

WOJCIECH KOSIOR*
(Jagiellonian University)

Undead Knights, Fallen Giants and The Poisoned Fruit of Life. A Digital Retelling of the Judeo-Christian Creation Motifs

ABSTRACT

Undead Knights [UK] is a video game released in 2009/2010 by Tecmo Koei for the Sony Playstation Portable console. Set in a fictional entourage resembling the late European Middle Ages it tells a story of three maliciously slain heroes (Remus, Romulus and Sylvia) who are raised from the dead, call up an army of zombies and set out on a quest to avenge their initial “death”. Throughout the subsequent chapters the protagonists face numerous opponents (e.g. Nephilim or Venom Angel), the royal couple responsible for their murder (King Kirk Gradis and Queen Fatima) and finally they confront Yggdrasil – the wicked tree of life. The narrative layer of UK is abundant in references to the Judeo-Christian creation mythology and ideas like the poisoned fruit, the angelic transformation or the mimicry of divine cosmogony find here a modern retelling. Accordingly, the main purposes of the present paper are (1) to reconstruct these motifs based on the UK’s narration and (2) to show their “classical” counterparts present in the Bible, selected apocrypha, pseudepigrapha and early Rabbinic literature.

KEY WORDS

game studies, digital media, Bible, apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, Rabbinic literature

Undead Knights [hereafter: UK] is a hack’n’slash/strategy/action-adventure game for the Playstation Portable system developed by the Team Tachyon division of Tecmo Koei and published in the autumn of 2009 and beginning of 2010. UK remains in line with previous Tecmo series like *Dynasty Warriors*

* Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations, Faculty of Philosophy
Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland
e-mail: wojciechkosior@tlen.pl

or *Ninja Gaiden* and as such fits the genre represented by *God of War* (both *Chain of Olympus* and *Ghost of Sparta*) or *Dante's Inferno*. The story of UK is set in a fictional world resembling the late European Middle Ages and its gameplay revolves around fighting numerous enemies while simultaneously giving orders to a band of undead troops. Progress relies mainly on manual finesse and although it has to be supplemented by some basic tactical and puzzle-solving skills, the game is definitely arcade in nature.¹

Content-wise, UK exemplifies the trend of the Jewish-Christian biblical and extra-biblical motifs incorporated in the stories of video games. Other examples of this phenomenon are numerous with series like *Diablo*, *Painkiller* or *Assassin's Creed*, to mention just the most outstanding examples of the last decade. These constitute the modern, pop-cultural and patchwork-like retellings of the ancient myths which have wended their long journey through numerous "stations" in the history of their reception. What is new, however, in each of these digital reiterations is the specific reshuffling of old elements. This also holds true in the case of UK's narrative layer which contains a complexity of classical references. One thread of this restructured network combines the essential ideas of the Judeo-Christian creation mythology such as the tree of life, human-divine cohabitation and hubris driving mere mortals to become deities. Each of these "building blocks" is of ancient and medieval origins but taken together they constitute a new and original retelling. The main goals of this paper are therefore (1) to reconstruct these narrative motifs by gathering in-game data and (2) to draw the connections with the classical sources. Beforehand however, (3) some preliminary remarks concerning the methodology need to be made in order to proceed in a coherent manner.

CORE AND SHELL

Game Studies is a relatively young yet highly conglomerate discipline and its inherent complexity stems from at least two basic factors. First and foremost, there is a wide spectrum of phenomena that are classified as video games²

¹ [Online] www.undeadknights.com [accessed: 13.01.2014].

² "Video game" is understood here in its simplest and broadest meaning as "an electronic game in which players control images on a television or computer screen". Entry: *game*, [online] <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/video%20game> [accessed: 14.12.2014]. This term is chosen from among the alternatives ("digital games" and "computer games") as being the most inclusive and thereby encompassing a variety of games independently of the hardware: be it computer, console or mobile phone. More importantly, the factual usage of "video games" in various media (e.g. Google statistics) far exceeds in numbers that of

[hereafter: VG] ranging from relatively simple puzzles like *Tetris* or *Sudoku* right up to conceptually advanced MMORPGs like *World of Warcraft* or *ArchLord*. Not only does each type of game demand a different approach but the reality of those more complex specimens gradually starts to resemble that of the “real”, i.e. non-game world and as such calls for an adequate specialisation.³ Second, it is precisely the human factor which is at play here as each academician brings along their own biography of game-experiences and academic education. The consequences of the so called observer effect are particularly vivid: cognitive psychologist, scholar of literature and programmer – all of them would approach a given VG from a different angle and analyse its different aspects. The bottom line is that until when arriving at a more developed stage of Game Studies as an academic discipline and establishing a relatively consistent set of research tools, each scholar of VG is expected to supply a clear explanation of the applied methodological principles.⁴

Thus, due to the nature of UK on the one hand and the research purposes of this paper on the other, it is crucial to refer to Mäyrä’s division of two basic layers of a given VG. Accordingly, each specimen contains (1) the “core”

the other options. See also: J. Van Dreunen, *The Aesthetic Vocabulary of Video Games*, [in:] *Computer Games as a Sociocultural Phenomenon. Games Without Frontiers, Wars Without Tears*, eds. A. Jahn-Sudmann, R. Stockmann, Palgrave Macmillan 2008, p. 3; F. Mäyrä, *An Introduction to Game Studies*, SAGE 2008, p. 12, footnote number 1.

³ As one of the researchers puts in: “computer games can portray, in principle, any phenomenon we would care to think about, and so, also in principle, no research area is excluded”. E. Aarseth, *Playing Research: Methodological Approaches to Game Analysis*, in: *The Proceedings of MelbourneDAC, the 5th International Digital Arts and Culture Conference May 19–23, 2003*, [online] <http://hypertext.rmit.edu.au/dac/papers/Aarseth.pdf> [accessed: 31.12.2014], p. 1.

⁴ Such conclusions are reached by *inter alia*: *ibidem*, p. 6; G. King, T. Krzywinska, *Tomb Raiders and Space Invaders: Videogame Forms and Contexts*, I.B. Tauris 2006, p. 11; S. Lammes, *Approaching Game-Studies: Towards a Reflexive Methodology of Games as Situated Cultures*, [in:] *DiGRA '07 – Proceedings of the 2007 DiGRA International Conference: Situated Play, The University of Tokyo, September, 2007*, Vol. 4, [online] <http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/07311.28016.pdf> [accessed: 31.12.2014], p. 25; D. Williams, *Bridging the Methodological Divide in Game Research*, “Simulation & Gaming” 36/2005, [online] www.dmitriwilliams.com/gamemethods.pdf [accessed: 31.12.2014], p. 2. A very optimistic methodological assertion is presented by F. Mäyrä: “when systematically applied and critically tested, there are multiple ways into knowledge. Scientific practice is continuously created, maintained and corrected by the academic community, and the never-ending «approach to truth» describes it much better than a declaration of any single absolute truth” (F. Mäyrä, *op. cit.*, p. 3).

(*ludosis*) or the gameplay, i.e. the rules that govern the game and all the player's factual and potential actions, and (2) the "shell" (*semiosis*) – the semantic layer containing the meaning attributed to the game's "core."⁵ This basic distinction needs some further considerations with regards to its form and content specific for UK. Formally, with its progression through subsequent chapters (levels), the player is presented with consecutive fragments of the main story. This in turn can be treated as a form of narration hereby understood in its simplest and most inclusive meaning as "the act or process of telling a story or describing what happens" and, by means of metonymy, as the result of such a process, identical to a "narrative."⁶ The narrative in UK has several formal aspects: (1) pre-rendered cut-scenes, being selected parts of the introductory video-clip supplemented with a different narrative soundtrack; (2) longer portions of text read by a lector during intermissions between clusters of chapters; (3) a concise textual introduction presented on the menu-level before each chapter; (4) in-game, real-time and non-interactive animated sequences, usually supplemented by a verbal exchange between the game characters; (5) short portions of text presented in-game, generally used for explaining the interface and controls, but sometimes providing the player with shell-relevant data such as a description of particular enemies' qualities. As a summary, it is possible to treat the UK's narrative as a text, that is subject to "real-time hermeneutics"⁷ characterised by

⁵ Ibidem, pp. 17–18. There are several alternatives to Mäyrä's division that are characterised by a higher level of complexity. For instance E. Aarseth (op. cit., pp. 2–3) points out three dimensions: "gameplay (the players' actions, strategies and motifs), game-structure (the rules of the game, including the simulation rules), game-world (fictional content, topology/level design, textures etc.)". L. Konzack (*Computer Game Criticism: A Method for Computer Game Analysis*, [in:] *Proceedings of Computer Games and Digital Cultures Conference June 6–8, 2002*, ed. F. Mäyrä, [online] <http://www.digra.org/dl/db/05164.32231.pdf> [accessed: 31.12.2014], p. 89) goes even further and outlines "seven different layers of the computer game: hardware, program code, functionality, game play, meaning, referentiality, and socio-culture". Similar distinction is adopted by G. King and T. Krzywinska (op. cit., p. 8) who propose two dimensions: the performance and enjoyment rising therefrom and the meaning-creating contexts. A slightly more pragmatic perspective is assumed by G. Howland (*Game Design: The Essence of Computer Games*, [online] http://www.cpp-home.com/tutorials/198_1.htm [accessed: 2.01.2015]), who differentiates between the story and the gameplay with the former containing "any background before the game starts, all information the player gains during the game or when they win and any information they learn about characters in the game".

⁶ Entries: *narration*, *narrative*, [online] <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/narration>, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/narrative> [accessed: 15.12.2014].

⁷ E. Aarseth, op. cit., p. 5.

the necessity of reading “across several modalities of communication.”⁸ This in turn allows to apply content analysis – a method that is used to summarise large amounts of data, analyse thematic units and extract recurring patterns.⁹ Content-wise, the shell of UK presents a relatively compound narration replete with references to pre-Christian European and Judeo-Christian mythologies. In order to carry out the purpose of this study and to extract the previously specified threads from UK’s story, one needs to resort to the specific “analytical lenses”, which help to “to constrain and direct the interpretations.”¹⁰ The practical heuristic arising from these assumptions is (1) to closely read the narrative of UK with special attention paid to the particular thematic threads, (2) to reconstruct the meaning of the key ideas within the game world and (3) to juxtapose these elements with their classical biblical and extra-biblical counterparts.¹¹

For the sake of completeness, this methodological introduction needs to be supplemented by a description of my playing style and practical details of data mining.¹² I consider myself to be a mid-core gamer¹³ with over 25 years of playing experience involving a variety of gaming platforms. When playing I tend to fall into Bartle’s categories of achiever and explorer.¹⁴ In the case of UK I have spent enough time in order to complete the game accompanied by

⁸ J. Bizzocchi, J. Tanenbaum, *Well Read: Applying Close Reading Techniques to Gameplay Experiences*, [in:] *Well Played 3.0: Video Games, Value and Meaning*, eds. D. Davidson et al., 2011, [online] <http://press.etc.cmu.edu/files/WellPlayed3-DrewDavidson-et-al-web.pdf> [accessed: 31.12.2014], p. 6.

⁹ C. Nelson, R. H. Woods Jr., *Content Analysis*, [in:] *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods and in the Study of Religion*, eds. M. Stausberg, S. Engler, London–New York 2011, pp. 109–110.

¹⁰ J. Bizzocchi, J. Tanenbaum, op. cit., p. 10.

¹¹ The question how exactly these classical ideas influenced the authors of UK remains beyond the methodological scope of the present study.

¹² The need for an explicit self-description is suggested by *inter alia*: E. Aarseth, op. cit., p. 3; D. Williams, op. cit., p. 12.

¹³ By “mid-core” I understand somebody who “arranges their gaming around their daily schedule” in opposition to “hardcore”, who “arranges their schedules around their gaming”. See: M. Mason, *Demographic Breakdown of Casual, Mid-Core and Hard-Core Mobile Gamers*, [online] <http://developers.magmic.com/demographic-breakdown-casual-mid-core-hard-core-mobile-gamers/> [accessed: 15.10.2015].

¹⁴ R. A. Bartle, *Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds, Spades: Players Who Suit MUDs*, 1996, [online] <http://mud.co.uk/richard/hcds.htm> [accessed: 31.12.2014]. Bartle’s theoretical framework inspired numerous Internet quizzes and tests claiming to provide the grounds for an adequate categorisation of a particular gamer. See also Aarseth’s suggestion that this division could be used to classify the scholars as well (E. Aarseth, op. cit., p. 3).

a repeated finish of several chapters afterwards.¹⁵ My knowledge of UK has been drawn mainly from actual gameplay supported by familiarity with other examples of the hack'n'slash/strategy/action-adventure genre. Additional data was gleaned from online reviews and FAQ sheets. In order to gain fast access to a particular piece of information, YouTube clips¹⁶ containing the complete playthrough proved useful.¹⁷ Although the following study concerns the European version of the game, almost all of its conclusions can probably be transposed to the American and Japanese editions as well. Most of the gameplay occurred in the role of Romulus Blood and although there are slight differences in the UK's core depending on the choice of character, these affect neither the script nor the lines uttered by the NPCs.

THE FALLEN AND THE RISEN

The story of UK takes place in the fictional dark-fantasy kingdom of Cavalier. The country is ruled by Kirk Gradis, a good and noble king who at some point in his twilight years marries Fatima, a femme fatale of unknown origins, and becomes corrupted by the new queen's intrigues.¹⁸ The only ones fully aware of Fatima's evil plots are the game protagonists: Sylvia Gradis, the king's daughter along with Remus and Romulus – descendants of the House of Blood. As a result of Fatima's actions, the king has his daughter murdered along with her fiancé (Remus) and his brother on the way to the wedding – an incident that is later on referred to as the Marriage of Blood.¹⁹ Soon afterwards however, a mysterious figure known only as the Beast joins the story

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 6.

¹⁶ A collection of walkthrough videos documenting the whole game has been uploaded by the user "MrWhiteProductions". [Online] <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL342E-AEBCB3F948B9> [accessed: 6.01.2015]. Additional videos of the user "TheASHfire06" have also been resorted to. [Online] <https://www.youtube.com/user/TheASHfire06> [accessed: 6.01.2015].

¹⁷ The categorisation of the sources of knowledge proposed by E. Aarseth, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹⁸ Ch. 19, in-game animation, boss-fight with King Gradis. The main clustering tool of UK's shell is the division into 20 chapters. Combined with the formal aspects of narration it will be utilised as "sigla" of a kind, helpful in a relatively precise localisation of particular data.

¹⁹ Ch. 1, text read by the lector preceding the game. Later on however, it becomes clear that it is Romulus Blood who is responsible for killing Sylvia and making the subsequent pact with the Beast. Ch. 15, in-game animation after boss-fight with Venom Angel and ch. 16, pre-rendered cut-scene.

and resurrects the heroes so as to allow them to avenge their death and bring balance to the world. At this point the protagonists are given a new “life” and the ability to turn dying enemies into obedient zombies.²⁰

The similarities between the necromantic²¹ powers of the Bloods and those of the antagonists are gradually revealed. The first implicit hint appears in the middle of the story, when a legion of the hostile undead appears to confront the protagonists²² while the second clue is presented even more directly in one of the intermissions: “The terrible power granted to the Bloods appears to have disturbing similarities to the force behind their enemies.”²³ Finally, Lord Follis, one of the chief enemies, explains that the necromantic power is not magical but originates from the demonic realm known as the Void – the Beast’s home world.²⁴ However, that both parties rely on the Beast’s blood as the source of their powers is explained only towards the end when the Beast’s factual agenda in reanimating the protagonists becomes clear: the resurrection comes with the price of obedience to the Beast. In the final chapter, Queen Fatima admits that she had once cut a deal with the Beast and she herself was infected by his blood, yet managed to extract the fluid and crystallise it in the form of the stone she wears on her neck. The newly acquired gem has thus made her independent from the Beast and pathed the way for the creation of Yggdrasil – the Holy Tree. This is a human-plant hybrid, blueish with pulsating veins and octopus-like tentacles described as the “flesh of the damned and flesh of the living fused into a new form of life. It bears a special fruit, with the same properties and powers as the Beast’s blood.”²⁵ These fruits in turn are capable of changing mere humans into supernatural beings.

Two such transformations occur throughout the game. The first one portrays Captain Gerard, the leader of the Knights of the Holy Tree, a special task-force responsible for the Marriage of Blood incident. In one of the cut-scenes he pulls out the fruit of life – a blood-red, gem-like oval object – and with the sound of a hatching egg morphs into a giant figure named Nephilim.

²⁰ Ch. 1, in-game animation opening the chapter.

²¹ “Necromancy” is understood here in the broadest meaning (and not exactly according to its etymology) as conjuring up the dead in both bodily and spiritual form in order to affect present events.

²² Ch. 9, in-game animation, after the boss-fight.

²³ Ch. 14, short portion of text on the menu-level preceding the chapter.

²⁴ Ch. 15, in-game animation before the boss-fight. The devilish nature of the Beast is later on hinted at by Jester, Fatima’s brother. Ch. 18, in-game animation preceding the boss-fight.

²⁵ Ch. 20, in-game animation preceding the boss-fight.

It is muscular, twice the size of Gerard, blue-skinned with visible veins and red patches, an oversized left arm and a manifestly reptilian head. Nephilim is capable of performing several kinds of attacks, one of them being a poisonous cloud exhaled from his mouth.²⁶ The other transformation is performed by Lord Follis, the game's "mad scientist". The process itself is analogous in that the camera changes perspective and the player is left to guess the details. A character named Venom Angel appears – much larger than the initial figure of Follis, bulky and vascular, livid with blood-red spots all over the body. The newly acquired arms of the Angel are disproportionally large and in their form and geometry resemble wings and as such serve as his main weapon. Yet, counterintuitively to the name, he does not have any attacks involving poison.²⁷

THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT

The game obviously plays with the motifs considered to be universal: bringing the dead to back life, enchanted fruits or people becoming superhuman are present in the mythical lore of numerous cultures around the world. Yet, the specific constellation of these ideas as furnished by UK seems to be based on the Judeo-Christian biblical and extra-biblical sources. Thus, the most explicit reference is the game's triad of the Holy Tree, Fatima and the Beast. The primal biblical counterpoint is Genesis 2:9, 17 which mentions the tree of the knowledge of good and evil²⁸ bearing the forbidden fruits. Its qualities are later on explained by the serpent in the dialogue with the first woman in Genesis 3:5: "in the moment you eat from [the tree], your eyes will be opened and you will be like 'elohim – those who know the good and bad."²⁹ The word 'elohim is semantically ambiguous and in the Biblical Hebrew can serve as (1) the personal name of one of the deities worshipped by the Hebrews, (2) the general category of divine beings later on identified with angels or (3) deceased

²⁶ Ch. 7, in game animation, boss-fight. Nephilim reappears later in ch. 19 as one of the mini-bosses on the road to Fatima.

²⁷ Ch. 15, in-game animation, the boss-fight. Venom Angel reappears in ch. 20 with a different head shape and texture.

²⁸ For the sexual undertones of the phrase see: H. S. Stern, *The Knowledge of Good and Evil*, "Vetus Testamentum" 1958, Vol. 8, Fasc. 4, pp. 405–418.

²⁹ All the biblical texts are presented in the author's own translation. The square brackets indicate the words introduced in translation, the curly brackets – the words translated freely, whereas the soft brackets – additional remarks.

ancestors.³⁰ The construction of v. 5 however suggests that here it denotes “gods” thus possibly witnessing to some ancient tradition of an unordinary fruit capable of turning humans into deities.³¹ In fact, this line of interpretation is communicated in several sources from Late Antiquity. For instance, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan [TPJ], an Aramaic translation and explanation of the Hebrew Bible renders the serpent’s words of Genesis 3:5 as: “in the day that you eat of it, you will be as the great angels, who are wise to know between good and evil.”³² A similar tradition is proffered by midrash Bereshit Rabbah – a colourful compilation of Rabbinic exegeses of Genesis.³³ According to 19:4 the serpent said to the woman: “Of this tree did He eat and then create the world; hence He orders you, ye shall not eat thereof, so that you may not create other worlds, for every person hates his fellow craftsmen.”³⁴ Finally, the Apocalypse of Moses 17:4 – a pseudepigraphical collection of stories about Adam and Eve – puts the serpent’s words in an even more explicit form: “God perceived this that ye would be like Him, so he envied you and said, Ye shall not eat of it.”³⁵ This notion of divine greed and insecurity is well-reflected in the Beast’s efforts to keep all the power for himself and get rid of factual and potential competition.

As becomes apparent later in the game, the factual power of the fruits of life relies ultimately on the Beast’s blood³⁶ and a similar motif is to be found

³⁰ An old yet still comprehensive presentation of the problem is furnished in *Names of God*, [in:] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, eds. I. Singer, C. Adler, Funk and Wagnalls, New York 1901–1906, [online] <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/11305-names-of-god> [accessed: 1.01.2015]. For an excellent study of the hypothetical Egyptian origins of the word see: C. T. Hodge, *Is Elohim Dead?*, “Anthropological Linguistics” 1971, Vol. 13, No. 6), pp. 311–319.

³¹ Cf. the account of Gilgamesh and the herb of rejuvenation or immortality stolen by a snake in Epic of Gilgamesh tablet 12. For the broader context see: B. Lang, *The Forbidden Fruit: An Ancient Myth and Its Transformation in Genesis 2–3*, [in:] idem, *Hebrew Life and Literature: Selected Essays of Bernhard Lang*, Ashgate, 2008, pp. 111–126.

³² Trans. J. W. Etheridge.

³³ For an approachable primer in the topics of midrashes and Talmuds see: J. Neusner, *Introduction to Rabbinic Literature*, Doubleday, New York 1999.

³⁴ Trans. H. Freedman.

³⁵ Trans. R. H. Charles.

³⁶ The most obvious anthropological interpretation would be to approach this motif from the totemic and psychoanalytical perspectives as a case of acquiring the divine qualities by means of oral incorporation of its flesh and blood. A parallel with the New Testament account of the Last Supper (as transmitted in Matthew 26:17–30, Mark 14:12–26, Luke 22:7–39 and John 13:1–17:26) and the idea of the participation in the eternal life attained by means of consuming the deity is apparent. For the classical elaborations of the

in the classical sources as well. The Bible itself does not elaborate on the qualities of the forbidden fruit – nevertheless, the Scriptural briefness served as an invitation for the hermeneutical creativity of the later sources. Thus, various Judeo-Christian extra-biblical traditions that arose around the matter played with the idea of some alien substance that polluted the mysterious fruit. For instance, the Apocalypse of Moses 19:3 tells of Satan who was driven by jealousy of the younger creation of God and “went and poured upon the fruit the poison of his wickedness, which is lust, the root and beginning of every sin.”³⁷ A similar motif is transmitted in the Greek Apocalypse of Baruch 4:8–9, a Jewish pseudepigraphic text, which describes the problematic tree as “the vine, which the angel Sammael planted, whereat the Lord God was angry, and He cursed him and his plant, while also on this account He did not permit Adam to touch it, and therefore the devil being envious deceived him through his vine.”³⁸ Apparently, although these sources speak of some secret ingredient, they seem to suppress any notion of its positive powers and remain mute in regards with any supernatural transformation. Still however, the fruit must have possessed some qualities that made it desirable and as such – an object of prohibition.

BLOOD OF MY BLOOD

More importantly however, a disturbing correlate of the poisoned fruit can also be found in the Judeo-Christian creation stories. First of all, the motif of injecting the fruit with poison or venom has a less innocent analogue which is briefly mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud. In tractate Yevamoth 103b, rabbi Yohanan is attributed with saying: “When the serpent copulated with

problem see: J. Frazer, *The Golden Bough. A Study in Magic and Religion*, New York 2000, ch. 51: *Homeopathic Magic of a Flesh Diet*, [online] <http://www.bartleby.com/196/> [accessed: 1.01.2015]; S. Freud, *Totem and Taboo. Resemblances Between the Psychic Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, London 1919, ch. *The origin of Exogamy and its Relation to Totemism*, [online] <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/41214/41214-h/41214-h.htm> [accessed: 1.01.2015].

³⁷ Trans. R. H. Charles. The detailed account of Satan’s enviousness is given in *Life of Adam and Eve* 12–13 – a work preserved in Latin, in many respects similar to the Greek Apocalypse of Moses and belonging thematically to the apocryphal cycle retelling the story of Genesis 1–4.

³⁸ Trans. R. H. Charles. For the identity of Sammael see the further part of the present paper.

Eve, he infused her with lust.³⁹ The lust of the Israelites who stood at Mount Sinai, came to an end, the lust of the idolaters who did not stand at Mount Sinai did not come to an end.”⁴⁰ From this perspective, Eve, “the mother of all living [creatures]” as described in Genesis 3:20⁴¹ is portrayed ultimately as the one responsible for disseminating evil desires among people. In this respect it seems that it is precisely the “dark” side of Eve upon whom the figure of Fatima has been modelled and analogically, the latter is depicted as an archetypal mother of all evil. The in-game hints are numerous and range from the hourglass shape of her body emphasising fertile potency up to her creative powers. Analogically, both Eve and Fatima are approached by an antagonist and both end up breaking some rule: while the biblical woman eats the fruit, Fatima breaks her pact with the Beast. Moreover, just as Eve is responsible for begetting the evil Cain and subsequent generations of wrong-doers so Fatima fills the world with her corrupted creations.⁴²

The myth of Eve’s sexual encounters becomes more clear when used to supplement the whole image with the hypothetical prototype of the game’s Venom Angel – Sammael. He is traditionally identified with the rebellious Satan, the angel of death or, according to relatively late Kabbalistic mythology, with *sitra’ ahara’*, i.e. “the other side” – the principle of evil. The etymology of his name is a matter of various hypotheses, yet the most widely accepted one is that it derives from the root *sem* denoting a drug, both as a medicine and poison.⁴³ Although his textual origins remain unsure, Sammael

³⁹ Aram. *zohama’* has a broad range of meaning ranging from “filth” and “decayed matter” up to “obscurity” and “voluptuousness”. M. Jastrow, *Dictionary of Targumim, Talmud and Midrashic Literature*, London–New York 1903, p. 384.

⁴⁰ Trans. H. Freedman. Cf. a parallel account in BT Shabbat 145b–146a. The notion of the first serpent copulating with Eve and fathering Cain is also hinted at in: Matthew 12:34, 2 Corinthians 11:2–3; 1 Timothy 2:14–15.

⁴¹ Accordingly, her name is Eve (*Havvah*), because she is the mother of all living beings (*ki hi’ haytah ’em kol hay*). Given her ambiguous nature it is worth presenting an alternative etymology which acknowledges kinship with the Aramaic *hivviya’* denoting serpent – a possibility that is hinted at in Bereshit Rabbah 20:11. Besides, some try to connect Eve with a Hurrian female deity, Hebat. N. Wyatt, *Eve*, [in:] *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, eds. K. van der Toorn, B. Becking, P. W. van der Horst, Leiden–Boston–Koln 1999, [DDD], pp. 316–317.

⁴² The motif itself is eagerly utilised throughout the game: the Beast creates protagonists, the protagonists create zombies, Prince Follis creates ouroboros-soldiers, etc.

⁴³ Among the alternatives is *sama’* – “being blind” or “making blind” and a potent paronomasia with the word *smol* denoting “left [side]” that came to particular significance in Kabbalistic traditions. M. Jastrow, op. cit., pp. 998–999. On the issue of Sammael’s

is often found in the context of the creation accounts. A relatively developed tradition is conveyed in Pirke de-rabbi Eliezer – an early Medieval Rabbinic midrash exposing the nuances of Genesis. The first, ch. 13 relates Sammael's intrigue who, with the help of the serpent, tricks Eve into eating the fruit. The second, one of the first paragraphs of ch. 21 reads: "(Sammael) riding on the serpent came to her, and she conceived (Cain)" whose likeness is described several sentences later as "not of the earthly beings but of the heavenly beings."⁴⁴ The point of departure for this extra-biblical reiteration is Genesis 4:1 which reads "Adam knew Eve, his wife. She conceived and bore Cain. She said: I have acquired a man {by Yahveh}." The verse is indeed puzzling and even a quick glance at its modern translations shows the struggle with the question of Cain's fatherhood. The initial suggestion of Yahveh's progeny with Eve has given rise to various traditions whose purpose was probably to repel the problematic assumption of a *hieros gamos* resulting in villainous children.⁴⁵ Obviously then the text tries to explain the wicked nature of Cain as stemming from Sammael rather than from Yahveh.⁴⁶ Yet, the classical background of Sammael notwithstanding, practically none of these motives made it to UK and while the game's Venom Angel is definitely closely connected to the poisoned fruit, no hints of intimate relations with Fatima are present.

Finally, the idea of human-divine cohabitation brings us to the biblical account of the nephilim, who gave their name to the one of UK's enemies. The word itself, meaning literally "those fallen and remaining so,"⁴⁷ appears just three times in the Bible in relation to both the primeval overgrown inhabitants of the one of the Canaanite valleys in Numbers 13:33 and the mysterious antediluvian figures in Genesis 6:4.⁴⁸ Of special significance is the latter passage

"promotion" within the Jewish literature see: J. Dan, *Sammael, Lilith, and the Concept of Evil in Early Kabbalah*, "AJS Review" 1980, Vol. 5, pp. 17–40.

⁴⁴ Trans. G. Friedlander. The parentheses in the quoted translation indicate the words that do not appear in all manuscripts but nevertheless can be safely inferred from the context.

⁴⁵ This of course is not the only instance of human-divine sexual relationships in the Bible. See Genesis 6 (in the further part of the paper), Judges 13 or the case of Mary "visited" by the angel Gabriel (Luke 1). P. Engel, *And Cain Was Begotten*, [online] https://www.academia.edu/4865268/And_Cain_was_begotten [accessed: 1.01.2015].

⁴⁶ See also the analogical story conveyed in TPJ of Genesis 4:1 which reads: "And Adam knew Hava his wife, who had desired the Angel; and she conceived, and bore Kain; and she said, I have acquired a man, the Angel of the Lord". Trans. J. W. Etheridge.

⁴⁷ P. W. Coxon, *Nephilim*, [in:] DDD, pp. 343–346.

⁴⁸ The scarcity of information concerning the biblical *nephilim* has been interpreted as witnessing either the widespread familiarity with the term or complete lack of acquaintance with it. G. Darshan, *Sipur Bney ha-'Elohim u-Banot ha-'Adam (Bereshit 6:1–4)*

that reads: “the nephilim were on earth in those days and also afterwards when the sons of *'elohim* would come to the daughters of Adam and [they] would give birth to them; these are the mighty ones of the old, the {famous men}”. This verse gave rise to two main lines of expositions differing in willingness to accept the vivid mythical undertones of the story. One saw in the sons of *'elohim* the angels who lusted after the earthly women while the other interpreted the two groups as being descendants of the righteous Seth and the wicked Cain respectively. Despite the attempts of the adherents of the latter hypothesis to suppress the “immodest” tale, it has managed to survive in various forms spread throughout numerous Jewish and Christian works. The most popular one appears in 1 Enoch – an Ethiopic apocryphal book, known for its developed angelological and demonological ideas. The relevant information is contained in 1 Enoch 6–7: the angels bind themselves in a pact, descend from heaven, teach people about arts and culture and finally engage in progeny with the earthly women. Their offspring, the biblical *nephilim*, are in turn described as “great giants, whose height was three thousand ells: Who consumed all the acquisitions of men. And when men could no longer sustain them, the giants turned against them and devoured mankind” (1 Enoch 7:3b–5a).⁴⁹ These giants are afterwards defeated by an angelic task-force and trapped in the valleys of earth (1 Enoch 10:12) or according to a different tradition – become the malevolent spirits afflicting humans (1 Enoch 15:8–12).⁵⁰ Given the totally distinct origins of the “parents” of the *nephilim* one could expect their progeny to possess a hybrid status manifested in their external form. In fact, whatever the ancient image of these creatures it is exactly the case with the UK’s

le-'Or Qatalog ha-Nashim ha-Hesyodi, “Shnaton” 2014, Vol. 23, p. 145; R. S. Hendel, *Of Demigods and the Deluge: Toward an Interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4*, “Journal of Biblical Literature” 1987, Vol. 106, No. 1, pp. 11, 17; J. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible As It Was at the Start of the Common Era*, Cambridge–Massachusetts–London 1997, pp. 181–182. For the reasons behind the connection between the Hebrew *nephilim* and Greek giants see: W. Kosior, *The Fallen (or) Giants? Some Remarks on Nephilim and Gigantes in the Hebrew Bible and Septuagint*, “Przekładaniec” 29/2014, pp. 41–64.

⁴⁹ Trans. R. H. Charles.

⁵⁰ For the connections with the Hellenistic lore concerning giants see: M. J. Goff, *Subterranean Giants and Septuagint Proverbs: the 'Earth-born' of LXX Proverbs*, [in:] *With Wisdom as a Robe. Qumran and other Jewish Studies in Honour of Ida Fröhlich*, eds. K. D. Dobos, M. Kosheggy, Sheffield 2009, p. 151. This Enochian myth in turn had inspired other narratives that superseded it. See: A. Y. Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity. The Reception of Enochic Literature*, Cambridge, New York 2005, especially pp. 122–159.

Nephilim composed of various anatomical elements.⁵¹ Although this figure owes his status to the fruit rather than exceptional parentage, the crossbred qualities remain clearly manifest. However, as was the case with the Venom Angel, hardly any additional information is provided by the game narrative.

BIBLIA PAUPERUM

Having dealt with the purposes defined at the beginning of the present paper we are left with the essential question about the relevance of the whole endeavour outlined throughout the preceding pages. After all, the correspondence between the elements present in UK and those scattered around the classical Jewish and Christian sources is explicit and one does not have to specialise in Biblical Studies to note the most apparent similarities. On the other hand, the in-depth elaboration of the origins of the game's particular motifs would involve the whole history of reception thus resulting in a far more voluminous work. Simply put: why does the story in UK matter at all in the first place? First and foremost, an initial familiarity with the classical sources contributes to a better and deeper understanding of the modern retellings. The nature of the digital media, especially in VG like UK, makes it necessary to carefully choose the information conveyed so as to avoid any data overload on the player's side. In other words – and in this particular example – the hack'n'slash entourage leaves no room for any elaborate explanation of the origins of the Venom Angel or Nephilim and has to rely on the gamers' initial network of associations. Knowledge of the classical myths surrounding the characters allows the player to quickly grasp additional meaning.

Moreover – and however surprising this may appear to be – one needs to acknowledge the pedagogical and educational potential of UK. The games are part and parcel of the modern world, have a strong penetrative power and as such may influence this relatively wide audience. In case of UK the sales' figures were quite satisfactory as 121,327 units have been sold worldwide, which made it one of the best selling titles of that period.⁵² Besides, the “impact

⁵¹ Given the reptilian qualities of UK's Nephilim it is worthwhile to notice that in several passages in Rabbinic literature the phrase *ben nephilim*, literally: “son of *nephilim*” denotes a kind of a lizard. Besides, the word *nephel* (pl. *nephelim*) means “miscarriage” – what in turn goes well with the deformed physique of the UK's Nephilim. M. Jastrow, op. cit., pp. 923–924.

⁵² As of November 29th 2014. [Online] <http://www.vgchartz.com/game/27309/undead-knights/Global/> [accessed: 18.12.2014]. For hard data concerning the influence of

factor” of UK is in a way corroborated by the mixed reviews the game gathered right after its publication. The reviewers expressed extreme opinions with regards to the most controversial elements of the game. Some of them scorned the inconsistencies with the decorum of the genre and condemned the mixture of the underground death/black metal soundtrack and explicitly vulgar language not necessarily suited to the dark fantasy/medieval entourage. The others in turn praised the game and its story for the potency to evoke cathartic experiences.⁵³ To summarise, the emotional impact of the narrative layer of UK made the Judeo-Christian motifs even more appealing.

Simply put, although more people have ever read the Bible than played UK, still many people would rather play and immerse themselves in UK than read passages from the lesser known extra-biblical collections of texts such as *Pirke de-rabbi Eliezer* or *Life of Adam and Eve*. Although UK is definitely far from being a typical example of digital edutainment it can serve as a stimulus for an older audience to explore the cultural heritage and its less popular motifs such as the promiscuous Eve, the power of the fruit of knowledge or the evil angels. In fact, my experiences so far in referring to the game during courses dealing with Judaism and Christianity shows that it may serve well the purpose of an “appetiser”, an exemplification of ancient motifs or, last but not least, as a mnemotechnic device to help students remember the patterns recurring in broadly understood religious narrations.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Aarseth E., *Playing Research: Methodological Approaches to Game Analysis*, [in:] *The Proceedings of MelbourneDAC, the 5th International Digital Arts and Culture Conference May 19–23, 2003*, [online] <http://hypertext.rmit.edu.au/dac/papers/Aarseth.pdf> [accessed: 31.12.2014].
2. Bartle R. A., *Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds, Spades: Players Who Suit MUDs*, 1996, [online] <http://mud.co.uk/richard/hcdfs.htm> [accessed: 31.12.2014].
3. Bizzocchi J., Tanenbaum J., *Well Read: Applying Close Reading Techniques to Gameplay Experiences*, [in:] *Well Played 3.0: Video Games, Value and Meaning*, eds. D. Davidson et al., 2011, [online] <http://press.etc.cmu.edu/files/WellPlayed3-DrewDavidson-et-al-web.pdf> [accessed: 31.12.2014].
4. Coxon P. W., *Nephilim*, [in:] *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, eds. K. van der Toorn, B. Becking, P. W. van der Horst, Leiden–Boston–Koln 1999, pp. 343–346.

the other VG titles such as *Mario Bros* see J. Newman, *Videogames*, Routledge, London, New York 2004, pp. 3–4, 127–128.

⁵³ [Online] <http://www.metacritic.com/game/psp/undead-knights/critic-reviews> [accessed: 3.01.2015].

5. Dan J., *Sammael, Lilith, and the Concept of Evil in Early Kabbalah*, "AJS Review" 1980, Vol. 5, pp. 17–40.
6. Darshan G., *Sipur Bney ha-'Elohim u-Banot ha-'Adam (Bereshit 6:1–4) le-'Or Qatalog ha-Nashim ha-Hesyodi*, "Shnaton" 2014, Vol. 23, pp. 141–164.
7. Dreunen J. Van, *The Aesthetic Vocabulary of Video Games*, [in:] *Computer Games as a Sociocultural Phenomenon. Games Without Frontiers, Wars Without Tears*, eds. A. Jahn-Sudmann, R. Stockmann, Palgrave Macmillan 2008, pp. 3–11.
8. Engel P., *And Cain Was Begotten*, [online] https://www.academia.edu/4865268/And_Cain_was_begotten [accessed: 1.01.2015].
9. Frazer J. G., *The Golden Bough. A Study in Magic and Religion*, New York 2000, [online] <http://www.bartleby.com/196/> [accessed: 1.01.2015].
10. Freud S., *Totem and Taboo. Resemblances Between the Psychic Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, London 1919, [online] <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/41214/41214-h/41214-h.htm> [accessed: 1.01.2015].
11. Goff M. J., *Subterranean Giants and Septuagint Proverbs: the 'Earth-born' of LXX Proverbs*, [in:] *With Wisdom as a Robe. Qumran and other Jewish Studies in Honour of Ida Fröhlich*, eds. K. D. Dobos, M. Kosheggy, Sheffield 2009, pp. 146–156.
12. Hendel R. S., *Of Demigods and the Deluge: Toward an Interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4*, "Journal of Biblical Literature" 1987, Vol. 106, No. 1, pp. 13–26.
13. Hodge C. T., *Is Elohim Dead?*, "Anthropological Linguistics" 1971, Vol. 13, No. 6, pp. 311–319.
14. Howland G., *Game Design: The Essence of Computer Games*, [online] http://www.cpp-home.com/tutorials/198_1.htm [accessed: 2.01.2015].
15. Jastrow M., *Dictionary of Targumim, Talmud and Midrashic Literature*, London–New York 1903.
16. King G., Krzywinska T., *Tomb Raiders and Space Invaders: Videogame Forms and Contexts*, I.B. Tauris 2006.
17. Konzack L., *Computer Game Criticism: A Method for Computer Game Analysis*, [in:] *Proceedings of Computer Games and Digital Cultures Conference June 6–8, 2002*, ed. F. Mäyrä, [online] <http://www.digra.org/dl/db/05164.32231.pdf> [accessed: 31.12.2014], pp. 89–100.
18. Kosior W., *The Fallen (or) Giants? Some Remarks on Nephilim and Gigantes in the Hebrew Bible and Septuagint*, "Przekładaniec" 29/2014, pp. 41–64.
19. Kugel J., *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible As It Was at the Start of the Common Era*, Cambridge–Massachusetts–London 1997.
20. Lammes S., *Approaching Game-Studies: Towards a Reflexive Methodology of Games as Situated Cultures*, [in:] *DiGRA '07 – Proceedings of the 2007 DiGRA International Conference: Situated Play, The University of Tokyo, September, 2007*, Vol. 4, [online] <http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/07311.28016.pdf> [accessed: 31.12.2014].
21. Lang B., *The Forbidden Fruit: An Ancient Myth and Its Transformation in Genesis 2–3*, [in:] idem, *Hebrew Life and Literature: Selected Essays of Bernhard Lang*, Ashgate, 2008, pp. 111–126.

22. Mason M., *Demographic Breakdown of Casual, Mid-Core and Hard-Core Mobile Gamers*, [online] <http://developers.magmic.com/demographic-breakdown-casual-mid-core-hard-core-mobile-gamers/> [accessed: 15.12.2015].
23. Mäyrä F., *An Introduction to Game Studies*, SAGE 2008.
24. *Names of God*, [in:] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, eds. I. Singer, C. Adler, Funk and Wagnalls, New York 1901–1906, [online] <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/11305-names-of-god> [accessed: 1.01.2015].
25. Nelson C., Woods Jr. R. H., *Content Analysis*, [in:] *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods and in the Study of Religion*, eds. M. Stausberg, S. Engler, London–New York 2011, pp. 109–121.
26. Neusner J., *Introduction to Rabbinic Literature*, Doubleday, New York 1999.
27. Newman J., *Videogames*, Psychology Press, Routledge, London, New York 2004.
28. Reed A. Y., *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity. The Reception of Enochic Literature*, Cambridge, New York 2005.
29. Stern H. S., *The Knowledge of Good and Evil*, “Vetus Testamentum” 1958, Vol. 8, Fasc. 4, pp. 405–418.
30. Williams D., *Bridging the Methodological Divide in Game Research*, “Simulation & Gaming” 36/2005, [online] www.dmitriwilliams.com/gamemethods.pdf [accessed: 31.12.2014], pp. 1–17.
31. Wyatt N., *Eve*, [in:] *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, eds. K. van der Toorn, B. Becking, P. W. van der Horst, Leiden–Boston–Koln 1999, pp. 316–317.

CLASSICAL SOURCES

1. Hebrew Bible [Codex Leningradensis], [in:] BibleWorks 9.0 (CD-ROM).
2. New Testament (English Standard Version).
3. *Pirke de rabbi Eliezer (The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great)*, trans. G. Friedlander, London 1916.
4. *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, trans. R. H. Charles, Oxford 1913, vol. I–II, [online] <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/charles/otpseudepig.i.html>, <http://www.pseudepigrapha.com> [accessed: 1.01.2015].
5. *The Soncino Midrash Rabbah*, [in:] Judaic Classics Library (CD-ROM).
6. *The Soncino Talmud*, [in:] Judaic Classics Library (CD-ROM).
7. *The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan Ben Uzziel On the Pentateuch With The Fragments of the Jerusalem Targum From the Chaldee*, trans. J. W. Etheridge, London 1862, [online] <http://targum.info/targumic-texts/pentateuchal-targumim/> [accessed: 1.01.2015].

ONLINE REVIEWS

1. Cabral M., *Undead Knights. Command Rotting Corpses as the Leader of Your Very Own Undead Army*, [online] <http://www.gamesradar.com/undead-knights-review/> [accessed: 1.01.2015].
2. Gaston M., *Undead Knights. Yawn of the Dead*, [online] <http://www.play.tm/review/29264/undead-knights/> [accessed: 1.01.2015].

3. Higham R., *Undead Knights Review*, [online] <http://videogamesdaily.com/reviews/201003/undead-knights-review/1/> [accessed: 1.01.2015].
4. Shau A., *Undead Knights Review*, [online] www.gamespot.com/undead-knights/ [accessed: 1.01.2015].
5. Sheard D., *Undead Knights PSP Review*, [online] <http://darkzero.co.uk/game-reviews/undead-knights-bsp/>, [accessed: 1.01.2015].
6. Sterling J., *Review: Undead Knights*, [online] <http://www.destructoid.com/review-undead-knights-151030.phtml>, [accessed: 1.01.2015].
7. Workman R., *Undead Knights PSP Review*, [online] http://www.modojo.com/reviews/undead_knights, [accessed: 1.01.2015].