivity and reliant on the spectacle of cut-scenes. While these cut-scenes do not necessarily have to use FMV, and in some modern games will be rendered using the game engine's real-time rendering capabilities, we would further argue that for the early interactive movies that are the topic of this paper, FMV, either in the shape of live-action footage or in the shape of traditional animation, was central to this game form.

The next pair of terms to be considered are purely technological, and closely related: the LaserDisc and the CD-ROM. In their underlying mechanics, both of these storage devices, like the later DVD-ROM and Blu-ray, revolve around the use of a laser to read data encoded on the surface of a flat metallic disc. However, the earlier LaserDisc was designed primarily for film playback, and as such was partially analog, with a small part of the disc available for digital data, and the rest for an analog-encoded video track (Wikipedia n.d.); the CD-ROM, meanwhile emerged later as a fully digital general data storage format. This meant LaserDisc was a far less flexible format, although both facilitated random access to data, i.e. where the laser lens can move to any other point on the disc surface to access a particular frame of video for a LaserDisc, or any data on a CD-ROM. These technologies thus were more akin to computer floppy discs, in contrast to the linear access on audio and video cassettes, of which the former was used by some 8-bit computers, while the latter was explored as a medium for one of the games discussed here, *Night Trap*. While the LaserDisc and CD-ROM were revolutionary in the amount of space they provided to developers (c.f. Therrien 2008; Wolf 2008a; Brookey 2010; Donovan 2010), both were also constrained by data read speeds and seek times, i.e. how quickly could the lens be positioned at the correct location on the disc surface to access the geographically-distributed data, and how quickly could the data then be transferred into random-access memory. The LaserDisc's partially analog data format effectively meant this medium was *only* useful in gaming for interactive movies. The CD-ROM was more capable, but because of the aforementioned speed issue, early CD-ROMs required very careful planning of the data layout (Ars Technica 2020). This narrowed down viable gameplay design choices, and generally encouraged linearity. While the interactive movie form was not the only viable option for the early CD-ROM, as amply demonstrated by *Myst* (1993), the CD-ROM initially certainly did seem to be a technology optimal for interactive movies and little else.

The combination of the strong visual focus with the reliance on specific technologies, which seemed to play a significant role in shaping the design choices of their users, carries the implication that analysis of FMV-based games cannot ever be entirely separated from their technological underpinnings. Many games can be analysed almost without reference to the specific technological structure of their platforms; these FMV games, however, in a sense were techno-fetishistic, and as such, some techno-fetishism is also required in their analysis.

The final term in need of deeper consideration prior to proper analysis is that of the quick-time event, or QTE. The use of this term is somewhat anachronistic; as already noted, QTE

as a term would be introduced as late as 1999 by Japanese game designer Yu Suzuki as a way of explaining mechanics implemented in *Shenmue* (1999) (Rogers 2011). It is not clear if Suzuki was aware of earlier attempts to use such mechanics; nonetheless, the QTE as defined by Suzuki perfectly matches what had been seen in *Dragon's Lair* and *Night Trap* in earlier years. QTE can, at its simplest, be described as a mechanic where the player must react at exactly the right moment by pressing the correct button, and where missing the mark either in terms of timing or using the incorrect button would result in some level of failure. However, in spite of its simplicity, QTE can be implemented with considerable sophistication, by incorporating aural and/or visual cues, by "training" the player to recognize specific cues, and by relying on rhythm to both direct and reward the player. Thus, while virtually all of the games analyzed in this paper can be described (and have so been described) as "primitive" by virtue of their reliance on the "simple" mechanic of the QTE, there is considerable nuance and differentiation in the way these titles actually implemented QTE.

Regardless of the specific techniques and technologies used, FMV games were positioned at the confluence of film and games, relying on both media formats. Indeed, while many FMV games were initiated by game developers looking to augment their medium with filmic features, in other cases, it was filmmakers that saw an opportunity to augment their medium with game features. The results of these attempts to merge media could frequently be poor in quality, but in each case, represent fascinating artifacts in need of greater analysis.

DRAGON'S LAIR AS "THE" LASERDISC GAME

Part of the first wave of LaserDisc games, in many respects, *Dragon's Lair* represents the archetypal LaserDisc / FMV / interactive movie of the 1980s by virtue of the centrality of its historical and cultural position. *Dragon's Lair* has been showcased in the Smithsonian National Museum of Art History, and is seemingly symbolic enough of 1980s arcade culture to have been featured in the popular '80s nostalgia-themed TV series *Stranger Things* (2016-) as a key example of what Bittanti (2001) refers to as a quotation technoludic film.

Adapting the idea of the 'prestige film' from the film industry, Parker (2015) posits that certain successful, high-profile videogames may be considered 'prestige games.' Dragon's Lair's position as a game unlike any other at the time of its release accorded it special status due to its sheer cinematic audio/visual spectacle. In arcades of the time, the cabinet was afforded central placement with maximum visibility to capitalise on the game's Disney-like film animation and subsequently became a success. Over time, even though there are those that foreground the game's flaws, it continues to hold the focus of attention of videogame enthusiasts. It is due to these reasons it may be suggested that *Dragon's Lair* be considered perhaps the only 'prestige game' among the LaserDisc and CD-ROM FMV games released in the 1980s and 1990s.

As outlined in one of the most iconic attract modes in videogame history (akin to an animated film trailer), the premise of this narrative-based adventure is a straightforward rescue mission in which the player controls the protagonist Dirk the Daring in a quest to save Princess Daphne from various villains and ultimately the Singe, the dragon.

The playable cut-scenes which comprise the game were achieved via high-quality film animation by ex-Disney animator Don Bluth provided players with an unequalled aesthetic experience in 1983, essentially the ability to play a Disney-type animated film, thanks to the technical possibilities of LaserDisc storage and retrieval. *Dragon's Lair* is a game that cannot be divorced from its technology. As Clarke (2024, 5) states quoting Lessard (2009, 197), "*Dragon's Lair's* 'reliance on pre-made content has a deep structural impact' on the game's look, design, and experience." Hence, the restricted nature of mechanical input and nodal game structure. This was an arcade game lacking a points-based experience in which a time-based approach to QTE mechanics and memorisation was necessary for success in completing the game as although sequences were able to be presented in random order due to the ability of LaserDisc retrieval in each playthrough, there were a limited number of scenes stored on the disc.

There is ample evidence *Dragon's Lair* developers saw their QTE-based gameplay as a base for further evolution in subsequent games, but this path was cut short by the videogame crash and subsequent collapse in arcade revenues. While their follow-up, *Space Ace* (1984), would be released just months after the original game, the direct sequel to *Dragon's Lair* would run into financial difficulty, and only be published in the second LaserDisc wave in 1991 (Wolf 2008c). In the meantime, *Dragon's Lair* would be ported across numerous platforms, albeit in almost all cases, until the advent of the CD-ROM platforms of the 1990s, these ports would lose virtually all cinematic qualities (c.f. Patman QC 2022a). Nonetheless, even in this short sequence of three games, the QTE mechanic undergoes significant evolution with the aim of providing more feedback, and more interactivity through branching. Already in *Dragon's Lair*, some of the later-implemented scenes provide signal cues hinting to the player when to react and how; these would be more strongly implemented in *Space Ace* (Patman QC 2022b). The latter would also incorporate a form of branching - the hero is periodically reduced to a teenage form by the villain's de-aging ray, and the player may choose at certain points whether to continue in teen form, or power up back into adult form, with the cel-animated FMV continuously reflecting this status. *Dragon's Lair II: Time Warp* (1991) likewise experimented with limited branching in the form of treasures the player could pick up or miss. These gameplay experiments did not reach their full potential, but would be continued in various ways by other lineages of interactive movies, including both *Mad Dog McCree* and *Night Trap*.

MAD DOG McCREE: FURTHER LASERDISC EXPERIMENTS

Following the sharp decline of the first wave of LaserDisc arcade products represented by *Dragon's Lair*, it would not be until the early 1990s that a second wave of LaserDisc videogames would emerge. This second wave included not only the much-delayed sequel(s) to *Dragon's Lair*, but also the first attempt to enter the market by American Laser Games - the Western-themed *Mad Dog McCree*. While Wolf (2008a) describes this second wave as coming "too late", he also highlights that it was the light gun shooters like *Mad Dog* that were best able, for a time, to provide a visual experience impossible to match on home consoles and computers, before ultimately their arcade existence would be cut short by the advent of the CD-ROM. *Mad Dog* seems to embody this trend, as the series did ultimately transition from the arcade to CD-ROM, being released both on PC and on a variety of home consoles such as the 3DO. Notably, while the game's filmic component, shot on a low budget, can be seen as somewhat camp, it would nonetheless have been a relatively unique spectacle in the arcades of the time period, and it would

not be until decades later that home versions would finally match the graphical resolution of the original LaserDisc release (c.f. Patman QC 2020).

Like *Dragon's Lair*, *Mad Dog* combines simple, QTE-based gameplay with FMV scenes, played back originally from LaserDisc, and later from CD-ROM. However, if *Dragon's Lair*, its sequels and other similar titles presented a time-based approach to QTEs, requiring the player to choose which button to press, but above all *when* to press it, *Mad Dog McCree*, as a light gun shooter, adds a spatial component into the mixture. In this sense, it is worth recalling Janet Murray's (1997) catalogue of the four affordances of digital media: procedural, participatory, encyclopedic, and spatial. All digital games explore procedural and participatory affordances, and LaserDisc games like *Dragon's Lair* could be argued to be among the first to demonstrate the encyclopedic capacity - perhaps ironically, through the use of the partially-analogue LaserDisc medium. However, the spatial affordances of digital media are at best marginal in *Dragon's Lair* - yes, the player must react to Dirk's spatial location on screen by pressing the appropriate directional button, but this is the extent of the game's use of space. Light gun shooters made a much more powerful case for the use of spatial affordances, by building their gameplay on the player's coordination of *three* separate, though closely linked spatial systems: as players face off against hostile gunfighters in a variety of Western-themed environments, they must first recognise the positions of enemy characters within the locale depicted on screen, being careful not to confuse them with innocent bystanders; secondly, they must translate this into two-dimensional screen space, and thirdly, they must position their own physical body in their own surroundings in such a way, as to aim the light gun appropriately towards the enemy within the screen space. The spatial component must be coordinated with time and order - when multiple enemy characters are visible, they do not all pose the same imminent level of danger, and as such, even aiming well for an enemy character may result in failure if doing so means ignoring another enemy presenting a more urgent threat.

The relatively unforgiving nature of the FMV-based *Mad Dog*, where, as in the earlier FMV-based electro-mechanical *Wild Gunman*, one mistake can be enough to end the game, stands in sharp contrast to the far more lenient, non-FMV-based light gun games. Such games, for example home console titles like *Duck Hunt* (1984), or arcade-based *Operation Wolf* (1987), typically subjected players to a multitude of targets, and rewarded or punished the player for the amount of targets eliminated, awarding the player points or subtracting health from a health bar if the player ignored a hostile target too long. While *Mad Dog* likewise introduces a score-keeping mechanic, awarding the player points for accurate shooting, there is no health bar: instead, the player has three lives, and every bullet taken or mistake made (civilian shot) results in the loss of a life and the restart of the current scene. The game's unforgiving nature certainly can be tied to the hardware limitations involved in playing back FMV sequences from a LaserDisc - being unable to easily jump from clip to clip without pauses, the game is instead designed to allow the player to only ever interact with one clip at a time. This is why when multiple enemies are present, they must be shot in the correct order, and why any mistake results in the entire scene being restarted. However, there is also reason to believe in this case, the game's mechanics were not only the result of hardware limitations, but rather, the hardware had been chosen, in spite of its limitations, because it suited the creators' intentions. This relates to the fact that American Laser Games started off as a developer of police training simulations, (Patman QC 2020), which would have required a more punishing approach to the player than traditional arcade games; a parallel can be drawn here to the much later *Full Spectrum Warrior* (2004), a game intentionally designed to be unforgiving in order to fulfil a training role for the US Army (c.f. Gee 2006).

Mad Dog differs from its LaserDisc predecessors also in its narrative form - unlike *Dragon's Lair*, where the player controls the hero, but never becomes him, here the distance between player and hero is eliminated. The game is depicted from a first-person perspective, with the camera not only representing the hero's field of view, but also representing the hero's movements through the player's own movements. The hero never speaks, and is never displayed on screen, in order to maintain the sense of the player and hero being one entity. Though discussions of first-person shooters tend to focus on shooters with full player freedom of movement, and thus typically omit light gun shooters like *Mad Dog* (c.f. Rehak 2008), there is no doubt that *Mad Dog*, its 1992 sequel and other similar games deserve to be integrated into the broader history of the first-person shooter genre. Simultaneously, FMV-based light gun shooters demonstrate that the interactive movie format was not as restrictive in gameplay form as may have initially appeared. Subsequent titles would demonstrate that once the FMV game shifted from LaserDisc to the more elastic CD-ROM, the same basic QTE mechanics could be refined for other genres, including even fighting games such as *Supreme Warrior* (1994). An important step in this evolution would be the final case study of the present paper, *Night Trap*.

NIGHT TRAP: DESIGNED FOR VHS, RELEASED ON CD-ROM

If FMV games in general are often maligned as "bad", there are certainly few titles that have acquired the level of notoriety of *Night Trap* in this regard (Thomasson 2024). The game's hostile reception in the US Senate is legendary enough that it need not be recapped here, except to note a peculiar irony - if the senators who castigated the game could justly be accused of only addressing a few elements pulled out of context, without any familiarity of the title as a whole, then game scholars seem to have subsequently likewise chosen to concentrate only on *Night Trap*'s encounter with the law, barely ever addressing the game *as a game* (c.f. Arsenault 2008; Perron 2008; Donovan 2010; Russell 2012).

Night Trap's second ironic aspect is the chronology of the game's release alongside its technological history. While the game is chronologically the last-released of the case studies in the present paper, coming out in 1992, and is a key representative of early CD-ROM games, its development history dates back to at least 1986, and predates any CD-ROM-based gaming platform. This is significant, insofar as *Night Trap*'s convoluted design and narrative cannot be fully understood outside of the context of the game's protracted, topsy-turvy development history. While it is risky to fully trust the opinions expressed by developers looking back on their own productions after decades, if the game director James Riley is to be believed (c.f. My Life in Gaming 2017), all of the crucial creative decisions made around *Night Trap* stemmed either from the intended technology, or from its production context.

Key to *Night Trap*'s design was a technology developed to facilitate the switching between four concurrent video tracks on a video cassette. This technology, intended to be the main attraction in Project NEMO, a new game console under development by toy manufacturer Hasbro (c.f. Donovan 2010; Parrish 2018), was to be demonstrated in *Night Trap* and its development sibling, *Sewer Shark* (1992). However, even as the two games progressed through their development cycle from pre-production all the way to filming, the planned cassette-based console was cancelled. Designed specifically to take advantage of the track-switching technology, *Night Trap* put the player in the role of a special agent, tasked

with watching various rooms in a mansion through multiple surveillance cameras and reacting to vampiric home invaders by activating traps - another example of QTE mechanics, this time combined with the additional strain of having to cycle through multiple locations. However, *Night Trap*'s multi-track system would have been difficult to reconcile with the affordances of a LaserDisc player, meaning that with the cancellation of its target console, *Night Trap* was effectively redundant. It was not until the advent of the CD-ROM and specifically the Sega CD console that *Night Trap* was revived as a project; however, the Sega CD's affordances were likewise significantly different to *Night Trap*'s original target, requiring among other things a drastic reduction in video resolution. Having been originally developed for a toy manufacturer concerned about any potentially reproducible form of violence, the game was also saddled with a number of other incongruent design decisions (My Life in Gaming 2017).

In terms of approach to FMV, the production of *Night Trap* employed the use of physical sets and practical effects, all shot using 35mm film, fully embracing traditional filmmaking elements in terms of image capture during production as outlined by Russell (2012).

In an effort to marry game mechanics and narrative, *Night Trap's* narrative frame casts the player protagonist as a rookie law enforcement official who is tasked with monitoring live surveillance camera feeds whereby the player is able to trigger traps as vampires appear in the various feeds. The game begins with a cut-scene in which the player is addressed in first-person by fellow law enforcement characters and the premise is sketched, following this, the game interface is presented to the player as they are to interact with the FMV surveillance feeds as directed by the player's superiors. It is worth noting that the theme of surveillance cameras central to the game was also a well-used convention of another disreputable cultural artefact of the early-to-mid-1990s, namely the erotic thriller film genre (Williams 2005). It could be argued that the employment of this trope strongly associated with softcore entertainment at the time may have contributed to the poor characterisation of the game.

In spite of its often-highlighted flaws, *Night Trap* remains a highly intriguing experiment among interactive movies, demonstrating yet another approach towards more complex gameplay even while still only using QTE mechanics and retaining all the restrictions brought by FMV. Like *Mad Dog McCree*, *Night Trap* adds a spatial component to its time-based QTE mechanics. In a gameplay format slightly reminiscent of the much later horror game *Five Nights at Freddy's* (2014) (c.f. Perron 2018), the player must cycle through multiple security cameras in order to identify which location currently requires action - in this case, triggering traps which neutralize the invading vampires. At all times, the player mainly sees what is going on in the current camera, with the other cameras providing only a very limited preview. The gameplay is further complicated by three factors. Firstly, the trap mechanisms are, as usual for QTE mechanics, strictly time-based, with only a narrow window of opportunity for the player to press the correct button. Secondly, the narrative requires the player to periodically reconfigure his system's access codes, as otherwise the trap mechanisms will become unresponsive. And thirdly, as the game unfolds, the player will usually want to find out the story of the house and its strange inhabitants, which can be done by watching those cameras where the inhabitants are seen talking - but doing so risks that the player will not be able to react in time to the vampiric invaders elsewhere in the house.

Like other early CD-ROM-based FMV games, *Night Trap* encountered the same problems reported by *Myst* creator Rand Miller (c.f. Ars Technica 2020), namely the need to reduce video to a low resolution in order to ensure smooth playback from the comparatively slow

single-speed CD-ROMs of the time. Consequently, early CD-ROM based games were frequently designed with interfaces that took up a sizeable portion of the screen; this had the double effect of masking the small size of the video frame, and empowering designers to combine FMV with other, interface-based gameplay elements, which would have been impossible on the earlier LaserDisc systems. *Night Trap* used the interface to display its multiple cameras; other games, like for example the pioneering *No-Ri-Ko* (1988) on Turbografx CD - one of the very first CD-ROM games of all time, albeit using mostly snapshots rather than FMV clips - incorporated simple mini-games into the interface, in this case a game of rock-paper-scissors.

CONCLUSIONS

Even if some interactive movies - specifically *Dragon's Lair* - have gained a substantial amount of prestige, there is little doubt that this peculiar crossbreed between games and films is generally poorly regarded. The detractors who claim that interactive movies do not achieve their full potential either as games or as films, certainly have strong arguments. Early interactive movies clearly did not have the budget nor the capacity to take full advantage of what live-action FMV could offer them in terms of narrative complexity, yet the very use of FMV imposed significant constraints on gameplay possibilities. Effectively, FMV interactive movies, even in the case of the multi-track *Night Trap*, remained largely bound to linear narrative, at best allowing the player to choose one of a couple of branching paths, and some cases such as *Dragon's Lair*, as Crawford (2005) so scathingly pointed out, allowing only a choice between the right path and instant death. Yet, it is precisely the limitations born at the crossroads between two media that make these games fascinating and worthy of deeper examination.

Far from reaching an instant dead end in their mechanics, even though effectively constrained to QTE gameplay, each of these titles found a way to innovate in their use of QTE. Whether this innovation meant requiring the player to come to grips with the language of cinema, in *Dragon's Lair*, or coordinate between multiple spatial systems while also having to choose the right target in light gun shooters like *Mad Dog McCree*, or juggling multiple viewpoints and cycling between gameplay and narrative as priorities in *Night Trap*, each of these titles invented its QTE mechanics anew. Subsequent titles, such as *Supreme Warrior*, even if not well regarded, nonetheless demonstrated that it was possible to adapt the FMV-based interactive movie with QTE mechanics to many other game genres. Even so, already other games, like *Myst*, were being released to a much more positive reception, showing that FMV-based games need not be limited to the interactive movie, and that entirely different gameplay formats could be married with FMV-based narratives. These, however, are a story for another day.

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