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**ADVANCED 3D PRODUCTION**

**WITH NARRATIVE**

**KEVIN TAYLOR**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF**

**HUDDERSFIELD IN PARTIAL**

**FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR**

**THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF**

**ARTS BY RESEARCH IN**

**ADVANCED 3D PRODUCTION WITH NARRATIVE**

**SEPTEMBER 2013**

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## **Abstract**

In this thesis I will investigate methodologies pertinent to the development of a new intellectual property, consisting of a story world that has been created from a fictional organization of historic, religious, mythological and fictional characters and events that are bound together through syncretism to create a new timeline.

This timeline was developed using world building methodologies, through an investigation of successful world building writers insights. This new story world is created with the specific goal of engineering a world for accessibility to outside writers, creating a shared universe experience in the vein of Lovecraft's Cthuhlu mythos.

An animation will be produced that represents one such story, and will draw upon research into eastern and western cinematic ideology and methodology, with a focus on incorporating elements of horror from each. The psychology of character development, and the incorporation of psychological factors into the mise-en-scene, will be central points of the conveyance of narrative in the animation.

This thesis shows a clear distinction between east and western cinematic practices, incorporating these differences, and elements of Freud's narrative uncanny, into one piece of work in an act of creative consolidation.

This work is significant as a new standalone intellectual property, developed through the syncretism of Tolkien-esq world building, Lovecraftian shared universe writing, with its reinterpretation of religious and mythological story that underpins the animations narrative mise-en-scene.

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## **Introduction**

During this MA it is my intent to develop a new intellectual property that will consist of a developed story world, and an animation that will tell one tale from within that world. This world's canon will be constructed so as to allow for engagement by outside auteurs through shared universe writing, so as to allow for the base mythos to be expanded beyond its original envisioning, with each writer bringing their own auteurship to the world.

This thesis will be focused on the key components of this development process, beginning with the investigation of world building methodologies, through which the foundation for the story world can be firmly established. These methods will then be applied to ensure that the various different concepts can be successfully combined to create a cohesive world that appears much like our own, while believable containing elements of high fantasy.

The story told within the animation will be suggestive of the depth of the canon that has been constructed. It will not answer the questions posed by the story world, nor will it complete the narrative questions that it itself will raise. It will however employ elements to encourage engagement from outside writers.

The animation will build upon the exploration of eastern and western cinematic methodologies, which will be conveyed in the practical and philosophical approach to the delivery of the contents message.

This delivery will be reliant upon the exploration of Freud's uncanny in cinematic psychology in order to gain an understanding of the characters motivations so as to drive the stories narrative with semiotic representations of these states. Through these aesthetics and auditory decisions I will construct the animations mise-en-scene so as to depict the characters emotional and psychological decline through his waking nightmare.

## World Building

Ophidian is a story concept created in the vein of the Lovecraft mythos, in that it creates a suggestion of a much greater and unexplored world that can be investigated in many tales by many writers. 'Ophidian: Tales of the Underworld' provides the initial grounding in the Ophidian mythos, presenting key characters, mythology and conspiracies prominent within the tale. This provides the information that would be required on the many aspects of the supernatural and global state so as to form a narrative basis from which other tales can be told.

The illustrated book 'Ophidian: Tales of the Underworld' is strongly themed to the style of facts written by someone who has become unwittingly embroiled in this secret world, and found themselves unable to escape. This writer, 'McShane', is mentioned both in the book and the animation, linking the two and adding an additional level of depth to the animation. The animation itself is merely one small facet of the larger story, and as such, does not address or answer all of the points of interest that have been created.

The many fantastical elements that are vital to the story world created numerous challenges with regard to the desired presentation of the theme. It was vital in the forming of this IP that, despite the high fantasy nature of the supernatural concepts, the story world was able to engage the viewer from a point of potential realism.

"It is at any rate essential to a genuine fairy-story, as distinct from the employment of this form for lesser or debased purposes, that it should be presented as 'true.' ...But since the fairy-story deals with 'marvels,' it cannot tolerate any frame or machinery suggesting that the whole framework in which they occur is a figment or illusion." (Tolkien, J. 1939)

It was for this purpose, the creation of a 'genuine' and 'true' fictional world of marvels, that I engaged in a process of involved world building for Ophidian. This challenging aspect of Ophidian was also the most rewarding, creating a strong context for the story world, which felt both rich and consistent in its content. This provided a solid 'foundation for the action of [the] story' (Laramee, F. 2002) that was imperative in the establishing of the fictional world for an engaging and entertaining narrative.

The magnitude of incorporating all religious storytelling and ancient mythology into one timeline was not possible, but the story itself successfully established that it was this underworld of the otherworldly that has influenced the majority of human myth and religion. While not possible to explain every facet of this, some aspects are explored in detail across numerous areas, explaining how the fictional narrative has adversely affected the development of our cultures and civilisations throughout history.

The depth in which these elements have been developed, with complicated faction and character backgrounds (Taylor, K. 2012) and histories, was inspired by Tolkien's world building philosophy. Tolkien's belief that was the inspiration for much of the depth of the world building that Ophidian underwent, with his belief that the construction of a 'true' fairy-story will be far more 'powerful and poignant in its effect' upon the viewer.

This process of creating a believable fictional world, created via a merging of fact and fiction, required the application of established methodologies to ensure the processes structure. This process of world building took several months, with changes and advances to the world coming intermittently even after this aspect had been completed. In the style of Tolkien, I began with the application of the ‘outside-in’ or ‘top down’ technique (Cook, M. Tweet, J. Williams, S. 2003).

This style, which defines the larger components of the story world such as geography, inhabitants and history, was vital due to the tales vast syncretism. This syncretism saw facets of Christian, Muslim, Judaism and Arabic folklore joined into one cohesive timeline of events. From this point I was able to create a historical reinterpretation of events that united the many concepts, with additional fictional ties to ensure their cohesion.

Once this solid foundation had been constructed, with the firm establishing of a rich and ancient fictional history, I moved onto an alternate technique that would allow me to develop a timeline over a much larger period from 1000 BC until present day. George R. R. Martin, creator of the ‘Song of Fire and Ice’ series, believed that developing only visible areas of the concept that allowed the perception of a full world was all that was required for a seemingly deep and historic world. (Khanna, R. 2012)

With the successful establishing of a solid, believable story world, Martin’s ‘inside-out’ or ‘top down’ methodologies were then applied. This method was most successful in the development and incorporation of specific fictional events and timelines, which were then tied back into the main concept as fictional conspiracies and events to ensure the believability of the world and its timeline was not compromised. This allowed other areas to be fleshed out as was required in the later stages of the stories development, with some details left unexplored to allow for the act of shared universe writing.

This concept of collaborate writing was inspired by H. P. Lovecraft’s Cthulhu mythos. Lovecraft developed a deep and engaging world, with mysteries and otherworldly phenomenon explored over many different stories through various protagonists. Lovecraft’s protagonists were primarily educated individuals, whose insights into numerous questions of reality and morality acted as a conduit for many of his own beliefs and ideas as an auteur. (Lovecraft, H. 2010) The Ophidian world drew various inspirations, particularly from Stephen King, whose antagonists often present themselves in an array of psychological horrors. (King, S. 2009)

Kings ‘The Dark Tower’ series was seen to explore concepts of alternate realities, dimensions and demonic entities. While Kings novels take place in many times and dimensions, they are all subtly linked through the mention of the ‘Dark Tower’, with characters and imagery relating to this underlying story world appearing in each. In this way Kings acts to unify his tales, and add a deeper experience to his Dark Tower mythos. (King, S. 2003) This idea of a unifying theory has been incorporated into Ophidian through the mythos construction for shared universe writing. Kings conveyance of horror is conveyed through a series of disturbing or psychological means that were a inspiration for my own writing. This

inspiration also related to Lovecraft, who King himself states is the greatest horror writer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and an inspiration to his own work. (Wohleber, C. 1995)

Lovecrafts concept of 'cosmic indifferentism', in which the alien entities of the Cthulhu pantheon are actively indifferent towards the human race, was incorporated into my own tale with the development of the 'Undying'. (Taylor, K. 2012) The Undying are a species of otherworldly beings so far beyond the realm of human existence that their psychology cannot even be explored. Existing on a plane beyond that of the Djinn, they are completely corporeal and beyond concepts of time and space, able to materialise at will from the collective matter of the universe. This ability to exist beyond the Djinn's requirement for the hostile possession of the physical have given them mythological status to the Djinn, who perceive them as 'world eaters'. It is the Djinn prophecy of one Undying known as the Ophidian from which the mythos gains its title. The prophecy states that this entity will cast their gaze on the realms of man and Djinn, an act that will see both consumed by the Undying when 'cosmic indifference' is broken by some act that will draw its attention. The lowest faction of the Djinn known as the abominations seek to actively bring this consumption, ushering in an age of true chaos and torment. It is concepts such as these, touched on but never truly explored, that lay the groundwork for numerous additional tales that can be told within the shared universe of Ophidian.

This concept of storytelling through a shared universe is one that has been explored in numerous mediums. Comic books have long incorporated the stories of numerous writers into their worlds, with different comics telling a variety of different stories within the established canon for the same characters and settings. These differences are linked to the auteur-ship of their creators, through whom stories can take on different tones, and tackle different ideas, than may have been possible from the one creative source. This concept different auteurs bringing different visions to the table are clearly evidenced in films, with the cinematic director acting to unify the auteurs-ship of the different creative departments with his own vision for the cinematic experience.

Shared universe writing is not restricted to professional mediums however. A story universe can leave a profound impact upon the viewer, with the characters resonating with them to the extent that they are able to understand and write for the characters themselves. These individuals have been known to write whole stories for established universes, putting the stories characters into a range of situations and circumstances. This writing is known as 'fan-fiction', and there are numerous sites dedicated to such writing for a number of film, television and novel worlds. (fanfiction.net)

This fan response can also be a part of various movements to continue, or re-establish, discontinued stories and series, picking up on the threads of an established story world that were never able to be elaborated on in the official medium. Firefly, the 2002 TV series by Joss Whedon, received a substantial amount of fan support and interest after the series was cancelled by its network after one season. Forming a group known as the 'brown-coats' in reference to a group from within the story world, this collective of fans organised engaged in a number of actions including fundraising and petitioning in order to see their beloved story

world continued. Fan-fiction, while not the primary aim of the movement, was an outlet for the fans to personally see their desires for a continued story made manifest. (www.browncoats.com)

## **Eastern and Western storytelling**

The Ophidian mythos dates back prior to 1000 BC, with a fictional reinterpretation of the events that led up to the establishing of Solomons Kingdom. (Taylor, K 2012). The historical nature of these events, and grounding of much the story's history in what is now known as the Middle East, was always to be conveyed in a style that combined both eastern and western cinematic methodologies. Christopher Vogler's '12 steps' of the Heroes Journey, which is at the core of Hollywood script writing, was to provide a foundation for the stories development, with the incorporation of Jungian archetypes for characters. (Vogler, C. 2007) The depiction of the story itself would incorporate aspects of eastern cinema and storytelling.

The emotional reach of the WW2 atomic bombings, the subsequent status of Japan as a protectorate of America and the rising tensions between China and Japan, have long affected the Japanese. Those recovering from such a social trauma can effects such as 'depression, anger' and 'hostility' (Ewart, C. 2002. pg. 254-262). These are a few effects of 'perceived neighbourhood disorder', and become increasingly prevalent in the minds of those who have survived or live with an 'exposure to violence' that is a dominant force in their conscious minds.

Prior to the war, the Japanese people had maintained a strong sense of a national image that was dashed with the bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, and the subsequent loss of the war (Perez, L. 2013, pg 515). Kurasawa's filmmaking aided in the re-envisioning of the social mind of Japan, giving the populous a new direction that would aid in the rebuilding of a new national image. These films "sustained the people [with Kurasawa's] consistent assertion that the meaning of life is not dictated by the nation but by something each individual should discover for himself through suffering." This suffering is suggestive of the strength an individual gains from adversity, with Kurasawa's films allowing the people to rise from Japans wartime failure with a new sense of 'self' and 'individualism' beyond the confines of unified nationalism.

It is in this way that cinema, in the same vein as mythology and folklore, provide a moral basis for our own personal growth, spurring individuals into positive action. Films often convey a drastic change of fortunes, in which the protagonist succumb to some tragedy or adversity that removes them from the 'ordinary world', pushing them to a 'point of no return' (Vogler, C. 2007) that puts them at a point of clear decision making between succumbing to the problem or rising above it through action. These concepts are similar to Aristotles ideas of the 'reversal', a concept that remains as active within storytelling in cinema today as it was in ancient Greece. This reversal saw an ordinary man succumbing to an undeserved fate, which he would rise to overcome, after which he had grown and developed into a better individual. (Smithson, I. 1983, pg. 3-17) Such a concept is perhaps best defined by Nietzsche's statement "From life's school of war: what does not kill me makes me stronger" (Nietzsche, F. 1888)

While this idea of adversity and growth, particularly through conflict, is not new, the destructive power of the A-bomb could potentially deliver a greatly exacerbated incarnation of this effect upon the psychological blow to the Japanese mind. Kurasawa's work helped to rebuild the Japanese psyche to the point where the populous could begin recovering from the

war, but the psychology of conflict left a profound imprint on the social psyche that went largely unrecognised in the social conscious, but was expressed through the creative media of film.

While not having suffered such grievous trauma personally, the sense of auteurship that Kurasawa expresses provided a strong goal for the delivery of messages and concepts that I felt were important, regarding perception and reality within Ophidian. The timeless international nature of the project is meant to encapsulate how different cultures and individuals are able to perceive acts, both historically and through the media. This global reach of the tale, beginning strongly in the east and growing in the west, also lends itself to the incorporation of cinematic methodologies from these two distinct cultures in the presentation of my own work.

This difference in social mindset of Eastern cinema bears “a relationship to its society [similar] to that of American horror in post-Vietnam 1970s’. (Powell, A, 2005). A good example of this is J-Horror, the horror cinema movement of Japan, which has gained increasing international recognition over recent decades. This has led to numerous remakes of J-Horror films in the west, in an attempt to capitalise on the reputation of these films. These remakes largely fall short of the originals however, with the western mindset seeing reinterpretations losing their social context. This reinterpretation sees “the slow-burn pacing of the Asian originals is sharply ramped up, combined with an increase in the number of scare-jolts administered to the audience, while the low-fi special effects of the originals are usually replaced with CGI-enhanced spookery.” (Richards, A. 2010 pg. 105) The western inability to grasp this eastern concept of horror is evidenced in the dwindling success of Asian IPs that are remade in the west. One example of this would be the Silent Hill series. Silent Hill 2, developed by Team Silent at Konami Computer Entertainment Tokyo, was presented as “a study in surrealism and eerie, psychological fright” that is commonplace in Asian horror. The slow pace, and conveyance of unsettling themes created a strong horror experience, “drawing players in” with its subtle use of “atmosphere, unsettling environments, and unstable characters” (Perry, D. 2001). The game was well received internationally, and has subsequently influence numerous cinematic remakes with varying degrees of success. Silent Hill: Downpour, the 8<sup>th</sup> game in the series was produced by Czech developer Varta Games in 2012. This western company took many of the surface elements of the franchises enemies and locations, but packaged them into a different experience altogether, with a focus on “focus on action and combat” (Hooper, S. 2012) as has been seen to be common in western horror. This, as well as other issues with design and technical direction, saw the game poorly received as another western remake of an IP that was an eastern classic.

It is this desire in western cinema to administer blatant horror scenes and narrative to the audience that removes the essence of what makes the J-Horror movement so internationally successful. This blatancy may be to allow for a perceived universal appeal and understanding of the films, with many of the unsettling, psychological aspects explained to the point that all sense of the uncanny is lost. “..Asian horror films are content to leave certain mysteries unexplained, or for the narratives and character motivations to retain a core of ambiguity, the remakes tend to add layers of exposition that attempt to rationalise - and thereby contain -

their supernatural stories.” (Richards, A. pg 105) A sense of the unsettling is seen in a variety of Asian horror films, taking the form of the ghostly visage of some innocent child or girl, who themselves are often victims of some wrongdoing returned to seek vengeance. (*‘Ring’* 1998) The social context of these wronged innocents presents a strong idea of the weak, helpless or oppressed who have gone mistreated with no advocate to offer vindication. The Chinese government in particular is a prime candidate for these issues, and are known for ‘oppressing its people’, particularly with concerns to artistic expression which is often deemed a danger to the state. (ABC News Beijing Bureau, 2012)

“Fantasy, time-travel, random compilations of mythical stories, bizarre subplots.. propagating feudal superstitions, fatalism, reincarnation, ambiguous moral lessons and a lack of positive thinking” are just some of the areas that have been tarred with ‘strong disapproval’ by China’s state Administration of Radio, Film and Television guidelines. Professor Wu Yun, a lecturer at Beijing Normal University, feels that time-travel in particular is a risky subject due to its ‘exploring an unpredictable future’ due to the ‘depicting of a future society also required anticipating changes in social structures, which forces writers to confront politics’. Writing that suggests a new course of history could be seen as revolutionary, and could act as a catalyst for a new government or negative thoughts towards the current government. It is clear that not only does the Chinese government accept the power that narrative can hold on the moral direction of a country, but they seek to ensure that no concepts that would threaten the people’s loyalty to their government are not allowed any footing. (Zhang, Z. 2012)

Ophidian will encapsulate both eastern and western philosophes, with the ethereal projections of both the Djinn and McShane cultivating the different psychological approaches to each. The requirement of ambiguity and subtlety were developed during the core scenes of the animation, through the pursuit and subjugation of McShane. These ominous scenes encounter the more western horror later, with a grotesque Djinn occupying a human form. While the Djinn itself is revealed, its intentions remain veiled through its archaic language, through which we can glean only a small amount about a mysterious prophecy. These elements are explained in some detail within the accompanying illustrated book (Taylor, K. 2012) to ensure that the high degree of fantasy maintains aspects of ‘truth’ and believability, these details are omitted from the animation to ensure that eastern ambiguity remains throughout. This ambiguity was also incorporated into the animation’s finale, in which the ending events remain open and uncertain.

## **The Narrative**

Through auteur theory I directed my work to convey a strong sense of my own message and vision for the project. The magnitude of technical and creative work required prolonged periods of intense work and isolation, managing the projects research and development to maximise the potential outcome. Much as method actors may alter their life prior to shooting in order to gain an understanding of their subject matter, I felt that these alterations to my own life could only enhance the overall flavour of the work.

Unconscious expression is created in much the same way as mythology, as a means of expressing our innermost fears of the world at large. These myths once offered the only available answers to the meaning of life and death, and added understandable, human elements to the unperceivable sciences of the worlds functions. While many have set aside these beliefs, they remain a large part of many cultural heritages whose effects remain even in evolved minds. “As soon as something actually happens in our lives which seems to confirm the old, discarded beliefs, we get a sense of the uncanny” (Freud, S. 1919). This sense of the uncanny is the foundation for superstition, and it is this amalgamation of the rational and irrational minds that breeds apocalyptic beliefs into the modern mentality. This sense that there is an impending cataclysm that will come in the form of an astrological event or man-made, zombie breeding virus is a regurgitation of ancient superstition repackaged into a modern guise. Of 16,262 polled, “one in seven thinks the end of the world is coming” within their own lifetime (Michaud, C 2012). This fact suggests that the mindset for apocalyptic belief still exists quite strongly in the world today, with religion and superstition still a strong component of the international mind, and with the incorporation of scientific fears acting adding reason to the argument as opposed to dispelling the concept.

This belief in the timely demise of our civilisation has culminated in a morbid fascination with apocalyptic macabre. This interest is fed by a steady stream of apocalyptic blockbusters, and TV series like ‘The Walking Dead’, which premiered to a record number of viewers on its network. Horror, and myth, both feed and sate this generational interest. The Ophidian mythos will encompass the often macabre ancient mythology, modern conspiracy and my own fiction to create a new saga that rejuvenates ancient apocalyptic tales for the modern palate. (SkyNews, 2013)

While ‘Ophidian: Tales of the Underworld’ spans many ages of myth and conspiracy, the animation focuses on one story, told from three perspectives. The narrator, Kira and McShane.

McShane, the pursued man within the animated film, is a representation of the quintessential conspiracist as viewed by the general population. Conspiracy theorists are perceived as ‘lunatics’, ‘kooks’ and ‘paranoiacs’, with their beliefs regarded as ‘deficiency’ or ‘dysfunction’. (Byford, J. 2012) As explored, the term conspiracy is one that been warped by

the media through negative propaganda. This perception of conspiracists commonly leads to links into illness, or issues of interpersonal problems.

This perceived link between conspiracy and illness then also lends itself to a perception of irrationality and potential aggression. “The greatest fallacy of mental illness purported by the film industry is that there is a direct link between mental illness and violence.” (Kondo, N 2008) It is such links that aid in the rendering of conspiracists as a outsider group with little regard for tangible, proven fact. The animation utilises this preconception, packaging McShane into an unkempt visage of a man who is both homeless and of questionable mental state. In this way McShane appears as an unlikely ‘damsel in distress’, forcing the audience to find it harder to sympathise with his plight. This fact, and his appearance as an erratic individual ‘spouting’ about an unseen evil, is an attempt to encapsulate the perceived idea of the conspiracy theorist in one character.

Within Ophidian, the possession of McShane is an amalgamation of theories, with the religious aspect of possession meeting the mythological duality of host and subversive entity. McShane, having been hounded to the point of madness, had surrendered his freedom willingly in an attempt to find a moment of solace from his torment. It was this act of submission that allows the demon passage into his body, taking hold and resigning McShane to be a prisoner within himself. A puppet to the dark will of the twisted and formless Djinn. This journey of a man through terror and madness into fear is one extracted facet of the layered Ophidian mythology. The mise-en-scene of the scenes in the animation were constructed to facilitate a visual representation of McShane’s journey. The aesthetics tell us about his inner mental and emotional journey ‘down the rabbit hole’ from the ‘ordinary world’ into the ‘ordeal’ of the Ophidian story (Vogler, C. 2007). This visual journey is arranged to say more about the character than his dialogue.

There are a large number of different conspiratorial and ‘supernatural’ elements within the Ophidian mythology. Each aspect has undergone rigorous research and development in the quest to ensure that the world remained rich and wondrous, while still tangible and relatable.

The Djinn act as the primary antagonists of the tale, and of the animation itself. They are one of the most crucial aspect in both the book and animation as, without them, the story would lack the dark driving force that drives both narratives forward. The Djinn draw upon the theme of a concealed monster living within a human form, which is one that has been explored time and time again in literature and mythology. The most famous rendition would likely be Robert Stevenson’s Dr. Jeckle and Mr. Hyde (Stevenson, R.L. 1886), with parallels between the subversive force of Mr Hyde who fought to dominate Dr. Jeckle, and the Djinns aggressive subjugation of the hosts will prior to possession.

Mythology and fantasy are rife with similar themes of the duality of one’s own nature. Certain aspects of religious thought categorise such unions as possession, an outside entity subduing the human host. Within the mythography and mythos developed for Ophidian it is seen as an infestation, or a subversion of ones own goodness. Both are explorations of our own motivations and selves, in an attempt to better understand the darkness that lies within

each of us. In the animation, the viewing of McShanes flight and eventual possession is the enactment of one such typical case. The disembodied Djinn, more akin to a demon or spirit in the western world, are often seen as shadows or shades from which Jung drew the ‘shadow archetype’, which is an embodiment of characteristic evil. (Jung, C 1935)

The psychological aspects of Jung’s ‘Shadow’ archetype are applied to the Djinn on numerous levels. The shadow archetype refers to the inner shadow within us, one of many archetypes that we all possess, manifesting at different times. His explanation that the Shadow is an element of ourselves that we must acknowledge, while remain moral to ensure we never succumb to it, was taken as a literal interpretation for the Ophidian Djinn. This works well within the established mythology of the Ophidian word, with the restraint demanding “considerable moral effort” to prevent “a descent into that darkness” that McShane is seen to suffer through in the animation. (Jung, C. 1935). Vogler’s interpretation of the archetype for narrative also remain true in this case, with the Shadow acting as the main antagonist in the story, and “are usually dedicated to the death, destruction or defeat of the hero”. (Vogler, C. 2007) To Vogler the shadow represents the ‘unrealised’ or ‘rejected aspects’ of something, which to me resonated with the psychological yearning felt by the Ophidian Djinn to be real, or born, into this world of the physical that they so savagely envy.

The Djinn themselves are an approximation of those mentioned the Quran, and Arabic folklore. The clear parallels between the Qurans ‘Djinn’, and the Bibles ‘Demons’ are evident down to many fine points, such as their expulsion from paradise for not bowing down to mankind, Gods/Allah’s finest creation. (Quran.com) These creatures, seen as a third species created by god after Angel and Man, and were said to exist on a plane separate from human kind, but close enough to see and occasionally interact with them. The mythological evolution of these "ignorant, untruthful, oppressive and treacherous" (Kallamullah.com) creatures would evolve into the depictions of evil and demons as perceived currently by the Eastern and Western religions. The depiction of these creatures was altered somewhat for Ophidian. This was due to the sceptical nature of much of the modern world, and the desire to create more of a sense of the uncanny in the realistic representation of supernatural beings. While the many elements of the Ophidian mythos underwent this process of alteration, the Djinn were particularly important due to the desire to possess a strong hold on their otherworldly mentality and motivations.

Within my development of the Djinn for the Ophidian mythos I engaged in numerous studies, including investigations into the methodologies of psychologist Harry Harlow. Harlow engaged in research based around the Rhesus monkeys during the 1930s, which was instrumental in the development of human depression models. This research acted as the foundation for the Djinn’s psychology. Harlow’s use of such techniques as ‘the well of despair’, in which he isolated baby monkey for two years from birth, acted as a ‘psychological road map’ for the mind of these disembodied creatures (Harlow, H. 1965). Upon return to the population, the monkeys suffered from severe psychological issues ranging from social disordered to suicidal aggression, due to their inability to understand normal social functions. The Djinn of Ophidian suffer from a greatly exacerbated version of this condition. The timeless nature of their existence acted to exacerbate these findings, with

the feelings of aggression and rage building to fever point. This desire for a corporeal existence creates an envy and loathing of all things physical, in which way the Djinn demonise that which they themselves so truly desire. In this way, much like how the Rhesus monkeys acted once released from their cruel incarceration back into the populace, the Djinn find that attaining the freedom that they desired only underlines their own dysfunction. Those able to break through the veil into the human world, and subjugate a host, then suffer from the duality of both loving and loathing themselves and their host, which would in turn push the Djinn to attack individuals in an attempt to subdue their own desire to be physical.

This exploration and extrapolation of the Djinn's mental state allowed me a much greater understanding of their psychology than would have been possible with a simple application of Vogler's 'shadow' archetype. This was incorporated into scientific aspects of alternate realities, including Joseph Polchinski's superstring theories and fifth dimensional states of being, before a full understanding of the species place within the tale could be achieved. While detailed, this process was deemed necessary due to the pivotal role that the Djinn play in the Ophidian mythology in its entirety.

These, as well as similar development of other characters and factions, allowed for the creation of the mythological world of the Ophidian. With one aspect understood, it was then incorporated into the larger world, the new understanding of the elements sending ripples of change through the story before it settled into its improved state. These ripples acted to unify the three lines of history, mythology and my own fiction into one cohesive storyline.

### **The Animation: Mise-en-scene and the uncanny**

The animation itself is the depiction of one tale from within the larger story world of Ophidian. From the first scene, I felt it important to convey that the animation was only one component of the tale, with the vast library of the opening scene being a visual representation of this.

The viewer's passage into the book is reminiscent of the nature of Mulvey's studies into past and present cinema. Mulvey differentiates that a 'Film's original moment of registration can suddenly burst through its narrative time...[t]he now-ness of story time gives way to the then-ness of the time when the movie was made and its images take on social, cultural or historical significance, reaching out into its surrounding world' (Mulvey, L 2006)

Further application of Mulvey's theories included a reinterpretation of her concepts regarding Hitchcock's misogynistic view of women. "*Psycho* [is] a film which punishes audiences for their illicit voyeuristic desires...they ignore the fact that within the film not only are women objects of the male gaze, they are also recipients of most of the punishment." (Mulvey, L 1975) In Ophidian, the balance of this concept of voyeuristic aggression from man to woman is maintained. The exception is that the Djinn take the place of the aggressor, while the object of the punishment is now a man. In this way it is not only the strength of women that is marginalised, but of humanity in the wake of the Djinn's aggression.

The opening scenes are slowly paced so as to build up the anticipation of the beginning of the animation. The library itself is seen in stark shadow, revealing only a classical structure to its design that suggests age and value. The library is still to the point of timelessness. The brief glimpse over the outside world reveals a city situated far below, through a haze of blue suggesting great distance. These elements would render the library raised to an extremely high degree. This is representative of the mythology that surrounds the gods, both old and current, with the idea that they reside physically above us amidst the clouds. This image subtly suggests that the library is a manifestation of something greater than it is perceived. The arrangement of books of all shapes and sizes suggest the many stories that these shelves hold, each a look into the life of some character whose story will not be seen, making up the mythos of the Ophidian world. In this way the library is an interpretation of the concept of the old gods and their interactions with, and observations of, mankind. (Jason and the Argonauts, 1973)

The book of the Ophidian displays the story world as a still image on the page, which is clearly old and worn. The camera's passage into the book is a passage back through time, in which one aspect of the story from the book is told. In this way the tale is representative of the mind's narrative journey into a story world, in which we conjure the story from our own minds, using memories and associations that we can understand and relate to in order to create a mental picture of the tale. The timeless nature of the library also reinforces the idea

of the book being prophetic, which is suggested with the presence of Kiras visions of the past, as well as the Djinn's speech regarding fated events.



*Kevin Taylors 'Ophidian: Tales of the Underworld', 2012*

The next scenes introduce the McShane character, requiring a very different set of artistic rules to create the desired narrative aesthetics. It was here that I applied my research of the concepts of the 'uncanny'.

The uncanny is a common element of horror and mythology. Freud was the first, but not the last, to truly investigate its relevance in the perceptions of the human mind. The uncanny is not some indescribable quantity, perceived as wholly alien to our minds. Instead it is quite the opposite. The uncanny draws on elements of the familiar and recognisable, distorted or altered in some way so as to make them chilling or unsettling. The uncanny "derives.. from something strangely familiar which defeats our efforts to separate ourselves from it" (Morris, D. 1994 pg. 225-259). He feels that our 'animal' mind find meanings of the 'uncanny' and the 'magical' within the ordinary and mundane due to our minds tendency to incorrectly rationalize them. Rather than attempting logical investigation, our minds simply label them as uncanny in a process of 'repression' of that which we do not immediately understand.

Ophidian used this concept directly, conveying the story of the McShane character within the animation in such a way as to allow for the ease of rationalisation before infusing the

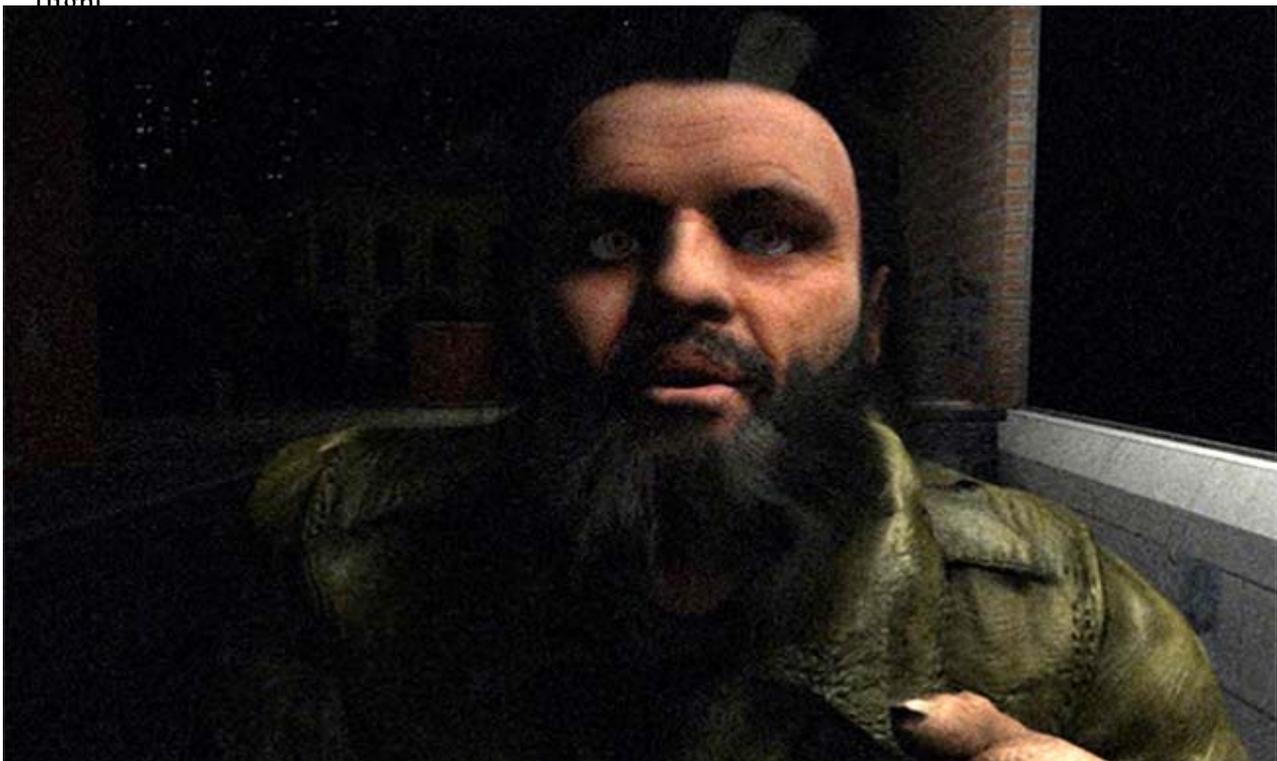
uncanny into the narrative. The character is depicted as a social outsider, degenerate and unstable personality, with whom polite society would have little to no time. The aspect of the uncanny is in the presentation of the tale as a believable narrative, with the illustrated story book pointing to aspects of science, history and proven conspiracy to suggest a way in which these events could be real within our current world.

The animation relies quite heavily on mise-en-scène to convey the deeper aspects of narrative. This, coupled with Freud's idea of the uncanny, were vital tools of the conveyance of the narrative aesthetic.

The need to create a sense of the uncanny within the animation is most prominent during the scenes in which we first see the McShane character. Freud felt that the line between the real and unreal was one that could be quantified and used within narrative to great effect. He felt that the conveyance of a clear message was a negative when attempting to create a strong sense of the uncanny. The misleading of the viewer, and presentation of different concepts that led the mind before being shifted again, prevented the viewer from gaining too strong a grasp on the nature of the scene so that the truth of the story eluded them. This was used “..in such a way that his (the viewers) attention is not focussed directly upon his uncertainty, so that he may not be led to go into the matter and clear it up immediately” (Freud, S 1919).

This sense of uncertainty was vital to gaining the correct mood with these scenes. The sense of the ambiguity of narrative, established in the vagueness of the actual pursuit of McShane, allowed the viewer to remain off balance and questioning the events that were unfolding.

In the first scene of the McShane pursuit, the camera initially suggests that it is the eyes of the pursuer through its fluid swooping motion, akin to the trajectory a bird of prey may take during a hunt. His fearful looks over his shoulder as the enemy is felt to be closing in, accentuates this sense of the chase, his breathlessness conveying the urgency of his imminent flight



*Kevin Taylors 'Ophidian: Tales of the Underworld', 2012*

The camera then takes a voyeuristic viewpoint, first from the alleyway that McShane passes, then shot within the empty café, in which the camera follows McShane as though through a set of watchful eyes as he falls and runs in panic. These scenes, akin to Hitchcocks moving the viewer into the killers eyes, move the viewer into the eyes of something unknown and potentially malevolent in its gaze.

The following shot, dropping from above to a close up of McShane, reveals that there is no assailant physically chasing him. This gives rise to the idea that the chase is in his mind, a concept that is fed through McShane's fearful pondering of his next move in the street, attempt to capitalise on Freud's Narrative uncanny.

The night-time streets seen during this phase of the animation were direct recreations of an area in Liverpool's city centre, in which violence and danger are not completely uncommon. These areas were further degenerated through a damaging of the street, the boarding of windows and the application of excess amounts of litter. In this way, the street encapsulates the altered frame of mind that McShane finds him in, where the dangers of the world are exacerbated by his mental state. This was further enhanced by the scene being at night, creating dark and ominous shadows, which even the street lights seem unable to penetrate. These visuals, working in conjunction with the scenes audio, were used to create an 'affective contamination' of the cognitive processes to create 'disgust' which can lead to a 'fear response'. (Cisler JM, Adams TG, Brady RE, Bridges AJ, Lohr JM, Olatunji, 2010)

Seeking solace from his nightmare, McShane runs for the illumination of an apartment buildings glass doorway. The glass, despite the state of the street, is clean to the point of invisibility. Only signs stating 'no smoking' can be seen upon its surface. This glass is an indicator of the invisible social barrier that will forever be between McShane and the civilised world of society, as is the door that he unsuccessfully attempts to open.

Through the glass doorway we see the room beyond has numerous communal boards, suggesting safety in the confines of the community. His pressing of the intercom, and pleas for entry to escape from his assailant, go unanswered. I had initially intended for a voice to threaten and ward off McShane over the intercom, but I felt that silence was more suggestive of the turned ear or blind eye that is often cast over the destitute. McShane weakly attempts to force his way in, banging on the glass with what little energy he has left, in a show of his final push for freedom before his will is broken.

McShane's voice, created by myself, was produced over a day of script readings. It required my tapping into the sense of desperate urgency that McShane was feeling, his pleas encapsulating the suffering that McShane had undergone in every moment leading up to the animation.



*Kevin Taylor's 'Ophidian: Tales of the Underworld', 2012*

The camera can be seen to then shift to a perspective on the other side of the glass, looking out towards McShane. The bright lights inside the apartment's hall reflect off the glass, creating a solid reflection of the interior that completely hides the dark street outside. This is an attempt to show how McShane's plight has gone unnoticed and uncared for from those within society. The camera moves further into the reflection, only receding once it is atop it, to show McShane leaning heavily upon the window. His will has broken, and he utters one last "please" before he psychologically surrenders to his fate.

For the first time the viewer is able to hear the voices of the Djinn that have been haunting McShane. This gives rise to the plausibility of his situation. That he is, in fact, being pursued. This sense of narrative ambiguity is increased when we see McShane's face warp for a moment, depicted in such a way as to be reminiscent of Francis Bacon's 'Three studies for a portrait of Lucian Freud' (Bacon, F. 1995). This causes the viewer to further question McShane's situation, taking advantage of Freud's concept of the uncanny in narrative. Freud felt that "In telling a story, one of the most successful devices for easily creating the uncanny

effects is to leave the reader in uncertainty whether a particular figure in the story is a human being or an automaton". (Freud, S. 1919) In this regard, McShane's humanity itself now comes into question with the distortion of his face. Rather than leaving the viewer to ponder this fact McShane is seen to turn, as though the presence has manifested to his side, before he flees. The camera shifts to another voyeuristic view of McShane, but this time it is angry, red and distorted, and the chase has taken an aggressive turn with the shouts of the Djinn as it chases McShane. The redness of the scene, indicating danger, with the bulging and flowing of the camera suggesting that the pursuer is otherworldly and inhuman.



*Francis Bacon 'Three studies for a portrait of Lucian Freud' (discovered) 1995*

The voice of the Djinn was created last in the sequence, and played off the hoarse, sore throat that I developed after a day of voice over work. The voice as it is heard in McShane's head is a culmination of numerous different sections of speech recorded for the Djinn, who speak in archaisms. Each line of speech was from a different old world language, including Latin, Greek, Arabic and Turkish. In each language the Djinn asks McShane to submit, stating that his soul belongs to the Djinn, and that it intended to tear it apart. Test screenings returned the result that, while finding the voices scary, the inability to understand what they were saying detracted from the power of McShane's fear. This culminated in the incorporation of an English line of dialogue, during which the Djinn declares to McShane that his soul belongs to the Djinn to clarify its intentions.



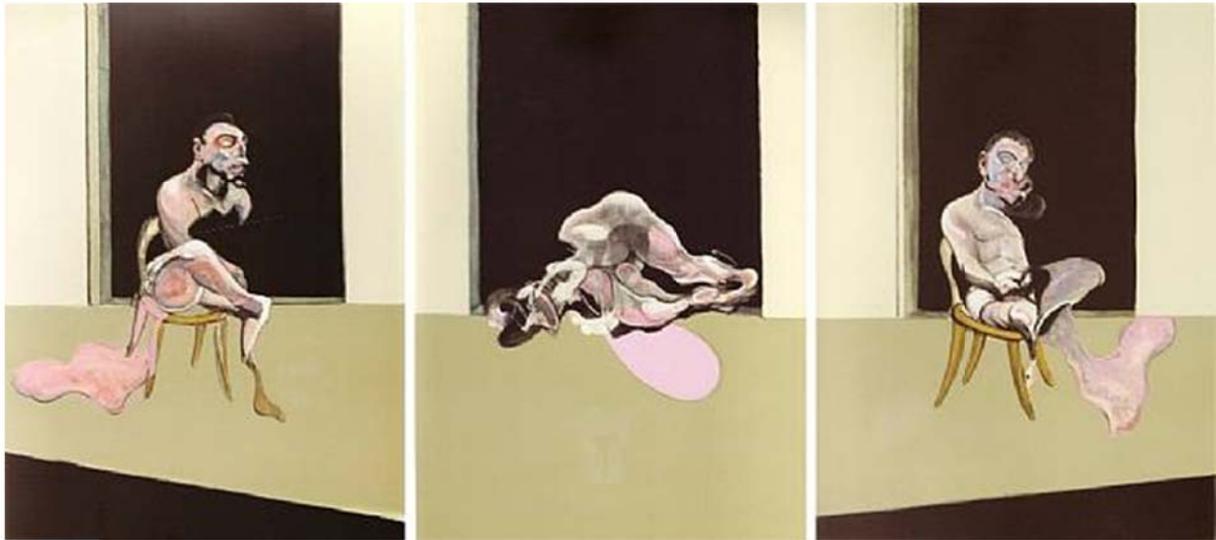
*Kevin Taylors 'Ophidian: Tales of the Underworld', 2012*

The next scenes document the approach of the Kira character into the building within which McShane was seen to flee. Within the final room, Kira is viewed from above the damage in the ceiling. The wooden slats in the roof compartment above the light appear as bars, suggesting that Kira has entered the metaphorical prison in which McShane resides. This sense of captivity is continued as we see McShane for the first time outside of Kira's vision. His back is to the camera as he stares longingly out of the window, suggestive of his yearning for freedom. His back turned, this stare takes on a sense of foreboding, with the viewer returning to the previous questions of McShane's nature. He turns, questioning the reality of Kira's presence, as he had long given up on someone coming to his aid. It is only here that Kira speaks, stating that she hasn't fallen for the Djinn's scheme, and is aware of his true nature. The Djinn attempts to continue the charade, but soon succumbs to its own maniacal nature, beginning to release its forced appearance, and reverting back to its current form.



*Kevin Taylor's 'Ophidian: Tales of the Underworld', 2012*

This style of transformation itself is an homage to the late Francis Bacon, with the body of the McShane character undergoing a set of visual deformations similar to those seen in 'Triptych' (Bacon, F. 1972). His motion is reminiscent of a fairgrounds laughing clown figure, which is both jolly, and unnerving at the same time due to its own uncanny nature. This transformation is interspersed with the image of a monstrosity forming in and behind the figure. The Djinn's appearance becomes increasingly prominent until the McShane figure is gone altogether.



*Francis Bacons 'Triptarch' from 1972*

The demonic visage that stands before Kira is the true form of the gestalt entity of the Djinn and the McShane host, as explained in the narrative section. The creatures towering, malignant form is viewed first from the back, showing hideous goat legs akin to Eliphaz Levis 'Baphomet' (Levi, E. 1856). This is suggestive of the creatures' demonic nature. Its skin texture is made up of images from tumours, infection and rotten flesh, representing the creatures state of being both alive and dead at the same time, with it's evil warping its form like a cancerous growth. The glowing embers that appear to be burning through the skin represent hell, and damnation, further establishing the creatures' visual connection with the demonic. The creature can be seen to have burns across much of its head and neck, an example of the conflict that exists with its own nature, its demonic aspects at odds with its place within the human form in which it sits uncomfortably. The placement of surgical staples across the tear in its head, beneath which can be seen more burning, show that the creature attempts to keep its physical body as human as it is able. This fact ties into the nature of the creatures desire to both possess and destroy the mortal aspects of its new host self. Its attempts to repair the dwindling form are indicative of its own fear of losing its newly gained mortal form, to which it remains too weak to maintain; forced to hide its corrupt body behind 'the veil' (Taylor, K. 2012) This ability, described within 'Ophidian: Tales of the Underworld' was developed in a philosophical and physics senses. The philosophical points to the inability of a being on a dimension below one that is present to be able to coherently comprehend the state of being that is so far beyond their own. (Abbott, E. 1992). Superstring theory, and musings regarding fifth dimensional science and potential states of being were developed for the Djinn background, with aspects of this study relating to perception being developed further as a ability to conceal themselves within a visage of their hosts form prior to their subjugation. (Polchinski, J. 2005)



*Kevin Taylors 'Ophidian: Tales of the Underworld', 2012*

The Djinn speaks with a voice that emanates from within as opposed to being spoken. The movement of the jaw is merely attached to the physical memory that it occupies regarding speech. The Djinn's voice is a culmination of anger and wisdom, with its rasping tones suggestive of a mythical angry ghost. Its speech patterns convey a sense of timelessness, with its wording being both poetic and prophetic. Kira, deciphering the creature's meaning, understands that she has fallen into a trap, at which point the camera moves into the hall to reveal three beings approaching. The camera moves to impact with one of the creatures, whose eyes can be seen to glow red as a ripple of distortion crosses its face. The Djinn can be seen to raise itself to its full height, showing that its hand has been dealt, and it is far more lethal than had been anticipated.

It is at this point that the image returns to that of a book's page, showing that this chapter of the tale is over. The final scene was purposely left on such an ominously dangerous point to encourage a desire to see a resolution over the cliff-hanger, to discern the fates of Kira, the Djinn and McShane that was left in ambiguity.

## **The Music**

The music chosen for the animation were from Akira Yamaoka's Silent Hill 2 (game) soundtrack. Yamaoka's approach to audio as an extension of the narrative, as opposed to a scene by scene accompaniment, suited my own ambitions for the audio. Yamaoka states that "Sound is very close to stimulating the emotions in your brain", feeling that this immediate connection pushed sound to the forefront of the emotional response scale, over visual stimulus (Yamaoka, A. 2010).

His concepts on the pacing, and what would generally be considered a 'misuse' of audio through a disjointing of sound from the visuals, were also valuable. "If a sound precedes a visual cue, it can cause anxiety" This disjointing of audio from visuals was also used during the Djinn's speech, in which his emanating voice lacks correlation with the creatures bobbing jawline. While effective, this disjointing effect remained most clearly successful in the music itself, impacting strongly on the sense of anxiety created by each scene.

Within the animation, Yamaoka's principles were also applied to the removal of the sound effects layer, with all footfalls, breathing and environmental ambience being extracted. "When there's no sound, your brain fills in the gap".

The track used during the opening sequence, Abandoned Streets (Konami, 2010), conjured a sense of loss and loneliness. The distant tolling of the bell amidst the tones of distorted warbling created an auditory image of a vast, murky sea covered in a bank of fog. This image of potential danger, and risk of drowning, suited the tales beginnings, in which danger was a perceived undertone yet to be realised.

The transition into the vision of McShane was accompanied by a track called 'Tension - Blue Creek Apartment Theme #2' (Konami, 2010). This track had a very unsettling feel, with disjointed sounds accompanying a constant heartbeat. The sound of a heart beat is considered

unsettling to some, linked with the condition of Cardiophobia. Alone the sound links to life, but the sound of a heartbeat is also linked with illness, as it is generally only perceived when someone is connected to a heartbeat monitor when grievously ill. Accompanied by the disturbing, chaotic and subdued sounds of what could be creatures or brass horns, creates a very unsettling audio experience. This felt very apt for the disturbing mental and emotional state of the McShane character, and added to the sense of foreboding that permeates the scenes.

The final theme, 'Approaching Death - Brookhaven Hospital Theme #8' (Konami, 2010), was intended as a standard tension track. The repetitive drum beats, and the continuous backing warble, create a sense anxiety and impending danger. This felt relevant to the mood of the final scene, in which conflict was suggested, but not seen.

## **Conclusion**

By developing a methodology constructed from an analysis of the creative processes of established writers Tolkien and Martin, I was able to construct the world of the new intellectual property Ophidian. This world, conveyed primarily through the illustrated book titled 'Ophidian: Tales of the Underworld', was an amalgamation of historical, religious and mythical elements. This syncretism created a story that was true and genuine in its syncretism of real world and high fantasy supernatural events. These story elements were constructed to allow for the story to possess a solid grounding in its established canon, while also allowing for space within that canon for new writers to add to the universe with their own auteurship.

The animation, intended to be a single story that would make up one of many, points to various aspects of the deeper tapestry of the Ophidian mythos, while purposely answers none of the raised points. In this way, the animation is set to inspire a continuation of the story by depriving the audience of an acceptable story resolution, attempting to direct focus towards the inspiring additional fiction writing.

The story within the animation took elements from Akira Kurasawa's auteurship, rather than his cinematic style, by ensuring the animation had a message that it sought to deliver through the narrative journey. These ideas were playfully applied in the narrative process, with the conveyance of alternating elements of Jungian archetypes with the story's protagonist that would elicit the same disbelief and disregard as the conspiracies that he represented.

The idea of altered perception was explored through the application of Freud's narrative uncanny, in which the nature of the protagonist was established and reversed numerous times in an attempt to maintain the unbalanced narrative that ensured the ambiguity of the protagonist's circumstance.

These concepts of narrative were conveyed through the application of a syncretism of eastern and western cinematic elements. This was conveyed through the subtle nature of the antagonists presence in the larger part of the animations first half, in which elements of Mulvey's insights into Hitchcock's cinematic style were re-envisioned to convey a different perspective on the concept of the gaze of aggressively voyeuristic desires. This style lent itself well to the ambiguity of eastern horror, and facilitated the slow dramatic pacing of the first half.

The elements of western cinematic blatancy, deemed detrimental to the subtle pacing of psychological horror, were represented in the realisation of the nameless evil, with whom all ambiguity of nature was dispelled to create a stark contrast of good and evil that was earlier avoided.

In this way the animation took the best elements from both, maintaining a clear east/west style, incorporating subtle aspects from each area of cinema into both sides through the clear rising of narrative from an ambiguous evil towards the finale of anticipated action and conflict. This journey was enhanced through an effective contamination of the sensed, created through the conveyance of increasingly repulsive environments, enhanced by the tailored scene-by-scene musical accompaniment. This auditory experience allowed for the manipulation of the viewers emotional responses for the intended scene psychology, which moved from emptiness to anxiety and fear. These senses palpably increased from the beginning until the animations end. The rising anticipation was also intended to elicit an additional shared universe experience, culminating in the animations finale in which the fate of the heroine would be determined in the narrative of a different writer.

I feel that the Ophidian mythos, with its animation and cannon established in the book, achieves the desired result set out during the projects beginnings. The story world is solidly grounded in developed theories of psychology that add a real world truth to the supernatural and historic timeline, characters and factions. The animation, acting as one solitary tale from within the mythos, conveys the mise-en-scene so as to tell multifaceted aspects of the narratives emotional and psychological journey. In this way, both components are successful as standalone works of literature and animation, but are stronger when taken together as depictions of the Ophidian mythos.

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