Myth, Diegesis and Storytelling in Perennial Games

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Abstract. Perennial games—ongoing, live games—are a form of games that often seem at odds with storytelling through their temporality, repetition and strange diegesis. This paper proposes a reframing of storytelling in perennial games as *myth* to alleviate these problems. Two layers of myth are presented, the first as the constructed fictional layer, and the second as the lived experience of the communities and people engaging with the game. This avoids the traditional player/author split, often seen as problematic in perennial games, by not focusing on authorship or control of these layers. Rather, it focuses on what each layer is affecting about the experience, how both authors and audience can engage with each layer, and how these layers affect each other. Three additional problems with perennial storytelling are identified that this reframing as myth helps alleviate. Framing the play of perennial games as myth shows how players are a part of a greater mythological experience in a disenchanted world. It explains the repetitive nature of perennial games as re-enactment and ritual, instead of as a logic-breaking repetition of story events. Furthermore, mythology has an inherently complicated relationship with truth and fiction, and this fits naturally with a similar relationship of perennial games and diegesis. Through this recontextualisation, we can improve understanding of how players are experiencing and engaging with perennial stories with a holistical understanding of their play and development.

Keywords: Perennial games, Mythology, myth, repetition, diegesis, play

Perennial games—live, ongoing games with continuing stories—consistently account for some of the most popular games in the current media landscape [46, 78] and include games like Minecraft [56], League of Legends [67], Fortnite [20], and Destiny [12]. Perennial games are expansive and often massive in scope, and their storytelling often sees content distributed across long periods of time, potentially spanning years. It is important to understand how these narratives are designed because of the presence and popularity of storytelling in perennial games. We should explore how perennial games enable interactive stories to be experienced on a different scale and scope than that seen from most other digital narrative experiences. However, narrative in perennial games has remained relatively underexplored in the literature outside of work focusing on storytelling in MMOs [7, 42, 46, 50].

The perennial nature of storytelling in these games gives rise to a number of potential issues and conflicts in their design and how they are experienced. These include concerns about diegesis and repetition, such as how storytelling and diegetic framing is supported if key moments of the story are required, by design, to be repeatable and are engaged with multiple times by the same players. For example, how would an individual match of League of Legends make sense to players in relation to the lore? Are repeated runs of a raid in World of Warcraft separate from its place in the overarching story? Is this a concern for players? Another significant concern lies in the realm of the diegesis [35] (what is a part of the fictional world) and what constitutes "true" (i.e. canon) events. It is often unclear to players what is part of the storyworld and what is not, and it is likewise not often clear whether the actions of individual players matter. When a fictional character overtakes the official Bungie twitter account and talks in-character [60, 84], is this part of the storyworld of Destiny? Authorship is a major point of contention in this context, when the actions of players can either become fictionalised, or be ignored. When players randomly dancing in Destiny becomes immortalized through in-game text [9], authorship cannot be said to lie entirely in the hands of the developers. Thus, the traditional split of author and player often falls apart in perennial storytelling. New approaches and perspectives are needed to describe and explore this phenomenon in greater detail.

We propose using *myth* as a lens through which we can understand perennial games and their storytelling. Many of the biggest events in perennial games already feel mythical. Take the example of the Fall of Dalamud from Final Fantasy XIV (FFXIV). On August 24, 2013, a moon crashed into the world, to fictionally wipe out the old world and replace it with the new "A Realm Reborn". The new game takes place 5 years after this "Calamity", and many of its events occur because of this originating event. And furthermore, the old world is no longer accessible to anyone: It *actually* got destroyed by the moon, and can only be seen today through videos, screenshots and retellings. This is a great example of a myth that propagated through a community and shaped its sense of identity, belonging and heritage. It is, literally, an origin myth[1]. And it was also something players lived through. It is, as a developer said, *"a myth that actually happened"* [62].

Understanding perennial stories as *myths* reframes the context for what the story tries to achieve, its reason for and method of being told. Recontextualising something as myth allows us to re-interpret some fundamental assumptions about its purpose and design. Repetition is treated quite differently in myth than it is in many other forms of storytelling [25, 42]. Authorship, too is treated differently [2, 15, 25, 42]. Using myth will therefore give us a different perspective on these key problems in interactive storytelling design. Further, it allows the use of myth as a tool for reframing interactive storytelling in perennial experiences, which will help recontextualize and improve understanding of how players are experiencing and engaging with perennial stories.

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[1] As defined by Eliade [19, p. 21] as stories that *"tell how the world was changed"*.

This helps us go beyond *solving* difficult problems and challenges, such as those posed by repetition or diegesis, and instead, shifts the perspective so they are not problems, but rather, meaningful aspects of the design that can be used, applied, and subverted.

Crucially, we propose looking at the play and development of perennial games as myth holistically. We argue that it is necessary to see the whole scope of the play, from an individual player grinding loot by themselves, to the community-wide activites such as The Gates of Ahn'Qiraj [68, 89], to the background lore written by writers months before a player sees it. All of these elements are neccesary and involved in the storytelling experience of a perennial game. Using myth as a lens for these experiences enables a holistic view of these elements, as well as highlights their relevance for mythmaking. In this paper, we will show how the core aspects of play help construct the complete myth of a perennial game.

1   Related Work

1.1   Mythology

As Segal [76] explains, a common understanding of "myth" has become as a falsehood: A story that was once believed to be true but is false [76]. This is not what we mean by myth. Folklorist Honko [31] defined myth as *"a story of the gods, a religious account of the beginning of the world, the creation, fundamental events"* [31], and some folklorists still consider myths to be stories of this kind exclusively [76, p. 5]. However, the structuralist reinterpretation of myths by influential scholars like Levi-Strauss [47, 48], Bronislaw [53], Campbell [13] or Jung and Eliade [25, 76], contributed to a more modern understanding of myth as something that can *"teach us a great deal about the societies from which they originate"* [48] rather than as ground truths in and of themselves, and to help discover universal truths hidden beneath each untrue story [17]. Later, this understanding got challenged, as myth has lost many of its religious connotations [76] and expanded its form. Examples include mythology as modern cinema [29], as social contexts [6], as political strategy [34] or in the play of video games [2, 25, 42]. This is not just meant in the sense that these media "contain" mythologies (or "lore bibles" etc.), but that we can view the construction and play of these stories as *mythmaking*. J.R.R. Tolkien, as raised by Aupers [3], advocated for *the active construction* of myths, using the term "mythopoeia" (mythmaking), to call for the powerful yet deliberate construction of secondary worlds that nevertheless speak to our own. We consider myth in both contexts: Myths are stories[2] by and for communities, to explain the world they inhabit, and these stories communicate their shared history, values, norms, and perspectives, and

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[2] Story is here seen in the perspective of Abbott and Ryan [1, 72], as a series of events, in contrast to a narrative, which is these events told through a discourse. A told myth is thus a narrative, and carries with it discoursal properties.

mythmaking is thus the active construction of these stories by the community[3] telling, re-enacting, retelling, or experiencing those stories with each other.

1.2   Myth in Games

Myth is not a stranger in game studies. Several scholars, including Krzywinska [42, 43], Rusch [69], Asimos [2] and several others [3, 15, 21, 22, 25, 28, 86] have applied various aspects of myth to games, such as in the fiction, social contexts, rituals, shared history, and personal stories.

Mythology is heavily used in the worldbuilding of games. Games like World of Warcraft, Mass Effect, or Shadow of the Colossus *have* mythology [25, 42, 69], i.e. they have history and "lore" [66], ancient beliefs and stories of gods that impact the world. Furthermore, games allow, as Geraci [25] and Krzywinska [42] point out, players to exist *within* that mythological space, to exist in "an epic cosmos" [25] and partake in the epic narratives. The actions of a player are given meaning through their mythological context: Players are not just inputting actions to make a blank slate's health to go 0, they are slaying *Arthas, The Lich King*, a character with mythological meaning built up over years, and that has great impact to its audience [25]. Surprisingly, despite these strong connections to storytelling, myth has seen little play in interactive storytelling communities. The word myth has mostly been used in the sense of a falsehood [36, 39, 71], or as inspiration for storyworlds [49], or single references to Campbell or Levi-Strauss [39, 58, 80, 83]. To our knowledge, myths have otherwise rarely been used specifically to understand interactive storytelling or interactive narrative systems.

However, myth has been used in other ways in game scholarship more broadly. One example is viewing both the game and the play of the game as mythic in itself. Harrington [28] uses Barthes' Mythologies—seeing social contexts as a kind of mythology that affects how the players view the world—to inspect the notion of the "4X Gamer" and how this specific genre of game has established its own mythology on how it is played and talked about. Rusch [69] sees games as potential guides to a meaningful life, just as traditional mythology would have, leaning on the psychological aspects from Campbell and Jung, to how games can affect contemplation and reflection in a player.

Cragoe [15] inspects the mythological relations to tabletop roleplaying games and finds several similarities between myths and RPGs. The most important ones here are "communication of expected norms", "providing a sense of solidarity through shared history", and "creating a system of mastery and ownership over the heritage and characteristics of the society" [15]. These all strongly relate to the amount of work done on the relationship between games and religion [4, 25, 27, 65, 88], showing how the practices of each overlap in forming social rituals and connections. Aupers [3, 74], too, shows how games can be a place to experiment with religion. This is not directly the same as mythology, but there is an undeniable connection between myth and religion [25, 76]. These sources all

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[3] Authors are here seen as part of the community. See section 3.1.

show how the play of games can be compared to religious activities, and mythical storytelling is one of those.

Asimos [2] is inspired by Levi-Strauss' explicit and implicit myths. The "explicit myth" of games can be seen as the written, authored mythologies of the world, and the "implicit" myth, as the personal, ritual action of myth, which in games is understood both as the active play experience and the personalized narrative. This split might strike a familiar chord in interactive storytelling communities to that of the authored versus player story [37, 38, 40, 44, 59, 70] or emergent narrative [5, 18, 33, 40, 45, 51, 52, 70, 79, 87]. The relationship between perennial games, myth, and emergent narrative, while fascinating, is unfortunately out of scope for this paper.

2   The Layers of Myth in Perennial Games

Existing literature on perennial games mentions myth briefly, but does not go into much detail on the power of this connection. As discussed in section 1.2, myth is predominantly something that happens in *communities*, through social connections and customs, and *over time*, through rituals and repetition. Perennial games are perpetual, have a continuous temporality with the real world, and their narrative is shaped by a community and the authors at run-time [46]. Therefore, perennial games have mythmaking aspects built-in since they are, by definition, communal storytelling experiences that create systems and rituals of play. Unsurprisingly, their construction of myth is as a result highly complicated, especially as it relates to question of authorship and diegesis. Therefore, it is important to clarify how myth can be used in the context of perennial games and how it is constructed. To accomplish this, we define two inter-connected layers of myth in perennial experiences (seen in fig. 1).

The first layer is the *fictional* myth. This is the realm of creative invention by authors [24], that create the myths inside games. It is the fiction, the lore, the backstories and fabric of the fictional universe. The fictional myth is the "canon" of the universal chronicle [46] of a perennial experience. This mythmaking is closely related to J.R.R. Tolkiens "mythopoeia" [3], which is the careful and deliberate construction of new fictional mythology that aims to say something about the world. This layer is Bungie authoring narratives in Destiny, by creating the gods and their domains. This layer is what the actions of players gain meaning by [25, 42], and where we can view their lore and cosmology as revealing about their creators and the people who play them, as in traditional mythological studies [13, 47, 48]. However, it is not only the domain of authors, as the players and audience play with the fiction, too, and through fanfiction, deliberation, and play, they affect and create new fiction. Crucially, the role of the audience is also often to *maintain* the fiction, to deliberate it and hold it to account, to update wiki sites and discuss narrative developments. Blaseball [81] is a prime example of the audience directly participating in and maintaining the fiction through their own actions, and the developers responding to this through future authored
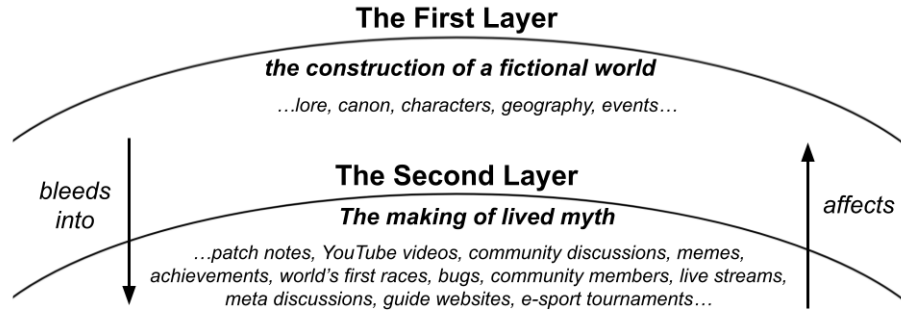
The First Layer

the construction of a fictional world

…lore, canon, characters, geography, events…

*bleeds
into*

The Second Layer

The making of lived myth

*…patch notes, YouTube videos, community discussions, memes,
achievements, world's first races, bugs, community members, live streams,
meta discussions, guide websites, e-sport tournaments…*

affects

Fig. 1. The two layers of myth in perennial experiences. The first layer is the construction of the fictional world through text and lore and deliberation, and the second is the lived myth that develops as a consequence of play.

events. Characters started with no more than a randomly generated name, and the fans alone created the backstories that influenced future events [41, 54].

The second layer is looking at the game as an object of myth-making *in play*[4]. This includes everything that is part of its play, and which is inherently *"non"-fiction* as it is stories lived by real people. All player activities in a game, such as questing, grinding, and raiding, and socializing and inventory management are included in its play and this sits in context to the mythical meaning established by the first kind of myth, even kinds of play that are not seen as traditionally narrative[5]. Asimos shows an example of how two kinds of Let's Plays both create myths [2], despite only one of them engaging overtly with the fictional element of the game. Krzywinska shows how the play of the game is affected by previous players, even without direct influence: Battles play out differently based on experience, based on best practices or the current "meta", that affect a player's given choices, even if established outside the game [42]. The second layer of myth is more expansive than in-game activities only. It includes everything that is part of the play of a game, even that which is not directly "playing the game": Patch notes, YouTube videos, community discussions, memes, achievements, world's

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[4] Here, Sicart's broad notion of play [77] is useful, as it encompasses the wide-ranging possibilities of play.

[5] One useful comparison to emergent narrative here is James Ryan's notion of emergent narrative as nonfiction or lived experience [70], as the case is similar: These are both stories created (curated) from a wealth of material events.

first races, bugs, prominent community members such as YouTubers and live streamers, meta discussions, guide websites, esports tournaments[6]) etc.

The intention here is not to state that these aspects are inherently mythical, but highlighting that these are the tools with which the myths can be made. The second layer is powerful because it highlights those aspects of a game that are not typically seen as "narrative", and frames it as part of the narrative experience by framing it as mythological. The creation of a "meta" in any game is a good example already mentioned by Krzywinska: We must submit to the *"powers that be"* [42] if we are to play efficiently—or intentionally counterplay against it, in any case, we reflect on the established myth. A meme, such as the infamous "Leeroy Jenkins" from early World of Warcraft [75] is part of the community's shared understanding of the game: It is part of the experience and used and reused as people play together. This *is* the enchantment of the world (see section 3.2). We are able to take something fictional and *play* with it, make it real, and thus feel like we can make our lives a little more magical. This is often seen as the activity of the audience, although authors can and will participate, and in fact, any update to the game can be seen as a part of this mythmaking, a further event to create myths out of. This is the second layer of myth.

These two layers can help illustrate something crucial how perennial games function. The most cited examples of perennial games are MMOs or similar games with a strong fictional element. However, live service games like Rocket League [64] or Counterstrike: Go [85] or Minecraft [56] are perennial games under the strict definition given in the previous paper [46] as well, as they receive continuous updates perpetually. However, the two layers showcase a clear difference in the contents of the universal chronicle. As an illustrative example, a game like Rocket League has very little fictional content—its first layer of myth is thin—but it does still have a clear perennial experience in terms of its temporality, and has plenty of myth in the second layer. Take an example like the "flip reset" [63], a technique that was discovered by the community that has no definition in the game's rules, that over time was developed, practiced and then popularized to the point where it is a common and expected part of high-level play. This development over time is a story that is part of the mythology, the universal chronicle of Rocket League. The difference between this and the type of perennial experience that happens in Destiny, where the perennial developments are about fictional characters and events, is that in Rocket League, there is no discussion of what is true. When a fictional element enters the game, suddenly, there are elements that are up for debate and it is here the diegesis becomes muddy and where the layers begin to interact. Yet, it cannot be said that Rocket League has no presence in the first layer, as there is always the possibility for people to create a layer of fictionality where none is intended (see how players create lore of Minecraft despite being given very little to work with [82] or the story of "Herobrine" [57]).

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[6] Esports could be viewed as its own mythology, as a sports narrative on its own, but that discussion is beyond the scope of this paper.

As seen from this example, the second layer of myth is clearly created and maintained through play. However, the first layer of the fictional world is not exempt from play: It is in large part through "narrative play" that these myths are upheld, through retellings and mythic repetition, etc. It is also the first layer of myth that *draws* the player in, entices them with the promise of magic: Here in this world, you can be a wizard (or a rocket powered car, and who doesn't want to be that?). The first layer can also affect the second through establishing accepted norms or preferred play patterns through the fictional myth, which are then upheld (or subverted) by the community in the second layer.

These two kinds of myth cannot be separated, and it is where both kinds of mythmaking combine that perennial games shine. In particular, when the second layer of mythmaking can become *about* the first, and the first is *affected* by the second. Leeroy Jenkins, originally a person from a comedic video of a raid gone wrong that became a meme because of his recognizable shout, was later introduced in Hearthstone [8] on the same level as any fictional character in World of Warcraft. The Fall of Dalamud, mentioned in the beginning of this paper, is another great example of a myth that functions in both layers inherently, through its conception. It is both a scripted and authored event by the developers that is part of the fictional fabric of the universe of FFXIV, but it is also an event uplifted and retold to mythological status by its players. Destiny has countless examples of players engaging in an activity and then that becoming "canonized" through the game's lore acknowledging such actions later [46].

This is the true magic of perennial games, as it relies on perenniality to function: Mythmaking takes *time*, and it is only possible to affect the first layer of mythmaking, the fictional world, if there is a built-in affordance to change it, and that can only happen over time. The mythmaking of the second layer can emerge from any game, and the first layer happens in traditional fiction, but it is only in perennial games that we see *both simultaneously*. Players create new myths in the moment that alter the fictional world, and reflecting upon them and how they affect their play in the same moment. This is something that can only exist with perenniality and fiction combined. We do not argue that this is entirely unique to perennial *games*, as the examples that Saler [73] brings up also show signs of this kind of experience, and American wrestling, as discussed by us [46], also include fiction and perenniality. But what is unique about perennial *games* is rather why and how they work so effectively as perennial experiences.

3   How Myth Helps Perennial Games

There are four main advantages to viewing perennial games through the lens of myth: First, it avoids assuming a false player/author split that is frequent when studying storytelling in perennial games. Second, it helps to explain why we play perennial games and the immediate attraction of *playing with* myth. Third, mythology has an inherently complicated relationship with truth and reality that also fits well with the complicated diegesis of perennial games. Finally, it solves

what has been perceived as a major issue with storytelling in perennial games, namely that of repetition.

3.1   The Author/Player Split

Myth provides an inherent binding between the traditionally narrative and the traditionally ludic. Krzywinska emphasizes how WoW situates its fiction firmly in the mythic, through its creation of an illusion of a coherent world in cultural, spatial, and temporal terms, yet this has gameplay consequences: *"Through a web of intertextual and intratextual signifiers, the game invites players to read the world and gameplay tasks as "myth," and like myth these have allegorical and material dimensions"* [42]. Krzywinska and Geraci show how the practices and play of games can be seen as mythological or sacred. Since the actions in games have mythological meanings (in the second and first layer), the individual actions of players become intertwined with the myth, and cannot be entirely separated from it. As Krzywinska says, *"it is common for players to understand the quest format in both narrative and other, more functional and experiential terms (e.g., a means of gaining better equipment and experience points); one is not reducible to the other, but instead they create a gestalt that better reflects in conceptual terms the multifaceted experience of playing the game"* [42]. In other words, the play of a perennial game affects both layers of myth at once, and they cannot be separated easily. This has implications for understanding the relationship between players and authors.

The two layers proposed in this paper might sound similar to the split mentioned in related work by Asimos (section 1.2), of explicit and implicit myth. However, explicit myth was authored and implicit was personal for a player, and this is not where the split of the two proposed mythological layers is placed. It might seem natural to assume that the first layer of myth is for authors and the second layer is for the audience, but as already shown in examples in the previous section, there are counter-examples to both of those assumptions. Players affect the fictional myth and authors affect the lived experience. In fact, authors are as much part of the lived experience as any audience member, as they are also experiencing the development of the lived myth first-hand alongside the audience. It cannot be said that any layer belongs to any specific participant.

Even when you look at "both", as Asimos does, it will inevitably lead to separation of author and player stories. Instead the power of myth is that it is able to, in a single phrase, encompass a more holistic view of the narrative play that happens in perennial games, that does not talk about a played or designed narrative but rather something else. The two layers of myth are perhaps orthogonal, or at least divergent, to players or authors. Both the audience and authors have the capability to affect, be part of, and engage with both layers of myth. One example of this is Destiny's Loot Cave, which was an unintended exploit the developers later turned into a part of the story, and eventually part of future experiences [23, 26, 32].

The two layers of myth do not show who is in control of the mythmaking process, but rather what part of the experience it affects. These two layers are

what is *at play* in a perennial game, it is what everyone changes when they engage with it. Even actions as simple as reading about the fiction helps enforce it, maintain it and strengthen its power, just as listening to a myth would help propagate it through society.

This is not to say that authors and audience members have the same kind of control over the perennial story—they are very different roles, still, but the roles are more complicated. The two layers show *what is*, not how it comes to be, and who is in control of what. The advantage of this is that it avoids the assumption that players are static "consumers" of the myth or that the authors are entirely the "gods" of the myth, as neither is the case.

3.2   Why We Play

Myth provides a very strong case for why perennial games are so enticing to play, and so successful as products.

Krzywinska [42] and Geraci [25] discuss how MMOs inherently invoke the "hero's quest"-aesthetics, and let the player "be part of something greater" or give them a chance to exist in *"a cosmos of epic meaning"* [25]. Geraci and Aupers [3] note how this is a response to Weber's old notion of the "disenchanted world", also referenced by others [3, 73]. To summarize Weber's argument, the modern (mostly western) world has become increasingly secularized and non-religious, non-mystical and non-magical [3, 25, 73]. Virtual worlds, to Geraci and Aupers, offer a chance at living, if ever briefly, in a world that once again has something that the modern world is missing: A sense of purpose. As Geraci said: *"myths are the thing through which character's (and thus players) actions make sense"* [25]. This idea of dealing with a disenchanted world through fantastical media is not new. Saler's [73] historical account of turn-of-the-century (1900-1940) literature shows how fantastic media creations such as Sherlock Holmes stories and The Lord of the Rings gained a lot of traction at the time precisely because of their ability to inject enchantment into a world that was becoming increasingly rationalised. Saler covers in great detail how the fan communities that developed from this media communicated, in similar ways to that we see around perennial experiences, just using physical letters or debate clubs rather than forum posts and chat servers. They were, in another word, *playing* with their stories. What digital media offers today, however, is that is the possibility to "enter" these worlds, as the very object that is being mythologised *is* what people play inside.

And the notion of *play* is important. Aupers [3] shows how it is specifically the voluntary, inconsequential, non-important attitude of play that allows this experimentation and exploration. We can *play* with myth in perennial experiences because "it is only" a game. Players are well aware that they are not materially affecting the outside reality, but it is precisely this awareness that allows them to play with the fictional reality. As Saler [73] showed, in response to a disenchanted world, players needed fantasy to be pointless (yet sensible) to allow themselves to engage with it in a world increasingly funded on rationality. Because the world of Destiny takes place in a video game, it is acceptable

for many to pretend to be a god-slaying space wizard. And furthermore, the promise of being part of an ever-evolving, *lived* myth, being *there when it happens* is something that perennial games excel at, through their temporality, and ability for players to inhabit spaces [25, 61].

3.3   Real-not-real

To Geraci, this playing in an "epic cosmos" only works *because* virtual worlds have "real histories", which the players can reference and situate themselves in: Life goes on in a virtual world when a player does not engage with it, and a real sense of place is established through this passage of time. It is not *just* play. As Krzywinska also said, *real* things happen in these worlds [42], and while they happen in mythological contexts, the events are not "fake" or "unreal", but in fact quite actual. Hong calls this notion *"real enough"* [30], focusing on the idea that these worlds are real enough for us to meaningfully get something out of them.

We have previously noted how the "diegetic muddiness"—the sense that what is part of the world is open to discussion at run-time—is part of the appeal of perennial games [46]. This echoes this exact "real-not-real" nature of myth that is also present in these games. They are fake enough to be fictional and exist within play (and is thus safe and inviting, non-dangerous and explorative), but are real enough that it matters (people care about it, find meaning and connection with it—it is more than frivolous). Hong [30] has valuable insight here: Using discussions on the real by Žižek [90], they conclude: *"I refer to it here as a sense of "real enough": We are able to play as if we believe this could have been real. The desire for the real does not take the form of earnest angst, but a willingness to dive knowingly into video game spectacles of "when life mattered.""* and later *"the invocation of a mythic time when life mattered comes hand in hand with a postmodern attitude of real enough. [...] what is at stake is not the "realness" of games, but a politics of engagement with the real writ large."* [30].

Mythology, too, has a complicated relationship with truth. It is baked into the very word (and the source for the meaning of the word as falsehood) that mythological stories are *false*, and yet there is still a grain of truth to them. Furthermore, traditional mythologies contradict themselves a lot [14], and have inconsistent logic or timelines. This is the case for MMOs and perennial games too. Different parts of a community can have multiple, co-existing explanations for events, and Destiny is a prime example of whole lore books with intentionally false accounts of happenings [10, 11]. One does not need to spend a long time in any "lore" community to notice their frequent obsession with "the canon" [16, 55]—knowing what is true and what is false. Multiple versions of the same story are rarely accepted, and rejected upon discovering one of them as a lie. "Retconning"[7] can be seen as a great sin and consistency often as a great virtue.

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[7] "Retroactive continuity": Changing a previously established truth about the world to serve a new narrative purpose. This could be innocuous, like changing the previous off-screen location of a character, to severe, such as reviving them from death.

This is perhaps ironic, as traditional mythology was often contradictory and illogical: Timelines are blurry and the state of the world is inconsistent from one story to the next. Yet, it is precisely this contradiction—the discussion of what is real given a complicated foundation—that is fundamental to perennial experiences. There is a built-in tension with the mythological and the audience's desire for knowledge, and this is, once again, *part* of the perennial experience. What happens in a perennial game is both real and not real, and it is impossible to define it fully as either.

3.4   Repetition

The fact that events in perennial games repeat has been a major point of criticism for their efficacy as storytelling media for a long time [7, 42, 46, 50]. Events in MMOs happen over and over again as players repeat events ad infinitum: Even important story characters like Arthas are killed every day. How can storytelling make sense in such a world? To Krzywinska and Geraci, this does not spell the demise of storytelling in WoW. Rather, through the mythical lens, we can see a power in it. Krzywinska notes how *"as with retellings of myths, battles are fought over and over again, and in this there is a cyclical/recursive organization of time"*.

Geraci recalls Mircea Eliade's work how participation in a religious society is about ritually retelling or reliving the stories again and again. Rather than treating this as a break in the narrative construction of the world, we can instead see repetition as a "retelling" itself. Players relive mythos of World of Warcraft through their play, and thus ritually repeat the great events of its history. As we would retell a great myth over and over again, so too, does the players of any perennial game reenact its events. Each repetition can be viewed as a retelling or a *re-enactment* of the event. A ritual, performed over and over by the players, to commemorate and immortalize the event itself, much as ritual serves myth in religion—as re-enactment. Rituals and repetition are in religion a primary way through which the myths are experienced [19, 76]. Similarly, we experience perennial games by (perennially) playing their content over and over again, and this is how their myths are absorbed, created and take form. Naturally, these re-enactments and retellings have the power to change what we think about the original event, as well. Repetition is thus not a byproduct but a necessity to establishing the myth of perennial games.

And just as rituals change over time in religion, the *powers that be* affect the second layer of myth, to affect how the ritual is performed every time. New strategies are discovered and new reasons to go through the raid may be found or implemented into the game. Nevertheless, each subsequent repetition is not the same as the event itself, but a reflection, a re-enactment.

4   Conclusion

In this paper, we propose using myth to reframe understanding of storytelling in perennial games. Doing so allows us rethink elements that are often thought

to be in contention with successful storytelling in perennial games. Namely, it allows us to rethink the meaning of repetition as re-enactment and ritual, and think of the diegesis as mythological and thus both real and not real at the same time. Myth also helps contextualise perennial games, to understand how being part of a greater mythological cosmos is attractive. Two layers of myths in perennial games were presented that avoids splitting the storytelling across a player/author axis, but rather have a layer of the fictional myth and the lived myth created through play and creation. This showcases the two major kinds of myth perennial games play with, and how they can and will interact when they are both present. This interaction between these layers, across players and authors, is the core of how myths are made, maintained, and altered in perennial games.

Reframing perennial games as myth allows new questions to come to the forefront, as the storytelling experience can be understood in a holistic way. It raises questions about how mythmaking operates in perennial games and how its aspects impact and shape the player and development experience, such as: How are myths created, deliberated, and maintained in perennial games, and by whom? What activities are repeated by players and how does that correspond with the fictional mythology? How does the developer respond to community actions, both those prescribed and those not?

The mythology of a perennial game must be understood in context to its play, its development, and its community as a whole, and thus we must ask questions that encompass the entire mythmaking process. This is the core of what framing it as myth gives us: We cannot help but acknowledge a holistic view of perennial games when we understand them as mythmaking processes, and thus we get a much more complete picture of the experience of playing them.

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