

Anito: Battle of the Gods - Exploring Philippines' Cultural Mythical Tales in a Cooperative and Competitive Fighting Video Game

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Abstract— This study presents a profound exploration into the synthesis of cultural mythology and video gaming, epitomized by the creation of "Anito: Battle of the Gods." With meticulous attention to detail, the game artfully merges immersive gameplay with the captivating narrative of the Philippines' rich cultural heritage. Grounded in the Scrum methodology, the project unfolded through iterative collaboration, ensuring both efficiency and alignment with player preferences. Extensive quantitative data was amassed through game evaluation sheets and purposive sampling, spotlighting the game's diverse aspects. Results unveiled resounding satisfaction among participants in categories spanning gameplay, aesthetics, user interface, player experience, and website usability. Theoretical implications accentuate the efficacy of cultural storytelling within games, while practical insights highlight the successful amalgamation of entertainment and education. Technically, the study underscores the potency of agile methodologies in crafting an engaging gaming experience. These findings hold far-reaching significance, demonstrating the power of culturally infused games to captivate and educate players. In this tapestry of research, the study signifies the convergence of creativity, culture, and technology, elevating gaming beyond leisure to an instrument of cultural exploration and enrichment.

Keywords—Cultural Mythology, Video Gaming, Edutainment, Scrum Methodology, Philippine Culture, Player Engagement

I. INTRODUCTION

The history of hand-to-hand combat video games traces back to the arcade era, with Sega's 1976 release "Heavyweight Champ" marking the debut of this genre. This early game featured two monochrome pugilists controlled by players using plastic boxing gloves and physical movements to simulate in-game actions. However, the true evolution of fighting games took a significant step forward in 1991 with Capcom's monumental release, "Street Fighter II." This iconic title introduced an international cast of characters, each possessing

distinct fighting styles and special moves executed through combinations of joystick rotations and button sequences. The game's subsequent conversion to the Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES) in 1992 propelled its popularity, selling over 6 million copies and spreading catchphrases like Ryu's famous "Hadouken." In the same vein, "Mortal Kombat," developed by Midway in the early '90s, offered a darker aesthetic with digitized actors and a distinctive feature known as "Fatalities," enabling players to execute brutal finishing moves. This game, along with titles like "Primal Rage" (replacing fighters with dinosaurs) and "Rise of the Robots" (featuring robotic combatants), contributed to a diverse array of fighting games during this era.

The mid-'90s marked a turning point with the advent of 3D graphics technology, ushering in a new era of enhanced visual environments and polygonal fighters. Namco's "Tekken" series, which utilized 3D graphics and advanced character designs, emerged as a prominent player in the genre. Simultaneously, Sony recognized the potential of "Tekken" as a system-selling game for its PlayStation console, and in March 1995, "Tekken" made its debut on this platform. The game's combination of impressive visuals, engaging characters, and an innovative control scheme—assigning each button to a different limb—contributed to its enormous success, selling over 45 million units. While "Tekken" played a pivotal role in shaping the fighting game landscape, it was not the sole contender. Capcom continued to produce notable titles such as the "Marvel vs. Capcom" series, "King of Fighters," and "Guilty Gear," ensuring their enduring presence in the market. Simultaneously, new directions emerged in the genre, exemplified by Nintendo's "Super Smash Bros" series, Namco's "Soulcalibur," and other innovative titles.

While the gaming industry has produced titles like "God of War" that delve into the mythologies of Norse and Greek

cultures, there remains a noteworthy gap in the representation of the Philippines' rich array of deities. Addressing this void, "Anito: Battle of the Gods" emerges as an innovative endeavor poised to shine a spotlight on the often-overlooked realm of the Philippines' deities. In a digital landscape where cultural narratives are continually evolving [1, 2], this game stands out as a bridge between entertainment and education, offering players an engaging platform to explore the captivating world of these deities. Through captivating aesthetics and an arcade-style story mode, players engage in battles that bring them closer to the heart of the Philippines' cultural narrative. The ultimate showdown with each character unlocks character-specific endings, adding layers of depth to both gameplay and cultural exploration. "Anito: Battle of the Gods" transcends mere entertainment, embodying the potential of video games to bridge cultural gaps and foster a broader understanding of the diverse mythologies that shape our world.

II. SIMILAR GAMES

In a fighting game, the game mechanics should encompass a range of dynamic combat techniques, including defensive tactics like blocking and grappling, as well as offensive maneuvers like counterattacks and the strategic assembly of attack combinations known as "combos." Rooted in hand-to-hand combat, often featuring martial arts techniques, this genre serves as the primary means of conflict resolution for characters. It's essential to distinguish the fighting game genre from the 'beat 'em up' genre, where characters confront numerous computer-controlled adversaries [3]. The creation of an exceptional fighting game hinges on prioritizing player movement, especially their responsiveness to the ever-changing environment. Swift reactions, a keen ability to interpret opponent movements, and a well-conceived offensive strategy lie at the heart of an impactful combat experience. The interplay of these elements elevates a fighting game into an immersive engagement that captures the essence of skilled combat. Furthermore, the game's overarching concept and narrative must be well-defined to sustain player engagement and immersion. In crafting a compelling fighting game, real-life parallels emerge, illustrating a clash of strength that is relentlessly tested with a definitive victor. It's within the context of these virtual arenas that the concepts of competition, strategy, and skill converge, echoing the dynamics of genuine physical conflicts. Ultimately, the elements that constitute a remarkable fighting game encapsulate the synergy of strategic depth [4], precise execution, and an immersive narrative that shapes an experience worth mastering and revisiting.

Several notable 2D and 3D fighting games exist in the gaming landscape, each with distinct features and narratives. Among the array of captivating fighting games, "Street Fighter V" stands as a significant entry, strategically placed between its predecessors to expand its narrative universe. Its introduction of a robust story mode, catering to both offline and online players, demonstrates a commitment to engaging storytelling while offering diverse gameplay experiences. Similarly, "Tekken 7" carves its identity by delving into the complexities of the Mishima family saga, employing a cinematic story mode that seamlessly transitions between cutscenes and gameplay. The incorporation of an arcade mode and the focus on character-driven storytelling adds depth to the gameplay, mirroring the ambition to integrate narrative into action. For fans of the

"Dragon Ball" universe, "Dragon Ball Z: Budokai Tenkaichi 3" becomes a playground of nostalgia. Its approach of merging pivotal story arcs from the series into gameplay captures the essence of the anime, combining this with arcade and versus modes to provide varied engagement. "Ultimate Marvel Vs. Capcom 3" encapsulates the essence of crossover battles, weaving character endings within its arcade mode to reward progression and dedication. This resonates with our game, as it integrates narrative context and character-specific conclusions through its story mode. In the 2D fighting realm, "Guilty Gear: Strive" explores accessible storytelling through a movie-like narrative, which differs from our game's interactive approach. While "Guilty Gear: Strive" opts for a distinct narrative format, our game seeks to blend narrative and gameplay seamlessly. These diverse approaches across all these titles reveal the multifaceted nature of integrating storytelling into fighting games, with each game carving a unique path. Similarly, our game strives to intertwine captivating mythology with immersive gameplay, offering players an engaging platform to explore and engage with the rich world of our cultural deities.



Fig. 1. The official game poster of the "Anito: Battle of the Gods" video game

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A. Gameplay

"Anito: Battle of the Gods" offers an engaging blend of single-player and multiplayer modes to cater to diverse player preferences. Within the single-player mode, an arcade-style story mode forms the core experience, enabling players to delve

into the immersive narrative of the game. Progressing through stages, players confront various opponents, each victory paving the way to unlocking unique character endings. This strategic progression echoes the genre's tradition while deepening player engagement by intertwining narrative rewards with gameplay accomplishment. The gameplay mechanics of "Anito: Battle of the Gods" add a layer of complexity and depth, catering to both seasoned players and newcomers. Successful execution of combos requires a nuanced understanding of the chosen character's moveset, adding a skill-based element that encourages mastery. Moreover, the inclusion of special moves amplifies the strategic aspect of combat, as players learn to tactically employ these techniques through precise inputs. The addition of a super move, accessible through the super meter, introduces an element of high-risk, high-reward decision-making, further enhancing the strategic depth of gameplay. In its entirety, our game signifies an immersive fusion of traditional gameplay elements with innovative narrative integration and interactive promotion. The game's multifaceted design speaks to the developers' commitment to delivering an enriched gaming experience that resonates with a spectrum of players, blending captivating storytelling with strategic combat dynamics.

B. Plot

In a tranquil island setting, a captivating tale unfolds as the memory of a god transforms into a sentient shadow, driving the deity into a relentless pursuit to reclaim its essence. This deity finds itself stripped of its recollections, leaving only the awareness of its shadow's existence—an embodiment of malevolent intentions that disrupt the island's peace. Motivated by the shadow's dark designs, the god embarks on a quest to confront and capture it, inadvertently mistaking the island's other three gods for mere shadows. This misconception ignites a series of unintended clashes, with the god unwittingly attacking its divine companions. Upon each victory, memories are rekindled within the defeated gods, yet the specter of defeat lingers even as recollections return. This cyclical pattern drives the narrative forward, as the god vows to conquer the genuine shadow after prevailing against its divine counterparts, recognizing that the recovery of their memories is the key to unlocking this ultimate challenge. Triumph over the shadow emerges as the conduit to awakening from the perceived reverie, grounding the god in the realm of reality, though a persistent sense of defeat taints even this triumph. As the other gods traverse similar experiences, they too remain tethered to their mental landscapes, etching these surreal events into their consciousness, weaving a mesmerizing web that entwines memory, identity, and the ethereal realms.

C. Game World

Immersed within the game world of "ANITO: Battle of the Gods," players embark on a unique edutainment journey that merges compelling storytelling with cultural exploration. This fighting game interweaves a captivating narrative featuring distinct deities, uniting their quests towards a conclusion rich with references to iconic Philippine tourist destinations. Embracing a vibrant cartoon/comic style, the game serves as a dynamic platform that entertains and enlightens its target audience. As players engage with the four deities, each deity's dedicated stage is meticulously crafted to mirror specific Philippine landmarks, and triumph in these stages propels

players deeper into the immersive experience. By skillfully blending entertainment with cultural exposure, "ANITO: Battle of the Gods" transcends the realm of mere gameplay, offering players a profound insight into the beliefs and traditions that shape the vibrant tapestry of Philippine culture.



Fig. 2. Bathala Cave.

The game world "Bathala Cave" (see Figure 2) emerges as a profound backdrop for the deity Bathala's stage. Situated in Marinduque, a pivotal location at the heart of Philippine geography, the cave resonates with the essence of Bathala, the supreme God. Bathala's role as the cosmic guardian and steward of nature finds embodiment within this mystical cavern. The Bathala Cave encapsulates the essence of this deity's reverence, drawing players into a realm where the physical and the divine intertwine, echoing the profound connection between nature, spirituality, and the cultural heritage of the Philippines.

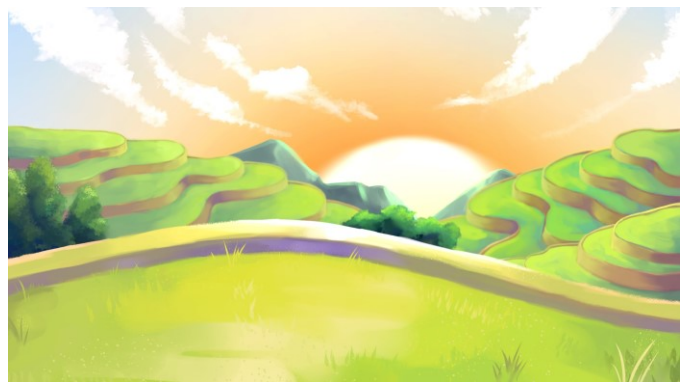


Fig. 3. Banaue Rice Terraces.

The game world "Banaue Rice Terraces" (see Figure 3) serves as a picturesque backdrop for the deity Ikapati's stage, encapsulating the essence of fertility and sustenance. Situated in the Ifugao mountains, these terraces are a testament to the ancestral wisdom that meticulously carved the land for agricultural prosperity. Aligned with Ikapati's domain, this setting embodies the deity's role as a bestower of fertility and a guardian of agriculture. The Banaue Rice Terraces become a living testament to the divine harmony between nature and human cultivation, paralleling Ikapati's blessings that facilitated Ifugao's agricultural abundance. Within this stage, players experience a synergy between the divine and the tangible, where the deity's influence mirrors the profound connection between culture, land, and the spiritual foundations of the Philippines.



Fig. 4. Balete Laze Tree.

The game world "Balete Laze Tree" (see Figure 4) emerges as the backdrop for the deity Mapulon's stage. Nestled within its surroundings, the Balete Lazi Tree finds resonance with his character as the compassionate deity among the pantheons. Enveloped by a healing pond, the tree serves as a physical manifestation of the deity's influence, mirroring his bestowal of favorable seasons and health upon humanity. Just as the people draw healing from the pond, reflecting his blessings, the tree becomes a conduit for players to explore the interconnectedness of spirituality, nature, and well-being. The Balete Lazi Tree stage weaves a tapestry where divine benevolence and rejuvenation converge, mirroring the relationship between Mapulon's generosity and the tangible realm of healing.



Fig. 5. The Islands of Tawi-Tawi.

The game world "Island of Tawi-Tawi" (see Figure 5) emerges as the atmospheric backdrop for the deity Amanikable's stage, encapsulating the spirit of the sea and the harmony between humanity and its aquatic surroundings. Tawi-Tawi, renowned for its sea nomads and their mastery of the water, mirrors the essence of Amanikable, the deity of the sea and hunting. Nestled within this island's maritime culture, Amanikable's stage becomes a canvas for players to explore the symbiotic relationship between the sea and its people. Just as Tawi-Tawi's inhabitants embody the deity's domains through their affinity for water and hunting, players are immersed in an experience that bridges human existence with divine influence. The "Island of Tawi-Tawi" stage weaves together the tales of sea nomads and the god of the sea, inviting players to navigate the realms of mythology and culture in a harmonious blend that mirrors the interconnectedness between human traditions and the sacred elements of nature.

D. Game Characters

The roster of game characters is a rich tapestry of deities, each embodying unique attributes and narratives that interweave mythology and human existence [5]. Bathala, revered as the supreme god and creator deity, commands the forces of nature—thunder, lightning, flood, fire, and earthquakes—exerting dominion over both the divine and mortal realms. Ikapati, a goddess synonymous with cultivated land, symbolizes balance through her hermaphroditic nature, offering the gift of agriculture and prosperity to humanity, endearing herself to the people as a sympathetic bestower of sustenance. A manifestation of benevolence, Mapulon nurtures health and wellness, his kindness yielding healing herbs that thrive under his blessing, a gesture that encapsulates his role as the provider of good seasons and well-being. Amanikable, originally revered as the god of hunters, has transformed in modern narratives into the tempestuous deity of the sea, a portrayal born from heartbreak and vengeance, casting tumultuous waves and tempests upon those who dare navigate his domain. Each character unfolds as an embodiment of cultural significance, transcending the game to offer players an immersive glimpse into the intricate narratives and symbolism that permeate Philippine mythology.

TABLE I. CHARACTER ARCHETYPES

Name	Archetype	Description
Bathala	All-rounder	Moveset specializes in balance by utilizing a projectile and a command grab.
Ikapati	Rushdown	Moveset specializes in keeping close using fast movement and fast close-range attacks.
Mapulon	Pressurer	Moveset specializes in close combat, frequently taking advantage of their opponents' openings and weaknesses swiftly and punishing them with damaging combos that leave no time for retaliation.
Amanikable	Zoner	Moveset specializes in long-range moves to keep opposing players from going in.

E. Development Methodology

For the development of our project, we chose to adopt the Scrum Methodology, which allowed us to foster a dynamic and iterative approach. Throughout the project's duration, our team members engaged in close collaboration, working collectively to achieve incremental but substantial progress on a daily or weekly basis. Whenever challenges arose, they were promptly addressed to ensure a seamless workflow [1, 6, 7]. Guided by the project manager's leadership, the team members received both encouragement and guidance in the development process. To maintain efficiency and prevent overwhelming the project, we strategically planned to accomplish specific milestones within the span of a week. This approach empowered us to streamline the game's development, embracing a focused and structured trajectory that aided the project's success [8-10].

F. Game Testing

For our research project, we employed a quantitative approach to gather comprehensive insights into our game's effectiveness. We utilized game evaluation sheets as a tool to systematically collect specific information about the game's various aspects. To ensure targeted and relevant data collection,

we opted for purposive sampling, a non-probability method that allowed us to handpick respondents based on specific criteria. These selected individuals were invited to participate in an open house game testing event, where they evaluated key elements such as the story, gameplay, concept art, and sound. We aimed to gauge the game's potential in fulfilling its role as an edutainment experience infused with elements of Philippine culture. To visualize our findings, we used tabular presentation, providing a clear representation of the data results. These results served as the basis for recommendations aimed at enhancing the game's overall quality. Employing an inclusive approach, we distributed an online survey through diverse platforms to target a demographic of participants—primarily college students with a background in Animation and Game Design [11], [12]. This methodology was key in guiding our research toward informed conclusions and actionable suggestions for refining the game.

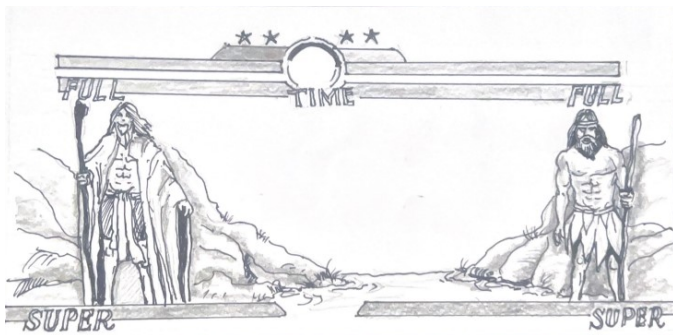


Fig. 6. Sample drawing of an in-game battle between Bathala and Mapulon.



Fig. 7. Actual snapshot of an in-game battle between Bathala and Mapulon.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The obtained results from the survey reflect a positive sentiment among participants regarding various aspects of the game. In terms of gameplay, a mean score of 4.02 signifies general agreement and satisfaction. Aesthetics received a slightly higher mean score of 4.18, indicating an overall favorable perception of the game's visual appeal. The user interface garnered a mean score of 4.06, suggesting that participants were content with the ease of interaction. Similarly, the player experience attained a mean score of 4.12, signifying a satisfactory level of engagement. The website component, with a mean score of 4.01, also garnered agreement and satisfaction from respondents. These scores collectively suggest that participants had a positive overall impression of the game, encompassing the constructs shown in Table 2.

TABLE II. SUMMARY OF THE OVERALL RESULTS

Area	Mean	Interpretation
Gameplay	4.02	Agree/Satisfied
Aesthetics	4.18	Agree/Satisfied
User Interface	4.06	Agree/Satisfied
Player Experience	4.12	Agree/Satisfied
Website	4.01	Agree/Satisfied
TOTAL	4.08	Agree/Satisfied

The findings of this survey hold notable implications across theoretical, practical, and technical domains. Theoretically, the consistently positive scores in various aspects of the game underscore the effectiveness of the design and development process in aligning with the intended objectives [13]. This aligns with the concept that a well-structured edutainment game, infused with cultural elements, can resonate positively with its target audience. On a practical level, the levels of agreement and satisfaction in gameplay, aesthetics, user interface, player experience, and website usability indicate that the game has successfully merged entertainment and education, catering to its intended purpose. This not only reinforces the value of adding cultural elements into game design but also emphasizes the importance of user-centered development for optimal player engagement [14-16]. From a technical perspective, the results validate the efficacy of employing Scrum methodology in managing the project's development. The consistently positive scores across multiple dimensions reflect the successful implementation of development strategies that align with player preferences and expectations. This, in turn, underscores the significance of employing a structured and iterative approach to game development. Overall, the implications highlight the symbiotic relationship between theoretical foundations, practical execution, and technical methodologies in crafting an engaging and culturally enriched gaming experience.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study unveils the significant impact of cultural infusion in the realm of video gaming, underscored by the resounding responses and engagement of participants. The findings vividly depict the potential of "ANITO: Battle of the Gods" to bridge entertainment and education seamlessly, enriching player experiences while imparting cultural awareness. The positive reception across gameplay, aesthetics, user interface, player experience, and website usability stand as a testament to the meticulously designed integration of Philippine cultural elements. This not only reinforces the potential of cultural storytelling to captivate players but also emphasizes the pivotal role of user-centric design in shaping a truly immersive experience. Moreover, the choice of Scrum methodology for development emerges as an instrumental factor in steering the project toward success, bolstered by agile collaboration and iterative progression. The implications of this study are profound and far-reaching, traversing theoretical, practical, and technical realms. The study underscores the theoretical notion that when cultural narratives are seamlessly interwoven with gameplay, players are not only entertained but also enriched with valuable insights. On a practical level, the

robust agreement and satisfaction rates affirm the potential of "ANITO: Battle of the Gods" to be a cornerstone in the edutainment genre, underlining the power of cultural storytelling to resonate deeply with players. From a technical perspective, the study validates the effectiveness of agile methodologies like Scrum in driving successful game development, attesting to their ability to harmonize intricate design elements with the expectations of modern players. In the grand tapestry of video gaming, this study emerges as a vibrant thread, weaving cultural heritage into the fabric of entertainment. "ANITO: Battle of the Gods" epitomizes the marriage of creativity, culture, and technology, portraying the game as more than a mere pastime—it stands as a medium that educates, captivates, and connects. As the gaming landscape continues to evolve, this study serves as a testament to the profound significance of culturally infused gaming experiences, paving the way for a future where games become not just windows to virtual worlds, but gateways to diverse cultures, histories, and narratives.

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