Monetising Pedigree: Genealogical Gacha and Racing Heritage in *Uma Musume: Pretty Derby*

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INTRODUCTION

This paper examines *Uma Musume: Pretty Derby* (Cygames 2021–present) to argue that some gacha systems monetise not only characters, but lineage: ancestry, inheritance, and historical prestige become purchasable inputs to optimisation. I term this configuration genealogical gacha. The term is not meant to suggest that *Uma Musume* is the only game to mobilise "inheritance" logics, but to name a specific pattern that is especially legible here because it is anchored in real-world thoroughbred pedigrees and a widely circulated national sporting heritage. I operationalise genealogical gacha through three design moves: (1) referential encoding, where a real-world genealogy and biography are translated into character data and collectible assets; (2) procedural inheritance, where progression depends on probabilistic "trait passing" across generations; and (3) monetised access, where gacha pulls price-discriminate access to better "ancestors" and training supports, turning heritage into upgrade currency.

Methodologically, the paper combines an interface walkthrough of the live-service client, analysis of official paratexts (e.g., posts and update communications), multi-sited netnography across Japanese- and English-language player spaces (including fan wikis, Discord servers, X/Twitter, YouTube), and a small set of semi-structured player interviews. Across these materials, I ask: how does *Uma Musume* translate racing heritage into a free-to-play optimisation economy, and how do players narrate spending in ways that blur calculation with care?

The game's core loop couples two summon streams—character pulls and support-card pulls—to training scenarios in which "inheritance" probabilistically transfers aptitudes and traits. Players are encouraged to rerun training arcs to produce improved descendants, a recursive process that pairs chance with disciplined time investment and community-authored optimisation knowledge (guides, spreadsheets, simulators, and banner calendars). In political-economic terms, this lineage loop shifts horse-racing's speculative logics away from state-regulated wagering and into platform microtransactions: uncertainty and variance remain central, but they are re-sited in the purchase of repeated attempts, account-building, and long-horizon saving strategies rather than bets placed on races.

At the same time, *Uma Musume* frames optimisation through affect. The "trainer" role script encourages routines of care (rest cycles, injury avoidance, route planning) that make successful outcomes feel like responsible stewardship, not only efficient play. Players also draw on idol-fandom language to describe attachment: oshi (推し) refers to a person's "favourite" character whom they actively support (emotionally and often financially). In this context, spending is frequently rationalised as devotion to one's oshi rather than as purely instrumental optimisation, aligning monetisation with parasocial intimacy (Horton and Wohl 1956). The franchise's concerts, voice-actor performances, and "Winning Live" sequences further aestheticise grind and improvement, converting optimisation labour into shareable proof of commitment and creating feedback between play, spectatorship, and social circulation.

By foregrounding genealogical gacha as a design pattern, the paper contributes a vocabulary for analysing how heritage and historical referents can become functional components of monetisation, not merely representational flavour. It also clarifies a regulatory and ethical tension specific to heritage-driven gacha: when real-world identities and histories are curated into collectible assets, questions of disclosure, odds legibility, and harm mitigation remain pressing even when overt gambling signifiers are downplayed (Xiao 2023). Ultimately, *Uma Musume* shows how durable gacha attachment can be produced at the intersection of probabilistic optimisation, care-based player identification, and culturally specific heritage infrastructures.

ENDNOTES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

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BIO

Chelsea Russell is an Assistant Professor at the University of Toronto Mississauga whose research spans video games, feminist posthumanism, affect, and digital

cultures. Her work examines robots, horror, and gendered technologies, with a dissertation focused on gynoids and posthuman embodiment. She has developed multiple game-studies courses and creates original games, including *CAMP-Fire*, funded by Heritage Canada. Russell's research extends across youth gaming cultures, gacha systems, queer representation, and tabletop co-creation. She has presented internationally at DiGRA, Console-ing Passions, ELO, ECGBL, and CGSA, and serves on editorial and review committees across the field.