# A Qualitative Analysis of Storytelling through Minecraft Roleplay

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# Abstract

This project aims to lay out the salient characteristics of "*Minecraft* roleplay", a prevalent form of digital storytelling performed in the virtual environment of the video game *Minecraft* (Mojang, 2009) and broadcast on livestreaming and video websites like Twitch.tv and YouTube. Scholarship on this specific subject is limited, but through patchworking together information about the related topics of video production, streaming and persona performance, immersion in storyworlds, and producer-consumer relationships, it was possible to paint a clearer picture of the lay of the land in regards to the medium. A process of Reflexive Thematic Analysis was used to identify several themes in a series of "case study" works of *Minecraft* roleplay: *Hermitcraft* (various, 2012-ongoing), *Empires SMP* (various, 2021-2023), *Dream SMP* (various, 2020-2024), *WHITEPINE* (IvoryCello, 2024-2026) and *Parkour Civilisation* (Evbo, 2023). These were chosen according to their relationship with the hallmarks of Machinima and Let's Play content, and in several cases their relationships to one another. The importance of factors like the connection between collaborators and the way that *Minecraft* features are used in service of storytelling proved to be crucial factors in this analysis.

## Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for a degree or other qualification at this University or elsewhere. All sources are acknowledged as references.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Defining Minecraft

*Minecraft* is a video game available on PC and various console platforms. It is a procedurally generated game, which means that every time a new world is loaded up by a player, every cubic meter of the terrain has been divided neatly into blocks and then assembled in a way which it is vanishingly unlikely the player, or indeed any other player, has ever seen before. It is also a sandbox game, which is to say that any perceived "plot" must be entirely derived by the player from their own self-directed gameplay, with very little pre-existing foundation to build upon other than the mining and crafting gameplay loop suggested by the title. *Minecraft* invites the player to step into a world of completely fresh, untouched terrain, in either "survival" or "creative" mode, and provides no further explicit instruction on what to do or where to go from here. While it is possible to reach an ending of sorts, defeating one of several "boss monsters" in an alternate dimension to reach the credits, a player is never guided towards this goal directly, and, without external context, might never know it exists at all. No part of *Minecraft*'s gameplay is required, even basic progression of material and tool gathering if the player chooses to use creative mode, the setting which allows players flight and infinite access to any items they desire. Even in survival mode, the default setting which lends itself best to *Minecraft*'s mining-crafting gameplay, a player may customise their experience practically limitlessly as they desire after enough initial progression. *Minecraft,* "starting from a relatively small set of elements and rules, can have a multiplicity of possible outcomes" - it is an emergent video game (Soler-Adillon, 2019).

In the fifteen years since the game's original publication, the game has proven to be an unprecedentedly popular breeding ground for digital imaginative play. *Minecraft* promotes imaginative play by its users because the foundation it provides for players to build upon is so basic. It has simple, pixelated graphics that prompt the player to fill in the blanks with their own ideas every moment they are looking at the screen. It allows infinite customisation of the player's appearance ("skin"), too, within the limitations of the low resolution 8-bit graphics the game uses. It is, in its PC-based "Java Edition" form, extremely easy to modify

("mod") with additions of extra items, rules, settings, entities, and appearances, through the form of datapacks and texture packs. This last point can preclude the use of mods like "proximity chat", which allows users to hear one another at a proportional volume to their distance from each other, or mods to increase the player character's limited range of motion with "emote" animations that are more common in other multiplayer games like *Fortnite* (Epic Games, 2017). Multiplayer is also easy and free on both editions of the game, and the mostly-console-based "Bedrock Edition" also has crossplay, which means that Playstation users, XBox users, and Windows 11 users can play online with each other unrestricted. In short, players can project their ideal imagined concepts on to the backdrop of *Minecraft* with ease, and any gaps in that ideal can be filled with mods or the collaborative input of other players.

## 1.2 Defining Minecraft Roleplay

Given *Minecraft*'s great potential as a virtual environment that can be made one's own, millions of people have, since its creation, been inclined to post video footage of their time playing it. Creators record footage of themselves playing the video game, with or without their own commentary added on top, and publish it either live to streaming platforms like Twitch or in edited video form to platforms like YouTube, usually with intent to gain enough popularity for their work that they are able to amass a following and earn revenue from advertising and paid subscriptions. This is an incredibly popular and lucrative form of online content creation, and *Minecraft* in particular is the most watched game on YouTube, with well over one trillion views on videos involving its gameplay having been accumulated since its release (Stuart, 2021).

There are many varied forms of *Minecraft* video content - creators may post follow-along process videos for constructing elaborate builds, or "redstone tutorials" directing others on how to use *Minecraft*'s in-game equivalent to electrical wiring, or attempt to "speedrun" completing a specific goal within the game as quickly as possible without cheats. This thesis aims to look instead at "Let's Play" and "machinima" style videos:

> *Let's Plays are videos that fans create of themselves playing video games, coupling game play footage with simultaneously recorded commentary by the Let's Players […] Let's Plays share similarities with machinima as both contain video footage*

> *recorded from playing; however, fans create machinima by repurposing recordings from video games to create original cinematic productions.*
>
> (Nguyen, 2016)

*Minecraft* has been a source for Let's Play content since mid-2010 (Guinness World Records, 2015) and machinima from at least mid-2011 (Machinima, 2020; Minecraft Video Reuploads, 2022). What both of these styles of video content creation have in common is that they are made in service of the expression of a narrative. However, machinima does so intentionally and explicitly, whereas a creator of a Let's Play video may approach their work through the lens of pure commentary, rather than recognising it for the emergent narrative it inherently contains by virtue of chronicling the events that play out within the gameworld.

Within the Let's Play genre, the concept of *Minecraft* roleplay has also been established. This paper centres on this concept, and will refer to "roleplaying" and "storytelling" interchangeably to a degree; these should both be understood to mean the practice of conceptualising and performing a narrative by players, specifically video content creators in this context. Some players use *Minecraft* as the virtual environment for the purpose of collaborative, purposeful storytelling, and may create defined personas or characters in the process rather than representing themselves as themselves. The first of these to gain notoriety was *Shadow of Israphel* (The Yogscast, 2010), a semi-scripted series involving two players taking on the character roles of spaceman and dwarf in a medieval-esque fantasy environment. Since then, the style of narrative production remains popular through works like *Vampires SMP* (PowCreations, 2025) and *Empires SMP* (various, 2021-2023), the latter of which will be discussed in further detail in a later section. The terms "story", "plot" and "narrative" will all be used referring to the events depicted in a given instance of *Minecraft* storytelling, whether these emerge spontaneously or are planned in advance by the creators involved. These words can often be considered relatively interchangeable, but some amount of distinction is made in this thesis: generally, "plot beats" will specify key events within the plot of a work of *Minecraft* roleplay, where "story" will refer to the wider thread and "narrative" will relate to the intent with which it is being conveyed to its audience.

Similarly to Live Action Role Play, *Minecraft* roleplay allows creators to interact and improvise in-character, to have and resolve invented conflicts, and to develop fictional relationships through the digital environment of a *Minecraft* world. The use of virtual bodies

in the video game space allows for body language- and proximity-based storytelling that would not be possible in other forms of roleplay like tabletop roleplaying games or text-based roleplay. This makes it a desirable option for groups of storytellers who cannot easily meet up in person or might otherwise have accessibility issues with using their physical bodies to perform.

Whichever approach a creator takes to the process of using *Minecraft* as their medium for storytelling, Let's Play or machinima, there is an impressive amount of diversity both compared between approaches and within each category, and a not insignificant amount of overlap between the two. The intent of this analysis is to identify the salient core features of the medium, addressing first the broad scope of it and then conducting a series of close readings looking at the characteristics of specific "case study" works to ground these claims in video evidence. Various *Minecraft* roleplay series are compared and contrasted in regards to the way they engage with narrative and with their audiences. From this, relationships of various degrees of clarity are identified between the production of these texts and the creators' desire to be viewed as authentic, their inclination to perform a consistent persona, to maintain audience immersion in their narrative, and to provide a professional-quality viewing experience, among other things.




# 2. Literature Review

Limited scholarship that directly relates to my topic of study is available, meaning that this literature review is primarily composed of sources that are tangentially related in one aspect or another, adding up to form a more complete picture of academic understanding of the composite parts of the topic. This review begins with the few sources which match my angle of analysis; it then goes on to address works that cover the connected topics of Twitch livestreaming, YouTube video production, and theoretical frameworks that can provide valuable insight into both the use of video games as virtual environments and into how narratives can be influenced by both producers and consumers.

## 2.1 *Minecraft* Roleplay Proper

The most closely related work I found is the work of Kim Barbour, whose analysis of *Hermitcraft* as "collaborative emergent transmedia storytelling" dovetails very neatly with my own field of analysis. Among these works (Barbour 2023a; 2024a; 2024b; Barbour, Adams, and Osman, 2024) are a breakdown of how the events of early Season 9 of *Hermitcraft* demonstrated creator Rendog's willingness to play a villain for the benefit of the wider server; the effectiveness of an unplanned "Incident" of one player breaking another player's machine leading to increased narrative tension and branching subplots; and how *Minecraft* content creators use specific language features as performance strategies in order to engage their viewers. The advance for Barbour's presentation *Improvisation, collaboration, and post-production storytelling in episodic YouTube series Hermitcraft* (2024b) lays out exactly what is implied by the unwieldy key phrase of "collaborative emergent transmedia storytelling", which is a large component of what my own research concerns:

> *Interactions between Hermits rely on improvisation and a willingness to go along with one another, with planned interactions used primarily to deal with time zone conflicts or to avoid spoilers. There may be broad plans for a season, but they do not script or plan out storylines in any depth – this is not machinima. Instead, individual episode structures may be developed in post-production, with key plot points emerging through gameplay rather than design.*
>
> (Barbour, 2024b)

There is one other source that addresses specifically the storytelling aspect of *Minecraft* roleplay. In *Talking Fanart: Small Stories About Drawings and Games* (2024), Pål Aarsand details an interview he conducted with 16-year-old Finley about several drawings based on the series Dream SMP, in which Finley tries to explain very briefly what *Minecraft* roleplay involves and how the art is related. This interview provides a clear example of the way in which *Minecraft* roleplay can become inscrutable for an outside observer. Finley goes to great pains to explain some of the context behind the art, as detailed in Section 9 of the paper, and in doing so ends up giving some false information. *Minecraft* does not have a mechanic for "a three-life system", as the researcher reports Finley as having said - this is a social rule imposed on the narrative of *Dream SMP* specifically, as will be elaborated on later. Aarsand correctly concludes that "[s]ocial media platforms are crucial for gaining [knowledge] about the characters and events" in these web series, and in the *Dream SMP* analysis chapter this transmediality will be further explored.

Besides this, several sources analysing the work of *Minecraft* video creators and streamers in ways besides the storytelling aspect have proven to be worth further reading. Of these, two (Durand, 2023; Potts, 2014) focuses on the sociological and anthropological side of the ecosystem, talking about the prevalence of homosocial behaviour between male *Minecraft* gaming content creators and how that may have positively impacted their audience reception. This does have relevance to many works of *Minecraft* roleplay, where same-sex relationships are often depicted between the characters in the work as a result of these inclinations towards homosocial behaviour [QK-3], although this is not a factor which I will be going on to address in this particular thesis. Another researcher (Tian, 2022) states her intent to analyse data from *Twitter* users to reach conclusions about how fan culture informs participatory culture and collaborative storytelling; unfortunately, it seems that her work has never been made available in its completed form, which limits my ability to assess Tian's conclusions and their relevance to my own arguments.

## 2.2 YouTube Video Production

There is much more scholarship concerning the broader state of video production, and of livestreaming as will be examined shortly, than there is of my specific angle. The literature that exists in this broader sense, though, gives useful insights into the intersections of platform and community in *Minecraft* roleplay narratives.

One of the first resources I have come across in the pursuit of literature surrounding my research topic, during the initial proposal phase, was *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* (Burgess and Green, 2009). This book is comprised of a broad analysis of popular content on the YouTube platform in late 2007, identifying patterns in the dataset in a way that would go on to inform the design of this research project. It also discusses audience interaction and participatory culture on YouTube. Burgess and Green's book is in-depth and thorough in its evaluation of what was popular on YouTube at the time, what connected those things to one another, and what this might say about the consumers who engaged with this material, but it has one unfortunate quality which makes it significantly more tangential as a source for my research: it was published before *Minecraft* was available for players to access in any capacity. As such, it categorically contains no information about *Minecraft* videos on YouTube. (Later editions would change this, but the *Minecraft*-related additions introduced after the fact do not substantially relate to my topic of research, so practically this does not affect its direct utility to me.) Even without that direct connection to my topic of study, it is still a useful resource for me to take inspiration from in terms of how to structure my own data collection and analysis, as like me Burgess and Green are here studying a large amount of YouTube uploads and trying to identify trends among them. As such, this book provides a good reference point when it comes to my own discussion of the distribution of *Minecraft* roleplay on the YouTube platform, and especially how seemingly different productions ultimately link into one another.

Over a decade later, Lozano-Blasco et al. (2021) would go on to study a similar contemporary dataset to find out what the most popular YouTube creators had in common, particularly English- and Portuguese-language gaming video creators. They conclude that key traits of successful YouTube gaming personalities include comedy and making the effort to seem relatable to a teenage audience. Presenting authenticity might seem opposed to presenting an invented narrative, but both involve their own variety of persona performance. The latter refers to the phenomenon of people creating, developing, and then expressing a fictionalised version of themself, particularly through the medium of the internet in this instance. Persona performance as a concept has been discussed by Barbour as well (2023b), specifically in regards to the way that gender stereotypes can lead to women crafting their online personas to fit a certain expectation, including through their work creating *Minecraft* content. This analysis will address the construction and performance of an authentic online persona in regards to *Minecraft* roleplay, drawing from the existing

research. Convention in *Minecraft* roleplay spaces dictates that character and creator are referred to by the same name in the vast majority of cases, which is a natural iteration on how on-screen persona and real person can be conflated by both consumer and producer.

Through these multiple degrees of iteration on the false self which shares its face with the true self, it becomes difficult to tell which parts of the perceived persona originate from which distinction, and can sometimes reach a point where (what the audience understands to be) components of the creator's persona or the text do not actually come from any real part of what they are being presented with. Many fans of *Dream SMP* perceived a familial relationship between the four characters Philza, Technoblade, Tommyinnit and Wilbur Soot, despite this neither being true for the characters in the text nor the actors in real life. This happened due to the fandom at large extrapolating from the actors' closeness outside of their performances, where they had given themselves the group name "Sleepy Bois Inc" to refer to their friendship in shorthand, although on *Dream SMP* their characters were largely political opponents with no real familial relation besides one father-son connection. This kind of sign without a referent is an example of the "hyperreal" as coined by Jean Baudrillard (1981); despite having no basis in reality, the nature of the *Dream SMP* “Sleepy Bois Inc” family dynamic was still widely understood and agreed upon by a large portion of the viewer base.

A concept which I have already established is the two different forms of *Minecraft* video that will come up in the analysis, Let’s Play and machinima. In regards to Let’s Play, the source I have found most enlightening is Nguyen (2016)’s *Performing as Video Game Players in Let's Plays*, which also links back in to the discussion of persona performance, focusing on how a Let’s Player must decide whether to go with or against the grain of what the game they play expects from them. In *Minecraft* roleplay, expectations about how one “should” play *Minecraft* - craft and upgrade tools, traverse dimensions, defeat the dragon, earn wings - can either be adhered to or flouted by the creators according to the narrative they are trying to create. They may be an important part of the narrative, as with *Empires SMP;* present, but unimportant to the story, as with *Hermitcraft;* partially present and partially cut off from participants, as in *Dream SMP;* replaced with an analogous form of progression, as in *Parkour Civilisation;* or completely disregarded, as in *WHITEPINE*.

Similarly, *Understanding Machinima* (Ng, 2013) provides the best frame of reference for the various traits that machinima exhibits and how it can be compared to *Minecraft*

roleplay videos and livestreams. The word “machinima” is a portmanteau of “machine cinema”, and, as previously mentioned, describes the use of a video game as the backdrop for a scripted and edited piece of film. These works require more careful editing in the same way that any traditional short film might, involving multiple takes of the same line to get the best delivery, establishing shots, and the removal of outtakes that do not fit with the planned narrative. Machinima is roughly as old as video games themselves, and exists across the gamut of games that involve characters at all; essayists in this book bring up works like the long-running sci-fi comedy series *Red vs Blue* (Rooster Teeth, 2003-2024) (Chapters 1, 2, 4, 7, 11) and the performance art piece *The Salt Satyagraha Online - Gandhi’s March To Dandi In Second Life* (DeLappe, 2008) (Chapter 8). However, although the book does not discuss this fact in particular, machinima has its place in the *Minecraft* video production sphere too. Aside from the multiple works that will be analysed in depth in the analytical chapters of this thesis, an incredibly well-received example is *Fuga Impossível* (Tazercraft, 2015), a Brazilian *Minecraft* machinima with over 26 million views as of March 2026. *Fuga*’s existence is indicative of the long-standing popularity of *Minecraft* machinima across time and continents. Through understanding how machinima is constructed, I will be able to address the way that *Minecraft* roleplay mirrors or strays from these conventions, making comparisons or contrasting where appropriate.

## 2.3 Live Streaming

Woodcock and Johnson’s *The affective labor and performance of live streaming on Twitch.tv* (2019) explores the idea that all streaming is persona performance, even when the intent of the streamer is to project an “authentic” self which is considered equivalent in behaviour to the version of them which exists off-camera and which audiences never see. It specifically addresses the more relevant concept of streamers who assume a character role and portray it for the duration of their livestream as well. Woodcock and Johnson interview two streamers, Connor and William, who cosplay a pirate and “a Norse character” respectively; the authors “suggest [that] streaming in character is a way to manage the stress and effort that live-streaming demands”, and that it may feel like less pressure on the streamer’s behalf to play an explicit role than to constantly project an ideal version of themself. “Equally, it seems that streaming as a character also serves to mark out these streamers from others on the platform”, according to Woodcock and Johnson; following this assertion to its natural conclusion, it would be reasonable to infer that those who engage in

*Minecraft* roleplay and perform their characters on livestream with regularity are doing so to their own benefit in terms of fostering an audience.

In the journal *MedieKultur,* the article "What's on the Interface Tonight?" (Kelly & Sørensen, 2021) compares BBC iPlayer to "a small shop with short and time-limited offers", and the Danish video-on-demand platform DRTV to "a large supermarket selling bulk goods". Following this metaphor, Twitch could be imagined as an expansive farmer's market, with each seller providing what they have grown with their own two hands, and goods changing abruptly according to what the vendors have in stock. Earlier in the same journal issue, the introduction *Streaming Media* points out, quite rightly, that the shortcoming of most existing analysis of online content creation is that it centres around the most popular creators, and as such there is little focus on what smaller, lesser-known streamers are doing (Andersen & Lüders, 2021). This may be further encouraged by the fact that if a person is not a public figure then it is more ethically questionable to conduct an analysis of their behaviour without the streamer's consent and involvement in the process, which might skew results due to the observer's paradox. My research aims to include the work of both larger and smaller *Minecraft* roleplay creators but the scope of it will inevitably be limited by my awareness of what to look for. The metaphor does fall short to some degree in the sense that the metaphorical farmer's market's "goods" are of unverified quality and can only be judged for their value by popular opinion, unlike the metaphorical shop and supermarket, where all content on the platform has been previously assessed to be of good enough quality to meet professional standards. To this end, there is a pervasive sentiment surrounding *Minecraft* roleplay livestreams on Twitch that they are lesser than "real" film and TV, the kind that would be approved for hosting on iPlayer or DRTV. This sentiment will be discussed in further depth in future chapters, both in terms of how it is catered to and how it is defied.

## 2.4 Important Theoretical Frameworks

In Marie-Laure Ryan's *Narrative as Virtual Reality* (2001), Chapter 10 contains a dissection of participation and interactivity in VR [virtual reality] environments compared to interactions in real-world spaces. Ryan posits that the combination of interactivity with immersive media is how players can "create the fictional world", simulating physical acts with verbal contribution "[a]s is the case in dramatic performance". Most, if not all, *Minecraft* roleplay works are not conducted through VR gameplay, but the virtual environment that *Minecraft* provides is still one where the player inserts themself into the digital space for the

purpose of social interactions and the construction of fictional worlds. What proved valuable to me in this chapter was Ryan's assertion that "we own not simply a physical body [...] but also numerous virtual bodies", which can be interchanged and replaced at will in service of presenting a particular manifestation of the self to others online. This concept is well embodied by *Minecraft*'s mechanic of "skins", the look of the player, which can be edited down to the pixel and swapped out with the press of a button; this will come up again later.

Equally useful is David Herman's concept of the "storyworld" (Herman, 2004; Herman, 2005). This is the semiotic term, essentially, for the rules and happenings of any given narrative; the storyworld encompasses the cast of characters, their roles, their actions, their interactions, their environment, and so on. This thesis makes a point of differentiating the gameworld of *Minecraft* from the storyworld of a work of *Minecraft* roleplay, because in close to all cases, at least some part of the storyworld contains some change from how *Minecraft* the game is predisposed to function. The storyworld acts as a reference point to the viewer for what to expect of a narrative and, as such, it is a crucial concept for this analysis of various narratives and how they are constructed. Through pulling apart the building blocks of several storyworlds, it will become clear exactly which factors contribute the most significantly to *Minecraft* roleplay's composition as a storytelling medium.

As coined by Julian Kücklich, a "hybrid" relationship between labour and play can be referred to as "playbour" (Kücklich, 2005). In the cited article, the term is used to refer to the work that game modders do, producing a commodity of sorts for their fellow community members while at the same time having fun with the activity they enjoy. Here, I co-opt the term to refer instead to the work of gaming video creators and livestreamers, which pairs the fun of playing on an SMP with friends and the labour of putting on a performance for an audience in return for paid subscriptions or advertising revenue.

Finally, the work of Henry Jenkins has been instrumental to this research project. Jenkins has over the years put forward several theoretical frameworks which are referenced and applied in this analysis. Jenkins describes an environment in which the consumers of a certain piece of media are driven to participate in the production process by creating their own entries into the narrative canon. The action of openly drawing inspiration from existing media to influence one's own creative works is known as "textual poaching" (Jenkins, 1992); the environment that results from the proliferation of this practice is referred to as a "participatory culture" (Jenkins, Ito & boyd, 2015). Ultimately, Jenkins argues, this

development leads to a “convergence culture”, where the line between producer and consumer becomes blurry, and the hybrid “prosumer” whose consumption of media looks the same as production is created, whether that be in the form of transformative fanworks or in social media posting (Jenkins, 2006).

Jenkins was also the one to originally coin “transmedia storytelling”, a term which is used in previously mentioned literature, and would be expanded upon by Colin B. Harvey in later years (Harvey, 2015). A transmedial narrative is defined as one that has been told over multiple different avenues of communication - a more traditional example might be the the expanded universe surrounding the indie horror game series *Five Nights At Freddy’s* (Cawthon, 2014). In order to find out everything there is to know about this one continuous narrative, a consumer would need to play over a dozen video games, read several books, watch multiple films, and even complete a children’s activity workbook in order to discover the names of plot-crucial characters which cannot be learned through any of the other works. *Minecraft* roleplay rarely, if ever, reaches these lengths of complexity, but it certainly makes use of the concept of having one single story told across multiple narrative platforms very often.

From this research process, I gathered a clearer understanding of how videos like the ones I mean to analyse are typically produced, the mindset behind those who produce them, and the aspects of audience reception which are important to those producers and which impact the choices that they make. I was also able to pull a lot of important theoretical concepts from the latter scholars, which will be useful referents moving forward into the analysis process. This project will synthesise my understanding of those concepts and of the various influences on the creative visions of *Minecraft* roleplay creators, and address the most salient ways that these influences manifest in the text of the works which will be analysed. The goal is to ultimately paint a more stable picture of how concepts like narrative immersion, transmediality, and persona performance, among others, apply to the modern landscape of *Minecraft* roleplay media.




# 3. Methodology

The aim of this project is to give name and form to the most influential qualities that works of *Minecraft* roleplay possess, as it is such a diverse and innovative storytelling medium that it can be difficult to see the forest for the trees. As such, it was important to choose a method of analysis that was designed to handle a large dataset, and that could turn hours of video data into a form that could be more easily studied and compared.

I decided to follow the process of Reflexive Thematic Analysis when processing my data. This is a specific form of Thematic Analysis (TA), a method created by Braun & Clarke (2022): "[a]t a very basic level, TA is a method for developing, analysing and interpreting patterns across a qualitative dataset, which involves systematic processes of data coding to develop themes". The method has been refined since its original proposal (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to put a greater focus on the reflexive aspect of the process, as "valuing a subjective, situated, aware and questioning researcher, a reflexive researcher, is a fundamental characteristic of TA" in the minds of its researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Since I am approaching this course of research from the position of someone who already has expansive knowledge of the subject, it only made sense to choose a method of analysis which treats that subjectivity as a strength rather than a weakness, while at the same time encouraging me to continue reflecting on how my own personal connection to the works studied could influence and shape my conclusions.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) is carried out in stages. Data is assembled and combed over for points of interest, and these points are labelled with "codes" that refer to their particular resonance. The codes are put together in clusters according to their similar focus, with an emphasis on reviewing and refining these clusters to find the most useful grouping of codes. The resulting groups are considered the "themes" and it is these themes that are brought forward into the write-up process to analyse what patterns they present.

Braun & Clarke point out that "even reflexive TA is not just one approach. Two reflexive TA analyses can look quite different, depending on their distinct approach and research aims" (2022); I took time before beginning the process to consider how my approach would be structured. Since I did not have a particular theoretical framework in

mind through which to view the data, I opted for a more inductive angle in terms of orientation to data, with specific theory introduced only in relevance to some themes. In terms of qualitative framework, I was initially interested in including some experiential data, but ultimately ended up with a critical framework instead due to having limited information about the intents and perspectives of the authors to look at. Since there is so little scholarship on the topic of *Minecraft* roleplay, it made sense to me to make this particular analysis broad and surface-level, identifying facts about the material construction of these narratives rather than going into depth about the underlying implications therein. Doing this pre-analysis work was one of the steps I took to ensure my application of RTA was rigorous and thorough, alongside repeating the process of several of the individual stages of analysis multiple times through different analytical lenses to maximise the number of salient observations the researcher is able to make about the text. While Braun & Clarke stress that there is such a thing as belabouring the point and spending too long on any of the stages, they still strongly encourage approaching the same data with fresh eyes as much as possible.

Because the analysis centres around specific aspects of the relevant narratives, the intent behind them, and their reception, I also wanted to approach the data with the method of close reading, which involves breaking down a larger text into its constituent parts and analysing those rather than focusing on the form of the text as a whole. This is also helpful for the particular medium of livestreamed, multi-perspective *Minecraft* roleplay, as the sheer quantity of data can be overwhelming in these instances, so zooming in on specific moments in the narrative and the choices that can be identified therein helps to narrow the focus and makes it easier to find clear evidence of narrative techniques and patterns of behaviour by creators. Traditional close reading is typically held to a rigorous standard by ensuring that for every one sentence of source text there are two sentences of analysis, which is not quite as easy to quantify when close reading is applied to individual narrative beats rather than transcribed sentences. However, I have made efforts to give each part I bring into the discourse the level of detailed analysis it is owed.

## 3.1 Initial Data Gathering and Analysis

Since the medium of *Minecraft* roleplay is used by thousands of creators making hundreds of works, the first step of my process was to narrow down exactly which works I would be looking at rather than trying to assess the whole. This was where my position as an

existing viewer of *Minecraft* roleplay content proved beneficial; I was able to start by reducing the pool down to just those which I had heard of before. While there would certainly have been merit to the choice to choose works I was unfamiliar with, I chose not to do so both to avoid spending too much extra time familiarizing myself with the texts themselves (one of the early steps of RTA) and because this meant I was approaching the process with some awareness of the context surrounding the different works' creation too, which often informed the conclusions I was able to draw and made them more nuanced than they would have been if I did not have such information. Researcher familiarity is a strength in this case, provided that reflection remains a consistent presence during the TA process, although in other cases it would be preferred for researchers to approach their dataset without preconceived understanding of the texts. I also chose to cut down the selection to anything that had been released in the last five years, minimizing the likelihood that the passage of time was influencing the differences between works in the set. With these parameters, the list came to a total of twenty different series.

I then performed a brief qualitative tagging process on these works that was inspired by but not equivalent to RTA, identifying twelve features in each work that related to various aspects of their textual or paratextual construction in relation to their narrative, such as character names or the use of cutscenes and flashbacks. Said features were differentiated as follows: *non-diegetic music* or *no or only diegetic music; pre-built sets* or *sets built as part of series; actors wearing atypical skins* or *actors wearing their default skins; death impacts story* or *death does not impact story; all events are considered Lore/canon* or *some events are not considered Lore/canon; any character has a unique name* or *all characters share their names with their actors; scripts/treatments* or *all improvised; use of cinematic mods* or *no cinematic mods; any cutscenes/flashbacks* or *all current and no cutscenes; streamed in any capacity* or *all edited videos; multiple perspectives posted* or *single perspective;* and *transmediality* or *exclusively told through MCRP.*

These tags were colour-coded red or blue depending on whether they were more closely associated with the curated nature of Machinima content or the more loosely organised format of Let's Play videos, with such judgements being based on the way that each form of media functions (Nguyen, 2016; Ng, 2013). For instance, the tag "all characters share their names with their actors" was coloured blue in association with Let's Play conventions, and "any character has a unique name" was coloured red in association with Machinima conventions; the same applied to "work does not contain cutscenes or flashbacks" and

"work does contain cutscenes or flashbacks" respectively.The resulting table of information could then be sorted by how many blue tags each work had been assigned, giving me a rough visualisation of the spectrum from which I would be able to choose diverse case study options. The full table of information has been attached as Appendix 1.

The described spectrum can be represented more simply as a single-axis scale, as follows:

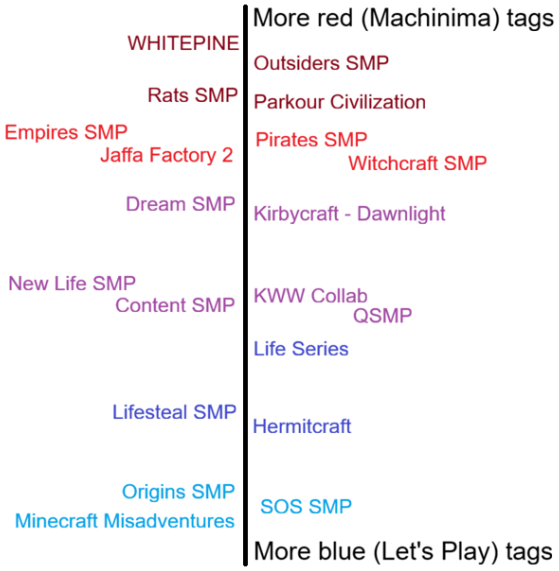



**Figure 1:** a representation of the data compiled in Appendix 1. Works are colour-coded with more red or more blue depending on the tags they received. 1-3 blue tags = dark red; 4 blue tags = red; 5-7 blue tags = purple; 8-9 blue tags = indigo; 10-12 blue tags = blue.

The diagram in Figure 1 displays the amount of features that each work had in common with conventional works of Let's Play or Machinima. As with Appendix 1, works that had more characteristics of Machinima are at the top, and works that had more characteristics of Let's Plays are at the bottom; to use the relevant slang from *Minecraft* roleplay fandom culture, they are ordered by how much "lore" they depict. ("Lore" is a descriptor which means something different within the specific sociolect of MCRP fans compared to how the average speaker would use it, which is why it is here placed in quotation marks. In the MCRP sphere, "lore" does not refer to background or historical information about a narrative, but is instead used to refer to any narrative element or aspect of a work of *Minecraft* roleplay.) Works that received a similar number of red tags are coloured in the same shade of red, and the same applies for blue tags and being coloured blue; works coloured purple presented a roughly equal amount of tags for each category.

Notably, none of the works ended up having only red or only blue tags applied to them - there is always some level of overlap, at least according to this first pass.

## 3.2 Choosing and Analysing Case Studies

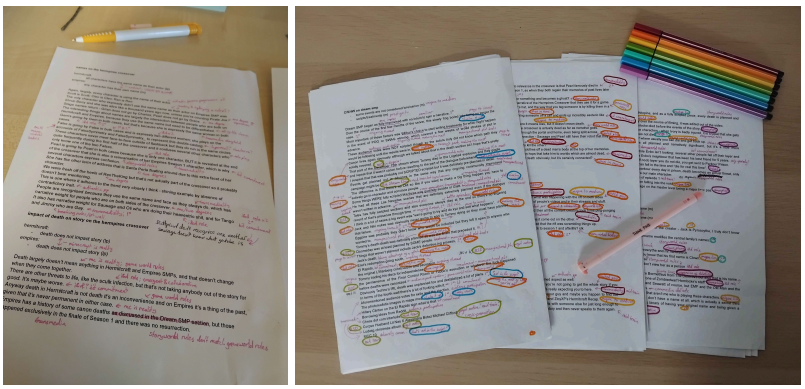
With this visualisation in front of me, it became a matter of choosing texts to analyse that sat at diverse points on the spectrum. This decision was also influenced by my own greater familiarity with some works over others; I knew that my analysis could be more developed if I came at it from a place of foreknowledge, which, given the single-year timeframe for my research project, was a relevant concern for me.

From the Machinima-oriented end of the spectrum I selected *WHITEPINE* and *Parkour Civilisation* as immediate points of interest. I spent some time debating which of the two I should pick for the analytical chapter, before realizing that a comparison between the two was an ideal compromise that would allow me to address how works of *Minecraft* Machinima can be extremely different despite ostensibly expressing the same characteristics. The fact that each work is quite short relative to most other works of *Minecraft* roleplay was also a point of consideration, as putting two contrasting works together would give me more text to analyse through the lens of Machinima. From the middle of the spectrum, I was drawn to *Dream SMP*, an extremely expansive and contentious work which I had analysed academically before and which I knew would provide plenty of data to identify themes in. As for the Let's Play-oriented end of the spectrum, the choice to look at *Hermitcraft* was driven by the desire to analyse a specific story event that took place in late 2022, which intersected with the events of *Empires SMP*. The hope was that, through highlighting a time where the members of *Hermitcraft* intentionally integrated themselves into a new environment with a greater focus on storytelling, it would bring into relief the standards at which *Hermitcraft* normally operates. While I cannot claim that the data collected presents a holistic view of all possible methods of creating *Minecraft* roleplay and what features that creation might exhibit, the information I did gather provides valuable insight into the general internal structure of many of these works, and some core differences between works that might otherwise be painted with the same brush of "being MCYT".

At this time, I reached out to a number of the creators involved in the production of these series, asking to interview them about their practical process when creating *Minecraft* roleplay with the intent to incorporate the information I received into my analysis. However,

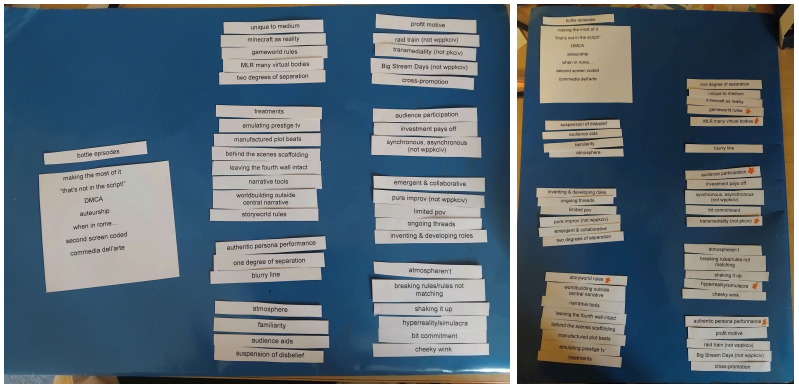
none of the people I contacted were willing to participate, so this plan was ultimately abandoned in favour of a dedicated close reading approach.

Having chosen my source material, I proceeded with the first steps of the RTA process: I watched, or rewatched, each of my case study works, and took notes about my observations of the way each narrative had been constructed. I endeavoured to write out as much information about the textual and paratextual features of each work as I could physically think of, using the twelve tags from Appendix 1 as guiding subheadings to create these collections of data, whether or not it initially seemed like it was going to be relevant to the analysis. As an example of this process, in one session, I considered the subject of how death is treated in regards to specifically *Dream SMP,* and so wrote down every example I could think of of character deaths that are canon to the events of *Dream SMP,* whether they were treated as permanent or temporary, the character's and other characters' emotional responses to the death, the relevance of the "Revive Book" plot device to all of these scenarios, and the one example of one of the actors' real-world death and the extensive fallout that this had on the narrative of the SMP. Given the extremely extensive nature of some of these works, it was necessary for me in the interest of time to narrow down my scope of examination to a specific section of the narrative or to focus on specific creators' output over others'. Then I printed out all of this information, and went over it line by line with red pen as seen in Figures 2.1 and 2.2, creating code labels to apply to the data and annotating the pages with them as I went. Returning to the prior example, I found that for the "death on *Dream SMP"* section, I annotated it with code labels like *Big Stream Days* often, as many narratively important "canon deaths" happened during those kinds of events. Since the code labels were invented during the course of the initial annotation process, it was necessary to go back over the dataset several times to make sure that everything was labelled exhaustively. This process took me around a month, within which I dedicated around 10 days each to writing up and coding the three analytical chapters' specific texts.



**Figures 2.1 and 2.2:** my code labelling and annotation process. After theme grouping, I highlighted each instance of a code from a specific theme in a different colour to get a feel for distribution.

Once I was satisfied with the labelling process, I transcribed each of my codes in a digital document, making it possible for me to filter out all duplicates and end up with a single list of every label I had invented, viewable on a single screen instead of across seventeen sheets of A4 paper. This also enabled me to easily remove redundant labels like the scrapped code *bottle episode,* to merge together similar labels like *breaking rules* and *rules not matching,* or to decide that some labels would be more useful if promoted to the position of themes, like *emergent and collaborative,* which became *Narrative emerges from collaboration.*




**Figures 3.1 and 3.2:** the process of cutting out and moving around themes to form clusters. Codes received orange stars if they linked back to specific theoretical frameworks.

The resulting list of thirty-five code labels was, again, printed out, and this time the information was cut out into individual strips of paper, which I could lay out across the table and physically move around to determine suitable groupings for themes. Having done this exercise once, I reshuffled the strips and did it again, and in each instance took a photograph of the results (see Figures 3.1 and 3.2), so that I could build a third selection of clusters that incorporated all of my best ideas. The data ended up being grouped into seven themes, named as follows: *Audience immersion is paramount; Creators have a growth incentive; I am*

*my cubito; It's just block game; Narrative emerges from collaboration; Participatory culture; Production imitates the professional.* A few of the labels proved too specific to one analytical chapter and not the others, in which case I have reserved them from being clustered under a theme and will address them in the relevant future chapter.




# 4. Theme Inventory

The seven themes are grouped under two super-themes, *Alienation* and *Immersion*. These titles refer to viewer perception of the works, and are intended to loosely correlate to the division between Let's Play and machinima, although the two pairs are not analogous and a fair amount of overlap exists between them. The *Alienation* super-theme contains codes like *profit motive, breaking rules,* and *authentic persona performance;* all of these things can contribute to an audience member viewing the material more through the lens of watching the performance of an entertainer than watching a narrative unfold. Conversely, the *Immersion* super-theme contains codes like *suspension of disbelief, worldbuilding outside of central narrative,* and *ongoing threads;* these contribute to an audience member feeling more deeply invested in the fiction of the narrative and paying less mind to its constructedness.

The data itself has been compiled into several tables, which is the content of Appendix 2. From this point forward, references to specific videos, streams, or other digital publications by the creators involved in the works will be cited using the letter-number code listed next to the appropriate link in Appendix 2. Where bibliographical citations are surrounded by parentheses, datapoint citations will be surrounded by square brackets.

## 4.1 *Alienation*

This super-theme was named in reference to a concept that is more commonly invoked in the realm of theatre, also known as the "distancing effect" or "Verfremdungseffekt", which was originally proposed by Bertolt Brecht (Brecht & Bentley, 1961). In Brecht's theatremaking, he made a conscious effort to ensure that the audience were kept aware of the fact that they were indeed watching theatre and did not get too caught up in identifying emotionally with the characters and events of the play, believing that the former better enabled audience members to come away from the work with an intellectual understanding of its meaning. Here it refers to themes which involve an alienation from the narrative and emotional through line of the works analyzed, focusing instead on creator attitudes and motivations.

Within *Alienation* I defined four themes. These are named *Creators have a growth incentive, It's just block game, I am my cubito,* and *Participatory culture*.

### 4.1.1 *Creators have a growth incentive*

Not everyone who engages in the act of *Minecraft* roleplay is doing so for audience engagement purposes, but the examples of these works which were analysed for this paper were all made by video content creators, who broadly are - they would not publish their creations if they did not have some desire for those creations to be seen. In the cases on which this paper focuses, creators are incentivised to do what they can to get more money and more attention for themselves and their coworkers, as their careers depend on it. As coined by Julian Kücklich and previously mentioned, a "hybrid" relationship between labour and play can be referred to as "playbour" (Kücklich, 2005); in this case, creators combine their desire to enjoy gaming with their *profit motive* to earn a living from streaming.

They can act on this motivation in several ways. One is the organisation of *Big Stream Days,* events which are announced in advance to maximise audience hype, where many or all of the creators involved in a narrative will be present at the same time in order for planned or improvised story developments to take place. This can either be synchronised streams, the source of the code label name, or a moment where many prerecorded videos are published at the same time [WS-3; TI-8; SG-2].

The code label *raid train* takes its name from the *Twitch* mechanic of "raiding" another's stream: a streamer can press a button that sends all of their viewers to another person's channel when their own stream ends (Twitch Help Portal, n.d.). Like this, creators are able to chain together their streams and make sure the viewers are funnelled seamlessly from point to point, encouraging them to continue watching.

This is also an example of *cross-promotion,* although that code was used to label examples of creators promoting the work of others from outside the *Minecraft* roleplay sphere, such as the presence of celebrity guests, or collaborations with variety creators [KJ-2; JM-1; TU-3]. It is differentiated from *raid train* because the latter was applied to instances of creators promoting others within their own ecosystem, not outside of it.

*Authentic persona performance* was named in homage to *Women and Persona Performance* (Barbour, 2023). It labelled instances where creators take pains to make their

on-screen persona seem more real and unfiltered, in order to foster parasocial bonds with their audience and maintain that audience's attention and continued viewership.

### 4.1.2 *It's just block game*

While it was difficult to pick a name for this theme, I ultimately chose a phrase that captures both the unfortunately common sentiment that *Minecraft* roleplay is lesser than "real", professionally made TV shows or movies, and the fact that, when watching works of *Minecraft* roleplay, viewers' absorption may be hindered by the reminder that they are looking at "just cubes".

The code labels *atmospheren't, shaking it up,* and *breaking rules/rules not matching* came together under a sub-theme, as they each express different but similar facets of the same phenomenon where a creator does something the viewer might not expect from the work, which might break them out of their immersion in the narrative of the work. *Atmospheren't* is a subversion of the later-defined code label *atmosphere;* it refers to instances where suspension of disbelief is disturbed or interrupted by some aspect of the work, usually unintentionally. *Shaking it up,* on the other hand, refers to intentional choices to go against narrative or medium conventions. Data that was labelled as *breaking rules* or *rules not matching* was ultimately narrowed down into the same category; in some cases, the defiance of convention came in the form of choices that flouted the gameworld or storyworld's rules.

Some creators openly lampshade their position as distinct from professional media through acknowledging or referencing existing media, a phenomenon which received the code label *cheeky wink*. Examples of this include *Dream SMP*'s links back to *Hamilton* (Miranda, 2015) and *Breaking Bad* (Gilligan, 2008-2013) [TI-2; WS-1], or *Empires SMP*'s borrowing of the aesthetics of *Encanto* (Disney, 2021) or the music of *The Witcher* (Schmidt-Hissrich, 2019-ongoing) [MS-2; OS-1].

*Blurry line* refers to instances where the divide between a creator, their on-screen persona, and the character they have invented and developed is made indistinct by some part of the storytelling process; these iterations of the self can break narrative immersion when exposed to the viewer [TI-5]. This indistinction has long been a source of frustration for large parts of the *Minecraft* roleplay fanbase, who coined the prefixes "c!" and "cc!"

(character and content creator) in response to ambiguity about whether their comments on the events of the story concerned plot beats or the behaviour of the real creators involved.

### 4.1.3 *I am my cubito*

A creator who plays a character in a work of *Minecraft* roleplay, or several, experiences multiple levels of distinction in identity between that character and the version of themself which is not made available to audiences. The *one degree of separation* code label refers to that first level, in which the real person behind the screen is differentiated from the persona which they perform on camera (Barbour, 2023; Woodcock & Johnson, 2019).

As Marie-Laure Ryan mentions in *Narrative as Virtual Reality* (2001), those who participate in virtual social environments like *Minecraft* are able to do so using *multiple virtual bodies;* this code label was applied to instances where the creator switches between various representations of themself which mean different things in relation to the narrative. For example, a creator may have one "skin" (virtual appearance) that they wear when doing in-character streams, and another that they wear for out-of-character streams instead. Likewise, if they play multiple roles, each character may be differentiated by the use of a different virtual body [FS-1; GT-1].

This theme also encompasses the code labels *gameworld rules* and *unique to medium,* which had similar applications. *Gameworld rules* refers to instances where the story incorporates mechanics of the gameworld within which it is enacted, which in this case means that characters treat the rules of *Minecraft* as the rules of their reality. This can manifest in situations like the blasé treatment of death in *Hermitcraft* and *Empires SMP* [GR-5] or the famous quote about "jumping for the chicken or jumping for the beef" from *Parkour Civilisation,* where raw meat is considered suitable as a character's sole daily sustenance [EV-1]. These choices are *unique to the medium* of *Minecraft* roleplay; they would be nonsensical if represented in more traditional forms of media like live-action or animation. *Unique to medium* was also applied in cases where the work expressed traits which are unique to livestreamed content, edited YouTube videos, or to machinima or Let's Play content in specific.

### 4.1.4 *Participatory culture*

This theme draws its name from the writings of Henry Jenkins regarding how fans interact with and become part of the works they enjoy (Jenkins, 1992; Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins, Ito, & boyd, 2016).

Because fans are paying close attention to the development of the narrative, investing notable amounts of time and mental focus into it, creators are encouraged to make sure that that *investment pays off*, the first code label clustered under this theme. They may do this by including small but interesting narrative details in otherwise innocuous seeming streams or edited videos, like moments where a character speaks to his friend in an alien language without explanation [PZ-3], or where a character is spontaneously accused of being God by a stranger [PM-2].

Creators might also encourage *audience participation*, the next code label clustered under this theme, through actively fuelling fans' desire to make transformative fanworks such as animatics based on their performance [WS-3] or dropping hints with the intent of spurring viewers to theorise about future plot developments [GR-4]. This code label was applied in cases where I identified actions that seemed motivated by audience response.

Returning to the work of Henry Jenkins, the code label *transmediality* is named after his concept of transmedia storytelling (Jenkins, 2006). It was applied in circumstances where a character's narrative arc is split across multiple different avenues of storytelling or different works of *Minecraft* roleplay [PM-3; QK-5; IC-7], incentivising audience members to keep paying attention to a creator's output in case a previous storyline they cared about is being continued.

*Bit commitment* refers to the frequent presence of comedy and running jokes across various SMPs, and was applied more broadly than its name suggests. It applies in any situation where a given concept is introduced early on through comedic framing, but continues to be referenced later in the work. This rewards viewers who continue to engage with an ongoing story by giving them a payoff for a joke setup they had previously identified.

Finally, in the world of *Minecraft* roleplay broadcasting, viewers are afforded both the ability to participate by speaking to the streamer synchronously in the live chat, and asynchronously on social media or in the comments section of edited videos. This increases

the chance that any given audience member feels as if they are part of the process, even if their contributions are not being directly acknowledged. Any data related to this dual manner of publication was given the code label *synchronous, asynchronous*.

## 4.2 *Immersion*

This super-theme was named with the literary concept of immersion as described by Marie-Laure Ryan, among others, in mind. She uses the term to refer to the quality which makes an audience member "lose oneself" (Ryan 2001, p10) mentally or emotionally in a work of art. This experience is both incredibly difficult to define and isolate, but any given audience member is also likely to "know it when they see it", meaning that a lot of academic effort has been devoted to trying to pin down exactly how this quality is attained and what it means for a narrative. This term is also necessarily differentiated from audience investment, which refers to how the audience interfaces with the work rather than how it makes them feel, and audience engagement, which refers to metrics of popularity as observed by creators. As a super-theme, *Immersion* groups together themes that involve the audience emotionally connecting with and investing in the narrative, and how that narrative is constructed by creators.

Within *Immersion* I defined three themes. These are named *Audience immersion is paramount, Production imitates the professional,* and *Narrative emerges from collaboration.*

### 4.2.1 *Audience immersion is paramount*

Keeping an audience invested in the story that is being told is a priority for storytellers. Code labels that described various methods of perpetuating audience immersion, and their effects, were clustered under this heading. These code labels could apply to most types of storytelling, unlike the next two themes, which cluster code labels that tend towards specific approaches.

The code label *atmosphere,* in contrast with the previously discussed *atmospheren't,* was applied in cases where creators implemented paratextual factors that enhanced the atmosphere and the immersiveness of the narrative, like the use of non-diegetic music or specific lighting effects through "shader" game mods [EV-1; IC-2]. Textual factors intended to maintain audience immersion, such as the use of foreshadowing or symbolism [WS-3], received the code label *narrative tools* instead.

If data was related to storytelling that was contained within the narrative proper, it was labelled with the code *ongoing threads*. On the other hand, if data regarded storytelling that surrounded the actual events of the plot, it was coded *worldbuilding outside central narrative*. Both of these factors are inherent to narrative works; the former is self-explanatory, and the latter included character backstories [MS-2], hints at past relationships between characters [PZ-2], or references to events and characters outside of the narrative proper that could be used as fuel for future sequels or spin-offs [EV-1].

*Minecraft* as a medium cannot accurately represent all facets of life which a creator might want to reproduce in their storytelling process. In these cases, *suspension of disbelief* is asked of the audience in order to keep the narrative and the audience's immersion intact. Data coded with this label involved substitutions [WP-2], modded implementations [OS-1], or off-screen implications [WP-1], for anything *Minecraft* does not contain already.

### 4.2.2 *Production imitates the professional*

Some *Minecraft* storytelling, more commonly machinima *Minecraft* storytelling, is made with the intent to seem to its audience as though it is "real", professional filmmaking/showrunning, rather than "just *Minecraft* videos".

The code label *emulating prestige TV,* named for the designation that has been given to TV shows favoured by high-budget streaming services like Netflix or Amazon Prime (Adalian & Brown, 2023), was applied to instances where creators used directorial techniques like cinematic drone-style camera angles and intentional audio mixing to give their work a specific feel [IC-1; IC-6; EV-1].

While most *Minecraft* roleplay heavily involves improvised and emergent storytelling, in some cases, scripting is used. In machinima, this is present throughout; in other cases, works may use *treatments*, a code label named for the TV show scriptwriting practice of the same name, to plan out narrative events to a relatively loose degree, and adhere to these treatments when playing out important story beats [WS-5]. In the absence of a treatment, *manufactured plot beats* are sometimes organised ahead of time and then executed either live on stream or in edited videos [SG-2; HR-1; IC-6].

*Familiar* was the code label applied to choices made in line with narrative or medium conventions, in contrast with the previously discussed *shaking it up* code label. One such choice which appeared frequently enough to merit its own code was *leaving the fourth wall intact*; this aspect also connects to the coinage of the previously mentioned "c!" and "cc!" prefixes, which are intended to reinforce the fourth wall by distinguishing character from content creator. Any data that connected to the divide between the real world creator and their fictionalised character self, bypassing the on-screen persona the creator uses, was given the code label *two degrees of separation,* connecting with the *one degree of separation* code.

Part of keeping production to a professional standard is the use of *behind the scenes scaffolding*. Creators may use mods like WorldEdit or Litematica, or prepare their work externally from the SMP they are involved in before copying it over, in order to maintain the illusion of an organically constructed project without the problems of builds taking too much time or effort to complete in regards to story progression [KN-1].

### 4.2.3 *Narrative emerges from collaboration*

The name of this theme is derived from the description of *Hermitcraft*'s output as "collaborative emergent transmedia storytelling" (Barbour, 2023). One aspect of this designation, the collaborative component, is its specific focus; it centres around immersion through the lens of the SMP group storytelling model, rather than that which emulates the professional. This theme name began as a code label but proved significant enough to be "promoted" over the course of the RTA process.

*Storyworld rules* was the code label applied to any instances where the rules of the narrative are purposefully declared to be different to the rules of *Minecraft* as a game, a choice which must be communal for an SMP with many performers. The term "storyworld", which was previously discussed as part of the literature review, was coined by David Herman (2004) and used in plenty of further academic writing in relation to the concept of immersion (Ryan & Thon, 2014; Bell et al., 2018). These rules might include adjustments to *Minecraft* gameplay mechanics [WS-4; IC-1] or reinterpretation of fantasy *Minecraft* items as being real-world phenomena [WS-1].

On an individual level, creators *invent and develop roles,* taking their initial concept for a character and enriching it through interactions with their fellow storytellers and with the

storyworld the character inhabits. This can be represented through physical changes to the character [PZ-4; QK-1; GR-5] or through pivotal moments of connection between characters that define their relationship moving forward [TI-3; PM-2; IC-1]. The latter links to the code label *pure improvisation*; moments of character development are often entirely unplanned before they happen, and emerge from the natural progression of a work.

Collaboration is key to the advancement of the narrative in *Minecraft* roleplay because the story is told through a series of *limited perspectives*, the final code label clustered under this theme. As compared with machinima, or professionally produced "real" film and TV, which typically utilise multiple perspectives in order to express as much of the narrative as possible in a single viewing experience, only watching a single creator's output for a given work limits a viewer's ability to understand the goings-on of the SMP and can cause confusion or misunderstanding of events. It is only by keeping up with the work that creators do together that audience members can stay properly immersed in the narrative being told.

In the following three chapters, the five chosen texts will be explored through their expression of some of these themes, with some overlap. A number of "chapter specific code labels" will be mentioned during these chapters as well; these were codes which proved to only be relevant to one of the analytical chapters and did not belong under the umbrella of any of the wider themes. When relevant, they will be identified appropriately.

# 5. Hermitcraft x Empires SMP Crossover

*Hermitcraft* is a *Minecraft*-based YouTube series that was started in April 2012 and is currently ongoing in its eleventh season as of August 2026. It involves a mostly static cast of around 25 creatives, the “Hermits”, who come together each new season to start a new *Minecraft* survival multiplayer (SMP) world together. Every Hermit publishes their own independent perspective of the events of this SMP on their own schedule, usually through edited YouTube videos, although a significant number of Hermits also livestream their presence on the SMP. There is no “main character” or single perspective which “should” be watched in order to best enjoy *Hermitcraft:* rather, viewers are encouraged to watch multiple perspectives of the events of the SMP and discover the creators they like best. The SMP also has no true leader or ultimate authority, with all administrative decisions being democratic - beyond some notable exceptions (Barbour, 2023).

Hermits generally spend their time on the SMP building large projects, creating games for their fellow Hermits to participate in, and interacting with each other; however, a large part of the *Hermitcraft* experience is the frequent inclusion of narrative threads. These are usually self-contained within their season, but can spread across multiple different seasons and across years of videos in some cases. They can sometimes be facilitated by a single Hermit, creating their own “lore” independently, and other times are built up collaboratively, through the participation and contributions of many Hermits to the wider narrative. One such collaborative work of storytelling consisted of a crossover event with the *Empires SMP* group.

*Empires SMP* is a MCRP anthology series whose first season ran from June 2021 to January 2022 and whose second season ran from June 2022 to May 2023; its narrative surrounds thirteen characters, the “Emperors”, who are each the rulers of their own “empire”, and the political and fantastical interactions that develop between them. Just like with *Hermitcraft*, there is no one “main character”, and any given perspective can be watched to receive a complete narrative experience. It is also released in a very similar way to *Hermitcraft,* with some livestreaming but more edited YouTube video production, and it also takes place on an SMP world. It differs from *Hermitcraft,* though, in that the express purpose of the SMP is for the creators involved to build a collaborative storyworld together, and to reach a defined narrative conclusion across the course of every season. Little to no narrative

overlap between the two seasons of *Empires SMP* is present depending on the perspective chosen. The *Hermitcraft x Empires SMP* crossover event spanned a period of several months, wherein members of each cast took turns travelling to the other cast's world and interacting with its storyworld, first with

This chapter covers the duration of the *Hermitcraft* x *Empires SMP* crossover event, and provides analysis of data which was grouped under the themes *Participatory culture, Narrative emerges from collaboration,* and *I am my cubito*.

## 5.1 *Participatory culture*

In April 2022, before the relevant season of *Empires SMP* even started airing, Grian (a member of *Hermitcraft*) created a "rift", a structure in a cave underneath his house that resembled the existing *Minecraft* entity the "Nether portal" which takes players to an alternate dimension; this rift would go on to become the centrepiece of the crossover's events. He stated at the time that he built the rift in an effort "to improve [his] storytelling through construction", but that he was "sure [it would] become something extra in the future as well" [GR-1]. In the weeks that followed, he did small things like unexpectedly survive a fatal fall next to the rift [GR-2], and then press a mysterious button to turn the rift into a functioning portal [GR-3], in order to build intrigue among his viewers. Two days later, LDShadowLady (a member of *Empires SMP*) uploaded her own footage of her character "Mayor Lizzie" discovering an identical rift on the other SMP, a completely different storyworld [LD-1]. She chose to send the NPC "Gary the Fox" through to the other side of the rift to look for treasure, and in Grian's episode aired the following week, a regular fox could be seen in the area nearby his side of the rift [GR-3], connecting the two events. Likewise, *Hermitcraft* member iJevin fired some arrows through the rift [IJ-1], the sound of which was heard by both SMajor1995's character "Scott of Chromia" and MythicalSausage's character the "Protector of Sanctuary" on the *Empires SMP* side [SC-1; MS-4]. This latter event was unique, though, in that the footage of the two events - cause and effect - were uploaded in the wrong order. This non-linear storytelling is an exemplary demonstration of how the "asynchronous" half of the *synchronous, asynchronous* code manifested in the conception and execution of this crossover.

In the lead-up to the event itself, these and several other small coordinated exchanges happened, and audience members who become aware of the ongoing narrative thread from watching a single creator's perspective would have good reason to follow multiple creators' perspectives in the ensuing weeks to make sure that they caught any updates to the story as they were published. If something happened that they had no context for, such as Grian discovering a note that read "toy mica Jam is nifty" [GR-4], viewers would need to search around all of the *Empires SMP* creators' recent videos to discover that it was an anagram of fWhip's message "Jimmy is in fact a toy" distributed at a music festival on the other side [FW-2]. This gives the audience a much more active and involved role in the consumption of the story. Conversely, the "synchronous" half of the *synchronous, asynchronous* code can be exemplified by what happened on the day the crossover properly began, October 27th 2022, where 7 members of *Empires SMP* and 6 members of *Hermitcraft* uploaded their own perspectives of the moment where the Hermits went through the rift and arrived in the land of Empires [SG-2]. Fans of the series could all watch the climactic moment that all of the foreshadowing had been building up to together - their *investment paid off*.

After this, many of the creators involved would livestream their actions on *Empires SMP*, either portraying a Hermit who was involuntarily stuck in a strange new world and trying to adjust to its culture, or an Emperor who could be trying to welcome the new arrivals or be suspicious of their intentions. This was another form of synchronous storytelling, and it enabled *audience participation* in the form of audience members being able to contribute to characters' decisions directly by making suggestions in the livestream chat. More explicitly, audience members were able to leave their mark on the world of Empires by commenting ideas for names of characters or weapons, which could be chosen by the creators to be incorporated into the "lore" of the SMP. An example of this in action is MythicalSausage's encouragement of his viewers to suggest names which he would then apply to the villagers living in the empire of Sanctuary using name tag items [MS-7]. This did not significantly impact other creators' experience on the SMP, but was nevertheless something that they might encounter, causing audience members' contributions to affect the collective experience in a material fashion.

Returning to the *investment pays off* code, it also ties into the data which received the *transmediality* and *bit commitment* code labels. Viewers were rewarded for being active followers of every project the creators were involved in, both in the past and within the

duration of the crossover. In terms of *transmediality,* this applies both quite apparently to the fact that the story of *Hermitcraft* Season 9 and the story of *Empires SMP* Season 2 each became relevant to the other during the crossover, and also to the way that other projects entirely are referenced in the narrative both briefly and in expansive detail. An example of brief reference to another project is the way that *Hermitcraft* member TangoTek and *Empires SMP* member Solidarity react to seeing one another in the land of Empires, calling each other "rancher" [SG-2], as a callback to the name of their alliance on the narratively disconnected *Double Life SMP* series that had ended several months earlier in July 2022 [SG-1]. Some more involved transmedial storytelling from the crossover period was enacted by MythicalSausage and *Hermitcraft* member PearlescentMoon, who had previously been depicted in Empires performing the cameo role of Sanctuary's patron saint "Santa Perla" [MS-3]. When the Hermit version of PearlescentMoon, dressed as a cleaning lady, encountered MythicalSausage's character, it was the beginning of a storyline that would go on to last until after the crossover ended in 2023, and which tied in elements of both of their previous performances on *Empires SMP Season 1* [PM-1] and *Afterlife SMP* [MS-1]. PearlescentMoon was not the only *Hermitcraft* member who became involved in the overarching narrative of Sanctuary and MythicalSausage; creators BDoubleO100 and RenDog were also included on different occasions [MS-6; MS-8], both of which involved a brief appearance of the canonically destroyed world of *Hermitcraft Season 8*. For those who are invested in all of these different creators' work, these moments provide a greater payoff than those who only follow one, or only follow the narrative casually.

On the other hand, the *bit commitment* code was used to label examples of situations where characters would commit to ongoing "bits", whether those were comedic or dramatic, over the course of the crossover. Various Hermits adapted to their new circumstances by adopting the local apparel, including TangoTek wearing the witch hat originally designed for Shubble('s character "Great Witch Shelby")'s empire [SH-1], and XisumaVoid and ZombieCleo wearing the pirate hats originally designed for the empire of Joey Graceffa's character "Pirate Joe" [JG-1]. The reason this code was clustered under *Participatory culture* is because it also covers bits that were shared by the audience before becoming explicitly canon - most notable in *Empires SMP* was the "Solidarity's Sheriff character is a toy, specifically a doll of Woody from *Toy Story*" joke, which stemmed from Solidarity's choice to portray himself as a classic Western sheriff during *Empires SMP Season 2,* and was picked up and run with by fans [PR-1]. It ultimately culminated in a prank played on Solidarity where his virtual appearance was changed to be half as tall as normal as seen in Figure 4, making him look

like a toy, according to the bit and much to the Hermits' amusement [SG-3]. This is a particularly comprehensible example of a process that happens often in *Minecraft* roleplay, where a passing joke snowballs into a concrete facet of the narrative. The adoption of the fan joke by the creators could also be considered participatory culture in action; consumers are given the opportunity to participate in the production of the work when their idea is incorporated into canon (Jenkins, 2006).

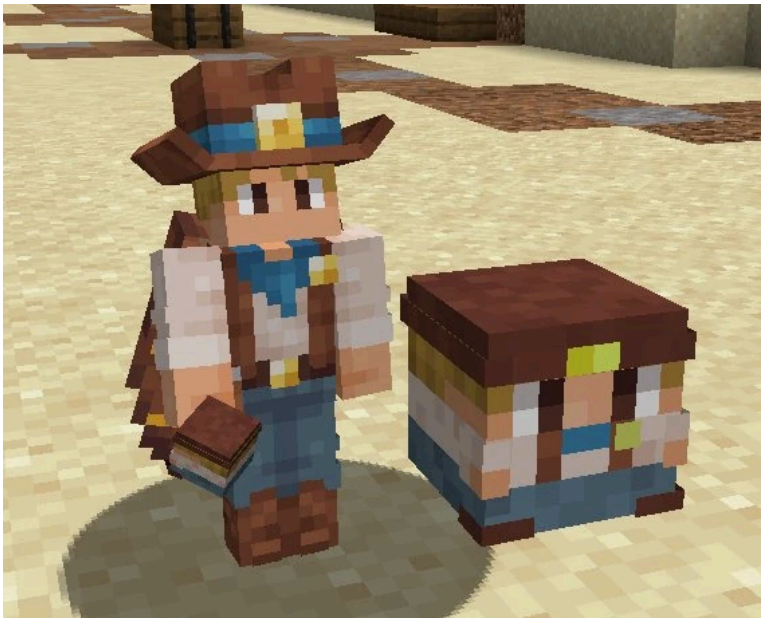


**Figure 4:** Solidarity's character the Sheriff, reduced in size, standing next to a toy version of himself. (Image source: Empires SMP Wiki)

## 5.2 *I am my cubito*

Once the *Hermitcraft* x *Empires SMP* Crossover began proper, it became necessary for certain specific members of the cast to address their "double-casting": three participants - PearlescentMoon, GeminiTay, and FalseSymmetry - already had a pre-established presence on both series before the crossover began in any capacity. Each of these creators approached the issue in a different way. As previously described, PearlescentMoon's presence on *Empires SMP* Season 2 up to this point had been limited to a short cameo, and she fully embraced enacting a collaborative transmedial storyline in tandem with MythicalSausage which ultimately explained her double identity of janitor and goddess as the product of divine reincarnation [PM-3]. As seen in Figure 5, GeminiTay chose to maintain that both of her characters, *Hermitcraft*'s woodland elf and *Empires SMP*'s butterfly "Princess of Dawn", were the same character; she portrayed embarrassment at having to admit to her fellow Emperors that both identities were assumed roles that she was

performing for fun, rather than a reflection of her character's "true self", which was an ordinary human woman [GT-1]. FalseSymmetry made the unique decision to have her Hermit character and her Emperor character be two entirely different people, and to use the fact that both of her selves were meant to be on the same SMP at the same time to her advantage as a storyteller [FS-1]. She introduced an additional narrative thread depicting the two characters' struggle for dominance over their life and their identity, calling into question which was the true False. This was buoyed by the other Hermits and Emperors being openly confused by the presence of the two Falses, and in some cases speaking to both characters in quick succession [MS-8]. These three decisions were all given the code level of *many virtual bodies;* most explicitly with FalseSymmetry, but in all three cases, the creators chose to represent their singular selves through the form of multiple avatars in the same storyworld and virtual environment (Ryan, 2001, p306).




**Figure 5:** GeminiTay demonstrates her numerous virtual bodies. (Image source: YouTube [GT-1])

The specific storyworld that is created by the intersection of the individual *Hermitcraft* and *Empires SMP* storyworlds incorporates several *gameworld rules* into its logic - this is to say that the mechanics of *Minecraft* govern the reality of the narrative. Notably, the concept of respawn is treated as a fact of the storyworld rather than being glossed over or replaced with alternative, invented rules about permanent death, as will be discussed later. Because of the impermanence of death in this storyworld, it becomes possible for death to be used more creatively by the storytellers. The result in this case is a game of "Multi-Tag" played by the members of the crossover, where the premise is for the tagged person to pick a target from the other group and kill that person in a unique, randomly determined manner [GR-5]. Having death be treated as at worst an inconvenience, and at best an opportunity for group play, is another example of a plot beat that is *unique to the medium* of emergent video game storytelling. Death is also useful to the players for "headhunting", as on *Hermitcraft* and *Empires SMP,* there is a mod that spawns a decorative copy of a player's head when they are killed by another player, and these decorative items are coveted collectibles or pieces of larger builds for certain players [ZC-1]. This practice of displaying the decapitated heads of

murder victims would widely be considered grotesque outside of the specific frame of a video game narrative.

Another facet of the Crossover that is *unique to its medium* can be exemplified by the existence of the *Hermitcraft Recap* (Lyarrah, Pixlriffs, & SloyXP, 2016-ongoing). The high number of creators who participate in *Hermitcraft* and its narrative, and the high amount of footage that is published of the goings-on of the SMP every week, make it unfeasible for most viewers to keep up with everything that every member is doing. For this reason, the *Hermitcraft Recap* was invented during *Hermitcraft*'s fifth season, and and has continued to output recap videos up to and including the duration of the crossover [HR-2]. However, one of the team members, Pixlriffs, is a member of *Empires SMP*. This serves as an excellent example of the *one degree of separation* code label in action: when Pixlriffs is performing his role as *Recap* host, he is doing so in his first degree of separation from his off-camera self, as a persona that is supposed to faithfully reflect his identity when he is not performing to an audience. It stands in contrast with the second degree of separation which he implements on *Empires SMP,* where he plays the character of the "Grand Architect". In the moment that character Pixlriffs first passes through the rift and enters the world of Hermitcraft, creator Pixlriffs takes the opportunity to drop that second degree of separation and deliver the iconic introductory line of the Recap with a twist, saying "This week on *Hermitcraft:* ME!" [PX-2]

## 5.3 *Narrative emerges from collaboration*

One of the most distinctive features of the crossover, and one that made this crossover stand out as a candidate for close reading initially, was the fact that *Empires SMP* inherently displays a much more intentional approach to constructing narrative than *Hermitcraft* has historically. While both SMPs do exhibit their own examples of *emergent and collaborative* storytelling, the *ongoing threads* of *Hermitcraft* are usually confined to only a portion of a season's occurrences, unless that season is particularly short [HR-1], and do not usually involve the entire cast. *Empires SMP,* on the other hand, declares its intent from the beginning to require the involvement of the entire ensemble in the development of the full season's narrative [FW-1]. As a result, when the two groups cross paths, each must adjust to the other's style of storytelling, and in doing so, novel narratives emerge. This section will discuss first how *roles are invented and developed* during the Hermits-on-*Empires SMP*

section, both across groups and within groups, and then how that expectation is dropped during the Emperors-on-*Hermitcraft* section.

Collaboration between the two groups was most easily observed in the first few days of the Hermits' arrival in the land of Empires. The code label *pure improvisation* was applied in this case, as the Hermits all spawned into Empires in different, randomly determined locations across the SMP, and met different Emperors as their first foreign interactions. The aforementioned wearing of one another's signature hats stemmed from this catalyst; TangoTek would not have put on Great Witch Shelby's hat as opposed to any other player's hat if he had not originally landed in the Evermoore [SH-1]. From this initial point of connection, the larger groups were able to reconvene and reorganise themselves into new smaller groups, at which point new dynamics were able to emerge. Creator Katherine Elizabeth, in her role as "Princess of Glimmer Grove", involved three Hermits in her *ongoing thread* of being a secret monster hunter, complete with matching outfits and animated cutscene [KE-1]. Creator MythicalSausage's multiple visits to other worlds, as previously described, also involved many of the Hermits' participation [MS-6; MS-8; MS-9], as did his development of a "Sun God" religion that required all participants to wear sunglasses around the SMP [MS-5]. Great Witch Shelby and Hermit Cubfan collaborated on the development of a narrative surrounding *Minecraft*'s "sculk" block as well, which they represented as parasitic and infectious, taking over their own instincts to reproduce across the land of Empires [SH-1]. From the *limited perspective* of watching a single creator, viewers might be blindsided by these sudden developments, especially from creators like Cubfan who were not typically known for initiating collaborative storytelling elements on *Hermitcraft*. It goes beyond the typically expected level of emergent narrative from a Let's Play (Nguyen, 2016), and this novelty drives interest.

Once the Hermits had been on *Empires SMP* for a little while, and their understanding of the *storyworld rules* that already existed there had been established, it was time for the Hermits to *invent and develop a role* of their own, as a group separate from the Emperors. This was done in two ways: through the building of "Hermitopia", the Hermits' central base of operations, and through the physical change of the Hermits becoming slightly shorter than the Emperors [GR-5]. Hermitopia was a tall and eclectic build full of efficient item farms, something antithetical to the *Empires SMP* ensemble's usual methods of making all item farms fit into their narrative; this contrast was taken to the extreme when Hermit ImpulseSV built an industrial "oil rig" (item farm) just outside of the fantastical Kingdom of Dawn [IM-1].

The Hermits' commitment to their newly developed role as technological marvels gave rise to the Emperors' decision to commit to growing distrust and suspicion of the outsiders, which led in turn to the formation of a secret group to investigate the Hermits' intentions and their technology [PX-1]. Next to the Hermitopia base, Grian built a machine which when activated would make the user slightly shorter; this physical distinction contributed to the division between Hermit and Emperor characters, and the position of Hermits within the narrative as strange and alien to the land of Empires [GR-5]. The chapter analysis-specific code label *when in Rome…* was coined to refer to this dynamic, where the Hermits took the fact that they were visiting a more explicitly narrative-focused environment as an opportunity to establish their own more artificial character presentation, painting themselves in contrast with the pre-existing dynamics between the empires. Improvisation is a process of "building a shared mental model" of the storyworld the characters inhabit, and improvisers must come to a collective agreement on the facts of this mental model (Magerko, Donoghe, & Deleon, 2011). By shifting to be on level ground with the narrative standards of *Empires SMP,* the Hermits are meeting this expectation and following the etiquette of collaborative emergent storytelling.

The division between character groups culminated in a climactic battle where a large part of the Hermitopia build was destroyed, and all parties fled to the *Hermitcraft* side of the rift to avoid further harm. So began the second half of the crossover, in which the previously established standard of narrative commitment was relaxed somewhat, in tune with *Hermitcraft*'s more relaxed atmosphere around all members' participation in the storytelling aspect. Indeed, creator Pixlriffs completely dropped kayfabe to conduct a live segment recording his part for the Hermitcraft Recap on the *Hermitcraft* SMP during this portion of the crossover [HR-2]. In this way, he displays an oppositional mode of engagement with the narrative, defying it entirely for the duration of his performance (Nguyen, 2016, 2.5). A gift exchange named "Prank or Present" was also conducted between the Emperors and the Hermits during this time, which was given the code level of *pure improvisation* as well, due to the random nature of the giftee assignments and the need to suit gift to giftee [GR-6]. On the whole, though, this section of the crossover highlights the more organic ways in which *Narrative emerges from collaboration,* rather than the prior section where it is more intentional and structured. The Emperors settled in an enclosed area of land on Hermitcraft, where they collectively built a Christmas-themed village, and largely spent their time focusing on the gift exchange rather than the rivalry they had established on the Empires side [FS-1; PM-3; ZC-1].

The characters of *Empires SMP* went back to their home dimension in late December 2022, when the portal that had brought them to Hermitcraft began shrinking unexpectedly; Grian's final comments on the matter declared that the interaction had been "a win" and "a breath of fresh air" [GR-7]. While there have been no further seasons of *Empires SMP* at time of writing, *Hermitcraft* has since continued into its eleventh season, with narrative beats similar to those that came before still being sprinkled throughout the work. The Crossover turned out to be an outlier in *Hermitcraft* history rather than setting a precedent for future episodes, and as such it serves as a great self-contained reference point for the way that these two kinds of series usually contrast, and how they can influence one another culturally if intersected.

What stood out to me most in this analysis was the recurring pattern of the two groups with different habits of storytelling coming together to form a pair of cohesive narrative environments. As discussed, improvisation is a process of collaborative agreement to the rules of the storyworld (Magerko, Donoghe, & DeLeon, 2011); whether that involves stepping up to the level of organised plot or coming down to the standard of unplanned Let's Play activity, the Hermit and Empire groups both met the other's expectations when prompted. Through invoking viewer participation, the creators exemplified that the progression of *Minecraft* roleplay is often strongly influenced by its audience, and that the plural consciousness of the audience can be leveraged by limiting what each individual perspective of the story shows and relying on the viewers' communication among themselves to assemble the whole picture of the narrative. Also notable was the way that creators utilised their position as public figures playing a video game to add intrigue to the narrative, to provide commentary on their labour as they performed it, and to do things that could not be done in any other medium. The members of *Hermitcraft* and *Empires SMP,* working together, made use of the full range of traits that *Minecraft* possesses to build a truly unique event in the form of this crossover.

# 6. Dream SMP

*Dream SMP* was a *Minecraft* SMP which started in April 2020 [DR-1] and which continued to be livestreamed through October 2024 [JM-2]. The approximately 40 participants were typically friends, or friends-of-friends, of the eponymous Dream, the administrator and man in charge of the SMP, and would livestream their activities on the SMP on both Twitch and YouTube (D'Anastasio, 2021). The narrative of *Dream SMP* emerged gradually from collaborative play, and ended up chronicling mostly political intrigue between various factions, particularly the independent nation named L'Manberg [TI-3] in conflict with the greater Dream SMP territory. Later, another nation named Las Nevadas would also be established [QK-2].

Like *Hermitcraft* and *Empires SMP, Dream SMP* has no one "true" perspective, and multiple different narrative threads were in play at any one moment during the peak of the SMP's popularity, meaning that different creators could be streaming wildly different storylines concurrently, and any given viewer of *Dream SMP* was likely to have a completely different awareness of what was going on to any other given viewer based on the specific perspectives they chose to watch. Unlike *Hermitcraft* and *Empires SMP, Dream SMP* did not move to a new world between seasons, and every part of the narrative was played out on the same map, even spin-off side stories like Karl Jacobs' "Tales From The SMP" project [KJ-2]. The SMP was also used for events completely disconnected from the narrative, like celebrity guest appearances and competitions [KJ-3; ER-1].

This chapter analyses various aspects of the *Dream SMP*'s narrative progression in connection with its creators' relationships to their online personas. The analysis will cover data which was grouped under the themes *Narrative emerges from collaboration, It's just block game,* and *Creators have a growth incentive*.

## 6.1 *Narrative emerges from collaboration*

The *Dream SMP* was not originally conceived of as a project with a narrative focus; it was founded with the sole intent to explore and play on *Minecraft*'s recent-at-the-time 1.16 update by Dream and his friends [DR-1]. Over time, circumstances changed, and new recruits

would lean into developing a narrative more purposefully - they were *making the most* of their situation, which is the relevant chapter analysis-specific code label for this section.

While some parts of the *Dream SMP* were planned out ahead of time using treatments, a lot of its narrative happened because of *pure improvisation.* Some important plot beats, like the trade which solidified L'Manberg's independence from the greater Dream SMP territory, happened with no prior agreement or scripting. Others were planned, but hidden from certain participants in order to ensure an authentic reaction, like the surprise attack and mass killing launched on L'Manberg's soldiers in the "Final Control Room", an enclosed underground space, on the same day as the former event [TI-3]. In some cases, unexpected outcomes came from scripted events; during the "Manberg Festival" event, an execution was planned, but two other characters died in the crossfire [TU-1], which led to dispute over whether those extraneous deaths should be counted as canon [DR-2]. Improvisation requires all parties to come to an agreement about the rules of the storyworld (Magerko, Donoghe, & DeLeon, 2011), and by catching one another off guard like this, that principle is flouted. Even so, these moments are usually accepted as part of the narrative, with creators *making the most of it* and "yes, and"-ing their way through them. Multiple plot developments' outcomes were decided by popular vote (WilburSoot, 2020; TubboLive, 2020), similarly to previous stunts by more established media enterprises like DC's vote for the life of Jason Todd (Tembo, 2021). While creator Wilbur Soot would later explain that in the former case he had created loose plans for the consequences of each option winning [WS-6], the poll results themselves could not be rigged by the creators to suit their creative plans. Indeed, efforts by one of L'Manberg's citizens, Fundy, to commit mass voter fraud in the 2020 election event were identified by its leader, Wilbur Soot, and discarded before the vote was counted [WS-3]. Maintaining the improvised and emergent nature of the narrative was evidently a priority to Soot among others.

As the SMP became increasingly narratively oriented, the extent to which creators *invented and developed roles* began increasing too. Creators' presence on the *Dream SMP* would go from being an extension of their existing online persona to the portrayal of a character with different backstories and opinions than their own. This change was often physically represented by the creators involved changing their skin to account for the experiences their characters had undergone; creator Philza, after his character was injured in an explosion [PZ-1], would update his character to have the appearance of broken wings on its back [PZ-4], and creator Quackity represented the after-effects of a fight where his

opponent put “a pickaxe [...] through [his] teeth!” [TB-1] by adding a scar to his character’s face [QK-1]. To visually signal their allegiance, the soldiers of L’Manberg all wore the military uniform skins displayed in Figure 6 for the duration of the war [TI-1; TI-3].




**Figure 6:** the L’Manberg army in their uniforms. Unlabelled character is Tommyinnit. (Image source: Reddit)

When creator Slimecicle first joined the *Dream SMP,* he joined in his capacity as a livestreamer and comedian, making jokes about being part of the “lore” with his friends [SL-1], but later he decided to join the narrative in earnest and had a reintroduction as a part of the “Las Nevadas” plotline, complete with a new skin and a commitment to fully immersing himself in the story that Quackity was telling. Slimecicle’s character was established as having been present on the SMP for centuries, observing all past events although not understanding them [SL-2], and proceeded to carry out a full character arc through to the final Las Nevadas-focused stream [QK-4]. “[T]he extent to which streamers broadcast as “themselves” or as a “character”” varies depending on the creator, and here it varies depending on what is expected of Slimecicle as a creator too - his capacity as a comedian or as an actor (Woodcock & Johnson, 2019). The division between Slimecicle’s first appearance on the SMP and his first in-character appearance on the SMP was far from the only instance of this process of *inventing and developing a role* distinct from a creator’s existing public facing persona within the bounds of this specific text, but it provides the clearest example of a before and after to compare against each other.

Roles were invented by individuals, but the collaborative aspect is exemplified by the way that *storyworld rules* were invented to govern the plot of the *Dream SMP* as well. Early on in the *Dream SMP*’s narrative, the concept of death was treated in line with how it works in *Minecraft*’s survival mode, the setting which the server was assigned: characters could die at any time, and that death would be considered to have canonically happened, but the character would also respawn and could return to the action immediately. The “Final Control

Room" event was one such occasion [TI-3], as was the death of characters Wilbur Soot and Tommyinnit immediately following the previously mentioned 2020 election [WS-3]; especially in the latter, the killed characters can be seen jumping straight back in where they left off, without treating their deaths as threats to their continued existence. Following the November 16th event, which featured what were intended to be the permanent deaths of characters JSchlatt and Wilbur Soot, dispute arose as to why some deaths "stuck" and others did not. Creator Wilbur Soot would shortly give his blessing to the concept of a "three canon lives" system [WS-5], which delineated some deaths as being more narratively significant than others, and provided an explanation for the permanent death problem. This *storyworld rule* was adopted by the rest of the cast at large, and future planned events would explicitly involve the loss of lives rather than simply deaths, like character Quackity's aforementioned scarring incident [TB-1] or the choice to bring character Dream down to his final "canon life" during a climactic showdown between himself and character Tommyinnit [TI-8]. Death became something for which creators could decide the narrative significance or permanence for themselves on a case-by-case basis. Even when a permanent death was agreed on, this did not mean a creator had to exclude themself from the story after that point: beginning with Wilbur Soot and followed by JSchlatt and Ranboo, creators could choose to bring their character back in ghost form, wearing new skins that either appeared greyed-out or in Ranboo's case as if they were wearing a sheet over their head [PZ-2; QK-2; TI-9]. This was another *storyworld rule* which has no basis in *Minecraft*'s existing mechanics but rather was collectively agreed upon by the members of the SMP.

*Minecraft* does have a permanent death mechanic known as "hardcore mode", but it was never enforced mechanically on the SMP, although character Technoblade did once state that "people don't have multiple lives where I come from" [TU-5]; all narrative concepts of permanent death were instead the result of these agreements. As such, it was a collaborative facet of the storytelling which emerged from gameplay, and given that it was expressed transmedially across the streams of all participants, it ends up meeting all criteria for the title of "collaborative emergent transmedia storytelling" (Barbour, 2024b).

## 6.2 *It's just block game*

Despite this increased commitment to narrative expression on the SMP, the fact that it was all being played out on the stage of a *Minecraft* world remained consistent. This in some ways limited the creators' ability to maintain their characters during plot-relevant

streams, but in others it afforded them increased levels of freedom to experiment with using their own and others' concepts in their work.

Sometimes, during livestreams, moments of serious in-character interaction would be interrupted by external distractions that abruptly broke the tension. Famously, an argument over whether character Tommyinnit's recent behaviour had been appropriate for a man with his position in government was interrupted by actor Tommyinnit's mother reminding him that he needed to empty the dishwasher, which forced all actors involved to stop the scene so they could corpse and recover from the situation [TI-5]. Occasions like these end up shocking viewers back into reality and seeing what they are watching for what it is, a group of pixelated avatars communicating through a Discord voice chat, rather than for the narrative that has been constructed within that arrangement. While this moment of comedy might have made Tommyinnit seem more relatable to his audience, and thus done favours to his popularity as a streamer (Lozano-Blasco et al., 2021), it did not do favours to the performance that the actors now needed to return to. The *blurry line* dividing character Tommyinnit's anger at being chastised from actor Tommyinnit's anger at being interrupted was made apparent, and that moment of genuine irritation led fluidly into character Tommyinnit's next line, where he declared, "[t]his is so fucked up. Everyone's out to get me."

The *blurry line* between actor and their digital avatar could also be used to purposefully catch the audience off guard and *shake it up* in comparison to what is usually expected from works of *Minecraft* roleplay. The human form does not exist in the world of *Minecraft,* so juxtaposing the blocky figures of *Dream SMP*'s characters with imagery of real humans was used on more than one occasion for both comedic and dramatic purposes. In the first "Las Nevadas" stream, the image of former US presidential candidate Hillary Clinton could be seen adorning a sign for character Quackity's abandoned former land development project "El Rapids"; it had originally been placed there as a joke, but in this stream it was doggedly punched out square by square to remove all signifiers of his allies. This was shortly followed by a harsh and sudden cut from a shot of Quackity's character to real-world footage of actor Quackity's hand crumpling up an image of the same shot, replacing it with a calendar full of nothing but the words "Visit Dream" and a case full of poker chips, as seen in Figure 7.1 [QK-2]. This cut served to prove to viewers that character Quackity was serious about his plans - he was being "for real", and the real hands of his actor were here to show it. Much later on, actor Wilbur Soot would use his real body to act out the final part of his character's storyline, in which he was transported from the *Dream SMP* to the middle of Utah,

America [WS-8], as seen in Figure 7.2. Character Wilbur had died before, and been resurrected later on; the use of actor Wilbur's real-world appearance to depict this ending emphasised that character Wilbur's disappearance from the *Minecraft*-based world of the *Dream SMP* was now real and final. These moments were also given the code label of *breaking rules;* all expectations of what is supposed to happen in a work of *Minecraft* roleplay are shattered when the footage cuts to the physical body of an actor, defying the conventions of the medium and presenting an oppositional approach to how the narrative had been constructed up to this point (Nguyen, 2016, 2.5).

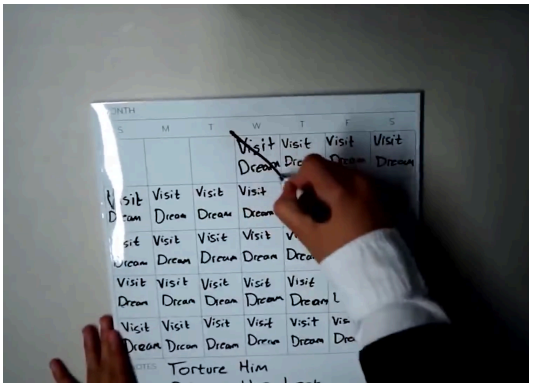




**Figure 7.1, left:** Quackity resolves to visit Dream. **Figure 7.2, right:** Wilbur arrives in Utah. (Image source: Twitch [QK-2; WS-8])

Creators also defied expectations about how their storytelling was supposed to work through transparent and playful reference to other existing narrative works and intellectual properties, which received the code label *cheeky wink.* Traditional mass media must abide by copyright regulations and cannot fall back on the practice of "textual poaching", where fans take parts of the works they enjoy and use them transformatively in the production of their own creative works (Jenkins, 1992). In contrast, *Dream SMP* was absolutely saturated with heavily directly referenced aspects of various other shows, movies, and musicals that the creators enjoyed. The "L'Manberg" storyline started with Wilbur Soot declaring to Tommyinnit, ambiguously in-or-out-of character, that he would like to to emulate the characters from the TV series *Breaking Bad* (Gilligan, 2008-2013) by selling drugs out of a campervan; then, as the idea expanded and the van became the nucleus of a seceding enclave country, he began to draw ideas from the stage musical *Hamilton* (Miranda, 2015) as well, and branded character Fundy as his character's son through a rendition of the song "Dear Theodosia" from the same [WS-1]. The latter concept ended up becoming a permanent fixture in characters Wilbur and Fundy's relationship, through to their final interaction [WS-7]. Fundy, among many other members of the SMP, was dressed in a skin that referenced a fictional character's appearance; his usual outfit was inspired by the design of character

Jotaro Kujo from the manga *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure* (Araki, 1989-1992), and Philza's skin is even more directly based off character Kisuke Urahara from *Bleach* (Kubo, 2001-2016).

The other chapter analysis-specific code label applied to *Dream SMP* is named *DMCA* and refers to when these instances of textual poaching were specifically done through the use of copyrighted music in moments of narrative significance. DMCA stands for the Digital Millennium Copyright Act and is often colloquially used as shorthand for the sentiment that "This audio is copyrighted, and if it keeps playing on my stream, I will receive a strike for unauthorised use of copyrighted content under the DMCA, negatively affecting my channel". Even knowing about these potential consequences, instances of *DMCA* were frequent over the course of the *Dream SMP*. During a showdown with character Dream, actor Tommyinnit played music from *Super Mario World* (Nintendo EAD, 1990) and *Deltarune Chapter 1* (Fox, 2018) in the background to contribute to his desired atmosphere of ominousness and high-intensity battle [TI-8]. Likewise, at the end of streams with distressing narrative implications for their character, actor Ranboo would famously close out by playing a slowed version of the *Undertale* (Fox, 2015) song "Fallen Down" [RA-1]. With these constant reminders of the external media that was being referenced, the audience are led to keep in mind that they are watching the work of amateur *Minecraft* roleplayers rather than anything professionally produced that might have a copyrighted soundtrack of its own. In other words, they would be reminded that *It's just block game*.

In regards to *why* it was so common for these creators to punctuate their work with music, it may link back to the fact that they are motivated to "always [give] viewers something new to look at, respond to, or comment on, and [minimise] the "down time" that might lead to disinterest" (Woodcock & Johnson, 2019). Music provides that novelty and keeps audience members engaged - it furthers a creator's growth incentive.

## 6.3 *Creators have a growth incentive*

Ultimately, what drove the *Dream SMP* to carry on for as long as it did was the amount of attention it was receiving from audiences, which appealed to the creators involved in terms of their motivation to maximise audience engagement metrics and income. These two factors are necessarily entwined: "those that [can] rise, hold, and grow large follower bases are important players in ensuring revenue generation" (Postigo, 2014). While a passion for self-broadcast and storytelling is necessary to make a career in

livestreaming gameplay successful, various techniques of driving growth were also in play during the course of the *Dream SMP*'s run, and tied into the storytelling process throughout.

*Big Stream Days,* events where many of the creators on the SMP would come together to play out a major narrative beat together, usually with the audience having been informed of the plan ahead of time in order to enable as many viewers as possible to be in attendance for the stream, were common during the peak of the *Dream SMP*. The creators on the *Dream SMP* were able to take this concept one step further by creating a mythology around the specific recurring date of the 16th of each month - in 2020, the dates of October 16th [TU-1], November 16th [WS-4], and December 16th [TB-1] all marked the occasion of significant developments in the L'Manberg storyline. Since each participant would have a different perspective of the events happening on the same day, another instance of transmedia storytelling (Jenkins, 2006), viewers were incentivised to keep an eye on multiple different creators' livestreams so that they did not miss out on any of the action, and to return on the 16th of each month in case further big developments took place.

If not the simultaneous form of broadcast that fell under the *Big Stream Days* code label, then creators could still assist one another with fulfilling their "imperative to be seen" (Johnson, Carrigan & Brock, 2019) through the *raid train,* the practice of seamlessly funnelling viewers who had tuned in for one stream into the audience of another subsequent stream (Twitch Help Portal, n.d.). This process was used in service of the narrative during the "Exile Arc", in which character Tommyinnit was exiled from society and lived alone on a distant island for a real-time period of almost two weeks, unable to communicate with his best friend. The actor for said best friend, Tubbo, would livestream daily earlier in the afternoon, and then at the end of that stream viewers could immediately hop perspectives to Tommyinnit's livestream to see what was happening out in exile, reinforcing the separation that character Tommyinnit felt [TI-7]. Ultimately, this culminated in a dramatic two-day series of miscommunications, where character Tommyinnit's aborted suicide attempt was mistaken for a successful one when character Tubbo finally visited the exile grounds, and character Technoblade would return home from a confrontation with Tubbo to find Tommyinnit in his basement [TB-1]. Once again, without watching each of the perspectives chained together, or keeping multiple windows open at once, viewers would be missing out on narrative information; by collectively withholding the whole truth of the story from all but the most dedicated viewers, the members of *Dream SMP* satisfied their incentive to maximise audience engagement through view count.

The concept of “playbour” (Kücklich, 2005) is most at home in discussion of this theme: creators hybridise the act of playing on a *Minecraft* server with their friends and the act of labour, performing to the audience for a paycheque, when they participate in works like the *Dream SMP*. For this reason, *authentic persona performance* can be crucial to the process of putting on a livestream; this code label was applied to many instances in the run of *Dream SMP* where narrative commitment came second to the need to stand out among the streaming community. Woodcock & Johnson (2019) detail how streamers feel a need to be “always on” when they stream, perpetually presenting an idealised version of themselves that nonetheless feels authentic to the viewer. While much of *Dream SMP* is play- and character-driven, at the same time, the creators involved are trying to sell themselves to their audience as people who are worth spending money on. *Dream SMP* was policed such that its members were not allowed to have certain convenient items or blocks unless they earned them through challenges [HR-1] or were gifted them by Dream himself [DR-3], leading to ambitious and expansive projects such as the Las Nevadas hotel taking hours to complete manually [FG-1]. This led to the SMP having a reputation for having naturally talented builders; later, when it became possible to download the world of the *Dream SMP* and explore it in one’s own copy of *Minecraft,* it became evident that at least one builder had used the mod WorldEdit to quickly and easily complete a building process that he had previously claimed took him a week of building by hand [KN-1]. The desire to maintain that authentic persona and avoid admitting to cutting corners, therefore, led at least one member of the *Dream SMP* to obfuscate the fact that tools had been used to make the labour process more convenient.

Outside of that which was connected to *Dream SMP*’s narrative, the creators involved were also able to grow their audience through symbiotic *cross-promotion*. On multiple occasions, famous public figures were invited to explore the digital world of the *Dream SMP* alongside its inhabitants. These included both celebrity guests, like musicians Corpse Husband [KJ-1] and Lil Nas X [KJ-3], shown in Figure 8, and *Five Seconds Of Summer*’s Michael Clifford [JM-1]. It also included notable online personalities, most notably the man with the highest subscriber count on YouTube as of August 2026, MrBeast. MrBeast ran several events on the *Dream SMP*, competitions where players raced to locate a cash prize of fast food gift cards [ER-1; TU-4] or clean up the digital ocean [HR-1] in collaboration with his “#TeamSeas” event (Spangler, 2021). Through collaborating with well-known personalities, the members of the *Dream SMP* could draw in larger audiences of curious new fans and fulfil

their growth incentive; and through hosting events on the *Dream SMP,* MrBeast was able to further grow his brand, which has since extended into Feastables chocolate bars and an Amazon Prime show called *Beast Games* (Donaldson, 2024-ongoing). The game and gameplay become "tools of a trade" for these creators, furthering their efforts towards the goal of generating revenue (Postigo, 2014).




**Figure 8:** Lil Nas X and Corpse Husband make guest appearances on the *Dream SMP.* (Image source: Twitch [KJ-3])

The natural outcome of a growing audience, for the members of the *Dream SMP,* was a growing income as well. To this end, creators would collaborate in order to help one another reach that point of increased income; these actions were given the code label *profit motive.* Creators who stream on Twitch can either make money through advertising revenue, through paid subscriptions, or by directing viewers off-site to buy their affiliated products directly. Twitch has a feature named the "Twitch Prime subscription", colloquially "a Prime", where viewers who link their Amazon Prime account to their Twitch account are given a free Twitch subscription to one channel, something which monetarily benefits the owner of the channel at no cost to the viewer (Twitch, n.d.). Unique to this text was the fact that members of the *Dream SMP* integrated their calls-to-action for viewers to use their Prime into the storyworld: creator Tommyinnit invented the religion of "Church Prime" and the concepts of the "Prime Path" and "Prime Bell", which when walked upon or rung repeatedly served as calls for the viewer to use their Prime on Tommyinnit's channel [TI-4]. While this began as a joke, during the "Exile Arc" it was unexpectedly played dead straight, in a dramatic moment where character Dream destroyed character Tommy's shrine to the Prime religion and he was forced to make do with "praying" at an unremarkable wooden log instead of the bell [TI-6]. More facetiously, creator Technoblade would regularly and insistently pause the action at the chiming of his "Sellout Timer" to step out of the story and call for YouTube subscriptions [TB-1]. Choosing to build these requests into the framework of narratively driven *Dream SMP* streams brings to mind the supertheme *Alienation* under which *Creators*

*have a growth incentive* was grouped - evidently, pausing to ask for money was more important to these creators than staying entirely in character for the duration of their in-character streams and maintaining narrative immersion for the audience.

While the origins of the *Dream SMP*'s narrative lay in a spur-of-the-moment suggestion to parody the events of *Breaking Bad,* by the time of the "Las Nevadas" saga, things had changed completely. The finale of the storyline came in the form of an hour-long, completely pre-recorded, cinematic, fully scripted and edited feature film [QK-4]; *Dream SMP* had officially entered the realm of machinima (Ng, 2013). After the final moments of the stream, the screen cut from a credits sequence to the face of its creator Quackity, who informed his audience of over 200,000 viewers that he had a line of themed merchandise available to purchase for a limited time at LasNevadas.com.

Ultimately, *Dream SMP* is typified by the way it straddles the line between character and creator. At one extreme, it is tied to real-world endeavours and public personas with the MrBeast collaborations; at the other, it is story-driven with some players springing surprise attacks on others to capture their authentically intense reactions. Between these, and the moments in between where chores bleed into political obligations, the plot of the *Dream SMP* inevitably attaches itself to the lives of its actors in one way or another. Participants pull their characters' faces and musical themes from the works that they love outside of their position as actors; their real life friendships become the basis for their in-character relationships, even when the connection between friends is narratively interpreted as that of father and son [WS-1; PZ-1]. This interconnection is the kind of atmosphere that would be unlikely to arise from a medium other than one like *Minecraft* roleplay, where the expectation to present an authentic persona as a streamer (Barbour, 2023) enmeshes with the goal of telling an engaging story.

# 7. WHITEPINE and Parkour Civilisation

*WHITEPINE* is a machinima series which was serially published to YouTube between August 2024 and July 2026. It is an early 20th century period piece centred around protagonist Ivory, a maid at a rich family's manor Whitepine, who becomes wrongfully suspected for a murder that takes place there. *WHITEPINE* has a total of eleven episodes, which were released according to a loose schedule that left at least one month's separation between premieres. IvoryCello writes, directs, scores, and acts in the lead role, and many of her fellow *Minecraft* creators provide voice acting talent alongside her.

*Parkour Civilisation* is also a machinima series serially published to YouTube, which has since been compiled into a single two-hour "movie" video. It is a dystopian action-comedy that depicts a world which has been rebuilt from the ground up to function entirely through parkour, which in *Minecraft* terms refers to the skill of jumping across terrain at various levels of difficulty and complexity. Main character Evbo is a "parkour noob", part of the lowest class of Parkour Civilisation's inhabitants, who dreams of ascending beyond his station and one day becoming a "parkour pro"; the series chronicles his journey to the top of Parkour Civilisation and the challenges he faces on the way. Episodes were released weekly and followed the popular titling trend in *Minecraft* YouTube spaces of beginning with "Minecraft but". It is harder to identify who wrote and directed *Parkour Civilisation* due to the lack of dedicated credits sequence, but it can be reasonably assumed that it was Evbo as the series is published under his name. The video descriptions identify multiple actors and voice actors alongside Evbo as the lead.

This chapter compares *WHITEPINE* and *Parkour Civilisation* as two very different examples from the same medium of *Minecraft* machinima. While *WHITEPINE* is designed to resemble traditional "prestige TV" (Adalian & Brown, 2023), *Parkour Civilisation* is designed to resemble other non-machinima *Minecraft* YouTube content, specifically "Minecraft but" challenge videos. Data grouped under the themes *I am my cubito, Production emulates the professional,* and *Audience immersion is paramount* will be analysed.

## 7.1 *I am my cubito*

The central conceit of *Parkour Civilisation* is that everything is parkour - the money [EV-1], the commute [EV-7], and even the prison sentence [EV-2]. This is a narrative in which *gameworld rules* are the framework upon which the story is constructed; *Parkour Civilisation* could not be told through a machinima of any other game without unavoidably having to change parts of the narrative. Figure 9 shows the first event of the story, in which Evbo, a parkour noob, having to "do the one-block jump for the raw chicken, or the one-block vertical jump for the raw beef" as his only food for the day, both foods which provide very few points to a *Minecraft* avatar's hunger or saturation stats [EV-1]. It is later pointed out that this is a purposeful systemic choice made by higher authorities in order to keep parkour noobs in a state of low hunger, because in *Minecraft,* having a hunger stat lower than six points makes it impossible for a player to sprint-jump, a more powerful jump that crosses a larger distance [EV-4]. Evbo attempts to complete the parkour course that will allow him to enter high society, but discovers that the final jump of the course has artificially been made too difficult for anyone to pass. He is forced to use *Minecraft*'s "barrier" block, an invisible block that is unobtainable through normal Survival gameplay, in order to get past the stopping point. Evbo was only able to find that block through secretly and illegally stockpiling raw beef to travel a long distance out to where another Parkour Citizen had hidden it long ago [EV-3].



**Figure 9:** Evbo chooses whether to jump for the chicken or the beef. (Image source: YouTube [EV-1])

*Parkour Civilisation* is full of similar nods to *Minecraft*'s gameplay features - each level of the civilisation's hierarchy wears a new and more durable kind of armour [EV-4]; at several points Evbo must walk ("clip") straight through a painting on the wall in order to access a hidden room [EV-2; EV-5]; he is later required to perform "water bucket clutches" to negate fall damage when navigating the "parkour master" layer [EV-5]. *Minecraft*'s iconic dirt block is central to the aesthetic presentation of *Parkour Civilisation,* too, being omnipresent on the

“noob” and “pro” layers [EV-1; EV-4], although as Evbo rises through the ranks to “master” and “champion” it is replaced with quartz blocks [EV-7], which are much more difficult to obtain through standard *Minecraft* gameplay. A viewer who is already familiar with *Minecraft* will already recognise all of these *gameworld rules*, and seeing them referenced by the narrative will be rewarding for these pre-existing fans. “Individual digital elements compete for audience attention while driving the narrative and helping to create an immersive environment”; the fact that the story has ties into the mechanics of *Minecraft* serves to move the narrative forward, keep watch-time metrics high, and enrich the storyworld, all at once (McErlean, 2018).

In contrast to the way that so much of *Parkour Civilisation*’s narrative is *unique to its medium, WHITEPINE* is a story that could easily have been told another way, whether that be through live-action performance or any number of other game machinima. The choice to use *Minecraft,* although likely inspired by IvoryCello’s previous work as a *Minecraft* content creator, is ultimately arbitrary in terms of the narrative itself. While it has some aspects that would be out of place in a work that was not machinima, like the unusual full names of Pyroscythe Hemlocke or Mr Clown Pierce, IvoryCello largely strays away from following *gameworld rules* when constructing this storyworld (Herman, 2004). Instead, the rules of the narrative are more in-line with naturalistic storytelling, reflecting the rules of our real world. In contrast to how food is portrayed in *Parkour Civilisation,* in *WHITEPINE* it is understood that characters must eat multiple meals a day in order to survive, and protagonist Ivory is chastised for skipping lunch during the work day [IC-2]. Likewise, while in *Parkour Civilisation* it is possible to easily sustain no injuries from falling from extreme heights using “water bucket clutches”, the *WHITEPINE* character Mysticat is found dead after being pushed from a first-floor mezzanine and landing at the bottom of the stairs [IC-1]. Interestingly, neither work incorporates *Minecraft*’s “respawn” mechanic, both choosing instead to have death be permanent in their respective storyworlds [EV-2; IC-2].

Both works presented an angle on the *many virtual bodies* code which was not present in any of the other analysed texts, representative of their unique position as scripted and edited works of machinima rather than being emergent SMP narratives. In both *WHITEPINE* and *Parkour Civilisation,* the acting and the voice acting are recorded separately; voice actors send in their voice lines separately from the recording of the characters’ physical movement in the space, and then that footage and the audio are edited together for publication. This has led in both cases to some gaps in knowledge which the voice actors

have remarked on. *Parkour Civilisation* actor Seawatt later commented that, despite having been the person to say a key line revealing a twist near the end of *Parkour Civilisation*, he was still surprised by the twist reveal when he watched the finished product [SW-1]. Similarly, *WHITEPINE* actor PrinceZam admitted that, since she was not given full context for the scenes she provided voice talent for, she read some lines addressed to her servant as if they were addressed to her lover [PZ-1].

Given this knowledge, it's possible to infer that the visuals for both works are recorded by completely different parties other than the voice actors, who are using the skins of the actors in order to pose as them. This would not be possible in the same way in a non-virtual production, where an actor must be present as themself to perform their role, and body doubles or CGI substitutions are only used in special circumstances. It is essentially standard in the field of animation, though, which is often used in *Minecraft* machinima either to make certain moments stand out [IC-5] or as the primary vehicle of delivery for the work such as in the *Fallen Kingdom* music video series (CaptainSparklez, 2016). In the *Minecraft* roleplay machinima format, a production team member is able to instantly become one of the actors listed in the credits, without the actor themself needing to be present at the recording session; the person controlling the virtual body is immaterial in terms of the practical result. This is a subversion of the theme name *I am my cubito* - the viewer understands the body they see on screen to be that of a given actor, but in reality, it could be anybody else without the viewer ever knowing. In typical instances of story-driven gameplay, player and digital avatar are intertwined; the player comes to refer to the actions of their in-game self as their own (Bell et al., 2018). Through the "movie magic" of machinima, however, the connection between player and avatar is intervened on.

## *7.2 Production emulates the professional*

While both works lean into the familiar conventions of the genre that inspired them, they do so in different ways: *Parkour Civilisation* borrows trends from other non-machinima *Minecraft* videos, and *WHITEPINE* leans into the production values of prestige TV series. Even so, both series presented examples of their directors trying to recreate the hallmarks of professionally produced media - that is, to *emulate prestige TV* - in a way that *Minecraft* roleplay usually does not.

*WHITEPINE*'s camera exists outside of the head of any character, which is atypical for *Minecraft* roleplay, as the game plays in a first-person perspective by default. This free movement of the camera can be achieved either through the use of game modifications that allow a player to place their viewing angle outside of their avatar's body, or through the use of extra "camera accounts" whose only job is to sit next to the action and spectate. Not only does director IvoryCello angle her shots with intention, she also implements various flourishes like montages which quickly flash between shots of different parts of the Whitepine house [IC-2; IC-5] or overhead shots that circle the characters while they walk [IC-6]. *Parkour Civilisation* is shot from the traditional *Minecraft* first person camera angle for the most part, but it uses some cinematic external shots too; when character Evbo completes his second rank up to "parkour master", the face-on view of the character donning his new golden boots (shown in Figure 10) pairs with the narration about how "no matter what challenge [Evbo] faced, nothing could stop [him]" to amplify the sense of triumph [EV-6]. These moments are strategically sparse, which makes each individually hit harder. *WHITEPINE* also involves frequent cuts away from Ivory's perspective to that of other characters, especially Pyroscythe, the man to whom Ivory has been assigned as personal assistant [IC-1]. Cuts away from character Evbo's perspective in *Parkour Civilisation* are much rarer, but happen at moments where he rises up the ranks, to inform the viewer that he is being kept track of by an unknown superior [EV-3; EV-6], among other occasions of high tension - other *manufactured plot beats,* which was a code label applied to this data.




**Figure 10:** Evbo receives his golden boots, in a rare third-person camera angle. (Source: YouTube [EV-6])

The *treatments* code label was named for moments of loose scripting like those in the works analysed in the other chapters, but here it is represented by the wholly pre-written and edited nature of machinima. In this way, the *fourth wall remains intact,* with no interruptions, looks to camera, or poorly delivered lines to break suspension of disbelief. If there were any such mistakes, they have been edited out, a fact which received the code label of *behind the scenes scaffolding;* so too did the way that *Parkour Civilisation* in particular is structured to keep the layers of the Civilisation separate. Upon reaching the "parkour pro" layer, character Evbo discovers that what seemed like a smooth and unbroken

ceiling of dirt from below is actually further-spaced blocks than he was used to [EV-4], suggesting that creator Evbo is utilising, and switching between, multiple nearly identical *Minecraft* worlds with different ceilings to create the illusion of one contiguous story environment. This act of sleight of hand serves to remove any gaps in the storyworld Evbo has constructed which might limit its immersiveness for the viewer (Herman, 2005).

Not only are *WHITEPINE* and *Parkour Civilisation* both fully scripted, they are also fully scored: *Parkour Civilisation* uses the ubiquitous royalty-free music of Kevin MacLeod at a low volume underneath most of its runtime, as is noted in the description of each video, and creator IvoryCello wrote and performed all of the background music in each episode [IC-7]. Given IvoryCello's position as writer, director, composer, and lead actress in *WHITEPINE,* and the assertion of the male lead actor Pyroscythe that he has no input on the production of *WHITEPINE* other than reading his lines [PY-1], it would be reasonable to conclude that *WHITEPINE* is not an instance of emergent or collaborative storytelling. Similarly, Evbo lists no collaborators on *Parkour Civilisation* other than the actors and voice actors, so the same is likely true for it as well. Here is where one of the chapter analysis-specific code labels cropped up: *auteur-ship,* which refers to data that paints a work as being created by a single "auteur", a creator who independently handles every aspect of the creative process that can be done without the input of others. This is normal for works of machinima, but notably unusual for works of *Minecraft* roleplay.

Also unusual for works of *Minecraft* roleplay is the intentional disassociation of character and actor - the introduction of *two degrees of separation.* This can be observed in the way that *WHITEPINE* characters are named differently to the pseudonyms typically used by their actors online, if in small ways; actor Clownpierce plays the role of Mr Pierce, as previously discussed, and actor Pinktsune plays Izzy Hemlocke [IC-2]. *Parkour Civilisation* also separates its characters from its actors, with the exception of Seawatt, but it does so in an unusual fashion: most of *Parkour Civilisation*'s characters have no names at all, instead being referred to with epithets like "my neighbour" [EV-2] or "the old man" [EV-3]. Separation is also achieved through having the actors wear new skins, essentially donning costumes, to mark them out as being different people or in different situations. IvoryCello typically wears a white dress on her *Minecraft* avatar, but when she plays character Ivory, this is traded out for a black dress and a white maid's apron [IC-1]. Narrative immersion is multi-dimensional (Bell et al., 2018); these creators bring together multiple different aspects of distinction to

create characters which the audience are more able to separate from the personalities who play them, of whom said audience are usually already aware.

## 7.3 *Audience immersion is paramount*

As has by now been thoroughly established, *Minecraft* can be an incredibly useful tool for roleplay, providing the environment and building blocks that storytellers need to create their storyworlds. However, it does not inherently contain all of the facets of storytelling that might be needed; as such, creators run the risk of breaking viewers out of their immersion in the narrative without the use of various other tactics.

Unmodded *Minecraft* only provides one way for players to communicate with each other, that being through text in the chat. As such, external means are required for voice chat in *Minecraft* roleplay, be that a separate call between participants or a mod to enable voice communication inside the bounds of the game. This is less pressing for creators of machinima, who edit the audio over the footage in post-production; they therefore have more room to do complex things with the audio they do have, and to do so with intention. *WHITEPINE* plays with sound in a few ways, like IvoryCello's use of muffled audio to represent a conversation that character Ivory listens to through a wall [IC-1], but it is also full of long periods of quiet, or instrumentals with no dialogue, following character Ivory as she acquaints herself with the Whitepine estate [IC-1; IC-2; IC-3…]. The series expects its viewer to pay full attention to its narrative even in these lull moments, building a very specific *atmosphere* in which the audience is asked to immerse itself. As "sounds [can either] push and pop the reader-player in or out of the storyworld and thus [either] contribute to or lessen immersion" (Bell et al., 2018), the choice to use quiet suggests a tendency towards avoiding the risk of lessening audience immersion on the part of IvoryCello.

Contrastingly, *Parkour Civilisation* has character Evbo narrate his experience moment-to-moment, never expressing any part of the story silently or pausing for the audience to take anything in [EV-1; EV-2; EV-3…]. This is reminiscent of the *second screen writing* phenomenon, one of the chapter analysis-specific code labels applied in this circumstance. "Second screen" describes the idea that viewers are assumed to be doing something else on their phones the entire time that the TV show is playing, and that as a result the script writer is encouraged to reinforce all important information to the point of redundancy to make sure that these viewers can follow the plot (Goldberg, 2023). *Parkour*

*Civilisation* is full of recap flashbacks to earlier events in the story, reminding the viewer of events that happened minutes beforehand. It is also peppered with attention-grabbing sound effects, primarily the noise commonly referred to as the "Vine boom" [EV-1; EV-2; EV-3…], which suggest that director Evbo expects viewers to frequently need stimulation outside of the narrative itself in order to stay attentive and follow the storyline. Both these active bids for audience attention and *WHITEPINE*'s more challenging lack thereof are different approaches to maintaining narrative immersion - it remains up to the viewer to judge which is more successful.

In other cases, the limitation on a viewer's immersion in a work of *Minecraft* roleplay can come from the props that creators might want to use, and their absence from the game can lead to a need for substitution. The prime example of this is the part of *Parkour Civilisation* where character Evbo reaches the "parkour champion" level and discovers the computer that is used to assign every newcomer to Parkour Civilisation their level of residence [EV-7]. Computers are not an extant item in unmodified *Minecraft,* so director Evbo represents the concept with pieces of black stained glass affixed to the wall and text edited over the top in post-production. The audience's commitment to *suspension of disbelief* is invoked here, requiring them to be willing to believe that this is actually a computer in order to stay immersed in the narrative. Similarly, in *WHITEPINE,* plates of food are represented by "item frame" entities, and cups are represented by flowerpots and sea pickles [IC-2]. The choice to approximate what they wanted with items that exist in unmodified *Minecraft,* over downloading a datapack that would have added the exact thing they needed to represent, implies a commitment on the part of each creator to only using the *narrative tools* afforded to them by their medium - this could in turn link across the aisle to the previously discussed ideas of *authentic persona performance* (Lozano-Blaso et al., 2021).

An easier way to populate the storyworld than approximating difficult items is to express superfluous details through the dialogue, which is to say, through *worldbuilding outside of the central narrative*. *WHITEPINE* character Serapter gets the series off to a strong start in this aspect, nonchalantly assuming that character Ivory hails from "Redhill" when she shows no understanding of the status quo in story setting "Emberton", despite us earlier having been told that Ivory was found in the woods "up near Gristle" [IC-1]. From there, it takes on a transmedial aspect (Harvey, 2015): IvoryCello runs a social media account for the in-universe newspaper The Emberton Wire, sharing short written pieces to accompany each premiering episode of *WHITEPINE* that satirically refer back to the events of the episode

[IC-8]. June 2025's edition, presented here as Figure 11.1, mentions that "recently there has been rumour [sic] of the Emberton police department abusing their power in some non-important way[;] these are all most likely rumours spread by women and immigrants to try and undermine the great police force", immediately after viewers had just seen character Ivory be beaten violently by the police detective in the accompanying episode [IC-5]. They also often contain political jokes about current events; the issue released alongside episode 4, presented here as Figure 11.2, describes a fictional healthcare CEO being murdered on the street in broad daylight, referencing the shooting of Brian Thompson that had happened earlier in the month (Wendling, 2024).




**Figure 11.1, left:** Issue 5 of The Emberton Wire. **Figure 11.2, right:** Issue 8 of The Emberton Wire (Image source: Twitter)

The continued publication of Emberton Wire articles also received the code label of *ongoing threads,* alongside the fairly self-evident fact that these scripted works of machinima each tell one overarching story that must be watched in sequence to be understood. *Parkour Civilisation* takes this one step further and presents one end of a thread that would not be unravelled until the following year. The final moments of the original series show character Evbo reaching the top of Parkour Civilisation's hierarchy and becoming a "parkour champion", which grants him a wish. With his last line, he declares his plans for the future: "in my Parkour Civilisation, people will always have a chance to try again", unlike the previously described system with computer-assigned class from which Parkour Citizens are never meant to deviate. The series ends abruptly here, setting up the future existence of a sequel series with an expanded world that continues to unravel the threads which were established in the first series - *PVP Civilisation* (Evbo, 2024) [EV-9]. By prolonging the events

of the *Parkour Civilisation* story, introducing the new aspect of PVP (essentially, combat), and continuing to publish new episodes regularly, director Evbo is able to maintain audience interest and thus continued viewership in the storyworld that he has by now spent years building.

This chapter's texts proved to be quite unlike those studied in the other two, rarely prompting me to draw from the same theoretical pool. *WHITEPINE* and *Parkour Civilisation* involve no improvisation and very little interaction of creator identity with character. What proved relevant instead was their relationship to audience investment and techniques of narrative enrichment; the creators of both works put great effort into ensuring that the viewer keeps their eyes on the screen throughout, although in very different ways. Their commitment to grounding the narrative in an expansive and well-developed storyworld is also of note, with *WHITEPINE* taking the route of naturalism and *Parkour Civilisation* committing to the exact opposite with an incredibly foreign status quo. In sticking to the very different conventions of their respective genres, both works nevertheless use the same medium to convey their narratives; this fact illustrates the versatility of *Minecraft* as a storytelling tool for both those who aim to draw crowds of habitual *Minecraft* challenge videos and those who wish to make a fully-fledged period drama without the budget to hire out a real-world mansion and fly their actor friends in from across the globe.

# 8. Discussion

The largest trend I identified in terms of connecting the findings of my research to the existing research I covered in the literature review was the number of sources that connected to the data I clustered under the *Creators have a growth incentive* theme. A lot of existing research into the work of Twitch livestreamers and YouTube video creators focuses on their work as a career, their methods of pursuing income and increasing audience engagement metrics. As a result of that, the majority of the information I was able to find on said topics centred around the same kind of information that ended up surfacing when I read the data with the *Creators have a growth incentive* theme in mind. In this case, I would point specifically to the works which studied how *Minecraft* video content creators utilise homosocial interaction with their fellow creators as part of their content (Durand, 2023; Potts, 2014), even though this specific behaviour was not part of my analysis, or to how the concept of "playbour" fit neatly into my analysis of the game of Tag in the *Hermitcraft* x *Empires SMP* Crossover chapter (Kücklich, 2005). These findings suggest that this particular aspect of the phenomenon has been researched extensively, and further study might benefit from focusing on how the growth incentive interfaces with other parts of the video content creation process. Concerning *Minecraft* roleplay, the growth incentive is far from the only motivational factor influencing creators' artistic processes as storytellers, but considering that it stands as a viable source of livable income for many *Minecraft* roleplay creators, it remains worth taking into account as something that might affect the narrative decisions they make in the process of creating their work.

Similarly, a lot of the literature covered subjects which surfaced in relation to the code labels clustered under the *Narrative emerges from collaboration* theme. Most directly, its name was inspired by the concept of "collaborative emergent transmedia storytelling" (Barbour, 2023), but it also echoed the findings of other researchers. The code label inventing and developing roles which is clustered under this theme links to the concept of streaming full-time under a specific character persona (Woodcock & Johnson, 2019), and storyworld rules as differentiated from gameworld rules was a distinction that came from the way that Herman (2004) originally defined the concept of the storyworld. Both of these concepts, as part of the wider theme, proved to be rich sources of material for analysis in both the *Dream SMP* and the *Hermitcraft* x *Empires SMP* Crossover chapters, which follows, considering that the manner in which narrative manifests in *Minecraft* roleplay was the

primary question I wanted to answer in the course of conducting this research project. There is plenty of opportunity for further study using this lens to analyse other works, or different aspects of the same works; the only part of the field for which it has limited application is the fully scripted side of *Minecraft* roleplay.

Beyond these, several other aspects of my research tied into the literature I came across during the review period. The *It's just block game* theme ended up tying most clearly into the findings of Lozano-Blasco et al (2021), considering the link between their assessment that it is a key trait of popular streamers to present what viewers consider to be an authentic and relatable persona to their audience and the evidence I found for creators doing the same within the context of their *Minecraft* roleplay work, particularly as discussed in the *Dream SMP* chapter in regards to breaking character in favour of making jokes or calling viewers to action.

*Participatory culture,* as expected, echoed the theoretical frameworks of Henry Jenkins, whose theory gave it its name (Jenkins, Ito & boyd, 2015); specifically, his concept of textual poaching (Jenkins, 1992) was also very prevalent in the *Dream SMP* case study, and transmedia storytelling came up across each of the analysis chapters, both by merit of multiple perspectives being published for *Dream SMP* and the Crossover, and in terms of the Emberton Wire aspect of *WHITEPINE*. The latter concept is tightly interwoven with the medium of *Minecraft* roleplay and thus it is very likely that this theoretical framework will prove useful to other researchers studying the same type of text in further research. A subject that could have spawned a thesis of equal length is the manner in which fanworks are created and disseminated in relation to their *Minecraft* roleplay inspirational source material; these are brought up by Aarsand (2024) who discussed some such work with his young interviewee Finley. Finley was engaging in participatory culture by creating the fanart depicted in said interview, becoming a producer of art as a result of that original consumer relationship to the text of the *Dream SMP*. Digitally disseminated works like these are afforded the fairly unique ability to provide their audience with the opportunity to establish a mutual prosumer relationship with creators, as fanworks are influenced by the source material and in turn influence the original creators' art.

While large amounts of academic study has been done into the theoretical concept of immersion, not much of it (Bell et al, 2018; Ryan, 2001) ended up assessed as part of my literature review. Still, plenty of the analysis conducted took into account this concept, to the

extent that it lent its name to one of the two superthemes. It contributed most, predictably, to the data which was studied under the theme *Audience immersion is paramount,* wherein the variously present techniques of maintaining audience investment between *WHITEPINE* and *Parkour Civilization* were contrasted. On the other hand, the supertheme *Alienation* was named for the Brechtian concept (Brecht & Bentley, 1961), but beyond that token nod to Brecht's practise of epic theatre, it did not factor substantially into my research process. Further study could afford the opportunity to consider to what extent the audience of a given work of *Minecraft* roleplay are discouraged from being immersed emotionally in the narrative and encouraged to maintain academic and analytical distance.




# 9. Conclusion

Even after having explored so many aspects of so many different works of Minecraft roleplay, this research project barely scratches the surface of all that is involved in its production and dissemination. Still, some clear patterns have emerged from the analysis that was carried out.

The significance of each adjective in the title “collaborative emergent transmedia storytelling” (Barbour, 2023) becomes individually clear when laid out from theme to theme. *Minecraft* roleplay lends itself extremely well to stories that are told by groups of creators coming together to build something greater than the sum of their parts. Even when productions seem to be the work of one person, credit is inevitably given to the others who have helped them make the story into what it is. Through these connections, a narrative can spring, whether intentionally so or not, and from there it is up to the creators involved to cultivate that narrative into a finished product. Transmediality also surfaced as a significant factor in each analytical chapter, whether that was through social media tie-in posts or through the use of multiple streamed perspectives to create a fragmented depiction of important plot beats.

At its core, *Minecraft* roleplay offers a home to stories that would be difficult to tell through any other medium - over and over again the works discussed in each analytical chapter presented evidence of this fact. Mechanics of the game, particularly how it treats the concept of death, were used creatively or transformed to enhance the contents of each narrative, and in the case of *WHITEPINE* where death was played straight as it would be in more traditional media, instead it was the items in the game that were used transformatively as props to aid the visual language of the story. It could cynically be considered a parody of professional media production, but a more optimistic read would be to call it resourceful, inventive and innovative use of the tools afforded to the creator by *Minecraft*. Since *Minecraft* is a sandbox game, this grants it a useful level of flexibility and versatility as a storytelling tool, in that it has a lack of linear gameplay threads or genre conventions which might nudge a creator into using it for particular kinds of storytelling. The high-fantasy backdrop of *Empires SMP,* the naturalistic period piece real-world setting of *WHITEPINE* and the barebones dystopia that is *Parkour Civilization* are all made with the same engine, and all are

able to match the aesthetic to the premise without difficulty. The digital nature of the backdrop makes it transient: costume is replaced with character skin, making costume changes near-instantaneous and facilitating double-casting; set with bases or builds, making it possible for the characters' environment to be adjusted and replaced with ease according to the needs of the story. This is a strength of the medium rather than making it something which pales in comparison to the kind of media that was previously discussed under the label of *Production imitates the professional;* just because some MCRP creators treat these works as a standard to aspire to doesn't make them inherently superior..

Further research into the medium could give a greater focus to the concept of *Minecraft* roleplay as the foundation for a business. The previously mentioned *Vampires SMP* is one of many works by the group PowCreations, who have built their business model on producing works of *Minecraft* roleplay with a semi-recurring ensemble cast, and who subsidise this production through donations to a Patreon and through the sale of branded merchandise (PowCreations, n.d.) - at the time that this section was finalised in March of 2026, they were selling dice, patches, postcards, and enamel pins themed around their current project *BannerFall SMP* (PowCreations, 2026). It would also be worth examining works that came out on the "blue" end of the data chronicled in Appendix 1 in greater detail, as the analysis of *Hermitcraft* in this project was linked to the much more "red" *Empires SMP* and as such there was less discussion of how emergent narrative manifests in Let's Play content. A study into how narrative emerged during *Origins SMP* (various, 2021-2023) or *SOS SMP* (various, 2024) could provide useful insight into this angle with more precision than what has been achieved by this research project.

# Glossary

**Animatic:** A form of animation which is intentionally presented to be sketchier and less detailed, with just the most significant parts of the animation presented. These are popular in MCYT fanwork spaces as they are easier and faster to create than fully-developed animations. "Animatic" is sometimes used in these spaces as shorthand for animatics, animations, and other forms of video fanwork which involve original fanart.

**Bit:** Colloquial term derived from the comedic sense, as in "doing a bit" or "committing to the bit". In MCYT spaces, typically an instance of improvised comedic roleplay between one or more creators and sometimes their audience/s, often meant to entertain, confuse, or annoy others. Can also be applied more broadly to any instance of recurring improvised roleplay.

**Convergence culture:** A culture in which the line between producers and consumers of popular media is blurred to the point of indistinction.

**Cutscene:** A pre-recorded and edited segment of footage which is inserted into a video game or MCRP work that would otherwise consist of live gameplay.

**DMCA:** The Digital Millennium Copyright Act. Implemented in the United States in 1998, this law outlines the scope of how it is legal and illegal to use and distribute copyrighted media in the US. It also contains the "Fair Use" clause, which carves out exceptions in which what would otherwise be illegal use of copyrighted material can be legally defended.

**Data pack:** A modification to a video game, here specifically Minecraft, which involves adding new data to the gameplay experience, typically through adding commands which the player can execute and have them perform novel functions.

**Discord:** Instant messaging online platform. Allows users to send direct messages as well as join larger communities known as "servers" for group communication. Commonly used by MCYTs to host both fan spaces and personal organization for SMPs.

**Gameworld:** The set of facts, events, rules, mechanics, characters, locations, and aesthetics that come together to form the makeup of a given video game.

**Kayfabe:** A term borrowed from the professional wrestling sphere. Originally describes the practice by professional wrestlers of pretending that the things they do under their character personas are real, as are their alliances and grudges, outside of matches; the audience join them in maintaining kayfabe by doing the same, even though all parties involved are aware that the storylines are fictional.

**Lore:** In MCRP spaces, used colloquially to refer to any narrative aspect of a work. Distinct from its dictionary definition, which would more appropriately refer to background information and worldbuilding in a storyworld.

**MCRP:** Minecraft Roleplay. Refers to MCYT works that involve intentional storytelling and narrative elements. Broad spectrum of ways in which this can manifest, as discussed.

**MCYT:** Minecraft YouTube or YouTuber/s. Video content which takes place in a Minecraft setting, and the creators who post this content. Refers both to videos posted on YouTube, and also to similar works livestreamed on Twitch or posted to other video uploading sites

like TikTok, despite the specificity of the label - an MCYT who only streams on Twitch and does not post to YouTube is still an MCYT. Does not have to involve intentional storytelling.

**NPC:** Non-Player Character. Any presence in a video game world which is not controlled by a player. Sometimes these are given dialogue which the player can listen to and "communicate with" the character, but this is not a feature of vanilla Minecraft.

**Participatory culture:** A culture in which textual poaching is commonplace, understood, and encouraged.

**Playbour:** Portmanteau of "play" and "labour". The practice of performing labour in order to enhance one's own gameplay experience.

**Prosumer:** A consumer of popular media who is indistinguishable from a producer, typically due to their creation of transformative fanworks.

**Resource pack:** A modification to a video game, here specifically Minecraft, which involves adding to or changing the originally supplied resources in the game, including textures but also fonts, music and other sound files, and visual effects.

**Respawn:** Of a video game character, to come back to life after having died, typically at a given "spawn point" which was previously set by either the player or developers of the game.

**Roleplay:** The act of assuming a character role as part of a storytelling process. Typically, but not always, involves performing this role in collaboration with others who are performing different assumed character roles.

**SMP:** Survival Multi-Player. Describes a specific variety of Minecraft server, where the gamemode is set to "survival", meaning that players have a health bar and hunger bar and must survive in the gameworld, and where multiple players share the environment and can interact with others and others' builds.

**Skin:** The appearance of a video game character, which can be altered and interchanged readily. For Minecraft Bedrock Edition, and other games like Fortnite, some specific skins are available for purchase as microtransactions, but in all editions of Minecraft skins can be edited down to the pixel and assigned to the player avatar for free.

**Storytelling:** The act of composing and delivering a narrative - a series of fictionalized events featuring a consistent set of characters, locations, and rules - to an audience.

**Storyworld:** The set of facts, events, rules, characters, locations, and aesthetics that come together to form the makeup of a given story.

**Textual poaching:** The action of openly drawing inspiration from existing media to influence one’s own creative works.

**Texture pack:** A modification to a video game, here specifically Minecraft, which involves changing the originally supplied textures in the game, making the physical appearance of items and blocks in the game differ from their vanilla state. A form of resource pack.

**Transmediality:** Also "transmedia storytelling". The practice of communicating one narrative through multiple avenues of narration. This can be multi-media, involving mediums such as novels, a film or film franchise, comic books or graphic novels, or an accompanying in-universe social media account. It can also, as typically presented in the case of MCYT, involve the publication of multiple perspectives of the same span of narrative through the

eyes of different cast members who each experience different, nuanced versions of the same events, and have unique experiences.

**Twitch:** Livestream hosting online platform. Popular among MCYTs for broadcasting their live Minecraft gameplay, as well as other games and "Just Chatting" streams.

**Twitter:** Microblogging/social networking online platform. Officially renamed "X" in 2022 after its acquisition by Elon Musk. Popular among MCYTs for advertising their work and otherwise making personal posts, known as "tweets".

**Vanilla:** Of a video game, not having had any modifications made to its gameplay.

**YouTube:** Video and livestream hosting online platform. Popular among MCYTs for broadcasting their live Minecraft gameplay, and for uploading edited-down Minecraft video content in both short-form and long-form.

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