William Sims Bainbridge

The Virtual Rebirth of Paganism

Abstract

This article begins by examining how two very popular massively multiplayer online games, Dark Age of Camelot (Mythic Entertainment, US 2001) and Age of Conan (Funcom, NO 2008), manage complex social and cultural structures. Both combine real history with legends, the first including the Norse pantheon of gods and the second emphasizing the Egyptian serpent deity, Set. They offer different degrees of fantasy and conflict between three primary factions of players, each represented as a culture or coalition of cultures. Against that background, a series of diverse examples suggest ways in which computer games and virtual worlds are exploring the modern meanings of ancient religions that were replaced by monotheism. The concluding section examines in closer detail the connections between religion and aspects of everyday life of virtual ancient Egyptians in A Tale in the Desert (eGenesis / Desert Nomad, UK 2003). Postmodern gaming culture endorses tribalism, enjoys imagining the collapse of civilization, and seeks escape from traditional faith, possibly even from any coherent philosophy of ethics. However, this creativity is a form of idealism rather than criminality, imagining the rebirth of creative legends and total religious freedom, often through the metaphor of repaganization.

Keywords

Pagan, Polytheism, Videogame, Dark Age of Camelot, Age of Conan, A Tale in the Desert, Virtual World, Online Game, Role-Playing, Secularization

Biography

William Sims Bainbridge has written 30 academic books and about 300 articles or book chapters in areas such as technological innovation, social movements, and modern culture. He gained his first real computer game, a GENIAC, in 1956, and has explored the human implications of that technology ever since. His 1975 Harvard doctoral dissertation and first book were a social history of the space program, while his second book, published in 1978, was an ethnography of a modern polytheistic religion. Since the 1980s, he has programmed much educational and research software, and he has edited encyclopedias on human–computer interaction and leadership in science and technology. In 2020 he published two books: *Cultural Science: Applications of Artificial Social Intelligence* (New York: Business Expert Press) and *The Social Structure of Online Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). Since 1992, he has served as a program director at the National Science Foundation. The views expressed in this article do not necessarily represent the views of the National Science Foundation or the United States.

Many cultures have legends about an earlier and more natural time in their history, perhaps as a dim recollection of their origins as hunter-gatherer bands.[1] Not much over a century ago, respectable travelogues claimed it was really possible to visit the exact location of the Garden of Eden,[2] but in today's secular world Eden seems at best an abstraction that represents purity, or nothing more than a fantasy. Today's most innovative fantasies, computer games, suggest a radical outcome of human progress. If indeed science soon reaches its natural limits[3] and does not satisfy humanity's deepest desires, the spiritual result of secularization may not be the death of religion but its creative disintegration, a form of *repaganization* that restores the independence of every person, family, or community to seek its own hopes and construct its own legends.[4] One definition of "pagan" is "local", given that *pagus* was the Roman term for the smallest administrative unit of a province; perhaps many pagan religions of the future will be individually small in population but similarly vast in the aggregate.

A good starting point to consider this possibility is a rather angry stanza from an early poem by John Milton:[5]

> Nor is Osiris seen
> In Memphian Grove, or Green,
>   Trampling the unshowr'd Grasse with lowings loud:
> Nor can he be at rest
> Within his sacred chest,
>   Naught but profoundest Hell can be his shroud:
> In vain with Timbrel'd Anthems dark
> The sable-stoled Sorcerers bear his worshipt Ark.

This is one of several stanzas describing the erasure of earlier gods in the ode "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity", written in 1629 from the perspective of Christianity's vast superiority. Much of this article will explore virtual simulations of ancient Egypt, and Osiris was its lord of death and rebirth, who had himself been assassinated. Thoughtful atheists may agree

---

1   Lévi-Strauss 1970.
2   Newman 1876.
3   Horgan 1996.
4   Bainbridge 2013; 2017.
5   See https://tinyurl.com/upynf6uk [accessed 29 June 2021].

that Jesus really existed, as did Abraham, Moses, Mohammad, Buddha, and a host of other messiahs, merely demoting them to the status of religious leader rather than emissary from God. So, we may postulate that Osiris really lived, born perhaps 25 centuries before Jesus, and played a similar role, including being murdered and then resurrected. Setting aside the theological debates about the Trinity and the possible demigod status of Mary and the saints, Christianity is monotheistic. Ancient Egyptian religion, by contrast, was polytheistic, so a key social role for Osiris was mediating among the gods and between them and Egyptians, thus supporting the emergence of the Egyptian empire that combined many tribes with local deities. The virtual paradise in today's computer games, especially the multi-player virtual worlds that thrive online, is a return to tribalism and spiritual independence.

Many solo-player videogames require taking the role of a pre-scripted character, much like the famous "method acting" style promoted in traditional theaters long ago by Constantin Stanislavski, in which the actor is subordinated to the character.[6] But that would not work in massively multiplayer online games, not only because dozens or even hundreds of people are improvising simultaneously in the same virtual territory, but also because players tend to create multiple diverse characters to run sequentially in search of different experiences each time. In the examples considered here, the player generally operates a single character, often called an *avatar* if it significantly represents the player's personality and perceptions. The player's viewpoint is frequently above and behind the avatar, seeing it walk across vast landscapes, enter realistic buildings, swim in a lake, and even climb ladders or ride horses. The environment includes dangers like carnivorous beasts and enemies who may belong to gang-like cults and even attack in groups, which motivates players to form fighting teams themselves. Social games often place avatars in competing factions, composed of ethnic groups that collaborate, and players may create enduring teams, called "guilds", "clans" or something similar, that may have hundreds of active members.[7] Avatars may loot armor and other valuables from defeated enemies, and the environment often supports gathering and crafting skills, such as mining metals then making them into swords and helmets.[8] These

6   Stanislavski 1964.
7   Bainbridge 2010b; 2020a; 2020b.
8   Bainbridge 2010a; 2019b.

virtual worlds may provide clues to how paganization might proceed in our future real world.

The research methodology employed here combines several techniques, especially participant observation ethnography and collection of statistical data when possible, for example conducting the equivalent of census counts through the systems provided to help players assemble both temporary teams and enduring guilds. Prior to beginning online research, I had studied many small religious movements, both observationally and historically, and "The Children of God (later named The Family International)" had assisted me in administering a questionnaire to over a thousand of its members.[9] I have experience with administering online surveys, but I found that more immediate observational methods worked better with the games, such as taking thousands of screenshot pictures of events and saving spontaneous public text messages shared by players in real time or on dedicated forums outside the game itself. Usually, I would explore the world using multiple avatars, each viewing it from a different perspective and having different skills for acting within it.[10] In later studies, researchers could use a different set of methods to assess the ways in which a player's real-life religious orientation might reflect the supernatural experiences of the avatars.[11]

Two Returns to Glorious Darkness

Snorri Sturluson stands outside the main gate of Jordheim, the capitol of Midgard, ready to tell stories but reluctant to discuss whether the philosophy behind his *Prose Edda* collection of myths dating from 1220 was based on the ancient Greek theory of Euhemerus, which proposed that the gods are merely exaggerated tales about real people of the historical past.[12] Just inside Jordheim stands a Valkyrie named Brienda, who offers a new weapon, saying, "This is the work of Odin and Thor. Our gods speak to us through four mighty oracles called the Visindakonar." Jordheim contains both the Temple of the Aesir and the Temple of Jotuns, while a special wiki explains the polytheistic theology of Midgard: "Ours is the harshest of lands, and we

---

9   Bainbridge 1997; 2002.
10 Bainbridge 2014; 2016.
11 Blascovich/Bailenson 2011; Yee 2014.
12 Sturluson 1916.

are bred from strife and hardship. Aye, and our power is the power of the old gods – of Odin and Thor and all the Aesir – and of the Jotun, the great giants of lore. Norseman, Troll, Dwarf, Kobold, and our more recent allies the Valkyn and Frostalf, have joined knowledge and strength to unite the mighty forces of Midgard, and we all look upon the rich lands of Hibernia and Albion with some eagerness and hunger."[13] Anyone can meet Sturluson today by entering the still viable 2001 massively multiplayer online (MMO) role-playing game Dark Age of Camelot (Mythic Entertainment, US 2001), because he is represented as a "non-player character", with a narrowly defined role that does not include analyzing legends.[14]

Euhemerism is actually a profound concept that can be combined with modern thinking about secularization to produce a radical but somewhat plausible theory about our current cultural conflicts and the future of religion.[15] Beginning with the Renaissance, aggravated by the Enlightenment, and now promoted by secular ideologies of the sciences, religious authority is disintegrating in so-called "postmodern societies", which may render monotheism too dogmatic and depose the Lord from his role as King of Heaven. This is not a prediction but a possibility, and after a period of confusion traditional monotheism may revive, because it offers a unified ethical system and potentially more satisfying psychological compensation for the trials and tribulations of life.[16] Yet many non-religious institutions and social movements now compete to take over these social-psychological functions, as sociologists are reminded by Auguste Comte's argument that their classrooms must replace churches, proposed in his 1883 academic scripture, *The Catechism of Positive Religion.*[17] For some significant fraction of our population, secularization may constitute repaganization, revival of the style, if not often the exact mythology, of ancient pagan religions and often beloved fantasy, rather than confident faith. Dark Age of Camelot (DAoC) has three factions, of which Midgard represents Norse paganism. Albion, with its capital at Camelot, primarily represents English Christianity but includes other ethnic faiths, while Hibernia lacks a sacred religion but practices Celtic magic oriented toward Nature.

---

13 https://camelotherald.fandom.com/wiki/Midgard [accessed 29 June 2021].
14 Mylonas/Howarth 2005; Bainbridge 2013.
15 Levin 1959; Spyridakis 1968; Honigman 2009.
16 Stark/Bainbridge 1985; 1987; 1996.
17 Comte 1883.

Among the most problematic periods of history are Europe's Dark Ages, especially in the society ruled by King Arthur from Camelot with knights including Gawain, Lancelot, Percival and Tristan sitting at the famous Round Table. Yet whether Arthur actually existed and where Camelot might be found are open questions.[18] In a field study of the modern Neo-Pagan and New Age subcultures associated with Glastonbury, England, I visited Cadbury Castle, a ruined hillfort often identified with Camelot. Glastonbury itself is frequently identified with Avalon, where Arthur's body may be buried. Other legends hold that Jesus earlier visited the area, and after his crucifixion Joseph of Arimathea brought the Holy Grail and thrust his staff into Wearyall Hill, where it took root and survived as a tree for centuries. Always, some people doubted such legends, but skepticism became conventional in the Age of Enlightenment, while the subsequent Romantic Era revived hope in miracles, as William Blake mused:

> And did those feet in ancient time
> Walk upon England's mountains green?
> And was the holy Lamb of God
> On England's pleasant pastures seen?[19]

Today, it is possible for anyone to visit Camelot on their home computer, and even go to Wearyall Hill on a pilgrimage. When DAoC launched in 2001, there were already other intellectually interesting MMOs, notably EverQuest (Verant Interactive / Daybreak Game Comp. US) from 1999, in which a human avatar can follow one of five newly imagined deities: Erolissi Marr (Queen of Love), Mithaniel Marr (Truthbringer), Rodcet Nife (Prime Healer), Karana (Rainkeeper), Bertoxxulous (Plaguebringer) or Innoruuk (Prince of Hate). A common structure of such games was for each player's avatar to belong to one of two or three major factions at war with each other, typically defending some territory that was safe for inexperienced players and holding battles on contested territories. On Sunday, 23 February 2020, I observed battles between Hibernia and Albion in DAoC, noticing that several of the Albion warriors belonged to a guild named Resident Evil after a videogame series that began in 1996. In the complex social structure, this guild with 50 members belonged to an alliance that consisted of 15 guilds, with a total membership of 2,981, as reported in table 1.[20]

---

18   Ashe 1968; Alcock 1971; Ashton 1974.
19   Blake 1946, 412.
20   https://search.camelotherald.com/#/search [accessed 29 June 2021].

Guild Name	Briton	Inconnu	Saracen	Highlander	Avalonian	Half Ogre	Minotaur
Guardian Council	341	153	185	168	105	61	36
Sedistic Torment	233	137	93	93	86	26	15
Ice Dragons	193	85	96	56	101	19	5
The Regulators	69	33	46	27	26	8	2
Lords of Gondor	33	19	24	11	5	3	0
Athenian Vanguard	38	15	11	11	5	0	1
I S A L T Y I	28	15	12	17	6	3	0
Two Clerics One Chalice	23	16	10	4	18	4	0
Resident Evil	12	10	9	8	9	2	0
Delusions of Candor	8	4	3	8	5	3	0
The Brethren	10	7	3	8	0	1	0
Dark Eagles	9	1	1	3	0	1	1
WaltDs	2	6	0	1	2	0	0
Kiss The Ring	2	1	2	0	1	0	1
Les Chevaliers Du Zodiac	1	3	1	1	1	0	0
TOTAL	1,002	505	496	416	370	131	61
Proportion of 2,981	33.6%	16.9%	16.6%	14.0%	12.4%	4.4%	2.0%

Table 1: Ethnic Distribution across an Alliance of Guilds in Dark Age of Camelot.

Each faction is a coalition of races, and three of those in Albion are clearly British: Briton (English), Highlander (Scottish) and Avalonian (inhabitants of the mythical Isle of Avalon, where the magical sword Excalibur was forged). Inclusion of the Saracens from Arabia may seem geographically incongruent, but a DAoC wiki explains: "Accompanying their kinsman Sir Palomides to Albion from the southern deserts, the Saracens bring a rich culture and technological acumen lost to most of the world in these dark days. Their foreign origin, along with their unusual speed and dexterity have often brought them accusations of thievery – accusations not always deserved, but which make them popular choices for scouting missions against the enemy."[21] The Inconnu are a blue-skinned non-human race that live underground and serve Arawn, Lord of the Underworld, and at his command have joined with the other Albion races to battle their common enemy, Morgana le Fay, the evil enchantress. As their name implies, Half Ogres are hybrids of Humans and Ogres, and I hypothesize that Ogres could also be called Orcs as in *Lord of the Rings*. All three factions have a few Minotaurs, brutes with the heads of bulls and the bodies of muscular humans. Clearly DAoC has strong fantasy elements, but they are largely traditional and connectable with diverse cultures of the real European Dark Ages.

21 https://camelotherald.fandom.com/wiki/Saracen [accessed 29 June 2021].

In a series of remarkably evocative fantasies that ended with his own suicide, Robert E. Howard imagined that a crude but courageous Celtic barbarian named Conan challenged civilization in the very early Hyborian Age, from which no other records have survived.[22] A legacy from 2008 is the online resurrection of its forgotten civilizations, AGE OF CONAN (Funcom, NO 2008), which despite its horror heritage gives less emphasis to combat between factions than DAoC does. Howard had transformed real ancient history into fantasy, with only a slight disguise of reality. This might be called *meta-euhemerism*, magnifying the legend not of a real person but of a real society. Originally there were three Hyborian ethnicities in which one could create avatars, each with its own territory: Aquilonian (ancient Greek or Roman), Cimmerian (Celtic), and Stygian (Egyptian). Later a fourth, Khitan (Asian), was added, presumably to make Asian players feel at home. The main Internet server in recent years is named Crom, after Conan's god, which Wikipedia describes in harsh terms: "Crom is the chief god of the Cimmerian pantheon, and he lives on a great mountain, from where he sends forth doom or death. It's useless to call upon Crom, because he is a gloomy and savage god who despises the weak. However, Crom gives a man courage, free-will, and the strength to kill their enemies at birth."[23]

Table 2 reports data collected in October 2020 through repeated in-game searches of the avatars currently online, and the complete membership of a guild that was actively recruiting beginner players. The Priest classes were determined by the religions of the three original cultures. Aquilonians primarily worship Mitra, and we may speculate he was an adaptation of Mithras, while a specialized Conan wiki notes: "Some Mitraists are unique in having an unflinchingly monotheistic devotion to Mitra. While most people follow a type of henotheism, in which they acknowledged the existence of gods that they chose not to worship, some Mitraists hold Mitra as the only god in existence. Not unexpectedly, this exclusivist view of Mitra produced intolerance of other religions at times."[24] The Stygians primarily worship Set, the totally evil Great Serpent, which Wikipedia confirms "is a god of deserts, storms, disorder, violence, and foreigners in ancient Egyptian religion".[25] Given that their tribes are not civilized and Crom is not worth

22 de Camp / de Camp / Griffin 1983.
23 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hyborian_Age#Crom [accessed 29 June 2021].
24 https://conan.fandom.com/wiki/Mitra [accessed 29 June 2021].
25 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Set_(deity) [accessed 29 June 2021].

Type	Class	Aquilonian	Cimmerian	Stygian	Khitan	Total	Guild
Priest	Priest of Mitra	30.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	8.6%	5.2%
	Bear Shaman	0.0%	17.5%	0.0%	6.9%	6.3%	7.9%
	Tempest of Set	0.0%	0.0%	26.3%	0.0%	7.5%	4.0%
Mage	Demonologist	0.0%	0.0%	27.2%	21.2%	10.5%	7.0%
	Herald of Xotli	0.0%	0.0%	11.2%	13.8%	5.0%	4.9%
	Necromancer	10.9%	0.0%	21.3%	16.7%	11.3%	11.7%
Rogue	Assassin	7.4%	3.0%	5.7%	12.3%	6.2%	7.0%
	Barbarian	4.4%	26.8%	0.0%	0.0%	9.5%	10.8%
	Ranger	6.7%	9.5%	4.1%	8.4%	7.1%	9.1%
Soldier	Conqueror	18.4%	22.0%	0.0%	0.0%	11.9%	13.3%
	Dark Templar	10.2%	12.3%	4.1%	11.3%	9.3%	10.0%
	Guardian	11.2%	8.9%	0.0%	9.4%	7.1%	8.8%
TOTAL Number of Avatars		430	473	437	203	1,543	668
Mean Level		65.0	65.8	67.1	68.4	66.3	30.3

Table 2: Survey of Classes and Races in AGE OF CONAN.

worshipping, Cimmerians have shamans rather than clergy as civilizations would define them.

The bottom row of Table 2 shows the average experience level of the avatars in a column, out of a maximum possible 80 that took scores of hours to achieve. The average was 66.3 among the 1,543 avatars in the main census, more than twice as high as the 30.3 in the beginner guild. The priests of Mitra and Set were more popular among the advanced players, and a news report from the game itself said that of the players who quickly reached level 80 in a temporary high-competition server named Saga of Zath, priests of Set were 10.6 percent of the total.[26] The other class categories were Mages, who are oriented toward magical attacks from a distance, duplicitous Rogues, and violent Soldiers. Originally, Aquilonians and Cimmerians could not be Mages, but after discussions with players, game designers made it possible for Aquilonians to be Necromancers, a technically interesting class that had been popular among Stygians because it could operate magical secondary avatars.[27] Following their serpent god, Set, the Stygians loved all forms of evil magic, so we must emphasize that this article will later explore versions of ancient Egypt that lack nasty combat altogether.

26 https://forums.funcom.com/t/saga-class-distribution-level-80/248 [accessed 29 June 2021].
27 https://forums.funcom.com/t/aquilonian-mage/65859;%20forums-archive.ageofconan.com/showthread.php?194436-Cimmerian-dark-templars [accessed 29 June 2021].

Halls of a Virtual Museum

Strategy games offer great contrast with role-playing games, for they are often designed for an individual player who gives orders to simulated armies rather than serving as a soldier inside an army. The most impressive historical series is TOTAL WAR, notably ROME: TOTAL WAR, dating from 2004, and TOTAL WAR: ROME II, from 2013. Generally speaking, the TOTAL WAR games (Creative Assembly / Feral Interactive / Activision, UK) take place on two levels, battles and wars. In the journal *The Classical World*, Paul Christensen and Dominic Machado described combat in ROME: TOTAL WAR: "Each battle begins with an introduction that lays out the historical context. The game then reproduces with considerable accuracy the topography of the battle site as well as the disposition of the opposing armies. Once the battle has begun, the player has the opportunity to zoom in and out of the battlefield and to see the action unfolding from above or to see what hand-to-hand combat would have looked like in ancient times."[28] When the player wins a battle and Rome conquers another town in the war of expansion, the inhabitants must be dominated, so their shrines and temples are torn down by the player, and Roman religion is imposed on them, as a medium of social control.

GODS AND HEROES: ROME RISING (Perpetual Entertainment / Heatwave Interactive, US 2011) was a multiplayer role-playing game set in the time of the Republic that provided a meaningful basis for virtual exploration of an ancient culture, including interaction with its deities as well as architecture and technologies. In creating an avatar, the player would first select a class, such as soldier, and then select one patron deity, with the option in that case of Mars or Minerva. Each other class also had both a male and a female deity: gladiator (Jupiter, Fortuna), mystic (Bacchus, Trevia), priest (Pluto, Juno), scout (Apollo, Diana), and nomad (Mercury, Nemesis). The marvelous simulated city of Rome included an elaborate temple for each of these deities, plus temples for Neptune and Vesta in the central Forum. *Gods and Heroes* was a tragic case of a high-quality cultural product that did not have sufficient audience to be a commercial success, or even obtain sufficient investment to reach completion, for example never providing the scout and nomad avatar choices. Thus Rome fell again, a decade ago, and the gods vanished.

---

28 Christesen/Machado 2010, 108.

There are many theories about why classical polytheism was replaced by Christian monotheism in Rome, but the transition was certainly difficult, even disastrous. Saint Augustine responded to the catastrophe by postulating a City of God: "The heavenly city is far above thine, where truth is the victory; holiness the dignity, happiness the peace, and eternity the continuance."[29] Long after the Renaissance, which revived civilization after the Dark Ages, Edward Gibbon considered whether Christianity caused the death of the Roman Empire or merely made that death less painful and concluded that Rome had over-extended itself and had always been doomed to fall.[30]

In the wake of the First World War, many European intellectuals considered the pathology of their own societies. They included psychologists like Sigmund Freud, who suggested that civilization caused discontent because it contradicted our natural primitive urges,[31] and Jacob Moreno, who argued we could be saved only through group psychotherapy role-playing that would create healthier intimate social networks.[32] Social theorists like Oswald Spengler and Pitirim Sorokin postulated that all civilizations are doomed to die eventually.[33] Sorokin, the founder of the sociology department at Harvard, suggested that a quasi-religious ideology would allow a new society to arise from chaos, united in what he called the *ideational* stage of development, which would gradually become more secular and hedonistic, what he called *sensate*, and then collapse back into chaos. His theory is ignored by sociologists today, despite the rising evidence that he was correct and we are rushing toward our own doom.

The highly popular and extensive ASSASSIN'S CREED series (Ubisoft, FR 2007) of solo-player games sends the player subjectively back to earlier eras of history, playing the role of a pre-scripted fictional character in the context of a hidden war between two high-tech mystical groups, the Assassins and the Templars. Both groups actually did exist but have been the focus of many legends, including rumors that both survive today and may shape our own history from their obscure hiding places. The Assassins were a sect of Shia Islam that came into existence around 1090 in Persia and Syria and became the focus of legends, most notably the tale of the Old Man of the Mountain

---

29 St. Augustine 1903, 103.

30 Gibbon 1880.

31 Freud 1961.

32 Moreno 1934; Moreno 1944; Bainbridge 2020b.

33 Spengler 1926–1928; Sorokin 1937.

popularized by the travels of Marco Polo, but were apparently eradicated around 1256.[34] In the chaotic context of the Crusades, they interacted, sometimes cooperatively, with the Templars.[35] In his 1818 history of the Assassins, Joseph von Hammer suggested that they had even been the inspiration for the Templars.[36] However, the myths about the Assassins seem to have been largely cooked up either by opponents or by story-tellers.[37]

The main action of the first Assassin's Creed game was set in the year 1191, when both the Assassins and the Templars were well established and active, but the second game began in 1476, when both supposedly had ceased to exist. The premise of the series is that both still exist as secret organizations, battling each other in the past through a form of time travel. Given that this rather violent set of games places an Islamic group in bloody conflict with a Christian one, the designers placed this message at the beginning of play: "Inspired by historical events and characters. This work of fiction was designed, developed and produced by a multicultural team of various religious faiths and beliefs." As the series developed, the legendarium expanded, going back to 1334 BC, when the Egyptian pharaoh Smenkhkare established The Order of the Ancients. A special wiki outlines the expanded legend, which dates the Knights Templar about 24 decades earlier than conventional history reports: "With the rise of Abrahamic religions and the decline of polytheistic religions across Europe and Asia, the Order began to decline and were eventually mostly wiped out by King Alfred of Wessex in 878 AD, who reformed the Order into the Knights Templar, otherwise known as the Templar Order."[38] Table 3 lists the first 11 main installments, with the number of Wikipedia pageviews (since 1 July 2015) and reviews on the Steam website, which distributes the entire series, all data as of 1 January 2020, along with the proportion of Steam player reviews that were positive.

Egyptologist Julia Troche at Missouri State University suggests that Assassin's Creed possesses real historical meaning, even if the two competing conspiracies are exaggerated legends: "Both groups are fighting for peace, but the Assassins believe peace can be achieved through liberty and free will, while the Order of the Ancients believe that strong rule and order is

---

34 Lewis 1952; Lincoln 2006.

35 Nowell 1947.

36 von Hammer, 1835, 216.

37 Daftary 2006.

38 https://assassinscreed.fandom.com/wiki/Order_of_the_Ancients [accessed 29 June 2021].

Installment	Setting	Year	Wikipedia Pageviews	Steam Reviews	Positive Ratings
I	Third Crusade (1191 AD)	2007	2,224,288	6,880	82%
II	Italian Renaissance (1476–1499 AD)	2009	1,847,089	17,923	85%
Brotherhood	Italian Renaissance (1499–1507 AD)	2011	1,481,565	7,583	87%
Revelations	Italian Renaissance (1511–1512 AD)	2011	1,526,990	6,701	83%
III	Colonial era (1754–1783 AD)	2012	2,660,723	2,122	44%
IV: Black Flag	Colonial era (1715–1722 AD)	2013	3,199,622	26,825	87%
Rogue	Colonial era (1752–1776 AD)	2014	2,922,198	5,910	81%
Unity	French Revolution (1776–1800 AD)	2014	3,619,624	19,603	63%
Syndicate	Victorian era (1868 AD)	2015	4,854,397	10,349	76%
Origins	Ptolemaic Egypt (49–43 BC)	2017	3,959,467	37,835	84%
Odyssey	Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC)	2018	3,069,458	37,654	86%

Table 3: The Highly Popular Historical Role-Playing Series Assassin's Creed.

the only way to ensure peace. I hope this reminds my History 103 class of a topic we have talked about recently and many students wrote essays on – this tension between how to rule and questions surrounding the inherent selfishness versus goodness of people is truly a centuries old debate."[39] The relevance to Egyptology is that the 2017 version, Origins, not only takes place in Ptolemaic Egypt around 49–43 BC, but also had an optional educational version, which could be freely downloaded by owners of the game or purchased separately, titled Discovery Tour Ancient Egypt.[40] The student visits a very large number and diversity of tour sites, listening to a guide's narration and opening pages like those in a picture-oriented textbook, reproducing the narrator's text in connection with reproductions of artifacts, sites, and more recent artistic representations.

One tour takes place at the Library of Alexandria, based on the appearance of the Library of Celsus at Ephesus because the original no longer exists, as this inside text explains: "Throughout the centuries, fires and wars between Christianity and paganism destroyed the library, leaving nothing behind." Another tour admits, "While there have been no major discoveries pertaining to the Sphinx of Giza in recent years, theories and hypotheses

39   See Missouri State University History Blog https://tinyurl.com/3bz8rj9p [accessed 29 June 2021].
40   https://assassinscreed.fandom.com/wiki/Discovery_Tour:_Ancient_Egypt [accessed 29 June 2021].

continue to emerge. Without validation provided by archaeological sources, however, they remain unsubstantiated." At another point in that tour, an example of euhemerism is offered: "Originally a representation of the king imbued with the power of the lion, the sphinx was eventually viewed as a direct representation of the divine." One may take these tours of ancient Egypt in the forms of several avatars, and I used one that represented Julius Caesar, thinking of the intellect expressed through his writings as well as his thirst for power when he climbed onto the back of the Sphinx.

The non-game virtual world *Second Life* contains many simulations of ancient Egyptian architecture, created from scratch by their owners, and the self-descriptions of three groups are worth quoting here. Temple of Nefertari (607 members): "a fantasy creation set in Ancient Egypt. The Temple has regular events like Belly Dancing, top DJ's, Quests, cultural activities, costume, adult play areas and events. Enjoy exploring the temples, pyramid and palace. See the notice boards for events. Costumes, landmarks and information in the bazaar!" Children of the Nile (442 members): "Enter into a mystical world full of love and adventure. 1500 years before Christ, Rome was not yet built, the Greeks were not yet aware that they were Greeks, the Trojan War had not yet taken place, as in Egypt, on the banks of the Nile, a high civilization flourished, verifiable only with modern times. Be a part, join us now!" The Temple of Bastet (190 members): "Bast is the ancient Egyptian Goddess of cats. Visit her sanctuary shrine for pagan spiritual ritual and worship. Join for voice events, RP [role-playing] themes, and lectures."

The History of a Virtual Egypt

Repeatedly since 2003, role-play gamers have entered a barren simulation of the wide territory around the Nile and gradually built a civilization, climaxing after roughly two years with celebrations of success, then total ritualized destruction, followed by the launch of a new tale.[41] The tenth *telling* of A Tale in the Desert began on 28 May 2021, and this study includes statistical data on the ancient Egyptian population at the conclusion of the ninth telling. In addition to participant observation research in five tellings, this section draws upon A Wiki in the Desert, which has preserved Tale's history in ten connected editions.

41 Bainbridge 2018, 2019a.

Although marketed as a commercial MMO, Tale is a marvelous creative community of a few hundred friends around the world, in which players communicate closely with the game developers, some serving as volunteer managers. For example, starting late in the ninth telling, about six months of active communication about features under development for the tenth telling took place in a public Discord, involving 4 developers, 3 game managers, a 2-person events team, and 86 subscribers who were especially active members of the community. Additionally, A Wiki in the Desert, a public medium for communication, includes records of the rituals that ended the first telling. Two transcendent and possibly supernatural beings had shaped the history of virtual Egypt, the Pharaoh and the Stranger. As the end of Egyptian civilization approached, the Pharaoh proclaimed:

> One year ago the Stranger presented us with 49 challenges. This is not the first time the Stranger has been in our midst. The ancients have faced him before. It's said that if a people can endure the challenges of the Stranger, then that civilization can live forever and it will be immortal. You've worked hard, and will prevail.

Oracles of Architecture: you've shown endurance and strength.
Oracles of Worship: you've shown unity of spirit and cooperation.
Oracles of Art: you've created real beauty.
Oracles of Conflict: you've shown cunning and strategy.
Oracles of the Human Body: you know our land.
Oracles of Thought: you've found wisdom and knowledge.
Oracles of Leadership: you've guided us through it all.

> It's man's nature that he is at his best when challenged. Men reach peaks of virtue only when they are tempted toward evil. And that's why I invited Stranger into our land. Soon our children will rule this land, and they too will need strengthening. They too will need their virtue tested so that they may become powerful and good. So we must become the Stranger. We must create new challenges for our children. We must create new tests for them to pass. The last thing we must do before we pass from this world is leave behind the greatest Monuments of our civilization: the tests that will strengthen the next generation.[42]

---

42   perl.atitd.wiki/tale1/Endgame [accessed 29 June 2021].

The oracles were the most honored specialists in seven *disciplines*, starting with Architecture, where *tests* could be passed by building physical structures from virtual raw materials and manufactured components. Each monument belonged to a particular discipline and must be built by 127 avatars who had achieved required status in that discipline: 1 oracle, 2 sages, 4 masters, 8 scribes, 16 journeymen, 32 prentices, and 64 students. The lowest status in each discipline, initiate, had not passed a test and thus was not eligible to help, so the seven rituals served as demonstrations of the social status achieved by active players. Indeed, they succeeded in completing the rather demanding monuments, each of which added a new test for the second telling, while the last one was followed by total destruction of everything else the Egyptians had built.

Each telling is moderately different, for example using software algorithms to place at new locations the mineral resources that can be mined. By the fourth telling, when my ethnography began, the Art discipline had become Art and Music, while the Conflict discipline had been replaced by its opposite, Harmony. It was "about contributing to our Egyptian Society, and knowing your fellow Egyptian," requiring meeting many Egyptians in the initiation quest, including one from each of the other six disciplines.[43] Tests became available as the avatar ascended a ladder of general experience, which was abolished for the ninth telling, and at level 5 an Egyptian could pass the Test of the Prophet in Harmony by predicting which other players would make the greatest progress. At level 7 the Test of Marriage became available in Harmony, at which two avatars would go through a wedding ceremony, after which they not only had the social status of spouses but also shared ownership of their properties. This group ritual must take place at a Common Altar, where a statue of a priestess kneels, following these instructions:[44]

> One person should clear the altar of any items, and meditate at it in order to clear and reset any previous interactions with it. The first partner places a medium diamond on the focus on the statue's left hand. The second partner places a medium diamond on the focus on the statue's right hand. Five witnesses click on the altar and choose to "meditate". The witnesses all need to meditate within a few seconds of each other, else it may be necessary to restart the ceremony. The couple themselves

43 www.atitd.org/wiki/tale4/Principles_of_Harmony [accessed 29 June 2021].
44 www.atitd.org/wiki/tale4/Test_of_Marriage [accessed 29 June 2021].

	Architecture	Art and Music	Human Body	Natural Philosophy	Thought	Worship	TOTAL
Initiate	43	22	88	90	104	113	460
Student	24	13	83	49	61	62	292
Prentice	10	17	57	40	21	40	185
Journeyman	7	1	36	9	15	3	71
Scribe	4	5	21	10	11	0	51
Master	3	13	10	5	7	0	38
Sage	0	0	5	1	0	0	6
Oracle	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
TOTAL	92	72	301	205	220	219	

Table 4: Advancement in Six Disciplines of A TALE IN THE DESERT.

do not meditate as part of the ceremony. If you hear music, the ceremony was a success. If something goes wrong, just clear the items and the altar, and try again. Remember to take the diamonds back when you're done!

The ninth telling reorganized the disciplines, removing Harmony and Leadership, adding Natural Philosophy, and moving some tests around, for example placing Marriage in Worship. In earlier tellings, a census of all the disciplines could be obtained at any University of Leadership, and this was moved to the Great Halls of three regional and ethnic factions that had been introduced with the eighth telling: Kush in southern Egypt, Hyksos in central Egypt, and Meshwesh including the northern Nile delta. Table 4 shows how many avatars had been initiated into each of the six disciplines and advanced to a higher status, demonstrating that they tended to specialize. The total number of avatars was 593 as of 19 December 2020, and the table reports 1,109 statuses, which means that the average avatar had entered only about two of the six disciplines.

Advancing beyond initiate ranks requires passing a *test* conducted as a competition in which early winners are celebrated but eventual success is available for any dedicated player. In the case of the Worship discipline, marriage would advance an avatar who had already been initiated. The classic starter quest in Worship is a group ritual that requires substantial resour-

ces: "Conduct a Vigil using a Sacrificial Bonfire built near an Altar. Visions will come to the participants describing required sacrifices. The visions will come faster as the Vigil increases in length. Scores are based on the number of sacrifices made, and of the length of the Vigil itself."[45] Vigils became less competitive in Tale 9, redesigned "to generate benefit for all of Egypt via Religious Favour."

Test of Festivals involved organizing a Worship ritual for very large numbers of players, but it began with preparations by a pair, who would make offerings at an altar to determine what exactly they would need to do during a later festival. Each of the Seven Gods required a different pair of items: Bastet: honey and camel milk; Hathor: male rabbit and female rabbit; Isis: honey and oil; Maat: linen and canvas; Osiris: flax and raw barley; Ra: medium quartz and medium topaz; Thoth: papyrus paper and candle.[46] Only one other Worship test became available in the ninth telling, which required 49 people to give great effort for a week to build a vast Megalopolis, with many walls, twelve towers, plus four gates and bridges. In fact, eight other Worship tests existed but were not available, with names like Beacons, Visions, Holy Shrine, Humble Priests, Ritual Mummification, and Ka. To gain access to a test, Egyptians needed to collaborate to unlock each one, primarily through donating raw materials or manufactured items in great numbers, and with Tale 8 the donation locations were moved to three geographically remote Universities of Progress.

The introduction of explicit factions in Tale 8 may have reduced the significance of tests in some disciplines, especially those like Worship that stress building community and did not directly enable practical skills. In earlier tales, each of Egypt's many regions could become the home of a network of cooperative guilds that would donate resources like bricks and wooden boards to local university structures that were entirely simulated, thereby gaining for that region the ability to acquire a particular industrial skill or discipline test. Each telling needed to be different enough from the one before to be really interesting to veteran players. Also, at this point in its history, TALE was going through leadership changes. Originally owned by eGenesis, it had been taken over by Pluribus Games in 2014, and then in 2018 by Desert Nomad Studios, all three of which were very small and creative companies. The great mystery across all these years was why such a high

45   https://atitd.wiki/tale9/Vigils [accessed 29 June 2021].
46   https://atitd.wiki/tale9/Test_of_Festivals/Testing_Your_Requirements [accessed 29 June 2021].

Rank	Kush	Hyksos	Meshwesh	Total	Female	Married	Mean Guilds
Initiate	74	221	145	440	43%	40%	1.0
Associate	21	66	41	128	45%	59%	2.2
Member	10	18	20	48	46%	75%	2.7
Kinsman	6	10	7	23	57%	83%	3.1
Fellow	2	4	2	8	0%	75%	2.9
Patriarch	1	0	2	3	67%	100%	3.0
Elder	10	6	6	22	32%	95%	4.2
TOTAL	124	325	223	672	43%	50%	1.6

Table 5: Status System of A TALE IN THE DESERT at the End of the Ninth Telling.

quality and constantly innovating game was not popular, having only a tiny fraction of the players of many MMOs. One sad explanation may be that TALE is non-violent, making it nearly impossible for avatars to fight, and certainly they can never kill a competitor, even in fiction.

To explore the factions, using both the wiki and the in-game search system I was able to get information about 672 avatars at the end of 2020 for Table 5, including 79 who may have been minor "alts" belonging to players with multiple subscriptions and are not counted in Table 4. In addition to their faction membership, it was possible to learn their faction rank, gender, marital status, and which if any of the 24 guilds with 25 or more members they belonged to. Joining a guild required applying at its Guild Hall and being accepted by a leader, but was not automatically limited by faction or existing membership in another guild. Note that only the elder status in the faction rank system actually confers power, and this is a status system using terms very different from the discipline ranks. One gains status points with a faction by contributing, for example by finding rare herbs or donating materials in a complex advancement system called *research*. This is historically analogous to the development of industries in ancient Egypt, but is achieved by investing goods to open the possibility for Egyptians to gain a valuable skill such as blacksmithing or farming, which allows completion of many tasks that are integrated into the Egyptian socio-economic system.

Each avatar begins in a remote tutorial area called Welcoming Island, where early skills are gained through practice. Advancing to Egypt itself in the later tellings required selecting a faction, although it would be possible to switch to a different faction, and by the tenth telling there was considerable collaboration between the factions. The most populous faction, Hyksos, owned territory on the Nile in the middle of Egypt, thus more convenient for extensive travel, while Meshwesh held the North including the Nile Delta, and the least popular faction, Kush, was in the far south and remote from both the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. The 43 percent female refers to the gender of avatars, not players, but many players are indeed women, and an unknown but apparently large fraction are older than the typical age of MMO gamers. Half the avatars have completed the Marriage Test and can share resources, in several cases representing married couples in the real world or two avatars belonging to the same player, who is technically able to operate both simultaneously. Of the 672 avatars, 43 belonged to at least five of the big guilds, with at least 25 members, and one had even joined 11 of them. The mean guild membership is a measure of connection between big guilds, because most players belong to one or even many small guilds not counted in that measure.

During my ethnography of the first month of the tenth telling, I focused on the connections between the polytheistic religion and practical aspects of life through three main activities: (1) helping to set up an ordinary six-member local guild with extensive manufacturing facilities, which we named Minions of Osiris, (2) joining the very special guild that built and supplied the research laboratories and that had 72 members as of 20 June 2021, and (3) checking the locations of common altars to update the map of altars in the wiki. In addition to competitive tests related to community, the Discipline of Worship offers skills that are related to life and thus render biology sacred, notably farming, horticulture, and animal husbandry. In addition to high status universities, the disciplines have more modest schools, where such skills can be obtained by paying tuition, which happens to be 100 of each of four vegetables for learning cooking at a School of Worship. Two types of seeds can be used to grow each vegetable, using water and following slightly different procedures to get the same results. Six of these eight seeds are named after ancient Egyptian gods: garlic (Apep's crop, Heket's reaping), onion (tears of Sinai, Amun's bounty), leek (Hapi's harvest, Horus' grain), carrot (green leaf, Osiris' orange).

My avatar learned "ritual item construction" at a School of Worship, encouraging him to adopt the *priest* specialization, which improved his ability

to do "dowsing, and anything that involves supernatural powers." The specializations are combinations of attributes, represented by variables in the relevant action algorithms, to which temporary abilities may be added by eating a cooked vegetable with the desired quality or, in the case of priests, by praying at a common altar to a selected god. Osiris provides two points of "focus" that last a day and speed up several jobs, such as dowsing, wood carving, and prospecting for rare metals and precious gems. The other deities and their attributes are Amen Ra (strength), Hathor (endurance), Horus (dexterity), Isis (speed), Set (constitution), and Thoth (perception).

Universities of Natural Philosophy offer a Test of Astrological Alignment that requires groups of pairs of Egyptians to do a special ritual at a common altar, to see how similar or different they are: "As the ritual is completed, the two participants will immediately sense a special bond, or lack thereof."[47] Universities of the Human Body connect very extensively with the altars: "The Test of the Bedouin is a special award given to those that prove themselves the best explorers of our land. When you visit an altar, anoint it with a drop of Cactus Sap. The longer that altar remains unanointed by others, the better. Every 24 hours, the best explorers will receive an advancement in the Test of the Bedouin."[48]

A Tale in the Desert is a nice model of how future paganism may function, given that the factions, guilds, and individuals both compete and collaborate. Nearly a month into the tenth telling, I had invested many hours anointing altars, so I commented in the Kush text chat: "Done 60 with no result." Other members of my faction replied: "You gotta do a lot more than 60." "At this point you are looking north of 120." "If there's 350-ish altars in Egypt you should aim for more than half … then again half these comments might be from people running altars hoping to discourage you." "I am probably going to give the crazy people another month then do my runs." When I started, early runners in the Hyksos and Meshwesh factions had reported the locations of several altars in the map on the wiki for the tenth telling, so I felt proud I was the first Kushite to do so. Then the fellow elder of my local guild suggested I keep the locations secret so our members could advance more rapidly than everybody else. The final discouragement was discovering that none of the altars had moved since the ninth telling, perhaps because the developers had concentrated on expanding the research

47   https://atitd.wiki/tale10/Test_of_Astrological_Alignment [accessed 29 June 2021].
48   https://atitd.wiki/tale10/Test_of_the_Bedouin [accessed 29 June 2021].

laboratory system, so the older version of the wiki map of altars from the ninth telling was still correct in the tenth. How cults of the future will share information, imagination, and memory may be a similar mixture of order and chaos.

Conclusion

Over two centuries ago, Samuel Taylor Coleridge asserted that appreciation of fiction requires *suspension of disbelief*,[49] yet that may not be very different from *belief* if one lives in a culture that lacks a dominant institution that tells people what every good person must believe. My avatar in A Tale in the Desert claims to have complete faith in Osiris, yet I myself am under no such obligation and hypothesize that Osiris was a real historical person, not a god. Outside the walls of Camelot or the villainous Templar cult, it is very hard to find historical Christianity in highly popular computer games, and the polytheism moderated by Osiris is rare as well. Yet during our time of cultural transformation with unpredictable outcomes, information technology and the religious freedom associated with secularization have allowed people to romanticize potentially utopian cultures from earlier periods of history. From moment to moment and across the full range of social situations we experience, faith and fantasy may weave together chaotically in the complex fabric of our future lives. We cannot predict whether a new Osiris will tie together the competing strands of hope, or whether agnostic despair will rule the coming Dark Age, or whether both utopia and dystopia will remain the fantasies of wandering dreamers.

Bibliography

Alcock, Leslie, 1971, *Arthur's Britain*, Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin.
Ashe, Geoffrey (ed.), 1968, *The Quest for Arthur's Britain*, London: Paladin.
Ashton, Graham, 1974, *The Realm of King Arthur*, Newport, Isle of Wight: Dixon.
Bainbridge, William Sims, 1997, *The Sociology of Religious Movements*, New York: Routledge.
Bainbridge, William Sims, 2002, *The Endtime Family: Children of God*, Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.
Bainbridge, William Sims, 2010a, *Online Multiplayer Games. San Rafael*, California: Morgan and Claypool.

49 Coleridge 1817.

Bainbridge, William Sims, 2010b, *The Warcraft Civilization: Social Science in a Virtual World*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Bainbridge, William Sims, 2013, *eGods: Faith versus Fantasy in Computer Gaming*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Bainbridge, William Sims, 2014, *An Information Technology Surrogate for Religion: The Veneration of Deceased Family in Online Games*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bainbridge, William Sims, 2016, *Virtual Sociocultural Convergence: Human Sciences of Computer Games*, London: Springer.

Bainbridge, William Sims, 2017, *Dynamic Secularization*, Cham, Switzerland: Springer.

Bainbridge, William Sims, 2018, A Simulated Utopia: The Social System of a Virtual Ancient Egypt, in: Lakkaraju, Kiran / Sukthankar, Gita / Wigand, Rolf T. (eds.), *Social Interaction in Virtual Worlds*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 253–287.

Bainbridge, William Sims, 2019a, A Virtual Trinity, in: Possamai-Inesedy, Alphia / Nixon, Alan (eds.), *The Digital Social: Religion and Belief*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 25–48.

Bainbridge, William Sims, 2019b, *Virtual Local Manufacturing Communities: Online Simulations of Future Workshop Systems*, New York: Business Expert Press.

Bainbridge, William Sims, 2020a, *Cultural Science: Applications of Artificial Social Intelligence*, New York: Business Expert Press.

Bainbridge, William Sims, 2020b, *The Social Structure of Online Communities*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Blake, William, 1946, [1808], *The Portable Blake*, New York: Viking.

Blascovich, Jim / Bailenson, Jeremy, 2011, *Infinite Reality: The Hidden Blueprint of Our Virtual Lives*, New York: William Morrow.

Christesen, Paul / Machado, Dominic, 2010, Video Games and Classical Antiquity, *The Classical World* 104, 1, 107–110.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, 1817, *Biographia Literaria*, New York: Kirk & Merein.

Comte, Auguste, 1883, *The Catechism of Positive Religion*, London: Trübner.

Daftary, Farhad, 2006, The "Order of the Assassins": J. von Hammer and the Orientalist Misrepresentations of the Nizari Ismailis, *Iranian Studies* 39, 1, 71–81.

de Camp, L. Sprague / de Camp, Catherine Crook / Griffin, Jane Whittington, 1983, *Dark Valley Destiny: The Life of Robert E. Howard*, New York: Bluejay.

Freud, Sigmund, 1961, [1930], *Civilization and Its Discontents*, New York: Norton.

Gibbon, Edward, 1880, [1776–1789], *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, New York: Hurst.

Honigman, Sylvie, 2009, Euhemerus of Messene and Plato's Atlantis, *Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 58, 1, 1–35.

Horgan, John, 1996, *The End of Science*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude, 1970 [1964], *The Raw and the Cooked*, New York: Harper.

Levin, Harry, 1959, Some Meanings of Myth, *Daedalus* 88, 2, 223–231.

Lewis, Bernard, 1952, The Sources for the History of the Syrian Assassins, *Speculum* 27, 4, 475–489.

Lincoln, Bruce, 2006, An Early Moment in the Discourse of "Terrorism": Reflections on a Tale from Marco Polo, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 48, 2, 242–259.

Moreno, Jacob L., 1934, *Who Shall Survive?* Washington, D. C.: Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing Company.

Moreno, Jacob L., 1944, Psychodrama and Therapeutic Motion Pictures, *Sociometry* 7, 2, 230–244.

Mylonas, Eric / Howarth, Robert, 2005, *Dark Age of Camelot Epic Edition*, Roseville, CA: Prima Games.

Newman, John Philip, 1876, *The Thrones and Palaces of Babylon and Nineveh from Sea to Sea*, New York: Harper.

Nowell, Charles E., 1947, The Old Man of the Mountain, *Speculum* 22, 4, 497–519.

Sorokin, Pitirim A., 1937, *Social and Cultural Dynamics*, New York: American Book Company.

Spengler, Oswald, 1926–1928, *The Decline of the West*, New York: A. A. Knopf.

Spyridakis, S., 1968, Zeus Is Dead: Euhemerus and Crete, *The Classical Journal* 63, 8, 337–340.

St. Augustine, 1903, *The City of God*, London: J. M. Dent.

Stanislavski, Constantin, 1964, *An Actor Prepares*, New York: Routledge.

Stark, Rodney / Bainbridge, William Sims, 1985, *The Future of Religion*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Stark, Rodney / Bainbridge, William Sims, 1987, *A Theory of Religion*, New York / Toronto: Peter Lang.

Stark, Rodney / Bainbridge, William Sims, 1996, *Religion, Deviance and Social Control*, New York: Routledge.

Sturluson, Snorri, 1916, *The Prose Edda*, New York: Oxford University Press.

von Hammer, Joseph, 1835, *The History of the Assassins*, London: Smith & Elder.

Yee, Nick, 2014, *The Proteus Paradox: How Online Games and Virtual Worlds Change Us – and How they Don't*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Gameography

Age of Conan (Funcom, NO 2008).

Assassin's Creed (Ubisoft, FR 2007).

A Tale in the Desert (eGenesis / Desert Nomad Studios, UK 2003).

Dark Age of Camelot (Mythic Entertainment, US 2001).

EverQuest (Verant Interactive / Daybreak Game Company, US 1999).

Gods and Heroes: Rome Rising (Perpetual Entertainment / Heatwave Interactive, US 2011).

Rome: Total War (Creative Assembly / Feral Interactive / Activision, UK 2004).

Total War (Creative Assembly / Feral Interactive / Electronic Arts, UK 2001).

Total War: Rome II (Creative Assembly / Feral Interactive / Sega, UK 2012).