Video Game to Streaming Series: The Case of *Castlevania* on Netflix

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On 7 July 2017, four episodes of a gory vampire series titled *Castlevania* appeared on Netflix with little fanfare. Produced and distributed by Netflix, the four episodes seem to function less as *television* in a traditional sense, and more as an extended pilot to test audience appetite for further production. At 92 minutes, the total running time of the first four episodes are slightly less than that of a feature film, and the narrative concludes with the antagonist, Dracula, undefeated. Within a week of the release of these four episodes, a second season of eight episodes was announced (Vo, 2018). Even before the second season was released on 26 October 2018, there was speculation about the potential for a ten-episode third season, released on 5 March 2020 (Jeffery, 2018; Robinson, 2018). Clearly, the experiment was successful, if success is measured by commissioning more episodes.

Netflix's *Castlevania* is an animated cartoon based on a long-running Japanese video game series produced by Konami. A publisher responsible for 'some of the best-known games in game history' (Consalvo, 2009: 136), Konami began producing the Castlevania series in 1986; more than 30 titles have been released in the series to date, with the most recent full title in 2014. A selection of eight older instalments were bundled for the 2019 Castlevania Anniversary Collection release to commemorate Konami's 50th anniversary (Robinson, 2019). The Netflix series is largely adapted from *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse* (1989), the sixth title in the game series. As an adaptation of a Japanese franchise, with a Japanese-coded animation style, this otherwise Anglo-American television series offers a nominal example of transnational adaptation.

The 'size' of the animated *Castlevania* series provokes reflection on the boundaries between film and television narratives. In the words of one reviewer, this Netflix adaptation of a video game series 'is not a thing that should exist' (Williams, 2017: para. 1). While I do not seek to confirm or dispute this, this chapter was conceived in a similar spirit of curiosity: what is at play when an extended pilot is positioned as a complete series unto itself, and what might it illuminate about Netflix's role in global media production? In many ways, the first season of *Castlevania* is an unlikely production: transmedia adaptations of video game series are typically neither successful nor held in high cultural esteem, the core production team had no previous experience in television production, and the four episodes (between 22 and 25 minutes each) are far from what would traditionally be understood as a 'full' series. Any one of these factors alone would be cause for concern if the series were considered for commissioning by broadcasters unsure of the capacity of a niche horror series to attract sufficient market share, or nervous about profit-maximisation through licencing to other markets. However, as I will discuss, the current configuration of Netflix as a media corporation 'available in 190 countries [and catering to] more than 100 million subscribers' (Jenner, 2018: 25) means its global audience reach can justify taking a risk on a small production.

The case of *Castlevania* on Netflix highlights a number of factors and concerns in contemporary global television production. In recent years, Netflix moved swiftly from being a supplement to 'conventional television' by providing an alternative to physical media (Mikos, 2016: 157), to being a producer of original content itself (Jenner, 2018). Taken at face value, the most 'global'-seeming aspects of *Castlevania* are its 'anime-style' animation and its international distribution via Netflix. Indeed, it is produced in partnership with Mua

Film (South Korea) and is apparently situated in the portfolio of Netflix's 'Director of Japan and global anime', despite having a tenuous connection to Japan beyond source material and visual style (Kim, 2018). As a 'Netflix Original' series – which, in this case, means that the series originated on the Netflix streaming platform, rather than being a property licenced by Netflix and presented in foreign markets with 'Netflix Original' branding – it has all the hallmarks of a normative example of contemporary Anglo-American production, in which international creative talent is filtered through an American frame.

This chapter takes Netflix's *Castlevania* as a case study through which to explore current issues in global television production and distribution. It examines *Castlevania* itself as an English-language text that takes a global media property as source material (though with minimal reference to its ludic past), adopts an anime style which references the game series' Japanese origins, and arguably relies on clichés for its version of medieval Romania. In doing so, it demonstrates one way Netflix has positioned itself as a space for risky or niche horror television production designed to reach a global audience.

Castlevania on Netflix

The first season of *Castlevania* adopts neither the narrative structure of a feature film nor the sustained development of character or plot found in serial television production. The scale and timing of the initial release suggest that the release functioned as a four-episode 'pilot', following more than a decade of attempts to adapt the game series to an English-language film and/or television series. The second season, which is eight episodes long, adopts a more traditional structure.

The first season begins with Lisa (voiced by Emily Swallow) entering Dracula's (Graham McTavish) castle, asking for support in her pursuit of 'science' and medicine and subsequently becoming his wife. Following this prologue, the story jumps forward to Lisa's execution by the local religious authorities on spurious charges of witchcraft, after which Dracula vows spectacular revenge on the province of Wallachia as retaliation for his wife's death. One year later, Dracula unleashes a horde of demons on Wallachia, ordering them to 'Kill everything you see' ('Witchbottle', 1.1). Trevor Belmont (Richard Armitage), the last member of a vampire-hunting dynasty, is reluctantly called into action over the next three episodes. Across the brief season, *Castlevania* follows Belmont through a few gory action sequences (some of which narrativise climactic 'boss' fights from the *Dracula's Curse* game) and concludes with a battle against Alucard (James Callis), who is Dracula's son with the murdered Lisa. As in the *Dracula's Curse* boss fight, defeat at Belmont's hands leads Alucard to join Belmont and the magic-user Sypha Belnades (Alejandra Reynoso) to defeat Dracula. Occurring at the conclusion of the first season, this action sets up the second season, in which the trio works together to stop Dracula and his assembled vampire court from wiping out all human life.[1] The second season ends with Dracula defeated and his allies depleted, but sufficient antagonists and unresolved narrative strands remain to populate a third season.

The animated *Castlevania* series follows several previous attempts at adapting the games. In 2005, *Variety* reported Paul W.S. Anderson would adapt and direct a live-action feature film. Konami subsequently sold the adaptation rights to Project 51 Productions, whose production of a direct-to-DVD animated feature to be written by Warren Ellis subsequently stalled (McWhertor, 2015). Eventually, series producer Adi Shankar – who had considered using Kickstarter to fund his own adaptation – partnered with Netflix to make the

animated series.[2] As Netflix is notoriously vague about its audience figures, it is not possible to know precisely how *Castlevania* was received worldwide. However, the digital data firm Parrot Analytics (Siu, 2017) reported that *Castlevania* had a US audience of just over 23 million in its first week of release, outperforming other so-called 'digital originals' such as *The Handmaid's Tale* (MGM/Hulu, 2017–)*,* and *Orange is the New Black* (Netflix, 2013–).

Interestingly, *Castlevania*'s first season appears to be the first industry-level television experience for key creative talent. British comics writer Warren Ellis was reportedly working on a *Castlevania* feature script as early as 2006 (McWhertor, 2015). While a notable figure in the comics industry, prior to *Castlevania* Ellis had previously served as story advisor when his work has been adapted for the screen, but only written for games, not television. Shankar had previously built a career as producer for Hollywood films (*The Grey*, 2011; *Dredd*, 2012) and semi-professional web-based fan films that parody existing franchises (Evans, 2015). Likewise, the series' director, Sam Deats, is an animator who also has experience in the games industry. Choosing animation over live-action was likely one way to mitigate the risk posed by *Castlevania* and its creative team's relative inexperience in television production, as animation tends to be less expensive than live-action narrative fiction production. Animation also enables globally (and temporally) dispersed production; for example, it is common for each actor to record their dialogue independently, making it easier to schedule different elements of the production. Additionally, it is straightforward to localise animation through alternate language tracks.

Writing of Netflix and other legitimate services that distribute their content over the public internet, as opposed to downloads and illicit distribution, Michael Strangelove notes that 'these new media companies represent a combination of experimentation and continuity

with legacy business practices characteristic of the television industry' (2015: 146). Netflix's tactic of releasing an entire television season on a single day, rather than in weekly instalments, offers audiences the choice to consume all episodes at once. The first season of *Castlevania* provides an extended and segmented narrative, but perhaps not a truly 'serialised' one. In an interesting evolution of what 'binge-watching' might mean, one reviewer of the first season suggests that it is 'not binge-able' as it is too short (Williams, 2017: para. 3). This suggests that watching all four episodes at once is not sufficient to constitute a satisfactory 'binge'. It is inviting to speculate why this adaptation was ultimately realised as a short-form serial narrative rather than a feature-length production, particularly as the first season is shorter even than a typical UK six-episode series. The offer of a short pilot episode feels like a signal of an ambivalence about its viability. However, while Netflix has been successful in building a brand around 'binge-able' television, it has mostly faltered with film production: by taking what might easily have been an animated feature and chopping it into episodes, Netflix positioned the first season of *Castlevania* as a television series, and builds on its established brand.

Castlevania as vampire fiction

From its first instalment in 1986, the *Castlevania* video game franchise has included a range of typical horror monsters, such as zombies, Frankenstein's monster and Dracula, which are fought by members of the Belmont family (Fernàndez-Vara, 2010). While some instalments of the games' franchise take place in the future, the majority are set in a range of 'historical' settings, following the game lore that Dracula returns every 100 years, only to be defeated by a new Belmont. For the Netflix cartoon, the current Belmont is Trevor, the last of his line, whose vulgar and boozy demeanour does not diminish the unambiguous heroism observed by

Andrew Black (2017) to characterise the protagonists of the game series. Taking its cue from *Dracula's Curse* (1989)*,* the Netflix series appears to take place in the 1470s, constructing a contemporary Anglo-American view of a late-medieval Romania influenced by adaptations of Bram Stoker's Victorian novel *Dracula,* and as originally imagined by Japanese game developers in the 1980s. However, *Dracula's Curse* is a 2D side-scrolling game without a strong narrative, which is perhaps the reason why the Netflix series draws on a later instalment, 1997's *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night* (set in the eighteenth century), to flesh out character relationships.

The Dracula of Netflix's *Castlevania* is not a 'sympathetic vampire' (Auerbach, 1995; Williamson, 2005; Spooner, 2017), but is meant to be a Stokerian iteration of a 'monstrous and authoritarian Count Dracula' (Abbott, 2016: 146). Granted, this Dracula is lent a measure of sympathy by his wife's unjust death. However, instead of taking this as an opportunity to explore the potential loneliness and angst of a vampire's long life, as modelled by Barnabas Collins in *Dark Shadows* (ABC, 1966–1971) or elaborated on via the rotating protagonists of Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* series of novels (Abbott, 2016; Spooner, 2017), this Dracula's bereavement is little more than a plot device. Lisa is introduced as a plucky woman whose interest in science and medicine leads to her subsequent condemnation as a witch. She is a thinly drawn character, and exists solely to die and give Dracula an excuse to murder thousands of Wallachians in graphic ways. [3] Despite his motivations, this Dracula remains a decidedly monstrous and unsympathetic antagonist, as this adaptation attempts to adopt the 'threatening image of patriarchal [and] military authority' that Stacey Abbott (2017: 190) argues is common to televisual Dracula adaptations in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

However, this Dracula follows his video game predecessor who, as Clara Fernàndez-Vara argues, was 'divested of his traditional powers and weaknesses' in his transformation from a character with a richness of cultural meaning into a 'stereotypical' villain who is interchangeable with other stock video game antagonists (2010: 7–8). As Paul Martin has argued, *Symphony of the Night*'s use of historical Europe by the Japanese designers at Konami for the game's setting 'may signify nothing more than a vague occidentalism' (2011: 80) as icons and signifiers of vampire fiction are used without reference to their cultural significance or metaphorical resonances. Indeed, in the Castlevania game series, vampires, zombies and other horror monsters are used as a skin for generic platform game mechanics – 'collecting items, jumping on platforms, avoiding and fighting enemies' (Fernàndez-Vara, 2010: 3) – and role-playing game elements such as levelling up character statistics and learning new attacks.

Significantly, these are not characteristics of *horror* games, where elements such as action-adventure survival mechanics, a suspenseful musical score and the evocation of terror (visceral and psychological) are used to identify this genre (Perron, 2009). Based on the mechanics of the series, Fernàndez-Vara very reasonably argues that 'the Castlevania games […] are not horror games themselves' (2010: 3), because they fail to offer their players the essential mechanics of horror games. Further, in the adaptation from game to television series, it appears that Netflix's *Castlevania* chooses to interpret 'horror' simply as 'gore', and refrains from engaging with the richness of existing vampire fiction or even the affective qualities of horror that Linda Williams (1991) has argued marks horror as a 'body genre'. Very little (if any) of the Netflix series seems oriented towards provoking an 'involuntary mimicry of the emotion or sensation on the screen' (Williams, 1991: 4), or even working through themes, aesthetics, narratives or anxieties related to horror more broadly (Kirkland,

2012). Just as Konami adopted a European gothic horror skin for its platformer games, the Netflix series manages to be singularly unaffective, provoking very few moments of disgust, terror or suspense.

Dracula-as-monster and violence-as-enticement were signalled in press releases, which promised audiences a series based on *Dracula's Curse,* featuring a male vampire hunter with content in line with producer Shankar's other 'dark and violent features' (AnimationXpress, 2017: para. 3). Prior to Netflix taking the series on board, Shankar sought to produce a 'bootleg' series; in a now-deleted Facebook post, he promised his adaptation would 'be dark, satirical, and after a decade of propaganda it will flip the vampire sub-genre on its head' (McWhertor, 2015: para. 2). In this case, 'propaganda' seemingly refers to the sensitive and emotional male vampires found in films and series like *Interview with the Vampire* (1994), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (WB/UPN, 1997–2003), *Twilight* (2008), and *True Blood* (HBO, 2008–2014), all of which address female and/or queer audiences. Shankar's promise appears therefore to have a gendered edge. The irony here is that Alucard, Dracula's half-human son who appears in both *Dracula's Curse* and *Symphony of the Night* games, is 'a glamorised, stylish, androgynous vampire' more akin to Rice's Lestat than Stoker's Dracula (Fernàndez-Vara, 2010: 10). Citing the description of Alucard in the player's manual for *Symphony of the Night,* Paul Martin notes that the character 'fits very much within the gothic tradition of the ambivalent monster appalled by its own monstrosity' (2011: 72). The second series of the Netflix *Castlevania* develops Alucard as a sympathetic vampire, with Dracula's ultimate defeat coming at the hands of his son, and Alucard shown to be visibly distraught at the end of the second series as he grieves losing both of his parents.

The graphic violence throughout *Castlevania*, not to mention an extended discussion of 'goat-fucking' in the scene introducing Belmont in 'Witchbottle' (1.1), is more notable than its capacity for effective (or perhaps *affective*) horror. This was not universally lauded, with one reviewer arguing that it can 'stray into try-hard "Look! We're adult and we can do this!" territory' (Williams, 2017: para. 15). One fan concluded a short review of the first season as follows: 'I really like this type of content. Couple that with a very nice visual style and no holds on the graphic violence, it's almost HBO-Esque' (itslate, 2018: para. 1). Leaving aside the characterisation of *Castlevania* as 'content', a fascinating term that elides genre- and medium-specificity in a streaming video landscape, this fan comment offers insight into how a particular audience perceives pleasure and value in television production. As is generally recognised within television studies, HBO and its ilk 'specialise in a new generation of critically acclaimed "quality" dramas' (Oldham, 2017: 297). These quite masculinised ideas of 'quality' in television production echo a pervasive understanding of HBO as the leading creator of television series characterised by 'cinematic' visuals and violent content (Newman and Levine, 2012). Free from the oversight of a network's Standards and Practices, Netflix follows channels such as FX and Showtime in how it borrows from HBO's playbook in offering audiences 'sex, violence, language, and subject matter' in excess of the norms of American mainstream television (Brown, 2010: 158). Still, it is easy to imagine a Netflix executive finding satisfaction in a comment that clearly signals success in attracting a famously lucrative young male demographic.

***Castlevania* as video game adaptation**

One possible reason that Netflix's *Castlevania* 'is not a thing that should exist', is that adapting video games to other media is more complicated than adapting novels or remaking films. Successfully adapting a video game franchise to film or television is far from a sure

bet, with few game adaptions matching their box office success (if any) with praise from critics. Such is the rarity of a 'good' game adaptation, reviews aggregator Rotten Tomatoes found it newsworthy to announce that *Castlevania* was its first-ever adaptation of a game to achieve a 'fresh' rating (indicating at least 60% positive reviews), with 79% of critics responding favourably, lauding its 'mega-violence, Gothic trappings, and consuming romance' (Vo, 2017: para. 4). (It is worth repeating that the only 'romance' of the first season is Dracula's brief and doomed relationship with Lisa.) In comparison, on the same site the recent high-profile game-to-film adaptations *Tomb Raider* (2018) and *Assassin's Creed* (2016) garnered 51% and 18% ratings respectively, with the *Resident Evil* franchise (2002– 2017) earning reviews between 20–37%.[4] Critical acclaim (or lack thereof) does not always correlate with a film's box-office success, but does contribute to a broader perception of game-to-film adaptations. However, there is a distinction to be made between the aims and pressures of game-to-film adaptations, and those of the Netflix series. Action films destined for theatrical distribution have a weight of expectation hanging over their (spectacular) aesthetics, their narrative scope and an implicit directive to appeal to a cinema audience beyond fans of the game. In contrast, the *Castlevania* cartoon series works within a different frame of expectations due to the affordances of a serialised narrative and the domestic distribution context.

In a context of Anglo-American production with a continual churn of sequels, remakes and reboots (Verevis, 2006; Loock and Verevis, 2012; Klein and Palmer, 2016), it is easy to see why games are repeatedly mined as source material. They are an abundant resource, with many games produced annually. Perhaps more importantly, they offer producers a 'pre-sold audience' for the adapted material (Jowett and Abbott, 2013: 59) demonstrated in the way *Castlevania* was positioned to appeal to a range of potential

audiences: those with a general interest in horror, fans of anime-style television, and engaged players of the game series. These multiple appeals read like a strategy to mitigate the risk run by past game-to-film adaptations in 'attempting to sell commercially successful solid gaming brands to an entirely difference audience' that does not already have a relationship with the source material (Brown and Krzywinska, 2009: 90). As already discussed, while commentary around the Netflix series positions it as an adaptation of *Dracula's Curse* alone, its story is adapted from multiple games in the franchise.

Netflix's version of *Castlevania* has inspired conversations online that evaluate its relationship to its source. Documenting game events and lore – which, depending on the genre, relies to a greater or lesser extent on player action or pre-written events – for debate and discussion online is a form of history work in which fan practices and a historian's methodology overlap (Webber and Stevens, 2020). For example, one fan-initiated thread on Reddit lists references in the Netflix series to *Dracula's Curse* (1989), *Symphony of the Night* (1997) and other instalments, illustrated with screenshots and YouTube clips. As an exercise in signalling something about taste and value, these self-declared fans of the game series 'identify themselves as discerning consumers by virtue of their cultural (or subcultural) capital' in their evaluation of the adaptation (Jowett and Abbott, 2013: 60). This group of fans have an interest in signalling their deep knowledge of the game series by collectively detailing every instance where the Netflix cartoon has drawn from the games. This list focuses on catching and attributing every reference in the cartoon series, noting all the ways it 'pays tribute [to the games] in as many subtle, indirect ways as possible' (itslate, 2017: para. 1), for example by cataloguing screenshots of settings that echo game locations, noting where characters move in a way reminiscent of game cut scenes, and listing the weapons and magic abilities that are common to both cartoon and games. The drive to catalogue every

reference extends to claiming that Dracula crying blood is a reference to a particular *Castlevania II: Simon's Quest* (1987) music cue titled 'Bloody Tears' rather than to a persistent trope of vampire fiction.

One of the replies to the aforementioned Reddit post claims that this exacting enumeration has 'obliterated' any 'complaints that the [production] team and [Warren] Ellis don't know anything about Castlevania' (Aiddon, 2018: para. 1) indicating that this portion of *Castlevania*'s audience values the experience of discovering markers of fidelity in the adaptation from game to cartoon. However, it becomes clear that these 'tributes' are limited to visual references, without reference to narrative or thematic translations from one medium to another. The thread hosts debates around the accuracy of the cartoon's presentation of medieval Christianity and the historical Vlad the Impaler, but it does not evaluate the series as a horror text.

As with other video game adaptations, in the *Castlevania* animated series the ludic aspects of the source medium are translated to narrative action sequences. As games are designed to be played, that is, written for players to interact with different elements, the challenge of translating a game into less interactive media forms is likely why films adapted from games are often unsuccessful with audiences and critics. To take a recent example, watching Lara Croft (Alicia Vikander) solve a series of puzzles in *Tomb Raider* (2018), which adapts the 2013 *Tomb Raider* reboot game, is not as engaging as working out how to solve a similar puzzle yourself. Alongside a story, the appeal of a video game is often found in the agency it offers, with players' skills and endurance being tested by the game. In horror games, as Tanya Krzywinska (2015) argues, this agency-via-mastery can be subverted by constructing conditions that limit a player's capacity to respond efficiently to expected cues,

offering instead claustrophobia, panic and powerlessness typical of horror fiction. With Netflix's *Castlevania*, the audience gets to watch Belmont traverse a series of platforms without either the agency to direct that action, or to experience the 'strong and direct sense of loss and vulnerability' (Krzywinska, 2015: 296) possible in an effective horror game. On another register, the fact that this is a cartoon and not live-action means the audience also misses out on the pleasure of watching actors and stunt performers achieving fantastical physical feats.

As Jesper Juul (2013) has argued, games are about the experience of failure: a game's dramatic tension comes from finally succeeding in solving a puzzle or overcoming an in-game feat after repeated attempts. Juul points out that 'the experience of failing in a game is quite different from the experience of witnessing a protagonist failing in a story' (2013: 14) because failures in a game force recognition of our own limitations as players. These failures, whatever their source, each involve a player missing goals set by the game or the player themselves. In video game adaptation, we have no input into the goals of a character, and no influence on their outcome. We know in the *Tomb Raider* film that Croft will not fail, appear to die, and respawn on screen during an action sequence; nor will she fail at a timed task that tests her problem-solving abilities. In *Castlevania*, at times the series offers an awkward hybrid of a platform game and televisual narrative with added quips. Questions of failure come through in the characterisation of Trevor Belmont as somewhat hapless and sarcastic, constructing a character that is shown to experience a certain degree of personal failure (falling through a floor; being too drunk to win a fist-fight) and a sarcastic reluctance to get involved with the cursed city.

Conclusion

The first season of *Castlevania* is an oddly complex text, for all that it is a four-episode cartoon series. Looking at the duration alone, one might expect it to be something cancelled early that has dribbled onto the home video market to allow a studio to mop up residuals, or a fragment of television from an overseas market that had once been recut into a feature film for domestic consumption, now getting its 'authentic' and uncut release. Instead, it is positioned as a complete season of new material, produced for a global audience. Mareike Jenner argues that series distributed globally under the Netflix Originals brand 'function as part of its reconception of television' (2018: 26). In the case of *Castlevania*, this may well include what 'counts' as a series (or season) of television. Michael Strangelove noted in 2015 that Netflix was trying to overcome its image of a purveyor of old television and mediocre films by 'producing its own premium content' (2015: 153). Since then, Netflix has developed into a producer of 'quality' television. For series and films made by Netflix, the affordances of Netflix as a platform and producer – global reach, a freedom from the constraints of a broadcast schedule, and the lack of regulatory oversight from national authorities – helps a popular perception of Netflix as fertile ground for television and film production. The long-running Japanese video game series' pre-sold audience has made it an attractive property to feed the present remake-led Anglo-American production context.

Castlevania's second season had its release date pushed back from summer 2018 (as originally reported by entertainment news sites *Digital Spy* and *USgamer*) to October, likely to take advantage of proximity to Halloween and its association with horror genres. Choosing to release the series on the Friday before Halloween, rather than following the first season's summer release, positioned it as part of a global horror event that included other several Netflix Originals including the film *Apostle*, a 10-episode adaptation of Shirley Jackson's *The*

Haunting of Hill House, and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (a reboot of 90s teen series *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*). It might be argued that the worldwide release of horror texts continues the export of the association in American media of horror with Halloween; the UK, by contrast, has long preferred its spooky stories at Christmastime (see Johnston, 2015).

The narrative of *Castlevania* is not particularly progressive, nor does it offer universal pleasures; indeed, I am more interested in what its existence can offer in discussions of Netflix as an experimental platform, as it takes a chance on a limited order of episodes. The series is engaged in negotiating different kinds of cultural capital – admitting to being a video game adaptation or not, being a vulgar and gory monster-hunting story (and therefore 'HBO-Esque', per the Reddit thread) and a masculinised idea of 'quality' and not exploring Dracula's more tender feelings. Ultimately, through the success of *Castlevania*, Netflix has demonstrated its potential utility as a platform for risky productions, thereby proving its utility as an aggregator for global horror audiences.

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[1] Dissenters among Dracula's forces do wonder if this plan to eliminate the vampires' primary food source is an elaborate suicide attempt.

[2] There have been at least two live action adaptations, both of which appear to be unauthorised/fan productions: an Italian feature film *Castlevania* (dir. Diego Vida, 2009) and an American series *Castlevania: Hymn of Blood* (2012).

[3] A phenomenon known as 'fridging', after Gail Simone's 1999 'Women in Refrigerators' list of female comics characters whose deaths or injuries serve as motivation for male heroes. The list is available at: *http://www.lby3.com/wir/* [Accessed 24 March 2019].

[4] *Resident Evil* (2002), 34%; outliers are *Resident Evil: Apocalypse* (2004) at 20% and *Resident Evil: The Final Chapter* (2017) at 37%.