Straying from *The Path*: Rethinking Culpability in "Little Red Riding Hood" through a Fairy Tale Video Game
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Once upon a time, in 2009, a video game was released by video game studio Tale of Tales and this game was called *The Path*. Developed by Auriea Harvey and Michael Samyn, they describe *The Path* as "an ancient tale retold in a modern medium" ("Games," 2021). As a narrative, *The Path* is familiar: it follows the traditional tale type ATU 333, commonly known as "Little Red Riding Hood." As a video game, *The Path* is unfamiliar. Described by the developers as a "slow game," *The Path* does not have the typical objectives of most video games: there are no "monsters to defeat" or "hard puzzles" to solve, and "most activities in the game are entirely optional" ("The Path," 2021). With no challenges for the player, *The Path* focuses less on gameplay and more on narrative, taking the video game format and transforming it into an interactive storytelling experience. The focus on narrative above video game skill and play results in a game that "does not appeal to everyone" but for those who do enjoy it, the game "produces an intense emotional reaction": players have described it as "unsettling," "upsetting," and "thought-provoking" (Ryan and Costello 2012, 113). These player reactions stem from *The Path*'s grim narrative of a young girl being attacked by a wolf—the standard plotline of ATU 333— but these emotions are amplified by the gameplay itself. What makes *The Path* stand out from other retellings of "Little Red Riding Hood" across various cultural mediums is not its narrative, nor its gameplay techniques, but rather how it is able to take a traditional, popular folktale and reinvent it through the interactivity of video games.

While many video games focus on pushing the correct buttons in order to succeed, *The Path* focuses on narrative and as such, it does not require any skill with video games in order to play. There are only two gameplay mechanisms in *The Path*: moving your character and

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interacting with found objects. Players can either use their keyboard's arrow keys or right-click their mouse to move around in any direction, and they can press the enter key or the left-click to "interact" with objects. The game itself is presented as simple: it opens with a character selection screen with six girls between the ages of nine and twenty standing in a red room (fig. 1). Once the player selects one of the girls, she appears on a path leading into the woods and the instructions appear on screen: "Go to Grandmother's House…. and stay on the path."

Figure 1: Character selection screen. From left to right: Ginger, Rose, Scarlet, Ruby, Robin, Carmen.

From here, players control their selected character's movements, guiding her through the game and letting her interact with objects she finds either by pressing the "interact" button or by releasing all controls. There are no monsters to fight or puzzles to solve. Instead, this game is exploratory in nature, with no goals or instructions other than to "stay on the path." In this sense, *The Path* is a slow game, one that the creators claim was made "for non-gamers" (Alexander 2009, qtd. in Ryan and Costello 2009, 123). However, *The Path* does belong to an emergent subgenre amongst video games: the independent, or

"indie," game. Indie games are produced by small studios outside of major (corporate) game studios that perceive games not as "products" but as "cultural works created by people" (Juul 2019, 6). Instead of focusing on conventional aspects of gameplay, indie games subvert player expectations and comment on traditional conventions (19). These games are about "personal expression" for developers but they are also a means of developing "more meaning" in gameplay, where games can devote space to "social commentary [and] whimsical charm" (22, 26). With a focus on gameplay that reflects society and reinterprets cultural conventions in new ways, indie games transform the experience of gaming from commercialized and corporatized into a form of collective expression and communication between developers and their audience of players. By focusing on creative expression among a small community of fans and creators, games such as *The Path* seemingly blend popular cultural mediums with folkloric functions, and in this sense, can be viewed as an emerging form of folklore.

Furthermore, as a storytelling medium, independent video games offer new opportunities for exploring and retelling traditional narratives. *The Path* is not unique in its focus on narrative: games such as *Slenderman: The Eight Pages* and *Five Nights at Freddy's* have become incredibly popular with their simple gameplay that invites exploration of ambiguous narratives. All three of these games refuse to tell a clear narrative: rather, they leave the story for players to discover through their gameplay, withholding the full narrative from a single playthrough, requiring repeated replay and a careful eye to unravel the story. Unlike these other popular narrative-based indie games, *The Path* stands out due to its firm basis in folklore. While *Slenderman*: *The Eight Pages* may have some folkloric origins, as it is based on the Internet legend surrounding the titular figure (Peck 2015), this is a digital legend for the digital age; therefore, it is unsurprising to find it in video game form. In contrast, "Little Red Riding Hood" is a traditional folktale, traceable back to similar oral

narratives from the Middle Ages (Zipes 1993, 18). With variations by both Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm, it is also practically ubiquitous in popular culture: it is a tale most people are familiar with and have heard countless versions of through various mediums. By adapting a tale like "Little Red Riding Hood" into a narrative-based indie video game, *The Path* invites audiences into a tale they *think* they already know, yet renders it unfamiliar through the mechanics of this new medium. Through player intervention in the narrative via its gameplay, *The Path* flips "Little Red Riding Hood" onto itself, defamiliarizing the tale to the player and offering ripe ground for reflection on the meaning and significance of ATU 333.

Despite the rising cultural presence[27] of indie video games such as *The Path*, video games have been largely neglected in folkloristics, but there has been some exploration of the way video games intersect with folklore. Kiri Miller has examined *Grand Theft Auto* as a form of digital folklore where individual performance is required to make sense of video game narrative (2008, 263). Likewise, scholars such as Ileana Vesa and Marissa D. Willis have argued that each video game playthrough is an individualized storytelling session, not unlike a folklore performance (2011, 2019). While there has not been much scholarship on folklore and video games, it is an increasingly rich area for folklore studies, especially considering the frequency in which folktales such as "Little Red Riding Hood" are evoked for inspiration. In a short survey article on video games and folklore, Emma Whatman and Victoria Tedeschi note that there is a "trend of revisionist fairy-tale video games" that explore "the darker undercurrents of the fairy-tale form" (2018, 634). "Little Red Riding Hood" is often adapted in these "revisionist" video games with the young girl

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[27] A quick search on video game hosting platform *Steam* reveals 62 000 games now fall under the broad category "indie" (on this platform, indie refers to any game made outside of major studios). There are nearly 4000 games in the "indie horror" category that *The Path* is classified under, but only 1000 in its "walking simulator" subcategory. See Juul 2019 for an analysis of some of the more popular indie game titles.

transformed into a "violent avatar" (636). One such game is *Little Red Riding Hood's Zombie BBQ* where the game "emphasiz[es] and exaggerat[es] the violence and sexuality" of older versions of fairy tales, including the titular character who is both violent (she kills zombies) and sexual (portrayed as an adult woman, not a child) (Keebaugh 2013, 591, 593). Video games, then, offer new opportunities to engage with folktales through gameplay, where darker themes can be explored, and the so-called "original" violence of the tales can be reclaimed.

   The Path follows this trend of revisionist video games, as it is an informed and engaged retelling of ATU 333, "The Little Red Riding Hood." The first known version of this tale type is Charles Perrault's "Le Petit Chaperon Rouge," part of his fairy tale collection *Histories ou contes du temps passé* (1697)[28] (Vaz da Silva 2016, 168). Fairy tale scholars such as Jack Zipes and Francisco Vaz da Silva have noted that it is likely that Perrault knew of oral versions of this tale and altered it to suit his narrative aims, making this tale's history both literary and oral (Zipes 1993, 18; Vaz da Silva 2016, 170). In oral tradition, ATU 333 is first recorded in the Grimm Brothers' *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* (1812) as "Little Red Cap."[29] It is in the Grimms' version that the huntsman is introduced as Red's saviour, and it is this version that has become predominant in mainstream culture (Zipes 1993, 36). According to Jack Zipes, the Grimm brothers "cleaned up" Perrault's telling in order to suit the "bourgeois socialization process of the 19th century," making their version a retelling of Perrault's and not an entirely "oral" tale (32). This sanitization of the tale remains consistent, with a wide assortment of children's books adopting the tale or simply reproducing the Grimms' narrative (344). For Zipes, the reason why both Perrault's and the

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[28] I have chosen to follow Christine A. Jones' translation of Perrault's French as I find her readings to be comprehensive and nuanced.
[29] Likewise, I have chosen to follow Jack Zipes' translation of the Grimms' German.

Grimms' versions remain relevant in the popular imagination is because they are able to demonstrate "shifts in social and political attitudes toward gender identity and rape" (343). Although there are no sex scenes in "Little Red Riding Hood," the narrative is commonly read as an allegory for rape, or alternatively, for sexual maturation. Tellings, including modern ones, tend to focus on how the tale conveys the "regulation of little girls' sexuality" and Red's sensual transgression, or they use the narrative to highlight rape culture (Zipes 1993, 66, 10-11). Although "Little Red Riding Hood" can be traced back for centuries, the vaguely sexual language and plot (of a girl tricked into climbing into bed with a male wolf) easily lends the tale to modernized tellings that focus on themes of sex, violence, and power.

Unsurprisingly, contemporary versions of "Little Red Riding Hood" highlight these themes through a feminist framework. Carri Keebaugh calls these versions a part of a culture-wide "fairy-tale recovery project," or the "recovery" of the original darker elements of the tale in oral and literary tradition (2013, 590). This "recovery" of the dark aspects is seen predominantly in films, such as adult thriller films that examine adult-child sexual relationships through using "Little Red Riding Hood" motifs and imagery (Greenhill and Kohm 2009, 37). In these retellings, Red is made out to be the hero, not the victim, through her vigilantism (55). Book adaptations as well focus on vigilantism, where Red must "protect others from being victimized" (D'Amore 2017, 387). These feminist vigilante themes highlight the "acute knowledge of rape culture" that is present in contemporary society (386). Thus, contemporary versions of "Little Red Riding Hood" focus upon Red's sexuality as a young woman, while also highlighting violence against women, transforming Perrault's traditional narrative into a contemporary and topical one.

As an indie game, *The Path*, then, functions as a modernized retelling of "Little Red Riding Hood" within an innovative storytelling format, combining both popular culture with folklore. As a retelling,

The Path highlights these dark undercurrents so popular in contemporary versions of this tale.

Before we continue, I will provide a summary of the plotline, or aim, of the game. After the character selection screen, the player-chosen girl appears on a path heading into the woods and the player is left with two options: follow the game's instructions and "stay on the path" or disobey the game and wander into the forest. If the player chooses to stay on the path, they reach Grandmother's house, climb into bed with her, and the game ends with a message on screen informing the player that they have received a "FAILURE!" If the player strays from the path, then the game becomes exploratory, where the player can discover various objects and locations to which their selected character will reveal a thought or emotion, allowing the player to piece together the girl's personality and loose story. Once the girl has strayed into the forest, the path is no longer able to be located by the player. The only way to find the path again is by chasing a wispy character known only as The Girl in White. The Girl in White is a young female dressed in a white slip dress who works as a guide for the player, helping locate objects and locations (such as the path) by running ahead of the red girl and motioning for her to follow. The Girl in White will also eventually lead the player toward the only other character in the game: the wolf. The visual appearance of the wolf varies for each girl, and once he is encountered, the exploration ends. The screen fades to black, and the Red Riding Hood girl is shown to be lying on the ground in front of Grandmother's house. Once inside, the camera changes from third- to first-person, and you and the girl, seeing through the same eyes, are led throughout the house, unable to stray from *this* path that guides you through the home. Grandmother's house is full of obscurities, such as objects spinning through the air and impossibly long hallways: it feels both dreamlike and horrifying. Finally, the girl arrives to Grandmother's room, where the game ends with the girl being attacked by her version of the wolf in a series of flashing images.

To most players, this narrative is typical of the familiar "Little Red Riding Hood" narrative where a young girl encounters a wolf in the forest and is ultimately overtaken by him. However, through the video game format, aspects of the tale are highlighted in ways that are too often overlooked. Video game scholars Malcolm Ryan and Brigid Costello have noted that as a video game, *The Path* is able to evoke a sense of tragedy through the interactive storytelling form (2012, 112). This tragedy is primarily demonstrated through the interaction between the girl and her wolf. Although there are six girls with six distinct wolves, I will focus upon two in particular--- Robin and Carmen--- because their storylines distinctively draw upon both Perrault's and Grimms' versions of the tale. Visually, Robin looks like typical images of Little Red Riding Hood (fig. 2). She is the youngest of the girls, around nine-years-old, dressed in the iconic and metonymic red hood. Robin skips as she wanders through the forest, and she attempts to play with nearly every object she interacts with.

Figure 2: Robin (left) and Carmen (right) sitting on the same bench at the "Theatre" location.

As a character, Robin is youthful and playful; I would say her story and appearance align with the common vision of "Little Red Riding Hood." In contrast, Carmen is much more mature at age seventeen. On the character selection page, Carmen admires her reflection, swaying back and forth as she adjusts a hat on her head. Self-image is important to Carmen as she is a flirt: upon sitting down on a bench, she thinks "oh come on, have a seat. Have a kiss" (fig. 2). While Robin is innocent and childish, Carmen is a girl on the cusp of sexual

maturation, showing interest in men and sex through her active flirting.

If Robin represents more traditional tellings, where the girl in the red hood is a "young country girl" (Perrault 1697, 175) or a "sweet little maiden" (Grimms 1812, 135), then Carmen reflects more contemporary retellings, where the red hood is viewed as a captivating sexual symbol and the term "little" is dropped from the Red Riding Hood name (Vaz da Silva 2016, 180-1). As well, through her flirtatious demeanor, Carmen's personality highlights both the academic and popular reading of the tale as one about sex and sexuality (Greenhill and Kohm 2009, 38). Both Carmen and Robin, then, reflect various interpretations and retellings of "Little Red Riding Hood," where the titular character is either a young, innocent, and sweet girl, or she is a seductive, sexual young woman.

Outside of narrative, many gameplay elements within *The Path* draw upon the cultural history of "Little Red Riding Hood." For example, there are collectable glowing flowers scattered throughout the forest. When enough flowers are collected, players are directed towards a findable location or object. Flowers play a significant role in both Perrault's and Grimms' version as the young girl makes flower bouquets while the wolf rushes to beat her to Grandmother's house (Perrault 1697, 175; Grimm 1812, 136). Francisco Vaz da Silva argues that these flowers are remnants of the "pins or needles" paths that Red chooses between in oral versions of the tale, and that these paths both represent menstrual blood, taking Red on a path to sexual maturation (2016, 179). Furthering this idea, *The Path* is full of the colour red: from the girls' names (all shades of red), to the character selection page (a red room), to the red elements in the found locations (a red sky in the graveyard location; a red bench at the theatre). Red is emblematic of the "Little Red Riding Hood" story, but it is also the colour of blood, whether that be the blood of violence, blood of menstruation, or blood of virginity loss. Indeed, there is a folk tradition of narratives of a girl in red encountering a wolf, even if the

"red hood" appears to be an invention of Perrault's imagination (Vaz da Silva 2016, 171-2). In contemporary culture, all it takes is a girl in a red cloak for the story of "Little Red Riding Hood" to be evoked, proving the redness to be not only metonymic, but also iconic and symbolic. Visually, then, *The Path* draws upon motifs of the "Little Red Riding Hood" tale as it is commonly represented in popular culture and in more traditional versions.

Of course, there is another element of the tale that *The Path* incorporates into its gameplay, and that is the role of the wolf. Each playable girl has her own unique wolf, suitable as each girl is demonstrated to be an individual with her own personality and story and thus, her own downfall. While each wolf is visually distinct, the wolf always appears male, with one notable exception. Ginger's wolf appears as a young girl, which can either support a queer reading or thematically emphasize that even the familiar or seemingly safe can be dangerous. For Robin, our young protagonist in the red hood, her wolf appears as an anthropomorphic wolf in the graveyard (fig. 3). This wolf walks primarily on his hind legs, humanizing him, but his body is wolfish, covered in fur with a wolf face and snout. Carmen's wolf is significantly different, appearing as a man chopping trees at the campground location (fig. 3). In a plaid shirt and suspenders, this wolf draws upon cultural associations and images of the "woodsman" or "huntsman," a character commonly found in tellings since the Grimms' introduction of this character to the tale in 1812. Instead of saving the young girl, as he does in the Grimms' version through cutting her out of the wolf's belly (Grimm 1812, 137), Carmen's wolf
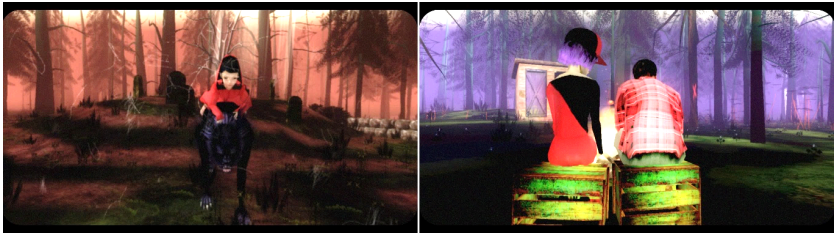

Figure 3: Robin and her wolf (left); Carmen and her wolf (right).

is not the saviour but rather the perpetrator of violence, subverting common notions of the woodsman.

The doubling-up of character types in "Little Red Riding Hood" narratives is not uncommon: Pauline Greenhill and Steven Kohm note that this is a common feature of thrillers inspired by this tale (2009, 48). What is significant here is how this doubling works to highlight an often-overlooked theme: the familiarity of the wolf. In Charles Perrault's telling, there is very little description of the wolf, but there is one key word used: "neighborhood" (1697, 175). The wolf that encounters the young girl is the "neighborhood wolf,"[30] *not* a stranger. Although many people I know interpret the tale as one cautioning about "stranger danger," Perrault's version highlights that this wolf is not a stranger, but a known or recognizable member of the young girl's local community.

The Path follows Perrault's version in this sense, making the wolves of both Carmen and Robin known to both the player and to the girls. Players understand that wolves are dangerous animals—both literally and figuratively—as Robin's wolf is, and they most likely recognize the woodsman as a hero-helper, made famous by the Grimms' version. With Carmen's wolf, seeing the huntsman evokes a sense of familiarity in the player, which then transforms into fear as they realize that the man they assumed to be the saviour is actually the perpetrator of violence. Even more terrifying is the slow realization that the wolf is *known* to the girls. Throughout the game, Robin repeatedly tells the player that she wants to play with her "big and cuddly thing." When she encounters the wolf, Robin begins to play with him, jumping on his back and riding around with him before the screen fades to black. Robin does not fear her wolf; for her, he is a

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[30] There is some debate on exactly how to translate the term Perrault uses to describe the wolf in its original French ("compère le loup"); however, both Christine A. Jones and Jack Zipes select to use "neighborhood" or "neighbor" and I have elected to follow their translations.

much wanted, playful friend. Likewise, Carmen actively flirts with her wolf by stealing his hat and placing it upon her head, drinking his beer, and sitting by the fire, waiting for him to join her. Not only is the wolf familiar to both girls, but he also intimately understands them. The wolf appears as what the girls desire most: a friend to play with, a man to seduce. Indeed, the entire forest seems familiar to the girls: it is littered with objects that the girls eagerly interact with, such as chairs or balloons, and most objects are only accessible to specific characters. For example, upon finding a red balloon, Robin specifically states that it must be the balloon she lost on her birthday. These objects found throughout the forest *belong* to the girls, implying that this is not the first time they have strayed from the path. As a retelling, *The Path* incorporates often forgotten aspects of older versions of the tale, such as how the wolf and the forest are not unknown to the girls. These elements are embedded into the gameplay, letting the player experience the tale in new light.

We have explored how *The Path* incorporates elements from both traditional and contemporary tellings of "Little Red Riding Hood" into a new narrative experience, but what we have yet to explore is perhaps the most essential part of *The Path*, and what distinguishes it among other versions of this tale: the role of the player. While traditional narratives consist of two roles, that of performer/teller and that of audience, video games blur the line between the two through the role of the player. Within video games, the player becomes both teller and audience as they help construct the narrative through interactive gameplay while at the same time, they experience the game and story for the first time (Vesa 2011, 252). The player, then, is a sort of narrator, where they are part of a narrative as they control the movement and actions of the character, while also being outside of the narrative, as they have limitations to what actions they can make by the intended narrative of the game. The role of the player as narrator is where the tragedy of *The Path* truly takes place as the player must grapple with the decision on whether or not to engage with the wolf

(Ryan and Costello 2012, 121). The only way for the player to "win" the game is to allow the girl to encounter the wolf, but because players already know the "Little Red Riding Hood" tale type, they know that by doing so, the girl will be harmed by him. It is only upon being attacked by the wolf in Grandmother's House that the endscreen informs the player that they have had a "SUCCESS!" rather than a failure. In their discussion of *The Path*, Malcom Ryan and Brigid Costello refer to the complicated feelings surrounding the relationship between the tale and the game as "player culpability" (2012, 112) and indeed, the culpability of the player makes the telling of this tale unique among retellings. Players are *directly responsible* for the demise of Robin or Carmen as they are the ones who choose to guide the girls from the path and choose to interact with the wolf. The game never forces players to stray nor to find the wolf; these are choices the player knowingly makes, understanding what must happen when they do so. This culpability is only heightened in the final scene, in Grandmother's House, where the gameplay changes from third- to first-person, letting the player experience the horrors of the violence and trauma of encountering the wolf through the girl's eyes. *The Path*, then, represents an interesting dilemma for the player where to win is to let the girls fail, resulting in the player experiencing not euphoria at winning, but rather a sense of guilt for their role in the narrative, complicating traditional gameplay by subverting norms regarding what it means to "win."

While listeners or readers of traditional "Little Red Riding Hood" narratives may not get to experience a degree of culpability or guilt, that does not mean that these themes are not present. *The Path* features characters that one expects in a telling of "Little Red Riding Hood" such as the young titular girl, her grandmother, and a wolf. There is only one character present in most tellings that is strangely missing from *The Path*: the young girl's mother. In the Grimms' version of the tale, the mother cautions her daughter, telling her not to "tarry" and not to "stray from the path" (Grimm 1812, 135). These

instructions appear very similar to those given to the player at the start of the game, where they are told to "stay on the path." In Perrault's version, however, the mother gives no such warning. Instead, she is said to be "crazy" about her daughter, adoring her so much that her daughter "didn't know that it is dangerous to stop and listen to wolves" (Perrault 1697, 175). Here, the mother never taught her daughter the skills necessary to navigate the woods, and it is this ignorance that leads to the daughter's demise. It is the mother, then, who is culpable for the girl's death--- not unlike how the player is culpable for Robin's or Carmen's end in *The Path*: it is the player who chooses which girl to send into the woods, just as it is the mother who sends her daughter. The player is thus not only witness to this narrative, but they also play a crucial role in its unraveling. When the player finds the location of the wolf in *The Path*, they are given the opportunity to leave or they can approach the wolf, free the controls, and watch the girl interact. With this choice, the player *lets* the girl interact with the wolf despite knowing she will be harmed, similar to how the mother *lets* her daughter leave without warning, despite the fact that Perrault's moral states "who among us does not know/that the saccharine wolf, of all wolves,/is the most treacherous?" (Perrault 1697, 177). This rhetorical question implies that everyone should know the dangers of the wolf, including and especially the mother who sends her daughter and thus should have cautioned her. The gameplay elements of *The Path* that evoke these feelings of guilt reinterpret the themes of culpability originally directed towards the mother and places them upon the player, making the player an active part of the narrative. These feelings of culpability and guilt are *only* able to be expressed through this interactive storytelling form, as the player takes on an important character role in the narrative and experiences the story first-hand.

Interestingly, there is one original character in *The Path*—that is, a character that does not appear in Perrault's nor the Grimms' nor any other common telling of the tale. This character is the aforementioned

Girl in White. As a gameplay mechanic, the Girl in White serves as a guide for the player: she runs through the woods, and if the player chooses to follow her, she will lead them to various items and locations. Following her is also the only way for the player to make their way back to the path. When the player locates the wolf, the Girl in White will run across the player's screen, as a sort of warning for the player or the girl. Outside of these gameplay functions, the Girl in White also serves a narrative role. After a girl encounters the wolf and goes through Grandmother's House, the game reboots to the character selection screen, except now the girl just played is missing. Players can play through each girl, and one by one, they disappear from the character selection screen. It is only when all girls have been played that the Girl in White appears in the character selection room, alone. As a playable character, the Girl in White is free to wander the forest. She has no wolf, and neither the path nor Grandmother's House disappear for her. When she enters the house, there is an unmoving wolf in Grandmother's bedroom—as though he is waiting--- and Grandmother lying in her bed. The Girl in White leans down at Grandmother's bedside and the screen fades to black. Once it fades back in, the girl is standing in the character selection room, red blood on her white dress (fig. 4). Slowly, one by one, the other girls re-enter and lastly, the Girl in White leaves, effectively restarting the entire gameplay experience.

Figure 4: The Girl in White standing alone on the character selection page. Note the slash of red on her normally white dress.

The Girl in White becomes the saviour of the other young "Red" girls. Instead of having a man, the woodsman, save them, it is a young, fearless girl who frees the others from the belly of the wolf. The red blood on her dress evokes violence, implying that she killed the wolf, and the girls re-entering shows that they have been freed. In this sense, the Girl in White represents the feminist vigilantism so often found in contemporary retellings of "Little Red Riding Hood." Through violence, she "takes on the responsibility of vigilantism to protect others from being victimized," a role that many modern retellings give to the girl in the red hood (D'Amore 2017, 387). Despite her fearless vigilantism, once the Red girls return, the game restarts. All the girls are once again playable, able to re-enter the woods and fall again as prey to the wolves. *The Path*, then, presents itself as a truly tragic tale, where even after being freed from the wolf's belly, the girls cannot entirely be saved, not so long as the game is still able to be played.

Who is to blame for this cycle of violence, where even the saved can fall prey again? If the tale of "Little Red Riding Hood" is a story of maturation, then the girls of *The Path* do not mature and never learn. Indeed, the cycle of violence enforced upon them exists outside of the girls: it is the player who sends them forth, and the player who strays them from the path, and the Girl in White who brings them back. The girls have very little to do with the violence enacted upon them directly by the wolf and indirectly by the player, who sent them forth into the world *knowing* the wolf was waiting for them. Through this subversive gameplay, *The Path* seems to imply that there is no singular person to blame for violence against women, but rather, this violence is systemic, part of a societal cycle that asserts this patriarchal violence as normative behaviour. Just as there is no singular person to blame for this violence, there is no singular saviour: the Girl in White can help, but that does not mean she will be followed by the girls in red. Players, then, are left with a game without

satisfying conclusion that cycles through without resolution. Players want games to be replayable, but with *The Path*, the replayability only means restarting a cycle that can never end satisfyingly. Here is a game where there is truly no way to win.

What *The Path* offers is a bleak version of "Little Red Riding Hood" that comments upon contemporary societal concerns, such as violence against women, in a modernized way through the indie game format. As an independent game, *The Path* subverts normative gameplay, and as a folktale, it also subverts our expectations of the "Little Red Riding Hood" tale. The narrative *The Path* offers is not "original" in that it is a retelling that draws upon other versions of the tale, but it is original in the sense that this narrative could only be told through the independent video game medium. As players become both tellers and listeners, *The Path* encourages interactivity with folktales, demanding players reconsider the tales that they have taken for granted and think through the issues and concerns that the tales continue to carry throughout time and space. Folk- and fairy-tale inspired video games, then, are not necessarily reiterations of familiar narratives, but rather they are new variants that offer fresh and unique ways of thinking through these tales, demonstrating the continued importance of folktales in the popular imagination.

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