

Ludologist Jesper Juul distinguishes two aspects to video games: the rules, which determine how the player interacts and when he is construed to have won or lost, and the fiction, the narrative and aesthetic material that gives context to those rules (*half-real*, 2005). Most video games that use classical mythology do so in order to clothe their rules in a fiction that is both aesthetically appealing and immediately recognizable to their audience. For example, "Rise of the Argonauts" (Liquid Entertainment, 2008) distinguishes four possible combat styles by associating each with a specific god worshipped by Jason. The gods chosen are Ares, Athena, Hermes, and Apollo. Jason's original association with Hera is dropped, and the gods are rigorously schematized around approaches to violence and power, since the classical fiction functions primarily as a way to help the player learn and apply a complex set of rules.

Terry Cavanagh's independently published "Don't Look Back" (2009) inverts this common relationship of rule and fictive material. "Don't Look Back" retells the story of Orpheus and Eurydice in the form of an retro-styled 2D platform game in the genre of "Super Mario Brothers" (Nintendo, 1985). Traditional game-play elements such as moving enemies who kill the player at a touch, moving or dissolving platforms, and boss monsters with specific weaknesses make the game accessible and set expectations about how to interact.

Unlike the games on which it is based, however, Cavanagh's game puts the play mechanics at the service of the story's emotional and thematic meaning. As Orpheus, armed with a gun rather than a lyre, the player navigates a difficult descent into the underworld, battling bats, snakes, and boss monsters such as Cerberus. Once he reaches his destination, he receives Eurydice as a companion, and must then fight his way back to the surface. From the moment he finds Eurydice, he is unable to move backwards while solving a level: if he does so, Eurydice vanishes and player must start that level over from the beginning. Eurydice is thus both a goal object for the player and a source of frustration: the impossibility of looking at Eurydice becomes part of the game rules. When Orpheus reaches the surface, the player discovers that the entire experience of the underworld rescue was a wistful dream by the real Orpheus, who remains standing by the gravestone where he began the game. The real Orpheus turns, and both Eurydice and her dream rescuer vanish.

Cavanagh thus deploys the rules of his game to support his emotional and thematic effects, following up possibilities for persuasive play described by Ian Bogost (*Procedural Rhetoric*, 2007). During the second half of "Don't Look Back", the mechanic of the vanishing Eurydice allows the player to experience his own version of Orpheus' guilt and frustration, while the conclusion, in which the player experiences no traditional win state, emphasizes the futility of clinging to the memory of the dead.