

“Shining Lights, Even in Death”: What *Metal Gear* Can Teach Us About Morality

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By

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Dedication

To my family and friends: Kept you waiting, huh? I love you, and could never have done the things I've done without you.

To my brothers and sisters-in-arms: Dáðir eigi orð; Deeds not words.

To the fallen: *"I won't scatter your sorrow to the heartless sea . . . I won't see you end as ashes. You're all diamonds."* – Venom Snake

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Abstract

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By Ryan Wasser

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Morality has always been a pressing issue in video game scholarship, but became more contentious after “realistic” violence in games became possible. However, few studies concern themselves with how players experience moral dilemmas in games, choosing instead to focus on the way games affect postplay behavior. In my thesis I discuss the moral choices players encounter in the *Metal Gear* series of games; then, I analyze and compare the responses of players with and without martial career experiences. My argument is that the moral choices players encounter during gameplay affect them differently, particularly if they have life experiences related to medical trauma, law enforcement, fire fighting, or military career fields, and that the behavior of those players will be observably different from players without the same experiences.

In chapter one I present my personal history with *Metal Gear*, before moving on to the literature review in chapter two, which focuses on scholarship about the *Metal Gear* series of games and video game research as a whole, particularly studies concerned with how violent content affects players. In chapters three and four, I analyze *Metal Gear Solid 3* (2004) and *Metal Gear Solid V* (2014/2015) in order to gain insight into the moral dilemmas posed by each game. In chapter five I report the results of a survey about player responses towards the game dilemmas given by martial and non-martial groups to identify observable patterns of behavior in how they act and react towards each scenario.

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Chapter I. Introduction

I received my first Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) in September of 1990; I had just turned six and it was the main attraction of the surprise birthday party my parents held for me after the first day of second grade. Those same parents (the source of the mischievous spirit that plagues me to this day) left the parcel in plain view for the world to see, and forced me to slog through a stockpile of other gifts—new clothes, action figures, homemade bric-a-brac from more frugally-minded friends and family—before hefting my prize and laying it to rest in front of me in an act of grandiose theatricality. My fingers rushed to undo the generously applied packing tape that held the seams together, and I nearly burst into a cold sweat when I became entangled in the professionally cinched ribbon that bound the object of my desire in its wrapping-paper prison. A quick snip of some scissors, a moment of irreverent tearing, and a second later I was greeted by a football-sized image of Mario in his raccoon suit splayed across the glossy exterior of the game system's yellow cardboard box.

The games that came with the system, *Super Mario Bros.* (1985), *Super Mario Bros. 3* (1990), and *Duck Hunt* (1984), colored my perception of video games: unsubstantial tests of manual dexterity and mental acuity dressed up in 8-bit sprites with the express purpose of distracting me from friends, family, and most damningly schoolwork. That impression would only be reinforced by other games I had the opportunity to acquire, either through my own means (i.e. money haphazardly squirrelled away during the holidays) or inheritance. From what I remember, my childish brain sorted games into four distinct categories: *The Legend of Zelda* (1986), which I only got to play at my cousin's house but constantly obsessed over; side-scrolling action games centered around some vapid mission such as *Super Mario Bros.*

(rescue Princess Peach) or 1987's *Mega Man* (defeat Dr. Wiley); sports games, which I claimed to enjoy but can't for the life of me remember actually owning, and "educational games" such as *Bible Adventures* (1991), which were (and still ought to be) avoided at all costs, as if they were a blight upon humankind. Then something happened. My fourteen-year-old cousin, who always seemed embroiled in some form of trouble or family controversy, had been caught *smoking*, and as punishment his mother saw fit to liquidate his entire collection of games by dispensing them randomly to the younger boys in the family. Thus, I was unceremoniously presented with a shabby, brown grocery bag full of NES game cartridges minus, of course, the distinctive golden *Zelda* cartridge I so desperately coveted. However, one game (more precisely an inferior port of a better version of the game) I had never seen caught my eye: *Metal Gear* (1988).



Fig. 1. *Metal Gear* ("Metal Gear").

Without any knowledge of the game, I popped the cartridge into my NES and pressed the power button, resulting in an experience that can only be described as "less than fulfilling." To put it bluntly, *Metal Gear* did not play like any other game I had experienced; Solid Snake, a CIA agent operating under the supervision of Big Boss, did not start the game with a weapon or supplies, and shockingly he was *easily* killed. Had I paid attention to the operation description provided by Big Boss (the shady mission commander), I might have figured out that my objective was more complex than to simply "seek-and-destroy," and that the idea of the game was to *avoid* being seen instead of going out of my way to violently

eliminate every enemy along the way. The NES port of *Metal Gear* continued to befuddle me off-and-on for the next eight years until it was rereleased with *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater Subsistence* (2006).² As a series, *Metal Gear* would not become a serious consideration in my life until 1998 with the advent of the Playstation game console and *Metal Gear Solid*.

Metal Gear Solid and its immediate successor radically transformed how I viewed games and their capabilities. While a handful of games until that point exhibited flashes of cinematic qualities (such as 1995's *Chrono Trigger* for the Super Nintendo), none of them synthesized gameplay, narrative, and cinematography in the same way.

Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty (2001) improved on its predecessor in a variety of ways, but the game that cemented my reverence for the series was (and still is) *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater* (2004). *Snake Eater* seamlessly blends highly fantastical narrative elements with a realistic combat system, camp humor, and a never-ending supply of pop culture references. Most importantly it introduced me to a more relatable protagonist: Naked Snake. Unlike



Fig. 2. Big Boss, circa 1999 (Bluerock).

Solid Snake (his genetic clone) and Raiden (a former child soldier), individuals who were born and bred to fight in special operations units, Naked Snake aka “Jack” is a relatively normal Green Beret who was recruited into the CIA, which made him seem more familiar in regards to my own lived experiences. I’d been in his position: untested and in a foreign place, naively unaware of the challenges I would face. By the time the game had come out, I was two years into my first enlistment, and was preparing for my first “downrange” deployment to Southeast Asia. I felt a kinship with the Snake, and only after lengthy reflection on my

own history did I discover the bedrock upon which my relationship to this character was founded: childlike naïveté and forceful growth.

As a master of intrinsic exposition, series creator Hideo Kojima expertly reveals Snake's lack of experiential sophistication through his relationship to his mentor, The Boss, during the Virtuous Mission, noting that he is (in regards to the battlefield) "still just a child" and has "not yet found an emotion to carry into battle" (*Metal Gear Solid 3* 32:15—abbreviated as "*MGS3*" Kefka³). That statement resonated with me deeply even though I didn't understand it at the time. Now it seems apparent that Snake's trials mirrored my own experiences on the battlefield across nearly a decade of service in both the US Air Force, and Army.⁴ The philosophies presented by the game's narrative gave me something I could return to, each time offering me some new insight to incorporate into my day-to-day life.

However it didn't end there—if Naked Snake is the archetype of my early military career, then Big Boss and Venom Snake are the enantiomorph⁵ representation of my post-military life. Released two years after I left active duty, *Metal Gear Solid V* (2014/2015) features an older, grizzled version of Naked Snake (or his doppelganger Venom Snake), now actively operating under the code name "Big Boss." Both characters are well-acquainted with the horrors of the battlefield, and both are equally acquainted with betrayal, whether it be by the country he used to fight for in the case of Big Boss, or by his mentor in the case of Venom Snake. This realistic portrayal of soldiers searching for a way to impose their own philosophy onto a world that would rather forget them continues to strike a chord with me, and concretized my appreciation for Hideo Kojima's "legendary soldier."

Both *Metal Gear Solid 3* and *Metal Gear Solid V* are games that deeply affected my life, and I cannot help but think that the array of moral sentiments I experience when I play

them are directly related to my experiences while serving in the United States military.

Because of my curiosity, I decided to conduct a survey to determine if people with similar backgrounds experience moral dilemmas the same way I do. In the following chapters I perform a textual analysis of *Metal Gear Solid 3 (MGS3)* and *Metal Gear Solid V (MGSV)*,⁶ paying specific attention to the different moral dilemmas of each game before attempting to determine how, if at all, life experiences shape the way players approach these dilemmas.

Following my game analyses, I report the results of a survey comprised of open-ended qualitative questions and adjacently themed quantitative questions to martial individuals—those in military, law enforcement, firefighting, and medical trauma career fields—and non-martial individuals in an attempt to gain insight into how they act in each of the described situations as well as how their perceptions of morality during gameplay might differ.

Chapter II. Literature Review

A. Hideo Kojima, His Myth and His Legends

While the scholarship on *Metal Gear* is far from exhaustive, numerous texts exist as well as an ever-expanding collection of video interviews featuring pivotal series contributors who address a broad range of topics dealing with the franchise. The most comprehensive text is Denis Brusseaux, Nicolas Courcier and Mehdi El Kanafi's *Metal Gear Solid: Hideo Kojima's Magnum Opus*, which looks at the history of the series, Hideo Kojima's biography and vision as a producer, as well as providing a thorough overview of each game. Later chapters explore the *Metal Gear* universe by analyzing key moments in the series, and recounting each game's plot to explore its philosophical undertones such as the notion that *The Phantom Pain's* (TPP) Venom Snake serves as "a pure projection of the player into *Metal Gear Solid*" (186). The authors also dedicate an entire chapter to non-canonical games in the series, before addressing Kojima's calculated use of Fourth Wall-breaking mechanics,⁷ his obsession with facilitating greater gameplay immersion, and the role humor plays throughout the series. Finally, Brusseaux et al. analyze each game's soundtrack, and highlight Kojima's relationships with Harry Gregson-Williams and Norohiko Hibino, his primary composers from *MGS2* onward.

Interviews such as those conducted by DidYouKnowGaming⁸ shed light on some of the more nuanced aspects of Kojima's thematic vision for his games, the inclusion of archetypal⁹ symbolism, and intertextual references to Herman Melville's 1851 classic *Moby Dick*¹⁰ before addressing his decision to switch from the linear gameplay of *MGS3* to *MSGV's* open-world design that did away with the oft-criticized cinematic cutscenes of his earlier work ("*MGSV* VG Facts" 13:50). According to Kojima, by breaking with how "[he'd]

told stories in the past,” *MGSV* operates less like an interactive movie, and more like a serialized TV show that simultaneously tells “one overarching story” and affords players maximum freedom to focus on smaller, tangential missions in between the occasional major operation (12:49). In other mediums, Kojima ruminates about the direction his series was forced to take, the increasingly dysfunctional relationship with his long-time publisher Konami, and parallels between his work and other pop culture artifacts. His May 2017 editorial for *Rolling Stone* highlights his disappointment with Konami’s demand for new *Metal Gear* titles, and draws similarities between the gaming industry and Hollywood’s compulsion to churn out “endless, persistent worlds” where heroes seldom get time off in between games (let alone die), despite the fact that, according to Kojima, “[all] that remains is the end of their story.” The aforementioned feud between Kojima and Konami, which “came to a head . . . when the publisher announced the cancellation” of another anticipated title, *Silent Hills*, is explicitly documented by Brian Crecente in an article for *Polygon*.

1. Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives

The meaning of *Metal Gear* extends beyond its relationship with its creator and publisher; each game’s narrative features implicit and explicit philosophical, political, and psychological concepts, as relevant within the game as they are in the real world. Daniel de Vasconcelos Guimarães’ 2015 essay characterologically analyzes the games using a Kierkegaardian lens to describe congruencies between the philosopher’s “Knights of Infinite Resignation and Faith,” and Naked Snake and The Boss. Dormin111 explores similar themes in “The Phantom’s Pain—Turning Venom Snake into the Boss” by deconstructing *MGSV* to assess the evolution of the series’ principal characters from various perspectives. The first

section provides a ludo-historical account of the games' narratives, with specific attention paid to significant series personalities as they develop across *MGS3*, *MGS: Peacewalker* and *MGSV*, whereas the following section provides a comparative character analysis of Big Boss and Venom Snake, and an introduction to their differing positions on topics like the development of nuclear weapons. Dormin111's third section contrasts Big Boss', Major Zero's and Venom Snake's philosophical interpretations of "The Boss' Will" for a unified world; in part four Dormin111 discusses trauma, and its effect on the games' characters, narratives, and even players. Dormin111 completes his analysis by speculating about how legends inspire future generations through the "real-life" actions of individuals, and how Kojima uses that motif to manipulate players by blurring the line between their otherwise nameless character, and the legendary soldier himself, Big Boss. While Dormin111 occasionally looks at *TPP* from a historical lens, scholars such as Derek Noon and Nick Dyer-Weatherford make the historicity of the series their primary focus. In "Sneaking Mission: Late Imperial America and *Metal Gear Solid*," they couch their concern for the dialectic between the series and reality in an analysis of contemporary US policies, and practices related to the real world such as the military industrial complex and information control. They also highlight the series' use of irony and humor as a means of diffusing in-game tension while concurrently interrogating itself as a cultural artifact.

Amy Green's 2017 collection of essays, *Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Trauma, and History in Metal Gear Solid V* approaches the game from a psychological angle. Similar to Dormin111, Green starts by broadly introducing the *Metal Gear* series and the basic philosophies of Hideo Kojima, which affords her the opportunity to describe the aspects of *Ground Zeroes (GZ)* and *TPP* that structure her later arguments. She then shifts the

discussion towards the subversive elements Kojima implements in *MGSV* to defy player expectations, such as the inclusion of a hidden morality system and the utilization of a new exposition delivery method (the cassette tape system). Next, Green describes how games digitally reconstruct historical events, and how those reconstructions mediate history and historical fiction in the game, specifically through an analysis of Camp Omega, *GZ*'s anachronistic representation of modern day Guantanamo Bay. Next, Green examines how real world manifestations of trauma inform *MGSV*'s representations by providing a thorough history of PTSD, before turning her attention to contemporary approaches taken by the US military to combat the condition in reality. Green then expands on her previous concepts by analyzing *TPP*'s prologue mission to explain how trauma is symbolically represented in specific characters. The last two essays are interconnected in that they both address traumatized characters directly, with the former focusing on the development of individuals like Quiet, and the latter being an excavation of Venom Snake's fragmented identity as well as a metacommentary about the experience of the players themselves.

2. Criticisms

Metal Gear has received its fair share of accolades that might be attributed, in no small part, to the complexity and richness of the series as detailed in the previous section. For all of its successes, *Metal Gear* is not without its critics, and criticism specific to the storied franchise is just as varied and robust as that which argues for its merits. In an article for *Polygon*, Jeremy Parrish nods to the greatness of Kojima's contemporary masterpiece, *MGS*, while simultaneously critiquing its reliance on tropes and gameplay mechanics borrowed from its MSX predecessor, *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake* (1990).¹¹ More serious critiques are

levied by Omar Elaasar as well as Soraya Murray who censure *MGSV* for propagating imperialist sentiments. Murray's essay draws attention to the effect digital representations have in relation to their real-world counterparts, noting that "its spatial features and gamescape [present] a particular view of a particular world," (196) to wit "the Afghan landscape of the American imaginary; rocky, arid, brushy, unforgiving, sun-beaten, and brutal, from a sensory perspective" (194). In this way, according to Murray, the gamescape often unwittingly becomes an ideological device. Elaasar's critique more directly relates to gameplay by addressing the way players exploit enemy combatants by extracting them from their home country, interning them in Mother Base's brig (or infirmary if need be), and converting them into a commodity for Big Boss' private army. From a feminist perspective, writers such as *Giant Bomb*'s Heather Alexandra's and *The Verge*'s Chris Plante engage with representations of women in the franchise—Quiet in particular—with Alexandra suggesting that even though gamers need to "acknowledge that the camera treats her as a sexual object," they can still use the guilt they experience as a stepping off point for introspective thought about the "guilty pleasures" they consume. In contrast, Plante lambasts Kojima's swan song for its "perverted and nonsensical conspiracy theory" riddled plot, thinly veiled character motivations, pathological use of 1980's pop music, and its highly sexualized and objectified female character, Quiet. While the above research is highly illuminating, it only represents a small portion of video game studies since it addresses *Metal Gear* in particular. In the following section, I extend my review towards a wider spectrum of scholarly video game research, specifically studies that investigate how morality and ethics are affected by gameplay.

B. Video Game Research

Despite its emphasis on nonlethal gameplay, *Metal Gear* is still a simulated military operation, and therefore will always be connected with video game violence. Studies about violent video games have become a pillar of legislative battles being waged at varying governmental levels, and have led to a conglomeration of research about the nature of the debate itself including its origins and evolution. In the first chapter of their 2017 book *Moral Combat: Why the War on Violent Video Games Is Wrong*, Patrick Markey and Christopher Ferguson provide a history of video game culture from its roots in back-alley gaming salons to becoming a household entertainment staple. Then, in another essay they describe the *moral panic* that led to the inception of governing institutions such as the Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB) in response to the release of *Mortal Kombat* (1992), *Night Trap* (1992), and *Doom* (1993), games that transformed how players consume video games (“Teaching” 100).¹² In archival footage, members of the 1993 Senatorial Government Affairs Committee such as former Senator Joe Lieberman assert that violent video games explicitly teach children “to enjoy inflicting torture” and therefore require regulation (“1993 Senate” 3:51). Researchers such as Michael Zimmerman as well as Christopher Paul catalogue similar issues. In the fifth chapter of *Atari Age* Newman provides a genealogy of similar concerns such as “the widespread fear and anxiety” surrounding video games’ perceived tendency to isolate and benumb players, as well as the fear of their addictive properties (156), whereas Paul, in *The Toxic Meritocracy of Video Games*, explores the evolution of aggression and toxicity in gaming culture aggravated by the advent of online gaming.

These views seem to be buttressed by the research of Lt. Col. Dave Gross and Gloria DeGaetano who, in *Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill*, examine violence in popular media as

well as the effect constant exposure to such violence has on the minds of children and adolescents. They begin their analysis by looking at the environment of the United States as a whole, specifically addressing the relationship between access to game media and an increase in violent crimes rates. Next, Gross and DeGaetano look at television programming and its effect on desensitization before addressing how children's proclivity to imitate and identify with characters across a variety of mediums prepares them for violence by diminishing their ability to distinguish between fantasy and reality. Next, the pair discusses how games psycho-physiologically condition children's brains for stimulus-response, before closing with a discussion about the different avenues parents can utilize to discuss the topic of violence in media with their children, as well as a methodology for moderating the way their kids interact with violent media. However, findings from recent research such as Scott Cunningham, Benjamin Engelstätter, and Michael Ward's study "Violent Video Games and Violent Crime" indicate that there is no evidence of an increase in violent crime related to gameplay; in fact, the researchers say, there was a "negative relationship between video game sales and crime" (1262), a finding that accords with recent FBI statistics that say violent crime is half as high now as it was in 1991 (Lartey and Li).

The debate about the effects of violent media and video games continues to be a heated affair, so in the following subsections I look at examples of video game studies that specifically address player aggression, desensitization, and moral disengagement as well as responses from video game advocates that seek to debunk what they view to be misconceptions about the effect games can have on players.

1. Examples of Video Game Research

One of the primary concerns of research focused on violent video games is that they desensitize people to various kinds of violence, and therefore should have their accessibility limited, especially for children. Konijn et al.'s 2007 study observes the behavior of a group of boys who, after playing random games of varying violence levels, are partnered with another boy to participate in a "competitive reaction time test," where the winner is allowed to administer a "blast of air" to the loser at whatever volume the winner deems appropriate (1040).¹³ The researchers conclude that "violent video games are especially likely to increase aggression when players wishfully identify with violent video game characters," particularly for mid-adolescent boys with lower levels of education (1042). Others, such as Alessandro Gabbiadini, Luca Andrighetto, and Chiara Volpato's 2012 report, look at whether continued exposure to immoral behavior in the world of *Grand Theft Auto IV* (2008) such as "stealing cars" or "paying [to] have sex with prostitutes" (1404) is predictive of future immoral or amoral activity in gameplay, noting significant correlations between player exposure to the game, and facets of *moral disengagement*, a theory explicated by Albert Bandura in a 1992 article that specifies actions such as attempting to justify one's behavior, diffusion of one's responsibility, and distorting the consequences of one's actions. The primary concern for researchers like Gabbiadini et al. is that being able to engage in simulated violent actions might affect players' views about issues like crime, money, or women, and this concern is echoed in other studies such as Xuemei Gao, Lei Weng and Hongling Yu's 2017 investigation of the relationship between character preference and player aggression, and Matthew Grizzard, Ron Tamborini, John Sherry, and René Weber's longitudinal study about the effect playing violent games has on players' ability to experience guilt. In Gao et al.'s

study, the researchers observe in-game behavior using two diametrically opposed characters (from the moral perspective) to theoretically establish that “the influence of empathy on the aggression of players [is] moderated by the game characters” they choose to play as. Players who selected characters considered typically “bad” were found to have higher aggression levels during post-play interviews than players who selected characters who might be construed as “good” (6). In Grizzard et al.’s study, participants played variations of the same violent game that alternated their perspective between moral (UN soldier) and immoral (terrorist) positions for four days, before introducing a novel game on the fifth day where the players were universally cast as terrorists. The researchers found that by day five, habituation towards violent actions developed as well as decreased guilt-sensitivity in the players who played more frequently as terrorists, leading to the conclusion that emotional desensitization occurs with increased exposure to violent games.

2. Critical Responses

In response to studies like those mentioned above, Christopher Ferguson’s 2007 meta-analysis, and Ferguson et al.’s 2015 study address video game research they consider problematic before identifying others that more sufficiently investigate the effects of exposure to violent video games. In the first example, Ferguson examines comprehensive projects (similar to his own) only to find that they too “produced mixed findings” regarding how violent video games affect aggression (310). His meta-analysis also isolates studies that determine whether real effects on aggression occur as opposed to those that settle for symptomatic evidence related to phenomena such as *priming* (311). According to his results, there is little evidence supporting claims that violent video games are responsible for

negative behavior associated with aggressiveness. In the second study, Ferguson et al. highlight methodological problems in violent video game studies, specifically mentioning that “something unique” about Konijn et al.’s “laboratory environment” may have “primed behaviors that are not replicated in real-life exposure to games” since “the youths’ actual experience playing games in real-life had no impact on [competitive reaction time test] aggression” (401).

3. On Players and Prohibitions

While the importance of understanding the history behind violent video game research as well as the underlying criticisms and theories cannot be understated, understanding how morality functions in virtual spaces is one of the principal concerns of this study. In “Moral Decision Making in *Fallout*,” Marcus Schulzke analyzes the different ways that Aristotle’s phronesis—otherwise known as “practical wisdom”—is fostered through in-game ethical dilemmas, specifically those presented by Bethesda’s *Fallout 3* (2008). He later expands on his analysis in “Defending the Morality of Violent Video Games” by exploring in-game morality (e.g. committing murder) through the lenses of Kantian deontology, Aristotelian virtue ethics, and Benthamite utilitarianism, views that seem to conflict with Ian Bogost’s research about video games’ ability to facilitate play-spaces where social and material practices can be meaningfully explored. Daniel Schafer’s research more broadly focuses on how ethical perspectives influence self-sanctioning processes, why moral engagement (or disengagement) occurs in the first place, and whether or not any of these concepts impact player enjoyment.

Comprehensive works like Miguel Sicart's *The Ethics of Computer Games* move beyond particular ethical systems by postulating that games are intrinsically "ethically relevant," and therefore players, by default, are ethical agents (224). Sicart begins by analyzing the fundamental elements of games in an attempt to address the relationship between the games and the worlds they represent (23). After his primary analysis, Sicart looks at how players act as moral agents during gameplay by analyzing what a game *is* before describing the constitutive structures of the gamers themselves. The following chapter explores gameplay using virtue and information ethics¹⁴ to develop a framework for understanding the network of responsibilities related to ethical situations encountered during violent video game play. Next, Sicart investigates how the content of different kinds of games affects players' ethical agency and its development. Sicart then troubles his previous claim by addressing ethical complications posed by unethical content in games such as Rockstar's *Manhunt* (2003) before addressing how ethical systems are integrated as operative features of games (214). Sicart's conclusion reiterates the overall message of his book—that players are moral beings that consider their in-game actions from ethical perspectives—while acknowledging what he perceives to be shortcomings in his research such as his failure to address videogame censorship.

Contrasting Sicart's work, Garry Young's text argues that psychology instead of morality should be used to determine the ethical standing of games. He begins by discussing play as a general phenomenon and then juxtaposes different positions about the morality of gaming (14). Young then examines game ethics using classic philosophical perspectives such as Hume's sentimentalism, Kant's concept of universality and the hypothetical imperative, and Benthamite utilitarianism before discussing whether a game's representative subject

matter ought to be considered valid grounds for determining the moral worth of the game itself, as well as its potential to cause moral corruption. Next, Young analyzes how *incorrigible social meanings* might be used to evaluate the need for prohibitive action against games. In the following chapters, Young investigates simulated taboo acts through the lenses of virtue ethics, ethical egoism, and social contract theory respectively before addressing player motivations for playing certain games. Young concludes by reiterating his opening assertion: no single moral theory is sufficient to evaluate games for prohibition, and that restrictions on content should be considered on the basis of their psychological impact.

Metal Gear is a complex cultural artifact, more so than most I would argue. Its history dates back more than thirty years and because of its longevity it has played a pivotal role in the evolution of video games as well as the discourse surrounding gaming as a whole. However, while the previously mentioned research sufficiently explores the ethics of gaming and its broad-scale effects, few studies focus on the effect specific moral dilemmas in games have on players from social groups such as martial gamers. In the following chapters, I analyze *Metal Gear Solid 3*, *Metal Gear Solid V*, and the moral dilemmas they offer players in order to lay groundwork for my study in chapter five.

Chapter III. Analysis of *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*

Nowadays I would hardly consider myself a gamer, at least not in any traditional sense of the word. As I grew older I became detached from the 8-, 16-, and 32-bit playgrounds of my youth, and by the time I committed to my first enlistment in 2004 I'd abandoned the virtual world in favor of tabletop war-games like *Warhammer* and conventional role-playing games like *Dungeons and Dragons*. Absent from my media collection were barracks' mainstays like *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (2004), and later *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* (2009), and I was blissfully ignorant about the plot of whatever *Final Fantasy* title was being released that year. *Metal Gear*, however, was and continues to be the only exception to my self-imposed exile from gaming, and has remained a powerful fixture in my life because of the way the series conveys its narratives while simultaneously presenting players with situations that challenge their morality. In this chapter I introduce *Metal Gear* as a series, and then analyze each of the focus games, paying specific attention to plot development, game mechanics, and prominent moral dilemmas encountered by players. For the purposes of this research, when I refer to "moral dilemmas" I am referencing the various in-game situations that cause players (at least in theory) to consider the morality of the situation or their actions.

A. A Brief Introduction to the Series

Metal Gear is the brainchild of Hideo Kojima, a contemporary Japanese video game designer and producer known for his love of American cinema, who got his start working for Konami developing titles like *Snatcher* (1992), and *Policenauts* (1994), a pair of games loosely styled off Ridley Scott's 1982 film *Bladerunner* (Brusseaux et al. 18). *Metal Gear*

was a popular title in his oeuvre, but had its reputation marred by a hurried Nintendo port (the version I inherited), and substandard sequel¹⁵ that has since been dismissed as non-canonical, *Metal Gear 2: Snake's Revenge* (1990). The original version of the game, according to Chris Kohler of *Gamespot News*, “was not a run-and-gun, all-out action game,” a distinction that set it apart from other games in the genre, even though its design was just as much a matter of practical necessity as it was Kojima’s predisposition towards innovative mechanics (qtd. in “Hideo Kojima Interview” 5:40). According to Kojima himself, the reason *Metal Gear*’s design was so different from its contemporaries is because the game, which was originally intended to be a “fighting game about war,” had to be developed to suit the needs of Microsoft’s graphically limited MSX2 system (qtd. in Brusseau et al. 23); by incentivizing stealth mechanics, and privileging nonviolent play, he was able to create a unique combination of gameplay and narrative that, while imperfect,¹⁶ laid the framework for bigger and better concepts. The most primordial example of this, which Kojima discusses in a 2014 exposé by DidYouKnowGaming, is his original vision for *Metal Gear*, where players could reconnoiter the entire map, identify possible objectives, decide where to go, and then approach the mission from various points of entry, a vision he finally accomplished with games like *Peace Walker* and *The Phantom Pain* (“*MGSV* VG Facts” 6:39). Those close to Kojima such as David Hayter—the voice actor who played “Snake” in every game until *MGSV*—have described the series as “visionary,” because Kojima “doesn’t follow the rules of what video games are supposed to be” and that “when he takes a game and turns it into a so-called cinematic experience he doesn’t turn it into what he thinks a movie should be either; I think he creates a perfect kind of hybrid” (qtd. in “Hideo Kojima Interview” 12:20).

The initial premise of *Metal Gear* is that the game's hero, Solid Snake—a pastiche of American filmography blending *Escape From New York*'s Snake Plisken with Nick from *The Deer Hunter*—is ordered by his commander, Big Boss, to infiltrate Outer Heaven, a fortress-nation near South Africa rumored to have developed nuclear capabilities. The players' goal is to sneak past enemies while navigating the map. Much to their surprise, Big Boss has been leading the Outer Heaven rebellion all along, using his Metal Gear—a massive, nuclear-equipped, bipedal tank—to threaten the world. As they guide Snake through Outer Heaven, players destroy the Metal Gear, defeat Big Boss (at least in theory), and escape the fortress just as it explodes.



Fig 3. Screenshot of the original *Metal Gear* taken by Ryan Wasser (*Metal Gear*).

*Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake*¹⁷ (1990), the canonical sequel to *Metal Gear*, sees Snake forced out of retirement to rescue a scientist responsible for inventing an inexhaustible supply of energy from Big Boss and his new military nation, Zanzibarland. As far as mechanics are concerned, this game was the first to introduce concepts such as crawling, hiding within the environment and under items (such as the ubiquitous box that has since become a series staple—see Figure 4), and varying degrees of alarms and alerts used by Big Boss' forces to make Snake's presence known. *Metal Gear Solid* (1998), the first 3D entry in the series, follows Solid Snake as he infiltrates Shadow Moses, an Alaskan nuclear disposal site where his former FOXHOUND¹⁸ compatriot Liquid Snake is leading an uprising against the US government. *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* (2001) focuses on new protagonist Raiden (much to the dismay of hardcore fans), a novice FOXHOUND member forced into a

simulation-gone-awry meant to train operatives to the level of the legendary Solid Snake.

Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater (2004) provides players the opportunity to experience the series narrative from the perspective of the other by telling the origin story of Big Boss as he undergoes his first mission in the jungles of 1960's Russia. *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots* (2008) serves as the culminating event of Solid Snake's story both literally and metaphorically as it sees him finally defeating Revolver Ocelot, but also implies his death at the end of the game. *Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker* (2010), the only canonical entry not initially released on a major console,¹⁹ returns players to the perspective of Big Boss as he stops yet another nuclear-equipped Metal Gear in Costa Rica, and begins building his private army, Militaires Sans Frontieres (MSF). The last canonical entry in the series, *Metal Gear Solid V*, is broken into two parts, *Ground Zeroes* (2014), which documents Big Boss' failed rescue mission at a CIA black site in Cuba, and the destruction of MSF, and *The Phantom Pain* (2015), which explores Venom Snake's mission to exact revenge as Big Boss' doppelganger.

In the next section of this chapter, I more thoroughly delve into *MGS3* and *MGSV*, providing a broad overview of each game's plot while addressing the morally challenging situations players encounter throughout their experience.



Fig. 4. Screenshots of the ubiquitous cardboard box and its evolution taken by Ryan Wasser (except where otherwise specified);

Fig. 4.1. (*Metal Gear*).

Fig. 4.2. by Daft PunkJet ("Cardboard Box").

Fig. 4.3. (*Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain*).

B. *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*

*Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater (MGS3)*²⁰ is a stealth-action game set in Cold War Russia for the Playstation 2 (PS2) game console. Consistent with other games in the series, *Snake Eater* places a premium on stealth tactics and incorporates an improved combat system (referred to in-game as CQC—Close Quarters Combat) to facilitate nonlethal player methods of subduing enemy combatants. The game is composed of two interconnected missions: the prelude, known as “Virtuous Mission,” and the main narrative of the game, “Operation: Snake Eater.”

1. Virtuous Mission

MGS3 follows Naked Snake, a former Green Beret turned CIA operative sent on his first “sneaking mission” to extract a Soviet scientist, Dr. Nikolai Sokolov, who has vital information about a top-secret weapons program. After Snake is briefed about “Virtuous Mission’s” parameters, players assume control, and guide him through the region, engaging with Soviet soldiers along the way (“*MGS3*” Kefka 9:45). Dealing with low-level enemies is the most common moral dilemma players face (in both games), but because such events occur frequently, it becomes easy to overlook them from a moral perspective. As moral agents with ultimate control over their enemies’ fate, players are left to decide on a moment-to-moment basis whether to engage with enemies, and whether to employ lethal tactics (various forms of firearms, CQC: knife to the throat), or nonlethal tactics (tranquilizer weapons, CQC: chokehold or throw). Depending on what “map” the players happen to be on,²¹ they can also attempt to avoid contact altogether by sneaking past the opposition. Scrupulous players can choose to capture and interrogate enemy soldiers for useful

information such as details about patrol routes and radio frequencies that can be used to call off alerts. All of these mechanisms are explained during radio calls with Major Zero (the mission commander) on the way to the rendezvous with Sokolov, and are indispensable tools for players who take Kojima's philosophy of stealth and relative nonviolence to heart. As David Hayter explains: "Theoretically, I believe, you can get through the whole game without killing anybody except for the bosses, the six main people who you're gunning to get. So I thought that was interesting from a gameplay perspective but I also thought it was interesting from . . . a morality perspective" (qtd. in "Hideo Kojima Interview" 10:45). These sentiments are not limited to the fan community or people directly connected to the games; parents from *Common Sense Media's* game review forum laud the game for its emphasis on nonviolence, such as william²² who states, "Non-violence guys, this is a fundamental part of the game" (qtd. in Lazenby).

After meeting Sokolov at the rendezvous point, the scientist explains the broad strokes of the situation surrounding Colonel Volgin, the commander of Soviet intelligentsia (GRU), and how his war machine, the Shagohod, fits into the plan ("*MGS3*" Kefka 15:45). Snake (now back under the control of players) extracts Sokolov from the area, only to encounter his mentor, The Boss, who informs him of her intention to defect to the Soviet Union before hip-throwing him into a nearby river (31:30).²³ As she and Volgin depart, Volgin destroys the weapons facility with a nuclear-tipped recoilless rocket to make it appear as though the US had staged a direct attack on the USSR (39:00). After washing up on an embankment down the river, Snake is extracted from the area via a prototype of the Fulton Recovery System,²⁴ at which point the main story begins (40:00).

Virtuous Mission is a playable introduction to the game world, and acts more as a device for basic gameplay tutorials. However, it does introduce the most common moral dilemma players face, engagements with enemy combatants, as well as how to interact with the flora and fauna of the Russian jungle. In the following section I analyze Operation: Snake Eater, the game's main story, and the various moral dilemmas it features.

2. Operation: Snake Eater

After recovering from his injuries, Snake is informed that he must return to Russia to retrieve Sokolov, and assassinate The Boss or he will be labeled a traitor in an effort to preserve international relations (43:45).

After being redeployed, players guide Snake back to the ruins of the weapons facility where he meets Eva, one of two undercover Soviet operatives. One can easily draw connections between Eva and the biblical character Eve. For example, Eva is a double-agent (triple-agent to be



Fig. 5. Eva (Arkhound).

precise), so the name might be meant to act as a symbolic reference to her expulsion from her homeland. Another theory I have is that Eva's relationship with Snake represents an inversion of the Biblical story of Genesis, since Eva's real mission, as I discuss, is actually to tempt Snake throughout the game.

This theory accords thematically with the game, since this particular event is also the first where players are prompted to press the R1 button to enter a first-person perspective during a cinematic, allowing them to stare at Eva's body (in this instance her breasts) if they so choose. One criticism of Kojima's work is the way he represents women in his games, and whether or not these depictions actually oversexualize their characters (JackVk), or cause

players to experience emotional guilt (Alexandra). Either way, a discussion is warranted about whether participating in the voyeuristic act of staring at one's female compatriots constitutes a moral violation. While Kojima has been relatively silent about these criticisms, looking at his influences as well as details from the plot might provide a window into the intent behind this character's design. For example, the similarities between *MGS3* and *James Bond* movies is apparent, and given that Kojima identifies the *Bond* series as one of his favorites ("My Favorite Films"), it is not beyond the pale to assume that Eva was influenced by characters like Tatiana Romanova from *From Russia With Love* (1963), or Helga Brandt from *You Only Live Twice* (1967). Furthermore, Eva herself reflects on her mission and upbringing as a spy after she steals the "Philosopher's Legacy" (a massive cache of money compiled by allied nations after WWI), noting:

My mission was to find out where Volgin was hiding the "Philosopher's Legacy," and steal it, so I infiltrated his base as a KGB spy . . . I sneaked in by pretending I was Eva, and you, Sokolov, and Volgin, you all believed me . . . I am an agent of the Philosophers, a graduate of one of their "charm schools." (3:57:40)

While she does not explicitly describe the details of the Philosopher's "charm schools," it is reasonable to suspect that she would have been taught to exploit her opponents by whatever means necessary, including her feminine wiles, which one might further hypothesize would require her to adopt a certain degree of aesthetic seductiveness in order to accomplish her mission. So, while her portrayal is certainly misogynistic on the surface, it serves a deeper purpose than simply satiating "the male gaze" of Snake and the male gaming community. Contrary to that notion, Eva weaponizes her sexuality to gain the upper hand on her male competitors. This situation only appears amoral or immoral if one ignores the potentiality of

this theory—it might actually be more amoral to deny her the credit she deserves for outmaneuvering and outsmarting a handful of the most cunning military operatives (i.e. Snake, Ocelot, Volgin) in gaming history simply because she *appears* to be excessively sexualized. Given that Kojima seems to enjoy making directorial decisions that trouble player expectations and force uncomfortable conversations, it would not shock me if he intentionally designed Eva to stir controversy amongst players and critics, even if it came at his own expense. This does not change the fact that real female spies—Nancy Wake for example (Borgert)—would likely utilize every tool at their disposal to accomplish their mission, including their appearance.

Returning to the narrative, Eva instructs Snake to head to Graniny Gorki,²⁵ a nearby laboratory where she believes Sokolov is being held (59:20).²⁶ Players can infiltrate the facility in one of three ways, the first, bloodiest, and simplest being to shoot their way through GRU forces. The second way is to sneak into the facility without being seen, but since the GRU presence at the lab is heavy the third option of using a scientist's lab coat as a disguise seems to be the safest and most pragmatic way forward. The situation involves subtle, yet serious tactical and ethical considerations that ultimately return players to the question about whether violence morally justifiable when nonviolent methods of approach exist. For example, while it might be fun to cut loose and go on a murder spree from time to time (especially during subsequent playthroughs of the game), serious gamers will probably avoid that path since it is costly in terms of health and equipment, end of game rating,²⁷ and the players' ability justify their behavior. However, arguments are in place for the latter category of individuals that might mollify the effects of their potentially compromised principles, such as a notion put forth by Marcus Schulzke in "Defending the Morality of

Violent Video Games,” which states that since game characters lack essential human qualities such as consciousness, the ability to actually feel pain, and internal biological similarities (besides outside appearances), their relationship to gamers is effectively superficial. This means that “[i]n the virtual world, where attacking avatars does no real harm, it is unproblematic for all players to act aggressively” (129). For Schulzke, since players *ought* to be able to differentiate between virtual and actual combatants, the morality of killing their enemies should be a non-issue. However, that does not appear to be the case. As I discuss in chapter five, martial and non-martial players alike exhibited emotional responses to killing enemies unnecessarily, albeit frequently in different ways. Judging by the players’ responses, the games’ moral dilemmas are intentionally positioned to trouble players emotionally by forcing them to consider the ramifications of their actions regardless of whether they recognize the virtual nature of on-screen enemies or not.

Instead of finding Sokolov at Graniny Gorki, Snake meets Aleksandr Granin, a direct rival of Sokolov’s who decides to help Snake by giving him the location of the Shagohod (1:28:30). Snake resumes his mission and heads towards the mountain camp, encountering two more members of the Cobra unit along the way: The Fear (1:30:20) and The End (1:33:25). The End presents a unique moral dilemma for players because they have several ways of dealing with the ancient sniper. Players who prefer a challenge might be inclined to face him head-on, using various environmental cues (e.g. the glint from his scope) to determine his location, whereas players who prefer nonlethal tactics, or simply enjoy a different kind of challenge, might try tracking his footprints in order to sneak up on him and subdue him. However, two other methods exist for defeating The End, although they might be considered morally ambiguous. The first involves a simple decision *not* to play the game;

if players avoid the game for two weeks (or set the game system clock ahead two weeks) The End will die of old age. The second occurs on the docks on the way to Graniny Gorki. The End can be seen sitting in a wheelchair during a cutscene featuring Volgin, at which point the player can preemptively assassinate The End, preventing the sniper duel from ever occurring.

Fans of the game, such as MeMyselfandBill, JerseyKid17, and YummyLee from schreibertyler's 2015 *Giant Bomb* discussion, routinely claim that the battle with The End is the best boss fight in the series (if not gaming history), but with the exception of schreibertyler, nobody wrestles with the moral implications of unceremoniously executing a legendary sniper, or allowing him to simply die of old age. The general ambivalence towards using expedient methods of dispensing with The End might stem from simple pragmatism, since few people have the time to properly engage in a protracted sniper duel, or spend the time learning how to track his movements. According to DidYouKnowGaming, "Kojima originally wanted the fight with The End to be an intense tactical battle that would go on for weeks," and although this ultimately proved too difficult to fully implement, the battle can still take hours, or days for unskilled or unknowledgeable players ("*MGS3*" 5:29). However, that rationale might not apply to players who would willingly shoot an old man sleeping in a wheelchair, or those who would allow nature to do their dirty work for them by exploiting a technical glitch. Regardless of the direction players decide to take, the battle with The End provides players a unique opportunity to reflect on their actions and the implications of those actions.

After defeating both Cobras, Snake reaches the summit of the mountain where he meets Eva for information about the Shagohod ("*MGS3*" Kefka 1:40:45). This serves as the second cutscene where players are prompted to stare at a momentarily undressed Eva, except

this time players see her semi-clothed body (albeit briefly) instead of just her breasts. After descending²⁸ the mountain and defeating the last *living* member of the Cobra unit, The Fury, Snake infiltrates Grozny Grad where he locates Sokolov (2:02:05). Unfortunately, Snake is captured by Volgin, tortured for information about his mission,²⁹ and thrown in the Grozny Grad brig (2:10:40). Despite his grave injuries, Snake escapes the prison through its sewer system while being chased by Ocelot and his men, eventually diving from a drainage outlet into a waterway below. Snake is knocked unconscious, and in a dreamlike, half-dead state, encounters the spirit of The Sorrow, a prolific psychic and the final member of the Cobra unit (2:30:56). Traversing The Sorrow's River deviates from the game's stealth-action mechanics in favor of an *Alien Invader*-esque (1978) "dodge the incoming object" style of play, where the player must avoid the spirits of the men³⁰ they have killed in battle until that point; the more lethal a player has been, the harder this part of the game becomes. Players in u/WaZ606's *Reddit* discussion address this section at length, specifically debating the minutia of what qualifies as a kill, such as fyininja, and mar3585's back-and-forth about whether eating vultures that ate dead enemies counts since those enemies elicit "You ate me!" responses as Snake moves up the river. While this part of the game does not necessarily challenge the players' morality directly, it does challenge them to think about their previous and future actions by punishing them with their own body count.

Once The Sorrow realizes that Snake is not actually dead, he compels him to return to the world of the living (2:30:13), at which point the players rendezvous with Eva who details a plan for destroying the Shagohod. Snake then reinfilters Grozny Grad to carry out the plan (2:45:07), but is again confronted by Volgin who, having captured Eva while *she* was searching for the "Philosopher's Legacy," challenges Snake to hand-to-hand combat. After

defeating Volgin, Snake and Eva escape the facility on her motorcycle, while she informs him that The Boss would be waiting for him by the lake near their escape plane. Snake defeats Volgin a final time, and the pair make their way to the lake where The Boss explains the intricacies of what had happened, her philosophy for a world united in peace without a need for soldiers, the pain of her experiences, and importantly the implications of the battle to come (3:24:18). In her own words:

I raised you. I loved you. I've given you weapons, taught you techniques, endowed you with knowledge. There is nothing for me to give you. All that's left is for you to take my life by your own hand. One must die and one must live . . . It is our destiny . . . the one who survives will inherit the title of "Boss," and the one who inherits the title of Boss will face an existence of endless battle. (3:35:23)

While the battle itself is a difficult endeavor, it does not necessarily warrant any critique from the perspective of morality because of its relatively straightforward nature, although knowledgeable players can utilize a few tricks to gain the upper hand over The Boss. The real question of morality comes *after* the battle has been won. Once players defeat The Boss, they must deliver the killing shot as she lies dying on the ground. While they do not really have a choice in the matter per se, the players are allowed to execute her in their own time, which allows them a moment to reflect on the events of the game. This has consistently been listed as one of the most compelling moment of the series, with *Game Skinny's* Kathy Laborde noting the "incredible significance" of learning that The Boss is not in fact a traitor, and staff from *GamesRadar* referring to the battle as "a haunting, honourable end to Kojima's boldest *Metal Gear*" (katlaborde, "The Top Ten"; "The Top Ten Moments"). Ultimately the moral stakes of this event are rooted in the solicitude players pay to the

moment itself, as well as their emotional responses and intuitions, which I discuss in chapter five. The act of killing The Boss is tragic but necessary, both as a device for passing along the undergirding philosophy of the game, and facilitating the continuation of the narrative.



Fig. 6. Screenshot of the battle with The Boss taken by Ryan Wasser (*Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*).

Importantly, before The Boss is executed she passes Snake a microfiche with details about the “Philosopher’s Legacy” in order to keep it out of Soviet hands. With little time to waste, players head towards the seaplane, and after a brief encounter with Ocelot, Snake

and Eva escape to international airspace (3:43:10).

In the next chapter I analyze *MGSV*; however, I am going to briefly describe the closing cutscenes of *MGS3* since they provide crucial retrospective exposition about the narrative as well as insight into the evolution of Snake (4:06:59). Snake realizes, after an intimate night with Eva, that she had fooled him all along, and had stolen the “Philosopher’s Legacy” while he was asleep (4:01:08). The final scene shows Snake, in full “dress blue” regalia, reporting to President Johnson³¹ to receive an award for valor, as well as a new codename, “Big Boss,” an important milestone that might be considered the moment when Snake loses faith in the US government, and turns his back on his unit (4:03:25). The last image of the game is Snake rendering a final salute at The Boss’ unmarked grave (4:07:15).

Chapter IV. Analysis of *Metal Gear Solid V*

Similar to *MGS3*, *Metal Gear Solid V* is a third-person stealth-action game for various Playstation and Xbox consoles as well as Windows computer platforms. Players typically play as “Big Boss” (or at least they think they do in *TPP*), although a variety of other characters³² become available later in the game for missions not connected to the main narrative. *MGSV* features a variety of improvements over its predecessors, the first being the not-so-small matter of how equipment is handled in game. In previous installments (with the exception of *Peace Walker*), the main character was magically able to haul all of his equipment with him at all times. In *MGSV*, the character is limited to a handful of support items, one rifle, one sidearm, and an optional heavy item such as long-rifles, missile launchers or riot shields slung across the back. This entails certain considerations that might affect the way players perceive the game such as having the wrong kind of equipment or too little equipment for a given situation. The experience of managing Mother Base first introduced in *Peace Walker* returns, but is vastly updated; players can now visit the base to interact with their soldiers, work in the Research and Development center, and utilize a multitude of target ranges for practice. Another feature taken from *Peace Walker* is the mission select option that replaces the traditionally linear narrative that hallmarked earlier entries in the series. Players now have the option to pursue the game’s main narrative, engage in “Side Ops” such as acquiring weapon schematics, rescue POWs and eliminate high-profile enemy forces, or utilize the “Free Roam” mode to experiment and explore the environment. Kojima talks about the freedom of the game’s open-world design and the effect he hopes it has on players in a 2014 interview with Matt Peckham, stating, “*Metal Gear Solid* is for the most part an infiltration game. You go somewhere, you execute your mission, then

you go back . . . You choose what to do—things that question your morality and your values” (“Interview: Hideo”). The game’s ability to encourage introspective reflection is magnified by the relatively subdued personality of Venom Snake (in comparison to other protagonists), something Kojima deliberately changed to divorce players from charismatic personalities like Big Boss in order to facilitate the players’ ability to project themselves onto Venom, thus extending their onto-ludological freedom³³ in the process (“Hideo Kojima Answers” 5:37). In the following sections I provide a plot summary of *Ground Zeroes (GZ)* and *The Phantom Pain (TPP)*³⁴ as well as analyses of both games’ moral dilemmas.

A. *Ground Zeroes (2014)*

GZ is a separate, playable prologue chapter for *MGSV* released a year prior to *TPP*. While that might not seem like such a bad thing on the surface, gamers and reviewers alike castigated Konami for releasing the game in parts, with critics like *IGN*’s Lucy O’Brien rightfully attacking *GZ* as a “stripped down affair” that relies too heavily on “unusually provocative cruelty,” even though she praises the game for its “incredible promise” in the end. Other reviewers such as *Kotaku*’s Kirk Hamilton compare it to a teaser by describing it “as a small plate at an expensive restaurant.” The reason I decided to acknowledge these criticisms (since I do not particularly agree with them) is because *GZ* is, by my own admission, excessively short, even with the non-canon, extra missions. In many ways the game is similar to *MGS3*’s “Virtuous Mission” in that it is a playable piece of exposition that sets up *TPP*, and therefore includes fewer moral dilemmas than the main game.

Ground Zeroes, which starts eleven years after Operation: Snake Eater, and a year after the Peace Walker³⁵ incident, is the prologue chapter of *MGSIV*, and follows Big Boss' infiltration of Camp Omega to rescue two individuals from the previous game, Paz Ortega (a double agent who tried to kill Big Boss), and Chico, a child soldier, while a UN inspection of MSF and Mother Base is set to occur. The inspection, however, is revealed in a cutscene to be a ploy by Skullface (the game's main villain) intended to draw Big Boss away long enough to launch an attack on his private militia ("GZ" Kefka 2:10). Big Boss' first mission is to locate Chico, who he believes will have information about Paz's whereabouts.

As with other games in the series, as players proceed they encounter numerous, individually detailed US Marines, and since Big Boss does not start this mission with less-lethal weaponry, the only option for dealing with sentries revolves around avoiding contact altogether, which is possible but also excruciatingly tedious, using CQC to choke the guards into submission, or shooting them with a rifle. Moreover, players are made aware through audio recordings—the replacement for the previously used, extensive cutscenes—that the Marines are basically unaware of the illegal activities at Camp Omega, and are therefore also largely innocent. Fortunately, the mechanics of Kojima's new "Fox Engine" allow for players to nonlethally wound opposition forces, so shooting a Marine in the knee is an option although it still carries the risk of allowing the injured Marine to call for help, or worse, bleed out due to a poorly taken shot. While essentially the same as the dilemma faced by players in *MGS3*, the added dimensions of enemy uniqueness coupled with increased realism inevitably changes the way enemies are perceived, at least in theory. Returning to Schulzke, if enemy characters are not conscious and do not feel pain, then they are theoretically fair game ("Defending" 129), but how does that perspective change when the characters act and react

consciously to stimuli (e.g. being attacked), and more importantly, when they exhibit visceral pain after being injured? I cannot justify needlessly committing violent acts when appropriate avenues of approach are available that would allow me to infiltrate the location nonviolently and without detection. However, since the canonical narrative is fairly short, I can see how it would be easy to justify “speed runs” where moral disengagement is all but necessary to complete the objectives within a self-allotted time period.

After locating Chico, the players carry him to the extraction point where he gives Big Boss an audiotape containing Paz’s location on the base (14:10). He finds her and extracts her to the rendezvous point, at which point they depart for Mother Base (27:45). Once on the helicopter, Chico locates a massive “V” shaped scar on Paz’s abdomen, which the on-board medic promptly identifies as an explosive (34:00). The medic performs emergency surgery to remove the explosive just as Mother Base comes into view, leading to the realization that a severely limited MSF had come under attack (37:45). He orders the chopper down to one of the platforms to rescue his closest advisor, Kazuhira Miller, before again departing to get away from the carnage. Paz suddenly wakes up in a frenzy, hinting to the fact that another bomb is hidden somewhere in her body, at which point she throws herself³⁶ from the open-bay door of the helicopter (41:26). The bomb explodes meters from the vehicle; while Miller sustains terrible albeit workable injuries, Chico is killed, and Big Boss and the medic (who jumped in front of the blast to save his mentor) are gravely injured. Both slip into extended comas, and are taken to a hospital in Cyprus where the beginning of *TPP* takes place nine years later (41:45).

B. *The Phantom Pain* (2015)

The Phantom Pain is, *in toto*, a different kind of game because of its jarring approach to topics like war, death, trauma, and revenge. Kojima describes his intent for the game in a 2015 video by DidYouKnowGaming as an attempt to “depict how you come back from war” noting that “even if you make it back you won’t be able to make it back unscratched,” and that “even if you come back, there’s some pain with you.” Kojima further states, “I tried to depict this in my games. One way to do this is by my characters losing limbs, that’s something I did want to put in the games” (“*MGS5 Caddicarus*” 0:50). According to Kojima in an earlier interview with DidYouKnowGaming, these tonal changes are represented symbolically throughout the game: the early uses of names like Ahab and Ishmael; Venom’s hook-hand; the giant, flaming whale witnessed by the players outside of the Cyprus hospital; and the name of Diamond Dog’s helicopter (the Pequod) are all direct references to Herman Melville’s 1851 classic, *Moby Dick* (“*MGSV VG Facts*” 11:10), a book about one man’s obsession with exacting revenge on the beast that destroyed his life. *TPP* shares this theme, something made explicit by Kazuhira Miller at the end of the game’s first mission, which raises an important question germane to the theme of my research: is pursuing revenge a moral decision? While my official answer to that question is a simple “no,” I do understand the desire to pursue vengeance in the name of fallen comrades, and it is precisely that tension that inspired me to conduct this study in the first place.

After waking up in a hospital, players learn that their avatar, “Ahab,” has been in a coma for the last nine years, and that his body has been peppered by debris, making it appear as though he has a “demon” horn (“*TPP*” Kefka 7:45). While Ahab is being informed of his situation by medical staff, a female assassin—Quiet—appears in the background, murdering

the doctor with a garrote (12:30). As she prepares to shoot Ahab, the patient in the next bed douses her with a flammable liquid and “gives her a light,” causing the assassin to jump through a nearby window in an attempt to save herself (14:40). The other patient, “Ishmael,” leads Ahab through the hospital as they are assailed by unknown enemy forces as well as two supernatural individuals, a levitating, redheaded boy (“the Third Boy”) who can seemingly pass through solid materials, and a literal Man on Fire. Back under player control, Venom/Ahab and Big Boss/Ishmael escape the hospital, and use an ambulance to ram their way through an enemy guard post, flipping the vehicle in the process and knocking Ahab unconscious (34:25). After waking up, Revolver Ocelot rescues Venom/Ahab from the Man on Fire and The Third Boy, and helps him get to the new Mother Base established just outside of Seychelles in the Somali Sea, reminding him along the way of who he “really” is and what happened³⁷ during his coma (47:00).

Venom’s first mission after regaining his health is to rescue Kazuhira Miller. Similar to *GZ*, enemies can be eliminated lethally or nonlethally (with a wide range of tranquilizer-equipped or less-lethal arms), or simply avoided altogether. However, actions in this game have different consequences than in past titles; enemies and injured personnel can be extracted to Mother Base as recruits for Diamond Dogs, although surviving the extraction process is not guaranteed. Moreover, killing enemy soldiers counts negatively towards a player’s “Heroism” score (which affects the likelihood that extracted enemies will be recruited), as well as their “Demon Point” (DP) score, a hidden morality system that attempts to judge the character of the player. This hidden system is one of the more profound additions to the series since it casts a shadow of morality over most actions in the game; for example, if players kill an animal (for whatever reason) they accrue 20 DP, and if they



Fig. 7. Screenshots of becoming “Demon Snake” taken by Ryan Wasser from (*Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain*).

critically wound an enemy, regardless of the situation they take on 60 DP. More serious offenses like killing Mother Base soldiers net Venom 180 DP per offense, forcing ethically minded players (or those simply concerned with their point totals) to deeply consider the ramifications of their actions during play (“Demon Points”).

Furthermore, players who accumulate a certain number of points begin to see changes in Venom’s appearance: players with less than 20,000 DP remain unchanged with only a small piece of shrapnel sticking out

of Venom’s forehead; those who breach 20,000 DP for the first time will notice that the shrapnel begins to protrude,

taking on the appearance of a horn. Upon reaching 50,000 points Venom suddenly appears to be doused in blood that cannot be washed away (no matter how many times the player showers at Mother Base). This final form—as seen on the bottom half of Figure 7—is what the game refers to as “Demon Snake,” and represents Venom’s complete submission to the “Big Boss” persona. These effects can be removed by performing morally righteous actions such as extracting animals from combat zones (-30 DP), extracting VIPs via helicopter (-120 DP), or most notably disposing of nuclear weapons, which removes 1,000 DP for every weapon destroyed.

After finding Miller, Venom is ambushed by “the Skulls,” individuals who, according to Miller, are willing participants (such as Quiet) in Skullface’s genetic modification program (1:04:00; 6:01:00). Outnumbered and outmatched, Venom and Miller flee the area, and

return to the new Mother Base located outside of Madagascar. While in transit, Miller describes the events that transpired during Venom's absence, and vows to help him rebuild the army they lost in 1974. In Miller's³⁸ own words, Diamond Dogs' mission is to "pull in money [and] recruits . . . to combat Cipher . . . all for revenge" (1:10:56).

Venom's overarching mission is to gather intelligence about Skullface's operations in Afghanistan and Africa in order to avenge MSF, but along the way he undertakes numerous other missions such as the recovery of Huey Emmerich (a disgraced engineer from *Peace Walker*), and dealing with the sniper Quiet. The battle with Quiet, while exceptionally hard, is an important benchmark in the game because it is the first moment where players are forced to deal with an enemy they do not understand. To start, players are given the freedom to decide *how* they engage with Quiet. In reality the only way to deal with Quiet is to either use lethal or nonlethal rifles to engage her from afar, but a speedier method exists that involves calling a cargo supply drop on her location to knock her unconscious. Regardless of the players' decision, Quiet is always rendered unconscious, which leads to the real dilemma: what should players do with a half-naked, unconscious opponent who moments before had been trying to kill them (and has tried to kill them before, if they were paying attention)? Players are given a choice between killing Quiet, or listening to Ocelot, who feels as though "she might be useful" on the battlefield (1:34:10). However this situation is more nuanced than most of the other dilemmas (with the exception of The Boss) since the moral implications of the players' actions are no longer masked by the frenzy of battle, and they must consciously decide to pull the trigger. While it is reasonable to assume that most players decide to spare Quiet because of what she represents as a game-asset, that action in itself might be considered problematic since treating people as a means to an end, as opposed to an

end in themselves is often construed as an ethical crime. Either way, since recruiting Quiet is considered the canonical decision (as evidenced by the body of in-game material dedicated to her), I proceed with this analysis as if that were the case.

At this point in the story, Venom has enough information to take the fight directly to Skullface. The main danger posed by Skullface is his desire to weaponize vocal chord parasites—a biological weapon activated by the intonations of speakers of specific languages—against the English-speaking world (3:12:50). He also plans to create an arsenal of nuclear weapons (controlled remotely and secretly by him) which he intends to make available to as many minority groups as possible in order to instantiate a zero-sum form of nuclear deterrence (3:42:30). The conflict with Skullface culminates with a battle against Sahelanthropus, his version of a Metal Gear piloted psychically by The Third Boy (3:53:45). After an intense firefight, players defeat Skullface and functionally disable Sahelanthropus. Skullface, pinned under the flaming wreckage of a tower destroyed by the behemoth, resorts to begging Venom to kill him to end his suffering.

This scene is similar to the scene after the battle with Quiet in that players are forced to decide whether they will consciously participate in the execution of Skullface, or if they will allow other characters, Kaz and Emmerich specifically, to do it by proxy. If players choose not to shoot Skullface, a brief waiting period occurs, after which Kaz grabs Venom's hand, and forces him to shoot off his fallen enemy's arm and leg, mirroring their own injuries, before throwing the weapon to the ground with a spare round of ammunition so Skullface can finish the act himself. If players choose to shoot, each round they fire makes the screen flash back to an image of Venom as he was in the hospital—damaged and almost beyond repair—before the rest of the scene unfolds with Kaz. However, this situation is

different from the scene with Quiet for a few fundamental reasons, which ought to be taken into account when deliberating the proper course of action. First, Skullface is not unconscious and is actually asking to be put out of his misery, so it stands to reason that a player who chooses to execute him might view the act as one of compassion. However, one might also suggest that executing him only fulfills the prophecy of the game (implied by *Moby Dick*): exacting revenge on an enemy is not enough to remove the “phantom pain” experienced by those who have suffered loss, a realization that should make it necessary for the player to stop and consider their reason for doing whatever they ultimately decide to do. In the end, the morality of this situation is based as much on the players’ circumspective consideration of their intentions as it is on the act itself. For Schulzke, killing virtual characters is not necessarily wrong because the players are not intending to kill another person while they are playing the game, but similar to the issue with Quiet that perspective does not necessarily hold up under closer scrutiny (“Defending” 129). The problem with Schulzke’s position is that it only seems to address mundane game situations such as dealing with low-level enemy combatants, but the situation with Skullface is different since it explicitly requires players to determine whether or not they will play an active part in their enemy’s prolonged demise. Intentionality, therefore, is a key feature of this dilemma. For my part, I am hard pressed to decide whether I decided to spare Skullface because I cannot morally justify executing a defenseless enemy, or if deep down I felt that he deserved to suffer for his crimes; reflecting on this issue while writing this thesis has shown me that I am still wrestling with the reason behind my own decision about the matter. As far as the plot is concerned, after refusing Skullface’s request, Venom heads towards the Pequod to return to Mother Base, but as he is leaving a gunshot can be heard in the background—as revenge for

the abuse he suffered (and potentially to tie up a loose end), Huey Emmerich executes Skullface (“*TPP*” Kefka 4:08:15).

With the primary mission complete, a series of important, tangential issues develop, specifically a second outbreak of parasites on Mother Base, later revealed to be the machination of Emmerich’s attempt to leverage the pathogen for money from outside sources. The mission starts out simple enough: Venom must enter the quarantine zone to rescue any surviving Diamond Dogs soldiers not infected with vocal chord parasites. A cutscene begins where Code Talker—another of Venom’s advisors— attempts to explain the parasites’ urge to get into open space to spread themselves to the outside world, but he is quickly interrupted by a mob of infected soldiers (who essentially act like zombies³⁹) trying to break out of the medical bay. Venom is forced to kill a handful of them before calling for an artillery strike to prevent their escape (5:23:13). Players then regain control, although their freedom is fundamentally limited. As Green notes, the “players [are] not given any choice” regarding how they handle the situation because “[all] of the infected soldiers must be killed or the game would be effectively trapped in the moment, with the player unable to advance the narrative any further,” a chilling revelation that only worsens when it becomes apparent that everybody in the bay has been infected. Kojima did not include the horror of this scene for mere shock-value (68). By forcing players to shoot their own soldiers while removing their autonomous ability to *choose* to do so, Kojima, according to Grant Tavinor, effectively “[subverts] the interactivity of the game in order to make a narrative point” (qtd. in Green 68). This, however, does not relieve players of the sense of moral responsibility they feel towards their actions—at least not in my experience—something Kojima discusses in his 2014 interview with *Time Magazine*:

In the case of a movie, in the end it's a different character separate from you executing all these actions. But in the game, it depends on you. It depends on your will to execute, to do something, to be violent or not . . . I feel like this is something unique, that I can portray this violence, and then the user can experience the truth of what that kind of violence entails . . . So yes, it's a kind of contradictory approach, but I want people to understand the side effects, the effects of violence through experiencing battles in the games.

My opinion accords nicely with Kojima's attitude about the use of violence in games: the morality of this situation has less to do with the actual acts players commit, and more to do with the concern they pay towards the mission as a whole. Players who do not maintain conscious solicitude towards their soldiers, or those who run through the halls maniacally gunning them down without a second thought are shirking what I consider to be their ethical duty to bear witness to their soldiers' final, gut-wrenching moments.

After the outbreak is quelled, Quiet is revealed to be a carrier of a special strain of parasites, causing her to leave Mother Base out of care for her fellow soldiers (6:03:15); however, while on her own she is captured by Soviet forces, leading to a particularly troubling scene where her captors attempt to rape and murder her, before she breaks free and kills them all (6:08:05). Once Venom arrives a massive battle ensues, at which point Quiet is knocked unconscious. Unfortunately, while trying to rescue her Venom is bitten by a poisonous snake, forcing Quiet to speak in order to call for medical support, thus activating her vocal chord parasite (6:19:35). She disappears into the desert before help arrives, effectively accepting a death sentence rather than take the chance of spreading her contagion to her fellow soldiers (6:21:00).

Similar to concerns about Eva's over-sexualization, critics such as Chris Plante and Heather Alexandra have chided Kojima over Quiet's portrayal, claiming her only reason for existing is to act as a sexualized object, which is paradoxically stripped of any eroticism. However, the most powerful critique of Quiet is by Michael Thomsen of *Forbes*, who analyzes her relationship to The Boss in his 2015 article "Guilt, Shame, and Quiet: Women in 'Metal Gear Solid'":

[The Boss] exists not as a woman, but as a narrative device to prove the absolute self-control to which every soldier aspires is a farce, at least if you're a man. Believing that you're ultimately nothing but a farce—that you can deserve nothing better than the clichéd backwash for generations that came before you—is central to the kind of culture that produces a character like Quiet, naked and poised for a sexual imagination that can neither articulate itself nor claim responsibility for itself.

Of course powerful does not necessarily imply correct, or even fully informed for that matter. Later in his critique Thomsen correctly describes Quiet as being "infected with a parasite that requires her to breathe and drink through her skin while feeding herself through calories from photosynthesis," but also suggests that "[h]er life literally depends on her nudity, a way of sexualizing without having to eroticize her, or grant her libidinal agency separate from metaphoric obligations to the story," and while there is some truth in that observation it ultimately fails to acknowledge the nuances of her situation. As previously noted, Quiet is the assassin that "Ishmael" lights on fire at the beginning of the game (14:00); at that point she was dressed in full combat fatigues, and obviously capable of speech. It is later revealed in her conversation with Code Talker that she was instructed by Skullface to release her strain of the parasites inside Mother Base, implying that she was originally out for revenge but that

she had not spoken, nor would she ever because of the loyalty she developed for Venom and Diamond Dogs (6:03:40). Furthermore, Kojima has obliquely responded to these criticisms (as well as others about other controversial themes like the inclusion of child-soldiers) by stating he “didn’t want to stay away from these things that could be considered sensitive” because “[i]f we don’t cross that line, if we don’t make attempts to express what we really want to express games will only be games” (“*MGS5 Caddicarus*” 2:30), a sentiment he initially discussed in 2014 when he asserted that without “going that far” regarding sensitive issues like trauma, games might never “be considered culture” (“*MGSV VG Facts*” 10:50). The tragedy of Quiet is in many ways the same as Volgin’s (aka the Man on Fire); she is a ruined person whose suffering and crippling wounds force her to decide between letting go of her failures or sacrificing her dignity in order to pursue vengeance, a pursuit she ultimately abandons after getting too close to her target. Thomsen claims that Quiet is incapable of articulating herself, something that is simply not the case; she can articulate herself but chooses not to because of the danger it poses to the people around her (“Guilt”).⁴⁰ Either way, that is a far cry from Thomsen’s perception. Is it wrong of players to stare at Quiet⁴¹ when they have the opportunity to do so? Absolutely. However, I find myself wondering whether it would have been just as immoral to forgo Quiet in the first place by failing to notice her at all, effectively rendering her quiet in a literal sense.

Mission 46, “Truth: The Man Who Sold the World,” serves as the canonical end of *The Phantom Pain*. The mission, which is triggered by an audio recording, is a posttraumatic flashback of the escape from Cyprus where players learn that Venom—their avatar throughout the game—is not Big Boss; he is the medic that shielded Big Boss from the explosion at the end of *Ground Zeroes*. Now aware of his true identity, Venom faces the

decision of either accepting his role in Big Boss' scheme, or determining his own direction. Venom chooses the former, flipping the tape and playing the reverse side labeled "Operation: Intrude N313."⁴² While never explicitly stated, this watershed moment is where Venom accepts his role as Big Boss' phantom, and assumes his position as the leader of "Outer Heaven," the unit that threatens the world with nuclear annihilation during the original *Metal Gear*. Now metaphorically a "demon," Venom smashes the mirror on the wall in front of him and with it his own perception of self as the Diamond Dogs emblem fades into the distinctive skull of Outer Heaven. Venom Snake walks away from the mirror into the mist, ready to face his next mission ("TPP" Kefka 7:25:00).

Chapter V. The Current Study

The moral dilemmas discussed in the previous chapter, among other things, are just one of the reasons *Metal Gear* has always stood apart from its contemporaries. These instances, which place primacy on stealth gameplay and nonviolent operations, levy a degree of moral pressure on the shoulders of players that seems to be missing in other games, and it is precisely that experience of moral questioning on the part of players that I find most compelling. My supposition is that games featuring intuitive gameplay, rich narratives, and significant challenges to players' morality—games like *Metal Gear*—have the potential to evoke observable patterns of behavior in individuals with shared life experiences. In this chapter I put that hypothesis to the test. By surveying players from martial career fields, I hope to gain insight into their gameplay behavior by looking for patterns in their responses, and comparing those patterns (if any exist) to those from a similarly composed, non-martial group.

The survey consists of qualitative and quantitative questions that ask players to examine and reflect on their actions during most⁴³ of the scenarios described in my textual analysis as well as a question about how the Demon Point System (DPS) affects the way they play *TPP*. While over 150 individuals participated in the study, only 31 men qualified for the martial group. The participants were roughly 29 years of age, and 67% came from the USA and the UK. The rest of the participants hailed from countries such as Greece, Germany, Canada, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Australia. The non-martial group, which I randomly selected from the rest of the total sample, was similar to the martial group except that they tended to be slightly younger, and included a single female from Germany, who was between 19 to 24 years old.

The first observation that became apparent was that the largest “cluster” of responses to the questions from either group tended to be thematically similar. When I mention “clusters” I am referring to any set of 5 or more similar responses to an individual question. For example, when asked about whether they executed characters like Quiet or Skullface, players from both groups routinely answered that they spared Quiet because they were “aware of her being a very useful asset in gameplay”; this question was unique because it also featured a second, smaller cluster that indicated both groups chose to spare both characters “because it seemed unethical” to murder them. When asked about the battle with The End, 20% of both groups stated that they used nonlethal approaches towards the fight, with many of the same individuals noting they did so because “they wanted the camo he [dropped].” Close to half of both groups noted that they did not perceive enemies in the games as real, although that did not stop them from going out of their way to rescue them if they were injured. A little over 60% of all participants preferred to save injured enemies when they had the opportunity do so, although this often “[depended] on their grading”⁴⁴ as a resource for Mother Base, and, more often than not, this concern was predicated by a desire to prevent the negative effects of *not* rescuing the wounded. These commonalities would suggest that most players of these games, regardless of their background, treat them *as games*, as evidenced by the fact that the majority of them treat game-instances as occasions to collect some kind of instrumental resource, be it an ally (Quiet), equipment (The End’s gear), or “talent” (soldiers for Mother Base). Despite this observation, in each group there were also outlying clusters that described different, more nuanced experiences with the games, and in each case the martial group’s position tended to be inherently different from the non-martial group’s position. The rest of this analysis is be dedicated to those clusters,

primarily because I suspect they will provide insight into some facet of their group that might otherwise go overlooked.

A. The Demon Point System (DPS)

My primary concern about the DPS was looking for ways it may have affected player behavior, so it stands to reason that I will only be discussing players who were aware of it during gameplay.⁴⁵ In the martial group only 17 of 31 individuals said they were aware of the DPS, with 53% indicating they changed their behavior whereas 21 out of 31 non-martial individuals said they were aware of the DPS, with 48% changing their behavior. Despite the similarity of the groups, their responses about how their behavior was affected, or why they felt they were not affected by the DPS were provocative to say the least. The only consistent patterns were statements made by players who were not affected by the DPS: in the first pattern, 18% of the 17 martial individuals and 29% of the 21 non-martial individuals said their behavior stayed the same because they already preferred to use a nonviolent style of gameplay. In the second pattern, 18% of the 17 martial individuals and 14% of the 21 non-martial individuals noted that their behavior did not change because either they felt “morality based games should be played in accordance to the way you make choices” or simply because “[they] play the game the way [they] felt like” playing it.

However, the answers provided by players whose behavior changed because of the DPS could not have been more different: 67% of the martial individuals affected by the DPS noted that the biggest reason it changed their behavior is because it forced them to be aware of how they were acting in the game. One participant in particular said, “It made me more conscious of the fact that something was watching my game ethics.” As for the non-martial

group, the biggest priority for them seemed to be adhering to their own conceptualizations of “good”: roughly 30% individuals affected by the DPS system did so because they “like to be the good guy,” or as one player put it, “I don’t really like the idea of doing bad things, knowing that I have the opportunity to do good things.” The differences between the groups, while subtle, are important because they seem to point to an underlying difference in the way the two groups perceive morality in games: the martial players seemed to be more concerned with whether or not they were acting ethically within a certain set of preexisting moral principles, ostensibly those similar to the military’s “Law of Armed Conflict” or other codes prescribed by martial lifestyles, whereas the non-martial players seemed more concerned with upholding archetypal conceptualizations about what a “good guy” is.

B. Quiet and Skullface

The statistics were clear on this issue: if players were going to execute either character it was going to be Skullface,⁴⁶ and while 50% of each group chose to do just that, what made this question enlightening were the reasons *why* the players chose to do what they did. Roughly 40% of martial players “killed Skullface for revenge,” with many indicating an inability to comprehend his motivations; others simply referred to his actions as “pure evil,” and a few cited his attacks against MSF, Diamond Dogs, and Chico and Paz as their motivation for acting. The common thread was that the players frequently described themselves such as one player who said, “Skullface was a thorn in my side that had to be destroyed.” The reason why this stands out is because while a slightly smaller cluster⁴⁷ of non-martial players said they felt that Skullface deserved to die, they tended to reference somebody other than themselves (if they mentioned anyone at all) as their motivation for

acting. A good example came from one non-martial individual who stated that he “executed Skullface because he took everything from Big Boss, and Kaz.” Others seemed less concerned with the issue narratively, noting that they killed Skullface because he “was the ‘Bad Guy,’” or that they simply did so out of curiosity, to “check if [they were] compelled to” do so. This is important, even if not decisively so, because it seems to imply that martial individuals are more predisposed to inserting themselves in the game (often literally) than their non-martial counterparts who seemingly act the way they do for less personal reasons.

C. The End

The most interesting question focused on the battle with The End. Both groups were similar in that most players used nonlethal approaches to defeat The End while the second most popular method was to execute him on the Graniny Gorki docks, an act most attributed to curiosity (“I was curious to see what would happen”), expediency (“Killing him in the wheelchair is the quickest way”) or humor (“I thought it would be funny if I shot him right there”). The rest of the players were equally divided between the traditional sniper battle, using lethal means to kill him at close range, or letting him die of old age (i.e. “the clock method”). Again, motivation tended to differentiate the groups. About 16% of the martial group described fighting The End in the way that they did out of respect, or because it seemed more meaningful such as one player who said, “I felt the ultimate sniper deserved to die through the ultimate sniper battle.” Another noted that since “The End is portrayed as a legendary sniping god . . . it would be quite unusual to kill him in any other way.”

Conversely, the non-martial players provided almost as many unique reasons for their actions as there were members in the group, with the most significant motivators being that the

players used nonlethal tactics because they felt that is what Big Boss would have done, using lethal means “because [they] didn’t know about the other ways [they] could beat him,” or to test their skill (“I wanted to see if I could be quick enough to slyly snipe him before he left the area”) just to name a few. These observations are important for two reasons: first, as evidenced by the sheer number of different responses by the non-martial group, it seemed as though there was more coherence in the experiences of martial individuals, and second, of the martial perspectives, the most significant was a tendency to act in ways that treated The End with a certain degree of reverence. Again, this seems to indicate that the battle with The End takes on a decidedly personal tone for martial players, something that might be attributed to similar experiences in their martial careers.

D. The Boss

Players are not left with many options regarding the execution of The Boss; they either do or do not shoot her (elongating the scene indefinitely), but that does not mean that the participants failed to provide interesting responses regarding how they felt about the situation. For starters, 43% of the martial group and 39% of the non-martial group made similar statements describing the negative emotions they experienced after “pulling the trigger.” Some martial individuals described how the “moral dilemma” posed by the situation made them feel, with many admitting to feeling “uncomfortable” or “sad,” while others referred to the act as “an ethical crime” despite understanding its overall “necessity.” The non-martial group echoed similar sentiments, although some also admitted to not shooting The Boss immediately to see if they could avoid having to do so altogether; one participant even described “[waiting] like thirty minutes before proceeding!” This pattern of behavior is

totally absent in the martial group's responses, and is something that I believe directly ties into a more important observation about martial individuals: the martial group seemed to agree that executing The Boss is a matter of duty. About 43% of the group described the situation using terms like "duty" or "necessary," although more than half of the same individuals also identified feeling tension between their personal loyalty to The Boss and accomplishing their mission. One participant summed this position up perfectly: "Morally it was wrong to kill [your] own master; but in the sense of duty it was the thing to do." One might argue that, given their experiences in real life, the martial players did not bother waiting to see if they could avoid executing The Boss because they ultimately knew that allowing her to survive was simply not an option available to them.

E. Enemy Soldiers

One of the more important differences between the martial and non-martial players is the way they perceive and act towards enemies in the games, especially injured enemies. Non-martial players, despite largely⁴⁸ agreeing that game enemies did not seem real, were also quite open about their willingness to set their perceptions aside to better enmesh themselves in the game. About 20% of the players noted that they *acted as if* they were real in order to facilitate greater immersion, such as one individual who stated he was "able to push aside [his] disbelief, and put [himself] into their world." Placing primacy on immersion seemed to be a theme within the non-martial group that directly contradicted the martial group's responses.

Conversely, about 30% of martial players indicated perceiving enemies in the games as real. Some participants related that feeling to real-world military experiences ("I have been

in the Army so I can feel them”), or the behavior displayed by enemies (“Their reaction surely seemed real”), while others referenced intangible aspects of the enemies “essence” as the cause of their perceptions (“I treat the enemy and the situation as a live situation, thus the enemy and their humanity are also real”). One individual in particular provided detailed insight by stating the enemies he faced felt “real enough that I don’t enjoy killing them for no reason, and that “ I feel like how I act to the enemies in [the] game is still a reflection of who I am, and I wouldn’t treat an enemy combatant disrespectfully.” However, this seemed to contradict the survey statistics that indicated martial players were almost twice as likely to abandon injured enemies than their non-martial counterparts. Many martial individuals—about 20%—felt that injured enemies “[were] not worth the trouble to rescue,” and many of the same individuals stated that the only thing that would mediate that risk would be whether injured enemies could be considered an asset that “[would] end up strengthening Diamond Dogs.” These seemingly callous statements felt out of character to me since, as I previously stated, I personally rescue injured enemies as often as I can *when I can afford to do so*. However, when I pragmatically consider “the battlefield” as I have experienced it, these comments seem less apathetic in tone. The martial group is invoking what I refer to as *battlefield economics*,⁴⁹ a system used to decide whether or not to pursue certain courses of action during high-stress situations. Given that Snake (or Venom) is almost always outnumbered in whatever forward location he happens to find himself, is always in danger of running out of ammunition, and most importantly is *perpetually* in danger of being killed (whether by enemies or local fauna), it makes sense that players who are less concerned with the game *as a game* would be more inclined to approach rescuing enemies with a certain degree of practical shrewdness.

F. Conclusions

So what can be learned from all of this? Well to start, I would argue more behavioral similarities exist between gamers of different walks of life than differences, something that seems self-evident when comparable responses are lumped into clusters. With the exception of The Boss' execution—which seemingly drummed up embedded sentiments about doing one's duty in the martial group—this overlap was observable in every behavior-based question, whether that be the preference towards sparing Quiet and executing Skullface, battling The End using nonlethal tactics, or rescuing enemies from the battlefield. The inference that can be made based on these initial observations seems clear: most players of games like *Metal Gear* play them *as* games (for whatever reason), and as such their life experiences have little observable impact on their gameplay, which is not to say they have no impact at all.

However, quite a few clusters within the groups deviated from the majority opinion. These smaller, internal cohorts deserve specific attention because they more profoundly represent the differences between martial and non-martial players, and therefore require further research to examine. Of particular interest are the way these behavioral and perceptual manifestations highlight the martial group's predisposition towards values such as “respect,” “meaning,” and “duty,” specifically regarding characters like The End or The Boss, and more importantly their apparent tendency to “existentially” insert themselves into the games, as observed when they discussed their feelings regarding the execution of Skullface or dealing with enemy soldiers. These seemingly habitual actions were often directly antithetical to those of the non-martial group, who, all things considered, exhibited less coherent sets of responses than the martial players. To me this suggests that martial

players experience moral dilemmas in games like *Metal Gear* differently from non-martial players, but also that the reason their gameplay experiences are so similar is because of the correspondence between the game dilemmas and real-life ordeals from their martial careers. For theorists like Green and Bogost, these findings make sense, and mirror observations from their respective works, specifically how games like *Metal Gear* can be used to re-enact lived experiences in virtual spaces. However, the findings also contradict Schulzke's view that players fighting virtual opponents should have no problem disconnecting from the overall experience ("Defending the Morality"). These are exciting observations, but they also pose a series of other questions that need to be answered, specifically by studies aimed at understanding what factors about their life experiences cause martial players to act differently from non-martial players in digital spaces, what methods can be used to observe those factors, and how to make use of the information derived from such studies. Unfortunately the answers to those questions exist beyond the scope of this thesis, and will likely require philosophical and psychological research focused on the manifold experience of martial individuals to uncover.

What makes games like *Snake Eater*, *Ground Zeroes* and *The Phantom Pain* so transformative is their ability to challenge the morality of players without ruining the overall experience of the game. I began my thesis with a series of simple questions: do other military gamers experience these games the same way I do, and can I determine if they do based on how they react to moral dilemmas in games? I suggested that players from different backgrounds would behave differently when they encountered moral dilemmas in the games, but also that players with shared, martial life experiences would behave differently as a group from non-martial players. To me the evidence seems clear: martial players incorporate

themselves more deeply into game settings like those found in *Metal Gear* than non-martial players, something I would attribute to congruencies between their chosen career fields and the simulated actions they undertake during gameplay. Given the demand for greater realism in games and the evolution of gaming systems built to satisfy those demands, it is my sincere hope that the results of this study inspire further research into the morality of video games. As discussed in my literature review, video games are especially suited for analysis using different systems of ethics, as shown by authors like Schulzke, Sicart and Young. By further extending ethical systems like deontology, utilitarianism, and sentimentalism to studies focused on games like *Metal Gear*, researchers could provide greater insight, not just into martial player psychology, but also into player psychology as a whole.

Appendices

A. Letter of Consent

Informed Consent Form

Shining Lights, Even in Death: What *Metal Gear* Can Teach Us About Morality

Summary: You are invited to participate in a research study for a Master's thesis that looks at player behavior in video games. My study focuses on decision-making processes in *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater* and *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* by paying specific attention to how different factors such as personality, moral perspective, and life experience influence moral intuitions in virtual situations where ethical decision-making is required. These games are unique in the way that they develop a deeply immersive narrative while privileging nonviolent, stealth-action over traditional military styles of play, and in that way are uniquely positioned to challenge players' conceptions of morality.

Nature and Purpose: The purpose of this survey is to add data to studies targeting violent video games, specifically *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater* and *Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes* and *The Phantom Pain*.

Explanation of Procedures: Participants will be selected from a variety of sources including social media fan groups, private gaming websites, and the West Chester student body. If you choose to participate in the study you will be asked to respond to thirty-eight (38), noninvasive questions about your experiences with the focus games. The survey should take between 25 to 35 minutes to complete, depending on the length of answers provided. Completion of the survey signifies that you agree to allow your answers to be used as a means to make inferences about issues such as player values, that you are aware that the subject matter of the survey explicitly focuses on violence, that you are 18 years of age (or 13 and older with parental consent), and consent to participate in this study. Please take the time to discuss this study with family and friends, if you so wish, before making a decision about whether or not to participate. This is not an open-ended study, and will conclude no later than the third week of August, 2019. No audio or visual recordings will be conducted.

Identification of Any Experimental Medical Treatments or Procedures: N/A

Discomfort and Risks: This study involves minimal risk to you. Individuals who may have experienced emotional trauma playing the games may experience stress during the course of this survey, and there may be other risks that we cannot predict. If you experience discomfort and no longer wish to continue you may opt out of the survey at any time by closing your window; your responses will not be recorded. If you feel as though this survey has caused undue discomfort you should visit *HelpGuide*, a nonprofit organization that provides evidence-based mental health education for free as support. Their website is www.helpguide.org/about-us.htm. This link will be available again at the end of the survey.

Benefits: It is reasonable that because of the reflective nature of the questions, those who complete the study may come to a better understanding of their perceptions of morality.

Confidentiality: We (the researcher, the director of research, and the research committee) will keep your information confidential. As such, all identifiers will be removed to ensure your anonymity. Follow up interviews may be conducted on a volunteer basis. No contact information provided will be shared with any outside entity or institution for whatever reason. Once the study is complete, all data collected will be stored in a secure location for a period of three (3) years at which point it will be destroyed.

Your rights: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You have the right to not participate in this study, or to leave it at any time. Your responses will not be collected, and will be deleted entirely a week after your last activity.

Compensation: N/A

Statement of Future Use: At the present time there are no immediate plans by any of the research team to use data collected from this study in future research.

Contact for questions or concerns: Email rw851045@wcupa.edu if you have any questions or concerns regarding the study, if you experience psychological discomfort due to the subject material, or if any other unusual happenings occur.

B. Letter of Approval from Institutional Review Board



Office of Research and Sponsored Programs | West Chester University | Wayne Hall
West Chester, PA 19383 | 610-436-3557 | www.wcupa.edu

Protocol ID # 20190618A

This Protocol ID number must be used in all communications about this project with the IRB.

TO: Ryan Wasser & Merry Perry
FROM: Nicole M. Cattano, Ph.D.
Co-Chair, WCU Institutional Review Board (IRB)
DATE: 6/18/2019

Project Title: Shining Lights, Even In Death: What Metal Gear Can Teach Us About Morality

Date of Approval: 6/18/2019

Expedited Approval

This protocol has been approved under the new updated 45 CFR 46 common rule that went in to effect January 21, 2019. As a result, this project will not require continuing review. Any revisions to this protocol that are needed will require approval by the WCU IRB. Upon completion of the project, you are expected to submit appropriate closure documentation. Please see www.wcupa.edu/research/irb.aspx for more information.

Any adverse reaction by a research subject is to be reported immediately through the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs via email at irb@wcupa.edu.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nicole M. Cattano".

Co-Chair of WCU IRB

WCU Institutional Review Board (IRB)
IORG#: IORG0004242
IRB#: IRB00005030
FWA#: FWA00014155

C. Survey Questions

Due to the limited scope of this thesis, the only questions that were used were numbers 1, 2, 3, and 27-36. I am currently seeking approval to conduct more research using the rest of the collected data.

1) What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Other (Write-in)
- Prefer not to say

2) What is your age range?

- 13-18
- 19-24
- 25-30
- 31-39
- 40 or above

3) What country do you live in? (Write-in)

4) What is your highest level of education?

- Have not graduated high school yet
- High school graduate
- Some college
- Bachelors Degree
- Masters degree or PhD
- Other (Write-in)

5) How would you describe your political views?

- Left/Liberal
- Centrist/Moderate
- Right/Conservative
- Other (Write-in)

6) Do you consider yourself to be religious or spiritual? If you feel comfortable answering, would you mind explaining your religious/spiritual preference? (Write-in)

7) Have you ever served in the military, police force or other career with exposure to violence? (Examples: EMT, firefighter)
Y/N

8) The games the researcher is focusing on are Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater/Subsistence and Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain (including Ground Zeroes). Have you played both games?
Y/N

9) Have you played any other games in the series besides those listed above?
Y/N

10) I act overly friendly to coworkers who are not my friend if I need them to help me get what I want. (Likert 1-5)

11) Getting recognized for my efforts is important to me. I like people to know how hard I work. (Likert 1-5)

12) I love to talk about new ideas. (Likert 1-5)

13) I like trying to figure out new ways to do things. (Likert 1-5)

14) I like to keep my gaming area orderly. (Likert 1-5)

15) I plan my day so that I can accomplish my goals in a timely fashion. (Likert 1-5)

16) My idea of a good time is going to parties because I like talking to people. (Likert 1-5)

- 17) When somebody asks a question, I prefer to keep to myself and let other people answer. (Likert 1-5)
- 18) I frequently disagree with people because I enjoy arguing. (Likert 1-5)
- 19) My friends feel as though they can come to me with their problems and I like to help them when they do. (Likert 1-5)
- 20) If I encounter an obstacle or situation in a game that I don't know how to deal with, I tend to get anxious or frustrated. (Likert 1-5)
- 21) Being in a car on a busy highway makes me feel incredibly uneasy. (Likert 1-5)
- 22) I have a strong set of principles that guide my life. (Likert 1-5)
- 23) Which playable character do you prefer to play as, Big Boss or Venom Snake? Explain your answer. (Write-in)
- 24) A main difference between Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater and Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain is that players assume the role of Big Boss in Snake Eater, whereas they assume their own role in the series narrative as Venom Snake in The Phantom Pain. Do you view morality differently in Snake Eater than you do in The Phantom Pain? Please explain your position in a couple of sentences. (Write-in)
- 25) A hidden feature of The Phantom Pain is the "Demon Point" counter, which tracks the moral or ethical standing of the player in the game. When you were playing the game, were you aware of this Demon Point system? Y/N
- 26) Did the Demon Point morality system affect the way you played The Phantom Pain? If you answer yes, please explain why and how the Demon Point system affected your experience. If you answer no, what are your thoughts about games that track character morality? (Write-in)
- 27) One of the key features of the Metal Gear series has been the option to approach enemy combatants using stealth tactics and non-lethal weapons as well as more direct, lethal approaches. As a player, I always opt to use nonlethal and stealth to engage with enemies. (Likert 1-5)
- 28) There are instances in Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater and Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain where the player is given the decision whether or not to execute another major character. The option to execute Quiet after the duel with her, and Skullface at the end of the main campaign is left entirely to the player to decide. What did you do?
- Execute Quiet but spare Skullface
 - Spare Quiet and execute Skullface
 - Execute both
 - Didn't execute either
- 29) In 2-3 sentences, explain why you chose to execute or save each character. (Write-in)
- 30) One of the most famous boss battles of the Metal Gear franchise is the sniper battle with "The End." During Snake Eater, players can kill The End in a variety of ways that do not require direct combat. The various ways have been listed below. How did you defeat The End?
- Lethal/using a long range sniper rifle
 - Lethal/using night vision (NVGs) to track his footprints in the ground
 - Nonlethal/ using NVGs and tranquilizers to subdue him
 - Old age/setting the clock on your system ahead to kill The End
 - Preemptively sniping him while he is asleep in his wheelchair earlier in the game
- 31) In 2-3 sentences, explain why you fought The End the way that you did. (Write-in)
- 32) Executing The Boss at the end of Snake Eater is mandatory. The game will not progress if the player does not kill her. Regardless, do you feel as though it is morally wrong to kill The Boss? How does this part of the game make you feel? Explain your answer. (Write-in)
- 33) While playing the game, do you feel as though enemy combatants are real people? Explain your position. (Write-in)
- 34) In Metal Gear Solid V, injured enemies can be rescued and sent to Mother Base for medical care. If I injure an enemy in the game, I feel compelled to rescue them. (Likert 1-5)
- 35) In 2-3 sentences, explain your reason for rescuing (or leaving) injured enemies. (Write-in)
- 36) The representations of female characters in the Metal Gear franchise have sometimes been described as problematic since they portray women in risqué fashion. In both games, Snake Eater and The Phantom Pain, players are occasionally prompted to stare at their female counterpart from the first-person perspective. Do you think it is wrong to stare at Eva or Quiet? Explain your position. (Write-in)

Endnotes

Chapter I

¹ To be fair, saying I had never seen the game is technically a lie. Ultra, the game's publisher and a subsidiary of Konami, had "copied" an image of Michael Biehn from James Cameron's *Terminator* (1984), and as I had seen the film with my aforementioned cousin (against my parents' wishes mind you) it made sense that I noticed the game's cover.

² The rerelease was not the same edition I had on Nintendo; it was the original Nintendo MSX version. *MGS3: Snake Eater Subsistence* also came with *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake*, the 1990 canonical sequel to the original game never released in the United States.

³ I abbreviate KefkaProductions using an abbreviated title of the game being discussed, e.g. "*MGS3*, followed by "Kefka."

⁴ United States Air Force 2004-2008; United States Army 2008-2012.

⁵ Enantiodromia is a phrase that, according to Oxford, is the tendency for a thing to change into its opposite ("Enantiodromia").

⁶ *MGSV* breaks down into two separate titles: *Ground Zeroes*, and *The Phantom Pain*. For the most part I refer to each title using abbreviations, however, I occasionally use the full title if it is needed to maintain clarity.

Chapter II:

⁷ According to Cambridge, the fourth wall "is an imaginary wall that separates the audience from the action of a play or film" that is broken when the characters (or the film itself in some way) acknowledges the presence of the audience ("Fourth Wall").

⁸ Similar to the KefkaProduction citations, I utilize an abbreviated citation for the game being discussed, e.g. "*MGSV*" followed by other information from the video to differentiate between the citations. I also remove the "?" from DidYouKnowGaming's citation to avoid confusion.

⁹ *MGSV* was originally titled "Project Ogre" while in early production, an allusion to the presence of an "Ogre" (i.e. tyrannical force) in the background of the game.

¹⁰ Kojima specifically references the significance of Ahab, Ishmael and the Pequod ("*TPP*" Kefka 11:10).

¹¹ Parrish is not the only author to note this aspect of Kojima's style; Brusseau et al. remark on this pattern of behavior, noting that "[a] possible reason for the numerous similarities is that these [mechanics] would not have been seen by many players in the release of *MG 2: Solid Snake*" since the game was not released in the West. However, the researchers have a different opinion than Parrish, noting that Kojima's "constant return" theme is purposefully included to drive home the message of historical repetition, a theory he explicates during Big Boss' exposition at the end of *MGS4* (154).

¹² *Mortal Kombat* and *Night Trap* were notorious for their photorealistic and digitized characters, whereas *Doom* introduced first-person perspectives to shooting games.

¹³ The researchers make sure to specify that the noise blasts are within the ethical limits of experimentation (1040).

¹⁴ For all intents and purposes, "information ethics" deals with the production, collection, handling, and dissemination of electronic information (Bynum "Computer and Information Ethics").

Chapter III:

¹⁵ Kojima has gone on record multiple times stating that he was not even aware this sequel had been made until somebody mentioned it to him while on a subway trip home from work one day (qtd. in “Hideo Kojima Interview”).

¹⁶ Players such as *Reddit*’s u/blood frequently lament the game’s poor implementation of features like the “pitfall traps” and “keycard system.”

¹⁷ While I did know of this game’s existence as early as the first *MGS*, I did not get to play it until the rerelease of *MGS3*.

¹⁸ There are numerous unit titles in these games: FOXHOUND, FOX, and XOF just to name a few. It should be noted that the casing of these titles is not mistake.

¹⁹ Although it was later released on the Playstation store, the original game was released for the mobile Playstation Portable (PSP) platform.

²⁰ The only major difference between *MGS3* and its subsequent rerelease, *Snake Eater Subsistence* (2006), is a change in perspective and game mechanics; *Snake Eater* features a fixed, third-person perspective whereas *Subsistence* features an over-the-shoulder, third-person perspective that can be manipulated by the player using the right joystick.

²¹ Unlike *MGSV*, which is the first and only canonical game to feature an open world, every other game in the series is composed of sets of interlocking maps or sections of gaming that could also be construed as levels.

²² The same individual then proceeds to cite the game’s over-the-top “sexual tension” as being “too high for anyone to handle.”

²³ The Boss is accompanied by her elite group of operatives, the “Cobra Unit,” Major Ocelot (a major character and commander of Russian special forces), and Volgin. The Cobras consist of The Boss (otherwise known as The Joy), The Sorrow, The Fury, The End, The Fear and The Pain.

²⁴ This is the same system used in *The Phantom Pain* to recover enemies and supplies.

²⁵ Along the way players encounter the first member of the Cobras, The Pain (“*MGS3*” Kefka 1:13:05), who they must defeat before making their way to the laboratory docks.

²⁶ It should be noted here that there is a lengthy cutscene involving Sokolov, Volgin, The Boss and Eva, where small pieces of information about The Philosophers are revealed. This is also the scene on the docks where The End is introduced. The End can be eliminated at this point with a sniper rifle, for those so inclined to do so (“*MGS3*” Kefka 1:15:02).

²⁷ Every *Metal Gear Solid* entry rates players’ performance at the end of game, taking enemies killed, times spotted, alerts triggered, and other aspects of their gameplay into account. While moral implications might exist for players on a personal level, it is not explicitly meant to determine the moral character of the player, just their overall skill within the purview of Kojima’s stealth vision for the game.

²⁸ There is another important cutscene here. Volgin, growing concerned about the presence of a mole in his unit, tortures and kills Granin for information about the informant. At this point, it becomes apparent that Ocelot is not what he seems (1:47:50).

²⁹ Volgin’s main concern is that the US is after the “Philosopher’s Legacy.”

³⁰ It should be noted that with the exception of The Boss and Eva, no female soldiers exist in the game. This might be construed as misogynistic but when one considers the time period (the 1960s) it makes sense that there would be no female presence in Soviet Special Forces.

³¹ As an interesting “Easter egg,” players can press R1 during this cutscene to enter first person mode to see Ocelot outside the window of the White House making a hand gesture towards Snake, reinforcing his triple-agent status in the game.

Chapter IV:

³² Examples in *Ground Zeroes* include Raiden from *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots* (2008) and the original pixelated Solid Snake from *Metal Gear Solid: The Phantom Pain* features a system that allows players from choose from a pool of Diamond Dog soldiers at the mission select screen, as well as the two characters mentioned from *Ground Zeroes*.

³³ When I refer to onto-ludological matters I am talking about the players’ sense of being within the virtual world. In previous entries this is relatively limited, since the games’ narratives are essentially “on rails,” but *TPP*, with its open-world design and ongoing narrative, escapes the trappings of a completely enclosed game-narrative. Players, therefore, are allowed to exist in accordance with their own Being (so to speak), especially after the primary story of the game is “complete.”

³⁴ Despite its positive feedback and clear technical improvements over its predecessors, *MGSV* is often a divisive topic in the *Metal Gear* community. While some reviewers such as *IGN*’s Vince Ingenito praise the game for “the freedom its open world affords” and its “fantastic base management layer,” others such as Jason Schreier had lukewarm experiences with the game, noting its incoherent dialogue, incomprehensible character motivations, and Achilles’ heel, a “woefully unsatisfying ending.” My thoughts on the matter are that *MGSV* seems to be a title sullied by poor handling on Konami’s part (such as releasing *Ground Zeroes* separately or rushing *The Phantom Pain*), something exacerbated by what I perceive to be a widespread misunderstanding on the part of players about what the game is meant to represent within the canon of the series. Gameplay aside, *MGSV* is, in my opinion, the *most real* game in the series, and therefore warrants special consideration since it is more of a simulation than a game.

³⁵ The Peace Walker is the primary Metal Gear of *Ground Zeroes*’ predecessor, *MGS: Peace Walker* (2010).

³⁶ While I have not included this as part of my analyses, Paz’s sacrifice warrants further discussion since it seems to be a selfless act that contradicts her previous attitude towards Big Boss at the conclusion of *Peace Walker*. For those who have never played the game, Paz pretends to be a college activist throughout the game until the very end of the game when she hijacks MSF’s Metal Gear, “Zeke,” and attempts to kill Big Boss.

³⁷ Of course Ocelot does not inform him about “Ishmael’s” identity or the role he plays in the game. While not the focus of this thesis, there are many interesting connections that can be made between Big Boss and Ishmael from *Moby Dick*.

³⁸ At this point in the game Miller and Venom still believe Zero’s “Cipher” unit to be their main enemy. Skullface is not revealed as the main antagonist until the sixth mission of the game.

³⁹ While never explicitly stated by Kojima, similarities exist between the vocal chord parasite “zombies,” and ants controlled by “puppeteer parasites” (Osborne).

⁴⁰ This is little more than conjecture on my part, but I believe this to be a subtle critique by Kojima about the way society perceives feminine speech.

⁴¹ Quiet's "gold" outfit is eerily reminiscent of Jill Masterson's "paint job" at the end of *Goldfinger* (1964).

⁴² Operation: Intrude N313 is the mission Solid Snake is sent on in the first *Metal Gear*, which would seem to imply that Big Boss sent him to combat Venom for one of two reasons: (1) Big Boss did not think Solid Snake would be victorious, a reasonable assumption to make considering Snake was still a "rookie"; (2) Big Boss was aware of Snake's capabilities and sent him to eliminate Venom, basically to tie up a loose end. As much as the first option makes sense, I am of the mind that by this point Big Boss had effectively made is archetypal shift towards abject tyranny, and needed to eliminate Venom and Diamond Dogs to keep his cover.

Chapter V:

⁴³ For personal reasons, and in the interest in space I have chosen not to speak about the execution of Mother Base soldiers in this study.

⁴⁴ Enemies in *TPP* are rated on an E to A scale, with E being the lowest rating (i.e. a bad soldier) and A being the second highest (i.e. highly competent soldiers). There are also S rank soldiers who are the best in the game, but very hard to locate.

⁴⁵ In this particular instance I have decided to identify the number of players out of the group that indicated awareness of the DPS as opposed to a percentage because I feel as though it would be confusing to have multiple percentages for the same group in one textual location.

⁴⁶ Out of both groups (60 total individuals; two individuals did not provide responses to this question), players generally responded that they spared Quiet and executed Skullface (55%), or spared both characters for one reason or another (38%). The only outliers were two individuals from the martial group who executed both characters.

⁴⁷ About 29%

⁴⁸ Approximately 45% of the non-martial group indicated not perceiving game enemies as real.

⁴⁹ I haven't been able to find evidence that such a concept actually exists academically. Stated simply, battlefield economics extends utilitarianism to combat operations and asks whether certain actions towards a given scenario will produce more positive results than negative results.

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