



# THE GARDEN OF HUMANITY: THE MANIFESTATION OF HOPE IN (POST) APOCALYPTIC VIDEO GAMES

**Department:**

English Language and Literature

**Program:**

MA

**Project type:**

Major Research Project

**Project co-researchers:**

Dr. Neil Randall, English Language and Literature, Faculty Supervisor

**Interesting fact:** Schmidt charted the convoluted lore of *Final Fantasy XIII* to show the game's complex world history, cultures, religions, politics, and ideologies in the appendix along with many, many, *many* footnotes.

## PAMELA MARIA SCHMIDT

Video games (like any form of art) are time capsules that reflect societal attitudes, cultures, and fears from a specific era. In **The Garden of Humanity**, Schmidt argues that games such as *Jak II*, *Horizon: Zero Dawn*, and *Final Fantasy XIII* encapsulate contemporary anxieties surrounding climate change and emerging technologies. Each of these games sets the player in a post-apocalyptic environment where technology and human intervention caused a climate crisis.

Schmidt used a multidisciplinary approach to investigate and analyze these games individually and within the (post) apocalyptic genre. She focused on themes of hope before and after the apocalyptic scenario to pinpoint the game worlds' societal attitudes leading up toward (and after) the event. Apocalyptic scenarios in these games are always caused by human intervention and are followed by a "return to the natural" (humans moving away from civilization and technology to live simpler lives closer to nature) once the events have transpired. Considering the current climate emergency and technological paranoia surrounding artificial intelligence (AI) and other emerging technologies, these games perpetuate the false notion that action is not necessary, because humanity will endure.

What these apocalyptic video games point toward is how human domination leads to themes of dystopia, abuse of the environment, and monstrous technological consumption. Schmidt noticed a great amount of hope in these games rests solely on the shoulders of the 'messiah figure' embodied by the player. These games promise that a hero will come and mitigate the apocalypse by learning about the sins of the past, and, therefore, preventing history from repeating itself. If our desire is to be saved, it will be reflected in the media we consume.