

## Claws and Controllers: Werewolves and Lycanthropy in Digital Games

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### Abstract:

Bridging a host of narrative and procedural genres, werewolves feature prominently in videogames as characters to control, enemies to kill, and allies to assist. Yet, despite the broad range of werewolf depictions found in games, there is a relative paucity of research examining how games depict werewolves and how these depictions relate to the mythos writ large. To address gamic werewolves specifically, this essay performs close readings of several games, notably *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* (2006) and *The Sims 2: Pets* (2006). The readings are guided by the works of media scholars, including Alexander Galloway, Ian Bogost, Souvik Mukherjee, Tom Tyler and others. In analysing werewolf avatar gameplay, this essay proposes that some gamic werewolves encourage players to acknowledge and value animal alterity, human animality, and human-animal relations. Additionally, these werewolves foster ‘becomings’ for players, allowing them to understand hybridity and liminality *experientially*.

Keywords: games studies, media studies, werewolf, lycanthropy, becoming

Since the late 1980s onward, werewolves and similar hybrid figures have featured prominently in digital games as characters to be vanquished, befriended, or controlled by players. Werewolves in games appear in a variety of narrative (action, horror, fantasy, science fiction) and procedural (role-playing, first-person shooter, point-and-click adventure, simulation) genres. Yet, despite the plethora of gamic werewolves, little research examines how these figures function within the medium and how they relate to the werewolf writ large. Scholars who attend to nonhuman and posthuman representations in games often mention werewolves as a point for comparison. For example, Debra Ferreday's 'Becoming deer: Nonhuman drag and online utopias' (2011) and Eva Zekany's "'A Horrible Interspecies Awkwardness Thing': (Non)Human Desire in the *Mass Effect* Universe' (2015) refer to werewolves for their queer and monstrous character, but ultimately focus their analyses on other figures. To examine gamic werewolves in greater depth, particularly werewolf avatars, this essay performs close readings that analyse how werewolves and lycanthropy in games operate.

Given lycanthropy's characterization as both a transformative and queer process (Bernhardt-House 2008: 159), the essay focuses on how two particular digital games diverge from earlier werewolf representations within the medium, transforming notions of what it might mean to *be* a werewolf. Games, such as *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* (2006) and *The Sims 2: Pets* (2006), offer players werewolves that deviate from those endemic to game narratives about masculine power and violence. Instead, these representations imagine lycanthropy as a process of 'becoming' through which human players may learn to value, appreciate, and identify with nonhuman animals. Werewolves in these digital games also inform how the werewolf figure navigates hybridity and liminality, specifically through avatars that require players to engage with these themes *experientially*.

### **Avatars and 'Becoming-Animal'**

To understand lycanthropic gameplay, it is crucial to review how video game avatars function. In computer games, avatars are graphical representations that stand-in for players and afford them limited interactions with digital environments through game hardware and software interfaces. While the mechanics of play conducted through an avatar might seem uncomplicated, the relationship between players and their avatars is deeply complex. Several game and media

studies scholars have proposed theories for understanding this complexity by turning to different frameworks that account for player identity, experience, and affect.

For example, Bob Rehak offers a psychoanalytic reading of video game avatars that observes how these representations occupy players' concepts of *both* self and other (2003: 106). Rehak notes that by controlling the motions and actions of their avatars through interfaces, players recognize the avatar as a representation of or a part of themselves—a claim also supported by Andreas Gregersen and Torben Grodal (2009) in their research demonstrating how players perceive avatars and interfaces as augmentations to their embodiment. At the same time, however, ruptures in gameplay that demonstrate the avatar's material alterity (e.g. moments in which the avatar does not recognize or respond to players' inputs because of programming constraints) highlight the digital representation as distinctly other. This cycling between self and other is an integral part of avatar gameplay, Rehak claims, and allows video games to serve as an experimental space where players might 'toy with subjectivity, play with being' (2003: 106–107).

Because, as Rehak suggests, digital games provide an opportunity to explore ontology in its various and fractured iterations, game scholars have recently turned to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of 'becoming' as a framework for understanding gameplay directed through the player-avatar dynamic. Souvik Mukherjee's *Video Games and Storytelling: Reading Games and Playing Books* (2015), for example, offers a theory for understanding digital gameplay within a broader framework of 'becoming'. Though becoming is not a process wholly unique to playing digital games, Mukherjee claims that games facilitate becoming because the player and the game machine operate as an assemblage.<sup>1</sup> He argues that players experience becoming through a disjunction between acting in line with the game's programming and acting on their own accord. During play,

both the game algorithm and the human player keep shifting identities as a result of the choices being actualised. At the same time, it must be noted that neither has absolute control: it is not possible for the game algorithm to totally control the actions of a character or characters that the player has *become*; on the other hand, the player cannot control the AI-driven characters of the opposing forces. (2015: 195, original emphasis)

Here, Mukherjee attends to the specific relations between players and game technology, describing the actions that occur during play in terms of fluid and fluctuating identities determined simultaneously by systems' and players' limitations. Colin Cremin, in his essay 'Molecular Mario' (2016), offers a similar reading of gameplay as an experience of temporarily proceeding towards becoming something other than one's self by controlling the avatar's actions and responding to the rules and algorithms limiting these actions.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, Mukherjee argues that becoming in digital games is both multiple and multidirectional. He writes that in digital games, 'the process of "becoming" is not single; rather, in itself constitutes a multiplicity. Neither is it unidirectional: The player experiences a becoming-game but the game also experiences a becoming-player' (2015: 208). He develops this claim through several examples, including Electronic Arts' (EA) *Spore* (2008). In the game, players build and control organisms as they progress through various stages of physical and sociocultural evolution. Because players identify with and disassociate from the organism avatar they control, as well as take on a god-like role in directing the game's life simulations, Mukherjee reads the experience of *Spore* as follows: 'this "becoming-animal" can only be understood as a "becoming-game"' (2015: 198). That is, even though players initially inhabit an animal or animal-like avatar, they ultimately 'become-machine' through the actions and rules that require them to manage the life simulation's data. Responding to the organisms' evolutionary events mirrors the game machine's algorithmic responses to players' inputs.

Though Mukherjee reads *Spore* as 'becoming-game' and not 'becoming-animal', as one becoming and not another (despite the concepts' theorization as simultaneous multiplicities), other scholarship indicates that some digital games have the capacity to evoke a becoming that is specifically animal. In his article 'New Tricks' (2013), media studies and animal studies scholar Tom Tyler claims that despite digital games' limited ability to capture other animals' perceptions comprehensively, they can still teach players to appreciate the often overlooked alterity of nonhuman species through nonhuman avatars, 'anti-environments', and 'altercasting'. With regards to the latter two elements, anti-environments are perspectives that challenge players' normative engagements with the game. Tyler's altercasting describes how acts of gameplay project specific identities onto players towards a specific end (2013: 73). Pairing Tyler's research on games with Mukherjee's and Cremin's work demands that game scholars (re)consider the types of becomings produced by gameplay with a particular focus on how they represent human

and nonhuman animal ontologies. Thus, the entanglement of Deleuze and Guattari's becoming with game studies requires further exploration. Werewolf avatars, as emblematic figures of becoming-animal, offer a particularly productive site for examining if and how games facilitate players' experiences of becoming both animal and machine.

Turning to Steve Baker's *The Postmodern Animal* (2000) can offer one way of understanding how becoming-animal in games can create challenges to the human-animal divide through the werewolf avatar. Baker's work explores how postmodern art engages with human-animal relations and produces becoming-animals. In the work, he draws on Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-animal, describing the process as 'a human being's creative opportunity to think themselves other-than-in-identity' (2000: 125). He claims that becoming-animal decenters the human from its subject position allowing for other possible configurations of the self, particularly when artworks facilitate a direct confrontation between humans and nonhuman animals in shared space (2000: 50). Baker argues that 'the encounter, the confrontation, is an insistent one, and one which is perhaps *most readily illustrated* in relation to a three-dimensional work' (2000: 51, original emphasis). He cites sculpture, installations, and performance as mediums that offer such an experience, while also observing the limitations of primarily textual and visual modalities in this respect. Baker's claim about space shared between humans and animals in postmodern art illustrates how we might understand human-animal interactions in digital spaces. Digital games readily facilitate the kind of human-animal confrontations that Baker attributes to postmodern art because digital games are constructed spaces that are heavily determined by and engaged with through player performance.

When players interact with, inhabit, or control animals in digital game spaces, they confront the nonhuman not only in its visual and verbal representation (as with other media, including literature and film), but also through two expressive forms that fundamentally shape players' performances of play: procedure and action. In *Persuasive Games* (2007), Ian Bogost proposes 'procedural rhetoric' to describe how computational media uses processes persuasively. He defines procedural rhetoric as 'the art of persuasion through rule-based representations and interactions rather than the spoken word, writing, images, or moving pictures' (2007: ix). Bogost claims that because digital games are designed through rules and algorithms, meaning emerges from not only their expressive, but from these computational aspects as well (2007: ix).

Moreover, he argues that digital games' procedural rhetoric communicates ideologies to players and teaches players their affiliated values through what players can and cannot do during play.

Though Bogost's work emphasizes procedure, Alexander Galloway's work in *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture* (2006) addresses action. Galloway argues that gameplay occurs along two axes, and the intersection of these axes produces four types of actions. These actions include diegetic machine acts (process), nondiegetic operator acts (algorithm), diegetic operator acts (play), and nondiegetic machine acts (code). He cautions that these categories are not fixed or ideal types, but rather they are tendencies that arise in many games (2006: 38). Galloway's framework conceptualizes the activity of playing a game as 'an *undivided* act wherein meaning and doing transpire in the same gamic gesture' (2006: 104). The covalence of meaning and doing in games requires that critics interpret gamic acts as a form of narrating discourse (2006: 104). Galloway argues that 'the game critic should be concerned not only with the interpretation of linguistic signs, as in literary studies or film theory, but also with the interpretation of *polyvalent doing*' (2006: 105, original emphasis). Similar to Bogost's claims about interpreting procedures, actions operate as a semiotic system through which players understand game meanings and engage with narrative. Galloway likens gamic actions to narrative allegory, explaining how the latter's definition as 'extended metaphor' can help critics understand games as '*enacted metaphor*' (2006: 105) – or as texts created by players' performances.

Turning to scholars who argue for critical analyses of procedure and action in digital games is especially germane to examining gamic werewolves because both digital games and lycanthropes operate through *processes* of becoming. Previously, scholars identified how werewolves and similar monstrous creatures in film produce posthumanist critiques by visualizing bodies and bodily transformations that dismantle the human subject or challenge distinctions between human and nonhuman animal ontology (Hurley 1995, White 1995). Some werewolf avatars offer these critiques as well; however, many of them do not often demonstrate the same visually intensive bodily transformations as their filmic counterparts due to technical constraints on graphics processing. The exception, of course, are those lycanthropic transformations depicted during in-game cinematics, which continue trends observed in most visual media. For the most part, however, digital games largely direct players' becoming-animal (and machine) through rules, algorithms, actions, and perspectives that acknowledge the werewolf-player's posthuman status.

### The Werewolf Warrior and the Twilight Princess

Playable gamic werewolves in the late 1980s and early 1990s exhibit a narrow range of qualities that reflect historic, literary, and filmic conceptions of lycanthropy. Games that feature werewolf protagonists often draw on associations between werewolves and the fierce warrior archetype – a coupling that has been perceived as dating as far back as human prehistory. As Phillip A. Bernhardt-House explains, what most, if not all, Western-European and Indo-European werewolf traditions share is ‘the usage of a canine or lupine image as both metaphor and totem for a group of people...who are semi-outcasts within their societies, who live as hunter-gatherers and occasionally serve in an auxiliary (or in some cases first-line) warrior capacity, able to bring about an ecstatic battle frenzy’ (2008: 160). While werewolf warrior depictions were metaphorical initially, later werewolf depictions, some as early as the fifth century BCE, literalize the human-to-wolf transformation as a physical metamorphosis. At the same time, folk tales and other narratives about werewolf protagonists, or ‘sympathetic’ werewolves, began to flourish and have continued to do so well into the contemporary moment (Bernhardt-House 2008: 162).

Digital games with werewolf protagonists not only literalize the coupling between berserker and beast, but also *proceduralize* this form of embodiment for players through avatars and gameplay. That is, many games depict lycanthropy using actions and processes (in addition to other expressive modes) that foster the player-character’s becoming-werewolf. In *Altered Beast* (1988) and *Werewolf: The Last Warrior* (1990), for example, players begin with their avatars in human form. Game mechanics, however, encourage players to transform their characters into muscular, bipedal human-wolf hybrids through power-ups that allow them to defeat enemies and overcome other obstacles in the game. Lycanthropy, however, only occurs in these games if the player-character completes specific actions that unlock their ability to transform. For example, in *Altered Beast*, the player-character must defeat three-headed wolf creatures and collect the spirit orbs they release. Once three orbs have been acquired, the avatar transforms into a were-beast<sup>3</sup> with powerful attacks and abilities that give the player-character a better chance at defeating each round’s boss.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, in *Werewolf: The Last Warrior*, the player-character must collect a red ‘W’ to become a werewolf or fill their ‘anger’ meter with collectible items to become a ‘super werewolf’. The first form gives the main character a longer range melee attack and the ability to climb walls, while the latter increases the character’s

jumping height. In both examples, the game strongly encourages lycanthropy as a means for players to complete the game.

In making lycanthropy an integral step in game mastery, *Altered Beast*, *Werewolf: The Last Warrior*, and similar games teach players to value animality for its ties to masculine power and violence. Winning the game by becoming a werewolf reinforces the reductive belief that animals, specifically wolves, are inherently violent creatures. At the same time, controlling the werewolf suggests to players that animals and animality can be controlled by humans (both players and the games' protagonists) and that they serve as means to anthropocentric ends (rescuing a damsel, humanity, etc.). Notably, while both male and female werewolf warriors appear in history (Bernhardt-House 2008: 160), gameric werewolves predating the twenty-first century turn are invariably male, continuing trends that obscure, if not erase, female werewolves (Priest 2015: 3). Only recently have games been published featuring female werewolf protagonists, such as Scientifically Proven's *Blood of the Werewolf* (2013). Still, the rhetoric and design principles of games from the late 1980s and 1990s continue to influence the medium in games such as *Bloody Roar: Primal Fury* (2002), *World of Warcraft: Cataclysm* (2010), and others that depict werewolves and other human-animal hybrids as aggressive warriors.

Published in 2006, Nintendo's *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* departs from some of the prominent trends in gameric werewolf depictions. The game was released for both the GameCube and the Wii consoles initially, but was re-released in 2016 as a high-definition port for the Wii-U. *Twilight Princess* is a fantasy, action-adventure game focused on combat, exploration, puzzle solving, and item collection. The game is the thirteenth installment of *The Legend of Zelda* series, and like its predecessors, follows the protagonist, Link, on his quest to save the kingdom of Hyrule. In *Twilight Princess*, players control Link from the third-person perspective using a controller. To complete the game, players must navigate and fight through nine dungeons – sequestered areas containing enemies, items, puzzles, and a boss. Dungeons in *Twilight Princess* are located within a large overworld (Hyrule) that Link must traverse by foot, on horseback, and through teleportation. Throughout the series, Link appears as a young man or a boy of fair complexion with blonde hair and blue eyes equipped with a sword, shield, and iconic green tunic. *Twilight Princess* deviates from its forerunners in that Link transforms into a wolf to defend Hyrule from a parallel dimension called the 'Twilight Realm'.



Unlike lycanthropy in *Altered Beast* and *Werewolf: The Last Warrior*, however, Link's initial transformation into a wolf is presented as an unavoidable and undesirable occurrence that later proves useful for saving Hyrule. The game's narrative begins in Ordon Village where Link works as a ranch hand. After the village children are carried off by raiding Bulbins (goblin-like creatures), Link pursues the monsters into the forest hoping to save them. During a cut-scene in the woods, he encounters a rift into the Realm of Twilight from which a Shadow Beast emerges and grabs him. Physically marked by the Triforce, a power bestowed to Hyrule's legendary hero, Link manages to blind the beast with its glow. Upon being released from the beast's grasp, Link drops to his knees and transforms into a wolf before losing consciousness. Link later awakens as a wolf imprisoned and chained in a cell. Link's new form, referred to as 'Wolf Link', resembles a wolf more so than the bipedal human-animal hybrids depicted in earlier werewolf games.

Players' experiences with Wolf Link frame lycanthropy as a queering of both *The Legend of Zelda* game series and gamic werewolves broadly because the avatar challenges the normative gameplay attributed to both fronts. Bernhardt-House's examination of the werewolf as queer offers some guidance in this regard. He describes lycanthropy's queerness as 'an alternative form of humanity which acknowledges and celebrates the animal side' (2008: 179). Wolf Link is a queer werewolf because the character subverts the conventions of a series that has been predominantly centred on human and humanoid characters and teaches players to value animal alterity. While earlier games about werewolves frame lycanthropy as a form of masculine empowerment through bestial qualities (specifically physical strength, aggression, and violence), Link's depiction in *Twilight Princess* suggests that lycanthropy offers a nuanced understanding of subjectivity and one's surroundings. In the game, lycanthropy initially results in Link's disempowerment as players' early encounter with becoming-wolf begins in a prison cell followed by servitude as Midna's steed – an edifying irony regarding animal treatment given Link's horseback riding.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the game mechanics surrounding Link's lycanthropy, such as 'Sense Mode' and the context-sensitive buttons, facilitate anti-environments and altercasting that play a role in helping players acknowledge, if not celebrate, nonhuman animal perspectives.

*Twilight Princess*'s Sense Mode operates as an anti-environment that makes players aware of nonhuman animals' otherness. Sense Mode is a distinct visual mode that players can access with the press of a button when controlling Wolf Link. While players' third-person perspective remains intact in Sense Mode, the game environment's visual aesthetics change,

dampening and darkening most of the game world's colours. At the same time, scents and odours in the game environment are rendered visually as brightly coloured smoke lingering in the air. As Wolf Link, players are encouraged by Midna to use Sense Mode and follow these scent trails, tracking down specific individuals, items, and locations. Additionally, players can use Sense Mode to interact with 'Poes' – ghosts of the deceased that cannot normally be seen by humans, existing in the liminal space between life and death. Their visibility in Sense Mode further reminds players of the werewolf's own hybridity as a figure caught between two realms, identities, and bodies. The aesthetic and procedural changes that occur when players shift into Wolf Link's Sense Mode operate similar to Tyler's understanding of gameric anti-environments.

Tyler, drawing on Marshall McLuhan's works, explains that anti-environments in games are alternative perspectives that challenge players' normative engagements with the digital world. He writes, 'Anti-environments, according to McLuhan can promote awareness and pattern recognition. They can provide new strategies of attention that train perception unto the unnoticed environment' (2013: 71). Given these qualities, Tyler argues that anti-environments situated from nonhuman characters' perspectives are particularly effective in challenging anthroponormativity in their juxtaposition with play modes depicted from human perspectives. Link, in his human form, frames the normative play mode for both *Twilight Princess* and *The Legend of Zelda* series, broadly. In contrast, Wolf Link's Sense Mode challenges gameplay from Link's normative perspective, making players aware of its limitations. Sense Mode acknowledges that nonhuman animals have alternative ways of perceiving the environment – such as a heightened sensitivity to smell – that humans cannot access but can only imagine. Additionally, because players must switch back-and-forth between both modes to complete the game, *Twilight Princess* argues that neither species' perception is preferable or inherently superior to the other. Both perspectives have value in specific contexts.

Link's Hylian and wolf forms also differ in the actions they afford players, encouraging them to value and identify with the nonhuman animal through altercasting. *Twilight Princess* altercasts players as Link and Wolf Link differently through context-sensitive buttons. Context-sensitive buttons are a game mechanic that allows game controller buttons to serve several functions based on the avatar's specific context. When an avatar enters into a situation, the game's user interface highlights what actions (e.g. speaking, moving objects, opening doors, etc.) can occur if players press the corresponding button. For example, if Link is standing still and

carrying a bomb – one of his several weapons – the on-screen display for the context-sensitive button will give players the option to place the bomb on the ground. If Link moves, however, or targets an object, the same context-sensitive button allows Link to throw the bomb. The game's context-sensitive buttons also respond to Link's body by allowing only particular actions to be performed in and outside of wolf form. For instance, Link usually carries a sword, shield, and secondary items; however, as a wolf, players cannot use these objects. Instead, Wolf Link attacks enemies by biting and defends against attacks by dodging, using the same buttons on the controller as they would in combat as Link. Unlike Link's human form, Wolf Link can 'dig' in patches of dirt that hide items or secret passages, as well as 'speak' with nonhuman animals using the context-sensitive buttons.<sup>6</sup> By providing a set of wolf-specific actions, *Twilight Princess* altercasts players as a nonhuman animal, reinforcing the player-character's becoming-animal. Altercasting through context-sensitive actions, along with Sense Mode's anti-environment, encourages players to identify with nonhuman animals and their imagined alterity.

### **Pack Dynamics and SIMulated Lycanthropy**

While Nintendo's *Twilight Princess* teaches players to appreciate animal alterity, werewolves in *The Sims 2: Pets* (2006) encourage players to value animals and human-animal relations. *Pets*, which was released nearly a month after Nintendo's *Twilight Princess*, is the fourth expansion pack for *The Sims 2*, a PC game published by EA. Like its predecessor, *The Sims* (2000), and its successors, *The Sims 3* (2009) and *The Sims 4* (2014), *The Sims 2* is a life simulation strategy game where players manage the day-to-day lives of simulated humans, called Sims. Players can create Sims, command them to perform actions, and build them elaborate homes. Additionally, the game's artificial intelligence system directs Sims to engage with environmental conditions autonomously, satisfying their 'motives'.<sup>7</sup> Since there are no explicit goals for the game, players of *The Sims 2* direct and manage Sims' actions to produce desired effects. Expansion packs for *The Sims 2*, such as *Pets*, add new objects, environments, and game mechanics to those already programmed into the base game.

*Pets* introduces a variety of nonhuman animal species to the largely anthropocentric world of the original game. Similar to other pet-themed expansion packs in *The Sims* franchise (i.e. *The Sims: Unleashed* (2002) and *The Sims 3: Pets* (2011)), *Pets* allows players to create and manage cats and dogs in addition to their human Sims. *Pets* includes a 'Create-a-Pet' mode

(similar to the ‘Create-a-Sim’ feature) where players can design their pet characters, selecting their body shapes, coat patterns, colours, and personalities, or choose from over one hundred pre-made cat and dog breeds. Pets can also have motives, life stages, and careers like their human counterparts but with species-specific variations (e.g. the Sim motive for a pleasant ‘Environment’ is replaced with ‘Scratching’ for cats and ‘Chewing’ for dogs). Cat and dog Sims can also learn tricks and produce offspring.

In addition to nonhuman animal Sims, *Pets* also introduces lycanthropy and werewolves to *The Sims 2*.<sup>8</sup> While both *The Sims* and *The Sims 3* games include expansion packs that feature werewolves – *Makin’ Magic* (2003) and *Supernatural* (2012), respectively – these expansion packs focus on horror and fantasy tropes that emphasize the monstrous and the occult. For example, players’ Sims can only achieve lycanthropy in *Makin’ Magic* through a magical charm called ‘Beauty or Beast’ that cosmetically alters a human Sim to appear as an anthropomorphic wolf—a human Sim covered in brown fur with a wolf’s head. The charm has no effect on Sims’ motivations or interactions, suggesting that becoming werewolf is in no way experientially different from being human. In part, these procedural limitations may be a product of *Makin’ Magic*’s technological limitations given the available hardware and software at the time of the base game’s release in 2000. In addition to the magical charms used in previous expansions, *Supernatural* allows players to build supernatural Sims, such as vampires, fairies, witches, and werewolves, in the ‘Create-a-Sim’ mode or transform Sims into werewolves or vampires through Sim-to-Sim biting. These latter procedural components, while loyal to the werewolf mythos, reduce the scope of werewolf ontology, eliding interspecies engagements as a possible vector for lycanthropy.

Werewolves in *Pets*, however, originate from a unique set of processes and actions that teach players to acknowledge and value human-animal relationships. To have their Sims become werewolves, players must attract a specific non-player character (NPC), called ‘Leader of the Pack’, to their Sims’ lots. The Leader of the Pack is a large, black wolf with glowing yellow eyes that wanders onto Sims’ lots randomly much like other nonhuman animal NPCs in the game. Players can increase the chances that the Leader of the Pack will visit their Sims’ homes by planting several trees on their Sims’ lots. Once the Leader of the Pack appears, players must have their Sims befriend the wolf. Forging a relation with the Leader of the Pack works in the same way as building a relationship with any other NPC in the game – players must direct their Sims

to perform specific interactions with the Leader of the Pack that increase the NPC's relationship points with the Sim. The game presents these actions to players as an array of options that appear when clicking on the wolf and includes choices, such as 'Play', with subcategories such as 'Fetch' or 'Razzle', that are discovered when clicking on other canines in the game. Players must avoid choosing Sim-Wolf interactions that may cause losses in relationship points, such as 'Scold' or other negative interactions. Once Sims' establish 'friendship' with the Leader of the Pack, the wolf may 'nibble' them, making the Sims bipedal werewolves.

Similar to earlier games about werewolves, *Pets* teaches players to value human-animal hybridity by making lycanthropy a unique, challenging, and rewarding play experience to pursue that also indicates some level of players' game mastery. Werewolves are classified as a 'life state' in the game, or a type of Sim with a distinct appearance and abilities. Like discovering life states in other expansion packs, creating a werewolf requires mastery of some of the game's mechanics such as relationship building. Aside from a brief tip describing how to cure a Sim's lycanthropy, there is little, if any, instruction in the game for turning Sims into werewolves. Players can either stumble upon the process on their own or find information about it in official strategy guides purchased separately or on fan-made instructional websites. These texts suggest that acquiring a werewolf Sim is a process for players willing to go beyond the conventions of gameplay by either experimenting, researching, or even using cheats to achieve lycanthropy. Thus, in *The Sims*, achieving gamic lycanthropy is symbolic of game mastery.

The procedures and actions that turn Sims into werewolves, however, also teach players to value human-animal relationships because of the various investments required during play. Adding trees to Sims' lots to attract wolves, for example, consumes in-game resources that could otherwise be used on human Sims, specifically time, lot space, and Simoleons (the game's currency). Requiring more trees on a lot to attract the Leader of the Pack argues for the importance of nonhuman animals' needs such as habitat – a particularly important point for a game that emphasizes land construction and development. Similar arguments can be made about players' cultivation of wolf-Sim relationships in the game. Wolf-Sim interactions force players to consider which actions would be positively received by both species based on prior lived experiences and gameplay experiences. The juxtaposition of wolves' environmental and social requirements with humans' needs within a domestic space dislodges the human as the centre of

the game's activity, calling into question the game and players' tendencies toward anthropocentrism.

Once players' Sims become werewolves, changes to their operation in the game environment encourage players to understand their Sims' transformation as a becoming-animal. For example, werewolf Sims transform during the night, starting at 8:00 pm in the game, and once transformed, their hunger meter depletes and their energy levels rise quickly. These procedural aspects of werewolf Sims signify their bestial character in mimicking nocturnal predators' behaviours. Werewolf Sims also acquire a unique set of passive skills that human Sims do not have, such as the ability to train pets rapidly and fight burglars. Both skills suggest a shared kinship between werewolf Sims and nonhuman animals, the former through communicative ability and the latter through behavioural similarities, specifically aggression based on territoriality (as opposed to bloodthirst). Additionally, werewolf Sims engage in an array of autonomous behaviours including howling at the moon and in retort to players' directions, both of which causes nearby pets to deplete their bladder meter by half. Werewolf Sims can also be directed by players to summon wolves to their lot by howling. Autonomous howling signifies the werewolf's alterity (as animal *and* game algorithm) through its inability to be completely controlled. Commanded howling, in contrast, models Deleuze and Guattari's theorization of becoming-animal as a process that occurs through an anomalous (the werewolf Sim) and its relation to a pack (the group of summoned wolves). According to Deleuze and Guattari, 'We do not become animal without a fascination for the pack, for multiplicity' (1987: 239–40). The pack quality is necessary to becoming animal, and it manifests in the Sims through howling. Deleuze and Guattari also explain that:

In any event the pack has a borderline, and an anomalous position, whenever in a given space an animal is on the line or in the act of drawing the line in relation to which all the other members of the pack will fall into one of two halves, left or right: a peripheral position, such that it is impossible to tell if the anomalous is still in the band, already outside the band, or at the shifting boundary of the band. (1987: 245)

The anomalous animal, then, rides the line between the pack and what lies outside of it: the human. Werewolf Sims, because of their hybridity, operate as anomalous in both their

similarities to human Sims and their ties to a wolf pack. Lycanthropy in *Pets*, then, demonstrates the process of becoming-animal for players through control, actions, and algorithms.

### **The Werewolf in the Machine**

Presently, the legacy of gameric werewolves as characters that help players appreciate nonhuman species and human-animal relations remains to be seen in the industry. Outside of the examples above, few contemporary games feature werewolves that nuance the bloodthirsty and violent lycanthropes depicted during the late 1980s and 1990s. Becoming-werewolf is largely constructed as becoming-game, which, in its ideal form, manifests as mastery over the play experience. In other instances, gameric werewolves are often flattened as yet another creature in the menagerie of supernatural specimens that populate horror and fantasy worlds with little reflection on its animal quality. Moreover, the latest iteration of *The Sims* series, *The Sims 4*, has yet to see an expansion pack featuring a werewolf life state similar to *Pets*. Likewise, it also remains difficult to discern if *The Legend of Zelda* series will see Wolf Link return as the central character of another game.

With the high-definition port of *Twilight Princess* published this year, however, we might trace a future trajectory for gameric werewolves by examining the Wolf Link Amiibo packaged with the 2016 re-release. Amiibos are Nintendo's popular 'toys-to-life' figurines that use near field communication (NFC) to transfer data to and from supported Nintendo 3DS and Wii-U games. As wireless communication and storage devices, Amiibos allow players to add, customize, and save characters or items to games as well as unlock new levels to play by tapping the figurine to a reading device, such as the Wii-U gamepad. The production of the Wolf Link Amiibo is worth attending to because it points to the werewolf's legacy in *The Legend of Zelda* series and presents the werewolf as yet another iteration of hybridity—as both material (figurine) and digital (data). The Wolf Link Amiibo is a hard plastic sculpture of Wolf Link with Midna riding on his back. The Amiibo also contains data that can be added to both *Twilight Princess* and *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (2017). Within both games, the Amiibo data, like moulded plastic, renders Wolf Link as animal, removing players' ability to access Link's humanoid form. For example, in *Twilight Princess* the Amiibo unlocks a challenge dungeon, the Cave of Shadows, where players fight enemies as Wolf Link and only Wolf Link. Players receive bonuses and rewards for their efforts and effectiveness in defeating foes. Adopting

playstyles from earlier werewolf games, such as *Altered Beast*, the Cave of Shadows encourages players to master werewolf gameplay by beating the challenges quickly, preserving health, and creating combinations of attacks. In *Breath of the Wild*, the Amiibo adds Wolf Link to gameplay as a domesticated hunting companion to the later iteration of the Link avatar.

The gameplay offered by the Wolf Link Amiibo points to different legacies for lycanthropy in the *Legend of Zelda* series. In *Twilight Princess*, Wolf Link symbolizes players' mastery of both the game's mechanics and performing as animal (or, at least, how one might imagine an animal to perform), continuing themes demonstrated in other werewolf games. *Breath of the Wild*, in contrast, uses the Amiibo to add Wolf Link as a character to the game, coupling him with the Link character-player as his hunting companion. From what can be gleaned from the *Breath of the Wild* Amiibo trailer, human and animal work alongside one another to defeat foes. Restructuring the avatar from human-animal hybrid to human-animal companionship at once externalizes Link's taming of the beast within, while suggesting a peaceable coexistence between human and nonhuman animals—or a relationship fraught with the problems of animal domestication, as the specifics of Wolf Link's gameplay still remain to be seen. Regardless, the Wolf Link Amiibo's potential to interact with future Nintendo titles leaves open the possibility of Wolf Link's return. The werewolf will perpetually prowl the peripheries of the game series as a symbol of Link and players' hybridity.

By examining Wolf Link and lycanthropic Sims, it is evident that some gameric werewolves are less concerned with bestial violence and bloodlust. Rather, games, such as *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* and *The Sims2: Pets* use gameric actions and procedures to encourage players to value and practice humans' connectedness to the animal category. As a werewolf, players engage in becoming-animal and grapple with their own hybridity as human animals and as players in assemblage with game technologies. Thus, analysing werewolves and lycanthropy in digital games reveals how werewolves are developed and deployed in the medium and how playing as a werewolf allows us to (re)consider the relations between humans, animals, and technology.

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<sup>1</sup> Deleuze and Guattari note that becomings proceed through 'assemblages,' which they describe as any number of 'things' or 'pieces of things' gathered into a single context that can produce any number of 'effects.' An assemblage is a structure, but not a static one; it has moving parts and these parts move in relation to one another (1987: 242).



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<sup>2</sup> Cremin explains ‘becoming-animal’ in gameplay through his reading of *Super Mario* (1985). He observes that ‘The human (player) imposes her will on the animal (avatar or diegetic object) while, at the same time, in a never-ending apprenticeship, the avatar, or object in a general sense, indicates ways to proceed, to exceed, in other words, what the player was until then capable of’ (2016: 450–451).

<sup>3</sup> In *Altered Beast*, the protagonist transforms into a different were-beast for each round of the game. The transformations are as follows: round 1, werewolf; round 2, weredragon; round 3, werebear; round 4, weretiger; and round 5, gold werewolf.

<sup>4</sup> A boss is an enemy that awards players an item of value or advances the game’s plot upon its defeat.

<sup>5</sup> Midna is an imp-like character in *Twilight Princess* who acts as players’ guide, teaching them game controls and offering hints if players get stuck. She also rides on Wolf-Link’s back, assisting him with her magic in battle, in hopes that he will help save both Hyrule and the Twilight Realm. Near the end of the game, players learn that Midna is the princess of the Twilight Realm and that she had been cursed and cast out by Zant, a conspirator to the throne, and Ganondorf, the game series’ long time antagonist. Upon defeating Zant and Ganondorf, Midna is restored to her throne and her human-like appearance.

<sup>6</sup> In both of his forms, Link uses gestures rather than speech or text to communicate with other characters in the game. The other characters, or NPCs, communicate with Link using written language displayed in dialogue boxes.

<sup>7</sup> In *The Sims* series, ‘motives’ refers to the physical and mental desires of Sims and Pets. Motives are measured by horizontal bars that fill and deplete based on Sims’ actions and interactions throughout the day. The following categories are the motives for Sims in *The Sims 2*: hunger, comfort, bladder, energy, fun, social, hygiene, and environment.

<sup>8</sup> Werewolves are not featured in the PlayStation 2 or Nintendo GameCube, DS, or Wii versions of *The Sims 2: Pets*.

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