

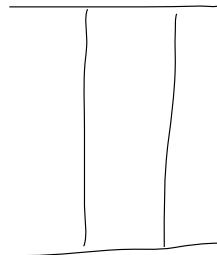
# Abstract

I am guilty of idolatry. I've violated the sacred Second Commandment.

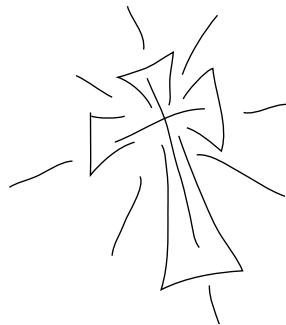
*"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD you God am a jealous God...".*

Yet I am not alone in this, many Christians have not been shy to depict the holy trinity since the coming of Christ. Whilst the second commandment has been taken very lightly in many cases it is not fully absent, it is still respected in various ways within the religious field. However, many contemporary depictions of the 'divine' have outgrown their restricted boundaries entirely and pledged themselves fully to the sin of idolatry.

Outgrown and evolved. Many young eyes have fixed their gaze on high definition digital screens, the more contemporary beacons of faith. Portals to the '*likeness of anything that is in heaven above...*', worlds beyond our own, not just to look at, but to immerse oneself in. Video games and their '*magical claiming*' power have created their own forms of contemporary religion accompanied with new rituals and sacred vows. This new idolatry worshiping by younger generations paves a path that helps guide the young and lost in their real, and often complex and chaotic existence.



# Take My Hand



I am very aware of the fact that writing about the vast subject of religion is a very daunting and challenging thing. I myself must admit that I do not have nor will I ever have similar amounts of knowledge about the subject as any theologian out there. That does however not take away the fact that I share similar interests of study. I will share my gathered knowledge with the best interest without trying to subjectively touch upon the core values of religion. I acknowledge that this is easier said than done, so I would like to humbly ask that you might see this small paragraph as a disclaimer of some sort.

So without further ado I would like to start sharing some insight into the evolution and origin of religious idolatry or image making. I would like to start by sharing a very well formulated description about the purpose of Christian religion written by Arthur Schopenhauer before we get to the visual aspects of religion. The description can be found inside the first chapter of the book '*The Horrors and Absurdities of Religion*'. The first chapter is called '*On Religion : A Dialogue*'. [1] The chapter consists of a dialogue or discussion between two fictional philosophers personified by Schopenhauer himself. In the discussion religion is seen as a substitute for raw philosophy. Philosophy being the non religious teachings of necessary morals and other values, unfortunately these teachings are not available or digestible for everyone. Therefore religion serves as its substitute, a more accessible means of learning the much needed morals and values, not raw like philosophy, but wrapped in allegory, myth and symbolism.

*"Philalethes : Oh yes, more or less as a wooden leg that takes the place of a natural one: it substitutes for it, does duty for it as best it can, claims to be regarded as a natural leg, is artificially put together well or less well, and so on. The only difference is that, while a natural leg as a rule preceded the wooden one, religion has everywhere got the start on Philosophy."*

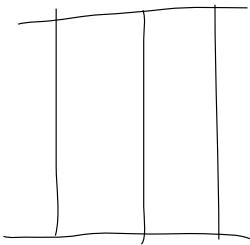
Not only does religion serve as a universally accessible substitute for philosophy. It provides theoretical answers some of mankind's most predominant and difficult questions. What happens after I die? Why are we here? Are there worlds beyond our own? etc. Answers to these undeniably complex questions will be sought after accordingly. Religion, in any form, helps to soothe mankind's inexhaustible quest to find answers to these questions.

*"This representation, supported by authority, appeals first of all to the actual metaphysical predisposition of man, to the theoretical need which arises from the importunate enigma of our existence and from the consciousness that behind the world's physical plane there must be*

*concealed a metaphysical, something unchanging which serves as a basis for the world's continual change; then, however, it appeals to the will, to the fears and hopes of mortals living in constant distress, for whom it accordingly creates god and demons on whom they can call, whom they can appease, whom they can win over; finally, it appeals to the moral consciousness undeniably present in man, to which it lends external stay and confirmation, a support without which it would not easily be able to maintain itself in the struggle with so many temptations."*

Religion helps to create guidelines and rules that are derived from the vast array of allegories and myth, something a person can hold onto and live by. It is precisely from this perspective that religion offers an inexhaustible source of consolation and comfort in life and is something that does not desert men even in the hour of death but rather only then reveals its full efficacy. Religion can thus be compared to one who takes a blind person by the hand and leads him, since this person cannot see for him or herself, and the sole point is that he should arrive at his destination, not that he should see all there is to see.

This summary of the function and reason of existence of religion was written in 1851. Yet the majority of the current world population, more than three fourth, is still considered religious whilst most often having access and the ability to process 'raw' philosophy. It is the ever present need in men to provide answers to the list of complex questions that makes the creation of religious Demons and Gods still so relevant today.



# The Second Commandment

### How does religion communicate? Allegory, Myth & Symbolism

*'To the fears and hopes of mortals living in constant distress, for whom it accordingly creates god and demons on whom they can call, whom they can appease'.*

How exactly are Demons and Gods created and what is their preferred method of communication? Religion was and is to be molded into the most efficient and accessible form of communication in order to reach broadest audience, that of the entire world preferably. The religious communication powerhouse consist of various methods; allegory, myth and symbolism.

Allegory, a form of communication that is relatable in many cases and is therefore considered a very efficient means of processing information. The message, moral or truth is easily extracted from the allegory be it consciously or subconsciously. This makes allegory perfectly suited to make religion most accessible for a universal audience.

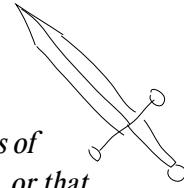
Myth, a representation of the answers sought after by mankind to help sooth their quest. Myth can be experienced in a very authoritarian manner, the presentation of almighty Gods or Demons provokes sublime emotions through their imposing feats. Such emotions makes one feel the presence over by a larger ruling force, something that and grips the beholder tightly. This combination of providing answers to the important questions of mankind and the authoritarian grip imposed by mythological entities make myth a very valuable asset in the range of communication components.

Symbolism, communication that speaks to mind not only through words but through symbols. The range of symbolical communication forms include; acts, artworks, archetypes, events, or natural phenomena. These often visual manifestations of religious ideas and ideals leave strong imprints on the beholders mind. Depending on the quality of the symbol one might experience similar sublime emotions beholding the symbol, tightening the grip that religion has on its followers.

These three components of communication help create a undoubtedly a very universal and most efficient communication method. However, there are important restrictions when it comes to the visualization or symbolization of religion. These restrictions stem from Moses his second of the ten commandments. A commandment that if violated leads to idolatry, the worshipping of false religions, that which is understood to be sinful.

### The Ban of Imagery or Idolatry

The Second Commandment :



*"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments." [2]*

The prohibition of images is the only commandment that receives an explanation. Thou shalt not make thyself images because God is jealous and he distinguishes between his foes, the image-worshipers, and his friends who abstain from worshiping images. Images rouse the jealousy of God because they attract worship and thus distract men from exclusively worshiping God who does not tolerate any other gods beside him. God considers images to be other gods and thus rivals. More explanation about the restriction of images can be found in the book of Deuteronomy :

*"Therefore watch yourselves very carefully. Since you saw no form on the day that the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, beware lest you act corruptly by making a carved image for yourselves." [3]*

This quotation claims that God is invisible. Therefore, he cannot be worshiped in anything visible. In short the reason for forbidding imagery is first because every image represents a (false) God, this makes it a question of loyalty. Images are considered other gods and provoke God's jealousy. Second because no image is able to represent a invisible and divine God. If an image of this nature exists and violates the sacred second commandment it is considered to be an Idol.

### Catholic Idolatry

Let us however not forget that the prohibition of image has swayed in favor of the idol in the Catholic devision of the Christian church. It has readmitted the image, images of the visible and even images of the invisible. With its incarnation in Jesus Christ, the word became visible, conceivable for the works of art because of divines human form. There are also other visual instances where the divine had intervened themselves and presumably created acheiropoietan ('made without hand') imagery, such as an imprint of Jesus his face on the 'Veil of Veronica' [4], whose name means 'true image'.

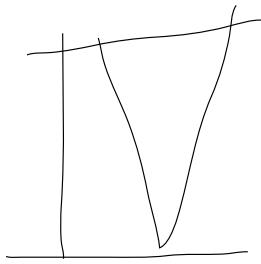
Christianity made a huge iconic turn over the past centuries. However the ten commandments persisted, including the prohibition of images and the incrimination of idolatry. While the reformed Christian Church refuses to depict Jesus or anything considered blasphemous in the eyes of the second commandment the more southern Catholic countries saw a drastic increase in icons/idols after and during the reformation and the Renaissance. Ever since the Catholic church has not been shy to depict Jesus or other divinities in various ways.

The Catholic church and their imagery, after all, was meant to help people in their search for God. The catholic image became realistic precisely in the name of this quest, and for the same reason its signature began to be appreciated. This paradox has been the basis of the explosive profusion of images since the Renaissance. Isn't God, after all, considered a creating God? Didn't he create the universe and assign humans a privileged place within it by making them- according to the first chapter of the Bible - '*in His image and likeness?*' Within this vision, both the image as well as all of reality, precisely in its beauty, continue to bear the sheen of the creator, who in every religious case is God itself. Art should emphasize the beauty of the creation, certainly wherever art represents man, who was explicitly created in God's image. Anyone who depicts the human body in all its beauty (and since the thirteenth century. This has been seen as the highest source of beauty) is also directly paying tribute to the divine creator.

### Reformed Iconoclasm

Christian history inherits a deeply rooted conflict between the production of religious imagery and the abolishment of it. One side welcomes the image as the likeness of the divine, while the other brands it as a blasphemous expression of human vanity. Most notably the Reformation of the sixteenth century. During the Reformation sculptures, paintings, and even organs were removed from churches and in large part destroyed. Despite the Catholics church's homage to Gods divine creations, Jesus his physical form and the visibility to the eye Jesus is claimed to have a second nature, the divine, the invisible. According to reformed Christian beliefs if a visual depiction of Jesus is made it includes Jesus Christ his second divine nature, that which is incomprehensible and impossible to depict will therefore refuse to acknowledge the Second Commandment. Another argument by the Reformed church would be that Jesus is part of a holy trinity that makes up God as a whole. The trinity exist out of The Father, Son and Holy Spirit and since Jesus is included in this arrangement he is fused with God itself and is thus, again, forbidden to be illustrated by the hands of mere men.

The endless Christian discussion about the prohibition of idolatry might just throw us into an abyss of negative theology. However the point here is not to bring an end to this discussion or start a sprawl of iconoclasm. These idols exist and have existed for many decades, it is merely about exploring the evolution of the idol.



# Power of the Idol

The idols exist and some of them have an incredible captivating power. But where does that power come from, why am I and many others so attracted to such images? Goethe in one of his writings calls it their '*magical claim*'. The image that attempts to integrate the aesthetic of the sublime, that which can put us in a indescribable roller-coaster of sensations. Something inescapable that cannot be put into words. The sublime aesthetic is that which transcends our sensual and conceptual capabilities and exposes the beholder to the horrors of the unknown. By exposing people to the unknown they find leads to answer their desire to confirm that behind the world's physical plane there must be concealed a metaphysical one. This is their captivating power, it rips us away from our everyday life's and show us that we might be part of a much larger incomprehensible spectacle. It appeals to our inexhaustible desire to confirm that there is something bigger that drives our universe.

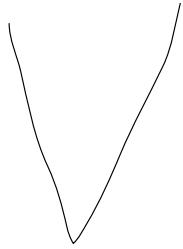
*"Dummes Zeug kann man viel reden, kann es auch schreiben.  
Wird weder Leib noch Seele toten, es wird alles beim Alten bleiben.  
Dummes aber, vors Auge gestellt, hat ein magisches Recht.  
Weil es die Sinne gefesselt halt, bleibt der Geist ein Knecht."*

*[Silly stuff may be said enough, and may also be written -  
this will kill neither body nor soul, nothing will be changed.  
Silly stuff, however, put before the eyes, raises a magic claim.  
Since it keeps the senses enthralled, the mind is made a slave.]"*

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Zahme Xenien. [5]

The reason why images work so incredibly well, more so than text is because text or speech can be answered with elaboration, counter-statements or even rejection. But how can you answer to an image? That which is indescribable and cannot be made verbal or textual. This effect has been very well put into words by Novelist Paul Auster “*The world enters through our eyes, but we cannot make sense of it until it descends into our mouths*”. [6] This ‘magical claim’ that possesses many idols is not underestimated by the Church. The aesthetic power of the idol, if used skilfully can easily drive people in different directions, away from the original beliefs in Christian Religion. If the monopoly on inspiring feelings of sublimity and providing answers to the predominant questions in life would not just be theirs specifically other parties could hold the power to create alternatives in beliefs and worship.

However, despite the attempts of avoiding such powerful and influential images by the church, they could never stand the test of time. Since the nature of religion is to spread its message most efficiently, to be shaped and moulded into the most accessible and captivating form of communication. The addition of the ‘magical claim’ imagery was therefore inevitable.



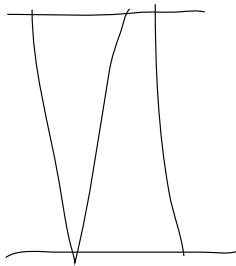
# Idol Makers

The power of the image or idol makers was not to be underestimated. The artists were the ones to wield this '*magical claim*' formula in order to create their imagery. Grand pictures of amazing magnitude were created in God's name. Be it a homage to the Divine or just an outright exposition of skill, their grip was unquestionable.

John Martin is a great example of an image maker who wielded the '*magical claim*' like no other, an English Romantic painter, engraver and illustrator of the early 19th century. He was celebrated for his typically large and melodramatic paintings of religious subjects and fantastic compositions, populated with minute figures placed in imposing landscapes. His images had the ability to instil fear onto people and create overwhelming feelings of sublimity. His most famous work '*The Great Day of His Wrath*' [7], a depiction of the words of revelation of Saint John, the end of the world. A vast landscape that is being torn apart by titanic forces, lightning strikes from the storming sky, volcanic lava spewing from the crackling earth. From John Martin's customary pamphlet it said that ; '*the great and leading feature of these productions is that they tend to inspire religious feeling and inculcate the desire to live morally and do good*'.

His images travelled the world as a very peculiar exhibition for its time called a '*Diorama*'. [7] This method of exhibiting was meant to make the picture more realistic. The image was placed inside a confined dim space. The space was setup much like a cinema theatre. Several rows of benches were placed facing the image. The image was lit by a mechanical structure holding multiple lamps that was built around and behind the painting. The audience after taking seat would now witness the artificial spectacle of sublimity. The exhibition crew would operate the mechanical lamp machine in order to make the lighting more dynamic. Not just the manipulating of light was part of the show also other elements were added to the painting behind the screen as the show commenced. Flickering spotlights would expose the giant storms in the image's sky whilst creating thundering sounds by smashing metal plates. Cries of desperation, the crushing of stone, the splattering sound of lava all added to the magnitude of the spectacle. During his time his artworks were not considered to be high forms of art. His techniques were considered less for it was understood only to draw in the masses, and so it did. The image became the most visited image of its time, by 1861 eight million people had seen the image, it is without exaggeration perhaps the most successful contemporary art exhibition ever. As mentioned before, his painting '*The Great Day of his wrath*' was understood to '*inspire religious feeling and inculcate the desire to live morally and do good*'.

The moral messages inherent to his paintings were of religious nature. *'To live morally and do good'*. In conjunction with the allegories of the Bible, John Martin had the ability to inspire religious feeling like no other painting of its time. It helped soothe the metaphysical need of men. For the duration of the spectacle its visitors were drawn away from their daily life and exposed to a world beyond their own. Especially when we consider the form of its exhibition. A confined space containing a world of wonders, the image in conjunction with the added elements, an artificial portal to the metaphysical planes we so desperately seek as men. As if John Martin had become a God in his own right, especially considering the image to be an idol, creating his own parallel universe if only for a short while. And surely the people came to worship his image.



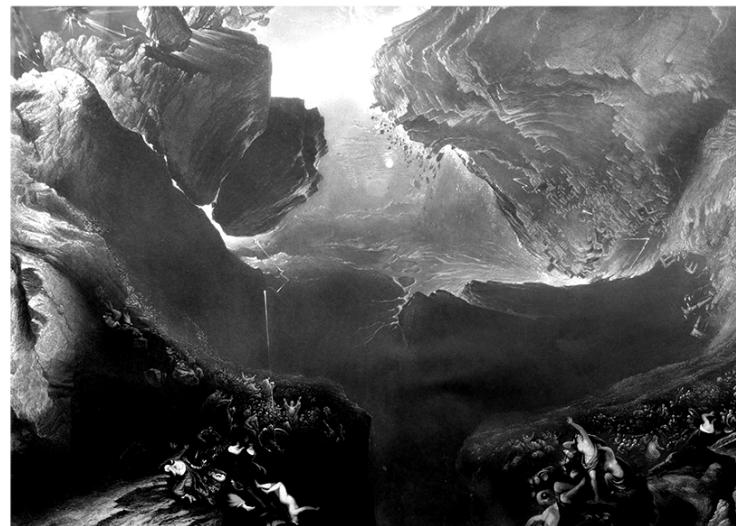
# Space Jockey, The Engineers



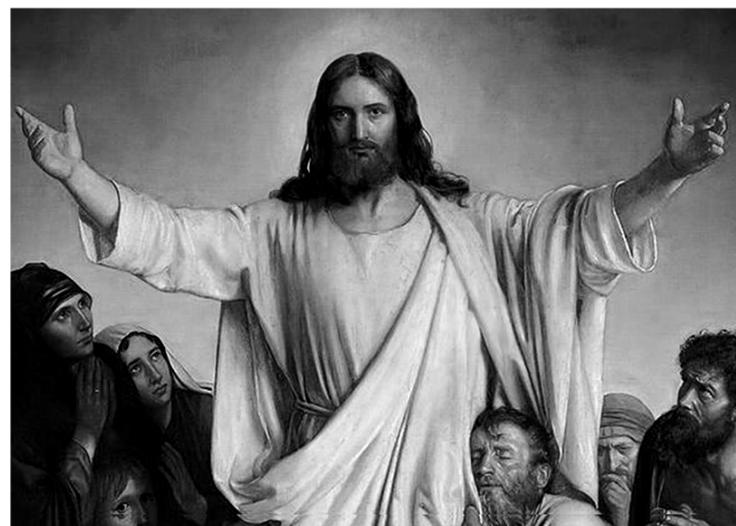
A enclosed space, a portal to outer worldly exposure, artificially created to draw people in to help confirm their needs. If we look at the idea of creating artificial worlds in this manner. It is not at all unlikely that one would compare the immersive diorama exhibits of the nineteenth century to that of the digital exhibits of the artificial and fictional worlds of many contemporary video games. Many contemporary video games make use of the same visual rhetoric as the idols from previous ages. Despite the fictional nature of video games not sharing any unaltered Biblical background they often do inherit the same '*magical claim*' and therefore answer the same needs of men and might inspire religious feelings nonetheless.

Looking back at first sentence of the second commandment : "*You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.*" It says that any depiction of likeness of what might lie beyond our own mortal world is prohibited and considered to be a false image, such is the nature of the idol, including that of video games. In the latter part of the commandment we read "*You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God...*". When we breakdown "*The LORD your God am a jealous God..*" we can conclude that the commandment was stated in a monotheistic context, meaning that the commandment stresses that there is only one true God. However, it says that God is a jealous God, through this we can acknowledge that next to the one true God there is another or perhaps multiple Gods inspiring people to worship them. We can therefore describe the various fictional tales and depictions of worlds beyond our own as false Gods or idols, needless to say is that these more contemporary idols have accumulated massive amounts of following of their own.

The second commandment alarmed us for the incredible power these images can have instilled inside of them. Initially the commandment was installed partly for the possibility of religious followers straying off in different directions then of the beaten path. Nowadays there is an abundance of fictional alternatives that through their visual nature make people gravitate towards them, and most of these Godly worlds are created by the contemporary idol makers, the video game developers.



Yogg Saron, World of Warcraft (game).  
The Great Day of his Wrath, John Martin.



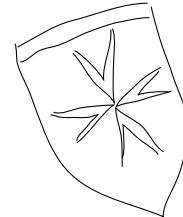
Prophet Velen, World of Warcraft (game).  
Christ the Consoler, Carl Bloch.



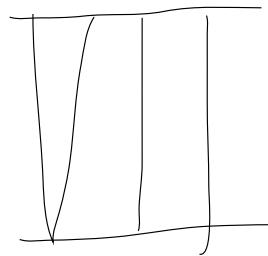
Blood Angels, Warhammer 40,000 (game).  
The Fall Of The Rebel Angels, Gustave Dore.



Irithyll, Aldrich Saint of the Deep, Dark Souls III (game).  
Duomo di Milano, Italy, Milan.



Desecration Demon, Magic : the Gathering (game).  
Dante's Inferno Circle 9, Gustave Dore.



# Algorithmic Divinity

Some of the most predominant contemporary idols (note: contemporary idols refer to the digital/artificial and fictional worlds of contemporary video games in the context of the second commandment) share many of the visual characteristics that originally stem from religious imagery or idols. Visual characteristics not only of compositions of grandeur as shown in John Martins imagery but also a wide variety of religious symbols, artefacts and religious characters. Despite the fact that the original denotation of such characteristics do not correspond with their new altered manifestations, they still resonate the same energy. As shown in the series of images from the previous section that introduces the contemporary idols we see clear visual similarities in the comparison of the traditional religious idols and their new contemporary manifestations.

The first comparison is that of John Martin's '*The Great Day of his Wrath*' and one of 'World of Warcraft's' grand displays of landscape, 'WoW' ('World of Warcraft') is a 'MMORPG' (massive multiplayer online role playing game) that at the height of its popularity had a enormous following of twelve million people. The images are similar in composition especially through the use of scale and natural forces. The images of John Martin were mainly granted their popularity and appeal through their immersive diorama exhibits. Video games share this same potential of immersion, the confined exhibition space of the 19th century has only been replaced with that of a digital monitor, the games they display draw people through their visual appeal in and make it possible for men to partake in these landscapes through means of playing. Needless to say is that people have developed a threshold when it comes to artificiality through means of developing computer graphics. The nineteenth century diorama exhibition format is now considered obsolete when it comes to its gripping potential. The metal constructions of rotating oil lamps and the clinging of metal to recreate the sound of thunder that supported the diorama exhibit has certainly been outlived by the complex and highly developed graphic game engines that serve as a foundation for the new idols.

The rapid development of gaming graphics is outstanding to say the least. The 1947 invention of the cathode-ray tube amusement device, is the earliest known interactive electronic game as well as the first to use an electronic display. Over the course of seventy years the gaming industry has seen tremendous improvement in the development of computer graphics. Lifelike digital copies of Mads Mikkelsen, the Danish actor and American actor Norman Russ featured in Hideo Kojima's most recent title '*Death Stranding*' shows a stunning display of the digital engine capabilities of today.

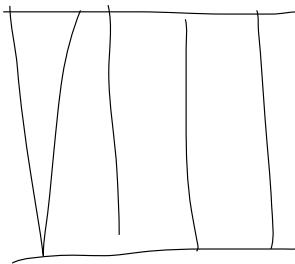


*“Another world exists that I must experience. A genus of people exists who I must meet. I must inhale the air they breathe--share their world at all costs.” [8]*

An even more infamous and radical concept believed in by Elon Musk, an entrepreneur at the frontier of global technological development, suggests that mankind already lives inside an artificial simulation of life, suggesting that life is a game in itself. He elaborated on this concept during an interview at the Code Conference 2016 :

*“The strongest argument for us being in a simulation, probably being in a simulation, is the following: 40 years ago, we had Pong, two rectangles and a dot... That is what games were. Now, 40 years later, we have photorealistic 3D simulations with millions of people playing simultaneously, and it’s getting better every year. And soon we’ll have virtual reality, augmented reality. If you assume any rate of improvement at all, the games will become indistinguishable from reality.” [9]*

Through our own rapid development of gaming engines we will again be able to continue the cycle of lifelike artificial worlds inside one another. An endless loop of parallel universes. So much for immersion and the undying urge of mankind to seek for meaning in worlds beyond our own.



1080p  
Reliqui

With the visual evolution of the idolatry the included relics and sacred artefacts are no exception. The traditional objects such as altars, candles, decorative frames, garments and goblets have been elaborated on with nearly every new gaming instalment throughout the last few decennium. The context has shifted and the relics have adapted accordingly to their new environment.

These new manifestations come in many forms that resemble the traditional relic. Many a game revolves in large parts around the collecting of 3D textured models of sacred staffs, weapons and trinkets that can be worn, carried and used by the in-game characters representing the player. Such relics are required to accomplish the necessary goals and objectives inside the game. Where a priest makes use of a smoke incensed thurible during sacred rites to do their blessings, the in-game character makes use of their own necessary relics to do their bidding.

The most notable and unique form inherent to the contemporary idol reliqui is the in-game user Interface or '*UI*'. The UI is an overlay that displays vital in-game information and acts almost like a frame to a traditional painting or an encasing reliquary. The information displayed can indicate many things such as the physical status, abilities and objectives of the in game character. This essential information is often embedded in decorative frame designs resembling the nature of the game. The UI shows most clearly and closest the visual resemblances and evolution of iconography and symbolism between the traditional Christian and gaming reliqui and design.

With the creation of the varying paths of idolatry come alternative forms of aesthetics and design that no longer resemble the original iconography but rather customized representations of beliefs and ideals. Observing the still very accurate visual resemblances in design between for instance '*Diablo III*' and traditional medieval Gothic symbolism one can tell that they still keep close to one another. Whereas the more abstract design interpretations of other games such as '*League of Legends*' have evolved into a visual language of its own. The spiritual energy pulsing crystals and mystical light waves designs embedded in the game have replaced, through numerous small steps, the once golden chandeliers and wax candles.

The visually more evolved idol still resonates the same spiritual and religious aura through upholding the traditional 'magical claim' formula if you will, whilst transcending the traditional designs of days past. It is here that a game in the context of creating new forms of worship and religion can separate itself from the Christian realm. The ones

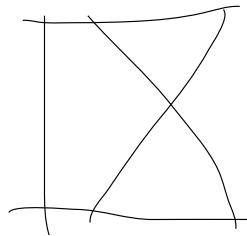
responsible, despite the second commandments warnings of idolatry, are the artist and designers. They are the ones who developed the countless range of new idols that provide the many alternative perspectives on the metaphysical need of mankind to gaze upon extraordinary worlds beyond our own, not even just to look at but to partake in.



Christian 'Thurible' or 'Censer', 1498.  
'Tuure Holy Priest Artifact Weapon', World of Warcraft, 2017.



UI Evolution Top down :  
Diablo III, Warhammer Online, World of Warcraft,  
Neverwinter, Moonlight Online, Rift, League of Legends.



# New Legends

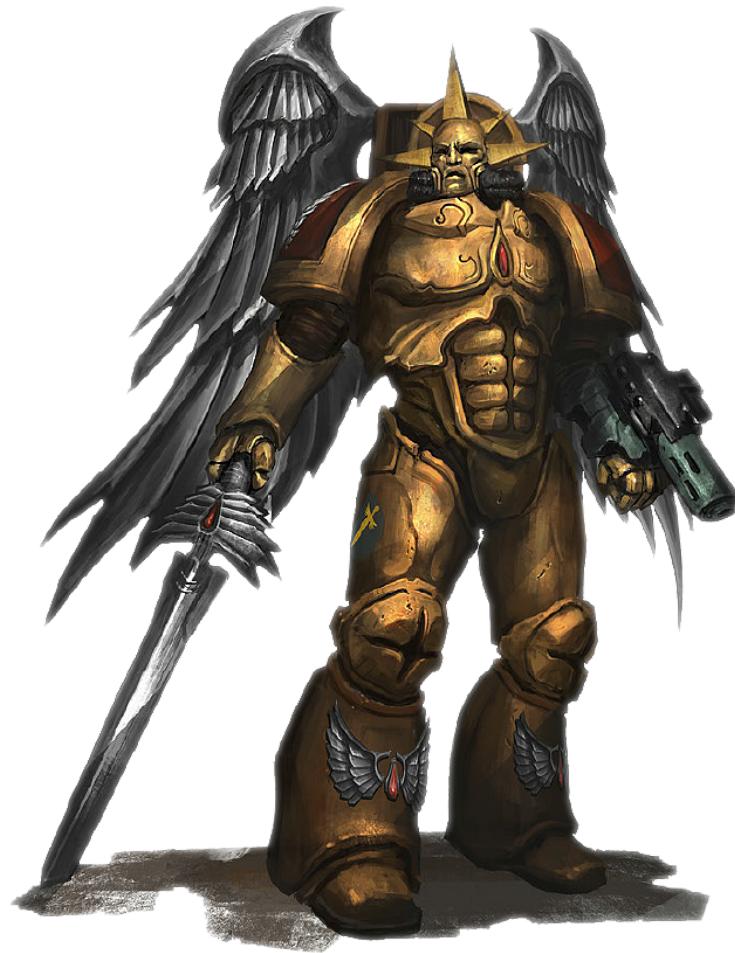
You can find many similarities or improvements in comparing the old and traditional idols to the new gaming idols not only in their visual characteristics, that have been adapted to suit the particular game in question, but also the many similarities in story telling. The scripts and allegories present in games and the historical religious tales often share the same morals and values. Of course not only biblical tales carry the means of teaching valuable life lessons, however many of the contemporary idols draw inspiration from the original religious allegories. They are told in various ways be it in a more simplistic black and white manner or perhaps a more complex layered form.

Well known characters in gaming such as '*Prophet Velen*' [10] from '*World of Warcraft*' resembles for instance the likes of Jesus Christ in form and character. As his title entails, Velen is a character that has been granted the gift of prophecy, and — aided by the Light — rejected offers of dark power from '*Sargeras*', one of games villains characters similar to the likes of Judas. In his depiction the prophet, like Jesus Christ guided his people away from sin through making great personal sacrifices.

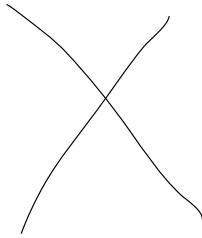
'*Sanguinius*' is a prominent character from the best selling and forty-six edition long '*Warhammer 40,000 : Horus Heresy*' book series that has been digitized and made playable in various games such as '*Space Marine*' or '*Dawn of War*'. This universe shares extreme similarities in narrative and leading figures with the Biblical story. '*Sanguinius*' resembling '*Archangel Michael*', who in the book of revelations, the war in Heaven tried to keep Lucifer from betraying God before becoming a monster. '*Once again, we meet. Give up this madness and enter the light. God loves you, and will forgive you.*' [11] In the *Warhammer 40,000* universe a similar scenario occurs between *Sanguinius* and *Horus*, the antagonist of the story, who resembles the likes of *Lucifer*. In this event *Sanguinius* and *Horus* meet face to face moments before *Horus* succumbs to madness and embraces his betrayal. *Sanguinius*, through the love he felt for his former comrade tries to persuade *Horus* from betraying the *Emperor*, *Warhammers 40,000*'s substitute for God, despite his already sinful deeds. *Horus* refuses and strikes *Sanguinius* down. In *Horus* his deadly strike *Sanguinius* seizes the opportunity to strike *Horus* simultaneously, breaking his armour, *Horus* survives. Regardless of *Horus*'s survival he has now become exposed and vulnerable this turns *Horus* more insane and losing his sanity turning into a demon. [12]

This is but one short example of many tales and characters based or inspired by the old religious legends and text that

should inspire to morally do good through their captivating stories. The array of comparable characters is long and comprehensive, more of these characters are shown in the series of image comparisons in the image section.



Sanguinary Guard, The Sons of Sanguinius,  
Warhammer 40,000, 2015.



# Contemporary Rituals

Religion in many ways is a spiritual means of teaching morals and inspiring men to do good in life. Living by the rules of the Bible and their accompanied rituals make up most of the necessary steps to live a rightful life in the eyes of the Church. Obeying the rules and performing the proposed rituals will add structure to ones life. Visiting church on Sunday morning, praying before dinner or any of the other significant events in the spectrum will make up a more steadfast life sought after by the Bible in order to fulfil ones duties and appeal to their moral conscious needs.

The new idols are no exception to such rituals. In order to perform well and walk the promising path of the fictional universes of many games one must follow a strict set of rituals. These rituals share fewer similarities in their appearance and approach but do however deliver similar structural elements to the life of a gaming partisan. ‘*World of Warcraft*’ will for instance require the partisan to attend so called ‘raids’ on Fridays nights or perhaps even multiple nights a week from eight in the evening to sometimes late at night. Raids are rituals where large groups ranging from ten to sometimes thousands of people gather online inside their predestined digital world. Raid groups systematically overthrow a certain obstacle in the game, most often a vile creature of great evil be it a humongous demon or a horde of lesser yet sinister creatures. This particular ritual requires you to perform complex martial dances inside the game of incredible difficulty. Successfully completing the ritual comes with great reward and feelings of fulfilment. Whilst being unable to complete it through absence or lack of skill is severely punishing, the fallen gamer will drastically fall behind and lose social standing among his or her fellow ‘worshippers’.

The ‘*raiding ritual*’ is commonly presented in the MMO genre. The figurehead of MMO’s is ‘*World of Warcraft*’ with its astounding following of twelve million people, although other names in the list have seen similar likes in popularity. In honour of the launch of ‘*Guild Wars 2, Path of Fire*’ the game developers reported to have gathered “over 11 million players” in the last five years. ‘*The Elder Scrolls Online*’ another popular MMO has over 8.5 million monthly active players in total, as of 2018. ‘*Final Fantasy XIV*’ currently has an active following of 511,657 people from all over the world. These titles are some of the more popular MMO instalments though the full list holds over more than one hundred names. [13]\*

The range of rituals in the games is not only limited to just ‘*raiding*’. Every MMO has its own dedicated rituals. Such as quests to collect of valuable or sacred artefacts of importance or pilgrimages, journeys of moral and spiritual

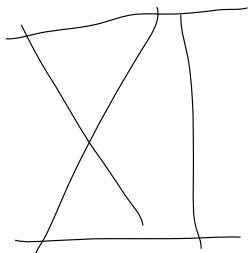
significance within the game's realm. Typically, a journey to a shrine or another location of importance to the game's narrative. Each game has a scale of offered rituals that generate a structure that should be followed accordingly, if you are unwilling to abide these rules or rituals you will be set back and downgraded as a player and perhaps mentally as a person.

A cunning and most notable fact about the MMO genre is that nearly every installed title handles a formula that will consecutively generate new content or rituals every so often. The '*World of Warcraft*' title for instance launched its first version in late 2004 and has released seven major game expansions, approximately every two and a half years, in conjunction with one-hundred and thirty-seven smaller updates referred to as patches spread throughout the game's existence. [14] These major or minor updates will continually present the participant with new challenges, raids, regions or otherwise. By doing so the player will hardly ever seize to find reasons and meaning to remain active inside the fictional game world. This constant stream of new developed content requires you to remain up-to-date with the current affairs making the setback for being inactive more punishing.

Hidetaka Miyazaki, '*Dark Souls*' is single player game series, that like the MMO genre requires you to fulfil a unique, long and painstakingly difficult pilgrimage through a complex world of wonders. Along the way you will be faced with countless of moral questions, requiring you to reflect on the stories that unfold while you participate. *Dark Souls* shares an incredibly significant amount of elaborate similarities in its visuals and narrative compared to that of the Biblical story. This is an example of '*contemporary idol*' where as a result many game researching experts have dedicated their career to the deciphering of the stories and its morals that are being told in this alternate universe. The three volume book series '*Beyond the Grave*'[15] narrates the epic success story, but also describes its gameplay mechanics and its specific lore across more than three hundred pages per volume. Characters, plots and the scenario of the four *Souls* games ('*Demon's Souls*, *Dark Souls*, *Dark Souls II* and *Dark Souls III*') are deciphered by two of such experts, Damien Mecheri and Sylvain Romieu, who spent a long year studying these dense and enigmatic games down to the smallest detail.

The vast following of these new contemporary idols, their '*magical claim*', rituals and their ability to create an offspring of game theologians have surely attained enough standing to affirm the warnings so long ago imposed by the sacred second commandment. Their influence increases to the potency of people straying from the traditional biblical path and choosing one of the more alternative routes of gaming

idolatry.



# Young Acolytes

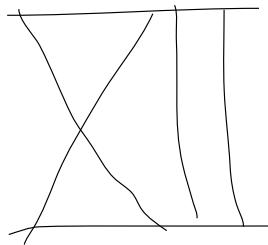
The accumulated audience of video games is enormous and continues to grow with rapid succession. Currently the most notable amount of players is that of the younger ages between sixteen and twenty-five. This portion of young ‘average’ gamers make up around forty-five percent of the totality of gamers as of late 2017. These statistics include all available computer games on the market to date. But the more specific MMO genre that most closely resembles the concept of the ‘*contemporary idol*’ has an even larger amount of young followers, that of sixty-six percent between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five. [13]\*

There are multiple reasons as to how and why this division came to be, marketing strategy being a main factor in the occurrence. The more prominent and developed MMO game titles such as the ones discussed have been around since the mid ninety’s or early two-thousand’s. To participate and understand a games concept one requires an intermediate familiarity with digital platforms such as computers or game consoles and their mechanics. New video games have a high tendency to go hand in hand with the latest technologies made available for video gaming during the time of its development and release. This requires their audience to be willing to understand and adapt to more unfamiliar territories. The younger ‘*Millennial*’, or even ‘*Generation Z*’ generations showed a more adaptive behaviour during the time of the earlier MMO releases and thus made a proper target group.

There are other less economic but social and individualistic motives for younger generations to pledge oneself to the idol. The life of a teenager can be difficult and hectic through the amount of choices, opinions or other significances an individual around that age has to make or deal with. The laid out structure of video games can help to bring about a more stable existence, whilst answering the ubiquitous search and desire for a world beyond our own. Harmony Korine is a filmmaker best known for his films ‘*Kids*’, directed together with photographer Larry Clark. His works mostly depict younger people often between the age of sixteen and twenty-five. His ability to dissect and display behaviour show an emotional and poetic insight into the lives of the young and their motives. One of his shorter and lesser known films ‘*Act Da Fool*’[16] depicts a girl, somewhere around the age of seventeen, that is in search of stability and answers in an unorganized and chaotic world. The script of this particular film illustrates very well the perspective on life of a teenager might have and their search for reason and understanding of life.

“*This town stinks. Most people here don’t even have names. Everyone’s*

*just passing through. Fuck this town... My friends and I are a gang of fools. We can act like wild animals, we can do some messed up shit. We act like little babies sometimes. Its us against the world. One day we got so drunk, I thought I heard god speaking to me. He said; "if you don't stop then I'm going to kick your stupid ass up and down this sidewalk". How come god gotta be so violent I thought. I ain't going to church no more. Church can suck it. I think the screens hold the secrets. The screens be shining at night, bright as hell. They say look at me. Look up here, I'm up here, they call out. We love you girls, we really love you. We will never leave you. Just be good to one another. You can make it out this dead town. Fuck everyone else. The world wants us to be happy. And I trust the screens. They ain't never lie yet. Every night they say the same thing. The screens ain't never gonna leave us."*



# The Children of Heaven

With the world largely disregarding the warnings of idolatry by the sacred second commandment many young eyes have fixed their gaze on high definition digital screens, the more contemporary beacons of faith. Portals to the '*likeness of anything that is in heaven above...*', worlds beyond our own, to look at and immerse oneself in. The provided structure and stability present in nearly every kind of religion can also be discovered and practiced in the artificial yet mesmerizing realms of many video games. Besides the varying visual aspects the contemporary video game idols maintain a method that will persist their longevity through continually implicating new, rewarding and exciting rituals and goals that contain stories of moral value or characters that can inspire religious feeling. The alternative structural and spiritual paths created and orchestrated by the responsible game designers and developers can provide a searching individual with the much sought after and soothing answers to the difficult questions predominating life.

## Bookmarks

- [1] Arthur Schopenhauer, The Horrors and Absurdities of Religion, 1851 On religion : A Dialogue, page 11-12
- [2] The Second Commandment, Book of Deuteronomy
- [3] Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the Hebrew bible, 4:15-16
- [4] Veil of Veronica, Hans Memling, 1470
- [5] Magical Claim, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Samtliche Werke in 18. Banden, page 617
- [6] Paul Auster, Moon Palace  
A Poet of the Eye - The Role of Art in Paul Auster's Works, page 122
- [7] John Martin, The Great Day of His Wrath & Diorama Exhibits Lecture 10, Handwriting on the Wall: John Martin's Belshazzar's Feast, 1820  
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[http://www.kjp.konami.jp/gs/hideoblog\\_e/2005/11/000039.html#more](http://www.kjp.konami.jp/gs/hideoblog_e/2005/11/000039.html#more)
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- [10] Prophet Velen, The Burning Crusade, World of Warcraft, 2007  
<https://www.engadget.com/2012/04/22/know-your-lore-velen-the-prophet/>
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- [12] Sanguinius & Horus, The Horus Heresy. Black Library, Horus Rising, page 278-289
- [13] MMO Statistics  
  
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- [14] World of Warcraft, Expansions & Patches  
<http://wowwiki.wikia.com/wiki/Patches>
- [15] From the Grave, Dark Souls, Volume I, II & III.  
Damien Mecheri and Sylvain Romieu. 2014 - 2017
- [16] Harmony Korine, Act Da Fool. Proenza Schouler, Fall 2010 Collection  
<https://vimeo.com/218855791>

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- 2.1 The Return of Religion and other Myths, a Critical Reader in Contemporary Art, 2008
- 2.2 Sigmund Freud, Moses and Monotheism, 1939
- 2.3 James Wood, How Fiction Works, 2008
- 2.4 Tegenlicht, All in the Game, 2017  
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