

**СЕМІОТИКА КУЛЬТУРНИХ НАРАТИВІВ
(кіно, відеоігри)
SEMiotics OF CULTURAL NARRATIVES
(movies, video games)**

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**Images of Ukraine of
the Future in the Sci-Fi Video Game Series of
*The CosmoOdyssey World***

Abstract

This article examines the video game series, including “CosmoOdyssey: Trip to Mars”, “CosmoOdyssey 2: Comeback to Origin”, “Son of Perun Kharkiv”, and “Baraban: Maister-torhash”. It analyses images of the Russo-Ukrainian war, protagonists, and the Other, through which the series constructs Ukraine’s future. The study shows that these games imagine the future as a postwar Ukrainian-centred space shaped by victory, memory, and the preservation of local cultural experience, while also marked by a socially complex and internally fragmented reality.

Keywords: Russian expansion, decolonization, historical memory, identity, information age, visual narratives, video games, science fiction, Ukrainian culture, representation, cultural problems.

Relevance. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has become a catalyst for a substantial rethinking by Ukrainians of their own culture and national identity. In the sphere of Ukrainian visual culture, this has manifested itself in the creation and circulation of cultural products that reflect on Ukrainian culture, its images, and its meanings. These processes have already been identified in studies devoted to contemporary art and cinema (Vashchuk 2025; Lihus 2023; Herashchenko 2025). Similar tendencies can also be observed in research on Ukrainian video games (Zinovieva 2024).

A video game (game) is “a program stored on a carrier device, launched on a platform device, and implementing a system of rules and mechanics that provide a particular experience, present a particular story, and convey a particular narrative” (Remizovskyi 2023, 12; *author's translation*). Video games are one of the contemporary media that likewise function as a space for such cultural reflection. In the information age, they have become one of the sites where ideas about society, history, technology, national identity, and the future are produced and circulated (Zinovieva 2024; Maliuk 2021). In this context, it is important to turn specifically to independent games (indie games) as a distinct segment of contemporary video game culture. By indie games, this study refers to games created outside the creative or financial control of major external corporate actors and associated with relatively small-scale, creatively autonomous, and less hierarchically organized modes of production. The present definition is based on the characteristics of indie game production outlined by several scholars (Martin and Deuze 2009, 276–7; Whitson, Simon, and Parker 2018, 4). Indie games production constitutes a separate mode of cultural production alongside the mainstream, while the shift toward smaller teams is often associated with an attempt to avoid hierarchically organized and creatively restrictive models of production. For this reason, several scholars regard indie games as a particularly valuable object of analysis for examining more author-driven, locally grounded, and less standardized ways of making sense of culture than those typically found in large commercial projects (Martin and Deuze 2009; Whitson, Simon, and Parker 2021).

Among indie games, the science fiction segment is particularly relevant to the present study, since it engages directly with cultural images of the future. By science fiction, we mean works whose plots develop through events made possible by imagined scientific discoveries and technologies and which, following Robert Heinlein's definition, offer realistic speculation about possible future events (Lukianenko 2021, 6, 9–10). Images of the future are important because they make it possible to trace how notions of the desirable, the acceptable, the threatening, and the catastrophic reflect the values, anxieties, and normative assumptions of a given culture. At the same time, an image of the future is not only a projection of what may come, but also a way of interpreting the present. This has been noted by various scholars of science fiction (Lidchi and Fricke 2019; Londoño-Proaña 2026; Djedjai 2022).

Focusing specifically on the work of Brenntkopf Development is relevant because this is a small Kharkiv-based indie team within whose output it is

possible to trace a relatively coherent authorial logic of cultural modelling.¹ It is also important that *CosmoOdyssey: Trip to Mars*, *CosmoOdyssey 2: Comeback to Origin*, *Son of Perun Kharkiv*, and *Baraban: Maister-torhash*² (in Ukrainian: “Барабан: Майстер-торгаш”, in English: “Baraban: Master Merchant”; translated by the author. — A. R.) constitute an internally connected corpus identified on Steam as *The CosmoOdyssey World*.³ Across these games, Ukrainian images are consistently reproduced within futuristic worlds. For this reason, this corpus provides productive material for the analysis of images of Ukrainian culture of the future.

Literature review. Several studies on Ukrainian video games are relevant to the present article. Zinovieva (Zinovieva 2024), analyzing approximately 26 Ukrainian games, argues that after the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion, Ukrainian video games became part of a broader culture of resistance and frequently employed comedic and carnivalesque elements in representing war. Maliuk (2021), in a cultural studies dissertation that addressed science fiction video games in Ukraine, examined the *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* and *Metro* series, as well as *You Are Empty* and *Collapse*, and identified the dominance of post-Soviet aesthetics in these games. Also relevant is Lassin’s study of how Ukrainian history and the Russo-Ukrainian war are interpreted within the gaming community surrounding *Europa Universalis IV* (Lassin 2024). This study is useful because it demonstrates that meanings related to Ukraine are actively articulated and contested in gaming culture.

In the context of the present study, it is also important to consider several works on science fiction produced in other fields, particularly literary studies. Of relevance here are Savytska’s analysis of Ukrainian science fiction (Savytska 2014) and Telestakova’s study of Chinese science fiction, especially insofar as the latter addresses the difficulties involved in defining science fiction as a genre (Telestakova 2020). This body of scholarship can be further situated alongside studies of other national and regional science fiction literatures, including Londoño-Proaño’s (Londoño-Proaño 2026) research on Latin American science fiction, Djedjai’s work on Arab science fiction (Djedjai 2022) and Lukianenko’s study of the English science fiction novel (Lukianenko 2021).

The study aims to examine the images through which Ukraine’s future is constructed in the video game *CosmoOdyssey* series (*CosmoOdyssey: Trip to Mars*, *CosmoOdyssey 2: Comeback to Origin*, *Son of Perun Kharkiv*, *Baraban: Maister-torhash*), developed by Brenntkopf Development; to provide a systematic characterization of their development across the selected games; and to analyse their relationship to the discourse of the Russo-Ukrainian war.

¹ Information about the Ukrainian origin of the studio: <https://brenntkopf-studio-kharkiv.itch.io/>

² The article uses the transliterated name of the video game from the Ukrainian language, as the video game does not have English localization.

³ https://store.steampowered.com/bundle/34725/The_CosmoOdyssey_World/

Methodology. At the conceptual level, the study draws on postclassical narratology, which expanded narratological inquiry beyond its classical literary framework and redirected attention from the narrator to narrative as a representation constructed by the recipient based on a configuration of signs (Ryan 2023). The central objects of analysis are images, understood as coherent narrative formations conveyed through different sign systems in the video games, from the protagonist's written notes to visual elements of environmental design. Taken together, these images form a broader representation of Ukraine's future within the game series.

The study is based on four main methods: the descriptive method, the comparative method, discourse analysis, and systematization. The descriptive method was used to record the narrative and visual elements identified during the playthrough of the selected video games. In other words, the analysis relies on the systematic fixation of what is directly represented in the games' stories, environments, and character design. The comparative method was used to compare these elements across the games to identify both recurring patterns and differences in the representation of Ukraine's future. Discourse analysis was applied to the broader context of game production, including the history of development, the developers' explanations of their artistic decisions, and their reflections on the influence of the Russo-Ukrainian war on the creation of the games. It was used to reconstruct the discursive link between the experience of war, the rethinking of ideas developed before the full-scale invasion, and the formation of the series' images of Ukraine's future.

The study also employs the method of systematization, drawing on the analytical framework of Perron's model of the "three bodies" in horror video games (Perron 2018, 3) and on its broader application in other studies (Remizovskyi 2023). The material identified in the games was organized into several analytical images:

- 1) images of the Russo-Ukrainian war: the signs and information through which the war is represented in the narrative and environmental design of the games, including both written in-game materials and visual elements of the setting;
- 2) images of the protagonist – the main character's biography, appearance, motivations, and actions throughout the game. The protagonist's initial environment (the room in which the protagonist lives or the location where the story begins) is also included in this category, as its visual imagery may reflect the character's origin and culture;
- 3) images of the Other: other characters and enemies, including their actions, attitudes toward the protagonist, origin, and visual appearance.

Environmental game design was not treated as a separate analytical image but was analysed as part of the other images.

By comparing the development of these images across the selected games, the study provides a systematic characterization of the image of Ukraine's future in this video game series.

Results

Development History. Before turning to the development history of *The CosmoOdyssey World* series, it is necessary to briefly outline the conditions under which it emerged to better understand its discursive relationship to the Russo-Ukrainian war.

According to Vitalii Chyzh, the series' principal developer and one of its two creators, the series was developed by two Kharkiv residents: Chyzh himself and the programmer Illia Khudokormov. Khudokormov was responsible for programming, while Chyzh was responsible for the remaining aspects of development, including the narrative concept, artistic vision, and overall concept of the games.⁴ Four games in the series were released on Steam between 2022 and 2024: *CosmoOdyssey: Trip to Mars* (18 August 2022), *CosmoOdyssey 2: Comeback to Origin* (17 February 2023), *Son of Perun Kharkiv* (1 September 2023), and *Baraban: Maister-torhash* (6 December 2024).

The series was developed under difficult material conditions. According to Chyzh, the war forced the developers to work from different countries and exclusively online. The development process was also complicated by regular power outages and internet disruptions (Danylov 2023).

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine became an important factor in the emergence of the *The CosmoOdyssey World* series. Before 24 February 2022, Chyzh had already been working on another PC project, "Getaway from Kharkiv Orbita", which was intended to unfold in the setting of a large, unsettling, and partly post-apocalyptic Kharkiv.⁵ After the invasion, however, this project could no longer retain its original form. According to the developer, such a game became inappropriate under the conditions of real war, when Kharkiv itself had turned into a space of destruction, shelling, and desolation. The series thus emerged through the reworking and replacement of earlier ideas. As Chyzh recalls, in the first days of the war he began working on a game almost in a state of stupor and later described this process as a form of "self-PSYOP," that is, a way of coping with psychological shock. This was how the first *CosmoOdyssey* came into being.⁶ The same logic persisted later: according to the developer, *Son of Perun Kharkiv* also grew out of the earlier assets and ideas behind "Getaway from Kharkiv Orbita", though they were reworked through a new plot, a new visual approach, and a brighter vision of the future.⁷

Another important discursive point concerns Vitalii Chyzh's attitude toward other Ukrainian games released before the full-scale invasion. In an interview for "Mezha", he stated explicitly that he does not regard *Metro* or *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* as "purely Ukrainian" games (Danylov 2023). In the former case, this is because the player takes on the role of Russians; in the latter, because the game requires the player to shoot at the Ukrainian army. These statements point to Chyzh's decolonial position.

⁴ Information from the developer's blog: <https://gamedev.dou.ua/forums/topic/39639/>

⁵ Information from the developer's blog: <https://gamedev.dou.ua/forums/topic/39639/>, <https://gamedev.dou.ua/forums/topic/42156/>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Information from the developer's blog: <https://gamedev.dou.ua/forums/topic/44911/>

Autobiographical memory, especially memories of family and of Kharkiv, also functions as an important discursive influence on the series. This is particularly evident in the development history of *CosmoOdyssey 2: Comeback to Origin*, which Chyzh explicitly links to memories of his grandmother and grandfather, rural life, fishing, a pond, an apple orchard, a vegetable garden, homemade alcohol, and other everyday village practices. Chyzh describes the game as a set of “memory-triggers” that return him to childhood.⁸ The same logic can be traced in the other games of the series. In developing the first *CosmoOdyssey*, for example, the author drew inspiration from the childhood animated film “How the Cossacks Met the Aliens”.⁹ In his blog, while discussing *Son of Perun Kharkiv*, Chyzh describes the game as a project that combines local Kharkiv memes and uses Slobozhansky dialect of the Ukrainian language.¹⁰ In the case of *Baraban: Maister-torhash*, the idea for the game, according to the author, was suggested by his father, who remarked that it would be “great to recreate the flavor of the Barabashovo market,¹¹ where Asians speak unusual Ukrainian, and you bargain with every seller to get the best possible price for the goods” (*translated by the author. — A. R.*).¹²

To conclude this section, it should be noted that from the early stages of the series’ development, the author sought to imagine a postwar horizon in which Ukraine appears as the victorious side. Discussing *CosmoOdyssey 2: Comeback to Origin*, Chyzh wrote that “the idea of victory and of the future after it runs through the entire game”.¹³ As the following analysis will show, this orientation is also significant for the other games in the series.

Images of the Russo-Ukrainian war. In the video games of *The CosmoOdyssey World* series, images of the Russo-Ukrainian war vary in their degree of directness. In *CosmoOdyssey: Trip to Mars*, the war is not articulated within the game itself and appears only indirectly through the trailer. In *CosmoOdyssey 2: Comeback to Origin*, it is represented through individual political markers. In *Son of Perun Kharkiv*, these images become a visible component of the narrative and environmental design. In *Baraban: Maister-torhash*, images of the war appear in textual and visual artefacts of the postwar world.

The games also differ in the specific images through which the Russo-Ukrainian war is represented. In *CosmoOdyssey: Trip to Mars*, the war is marked only in the Steam trailer, where the voice-over presents the future as one in which Ukraine has already won.¹⁴ The *CosmoOdyssey 2: Comeback to*

⁸ Information from the developer’s blog: <https://gamedev.dou.ua/forums/topic/42156/>

⁹ Information from the developer’s blog: <https://gamedev.dou.ua/forums/topic/39639/>

¹⁰ Information from the developer’s blog: <https://gamedev.dou.ua/forums/topic/44911/>

¹¹ Barabashovo market is considered to be one of the largest markets in Ukraine.

¹² Information from the developer’s blog: <https://gamedev.dou.ua/forums/topic/49547/>

¹³ Information from the developer’s blog: <https://gamedev.dou.ua/forums/topic/42156/>

¹⁴ In the Steam trailer for the video game, the off-screen narrator states: “What you think of with goodness comes to pass in the world. All this is our future: we will fly into space, sunflowers will bloom on Mars, and we will feed our home with wheat. And the moral of this tale is simple: every thought has but a tail, and along that tail kind guests will follow. Victory has come, and the viburnum has blossomed. This is how it will be with us, people, and the world will not forget Ukraine” (*translated by the author. — A. R.*).

Origin includes a quest in which the protagonist must clear his garden of Colorado beetles allegedly bred in Belgorod laboratories. The poison presented as a means of combating them is named after Valerii Zaluzhnyi.¹⁵ Awarded upon completing this quest, the achievement “Killer of Colorado Beetles!” reinforces the wartime associations of the episode through its reference to “Kherson watermelons,” evoking the 2022 liberation of the right-bank part of Kherson region by Ukrainian forces (Figure 1).

In *Son of Perun Kharkiv*, the images of the war become more numerous and explicit. The protagonist is directly marked as a veteran of the war: in his diary he recalls being shelled “in the battle for what was then Donetsk and is now Yuzivka,”¹⁶ while another entry explains the bodily consequences of his wartime injury (Figure 2). The war is also memorialized in urban space through a monument to the soldiers at Pavlove Pole, a district of Kharkiv (Figure 3). In addition, the protagonist’s diary mentions the reconstruction of the Horizon district in Kharkiv after its destruction during the war (Figure 4). Further references to the wartime damage inflicted on Kharkiv appear in the “Interesting Facts” loading screens, which mention, among other things, the destruction of Saltivka and the shelling of Barabashovo (Figure 5).

In *Baraban: Maister-torhash*, the war is represented through an in-game book that can be purchased after completing a mandatory quest. The book is framed as a memoir-like account of a military UAV operator and describes hunting tanks, FPV strikes, aerial reconnaissance, electronic warfare, logistics, and comradeship; one of its pages explicitly states that, unlike another story, this one is not fictional (Figure 6). Another visual image of the war is the billboard “OUR UKRAINE — 845 THOUSAND SQ. KM.,” which can be seen in the streets of virtual Kharkiv. The billboard presents a postwar political map in which Belgorod and Kuban form part of Ukraine, with Kharkiv positioned as the capital of this enlarged state (Figure 7).

Taken together, the series moves from a distant image of Ukrainian victory to a denser representation in which the war reshapes memory, the space of Kharkiv, and the imagined political order of the future. In this post-war future, Ukraine appears as the victorious state, Russia is displaced or absent, formerly Russian territories are incorporated into Ukraine, and Kharkiv is imagined as one of the central spaces of the postwar order.

Images of protagonists. The protagonists analyzed here combine common features with important differences that shape distinct images of future human beings. In *CosmoOdyssey: Trip to Mars*, the protagonist, Taras Bulbenko, is an agronomist from Pavlove Pole who is sent to Mars by several Ukrainian oligarchs to extract metal for transport infrastructure. He wants to grow sunflower and wheat on Mars and later use the resources gained to open his own farm. Thus, Taras is portrayed as a dreamer whose vision of the future remains grounded in farming. At the same time, Taras is portrayed as a protagonist strongly attached to his homeland. This is reflected in the design

¹⁵Valerii Zaluzhnyi was a Ukrainian general who commanded the Ukrainian army at the beginning of Russia’s full-scale invasion.

¹⁶Yuzovka is the old name of the Ukrainian city of Donetsk, in the pre-Soviet period. Donetsk is now annexed by Russia.

of his room, which contains icons, a portrait of Chornovil, a prominent Ukrainian public figure who opposed the communist regime and later stood in opposition to President Leonid Kuchma, as well as a map of a “Greater Ukraine” and a flag of Kharkiv Oblast (Figure 8).

In *CosmoOdyssey 2: Comeback to Origin*, Taras reappears as an agronomist. According to the plot, he hides in Canada after a conflict over the precious metals found on Mars and lives at his grandmother’s dacha while fleeing an angry creditor. He misses Kharkiv, continues to keep a diary, and remains deeply preoccupied with agricultural production (Figure 9). His Canadian refuge is filled with Kharkiv markers, including the flag of Kharkiv Oblast and photographs of the city (Figure 10). Thus, Taras is portrayed as a protagonist who’s Ukrainian and Kharkiv identity remains stable across changing settings, from outer space to emigration in Canada.¹⁷

Son of Perun Kharkiv offers a different image of the protagonist. Andrii Bondarenko is a veteran of the Russo-Ukrainian war and a detective in the Kharkiv Police Department, which in the game belongs to a private corporation (Figure 2). His main task is to investigate a failure in the “Kupol” system that regulates the city’s climate. After a restorative procedure performed at “KhAI” (“Kharkiv Aviation Institute”) following a wartime injury to his arm, he becomes a kind of “walking battery” capable of using electric energy as a weapon. Unlike the protagonists of the other three games, Bondarenko has both a health bar and an electric energy bar, and he can die because of enemy attacks. This makes him the only clearly gamified combat protagonist in the corpus. Throughout the game, he constantly recalls the war, reflects on urban memory, and compares past and rebuilt versions of Kharkiv (Figure 5). He speaks roughly and remains deeply attached to the city. At the end of the game, he is awarded the titles of Hero of Ukraine for successfully completing his mission. His image combines the veteran, the cyborg detective, and the guardian of a rebuilt postwar city.

The protagonist of *Baraban: Maister-torhash*, Yaroslav Varenyk, is the least heroic in a conventional sense. He is a philology student at Hryhorii Skovoroda University and moves into an almost empty apartment in Pavlove Pole (Figure 11). His storyline revolves around furnishing the apartment, bargaining at the market, and gradually turning a bare urban space into a habitable home (Figure 12). His image is constructed primarily through the diary and the apartment itself. He likes video games, comics, popular food, tea, and consumer goods; later, he agrees to help his father open a market stall selling agricultural products, comics, and game cartridges. Yaroslav is a student-consumer who gradually becomes a small trader. His coming-of-age story is shaped by comfort, family support, market culture, and everyday urban life.

All the protagonists are strongly tied to Kharkiv. Their images combine a futuristic perspective with nostalgia and with representations of Kharkiv and broader Ukrainian national culture. These characters do not abandon

¹⁷It should be noted that Canada is known for being home to one of the largest Ukrainian diasporas.

Kharkiv, family memory, or everyday domestic routines. On the contrary, they carry them into the future. Thus, these games imagine positive future protagonists not as radically new subjects, but as locally rooted, memory-bearing, and domestically oriented Ukrainian subjects who inhabit futuristic settings without giving up their national and regional identity.

Images of the Other. The image of the Other in these games is constructed through allies, neutral intermediaries, and enemies whose actions, attitudes toward the protagonist, origins, and appearance define their narrative role.

In *CosmoOdyssey: Trip to Mars*, positive Others include the human sponsors of the expedition (Kondratkin, Kolomyiv, Igor Maskin) and, above all, the Kharkarsians, a benevolent alien community. The latter are presented as green humanoids; they inhabit a Martian copy of Kharkiv, explain their earlier contact with Cossacks, and help Taras understand how to cultivate sunflowers on Mars. Their attitude toward the protagonist is explicitly hospitable, and their relation to Ukraine is affirmative, since Kharkiv functions as the model for their own urban space and technological survival (Figure 13). This positive attitude is further explained by their earlier contact with Ukrainian Cossacks, who helped them after their crash and introduced them to sunflower oil as a resource for their ships (Figure 14).

In *CosmoOdyssey 2: Comeback to Origin*, this positive image remains attached to the Kharkarsians, especially Trempel, who returns Taras to Kharkiv, provides him with technology, and thus preserves the figure of the alien Other as a helper rather than a threat (Figure 15). In *Son of Perun Kharkiv*, positive and neutral Others become more socially differentiated. The police chief, local residents, and witnesses provide information, directions, and practical assistance, while remaining embedded in a fractured urban environment. Radik Kopchenyi, a taxi driver from Batumi (Figure 16), functions as a mediator between the protagonist and the criminal milieu. His accent-marked speech and stylized “Caucasian” persona draw on ethnic stereotypes, which makes his representation potentially problematic from the perspective of minority representation.¹⁸

The game also depicts homeless people. Although they do not influence the plot directly, the protagonist may still interact with them through small acts of charity, which further emphasizes the city’s social fragmentation (Figure 17).

In *Baraban: Maister-torhash*, the image of the Other is grounded in domestic life and the everyday world of the market. The protagonist is supported by his family, while neutral Others take the form of traders selling clothes, porcelain, and game consoles (Figure 18); their role is defined by bargaining and small-scale commerce, with Vietnamese sellers standing out through accent-stylized speech (Figure 19).

Negative Others are absent from *CosmoOdyssey: Trip to Mars*, where the alien encounter is structured through cooperation. In *CosmoOdyssey 2: Comeback to Origin*, however, Kolomyiv, previously introduced as one of

¹⁸For example, his lines at the end of the video game often include the phrase “I swear by my mother!” His voice in the video game contains a strong accent and incorrect pronunciation of vocal sounds.

the figures for financing and supporting Taras's expedition, becomes a negative Other. He is represented as a wealthy businessman who pursues Taras out of greed (Figure 20). In *Son of Perun Kharkiv*, negative Others become more numerous and socially diverse. The protagonist encounters armed gangs marked by criminal slang and urban violence, as well as corporate antagonists such as Tarbull and Bulbenko (Figure 21). Among the criminal figures is Ptakha, a gang leader who first appears as an enemy but later becomes an ambivalent character by negotiating with the protagonist and revealing who hired his group. He presents himself as an anarchist, a person of the "Makhnovist type," and a man of principle, and he ultimately does not attack the protagonist because he understands that the latter was simply doing his job (Figure 22). Kondratkin, who had previously appeared among the figures supporting Bulbenko's expedition, is presented here as the owner of a private institute and is associated with the privatization of the police; his image is marked negatively both by the police chief's remarks and by the protagonist's own attitude toward him.¹⁹

Taras Bulbenko is the main figure through which this corpus stages transformation. In the first two games of the series, he is a protagonist, explorer, and agronomist. In *Son of Perun Kharkiv*, however, he reappears as a publicly glorified agrarian innovator and corporate head, represented through billboards (Figure 23), newspapers as a symbol of progress and food security. Yet the plot records the same figure as an oligarch-antagonist who hires armed gangs to stage a coup in the city. His actions are driven by competition with Kondratkin and by an effort to use urban destabilization for corporate expansion and control over the critical "Kupol" system (Figure 24). He is also associated with the privatization of the Kharkiv metro, which is said to function worse after the takeover.²⁰ In addition, he controls a dwarf-star reactor that can be shut down with a single switch, a detail that further reinforces the game's anti-utopian image of concentrated private power.

In *Baraban: Maister-torhash*, antagonism is limited to the sphere of everyday market interactions, where traders may refuse to bargain or deny the protagonist a discount. Yulik is the only villain in the game: a market trader who deceives the protagonist by selling him a defective game console that later catches fire (Figure 25).

Overall, the image of the Other in this game's series moves from benevolent and cooperative figures toward more fragmented and conflictual social formations. In the first two games, the most important Others are supportive humans and friendly aliens, whereas in *Son of Perun Kharkiv* and *Baraban: Maister-torhash* the field of the Other expands to include

¹⁹For example, after the protagonist talks to Ptakha and goes for coffee, the boss will contact him to inform him about the witness. In the monologue, the policeman will say: "Andriy, a woman contacted us and told us that she lives in Horizon, you need to get there by subway, and we quickly cleaned it up. And as everyone knows, at one point there was no one there, because Tarbul and KHAI bought the apartments and moved everyone to Kharkiv. I don't like these two anymore, even though KHAI is my boss."

²⁰The police chief explains this to the main character in the video: "After this fucking Tarbul, led by a peasant, bought the subway from the city for loans, it became intermittent. Now and then, a stranger will slip in and out or a patrol of homeless people will chase them."

police officers, witnesses, homeless people, traders, gang leaders, and corporate actors, thus making social differentiation itself a central feature of representation.

At the same time, the main source of danger is not the non-human Other, but increasingly human and institutional power. The clearest expression of this shift is Taras Bulbenko, who moves from protagonist and agrarian explorer in the first two games of the series to an oligarch-antagonist in *Son of Perun Kharkiv*, where concentrated private control over infrastructure is presented as an explicitly anti-utopian threat.

Conclusions. The analyzed images do not function in isolation but together form a relatively coherent representation of Ukraine's future. The images of the Russo-Ukrainian war define the historical horizon of this future as postwar and victorious; the protagonists embody it through locally rooted, memory-bearing, and everyday forms of subjectivity; and the images of the Other outline the social world in which this future unfolds. Taken together, these images construct a vision of a restored and Ukrainian-centred future in which Kharkiv, family memory, and Ukrainian cultural markers are not abandoned, but projected into speculative settings. More specifically, they project Kharkiv, family memory, and Ukrainian cultural markers into such spaces as Mars, emigration in Canada, and the rebuilt technological environment of postwar Kharkiv.

Thus, the series imagines the postwar future primarily in terms of restoration rather than total rupture. Ukrainian victory secures the survival of Kharkiv, family memory, and nationally marked everyday life, yet this future remains shaped by familiar oligarchic and market structures. In these games, people travel into space and use technologies capable of accelerating plant growth and regulating the climate of an entire city, yet this same future world still includes criminal bosses, oligarchic control over key urban systems and bazaars, where people go to buy clothes and food cheaper than in ordinary shopping centers. The series therefore projects Ukraine into the future not by abolishing familiar power structures and relations of production, but by carrying them forward into a restored postwar world.

This should not, however, be read as evidence that the game series functions either as an ideological critique of the contemporary Ukrainian system or as an attempt to ignore its shortcomings. Rather, if one considers the influence of the Russo-Ukrainian war on the author of the series and examines these games from a broader perspective, it becomes evident that the series is not only an attempt to imagine Ukraine after victory over Russian expansion at a time when the author's city and country had been severely damaged by Russian attacks. This is also an attempt to preserve the memory of his city, his childhood, and his country. In this sense, even the representation of oligarchism and criminal culture in a rebuilt future Kharkiv can be interpreted as a form of memory work directed not only at the city itself, but also at the political culture of Ukraine.

Figures*

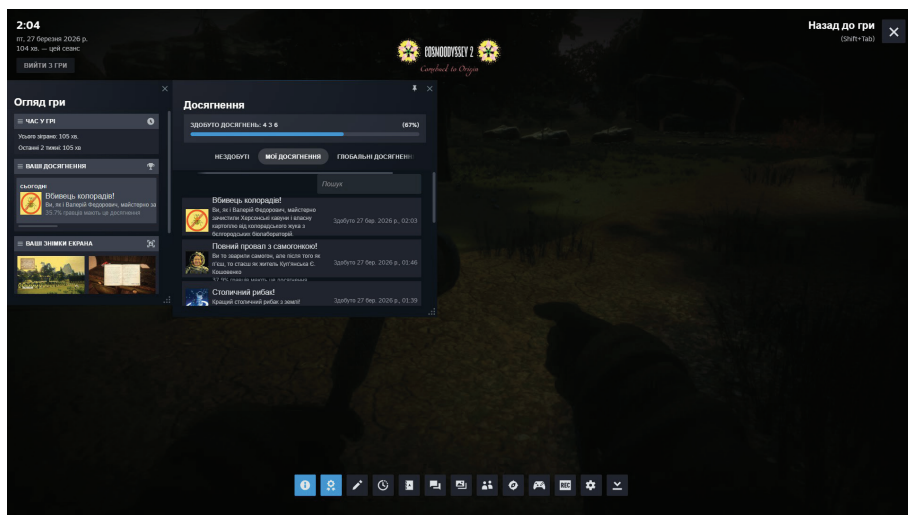


Figure 1. Achievement for destroying Colorado potato beetles in *CosmoOdyssey 2: Comeback to Origin* (Steam game store). The Ukrainian inscription reads: “The Colorado Killer! You, like Valerii Fedorovych, skillfully cleared Kherson watermelons and your own potatoes of the Colorado potato beetle from Belgorod biological laboratories” (translated by the author. — A. R.). It should be noted that in the English version, the achievement’s in-game text differs and does not mention Valerii Zaluzhnyi, the Ukrainian general who led the Ukrainian army in 2022. Instead, the English version reads: “Killer for Bugs. You stopped the invasion of your territory by the Colorado invaders.”

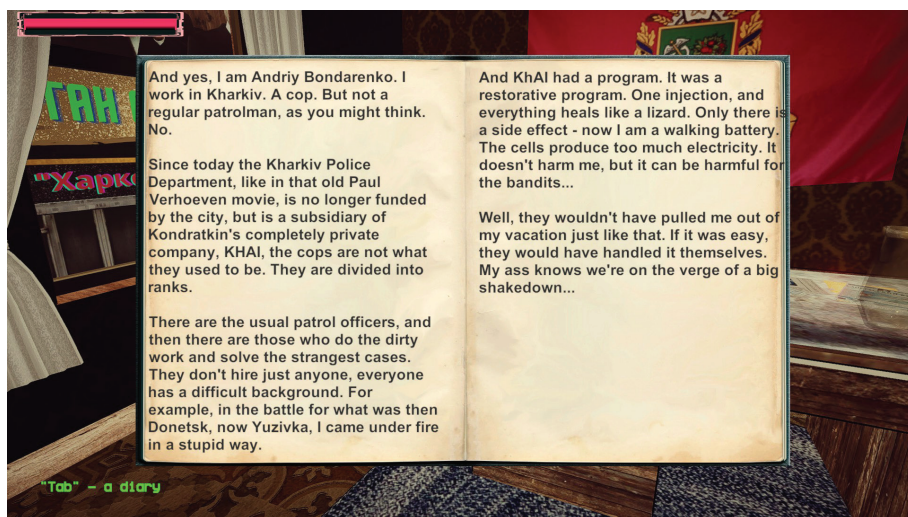


Figure 2. A page from the protagonist’s diary in the video game *Son of Perun Kharkiv*, in which he recalls his participation in the Russo-Ukrainian war.

*All screenshots were captured by the author during gameplay.



Figure 3. A memorial to Ukrainian soldiers who died during the Russo-Ukrainian War in the video game *Son of Perun Kharkiv*. According to the plot, it is located in a district of the city of Kharkiv known as Pavlovo Pole.

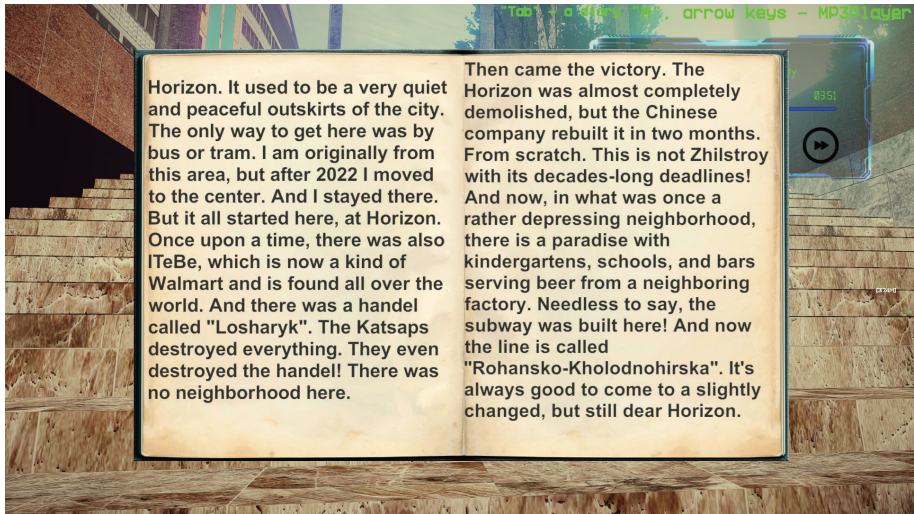


Figure 4. The diary of the main character in the video game *Son of Perun Kharkiv*, in which he describes the reconstruction of the Kharkiv district of Horizont after the war

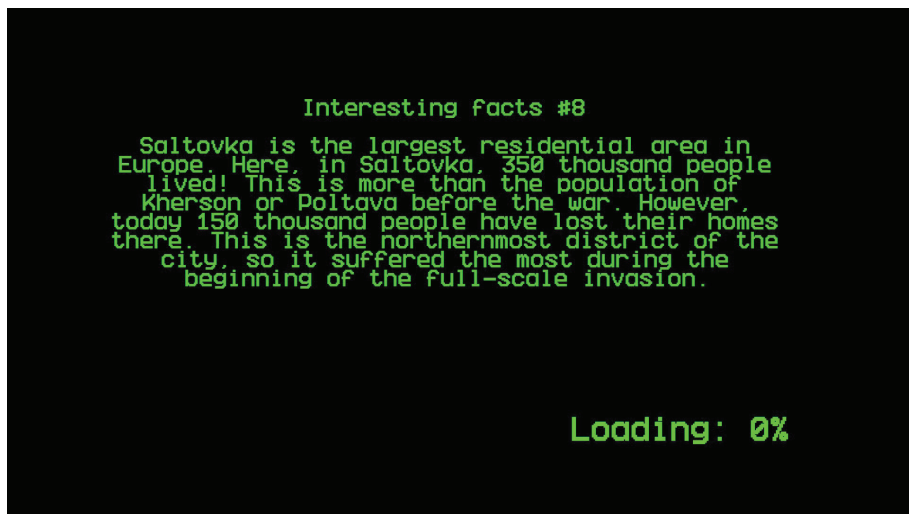


Figure 5. The text of one of the “Interesting Facts” displayed in the loading menu of the video game *Son of Perun Kharkiv* between levels and upon restarting after a character’s death. The text describes how Saltivka, Kharkiv’s largest residential district, was destroyed by Russian troops.

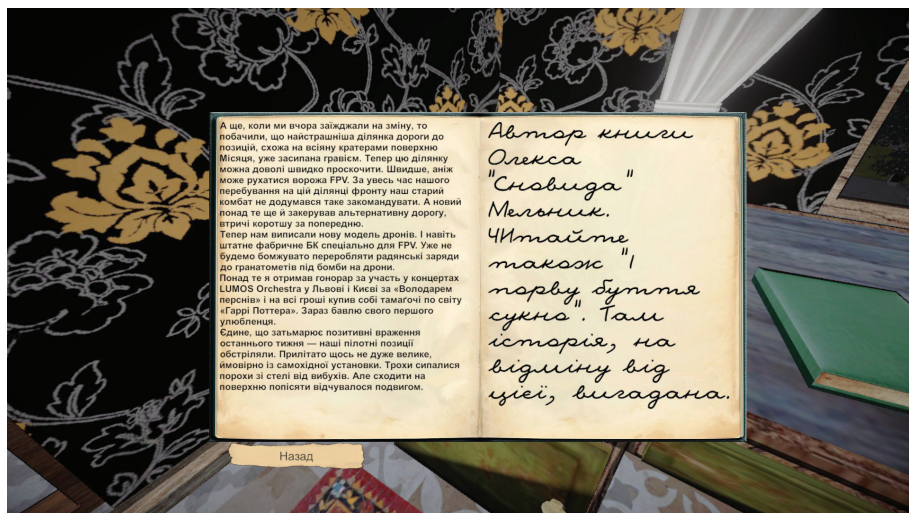


Figure 6. An excerpt from the book by real Ukrainian author Oleksa “Snovyda” Melnyk, which can be read in the video game *Baraban: Maister-torhash*. In it, he recalls his service as a combat pilot in the Ukrainian Armed Forces. The right-hand page reads: “The author of the book Oleksa ‘Snovyda’ Melnyk. Read also “Ya porvu buttia sukno’. Their history, unlike this one, is fictional.”



Figure 7. A billboard in the video game *Baraban: Maister-torhash*. The text reads: “Our Ukraine – 845 thousand sq. km. Sепectр, Beresta, Bobrivsk, Voronezh, Gomel, Kursk, Rostov, Kubanodar, Starii Dub, Yuzivka, Luhanka, Taganrig, Kamianka, Shakty, Batiysk, Azov, Starii Oskil, Ostrogozk, Shebekine, Nova Tavolzhanka – 25 years like home!”.



Figure 8. The room of the main character aboard a spaceship in the video game *CosmoOdyssey: Trip to Mars*. Reference: *CosmoOdyssey: Trip to Mars*.



Figure 9. The garden of the main character in the video game *CosmoOdyssey 2: Comeback to Origin*, where, according to the plot, he experiments with new plant varieties.



Figure 10. The main character's house in the video game *CosmoOdyssey 2: Comeback to Origin*.

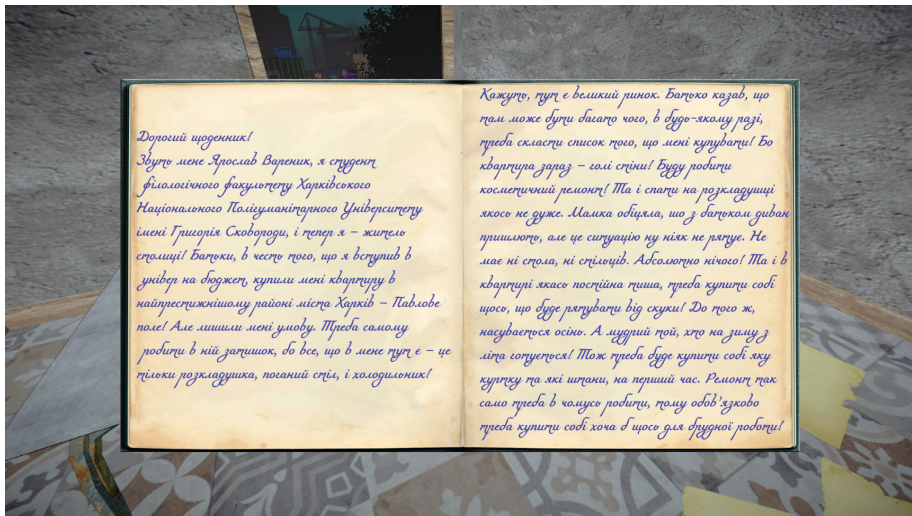


Figure 11. The diary of the main character in the video game *Baraban: Maister-torhash*. The text reads: “My name is Yaroslav Varenyk. I am a student of the Faculty of Philology of the Kharkiv National Polyhumanitarian University named after Hryhoriy Skovoroda, and I am now a resident of the capital! To celebrate my admission to a state-funded place at the university, my parents bought me an apartment in the most prestigious district of Kharkiv – Pavlovo Pole! However, they asset one condition: I must furnish it myself, as all I currently have is a folding bed, a poor-quality table, and a refrigerator!” (translated by the author. — A. R.)

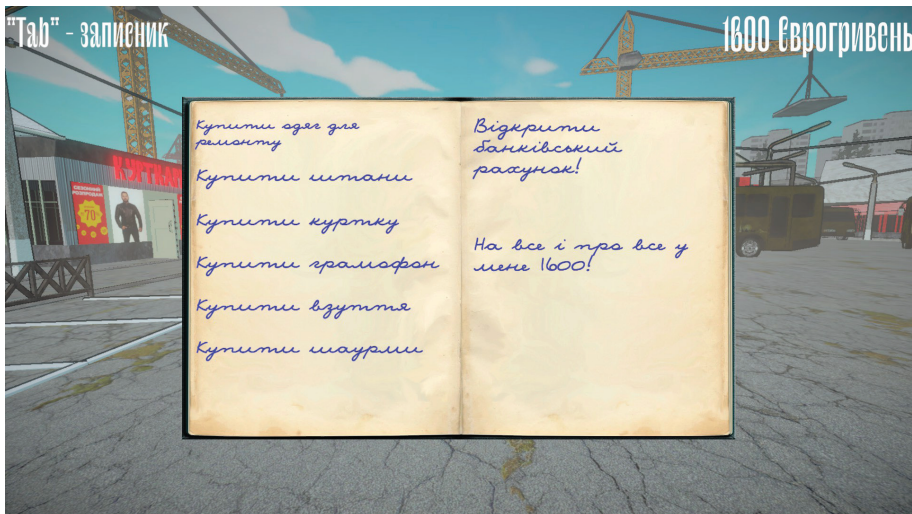


Figure 12. The journal of the main character in the video game *Baraban: Maister-torhash*, indicating that he needs to purchase an apartment in the Barabashovo market.

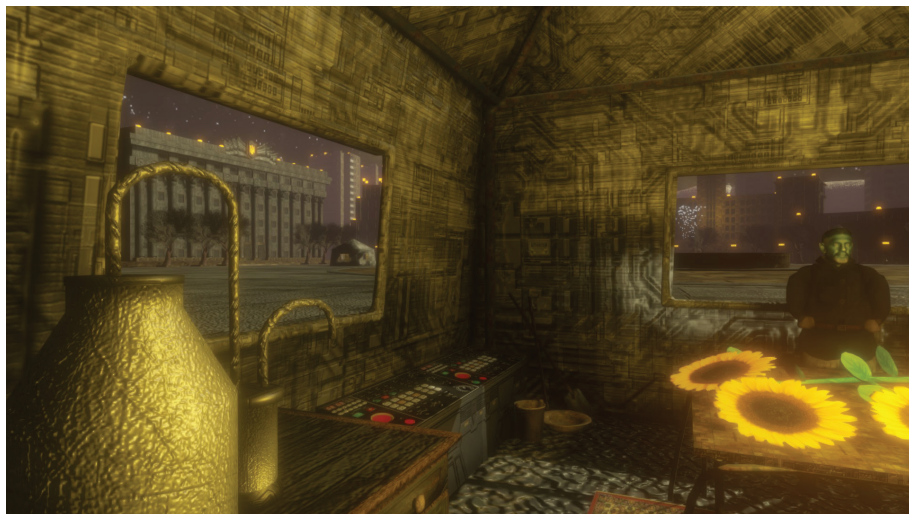


Figure 13. Aliens from the Martian city of Kharkas in the video game *CosmoOdyssey: Trip to Mars*. A building modeled after the Kharkiv Regional Administration building is visible through the tent window. Sunflowers can also be seen inside the tent.

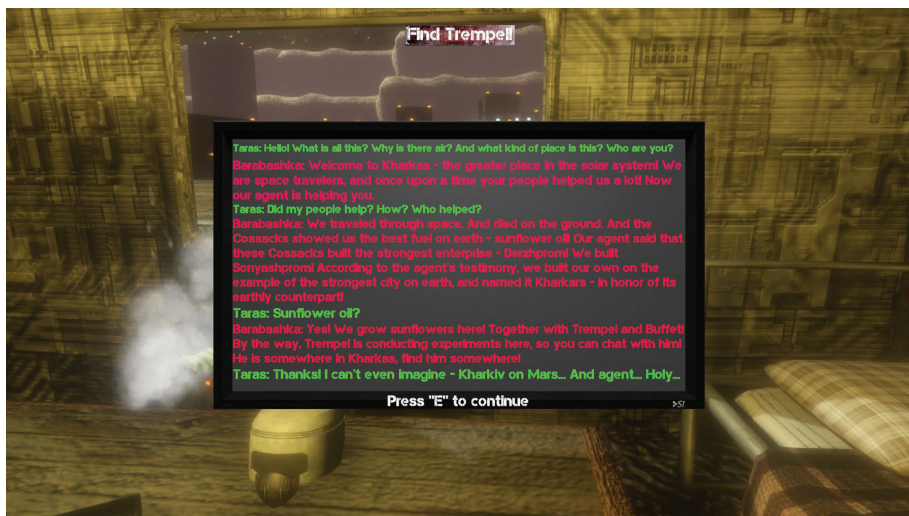


Figure 14. A dialogue with an alien in the video game *CosmoOdyssey: Trip to Mars*, discussing how the aliens were assisted by the Cossacks.



Figure 15. The character Trepel in the video game *CosmoOdyssey 2: Comeback to Origin*.



Figure 16. The character Radik Kopchony in the video game *Son of Perun Kharkiv*.

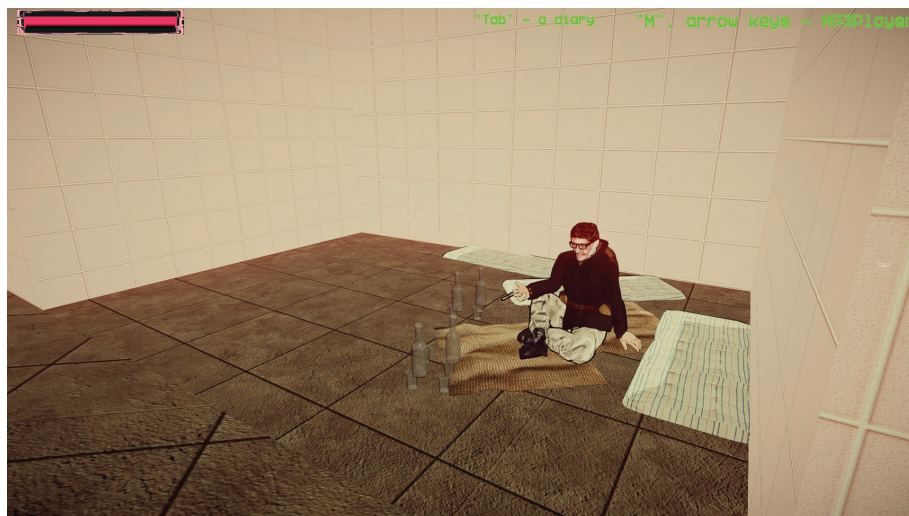


Figure 17. Homeless individuals in the video game *Son of Perun Kharkiv*.



Figure 18. A game console dealer in the video game *Baraban: Maister-torhash*.

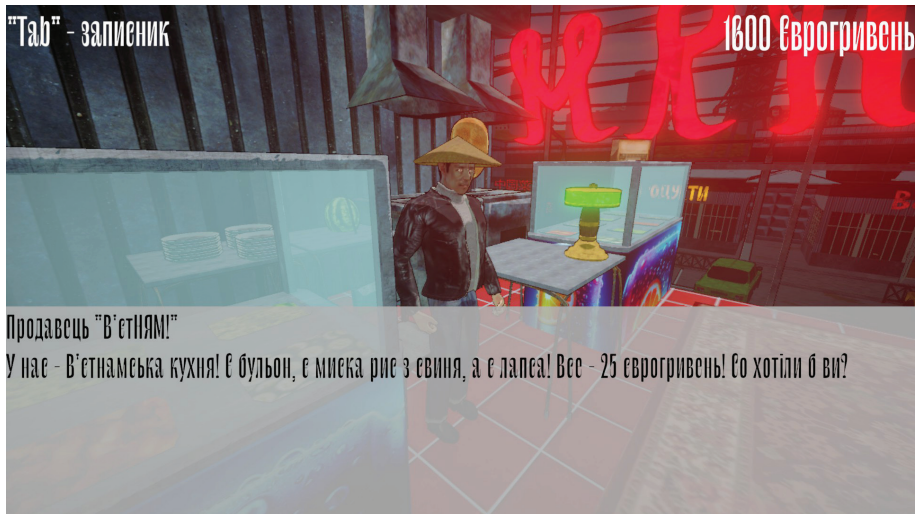


Figure 19. A Vietnamese food vendor in the video game *Baraban: Maister-torhash*.



Figure 20. Kolomyiv in the video game *CosmoOdyssey 2: Comeback to Origin*.



Figure 21. Bandits attacking the protagonist in the video game *Son of Perun Kharkiv*. Two types of enemies are present in the game: those armed with melee weapons and those with firearms.

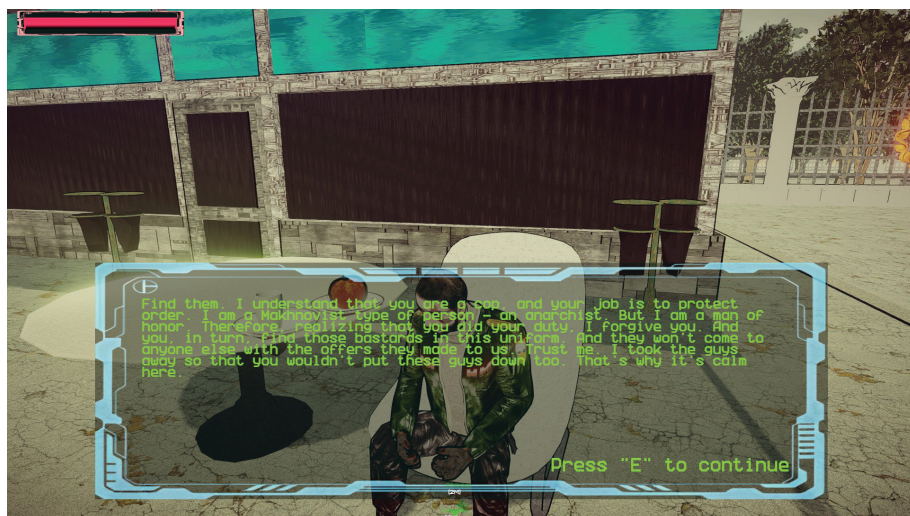


Figure 22. A dialogue with Ptaha, the leader of one of the gangs in the video game *Son of Perun Kharkiv*, in which he describes himself as an anarchist and a man of principle.

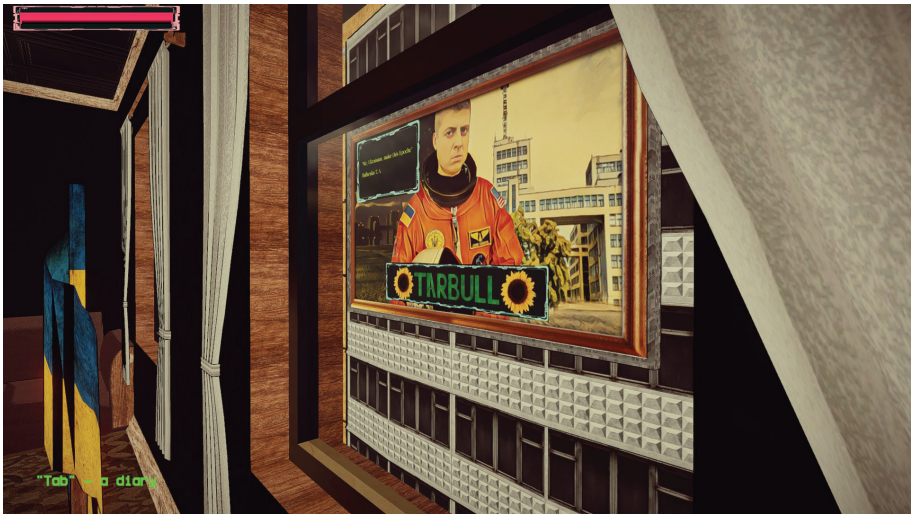


Figure 23. A billboard featuring Taras Bulbenko in the video game *Son of Perun Kharkiv*.



Figure 24. A dialogue with Taras Bulbenko in the video game *Son of Perun Kharkiv*, in which he explains the motives behind his actions.

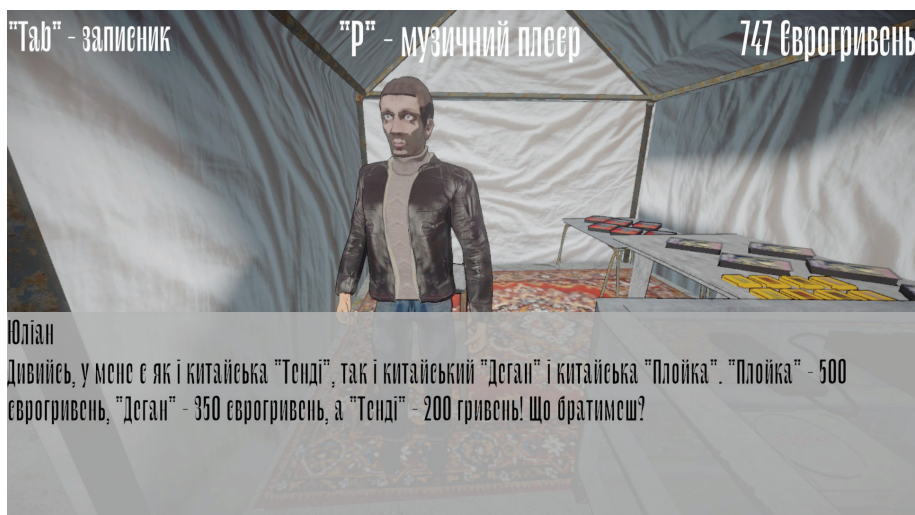


Figure 25. Julian, a merchant in the video game *Baraban: Maister-torhash*, who sells the hero a broken console.

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Образи України майбутнього в серії науково-фантастичних відеоігор «The Cosmoodysey World»

У статті простежено, як у відеоігровій серії «The Cosmoodysey World» української незалежної студії Brenntkopf Development конструюється образ України майбутнього. Матеріалом стали чотири гри 2022–2024 років: «КосмоОдісея: Подорож до Марсу», «КосмоОдісея 2: Повернення до витоків», «Son of Perun Kharkiv» і «Барабан: майстер-торгаш». Аналіз зосереджено на трьох групах образів: російсько-української війни, протагоністів та Іншого. Їх зіставлення дало змогу виявити спільну логіку серії та внутрішню динаміку уявлень про післявоєнне українське майбутнє.

Образ російсько-української війни в серії варіює за ступенем вираженості: від опосередкованої присутності до більш виразного введення в наратив, просторовий дизайн і текстові артефакти повоєнного світу. У першій грі війна окреслює загальний горизонт української перемоги, у наступних вона стає частиною міського простору, особистої пам'яті героя та політичної уяви про повоєнний порядок. Харків постає як відновлене місто, як один із центральних просторів майбутньої України.

Протагоністи серії пов'язані з Харковом, сімейною пам'яттю та повсякденністю. Майбутнє в цих іграх не відриває людину від національної та регіональної ідентичності, а переносить її в космос, еміграцію та технологічно трансформоване міське середовище. Образ Іншого водночас показує зсув від кооперативних і доброзичливих фігур до соціально диференційованого світу, де загроза дедалі більше походить від приватної влади та криміналізованих структур.

Відеоігрова серія постає як спроба уявити українське майбутнє після перемоги над російською експансією і водночас зберегти пам'ять про Харків та Україну в умовах війни.

Ключові слова: російська експансія, деколонізація, історична пам'ять, ідентичність, інформаційна доба, візуальні наративи, відеоігри, репрезентація, культурологічні проблеми, наукова фантастика, українська культура.

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Сфера наукових зацікавлень: відеоігри, відеоігрова індустрія, візуальна культура, наукова фантастика, горор.

Main research fields: video games, video game industry, visual culture, science fiction, horror.



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