

# A STAR WARS TALE: Representation in the Galaxy's Outer Rim

*A Game Analysis of Tatooine's Nature in the game Star Wars: The Old Republic*



*Image 1: SWTOR loading screen for Tatooine.*

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Original due date: April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

Final due date: June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

Graduation year: 2021.

Course: Master's Thesis in New Media & Digital Culture 15EC (MCMV16048).

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Word count: 11021, excluding footnotes, bibliography, practical information, content list, abstract, keywords, and acknowledgements.

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## Acknowledgements

I want to thank my professors Dr. René Glas and MA. Elize de Mul, who have both helped me immensely in the making of this thesis. Dr. René Glas for introducing me to game analysis and game methods during the course *Ludification of Culture* and during the thesis writing itself. MA. Elize de Mul for the sheer amount of work and time she has put into improving my thesis and ensuring that I was okay throughout the entire process. If there is anyone here that should be given credit for this thesis, it is her.

## Abstract

In this thesis, the visuals of Tatooine in the game *SWTOR* are analysed using postcolonial theory specifically regarding race. In doing so, this thesis analyses the evoked spaces of Tatooine within the postcolonial debate. The following research question has been posed: *“How does the representation of nature construct the Dark Other on the planet of Tatooine in the game SWTOR and, in doing so, contribute to constructing certain impressions of people in colour in popular culture?”* This question is answered by using a modified version of Clara Fernández-Vara’s Game Analysis. The structure set up by the Game Analysis has enabled this research to analyse how depictions of landscapes and the likes within games can come to evoke real locations and how fictional monsters within the game can come to impact people of colour by being representative of them. This research shows that the fictional space that is Tatooine is not neutral as the landscapes depicted within the game are reminiscent of real locations and by including monsters that are shown in a similar fashion to people of colour.

**Keywords:** Nature, Dark Other, Postcolonialism, Monsters, POC, Game Analysis, SWTOR, Frames, Evoked.

## Introduction

“Mos Eisley spaceport. You will never find a more wretched hive of scum and villainy. We must be cautious.”<sup>1</sup> – Sir Alex Guinness (Obi-Wan Kenobi).

“[[I]s there anything there besides for the heat?”<sup>2</sup> – Kira Carsen (Companion character).

These are the first comments made referring to the planet of Tatooine. The first quote is from the original *Star Wars* movie of 1977, the other from a companion character from the game *Star Wars: The Old Republic* (hereafter: *SWTOR*).<sup>3</sup> They both talk about the planet Tatooine, a hot, coarse, and desolate outer rim planet. Whereas a movie like *Star Wars* (1977) can only visually tie fictive spaces to real geographical locations on Earth, a video game allows players to step into that location and explore its spaces beyond what a still frame permits. As a *Star Wars* fan and a young academic with a background in postcolonial studies, I stepped into this games' open-world representation of the planet of Tatooine. I saw that although this planet is supposedly in a 'Galaxy, far, far away,' certain representations of monsters and nature, such as stereotypical seas of endless dunes and violence at every corner, have been used to represent an actual location on Earth.

### Representative Nature: A New Hope.

Social and academic relevance are two elements required for justifying undertaking a thesis of this proportion. Research on the representations of nature within video games contributes on a societal level by highlighting another area in which racially charged representation occurs. Whereas *Star Wars* has improved since 1977 in its representation of natives in a fictional setting, there is more to be done. A recent example is the representation of Tatooine's natives; in the Disney+ series, *The Mandalorian*, the Tusken Raiders are shown more humanely by trading with them through sign language.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, there is still room for improvement as *The Mandalorian* fails to do so with nature or the planet's monsters. These subtle changes do, however, show that an attempt is being made on their part to improve earlier representations.

The outcries of fans and scholars might have been the cause for these changes as there is no lack of amateur and academic work on representation within the *Star Wars* franchise. For example, transmedia, culture, and communication scholar William Proctor has looked at the #BlackStormtrooper phenomenon. #BlackStormtrooper regards black actor John

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<sup>1</sup> *Star Wars: A New Hope (Episode IV)*, streaming, directed by George Lucas (1977; United States: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 1977).

<sup>2</sup> BioWare, *Star Wars: The Old Republic, English Version* (Windows), Electronic Arts, December 20, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> *The Mandalorian*, "Chapter 5: The Gunslinger," streaming, directed by Jon Favreau, (2020; United States: Disney Platform Distribution, 2020).

Boyega's debut as a stormtrooper and people's reaction to him.<sup>5</sup> In the same field, Dan Golding discusses how *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* fans reacted to a supposed overrepresentation of people of colour in *Star Wars*.<sup>6</sup> While there is plenty of research on representations of people in *Star Wars*, I believe a focus on nature's relation to race is another point of interest and, as such, constitutes this paper's academic relevance. Professor in geopolitics, Klaus Dodds, states that by understanding the geography of people and place, one can construct particular perspectives on physical places and those that inhabit them.<sup>7</sup> While there are people who consider geography when discussing race, such as professor in Latin American Culture Persephone Braham, in *From Amazons to Zombies: Monsters in Latin America*, none explicitly make the connection that nature might also be constructing certain images of race.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the majority of studies have been on *Star Wars* movies, while this study looks at a video game. By focusing on a game's visuals and freely playing the game, one can discuss Tatooine's nature as a game space.<sup>9</sup> Video games as a source have an explicit value by being playful media; by being an MMORPG (massively multiplayer online role-playing game), the game's lack of ludic structure brings a new interactive experience to its players, adding a new layer of interpretation through the players' actions.<sup>10</sup> Delving deeper, *Star Wars* games have an explicit value, as they maintain a clear link with the rest of the *Star Wars* franchise (This link is made through protecting their intellectual property and fan expectations), which arguably says something about the franchise as a whole. Having established that the academic and social relevance is related to race and representation, I move on to the academic debate.

#### Postcolonialism: The Dark Side.

This thesis must situate itself within an academic debate to contribute beyond merely highlighting that depictions of nature have underlying meanings. This thesis is positioned in a postcolonial debate concerning popular culture by looking at gameplay and using a video game as a primary source to look at representations. I do this by using *Ebony Elizabeth*

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<sup>5</sup> William Proctor, "Fear of a #BlackStormtrooper. Hashtag Publics, Canonical Fidelity, and the *Star Wars* Platonic," in *Disney's Star Wars: forces of production, promotion, and recaption*, ed. William Proctor, Richard McCulloch (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2019), 193-205.

<sup>6</sup> Dan Golding, "An Awakening," in *Star Wars after Lucas: A Critical Guide to the Future of the Galaxy*, ed. Dan Golding (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 89-112. ; *Star Wars: The Force Awakens (Episode VII)* directed by J. J. Abrams (2015; United States: Walt Disney Studios, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Klaus Dodds, "Hollywood and the Popular Geopolitics of the War on Terror," *Third World Quarterly* 29, no. 8 (2008): 1621-1637.

<sup>8</sup> Persephone Braham, *From Amazons to Zombies: Monsters in Latin America* (Maryland: Bucknell University Press, 2015), 53-82.

<sup>9</sup> J. Van Vught and R. Glas, "Considering play: From method to analysis," *Transactions of the Digital Games Research Association Journal* 4, No. 1 (2018): 220-221.

<sup>10</sup> William Sims Bainbridge, *Star Worlds: Freedom Versus Control in Online Gameworlds* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2016), viii, Preface.



Thomas's work within popular culture and postcolonialism, specifically critical race theory.<sup>11</sup> Taking a postcolonial position, I highlight how representations of nature can contain meanings by using historian David Arnold's *Tropicality*. *Tropicality* is used as an example of how nature can have meaning and how nature came to be tied to postcolonial theory.<sup>12</sup> Having made clear that nature can indeed have intentions behind them, I use professor in critical race studies, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's, *Monster Theory*. Through his research on monsters in popular culture, Cohen says that depictions of monsters are cultural and are formed behave in specific ways accordingly. Ebony Elizabeth Thomas further ties this to representations of people of colour, showing that the monsters added in *SWTOR* are also not neutral.<sup>13</sup>

The representations within *SWTOR* are part of what race scholar Ebony Elizabeth Thomas calls the *Dark Other*. The *Dark Other* views how nature and monsters, amongst other things, can be racialized.<sup>14</sup> Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, however, does not define what she means by nature. For this research, nature will be referred to as meaning the physical phenomena of the world that are opposed to humans and human creations, such as landscapes and plants. Monsters will be referred to as simply monsters. Monsters can be defined as part of the term nature, as they are not man-made, but to make things clear during the analysis, they will remain separate only for monsters and landscapes to merge under the term nature in the conclusion. In doing so, the focus is on human representation through the monsters present, as they both belong to the *Dark Other*. This problematic connection will become evident later in the theoretical framework.

Furthermore, I rely on professor of cinematic arts and communication Henry Jenkins's environmental storytelling, as nature and monsters are being evoked through mental frames.

Constructing and Depicting: Tatoonie.

The planet of Tatoonie, with its nature and monsters, deserve to be studied within a video game context in order to see how it is implicated with the *Dark Other*; as such, my research question is:

***“How does the representation of nature construct the Dark Other on the planet of Tatoonie in the game SWTOR and, in doing so, contribute to constructing certain impressions of people in colour in popular culture?”***

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<sup>11</sup> Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, *Dark Fantastic: race and the imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 19.

<sup>12</sup> David Arnold, “‘Illusory Riches’: Representations of the Tropical World, 1840–1950,” *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 21, no. 1 (2000): 6. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9493.00060>.

<sup>13</sup> Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 4.

<sup>14</sup> Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, *Dark Fantastic: race and the imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 19.

By answering this question, I look at how a postcolonial lens can see racial representations within popular culture that might be overlooked. I will answer the research question by firstly asking:

***“Which geographical location is being evoked through the representation of nature on the fictional planet of Tatooine in SWTOR?”***

In answering this, I establish why the planet of Tatooine looks the way it does. Doing so establishes that this fictional space is not as fictitious as potentially believed. The second sub-question establishes how a video game, *SWTOR* in this instance, can further construct certain impressions through the monsters present on the planet. As such, I pose the sub-question:

***“How do the monsters on the planet of Tatooine construct certain impressions of people of colour in accordance with Ebony Elizabeth Thomas’s *Dark Other*?”***

To answer these questions, I will be conducting a game analysis as described by Clara Fernández-Vara, which is a form of textual analysis that views games as artefacts embedded with culture.<sup>15</sup> Game analysis works by establishing building blocks, mine with a focus on physical spaces and representation. The data will be gathered by critically playing the game. Critically playing the game entails making conscious choices regarding what I am looking for through Free-Play and Instrumental-Play. One gathers data by wandering the map and the other by following the recommended game path. Furthermore, I will operationalize Cohen’s monster theory to establish that *SWTOR*’s monsters are indeed part of Thomas’s *Dark Other*, which allows me to analyse the monsters of Tatooine and tie them to culture through criteria he has posed. I will also be using tropes that establish what Tatooine is supposed to be similar to; using Henry Jenkins notion of evocative spaces to see how earlier Star Wars creations and thoughts on race through invoking the pre-existing narrative associations one might already have<sup>16</sup>; and establishing what frames are being activated by making connections between fictional spaces and pre-existing associations. All of this will be further explained in the method chapter.

Within this research project, chapter 1 addresses the theoretical framework, which consists of the postcolonial notions of the *Dark Other*, *Tropicality*, monster theory, evocative spaces, and frames. Chapter 3 addresses the method, which is various ways of play and game analysis. Chapter 4 and 5 contain the analysis that corresponds to the sub-questions. Lastly, chapter 7 provides the conclusion.

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<sup>15</sup> Clara Fernández-Vara, *Introduction to Game Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 11.

<sup>16</sup> Henry Jenkins, “GAME DESIGN AS NARRATIVE ARCHITECTURE,” publications, <http://web.mit.edu/~21fms/People/henry3/games&narrative.html>.

## Theoretical Framework

This research positions itself within a postcolonial debate with a focus on popular culture. The theoretical framework introduces the reader to postcolonialism, specifically postcolonialism within popular culture, focusing on video games. It does so by introducing the notion of *Orientalism* and how it is used to tie Western mentalities to a variety of different things. Having established what postcolonialism is, I tie it to video games. Tying it to video games lays the foundation for the method specified for video game studies and the analysis section that focuses on said video game. Afterwards, the focus shifts to how postcolonialism applies to representations of nature and monsters regarding race. By introducing *Tropicality* as an example of how nature can contain Western mentalities, I hope to clarify that the bridge between what is perceived to be natural and what is fiction can easily be crossed. Ebony Elizabeth Thomas proceeds to do something similar by introducing the *Dark Fantastic*.<sup>17</sup> By using these theories it will become evident that the way monsters are being portrayed within the game *SWTOR* is worsening the position of people of colour by both being part of the *Dark Other*. The final sub-chapter covers how the game's visuals can evoke specific locations and construct frames by playing *SWTOR*.

Post and Pop: Postcolonial Theory in New Media Popular Culture.

This sub-chapter looks at the origins of postcolonial theory and how it came to be tied to video games, and by being so, can be used to look at the representations of people within games.

Postcolonial theory, or postcolonialism, studies the cultural legacy left by colonialism and imperialism, specifically the consequences of exploitation and control upon people.<sup>18</sup> Over time, this has come to incorporate a variety of theories that look at how this legacy is impacting minorities. Postcolonialism is thought to have been around since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is claimed by some to have originated through the works of Edward Said, a cultural critic and a professor of literature.<sup>19</sup> He came up with the notion of *Orientalism*, which is when Western depictions and representations of the Orient portray stereotypical notions that were constructed by a Western-centred world view, effectively distorting the mental image of those experiencing it second hand.<sup>20</sup> *Orientalism* derives from the Foucauldian claim that language can express power and that the dominant peoples of society can suppress minorities through

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<sup>17</sup> Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, *Dark Fantastic: race and the imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 8.

<sup>18</sup> Masood Raja, "What is Postcolonial Studies?," last modified April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019, <https://postcolonial.net/2019/04/what-is-postcolonial-studies/>.

<sup>19</sup> E. San Juan, Jr., "The Limits of Postcolonial Criticism: The Discourse of Edward Said," *Against the Current* 77 (1998): <https://againstthecurrent.org/atc077/p1781/>.

<sup>20</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 31-37.

culture and language.<sup>21</sup> Said claims that within this framework of domination, *Orientalism* occurred “by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it. In short, [Said sees] *Orientalism* as a Western way of dominating restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.”<sup>22</sup>

A shortcoming of Said’s definition and use of *Orientalism* is his sole focus on depictions and representations of the Orient in high art. According to historian John MacKenzie, in doing so, Said fails to recognize the representative powers of popular culture.<sup>23</sup> Game and communication researchers Emil Lundedal Hammar and Souvik Mukherjee say that game studies concerning postcolonial discourses have just recently become something of interest. In contrast, the connection of video games to colonialism has been studied for a while.<sup>24</sup> However, the line between what is considered high art and popular culture has become blurred due to the world economy being more integrated, making postcolonialism easier applicable to games.<sup>25</sup> In Hammar and Mukherjee’s paper, “Introduction to the Special Issue on Postcolonial Perspectives in Game Studies”, they aim to break away from a colonial perspective due to the lack of postcolonial ones.<sup>26</sup> In *Video games and Postcolonialism: Empire Plays Back*, Mukherjee claims that the culture and society of once colonized countries portrayed in games are done so through a Eurocentric gaze on progress and history. In doing so, games can promote colonialism.<sup>27</sup> A postcolonial perspective on contemporary games can show constructions of images and knowledge from the West on once colonized locations. An example race and video game scholar TreaAndrea M. Russworm gives is that some video games rely on an established pattern of “conflating black identity with the pathos of sacrifice and suffering.”<sup>28</sup> What occurs here is that the representation of black identity is granted and constructed through a Western gaze. This goes to show that video games, like all forms of popular culture, are not neutral in representation.

Nature & postcolonialism: A Biased Representation.

This sub-chapter focuses on the connection between postcolonial theory and nature, specifically how nature is not neutral. Here the concept of *Tropicality* is introduced as an

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, INTRODUCTION.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 11

<sup>23</sup> John MacKenzie, *Orientalism, History, theory and the arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 20-71.

<sup>24</sup> Souvik Mukherjee, and Emil Lundedal Hammar, “Introduction to the Special Issue on Postcolonial Perspectives in Game Studies,” *Open Library of Humanities* 4, no. 2 (November 2018): 1-14.

<sup>25</sup> Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 7 (1990): 295-310. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026327690007002017>.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Souvik Mukherjee, *Video games and Postcolonialism: Empire Plays Back* (Cham: Springer Nature, 2017), 103.

<sup>28</sup> TreaAndrea M. Russworm “Introduction: Identity, Representation, and Video Game Studies beyond the Politics of the Image,” in *Gaming Representation: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Video Games*, ed. Jennifer Malkowski, TreaAndrea M. Russworm (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2017), 11.

example of how *Orientalism* can be tied to nature, creating a link between representations of non-manmade artefacts and people.

*Tropicality* can be defined as: “[t]he state or condition of being tropical; the extent to which something is characteristic or reminiscent of the tropics.”<sup>29</sup> The term itself originates from the works of Pierre Gourou, a French geographer who did extensive work on the tropical regions of Asia during the French occupation of Indochina. In his work *Les Pays Tropicaux*, Gourou differentiated between geographical regions of Asia but still generalized the tropics.<sup>30</sup> Gourou had a rather pessimistic view of the tropics, a view that was still pervaded with the naturalism of the tropical world.<sup>31</sup> While writing about Pierre Gourou, French geographer Michel Bruneau sums up Gourou’s thoughts on the tropics: “[t]hese countries with their retarded civilisations and economies’ are, he considers, hampered by the physical environment, presented as far more disadvantageous than that of temperate areas (insalubrity, poor soils).”<sup>32</sup> Gourou, furthermore, does not believe that colonialism or colonialist thoughts had a say in the development of the tropics or how Westerners viewed the tropics.<sup>33</sup>

While Gourou is considered to be the first to start writing subjectively about the tropics and tried to tie various contextual conditions to the people there, the field of *Tropicality* does not end here. Within *Tropicality*, there are two schools of thought. The francophone school of thought puts a heavier weight on Pierre Gourou’s work and also seemed to include more international literature. Like Gourou, the francophone school of thought also does not consider colonialism a significant factor in how the tropics were being shaped and perceived, making it less of a tool for postcolonial theory than its Anglophone equal. The Anglophone school of thought neglects to include a large variety of international works and focus more on works written in English. By using more literature written in English, it has come to rely more heavily on Edward Said’s *Orientalism* and, in doing so, views nature as being subject to human representations and mentalities.<sup>34</sup> The Anglophone school of thought is more appropriate for this research as the continuously repeated images within SWTOR are constructed by a Western-centred world view, effectively distorting the mental image of those experiencing it second hand.

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<sup>29</sup> “Tropicality,” Lexico, accessed March 3, 2020, <https://www.lexico.com/definition/ngo>.

<sup>30</sup> Pierre Gourou, *Les pays tropicaux. Principes d’une géographie humaine et économique* (Paris: PUF, 1947).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> “Pierre Gourou,” Hypergéô, accessed November 25, 2019, <http://www.hypergeo.eu/spip.php?article638>.

<sup>33</sup> Daniel Clayton and Gavin Bowd, “Geography, tropicality and postcolonialism: Anglophone and Francophone readings of the work of Pierre Gourou,” *LEspace géographique* 35, no. 3 (October 1, 2006): 208-221, <https://doi.org/10.3917/eg.353.0208>.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

This Anglophone school of thought was heavily shaped by the works of professor in subaltern and Asian history, David Arnold. In “‘Illusory Riches’: Representations of the Tropical World, 1840-1950,” Arnold traces how the representations of the tropics by the Western world have changed over time.<sup>35</sup> What was once considered an exotic region and a natural food basket was slowly replaced by the colonisers’ frustrations and fears due to their growing realisation that developing the tropics would be impossible. By studying Pierre Gourou’s *Les Pays Tropicaux* as an example of the pessimistic attitudes towards the tropics, it became apparent that although regions were distinct from other regions, the tropics were considered impoverished. According to David Arnold, the colonial powers believed that the tropics were not suited for people from Northern climates and was neither receptive nor plausible for white settlement and agriculture. The tropics came to be known as a primitive region compared to the colonial home countries, and the geographical region came to represent those who have bad morals, inferior materials, and the home of uncivilized people.<sup>36</sup> The nature of the tropics over the years did not change; the mentalities towards the region did.

By showing, through the example of *Tropicality*, how nature can come to represent Western thoughts upon a geographical location, it becomes clear that nature is indeed not something considered neutral, especially considering the nature that is being constructed within popular culture. This implies is that the players, when navigating their way through the dunes of Tatoonie, is not consuming some wholly new and constructed location spawned from the void, but rather an idea of how someplace like Tatoonie should look. The added visuals to the game further can construct new impressions of a location. This leads us to the following sub-chapter, where I show how monsters within popular culture can be neither neutral nor new.

*Monsters: The Darkness in popular culture.*

This sub-chapter discusses how monsters are being racialized and, by being so, are not neutral. The sub-chapter further delves into the theories by Thomas and Cohen that are used to specifically tie race to monsters and nature and establish what specifies a monster.

Whereas *Tropicality* serves as an example of how mentality can become tied to an actual natural location, Professor in race and representation, Dr. Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, shows that specific mentalities can become tied to different things. Researching popular culture, she constructs the notion of the *Dark Fantastic*. She notes that in the larger postcolonial context of race, nature is indeed an element that contains racial connotations.

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<sup>35</sup> David Arnold, “‘Illusory Riches’: Representations of the Tropical World, 1840–1950,” *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 21, no. 1 (2000):. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9493.00060>.

<sup>36</sup> David Arnold, “‘Illusory Riches’: Representations of the Tropical World, 1840–1950,” *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 21, no. 1 (2000): 6-9. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9493.00060>.

The *Dark Fantastic* was constructed whilst researching various sources of popular culture. The *Dark Fantastic* refers to the role that racial difference plays in our imaginations.<sup>37</sup> It occurs in all made-up worlds, and it is the words used and images portrayed that construct the fantastic resonant connotations.

“The traditional purpose of darkness in the fantastic is to disturb, to unsettle, to cause unrest.”<sup>38</sup> Whereas she refers to darkness itself, the scope of what is considered dark goes beyond the lack of light. “(...) [I]n the Anglo-American fantastic tradition, the Dark Other is the spectacle, the monstrous Thing that is the root cause of hesitation, ambivalence, and the uncanny.”<sup>39</sup> The fear of darkness and even the *Dark Others*<sup>40</sup> stems from the fear of the dark and has spread to everything that appears to be unknown, including imaginary monsters. As such, the concept of darkness is personified and racialized.<sup>40</sup> “No matter what the reasons were for the way our culture came to view all things dark in the past, the consequences have been a nameless and lingering fear of dark people in the present.”<sup>41</sup> People of colour came to be represented along in the same fashion as aliens, orcs, and beasts. They must be removed and defeated to return to what is considered normal and happy, but only for the white protagonist. Nature and monsters run along racial lines in the same fashion as those used for people of colour to oppose the white male protagonist and, in doing so, construct the *Dark Other*. Thomas ultimately claims that monsters, nature, and darkness are personified and tied to the same racial lines as those of people of colour.

At this stage, Thomas has established that monsters and nature can be tied to representations of race as they all belong to the category of the *Dark Other*. The importance of monsters in this research is that by being part of the *Dark Other*, just like people of colour, the way the monsters are portrayed comes to shape how the *Dark Other* is viewed. If the monsters within *SWTOR* are shown as problematic, then it could be that the game contributes to worsening perceptions of people of colour. The choice of looking at monsters is because Ebony Elizabeth Thomas states that they are an important part of what constitutes the darkness within popular culture.

Thomas has relied upon the works of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and his theory on monsters for a definition of what constitutes a monster. Cohen notes that the monsters within popular cultures are an “embodiment of a certain cultural moment— of a time, a feeling, and a place. The monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy

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<sup>37</sup> Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, *Dark Fantastic: race and the imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 8.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 19-20.

(ataractic or incendiary), giving them life and an uncanny independence. The monstrous body is pure culture.”<sup>42</sup> According to Ebony Elizabeth Thomas’s interpretation of Cohen’s monster theory, one can distinguish a monster by seeing if they meet specific criteria. Monsters should be capable of escaping, reappearing and being omnipresent; the *Dark Other* is a constant trickster towards the player in its ability to avoid a concluding moment. The monster does not participate and, in doing so, cannot be controlled. The monster is a being that limits geographical mobility, and yet does not wander outside of its designated zone. The monster should have some kind of lure that makes it deserving of destruction, yet the monster should be regarded as unreasonable for defending itself.<sup>43</sup>

“The monster is difference made flesh, come to dwell among us. In its function as dialectical Other or third-term supplement, the monster is an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond— of all those loci that are rhetorically placed as distant and distinct but originate Within. Any kind of alterity can be inscribed across (constructed through) the monstrous body, but for the most part monstrous difference tends to be cultural, political, racial, economic, sexual.”<sup>44</sup>

Now postcolonial theory has been tied to nature and monsters. Through Cohen, it is possible to detect which traits of monsters are deemed to be monstrous within popular culture and, in doing so, establish what to be on the lookout for in *SWTOR*. This connection allows the research to see how monsters can construct the *Dark Other* and impact people of colour. The following sub-chapter will establish how the player can be connecting these thoughts on race to nature by merely playing the game.

Remembering the Past: Evoking and Framing.

This final sub-chapter of the theoretical framework delves into how things can be evoked through the game’s visuals and construct dominant frames.

Nature and race can be tied together. However, it is not clear exactly how this is done, and even more so, how this is done through video games. In “Game Design and Narrative Architecture”, media and game scholar Henry Jenkins brings forward the notion of *Environmental Storytelling*, an idea within game theory that believes spaces within games impact the player’s experience.<sup>45</sup> Henry Jenkins distinguishes four ways of environmental storytelling which “create[] the preconditions for an immersive narrative experience in several ways.”<sup>46</sup> One of these is Evocative spaces; spaces invoke the pre-existing narrative

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<sup>42</sup> Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 4.

<sup>43</sup> Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, *Dark Fantastic: race and the imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 20-23.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>45</sup> Henry Jenkins, “GAME DESIGN AS NARRATIVE ARCHITECTURE,” publications, <http://web.mit.edu/~21fms/People/henry3/games&narrative.html>.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*



associations one might already have. Practically, it is the pre-existing notions and fantasies of whichever theme or concept is being evoked. As such, it ties game narrative to a larger narrative economy and is compatible with the idea of transmedia storytelling. The spaces within the games become an extension of what is already believed to be true. This form of environmental storytelling relies heavily on designing a geographically well-constructed map.<sup>47</sup> Evocative spaces imply that the earlier Star Wars franchise was likely evoked through the game. The original franchise relied on potentially problematic representations of people and places in their original works, and these can also be evoked through the game.

This clear evoking of an earlier franchise and location through the game's visuals is done through a combination of mise-en-scene, meaning the conscious layout of the scenery, and the tropes established through the earlier franchise.<sup>48</sup> In the original Star Wars movies, they used already established tropes of nature to depict geographical locations. Cinema tropes can be defined as "a universally identified image imbued with several layers of contextual meaning creating a new visual metaphor[,]"<sup>49</sup> such as tropes of Middle Eastern Bedouin people and their desert cultures being used to represent the Tusken Raiders, or Sand People, of Tatooine. They are "(...) not revealed as an individual composed of various human traits, but rather as an emblematic figure painted in the hard monochromes of abstract Bedouin virtue."<sup>50</sup>

According to linguist and philosopher George Lakoff, tropes can evoke other references through frames. The continuous reiteration of, for example, an image constructs and strengthens a mental image, or metaphor, associated with an object.<sup>51</sup> Where George Lakoff is different is that he claims that frames originate in the brain, stating that the brain physically sorts memories and images into interconnected frames where one frame can evoke a different frame. He states that the more these frames are repeated, the more certain patterns settle in the brain, ultimately becoming dominant frames.<sup>52</sup> These dominant frames proceed to become the somewhat agreed upon norm of what frame should be evoked when experiencing something.<sup>53</sup>

What has become clear is that the planet of Tatooine within *SWTOR* is likely to evoke frames that the players have already constructed prior to playing the game, either this be a

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> S. Ferrari, "The Judgment of Procedural Rhetoric," Dissertation. Georgia Institute of Technology, 2010, 5.

<sup>49</sup> Michael Rizzo, *The Art Direction Handbook for Film* (London: Focal Press, 2005), 321.

<sup>50</sup> Paul Charbel, "Deconstructing the Desert: The Bedouin Ideal and the True Children of Tatooine," in *A Galaxy Here and Now: Historical and Cultural Readings of STAR WARS*, ed. Peter W. Lee (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc, 2016), 141.

<sup>51</sup> George Lakoff, "Why it Matters How We Frame the Environment," *Environmental Communication* 4, no. 1 (March, 2010): 71-72. ; John Gomez, *An Analysis of Roland Barthes's Mythologies* (London: Macat, 2017), 38.

<sup>52</sup> George Lakoff, "Why it Matters How We Frame the Environment," *Environmental Communication* 4, no. 1 (March, 2010): 71-72.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

real location and/or the earlier franchise. What this means is that the game does not exist in a vacuum. Overall, the theoretical framework constructs a thematic and historical timeline of which starts at the dawn of postcolonial theory and ends with how games can evoke certain frames through things such as visual imagery. The following chapter consists of the method used to confirm that there are indeed representations of the *Dark Other* in the game *SWTOR* and does so through a game analysis. Furthermore, it relies heavily on operationalizing the theories and concepts noted in this chapter.

## Method

In this chapter of the research, I will first introduce the overarching method of the game analysis used for this research. Afterwards, I shall explain how I will be operationalizing this method through two parts, Overview and Formal Elements. Having explained how the method works and how the necessary data will be presented, I delve into how the data was gathered for the Overview part.

### The Game analysis

Studying how the game of *SWTOR* is contributing to potentially worsening the representations of people of colour through the *Dark Other* will be done through a game analysis in accordance with the methodology created by Clara Fernández-Vara. This method could be considered an offshoot of a textual analysis since game analysis approaches games as texts. Fernández-Vara argues that the term ‘text’ can be granted to activities and artefacts, such as games, as they are a form of human expression.<sup>54</sup> By studying games, one studies both the meaning within the game (meaningful play) and the meaning around it (cultural significance). “The aim of textual analysis in general, and this approach [of] game analysis in particular, focuses less on making value judgments on the game and more on appreciating how we make sense of them.”<sup>55</sup> A challenging issue with game analysis is whether games are to be understood as a new way of communication or not. Unlike other media that are a one-way method of communication, in games the player becomes a critical aspect of the message being told. The player needs to interpret the game, its rules, and the world around it.<sup>56</sup> Ultimately, the aim of a game analysis is to show that there are more levels of interpretation than in most other media by having the user gather the data in a way benefitting to each individual case study. The user presents the data in a way they want, and the focus is on whatever the chosen focus is. Game analysis differentiates itself from other forms of analysis by permitting such significant differences in its use and focus.

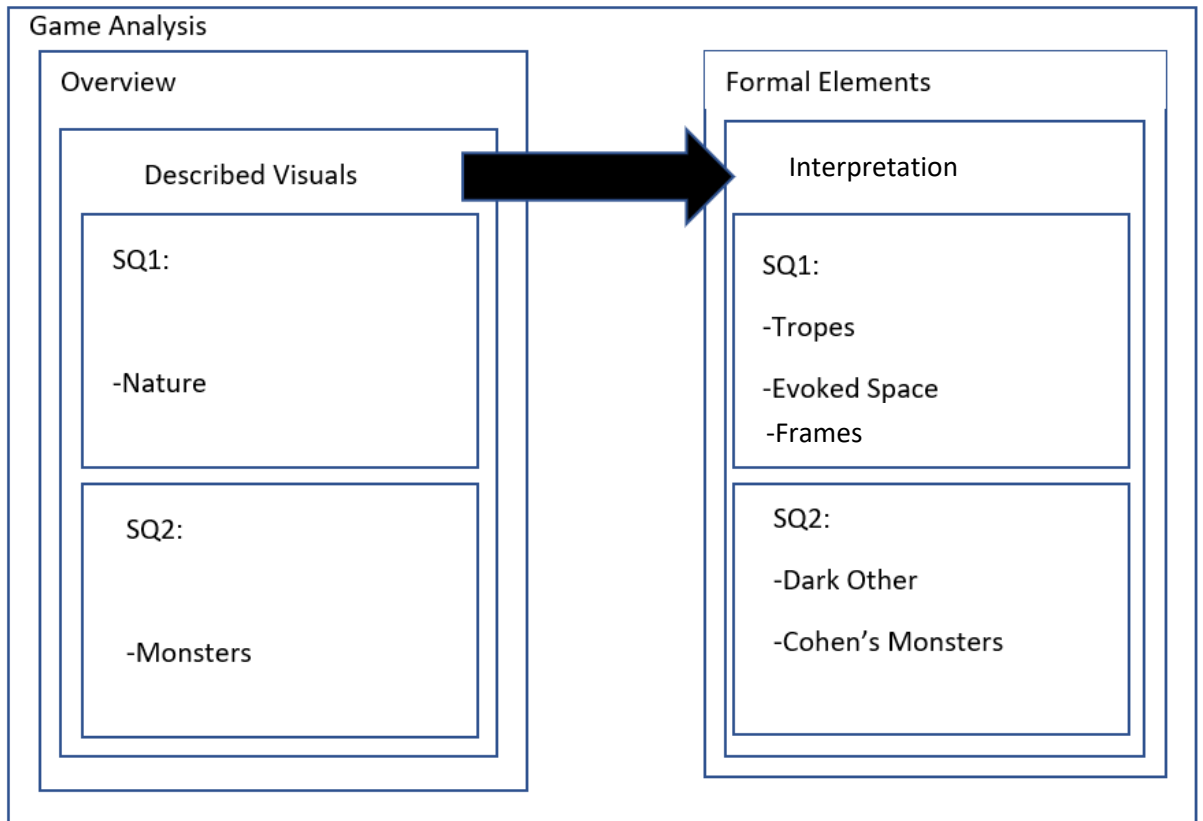
The game analysis requires two parts to understand the connection between in-game visuals and people of colour. Firstly, the escribed visuals that constitute the Overview section of each question are presented to understand what the game looks like. Secondly, the visuals are interpreted through the use of the concepts that will be introduced further down. While both sub-questions are structured similarly, their contents seek to answer different questions that ultimately answer the main research question.

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<sup>54</sup> Clara Fernández-Vara, *Introduction to Game Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 6.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 7.



*Image 2: Schemata of Game Analysis.*

I have constructed two sub-questions based on the combination of the Overview and Formal Element part. Firstly, I want to know about certain visuals of Tatooine within *SWTOR* in accordance with the focus of each sub-question. Secondly, I want to know how these visuals can be interpreted through the soon-to-be-introduced theories to analyse how *SWTOR* is furthering certain representations of people.

#### Operationalizing the Game Analysis.

As proposed by the game analysis, both parts of the analysis will be in each sub-question. Each sub-question focuses on having both an Overview section and a Formal Element section. In the following part, I will be describing the Overview and Formal Elements as a whole, as well as delving deeper into the individual concepts and theories used for each question.

## Overview

The game overview helps the reader situate themselves by showing the focus of the analysis through the structure and content of the game. The Overview is shown by exploring the fictional space of Tatooine, where the focus is on the imagined spaces that have been constructed, in this case, by how the objects move, how space is divided and how things are arranged within the space of Tatooine.<sup>57</sup> The method of conveying the descriptive data to the reader will be done by considering myself an in-game tourist explicitly looking at the nature of Tatooine, writing down the various things I come across while roaming the map. This ethnographic method allows a player in the role of a tourist to experience the conflicting desire of being immersed but also be in a comfortable position by not subjecting myself to other players' judgements and behaviours.<sup>58</sup> This ethnographic method will take the shape of a travel log where a detailed explanation of the visuals seen in the game will be given as if being a real tourist.

### Sq1

The focus of the tourist in the first sub-question will be on how nature is structured within the game and how that nature allows the reader to identify Tatooine. What is most readily available and easy to identify is the nature of which the planet is so famous, the coarse sand that is everywhere and the twin stars that illuminate the planet. As such, the overview section of this sub-question aims to show the landscape, flora, weather, and the likes.

### Sq2

The second sub-question will focus on showing the visuals of the monsters within the game. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, Cohen's monsters are turned into a method to distinguish the *Dark Other* in the monsters present on the planet of Tatooine. What can be considered as a monster are those that can be deemed a hindrance, those that are different, everywhere, never dies, is in opposition to the player, and is in some way detrimental to the player when travelling through Tatooine. A brief disclaimer for this second sub-question is that I will avoid repeatedly commenting on the various monsters spotted during the expeditions, besides those used as examples to make a point, otherwise, there would be rather many and long examples made from the continuously seen monsters.

By looking at how the monsters move and how the designers actively chose to depict them, the necessary examples will be constructed to show how the *Dark Other* is evoked and presented on the planet.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 110-117.

<sup>58</sup> Kiri Miller, "The Accidental Carjack: Ethnography, Gameworld Tourism, and Grand Theft Auto," accessed April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021, <http://gamestudies.org/0801/articles/miller>.

### Formal elements

The Formal Element section of each sub-question of the research takes the visuals as shown in the Overview and inquires why they are as they are, how they operate and, how they impact the player.<sup>59</sup> Here new knowledge will be generated by focusing on the representation of the visual design of the level as it expresses the game's themes. The formal elements tie the visuals of Tatooine to postcolonialism, particularly race theory, to indicate how the game was constructed by frames and, in doing so, is constructing new frames.<sup>60</sup> By taking the visual cues indicated in the game overview and combining them with the theory through the formal elements, the two sub-questions will indicate that these racial stereotypes developed through the *Dark Other* do construct frames that impact the player through continuous reiteration.

#### Sq1

In the first sub-question, I will be looking to establish the location that is being evoked when experiencing the planet of Tatooine in *SWTOR*. This will be done by looking at the comments that George Lucas, the creator of Star Wars, and others have made regarding where Tatooine is similar too. This is done to see which frame is being activated. To establish that this frame is indeed correct in its assumption of where Tatooine looks like, it will be compared to the common popular culture tropes generally used for where people assume Tatooine is comparable to. As a result, this establishes that the geographical location of Tatooine is indeed being based on an actual location, removing any possibility for claiming that it is not based in reality. Ultimately, answering this question strengthens the argument that the representations of the *Dark Other* on this planet are tied to a certain demographic.

#### Sq2

In the Formal Element, the monsters that have been found to be constructed according to Cohen's criteria are analysed using Thomas's overarching argument of how the *Dark Other* can be detrimental to people of colour. This is done by seeing how people of colour and monsters have come to be associated through Thomas's *Dark Other*, and in being connected, to such an extent the depictions of fictional beings are affecting real people.

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<sup>59</sup> Clara Fernández-Vara, *Introduction to Game Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 131-138.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 190-185.

### Gathering data

When playing an MMORPG as large as *SWTOR*, conscious choices on what to look at and how to find what to look at must be made. The visual data will be gathered by critically playing the game. To play is to be actively involved in a participant observation which will be done by conducting Instrumental and explorative play. These are concepts by game study scholars Jasper van Vught and René Glas.<sup>61</sup> Free-Play is a way to play a game that does not follow a particular structure. Within the method of Free-Play, there is explorative play. “A key characteristic of games is that they afford exploring both ludic strategies as well as fictional dimensions (if present) beyond the intended or primary playing paths, resulting in an almost endless range of potential playings.”<sup>62</sup> MMORPGs, like *SWTOR*, “thrive on allowing players to explore the world in their own time, or at least give room to gather information, and even learn from trial and error.”<sup>63</sup> The importance of Free-Play is that it changes the experience of the nature represented as the game will not lead you to all locations or come across some of the more rare monsters and landscapes.

Whereas simply playing the game will result in a large amount of data being gathered, there are some places that cannot be accessed unless on a specific mission. This is where Instrumental-Play is necessary. Instrumental-Play is a playing method that follows the rules and structure of play more rigorously. Within Instrumental-Play, one can play as the rational player where the player’s choice of movement is made according to the most linear way to complete the mission objectives.

“(…) [A]s long as our every ‘move’ is informed by the desire to achieve the game’s objective goals, we get to focus on the way that the game structures our behaviour through a dichotomy of positively and negatively valued content. This allows us to ask questions about the way that the game’s rules encourage certain actions over others, which can lay bare interesting ideologies in the game’s design.”<sup>64</sup>

The objective of *SWTOR* is for the player to level up their gear and character by completing missions, collecting the loot dropped by enemies, and through the missions themselves. The most direct way of doing this is to do the missions that are coloured purple. BioWare stated that the fastest way to level one’s character is to do the class and world

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<sup>61</sup> J. Van Vught and R. Glas, “Considering play: From method to analysis,” *Transactions of the Digital Games Research Association Journal* 4, No. 1 (2018):.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 220-221.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 221.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 217.

missions.<sup>65</sup> In doing so, the route one takes does not cover the entire map but only specific locations. By combining Instrumental and Free-Play, the player will be able to cover as much of Tatooine as possible. In doing so, the research benefits from having more visuals in the number of examples brought up during the analysis.

To briefly reiterate, through a game analysis, the operationalized concepts establish the location that Tatooine is attempting to represent. It will further bring forward that the nature of Tatooine is indeed evoking a location and that the monsters are being run along racial lines. The following chapter will start by introducing the game *SWTOR*.

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<sup>65</sup> “Core World Changes,” Community News, *SWTOR*, last modified 10.05.2015. <http://www.SWTOR.com/blog/core-world-changes>.



Not so, “far, far, away.”

In this chapter, I will start with the necessary Overview section where I show how to get to the planet of Tatooine, where *SWTOR* fits in the Star Wars universe, and the visuals of nature within the game. Afterwards, the Formal Elements section of the analysis delves into how the game’s visuals are evoking a geographical location through the use of frames that tropes have established.

#### Overview

This sub-chapter looks at the visuals that construct the planet of Tatooine. This involves looking at how the planet’s nature is being shown through a series of images and text that form a travel log. In doing so, we establish what Tatooine in *SWTOR* looks like that allows for further analysis in the Formal Element section of the sub-question. Firstly, a brief introduction to the timeline in which the tourist finds themselves.

While it could be the case that the depictions of Tatooine within the game is the player’s first time seeing it, this could also not be the case. This is because it was originally depicted in the 1977 movie *Star Wars* and belongs to the Star Wars franchise, from which the *SWTOR* depiction of the planet derives from.<sup>66</sup> The story within *SWTOR* is different from the one taking place in the movies. They both involve the idea of good vs evil, Jedi vs Sith, but the incidents in the game are occurring almost 4000 years before Luke (the main character of George Lucas’s 1977’s *Star Wars*) is born.

To reach the planet of Tatooine in *SWTOR*, one must play the game to a certain extent. When starting the game, one begins on their designated starter-world according to the team and class the player picked during character customization. Here one slowly builds up experience, equipment, and abilities before following certain routes to level up further. By levelling up, the player will gradually go to other planets where higher level monsters and missions are found. Once far enough into the game, the player is told to go to Tatooine. To get there, the player needs to first get off their starting planet, travel to the Imperial or Republic fleet, and then shuttle down to the planet. It is on this shuttle that the player creates their first impression of the planet as a cut-scene shows a brown-ish coloured planet in the distance. The player makes their way down to the planet.

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<sup>66</sup> *Star Wars: A New Hope (Episode IV)*, streaming, directed by George Lucas (1977; United States: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 1977).

*Arriving on my space shuttle to the Republic base of Anchorhead, I find myself surrounded by the heat generated by the twin suns above. The bright blue sky surrounds the two suns, a yellow tint increasing ever so slightly as the horizon approaches the ground, likely due to the sand in the atmosphere. Outside of the spaceport, there are dried weeds and sand surrounding the building. Some things seem to be on fire.*



*Image 3: The first visuals of Tatooine outside of the Spaceport building in Anchorhead.*

The very first impression the player receives upon landing is one of heat and a somewhat chaotic landscape. In terms of setting the scene, the game developers have already constructed the beginning of what seems to be a violent planet.

*Looking at my map, I see that the location I am in is called Jundland. The map only covers here, and a section to the East called The Dune Sea. Wanting to see it all, I make my way out of Anchorhead. Jundland is a flat and sandy area looking like salt flats with a ravine going through it. In the distance there are mountain formations.*



*Image 4: The flatlands of Jundland.*

*The mountains contain some chasms, and everything besides the sand is a dark brown colour. There is some vegetation, but this is in the form of weeds. Some parts of the mountains are impossible to reach. The process of travelling over the flat landscape and into the mountains was a treacherous one as there were monsters everywhere, making me have to fight with some and avoid others.*



*Image 5: The mountain and chasms between Jundland and The Dune Sea.*

*Finding myself back in the flat section of Jundland making my way to the East, I recheck my map to find myself in a section of Jundland known as the Deadly Heat. Oddly, I do not find the heat here any more intense than elsewhere. Making my way over the mountains to the East and into The Dune Sea, an endless sea of dunes greets me, one so vast that crossing it would be impossible. I discovered this first-hand when attempting to cross. When venturing too far sandstorms become more frequent, forcing me back.*



*Image 6: The endless Dune Sea.*

*While venturing through the desert dunes, I recheck my map again, finding myself in a location called the Infinite Desiccation. Here there are only dunes and nothing else. The name suggests a lack of moisture, and I see what the person naming this place had in mind. However, travelling more to the North, I come across an oasis. It is rather small and brown, nothing really grows there, but the map clearly states oasis. Taking a closer look, I spot a strong being in the oasis, which I do not currently wish to fight. I leave the oasis alone to travel elsewhere.*



*Image 7: The strong being at the bottom of the Oasis. The location is known as an Oasis because the subsection of the map to the bottom right indicates that.*

By having shown how the nature within the game looks through a series of visuals and travel logs, I hope to have captured how the nature of the planet is, in most cases, simply a visual aesthetic of a barren planet, and how it in some cases works against the player. What can be taken away is that nature is not designed in a way to be considered hospitable, something that will be further elaborated on in the next segment.

### Formal Element

The Formal Element section of the chapter will look at the comments made regarding where Tatooine is seemingly representative. Once having done so, the visuals within the game will be compared to the typical tropes used for that geographical region within popular culture in order to confirm that this is most likely the place it is representative of. This is done to establish that Tatooine is not neutral, nor is it a fictitious location, but rather a real location.

When experiencing a location within a fictional setting, the player can come to tie fictional locations to real ones. Tatooine has come to be tied to a certain geographical region. Aljazeera notes that scenes of Tatooine depict "(...) scavenging, hustling Jawas, piloting a giant slave ship for robots around the dunes; or the Mos Eisley Cantina, a bar drawn straight from the malaria-fevered imaginations of an old colonial soak returned from some mythical Kasbah in the mystical Orient."<sup>67</sup> The news agency notes that the Sand People of Tatooine are savage desert people with a passing resemblance to the Bedouin. One news agency constructing this image might be a coincidence, however, Hanna Flint, writing for Yahoo! Movies, makes the same connection. She clarifies that the location of Tatooine was inspired by how Tunisia felt and looked like to the crew, mentioning the nomadic Sand People in the desert.<sup>68</sup> This is not a strange connection as even George Lucas, the creator of the Star Wars franchise, on his return to Tunisia to film Episode I, said "as difficult as it was, Tunisia was the place that brought back the most memories for me. It looks like Tatooine—it must be *Star Wars*."<sup>69</sup> The creator of Star Wars feels that the country of Tunisia best represents his image of a foreign galaxy.

This connection between a fictional and a real location is occurring due to certain frames being evoked while experiencing the planet of Tatooine. The continuous uttering of the current depictions of Tatooine can construct a dominant frame, which means the most common thing to think of when witnessing Tatooine in media.<sup>70</sup> Dominant frames rely on having been established over a period of time, which is why by being a continuation of the franchise, the depiction of Tatooine in *SWTOR* aims to evoke the movies and, in doing so, the

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<sup>67</sup> Alistair Crichton, "Star Wars stereotypes: Not a force for good," Aljazeera, last modified December 1<sup>st</sup> 2014. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/12/1/star-wars-stereotypes-not-a-force-for-good>.

<sup>68</sup> Hanna Flint, "Star Wars' has borrowed from Arab culture for years - when will it give back?," Yahoo!movie, last modified August 30<sup>th</sup> 2018. [https://uk.movies.yahoo.com/star-wars-borrowed-arab-culture-years-will-give-back-](https://uk.movies.yahoo.com/star-wars-borrowed-arab-culture-years-will-give-back-064204271.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAD3vkBE6cq4wrhkh01PM8bE3lq0EK3D3FB8tOdHDuz-Ugqth8WJ_xUUPza9nXBJ-NY0M9MQJF_cQuXUWJyUjAeXrjN7x5c2W5pmYQ5W5NHBgc_qgYyOq58UsAp1UlkbkBAOHZ1NaO3dyMRvHcchP4xhVDXbRl1uoO58AesDrBe8)

064204271.html?guccounter=1&guce\_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce\_referrer\_sig=AQAAAD3vkBE6cq4wrhkh01PM8bE3lq0EK3D3FB8tOdHDuz-Ugqth8WJ\_xUUPza9nXBJ-NY0M9MQJF\_cQuXUWJyUjAeXrjN7x5c2W5pmYQ5W5NHBgc\_qgYyOq58UsAp1UlkbkBAOHZ1NaO3dyMRvHcchP4xhVDXbRl1uoO58AesDrBe8.

<sup>69</sup> "Encountering Tatooine," Orientalism: The Phantom Menace, accessed 24<sup>th</sup> of February. <https://orientalismthephantommenace.wordpress.com/encountering-tatooine/>.

<sup>70</sup> George Lakoff, "Why it Matters How We Frame the Environment," *Environmental Communication* 4, no. 1 (March, 2010): 72.

game also relies on the same cinema tropes used for the Middle East. This is due to the most compelling experiences build upon stories, genres, or traditions already well known to the player, allowing the player to enter a space that they are already familiar with.<sup>71</sup> Ultimately, this means that they ended up using the same tropes as the movie.<sup>72</sup> Additionally, “any contradictory element may shatter the sense of immersion into this narrative universe[.]”<sup>73</sup> meaning that if the game was to be too different from the depictions that have already been established as representative for the planet, the players might not come to recognize Tatooine in *SWTOR* as the Tatooine they have come to know already.

Whereas Tunisia (from here on referred to as the Middle East<sup>74</sup>) has seemingly come to be the frame evoked when witnessing Tatooine, this is not necessarily true. By looking at the tropes usually used to depict the Middle East in popular culture, the visuals from within the game will be compared to common tropes. This continuation of the tropes used to represent the Middle East within popular culture will become apparent in the following examples.

One of the visuals shown in the Overview section of this chapter was that of sand. The sand and dunes everywhere on the map are a trope that is commonly used in most depictions of the Middle East. While it is indeed true that there much sand to be found in those geographical regions, many countries like Iran, Israel, Lebanon, and Turkey have more arable land and forests than they have deserts.<sup>75</sup> Just like the Rif Mountains in Morocco, there are places where there is lush vegetation through hilly areas where it is rather wet throughout the winter.<sup>76</sup> If for some reason, the game designers wanted to continue using Tunisia as a geographical location of reference for constructing their image of Tatooine, they could have chosen the more vegetated northern parts of the country or the Bou-Hedma National Park, (a UNESCO heritage site known for its fauna), yet chose not to.<sup>77</sup> Tunisia is indeed a warm location with sand, however, it is a country around the Mediterranean Sea where the “climates

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<sup>71</sup> Henry Jenkins, “GAME DESIGN AS NARRATIVE ARCHITECTURE,” publications, <http://web.mit.edu/~21fms/People/henry3/games&narrative.html>.

<sup>72</sup> George Lakoff, “Why it Matters How We Frame the Environment,” *Environmental Communication* 4, no. 1 (March, 2010): 73.

<sup>73</sup> Henry Jenkins, “GAME DESIGN AS NARRATIVE ARCHITECTURE,” publications, <http://web.mit.edu/~21fms/People/henry3/games&narrative.html>.

<sup>74</sup> Geographically Tunisia belongs to North Africa, however, the countries that belong to MENA (Middle East-North Africa) have often come to be included when people refer to the Middle East due to having a plethora of similarities in different areas, one of them being geography. ; “Middle East,” *Britannica*, accessed January 11, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Middle-East>.

<sup>75</sup> “Useful Notes / The Middle East,” *tvtropes*, accessed November 3, 2020, <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/UsefulNotes/TheMiddleEast>.

<sup>76</sup> Jessica Barnes, “Water in the Middle East,” *The Middle East Research and Information Project 2020* (September 2020): 2.

<sup>77</sup> “Djebel Bou-Hedma Biosphere Reserve, Tunisia,” UNESCO, last modified October, 2018, <https://en.unesco.org/biosphere/arab-states/djebel-bou-hedma>.

are milder and rainfall higher. [Other Middle Eastern countries also experience varying weather,] [i]t sometimes snows in Damascus.”<sup>78</sup>

When travelling the planet that is Tatooine, I also came across an Oasis. An Oasis in the desert is not an uncommon trope for the Middle East.<sup>79</sup> These rare locations are seemingly representative of there being small pockets of fruitful land, however, that is not the case in *SWTOR*. It is not surprising that the lush areas of the Middle East were not chosen to represent Tatooine. The location referred to as an Oasis on the map in the game is indeed a dry location without any mentionable greenery. They even added a difficult boss to the location to make the point that there is no peaceful area on Tatooine. And while, like many Middle Eastern countries, Tunisia is indeed quite barren, but that does not mean everywhere.

One of the more interesting geographical locations within the game was the mountains. Mountains are not often present in popular cultural depictions of the Middle East. A common way to portray the Middle East is as an extensive, desolate, and parched landscape.<sup>80</sup> Whereas this is indeed part of the truth as the Middle East is incredibly flat, it is far from the whole truth. “The Middle East is actually very mountainous in many places, as it sits on top of the intersection between several geological plates.”<sup>81</sup> *SWTOR* does take into account the mountainous areas of the Middle East. In doing so, it is more accurate a representation of the Middle East. However, by swarming the mountains with hostile monsters and still finding sand everywhere, it remains evident that this is not a peaceful place.

While this might initially seem contradictory to the earlier statement that any profound changes can pull the player out of the immersion, Henry Jenkins states that some changes that are not different enough and still are plausible for the fictional space of which the player finds themselves in can incorporate new narrative experiences, which can be achieved through creative manipulation of environmental details.<sup>82</sup> This is possible because frames can be activated through certain words or images. According to George Lakoff, images themselves are not frames, but under the correct circumstances, the same images can be used to activate

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<sup>78</sup> Jessica Barnes, “Water in the Middle East,” *The Middle East Research and Information Project 2020* (September 2020): 2.

<sup>79</sup> “Useful Notes / The Middle East,” *tvtropes*, accessed November 3, 2020, <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/UsefulNotes/TheMiddleEast>.

<sup>80</sup> Karen Culcasi, “Constructing and Naturalizing the Middle East,” *Geographical Review* 100, no. 4 (October 2010): 593.

<sup>81</sup> “Useful Notes / The Middle East,” *tvtropes*, accessed November 3, 2020, <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/UsefulNotes/TheMiddleEast>.

<sup>82</sup> Henry Jenkins, “GAME DESIGN AS NARRATIVE ARCHITECTURE,” *publications*, <http://web.mit.edu/~21fms/People/henry3/games&narrative.html>.

desired frames.<sup>83</sup> In doing so, the game developers have included something untypical of tropes for the Middle East yet seemingly kept Tatooine associated with the Middle East.

By incorporating all these tropes of the Middle East and the mountains that are not typical of Middle Eastern tropes but are of real Middle Eastern geography, *SWTOR* creates another instance where the Middle East becomes evoked through a fictional world. This reiteration renders the rather vast differences in the climate of the Middle East to what the consumer has come to expect of a villainous sandscape by continuously consuming the same popular tropes found elsewhere. Looking at the statements made by news outlets, as well as the one by George Lucas himself showed which frame can come to be activated by Tatooine, by incorporating the examples that clearly show that typical Middle Eastern tropes, as well as more accurate representations of the Middle East, constructs the undeniable dominant frame. Tatooine evokes a frame of the Middle East. What this means is that the nature of Tatooine is not fictitious as it is rooted in the idea of a real location on Earth that the players are passively consuming through gameplay. Why this has implications will become evident in the following chapter, by seeing how monsters placed inside a representation of a real location can be problematic for groups of peoples.

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<sup>83</sup> George Lakoff, "Why it Matters How We Frame the Environment," *Environmental Communication* 4, no. 1 (March, 2010): 73.



## The Monster in the Dark.

In this chapter, I will be looking at the monsters within the game and how they meet the criteria set by Cohen. Furthermore, by establishing that they are part of the *Dark Other*, it becomes apparent how that might be harmful to people of colour.

### Overview

This section looks at the monsters. This involves looking at a series of images and text that form a travel log.

*While travelling across Jundland and The Dune Sea, I came across many instances of danger. There were numerous encounters with monsters, so reciting every encounter will be a tedious task. However, here are a few instances. Making one's way through the Jundland mountains there are many instances where one follows small paths. While navigable, these paths are often filled with monsters, such as the Rill. They are nasty creatures, attacking you whenever you come too close. One finds themselves clinging to the wall to evade them. Thankfully they do not come closer as long as one avoids them. While this would not be too problematic if it were a rare occurrence, sadly, that is not the case.*



*Image 8: A Rill blocking a narrow path, forcing the player to hug the mountain to avoid it or forces them to fight.*

According to Cohen, one of the monster's characteristics is that it limits the players' geographical mobility and yet does not wander outside of its own designated zone.<sup>84</sup> The Rill and many other monsters here do this. They are designed to attack when the player comes within their designed radius.

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<sup>84</sup> Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 12-16.

*Making a quick stop at a Republic outpost in the middle of The Dune Sea, I read a notice saying The Sand Demons Lair. I find this a rather odd name. The notice is a mission to kill giant green bugs known as Sand Demons, 20 fully grown ones and 20 of its offspring. If the Sand Demon drops any loot after meeting its fate, then the loot belongs to the one who kills it. The notice says there is a reward for doing so, money and equipment, even saying that it is good for experience. With nothing left to read, I make my way back out from Anchorhead into the Jundland flats.*



*Image 9: The loot that a high-level Sand Demon drops.*

Cohen says that monsters should have some kind of lure.<sup>85</sup> With missions that grant you money and experience and monsters that when they die drop loot, there are plenty of lures. Whereas not every mission has a killing element to them, most missions force the player into areas dense with monsters, making them have to kill them. Some missions even go to the extent of having their sole aim being the destruction of a certain number of monsters. An interesting point of notice is the language used to name these monsters, the use of the word demon to call a local creature is an interesting take on language use.

*While on my travels, I often find myself wanting to gain experience and goods through fighting the easier monsters to beat, yet the fact that they do put up a fight can be rather irritating. Even the Reek, a creature bearing a resemblance to a rhinoceros on Earth, which is usually passive, fights back when struck first.*

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 16-20.



Image 10: The Yellow Titled Reek does not attack unless attacked first.

Fighting back is unreasonable. The Reek, amongst others, will fight back when approached or struck.<sup>86</sup> The player will often experience that the monsters of which they are fighting set up a reasonable effort to fight back when playing. Not only is it found to be unreasonable for the monsters to fight back physically, but they also cannot stand up for themselves in periods of misunderstanding. In one instance, monsters were being blamed for damaging moisture farms (farms on Tatooine that gather water from the dry air) while it was the local thugs. The monsters are designed to be enemies, and in being so a hindrance in many ways, yet their insistence on setting up a fight is deemed a characteristic of being a monster.

*Finally, returning to the Republic base of Anchorhead, I find myself wandering the streets to experience this outer rim outpost in its entirety. Walking past a more rundown area of the base, I notice a large gathering of womp rats. Womp rats are vile creatures, small yet ferocious in attitude; you would be lucky not to get attacked when coming too close. Thinking back, I remember seeing Womp rats everywhere throughout Jundland and in the desert, much like I saw Rills and other creatures everywhere across this section of Tatooine. I wonder why they are seemingly everywhere.*

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<sup>86</sup> Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, *Dark Fantastic: race and the imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 21-22.



*Image 11: The Womp Rat, like most of the monsters, can be found everywhere. These are found in Anchorhead.*

A monster is something omnipresent, capable of escaping and constantly reappearing.<sup>87</sup> This is unmistakable as there is just such a large abundance of monsters everywhere as well as the fact that they respawn after death at such a pace that a second player shortly behind would have to interact with them after you kill them. This constant presence of monsters on Tatooine makes the planet not feel safe or manageable to the player. This feeling of being unsafe is somewhat evident because even within the walls of Anchorhead, the player can still run across Womp Rats.

Until this stage, all the monsters mentioned have belonged to the category of monster per the criteria set by Cohen. *SWTOR*, like many other games, have a coloured title above the heads of the monsters. In this game the monsters with a red title follow what Cohen would categorize as a monster as they have met all the criteria for being so. Yellow titled monsters are those who only attack a player once attacked and meets the criteria of being unreasonable for the monster to protect themselves. However there, is another kind of monster.

*Having left the planet of Tatooine, I look back on my experiences with the creature of the planet. There were many occasions where I had to fight my way through certain areas and avoid others. However, some creatures were friendly. Local to the planet of Tatooine, the Bantha is super friendly. They visually look like a mix between a camel and a mammoth on Earth. They are so friendly that causing them any harm is simply inconceivable. Its only fault is that it is a common travel mount to the Tusken Raiders, the natives of Tatooine who are*

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<sup>87</sup> Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 4-6.

*not too fond of seeing foreigners on their land. Ultimately, I look back on my time there with a negative impression. Tatooine is, as much an uncontrolled, outer rim, planet that there is. I will not be returning.*



*Image 12: The Green Titled Bantha cannot take damage and cannot harm the player. They are seen with their Tusken Raider handlers who have Red Titles.*

By having a green title, the Bantha might not be a monster if one follows Cohen's criteria, but it is still worth using as an example as it becomes part of nature. "Representations of the Middle East nearly inevitably include (...) [a] string of camels, (...)." <sup>88</sup> Simply because it is green does not make the Bantha neutral.

Most of the monsters within the game meet the exact criteria of which Cohen and Thomas believe monsters meet. In doing so, it is evident that the monsters belong to the *Dark Other*. In the next segment it will become evident how *SWTOR* monsters are detrimental to people of colour.

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<sup>88</sup> Diana K. Davis, "Imperialism, Orientalism, and the Environment in the Middle East: History, Policy, Power, and Practice," in *Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Diana K. David and Edmund Burke (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2012), 14.

### Formal Element

This section looks at how monsters construct certain impressions of people of colour by seeing how people of colour and monsters have come to be connected through Thomas's *Dark Other*.

What has become clear is that the red titled monsters within the game belong to the *Dark Other*. Even the green titled monster, the Bantha, by being under the control of the red titled Tusken Raiders have become something viewed as a harmful entity. Whether the Bantha is peaceful because they are supposed to be a frame of the earlier Star Wars franchise and that of Tatooine, or in George Lucas's words, Tunisia, is questionable. Why the developers chose the Bantha to have a green title rather than a yellow one is an interesting choice on the developers' end.

The inclusion of these monsters within *SWTOR* constructs the necessary darkness within this fantastical story-world that the lack of typical representations of people of colour leaves a void for. According to Thomas: "(...) there can be no fantastic without the Dark Other. The Dark Other is the counterbalance, the counterweight that makes the entire enterprise of the fantastic work."<sup>89</sup> What is occurring within the game is that the monsters that are meeting Cohen's criteria are functioning as stand-ins for minorities.<sup>90</sup> They are not a replacement for the people with non-white skin, but rather they are the component within this story that constitutes the necessary *Dark Other*.<sup>91</sup> They do so not by being visually similar to people of colour or necessarily functioning in the same way in regard to their agency, but they are nonetheless their replacement by being part of the category that is the *Dark Other*.

The many readers, viewers, and fans of colour can find themselves (by being categorized into Thomas's *Dark Other*), being slain, and justifiably so when considering the traits and requirements laid down by Cohen for what a monster constitutes.<sup>92</sup> While they need to experience this, Western civilization and culture have laid the foundation for ignoring race and finding the act of doing so graceful.<sup>93</sup> "To notice is to recognize an already discredited difference. To enforce its invisibility through silence is to allow the black body a shadowless participation in the dominant cultural body."<sup>94</sup> This means that the game developers did not notice how the monsters included are a way that race, difference, and darkness are hailed in *SWTOR* by being luring, hard to beat, or agitative.

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<sup>89</sup> Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, *Dark Fantastic: race and the imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 28.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

<sup>93</sup> Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 9-10, quoted in Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, *Dark Fantastic: race and the imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 29.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*.

The *Dark Other* is what both people of colour and monsters have come to be a part of. Whereas they are separate, by being part of this *Dark Other*, their sadly ignored and necessary presence and actions come to impact the other. As such, the mere presence of what constitutes a monster in accordance with Cohen and Thomas is enough to construct certain impressions of people of colour. By looking at all of the different and interesting monsters on the fictional planet of Tatooine and seeing how they have, in this case study, become the replacement for more traditional depictions of people of colour, it becomes apparent that Tatooine's monsters are not neutral. With this being the case, the next chapter will answer how knowing which geographical location Tatooine is evoking and how monsters constructing impressions of people of colour can answer how nature as a whole is detrimental to people of colour.

### Concluding remarks

This chapter returns to the definition of nature as described in the introduction, answers the research question using the two sub-questions, scrutinizes the choice of method, and suggests future research.

### Conclusion

The visuals of the game are a critical part of the experience. Henry Jenkins claims that these evoked spaces construct the fictional setting and are crucial for drawing the user into the world the developers want to display. In developing their game, BioWare used the earlier franchise of Star Wars as the template of which they constructed their version of Tatooine.

It is due to this that answering the question regarding what Tatooine is evoking, and where that is, becomes an integral part of this thesis. Most comments regarding which geographical location they are experiencing being evoked through connected frames are those of the Middle East. Why this is the case becomes clear when comparing the visuals of the landscapes and climates, amongst other things, to those visuals commonly used to display the Middle East in popular culture. With the evidence to back these claims of the Middle East being evoked, these evoked frames become an indisputable dominant frame. This is problematic because a problematic Outer Rim planet known for its lawlessness becomes associated with the Middle East.

What makes this worse is that the developers included monsters to this location. Ebony Elizabeth Thomas states that monsters, nature, and people of colour, amongst other things, are part of what is known as the *Dark Other*. Within *SWTOR*, the monsters on Tatooine meet the requirements for being part of the *Dark Other*, which is not exactly a positive thing, as the majority of the traits and requirements are harmful, like causing harm, deceitful, and unreasonable. How this impacts people of colour is relatively straightforward by both monsters and people of colour being part of the *Dark Other* what one of them does comes to impact the other. By having these characteristics, the monsters on Tatooine are creating damaging impressions of people of colour.

If the monsters are what are impacting people of colour, exactly how does nature do the same? Returning to the introduction, I made it clear that for the purpose of this research, nature will be referred to as meaning the physical phenomena of the world that are opposed to humans and human creations, such as landscapes and plants. Monsters will be referred to as simply monsters. Monsters can be defined as part of the term nature, as they are not man-made, but to make things clear during the analysis, they will remain separate only for monsters and landscapes to merge under the term nature in the conclusion. The landscape and monsters are now returned to the umbrella term of nature.



What this means is that through a game analysis, it can be concluded that by the visuals of the landscape inside of the game, being representative of a real location, and the monsters being representative of real people, nature comes shining a rather poor light on the Middle East and its people. The nature of Tatoonine is subconsciously leaving an impression upon the players of *SWTOR*, whom of which will take these newly made frames and potentially, subconsciously, have them evoked when witnessing the Middle East and its people.

### Limitations and the Future

Several important limitations arise from the way this research is constructed. The initial limitation comes from how to gather the data for the analysis. BioWare made it clear that by following the purple missions and levelling up the character, you are playing the game as intended and gathering data through Instrumental Play can be done. However, an important element of MMORPGs that attracts a lot of players is the role-playing aspect. For these individuals, the proper way to play the game is to disregard the missions and loot, and instead focus on world and story building. This method of play could have made new observations.

The method of analysis, the game analysis, also was limiting in the way its building blocks expect to be arranged. Each sub-question has an Overview and Formal Element, making them somewhat chaotic in how they appear. Game analysis initially calls for all the visuals in the Overview to be mentioned first but proceeding to do so would have led to a poorly structured, visually heavy chapter without any content.

Future research in this regard can focus on how different definitions of the what the games goals can lead to various results. Furthermore, this thesis has shown that the visuals within games are not neutral and can impact people of colour; however, this does not imply that the visuals can only be analysed through race theory. Applying other theories to the visuals could make it apparent that the game is constructing different frames. Hopefully, this thesis and analysis have shown that it is possible to scrutinize games further and inspires further research to do so.

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