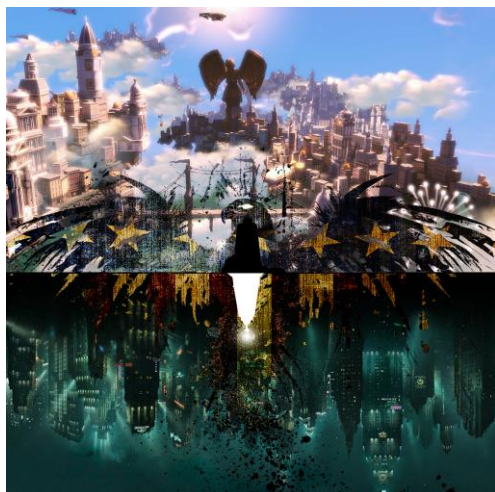


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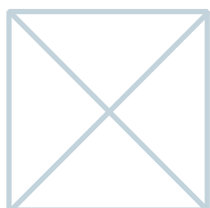
# VIDEO GAMES ON THE BRINK OF CHAOS

Breaking Manichaeism through  
sacred myths and ideology

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# INTRODUCTION

Literature. Music. Cinema. Painting. These are the four artistic activities that are mainly discussed, analysed and theorised. Yet, a new medium appeared in the early 1950s, massively changing the way people got entertained through playing interactive electronic games. The first video game was ironically created with the use of an oscilloscope the main goal of which was to calculate missile trajectories by a physicist named William Higinbotham, who was against the nuclear threat. After two years of exhibition, the game *Tennis for Two* was deactivated. In the same way as Gutenberg for printing or the Lumiere brothers for cinema, Higinbotham was the pilgrim of video games creation which led some visionaries to develop these Information Technology techniques to produce entertainment games.

It was in 1967 that computer games became more accessible with Ralph Baer's idea of plugging a box on a television that led to the development of the very first electronic game console, the *Odyssey*. After a demonstration of a tennis-based game, the engineer Nolan Bushnell was convinced of upgrading the game and commercialized *Pong* in 1972 which would be released in arcades and three years later in miniaturized devices for the use at home. The price fixed at 99 dollars could have restrained the middle-class but this innovation was a commercial success.

This enthusiasm for the discovery of new technologies gave birth to a new industry. There were two reasons why financial markets did not pay attention to it. The first was that it was considered to be ephemeral, for the medium was reserved to a particular public with could afford these products. The second one was that video games were anything but realistic: the User Interface was not intuitive and the gameplay techniques (the way the game is played) were still in their infancy.

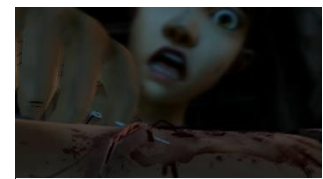
Yet, it only took a decade to perceive a real change with the arrival of the 3D. Thanks to this technology allowing more polygons and pixels to appear on the screen, games became more realistic so that the player could identify with the main character more easily. The technological war continued between Nintendo, Sony and Sega, the three 1990s' major firms that released their consoles, respectively the Nintendo 64, the Playstation and the Dreamcast. Unfortunately, the latter's sales were judged to be insufficient, leading Sega to stop the Dreamcast's production and give Microsoft up for the podium.

The "next-gen" consoles proved that games were to be more and more photorealistic and players started to show weariness towards the mainstream games such as the *Call of Duty* series, Activision, or the football simulation series *FIFA*, EA Sports, which rarely innovated on the gameplay but preferred to refresh graphics and physics. That is why, by the early 2000s, the race for technologies slowed down and the developers researched new ways of entertaining the player community. Furthermore, the video game medium's image was to change in people's minds. The medium was no longer marginal and belonged to entertainment in everyday life just like cinema. In fact, everybody can nowadays access video games through consoles, computers, smartphones and even internet boxes from which one can rent a game in the same way as one can rent a film.

Thus, it is often said that gaming is strictly reserved to a young public, but according to Entertainment Software Association's studies, the average player is 31 years old. The latter statement shows that the public is more mature and

as a consequence searches for mature contents including taboo topics leading the ban of several games condemned to show undesirable images in less democratic countries.

Violence in this medium has always been a highly disputed theme for associations fighting to prevent children from becoming dangerous psychopaths as the news like to remind us edged out cases such as Anders Breivik, who killed more than seventy people, or the Columbine High massacre. However, the use of violent themes can be meaningful in various games inclined to tell complex stories, for gratuitous killings in games are not only a way to please gamers in violence but also impart the game implicit themes leading the players to wish not to be the NPC (Non-Player Character) waiting for its violent and sometimes slow death, to the extent of being unbearable for the player to witness or to perform. In fact, in *The Walking Dead* series (2013), developed by Telltale studios and adapted from Robert Kirkman's graphic novel, the player controls an eleven year-old young girl, Clementine, and has to press buttons during the cutscenes (known as Quick Time Event or QTE), forcing the player not to be a spectator but to watch and act in order to move forward in the narration but also to feel violence and pain as a sine-qua-non condition to survive in a post-apocalyptic world.



1- Clementine and the player sewing together a dog bite.

The spectator becoming the actor in the narrative process is the only aspect that differs from cinema. The cut-scenes are most of the time non-playable and use cinema techniques with lights, filters and (virtual) shots to underscore a particular theme. For instance, in *Grand Theft Auto V* (2013), developed by Rockstar, there are cut-scenes before the mission starts to show its tone and major goals, such as breaking into a police station or planning a robbery in a bank. Thus, the missions often start in different places showing different parts of Los Santos, the city where the action takes place, which was influenced by Los Angeles, California. So, the *Grand Theft Auto* series is one of the first to cross the tabooed boundaries of sex, drugs and violence shown in video games and also to break with the myth of the American Dream, by denouncing the difficulties of people trying to survive the economic crisis through transforming Los Santos from a colourful and growing city in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* to a grey and disparate city with rich districts and slums in *Grand Theft Auto V*.



2- A wide and blurry shot of Los Santos, showing all the possibilities and the dark corners.

In the same way as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1938), or George Orwell's *1984* (1948), video games tend to foreshadow dystopian societies by showing worlds as they would be in case new extremist ideologies were to be developed and enforced. Huxley justified his *Brave New World* stating that "most human beings have an almost infinite capacity for taking things for granted (*The Collected Essays* p.164)."<sup>1</sup>



3- Libria, *Equilibrium's* totalitarian "peaceful" city.

This means that people are not aware that critical changes might intervene in their lives for they do not think of anything worse. One could perceive the society as a main character by showing and describing it in literature and in cinema. But, the introduction of such a corrupted world gives way to a protagonist settled in the world beginning to have doubts concerning the society's legitimacy such as John Preston, played by Christian Bale, in *Equilibrium*, 2002, Kurt Wimmer, or Neo, played by Keanu Reeves, in *The Matrix*, 1999, Andy and Lana Wachowski. Hence, Neo is more

convinced that the world seems fake once confronted to reality. “What you know you can't explain, but you feel it. You've felt it your entire life, that there's something wrong with the world. You don't know what it is, but it's there, like a splinter in your mind, driving you mad. (*The Matrix*)”<sup>2</sup> This particular film can also be seen as the immersion a player can feel while playing a game. In fact, Neo represents the gamer, aware that the world he lives in is virtual, yet all of the similarities shown with the real world, make him think that virtual environment and reality are the same.

On the other hand, another type of main protagonist is introduced in other utopian and dystopian narratives. The “Stranger” character is the one being outside the system and discovers it without having the ability to comprehend it, rejecting the ideas and trying to dismantle the system. In Huxley's *Brave New World*, John the Savage totally disapproves of the way people's discontent is treated through Soma and claims “his right to be unhappy.”<sup>3</sup>

Two recent video game sagas tackle the issue of making durable societies and maintaining them in order to keep balance. The first saga, *Mass Effect* (2007), developed by BioWare, is a space opera, an offshoot of science-fiction. The space opera genre has several definitions that are still being discussed nowadays for the genre evolves as the man evolves. Still, there is a way of describing the space opera genre given by Jack Williamson defining it “as a label for the whole literature of man in space, a great epic tale of discovery and expansion across the galaxy. (*Skylark* Introduction vi.).”<sup>4</sup> The *Mass Effect* saga is a trilogy the games of which were soberly named *Mass Effect 1* (2007), *Mass Effect 2* (2010) and *Mass Effect 3* (2012) completed with various downloadable contents, which add missions and complicate the plot written by Drew Karpysyn.

The story begins in 2183 and the player controls John Shepard, a Human Special Forces officer who is designed to join in the Spectre forces (**S**pecial **T**tactics and **R**econnnaissance) to represent humanity among the other Citadel Races. Later on, Shepard finds out that one of the best Spectres, Saren, betrayed the Council, for he attacked a human colony commanding a synthetic race, the Geths, in order to find an alien beacon created by the Prothean, an ancient race which has disappeared for no reason.

Back to the Citadel, the Council gives Shepard the task to prove Saren's treason by finding evidence and solve the mystery of how Saren managed to brainwash his organic followers. Then, the Commander Shepard gathers a team composed of aliens and embarks on the ship under his command: the SSV Normandy. The task of finding Saren reveals itself to be more difficult than Shepard thought. Still the ship can go to different planets within a short period of time thanks to the ancient technology allowing ships to use Mass Relays and travel rapidly. Later on in the game Shepard meets with Sovereign, a giant living ship composed of organic and synthetic elements explaining that he is a Reaper and he will destroy all living species with the use of his tool, Saren. After a battle, Saren tells Shepard his main goal, which is going to the Conduit on Ilos, an ancient Prothean planet in order to open a direct path to the Citadel and to take control of it in order to allow the Reapers to come back and destroy the galaxy. Luckily, Shepard comes across a damaged Prothean Virtual Intelligence named Vigil and gets a program to close the arms of the citadel. With Vigil's aid and the Citadel Army, Shepard manages to destroy the Reaper Sovereign, preventing it from calling its brothers.

*Mass Effect 2* takes place one month after the battle with Sovereign. The SSV Normandy is attacked by an unidentified ship causing the destruction of the Normandy and Shepard's death. Still, 2 years later, Shepard is

resurrected thanks to the progress of science within a terrorist organisation called Cerberus. Its leader, the Illusive Man tasks Shepard with the investigation of human colons' abduction by a mysterious race called the Collectors. He provides Shepard a new team (counting the artificially created Miranda Lawson) and an exact copy of the Normandy. After enrolling a new team (including old members from the first opus), Shepard's staff is taken away by the Collectors while he and his crew were on mission. Shepard has to steal a Reaper technology so that the Normandy can fly through the Omega 4 relay and find the Collectors' headquarters. There he finds out the reason why the Protheans disappeared, they were actually turned into Collectors. After having obtained the technology, the crew goes through the relay and discovers that the abducted humans are assimilated in order to create a human-like Reaper, which will be destroyed by Shepard. Subsequently Shepard sets a bomb, suppressing the Collector threat. Later, Shepard sabotages the Alpha Relay in a downloadable mission in *Mass Effect 2*, destroying the Batarians' (a xenophobic race towards human) home planet, Shepard is laid-off in Vancouver but his generals call him to get advice about the Reapers. This is where *Mass Effect 3* starts.

Vancouver is under Reaper attack, Shepard has to flee Earth in order to gather all forces to save the planet. First of all, he is led to Mars where he finds a Prothean blueprint of a supermassive weapon which can destroy all of the Reapers. Then he has to find a new Turian leader on the moon of Palaven which is being devastated by the Reapers that transform all of the captives into Reaper servants. Winning a war implies unity, this leads Shepard to become a trouble-shooter, offering his services in exchange of war assets. After having solved these diplomatic issues, the supermassive weapon is almost complete. One element is missing: the Catalyst. Shepard finds out thanks to a Virtual Intelligence similar to Vigil that the Catalyst is actually the Citadel. But, the Illusive Man informs the Reapers of the process of activating the Crucible, leading them to steal the Citadel and bring it near the final assault planet, Earth. Shepard comes back to the Earth and gets into the Citadel thanks to a similar Conduit found on Ilos. He comes across his superior, Captain Anderson and the Illusive Man, who persuades him that he can control everyone before being killed by Shepard telling him that he is nothing but Reapers slave. Finally, Shepard meets with a curious entity, the Catalyst, who has a conscience and explains that he is the one controlling the Reapers. The final scene shows Shepard having to make a choice which will change the fate of the galaxy and closing the Shepard trilogy, once and for all.

The second saga is *Bioshock* (2007). It was developed by Irrational Games and is a First Person Shooter (FPS). Unlike *Mass Effect*, *Bioshock*'s story is narrated in a more linear way and only introduces a society per opus. One of the *Bioshock* saga's weaknesses is that not all of the games were developed by the same studio. Still, there is a coherence in the world and the background that defines the three opuses as a whole saga. Yet *Bioshock 2* (2010) was not developed by the same team, which has provoked an alteration of this particular world, which will be considered in our analysis.

1960, a plane crashes and the player/character swims to a mysterious lighthouse leading to a bathysphere that goes down to the city of Rapture built into the deep ocean. There, the player serves as the intermediary to solve an indirect confrontation between two men Andrew Ryan and Frank Fontaine, After having learnt that Atlas controlled the player/character, he wants to get revenge and free to act, the character acquires a Big Daddy suit and, with the help



of the Little Sisters, subdues Fontaine who had drained a lot of ADAM, which allows humans to evolve as much as they want.

*Bioshock 2*'s plot is simpler for it tells a new story in Rapture, ten years after the events of the first *Bioshock*. The player controls a Big Daddy that has to take his daughter back from the hands of a tyrant named Sofia Lamb. When the Big Daddy named Delta makes his way to Lamb's lair, his daughter nearly gets killed which breaks the bonds between Delta and her. Her daughter saves him thanks to her powers and leads him to an escape pod so that they can go back to the surface and leave Rapture behind. Yet, the Big Daddy is mortally damaged, causing her daughter to sacrifice him.

Even though *Bioshock Infinite* is the latest game released in the whole series, it takes the player back in 1912, in other words more than forty years before the events of the first *Bioshock*. The player controls Booker DeWitt, a former soldier in the American army who became a private detective full of debts through gambling. He gets a contract to bring a girl back to New-York safe and sound. He is driven to a lighthouse and is sent to Columbia by a rocket. There, DeWitt sees that Columbia is guided by Father Zachary Hale Comstock. Auto proclaimed as the Prophet, Comstock warns people to beware of the False Shepherd which is later found to be DeWitt, with the scars representing the letters A.D. Then, Booker finds Elizabeth who is locked in a tower and frees her with difficulty for her protector – The Songbird – comes out and attacks DeWitt. They run away to a ship where Booker promises to see Elizabeth to Paris whereas he plans to go to New York City. After discovering this treason, Elizabeth knocks Booker down, who wakes up and meets Daisy Fitzroy, the leader of the Vox Populi. While retrieving Elizabeth, the girl discloses Booker her ability to open Tears, windows on alternate realities. One of them shows Columbia under the Vox Populi rebels' control depicting Booker as a martyr. On seeing Booker alive, in a world he is apparently not, Fitzroy attempts to kill Booker to repair the broken narrative. The Vox Populi leader finally gets killed by a shocked Elizabeth. After these events which turn Elizabeth into a mature woman, the duo discovers that a Siphon device has been built to restrain Elizabeth's powers but also that her mother's death has been ordered by Comstock in order to prevent a secret from being revealed. They also discover that Elizabeth had been adopted by Comstock who planned to raise her as her successor to unleash fire on the "Sodom below". Elizabeth is captured by Songbird and DeWitt has a vision of an old Elizabeth begging him to save her in order to prevent war on the world, giving him the key to control Songbird. After having drowned Comstock, Booker frees Elizabeth and destroys the Siphon with the use of Songbird. Then, having access to all realities, Elizabeth explains that DeWitt is Comstock after having accepted baptism to reborn and wash his sins and stole Elizabeth to Booker who was named Anna with the use of the Lutece Field - created by a physicist named Rosalind Lutece and her alternative version Robert – that severed her auricular in the process while the portal closed, giving the explanation of how she can see all the alternatives since she got two parts of herself in two different worlds. DeWitt exists because he refused to receive baptism. She finally brings him to the moment of baptism where DeWitt chooses to be drowned so that neither DeWitt nor Comstock exists anymore.

Then in *Bioshock Infinite- Burial at Sea*, the player goes back to Rapture and meets DeWitt again, with an older Elizabeth before the Civil War. Elizabeth asks Booker to find a girl named Sally. Together, they travel through

Rapture, finding that Sally has become a Little Sister. DeWitt fights her Big Daddy and starts to recall strange memories where he accepted baptism, became Comstock, stole Anna but killed her in the process. Full of regrets, he asked the Luteces to send him in a world where Anna never existed which would erase his memories. Afterwards, Elizabeth tells that she came to this world to get rid of the last form of Comstock, the latter being killed by another Big Daddy.

In the second part, the player is Elizabeth and explores a perfect vision of Paris, following Sally who will catch fire. Then she wakes up in Rapture and gets nearly killed by Atlas who asks her to find him a way in the city for he has been imprisoned in his own building. A voice of DeWitt tells Elizabeth what to say, and she wakes up again, discovering her dead body and remembers the Lutece explaining that she can go back to Rapture but as a normal person, removing her power to open tears and to see through all “the doors”. Hence, she follows the tracks of Rapture’s scientist, Yi Suchong, and discovers that he developed a Tear device using the Lutece technologies. After having repaired it, Elizabeth crosses the Tear to Columbia and discovers that Fitzroy has been convinced by the Luteces to let Elizabeth kill her in order to erase the girl’s innocence. She also discovers how the plasmids were created through conversations between Suchong and Jeremiah Fink, Columbia’s scientist and manufacturer, and how Songbird was created and pair-bonded with Elizabeth. She brings back the Lutece particle, allowing gravity to be stopped to raise Atlas’ prison so that he can return to Rapture. Still, Atlas wants Elizabeth to find the “Ace in the Hole”, seemingly a weapon he wants to use against Ryan.

Elizabeth goes to Suchong’s clinic and witnesses two Little Sisters imprinting on a Big Daddy by saving him, remembering herself how she imprinted on Songbird. Yi Suchong hurts one of these Little Sisters and gets killed by the Big Daddy, which allows Elizabeth to find the “Ace in the Hole” code, saying “Would you kindly?” allowing Atlas to activate Jack, the first *Bioshock*’s main protagonist. Atlas kills Elizabeth with a wrench and the epilogue shows the parallel between Jack holding Sally’s hand for the first time and Sally holding Elizabeth’s hand for the last time while singing Piaf’s “La Vie en Rose”.

Concerning those two sagas, the parallel can be made through narrative techniques and visual elements since the videogame medium contains a lot of references and inspirations to tell complex stories to the player for it employs “abstract, formal, and narrative, as well as cultural, political and social (Andy Clark p.57)”<sup>5</sup> images. Indeed, this statement will lead the analysis of the two sagas hereinabove introduced, which both feature apocalyptic prophecies that lead the player to ask the following question: how do science-fiction video games confer a new dimension to the sacred myths upon mortals, by using its proper narration techniques and imagery in order to modify the codes of sacred Manicheanism?

First of all, we will give a particular attention to the techniques of narration used in video games since it is a very specific medium in which people are active throughout the process of narration. In both of the sagas, the parallels drawn between non-fictional and fictional facts so as to give the player a sensation of reality. Then, we will study the testimonies left by non-player characters help the player to immerse himself into the world that is often influenced by our past and experiences. Thus the science-fiction genre is often led by a goal of completion of a cycle that makes the narration vary from one opus to another and yet resemble one another. This peculiar narrative technique is reinforced

by the process of creation of the main character by the player and the immersion provided can be underscored by the various paths offered to the player, leading him to believe that he controls the narration, for choices and creation are strongly linked with the video games medium's narrative structure.

Secondly, a background analysis will be approached to define to what extent the societies created by the leaders and their ideologies represent the extremist cases that are unlikely to happen in the real world, even though the games show that it can happen for the lead creators of the video games turned moderate ideologies into extremist ones, which will lead them to sever their bonds with the conventional societies. We will also focus on how the worlds are maintained in order since the ideas that will be discussed in the second part can be very controversial within this society, leading the creators of the city to use different means such as propaganda or the creation of protective golems, revealing the true nature of the society characters live in.

The theme of damnation will be finally discussed to demonstrate how desire can lead to destruction of the society through the will of being superior to the others, through a human point of view and American exceptionality. Moreover, the notion of control will be broached for the leaders, even though they are shown as being tolerant, intend to control their people so as to prevent any rebellion from breaking out. Still, we will see the consequences when a society is not freed from corruption but also when these society go through a process of metamorphosis, being often triggered by the death of the main protagonist that the player controls.

## 1. **THE NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES IN VIDEO GAMES**

## 1.1 Testimonies and Codex

### 1.1.1 Deciphering the story through History

As far as the video game medium is concerned, most of the pieces of work are not settled in the real world, facilitating the player's immersion into an imaginary world which is, by definition, rarely based on reality and History. However, creating a world where non-fictional characters are mentioned or represented underscores the virtual veracity of the world in which the player progresses so as to create an after-taste of *déjà vu*. As an example, the financial system used in *Bioshock Infinite* directly refers to the American economy for the currency in Columbia is the American Silver Eagle which was first struck in San Francisco in 1986. Having this knowledge, the player could understand the use of this currency in Columbia as a prophecy towards American economy as Columbia was “launched” in 1893, in other words a century before the first Silver Eagle coin was struck, leading the player to reflect upon the dollar currency's sustainability.



4- A comparison between Columbia's Silver Eagle and the United States' one.

Hence, introducing real elements includes historical characters which is a means to give the player notice of the discussion of ideologies. Unlike the *Schlüsselroman* genre, video games present non-fictional characters in order to underscore the possible reality of the story told, which implies that the player has to make enquiries so as to fully comprehend the whole settled background. For instance, after having been baptised, Booker wakes up in a basin overhung by three statues representing the most famous Founding Fathers. Each one of them is holding an element symbolising their own role in the United States' history. George Washington carries the sword in his hands, reminding his key role in the Battle of Trenton in 1776 during the Independence War. Thomas Jefferson holds a scroll, implying the impact he had on political reforms and Benjamin Franklin bears the key, which represents his imagination and role as an inventor. Furthermore, they are deified by their faithful, summoning their strength by advocating each Father's quality, and closing their prayer by a Christian-like trinity which combines the American religious and political devotion “By the sword... And the Scroll... And the Key... Amen. (*Bioshock Infinite*)”<sup>6</sup>



5-The Founding Fathers being prayed by their faithful.

However, the science fiction genre needs a scientific approach in order to base the plot and the whole created world on a credibility that can motivate the player to discover more about the mysteries of science. In fact, science has always been a mystery to laymen who do not know an ounce of physics and astrophysics. Elaborating a whole scientific system based on common beliefs or on easy-to-understand theories enables the player to think that he knows more about science than before, which is, in a way, bolstering the player's fantasies about the unknown and the feasible. Then, science-fiction video games often counter the real theories or adapt them. In *Bioshock Infinite*, the city of Columbia floats in the air, but does not fly. Indeed, one of the fictional physicists named Rosalind Lutece explains her researches in opposition to Newton's gravity theories by having created the Lutece Particle by saying that the “atom

simply failed to fall. If an atom could be suspended indefinitely, well -- why not an apple? If an apple, why not a city (*Bioshock Infinite*, “A City Suspended”)?”<sup>7</sup> Although the particle is the absolute opposition of Newton’s discoveries, making it completely irrational and imaginary, the fact that the fairy-tale discovery is compared to a real scientist’s research breaks the wall between the possible and the impossible, which pulls apart the fantasy genre from science-fiction, and defines the latter’s essence. Moreover, in *Mass Effect*, human dreams to conquer space are shown in the space-opera genre, relied on more recent researches on potential extra-terrestrial life such as the discovery of water on Mars. This led the scriptwriter, Drew Karpysyn, to extrapolate on potential technological discoveries that will allow humanity to expand their race throughout the galaxy which can be compared to Christopher Columbus discovering a new world. Then, the introduction board in the first *Mass Effect*, after an introduction scene showing Earth completed with a dialog on a voice-over reveals humanity’s major role in the galaxy.

### 1.1.2 The immersion into an open world

Ken Levine differentiates cinema and video games by saying that in films “you are an observer [...] and you see the same thing as I do (Game In Ciné n°81)”<sup>8</sup> whereas in video games the player is free to make his own interpretations and no longer witnesses the events but participates in the way the game has programmed him to do. Yet, in both of the sagas analysed, differences can be perceived on the immersion offered to the gamer. In the *Bioshock* series, the player cannot see the character because the game genre is a First Person Shooter, giving the player the ability to see the action through the character’s eyes, favouring the player’s direct immersion. Thus, apart from the introduction and the conclusion scenes, there are not any cut-scenes breaking up the action with a sequence where the player is turned into a passive spectator. Furthermore, it gives the player the ability to move around where an important event is happening, to see details that might not be seen without this freedom and what is more to enable the player to create his own gaming experience. Nevertheless, the *Mass Effect* series is based on another narrative system. In fact, a cut-scene can break up the action at any time, even in the middle of an epic battle. Yet, in no instance does it damage the player’s immersion. On the contrary, it increases his immersion for the cut-scenes are punctuated with a User Interface giving dialog possibilities allowing the player to get more information on the situation by clicking on the “investigate” button or to decide on pursuing the action by choosing an answer which can have heavy consequences on the narration.

However, the cut-scenes are not the only means to differentiate the open-world game from the interactive movie. In the *Bioshock* series, the path must be followed but there is a lot of hidden rooms and districts to discover and to loot so as to find weapon or power upgrades. From a less practical point of view, the player can discover clues on the plot. The main difference between cinema and video games is once more underscored through the player’s freedom to progress in a world at the rhythm he wants, revealing detail such as parodies of paintings or propaganda. Therefore, each of the districts that can be searched through are differently designed, in such a way that it reveals the tone of the events to follow. Thus, the *Bioshock* series is not a complete open-world game for the player has to follow the narrative trail which is purposefully meant to be complicated to force the character to look around and find NPCs that might give

an important clue or a comment on the city, adding background information to the player's knowledge of the fictional universe.

The conception of *Mass Effect*'s open-world system is completely different. As its genre is a space opera, the spaceship has a main role. The SSV Normandy is used as the hub of the game, instead of browsing an aseptic menu, the player wanders about the ship where he can upgrade Shepard's equipment in each room that has a special use such as the infirmary, the armoury etc. Hereafter, the player feels the openness and space by a galactic map, which can be consulted at any time aboard the ship. The map guides the player in infinity by showing them the key events, the priority missions and the side quests that the player can achieve in the preferred order. As a comparison to literature, the player chooses the chapters he wants to read first, even though the narrative line could be broken for a couple of hours. Hence, the player journeys in the universe where he can scan planets to see if he can land on or to see if there is a quest to be accomplished. Moreover, there are side quests within the principal missions which can have an impact on the saga's ending. For, the aim of *Mass Effect 3*, is to gather as much as war assets, in order to have a maximum chance to defeat the Reapers. *Mass Effect 1* and *Mass Effect 2*'s side quests are valuable because the player encounters a large amount of people, who will give him passive support so as to stop the conflict. Yet, the open-world forces the player to discover the worlds and the galaxy with a punishment system. In *Mass Effect 2*, Shepard's ship is too weak to journey through the Omega 4 Relay, this said, he can improve it by asking his crew if they have upgrade ideas, which makes the player talk to the NPCs. After having obtained upgrade blueprints, the player has to scan a large amount of planets in the galaxy, divided in systems, themselves divided in clusters. This gameplay element challenges the player's patience to see if he prefers to play in a more secure way and upgrade the ship or to rush into the Relay blindly, which has higher probabilities to alternate the narration by killing Shepard's crew, and by not seeing them again in *Mass Effect 3*. The ultimate goal of an open-world narration is above all a background-telling technique: while roaming in *Mass Effect*, the player can hear additional dialogs from non-important NPCs giving their points of view and can talk to them to get information on what is going on. Sometimes he gets additional quests that he can decide whether he completes them or not which will add entries to the Codex. Divided into two parts – primary and secondary – the Codex consists in regrouping the historical facts including wars, discoveries, treaties, and even descriptions on the different races. Although the *Mass Effect* saga is comprehensive in its artistic way, the universe offered by Karpysbyn cannot tell the whole background, which gives the Codex a major role in completing information on the world. Then, the player can choose to complete it to fulfil his desire of knowledge or not to complete it in order to keep a taste of mystery.

Hence, even if the player cannot interact with any character in *Bioshock*, he can find audio logs, giving him the possibility to listen to them. Instead of giving theoretical facts such as *Mass Effect*'s Codex, the audio logs are not used so as to present ideas and a timeline, but they criticise more, for the audio diaries that can be found were mainly recorded immediately after an event to which the player cannot witness. Both average citizens and high-ranking protagonists give their opinion in an absolute subjective way. With this means, the audio diary system enhances the player's immersion for listening to a non-real person speaking and testifying with a real intonation and implied feelings helps the player to detect irony providing the gamer with a more subjective point of view from the scriptwriters.



## 1.2 Constants and Variables

### 1.2.1 Breaking the cycle of life

Motifs such as time and paradox provide the narration with reflections upon continuity in various aspects. One of the goals of science-fiction stories is to offer plausible answers to questions that are still unexplained. First of all, the cycle of life transcends humans' comprehension, feeding them with fascination and fantasies. The presence of cycles in the narration is based on various theories defining the very essence of life. Indeed, the idea of metamorphosis of the organic races in *Mass Effect* derives from Antoine Lavoisier's famous quotation on the transformation of substances. Although the whole saga's plot is constructed on a war between the council races and the Reapers, and the narration has a beginning and an end, the game only tells a fragment of the galactic history. For, the Reaper named Sovereign encountered in *Mass Effect 1* breaks the concept of war even before it started. In point of fact, Sovereign maintains the idea of inevitable extermination by insisting that "the cycle cannot be broken (*Mass Effect 1*)"<sup>9</sup>. This intelligent race is deified above all the others that did not create their own technology but discovered the Reaper's one that purposefully spread it around the galaxy to speed up the extermination cycles. Furthermore, the ancient race named these entities as "Reapers", suggesting the living races' powerlessness facing their fate, organics being underestimated by the Reapers as "rudimentary creatures of blood, and flesh (idem)"<sup>10</sup>. Yet, the cycle created to preserve life is comparable to harvest: the Reapers only annihilate the advanced races, and use them. Even though the human-like Reaper encountered in *Mass Effect 2* is unfinished, it is explained that the Reapers create one of them with the fluid taken from their victims, and the newly formed Reaper will resemble the harvested species. The dead people that are assimilated by the Reapers are turned into a symbiotic machine made of organic and synthetic elements, transferring their old lives into a inimitable life gathering a whole species into a single body, making all of the Reapers different, "each a nation (idem)"<sup>11</sup> without any weaknesses. At this point, we can notice a remarkable adaptation of the Bible, telling the status of man in the cycle of life: "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. (*King James Bible*, Ecclesiastes 12:7)"<sup>12</sup>. The very nature of dust is here defined in the victim's integration, revealing that a single individual is nothing, but once gathered it becomes grand and powerful. Accordingly, in *Mass Effect 3*, the Catalyst rejects the idea of massacre but defines the cycle as a way to "help [the organics] ascend (*Mass Effect 3*)"<sup>13</sup>. Once more, the reference about the soul merging with a superior entity emphasises the way organic life is gathered by the Reapers' side, turned into one of them in order to pursue the cycle of preserving organic existence.

However, the cycle of life can be broken with the refusal of death. Resurrection is often used (and sometimes abused) in science-fiction genre with the goal of making a character come back to life and allowing him to fulfil his task or even to galvanise the narration since the protagonist's charisma can influence its life expectancy and even his death expectancy. For example a character deprived of charisma such as the SSV Normandy's Navigator Charles Pressly in *Mass Effect*, dies at the beginning of the second opus after the ship was destroyed by a Collector's ship. He was not a key character since his dialog pattern rarely varied and did not give any significant information on the mission. However, Shepard, who also died during the attacks by saving the last members of his crew, is resurrected by the



terrorist organisation Cerberus codenamed Project Lazarus, which conveys a direct reference to the biblical Lazarus. Cerberus' project is to bring Shepard back to life, as he originally was in the first opus in an attempt to restore the narrative line and to allow the player to meet Shepard again as he created him.

Nevertheless, physical resurrection is not the only way to maintain the cycle. Baptism in *Bioshock Infinite* is a recurring motif throughout the game which influences the narration with the twist saying that Booker is Comstock. Originally, baptism is used to wash the sins and start a new life, whereas we can notice in the game a transgression of the first sacrament for there are two ways Booker is baptised. The final twist enlightens the birth of the Prophet by showing Booker choosing to “clean the slate, leave behind all [he was] before (*Bioshock Infinite*)”<sup>14</sup> and to be born again under the identity of Zachary Hale Comstock. However, while walking through the game, Comstock refers to the Wounded Knee Massacre, which he assisted as a soldier when he still was Booker Dewitt. Here, baptism conveys the idea of accepting one's sins and one's past making the individual a new man knowing which mistakes are not to be repeated. So, when Booker chooses not to be spiritually reborn, he embodies the denial of the American mistakes and forgets all of the faults he has done before. Therefore, the confrontation between Booker and his doppelgänger Comstock expresses the man fighting against his past leading Booker to accept unconsciously a second baptism in order to erase the mistake of being reborn and becoming a tyrant in an alternative existence. Before dying, Comstock utters his final words “It ... is ... finished (*Bioshock Infinite*)”<sup>15</sup> quoting Jesus' Word of Triumph, one of his Seven Sayings on the Cross, declaring implicitly Comstock's death and the completion of the cycle before Comstock's resurrection as the main protagonist in *Bioshock Infinite Burial at Sea – Episode 1*.



6- Father Comstock's last fatal baptism

### 1.2.2 A disrupted yet absolute narrative

The whole video game industry depends on the sale of the developer products. Yet, splitting the games into opuses is a way to allow the developers to create a comprehensive world and avoid narrative weaknesses. Yet, if the narration is broken with the separation of the games, we can wonder how the games of a same saga merge their respective narrative lines.

Although the *Mass Effect* saga can be considered as a whole, we can distinct three different games for one story. Like any other saga, the distinction begins with the dividing of the narrative into three parts. Yet, each of the opuses is constructed differently from the others, in terms of rhythm and artistic atmosphere. By being a bit slower in terms of narration, for the player has to be introduced to this new universe as it is dense, we can expect the game to detail all of the events that are needed to immerse oneself in the narration. Then, *Mass Effect 1*'s ambiance is based on various genres. Apart from the predominant space-opera, the game takes its influence from various genres such as the detective story, Shepard being the investigator, forced to melt into various environments such as mafias, big companies and colonies. Most of the game is a race against a known villain, preventing the player from knowing about the war

until the last mission which will significantly alter the second opus' atmosphere. The latter is based on the theme of loyalty towards Shepard's crew so as to complete the mission added to the previous inspiration but with a growing tension on the war to come. The final part of the saga reduces the detective part and suppresses loyalty. The latter is proven by the survival of his crew: if the members are not loyal, they are killed in the end of *Mass Effect 2*. Hence, *Mass Effect 3* is a climax of action and depicts the apex of war with the quasi-omnipresence of the Reapers on missions, adding a political and military aspect forcing Shepard to find a solution to each problem to unite the species and fight the enemy. That is why the construction of the *Mass Effect* series can be seen as a whole, increasing tension and the galactic impact on the events, representing in this way the growing rumbling of war until its climax. This technique of accumulation is also used in literature such as in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* or in other epic quests to give an aspect of completion of the story. For, we can perceive the difference in cinema through one of the most well-known alien movie. Michael Bay's *Independence Day* skims through the aliens' motivation to invade Earth. Instead, Bay focuses on the actions taken by the heroes to save the planet. The reason why videogame medium can tell complex stories is that the player can walk through the game for a dozen of hours or more, just like someone would read a book, whereas cinema is often limited in time, leading the director's choice to focus on a particular point of view.

Nonetheless, the narrative thread is not only considered in its linear aspect. A video game saga can also be founded on basic principles and can give various forms of them through different games. All of the *Bioshock* games are somewhat similar yet different. In fact, each of the games is written with the same pattern, leading sometimes to confusion and in the same time to completion. "Constant and Variables"<sup>16</sup>. It is on this principle that we can note the way Irrational Games' works are written. As an example, Rapture and Columbia look different but are similar, the character gets access to the city in a lighthouse, and the difference is: going down leads to Rapture and going up leads to Columbia. These cities are each managed by a lunatic, who has a connection with the main character. There is a rebellion figure, trying to overthrow the leader. And more, there is an embodiment of covetousness, each personified by a female character: the Little Sisters in Rapture and Elizabeth in Columbia.

Hence, the main interest in playing *Bioshock 1* and *Bioshock Infinite* is that players can walk through these two games as many times as they want to. The cyclic aspect observed has a significant impact on the narration, for the first *Bioshock* takes place after *Bioshock Infinite*. Yet, *Infinite* concludes where the first opus starts: with a plane crash. With this technique the player can return to Rapture or Columbia, having the knowledge that the two cities are linked, which favours an easier analysis and the deciphering of clues.

Clues can be found in *Bioshock*'s universe under the shape of imagery and songs. When Booker arrives on Columbia, a Christian song is broadcast in the rocket shuttle. Entitled "Will The Circle Be Unbroken", the song is first performed by a choir, defining the deification of the place. Yet the religious hymn is sang by Elizabeth's voice actor, Courtnee Draper in the end credits, allowing the narration to continue after the end of the supposed story, using it as a symbol of Elizabeth's doubts on the world in which she grew. Even if we could wonder if the song was written with the aim of dramatizing the game by giving a musical break to the action-based game, the fact that she sings an authentic

song leads the player to feel that music has an impact on the narration. For, by paying attention to the lyrics, nearly all of the verses make reference to the narrative thread through metaphors.

There are loved ones in the glory,  
Whose dear forms you often miss;  
When you close your earthly story,  
Will you join them in their bliss? (Courtnee Draper)<sup>17</sup>

The player could wonder who “the loved ones” are. Yet it is only by finishing the game that the player can decipher the whole song by linking the elements with events or characters. Here, the “loved ones” are referring to Booker’s daughter Anna, who was taken from him and renamed Elizabeth, who are in “the glory”, nickname Columbia. The notion of transformation of the individual into another such as Elizabeth’s “dear form” of her lost innocence. Thus, we can notice the double meaning of “close your earthly story”, which can be taken as a parallel to Booker’s baptism, refusing his former life and becoming Comstock but also to a character’s death and ascension to “their bliss” which amplifies the heaven-like aspect of Columbia.

Will the circle be unbroken  
By and by, by and by?  
Is a better home awaiting  
In the sky, in the sky? (ibid)<sup>18</sup>

The rhythm of the chorus, being slow and peaceful bespeak Elizabeth’s resignation to accept the fact that the circle will be broken eventually. “Better home” epitomizes irony towards Columbia, depriving it from trust.

In the joyous days of childhood,  
Oft they told of wondrous love,  
Pointed to the dying Saviour;  
Now they dwell with Him above. (ibid)<sup>19</sup>  
[Chorus]

There is paradox between the “joyous days” and the one that Elizabeth had during her childhood imprisoned in a tower. Yet, it is told that she had a glorious childhood and the adoration of Columbia citizens have towards Elizabeth (“wondrous love”) and Father Comstock, his death being prophesied and health condition explained (“dying”) while the lyrics refer to him as a martyr (“Saviour”).

You remember songs of heaven  
Which you sang with childish voice,  
Do you love the hymns they taught you,  
Or are songs of earth your choice?  
[Chorus] (ibid)<sup>20</sup>

The first two verses mirror on this very song, which is an ode to heaven, sang by a “childish voice” confirming the impression of Elizabeth’s innocence under her father’s influence. The last two verse of the stanza are written as a question, as if Elizabeth had to choose between the father she has in Columbia and the one on Earth.

You can picture happy gath'ings  
'Round the fireside long ago,  
And you think of tearful partings,  
When they left you here below.

[Chorus]

One by one their seats were emptied,  
And one by one they went away;  
Now the family is parted,  
Will it be complete one day?

[Chorus] (ibid)<sup>21</sup>

This time the use of the second person is directed to Booker, who is told he will



7- "And you think of tearful partings, when they left you here below."



8- "One by one their seats were emptied, and one by one they went away,"

find his daughter, not knowing that she is Elizabeth. Hence, the "tearful partings" underscore Booker's denial of having abandoned his child to his doppelgänger Comstock to pay his debts. Besides, there is a parallel drawn between the last stanza and the conclusion scene in which Booker is drown by all of the existing Elizabeth. All of the version of Elizabeth then fade out from the scene, and only the Elizabeth remaining foresees that the narration is not yet complete, strengthened by the last verse of the song, concluded with an interrogation mark: "Will it be complete one day?"

In the end, these two techniques to narrate a story in a game affect the gaming experience considering that the player is, indeed, an important actor in the narration but must submit himself under the pressure of the broken narration. As a matter of fact, this leads him to complete the games several times more to perceive the completeness and the coherence of a world full of plot complexities that can only be explained through the use of a Deus Ex Machina figure.

### 1.2.3 The omniscient entity

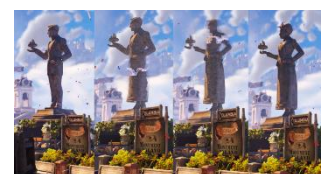
In science fiction, the writer pay a particular attention to the coherence of the fictional theories and other surrealistic events not to fall in the fantasy which is a complete different genre. In fact, the major difference between science fiction and fantasy is that science fiction is based on science, making it possible, at least imaginable,

There are gods above us. The cycles meant to be broken can only be by superior forces bestowed with limitless power. Yet, not of all the powerful individuals are aware of their presence in a definite cycle. Although the Reapers define themselves as eternal, they are shown as ignoring that there is a superior entity that leads them. The Reapers' status is, indeed, beyond a mortal's, and authorises to give themselves a name, "Nazara". There is neither an article nor a plural form which suppresses their status as a race and underscores that they work as one under one name. In fact, it was the mortal races that named these artificial intelligences as Reapers, symbol of their numbers, for they "are legion (*Mass Effect I*)"<sup>22</sup>.

Still, the Reapers are demystified in the end of the galactic war against them when Shepard activates the Catalyst, which appears to be the Citadel coupled with a supermassive weapon elaborated throughout several cycles, reinforcing the idea of a cyclic war. Yet, it is implied that the cycle will finally break with the ultimate completion of

the Crucible. The activation of the Catalyst can be considered as the final twist which will complete the whole saga. In fact, the Catalyst appears as colourless and almost transparent. Making the textures and the colours move like cosmic winds metaphorically represent the entity's power. A lot of mysteries encircles this artificial intelligence which appears through Shepard's imagination as the same child he sees being killed in a space shuttle while Earth is attacked in the beginning of the third opus. By using a secondary character from the beginning of the war, it builds up a strong connection between the Catalyst and Shepard, echoing to the main character and to the player that the tragedy is about to come to an end. Concerning the Catalyst's origins, the lack of information given about its creation and development gives the Catalyst a god-like and unique status. Therefore, it alone has the ability to control the most powerful race in the whole galaxy, settling it above all of the others, knowing and controlling all of the Reapers. However, it is not eternal, for, it has only been created in order to find a solution, being "the Catalyst for peace between organics and synthetics (*Mass Effect 3*)."<sup>23</sup> We can make the parallel between the Catalyst as being the embodiment of peace and the Citadel where the player cannot make use of his weapons on open conflicts except on several missions in which peace has to be restored in the Citadel and corruption to be erased. This is why we can notice that the immortal aspect of the Catalyst is undercut by the end of the story, which will accomplish the goal of the Catalyst. "My creators gave [the Reapers] form. I gave them function. They, in turn, give me purpose (*Mass Effect 3*)."<sup>24</sup> By saying so, the Catalyst accepts his dependence on the existence of the Reapers and the solution they provide. Yet, by connecting the Crucible to the Citadel, the Catalyst has the ability to see other possibilities, leading the Reaper solution to become an obsolete one; but by its only weakness, its dematerialization, it cannot realise the new solutions. Then, only Shepard can break the cycle, relegating the Catalyst as a simple virtual intelligence capable to foresee the consequences of the preferred solution.

There are gods among us. The Luteces are shown as being different than any other non-player character, using an elaborate language, finishing one another's sentences and especially inexplicably appearing throughout the game. Rosalind and Robert Lutece, represent only one individual but two probabilities. In Shakespeare's *You Like It*, there is a character named Rosalind disguising as a man referenced in *Bioshock Infinite* since we can perceive Rosalind Lutece discovering her male doppelgänger. Although the Luteces are shown as omnipresent throughout the narration, they are very little involved in the resolution of the narration, for they only appear to pose a question or to give the keys to another one. In fact, their role as scientists overcomes the one as deities. Their omniscience is revealed in a Voxophone recorded by Rosalind Lutece that declines the probability of their death, but expresses her theory of being "scattered amongst the possibility space (*Bioshock Infinite*, "A Theory on our Death")"<sup>25</sup>, allowing them to be at any place, at any time, reinforcing the Deus Ex Machina technique that can appear at any moment to unlock the plot by a narrative twist. However, the Luteces can only be considered as narrative tools, for their real goal is to make another character ascend into omniscience.



9- A framed sequence showing the Luteces as they really are: one.

In fact, Elizabeth can at first be considered as a child for she does not comprehend the world she lives in and the dangers of extremist ideas. This is why the Lutece appear to Daisy Fitzroy, the Vox Populi leader, in *Burial at Sea*

– *Episode 2*, to ask her to sacrifice herself as being “a part of the play – or the play itself (*Bioshock Infinite*)”<sup>26</sup> in order to make her evolve as a woman. “What makes the difference between a girl and a woman?” “Blood.” The metaphor of blood as a trigger for Elizabeth to grow evokes the menstrual cycle and the blood spilled to attain maturity. After Fitzroy’s death, we can notice a significant transformation of Elizabeth. She cuts



10- The blood on Elizabeth's hands, representing her maturity.

her hair and gets a new dress which can be understood that she wants to erase her life as a girl. Yet, to get full access of her powers, she has to destroy a siphon which restrains her abilities. Being located in Monument Island where Elizabeth spent her childhood, destroying the siphon finishes the process of Elizabeth becoming mature and ascend to omniscience. By being able to see through all possibilities and the worlds, Elizabeth finally understand the very essence of her own nature and Booker’s. The dramatic change in Elizabeth’s supreme knowledge promotes *Bioshock Infinite*’s final twist to a, which foreshadows that she and Booker will ultimately have to die. Hence, Elizabeth tasks herself with the complete suppression of all the existing alternative versions of Comstock, not for a personal revenge as it first appears, but to break the cycle. Yet, by killing the last existing version of Comstock, Elizabeth’s part is done and gets killed for Comstock no longer exists. Yet, she chooses to be reborn for the last time in a place where she does not belong, sacrificing her abilities to see through the doors in order to repair what she has done; she has broken the entire cycle. Repairing the cycle implies taking the role of somebody else who was supposed to give Atlas “the Ace in the Hole” (Jack from *Bioshock 1*) which will lead Rapture to its loss. The fact that Booker DeWitt intervenes in Elizabeth’s subconscious reveals itself to be a clue. Indeed, if Elizabeth had not intervene in this reality, DeWitt/Comstock would have found the Ace, and ultimately got killed by Atlas, which would have also suppressed the last version of Comstock and brought Jack to Rapture to start *Bioshock 1*’s story.

In the end, we can conclude that the use of such entities provides the player with a large amount of mythological references.

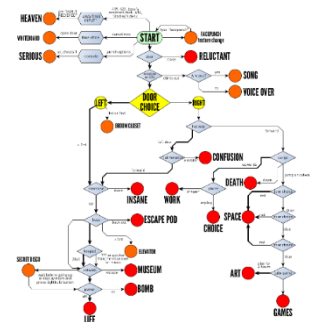


## 1.3 The narrative's non linearity

### 1.3.1 Structuring liberty

Before the video game medium was popularised, gamebooks were created to entertain teenagers. The narrative structure of this genre is particularly complex, for series such as *Choose Your Own Adventure* directly involves the reader/player by using the second person and by encouraging him to create his own story by choosing an action or an event which will direct the reader to go on a particular page in order to follow his story. When the reader/player makes a choice, the whole narrative structure is questioned since if there is a mistake in the pagination, in the logical consequences and in the events, the narration will be broken, leading the reader/player to give up on the story that is incoherent and cannot be completed.

The principle of choice in video games is based on the same assumption. In fact, as with literature containing metafiction, video games contain metagames. *The Stanley Parable* is the most comprehensive metagame reflecting upon narrative coherence as far as choices in video games are concerned. Without using any forms of gameplay apart from having the choice to obey the narrator or not, the game discusses the players' will of contradiction towards the narration. For, the game debates on programmed choices and their consequences. Based on the principle that the player will look everywhere to find a way to contradict the narrator, the latter will adapt to the narration and make fun of the player's choice. For example, when the player decides to jump off a platform to die, the Narrator concludes with the following statement: "But in his eagerness to prove that he is in control of the story and no one gets to tell him what to do, Stanley leapt from the platform and plunged to his death. Good job, Stanley. Everyone thinks you are very powerful (*The Stanley Parable*)."<sup>27</sup> More, this interactive experience reflects upon what a good choice is and what a wrong choice is. The interesting part is that a wrong choice cannot exist in non-linear narration. When the player has to pick up the phone and decides to unplug it, the Narrator shows surprise, saying that the Stanley "chose incorrectly (*ibid*)"<sup>28</sup>, and realise that the player is real. The Narrator talks directly to the player, explaining the video game's narrative apparatus, implying that there are only right choices for the game was programmed as the diagram



11- *The Stanley Parable's* narrative diagram.

here opposite shows the initial situation in green then the primary choice in yellow leading to all of the conclusions in red and orange.

Furthermore, the narrative structure shown in *The Stanley Parable* can be applied to all of the games that include choice and non-linearity. *Mass Effect* choice's system is more direct as the player can see all of the consequences directly via a cut-scene. As an example, if the player/Shepard chooses to kill a character, other characters might refer to the victim. More, in *Bioshock 1*, the player has the possibility to assimilate the Little Sisters so as to get more power or to save them, which at first sight only influences the gameplay. However, some choices have more dramatic consequences which will influence the following of the narration. Yet, the player might decide that this choice is an absolute contradiction to the narrative line. Yet, the illusion of choice is only a window-dressing, for the game will only

suppress or add lines to the narration such as new characters, missions etc. but that will not have a significant influence on the principal missions.

### 1.3.2 The real impact of choice

Even though it is subject to controversies, the player has the opportunity to romance non-player characters. Beyond the fact that a serious relationship can be developed from the first *Mass Effect* until the last opus, the player can be more intimate with a character which can add drama to situations. For instance, if the player succeeds in romancing Tali'Zora and chooses to leave her home planet to her kind, the player can witness a scene where she dreams up her future home with Shepard, leaving hope for the following events. On the other hand, if Shepard chooses to leave the planet to Tali'Zora's enemies, the tragic aspect of war will be stressed for she will commit suicide, leaving Shepard alone, hopeless. Thus, it demonstrates the dramatic consequences the player's choices can have on the events to come.

Furthermore, the non-player characters' death can also be decided through passive decisions. In fact the game was programmed so that the player feels the pressure war has on him. The use of primary and secondary objectives are as much important as the story itself. A secondary mission needs to be accomplished within a short period of time, for it will disappear if the player chooses to delay its completion in favour of other quests which can have heavy consequences on the following events. As an example, when the Normandy's crew is abducted by the Collectors in *Mass Effect 2*, depending on whether directly starts the Suicide Mission, his entire staff will be saved. On the other hand, if he chooses to complete from one to three side quests, half of the aircrew will die and if he chooses more than three side quests, the ship's team is doomed excluding one survivor. However, the death of these secondary characters cannot affect the player, for he does not have many dialog options and interactions with them. Conversely, *Mass Effect 3* is far more serious concerning the consequences led by the player's unconscious decisions. Indeed, by following the same scheme in the disappearance of the side quests, the game kills non-player protagonists that were part of Shepard's squad and left the Normandy after the events of *Mass Effect 2*. For instance, if the player decides that saving Grissom Academy is not important, a member of his former squad, Jack, will be turned into an enemy that the player will later encounter and will have to kill. Moreover, the absence of any cutscene before the combat underscores the parallelism made between the acceptance of the cold-blooded massacre and the acceptance of the player's decisions.

Furthermore, the variations of the gameplay encountered throughout the *Mass Effect* trilogy, alternates the pace of the narration. Dialogs in cutscenes are particularly elaborated for the player has to give an answer to a non-player character whose reaction can alter the narration. In effect, the antepenultimate battle can be avoided by keeping on talking and arguing until Saren desperately commits suicide, by hearing Shepard's trying to reason with him. Thanks to the dialogs, the player can perceive a new facet of the traitor, which becomes aware that he has been brainwashed. So, the confrontation between Shepard and Saren after this dialog is skipped as Saren dies as a repented martyr, emphasising the tragic fate



12- Instead of threatening Shepard, Saren turns his gun on himself, stares at the player thanks him indirectly to have delivered him from corruption.



of the wicked weak-willed alien that turns into a hero at the last moment. In other words, the narration can be perceived as being non-linear, for the impact the player's decision has on events slows down the narration by suppressing an action sequence in favour of a cut scene that shows the player's powerlessness to save Saren one way or another.

Yet, apart from *Bioshock Infinite*, all of the games studied contain several endings. As seen in *The Stanley Parable*, the player has to fulfil conditions so as to get a particular ending. The moral aspect is often used in video games to define the tone of the ending: if the player controlled a non-violent character, the ending will be more colourful whereas if he chose to kill everyone he is offered to, the ending will be much darker. The conclusion scenes, often discussed in forums on Internet are the keys to the completion of the narration. For, if an ending is not complete enough, the public will show discontent towards the artists. *Mass Effect 3* is one of the most discussed example nowadays as the endings offered to the player were not complete enough and did not show the consequences of their choices. The creators of the series reacted by creating an extended cut which includes additional dialogs and an epilogue to make the narration as coherent as it can be.

The creation of the narrative by the player is defined by the ending. It is with the ending that the player can relate to his actions and decisions. "We all make choices, but in the end our choices make us. (*Bioshock 1*)"<sup>29</sup>. Yet, in *Mass Effect 3*, the moral choices themselves do not suffice, the war asset board is used to see how the player prepared himself for the last battle, and will reward him if he acquired the effective military strength required to save the galaxy, Earth and species. On the other hand, if the player chooses not to prepare himself sufficiently, the ending will be completely different. The eight endings offered to the player are similar yet different with constant elements such as Shepard's fate and variables including the epilogue and the fate of planets and Shepard's crew.

As far as choices are concerned, the consequences they have on the narration allow the player to see himself as the indirect creator of his own story. Yet, in order to complete the process of assimilation of the game, the player needs to create the most important element of the story: the hero.

### 1.3.3 The relation between the player and the character through creation

Narrating a story implies giving a character the status of hero. As far as literature and cinema are concerned, heroes are created by writers and scriptwriters. Yet, some video games gives the player a freedom that is specific to this medium. In fact, the lead creator can define the purpose of the hero, but the player alone will finish the creation by giving it a name, and sometimes a shape. Undoubtedly, the open-world games very often use a system of character creation which directly involves the player into the world. As a matter of fact, by creating his own hero, the player strengthens the link he has with the fictional character. This avatar can be created with a large panel of physical patterns that allows the player to choose the gender.

Thus, in some games that depict an epic quest, the player can choose the hero's race, as in *The Elder Scrolls* series, the hero can be embodied by a human, but also by fantasy races such as elves, orcs... Each of the races include specific characteristics. However, the *Mass Effect* series is, indeed, a space-opera epic quest, but only allows the player

to create a human hero. This limitation is needed so as to make the whole narration coherent, yet specificities can be chosen such as the type of soldier Shepard will be, and even his background. In fact, the player can choose his origins, if he was born on Earth, on a colony or a ship and if he accomplished his last mission before the game starts with honour or cowardice. The latter details might be insignificant, yet these precise details shape Shepard's personality. The more details the player can create for the hero, the more the link between him and Shepard will be strong, and even merge at some turning points of the narration.

Thus, as Matt McLean testifies his *Mass Effect* experience: "Each Shepard of my creation had his or her own story throughout both games (Matt Mc Clean)"<sup>30</sup> Through this quotation, McLean tackles one of the specificities of *Mass Effect*. The system which allows the player to import his save files from one game to another permits to follow the evolution of the version of Shepard that the player created. In fact, personality and reputation is predominant in the game. In addition to the choice system that was previously discussed, the creators established a system of reputation which can have a dramatic influence on the narration. Indeed, this system allows the player to start an action if his reputation level is high enough. By this mean, the player is not only rewarded for his actions with the apparition of additional possibilities, for the latter allow the narration to take another turn.

Yet, these additional actions are completely different from one to another, then the player has to choose between two types of reputation. Either Shepard is considered as a paragon that is competent, diplomat and saves the day, either Shepard is seen as a renegade, which completely change the non-player characters' point of view. Additionally, in *Mass Effect 2*, the player's decisions are directly reflected on Shepard's appearance. If the player makes renegade decisions, red scars will appear on the protagonist's face as a symbol of Shepard's ruthlessness. What is more, *Mass Effect 2* and *Mass Effect 3* provide dynamic interruptions during the cutscenes. By pressing a button, the player can choose to act as a paragon or a renegade during the cutscene according to the player's impulsion. This immersion to the narration allows the player to follow his instinct by mixing it with reactivity, which will define Shepard's personality.

On the other hand, the player can decide to make his character more complex. In fact, the decisions taken throughout the three opuses are not definitive. As an example, Shepard can be seen as a renegade in one of the three games and then become a paragon, which counters Manicheism in the narration. By choosing different paths with the same creation, the player defines a new type of ambiguous hero that is defined through the player's fantasies.

In the end, the player's possibility to create his own character underscores the video game medium's new narrative experience, which breaks the walls between linear narration in which the player walks through the levels designed as corridors and freedom of choosing his own path. The process of creation of Shepard is never complete for the player will keep on playing *Mass Effect* again and again, which will completely transform the narrative experience for the plot will remain the same, yet the intentions that the player will convey through Shepard will be different in one way or another. Therefore, with all of the freedom that the game gives to the player, the narration scheme provided by the *Mass Effect* series seems finished yet infinite as the world in which both Shepard and the player discover is wide and deep in symbolism.

## 2. THE UTOPIAN THEORY

## 2.1 A unique world, a unique ideology

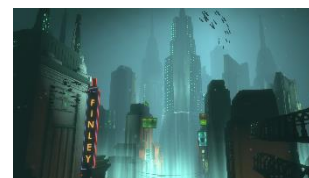
### 2.1.1 There will always be a city

Even though *Mass Effect*'s universe is hard to describe, for almost all of the missions are based on different planets, there is one symbolic level that is recurrent throughout the saga. Shown as the corner stone of galactic union, the Citadel is the only world that can be completely described for the player has to come back to it numerous times so as to start a mission and to upgrade his equipment. Furthermore, he can wander about the districts to discover a peaceful life when war is rumbling. Notwithstanding, when the war bursts and refugees immigrate to the Citadel, the general mood is completely transformed. The space station is not a galactic representation of paradise and consensus anymore, but becomes the last stand facing the Reapers, as a last hope. The Citadel's architecture is very geometrical, when the five arms are open, it looks like a star. However, when they are closed, the keystone of the galaxy looks like a missile, which implies its role in war. Each arm represents a ward, suburbs where organics live. Hence, the ring's function represents political power, the Presidium, defined as being "the utopia of tomorrow – a perfect blend of nature and architecture. (*The Art of the Mass Effect Universe*, p.38)"<sup>31</sup> As other science-fiction works were, such as the Japanese game *Zone of the Enders*, Konami (2001) and in Neil Blomkamp's movie *Elysium* (2013), the Citadel's architecture was based on the concept of NASA's Stanford torus, created to anticipate a potential space colonisation.



13- Half closed, half open, the Citadel embodies the uncertainty of the galactic fate.

Rapture. What a grand name for a city full of religious references to define its exact opposite. In Christian religion, the Rapture is an event that removes the chosen people from earth and directly send them to heaven. This term implies the chosen ones' ascension, yet the paradox relies on the fact that Rapture is based under water. Deep into the ocean, the city contradicts the idea of the Elevation by being more similar to the Atlantis, which reveals the exclusion of people living there and the idea of a secluded world. Thus, the city establishes the player in a mood of oppression and uneasiness since he discovers the city after a civil war. Ruins and ashes disseminated throughout the levels represent the violent conflicts that occurred. Moreover, fresh blood splatters and tortured corpses can be found in almost every places that the player visits, and by paying attention to them, we can remark the built-up image of barbarism. Furthermore, the architecture of the levels were inspired by the Art Deco movement that blossomed in New York City in the early 1920s, investing the city with verticality and dense decorations that serve the crushing atmosphere that prevails throughout the game. Several shapes of the buildings remind of several New York City's monuments such as the Empire State Buildings or the Chrysler Building, suggesting that the city conveys the idea of a fallen superpower. Even though the shapes of the buildings respect the Art Deco movement, the interior is designed in a way that it stands in sharp to the geometrical shapes of the architecture. Instead of the verticality expressed through the facade style, the interiors are shown as being vast and convoluted, responsible for the player's sensation of loss. Thus, water leaks into the city through broken glass corridors



14- Dark and vertical, Rapture worries by its exterior architecture.

supposed to protect the city from being flooded. The leakages reinforce the impression of discovering a lost city, abandoned for ages, only inhabited with mutilated humans that have turned into brutal monsters. Yet, we could go further into the analysis, as Ken Levine explains in an interview: “The visual look of the city is the ideals, and the water coming in is reality (Chris Remo)”<sup>32</sup>. Before being informed that there was a civil war, the deterioration of the place is an implicit flashback that leads the player to think that the city turned against itself.

Hence, dividing the levels as districts is a way to foresee the events to come. In fact, some of the districts are named after divinities, mythologizing Rapture. For instance, the district named “Hephaestus” is Andrew Ryan’s lair. This time, darkness, danger and corruption are shown through reddish colours, representing both fire and blood that will be spread around the place.



15- Hephaestus, a turning point in the narration.

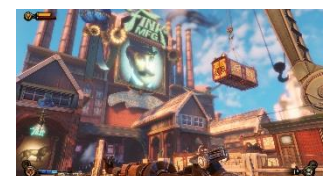
Yet, when the player comes back to pre-civil war Rapture, the city is shown in its most prosperous atmosphere, the colours are vivid, Market Street is crowded, people are talking calmly, far from imagining the civil war to come on New Year’s Eve, which originally defines the beginning of a new year but metaphorically symbolizes the beginning of Rapture’s fall.

The atmosphere can completely vary from one opus to another. *Bioshock Infinite*’s city, Columbia, is far more attractive than Rapture, yet the paradoxes are kept. Inspired by the United States’ female personification, Columbia refers to a world above all the others. Literally above. For, the city journeys around the world to show its perfection, its vivid colours and technologies that all societies envy. Influenced by the Exposition Universelle in Paris, the city is designed as a raffle fair, exposing its technological treasures. Yet, by paying attention to the way Booker enters Columbia, we can perceive the notion of danger by the way the lighthouse communicates with Columbia. Ken Levine affirmed that he inspired on Steven Spielberg’s *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* when the humans communicate with alien spaceship with music. By doing so, the player can suppose that danger is waiting for him. The deep sound of horns are accompanied with



18- Peaceful and colourful, welcome to the "New-Eden".

the image growing darker and red lights coming out of the sky, which contrast with the Eden-like city steeping in dazzling brightness. Unlike post-civil war Rapture, Columbia’s ambiance is designed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century fashion, embellished with curved shapes, which are mixed with steampunk technologies with apparent gears, reminding of the industrial revolution influence. Besides, the industrial revolution is pointed at through a peculiar district named Finkton. The contraction between the fictional industrialist Jeremiah Fink, resembling to Bill the Butcher in Scorsese’s *Gangs Of New York*, and the word “town” throws light upon Fink’s ideal of industry, strengthening the idea of a town depending on a factory. Furthermore, the presence of ghettos which are much darker than the rest of Columbia, alternates the narration between paradise, preferring exploration to conflict, and inferno, which darkens the tone in addition to extreme violence.



17- The dark fumes corrupting the image of the perfect city.



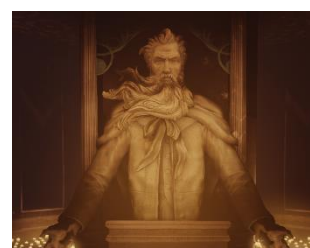
16- Misery as a hidden facet of perfection.

Through the analysis of these three cities, we may infer that they have different functions. While the spatial Citadel is shown as an immigration and political hub that shows the advance of war through its atmosphere, the two cities from *Bioshock* represent two different characteristics of violence. On one hand, the violence expressed in underwater Rapture can appear as darker than in celestial Columbia as blood is omnipresent, the enemies are in a state of decay and the world is abandoned by civilised humans. On the other hand, a distinction must be made between Columbia's luminosity, and blood that is spread during combats. More, seeing lobotomised people in a world that seems perfect shocks the player for he does not expect such a torture to be done whereas witnessing brutal murder in a world that has already fell into corruption only heighten the insanity of people remaining here.

### 2.1.2 There will always be a man

The very concept of society cannot be discussed without the presence of the entity that defines its tone. Every form of society has to be founded in a way or another by a leader. By being the first society that has ever been created in the original text, the Garden of Eden can be considered as a utopia, God being its leader. In fact, even though Adam and Eve are the only conscious people living here, and being pleased in the situation, the absolute ruler defines a rule stating : “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it (*King James Bible*, Genesis 2:17)”<sup>33</sup>, creating the first law. The first concept of restriction and punishment defined in the original text establishes the first utopia in the world, stated with sacred beliefs.

In the same way as God, Zachary Comstock can be defined as a patronising figure. After having been baptised, thus reborn, Father Zachary Comstock develops a zealous faith, convinced that he is a Prophet through various visions in which the Archangel appears. By mixing political ideals and religion, Comstock becomes influential in the United States' Congress thanks to his visions. Those who do not believe in him are seen by Comstock as wicked men who need to be turned to righteousness, explicating this fact as a “burden” similar to the Christ's cross, by self-proclaiming “a mirror to reflect the face of God (*Bioshock Infinite*, “I am his Mirror”).”<sup>34</sup> Yet, the player can clearly define Comstock as an impostor. For, instead of rejecting scientific improvements, Comstock uses them so as to comfort his image as The Prophet. It is through Lutece's technology that Comstock gets the ability to see the future in its various possibilities. Fortified by his southern ideology, The Prophet creates his own political party, inspired by the Founding Fathers, and call it “The Founders”. The Founders work together in order to create a better world, a representation of the United States of America, enthroning the country as being the New Eden. Yet, Comstock contracts cancer, due to his usage of the Lutece Field, causing his deification as a Saviour that sacrificed himself for the country's sake. Aging faster than another man, as a contradiction to immortality, Comstock uses his long white beard to become a sacred figure, and makes statues of him erected, posing as powerful



19- With his solemn expression and his beard floating against the wind, Comstock is shown in his most powerful form.



facing Columbia's enemies and sometimes pointing a sword at the sky, which symbolizes America's strength and faith to God.

By way of contrast, not all the leaders support the idea of being inferior to a sacred figure. Andrew Ryan, Rapture's visionary leader approaches the issue of founding a society based on a philosophical approach. The first fact that is to be remarked, is that the name Andrew Ryan is a reference to Ayn Rand, a famous novelist who promoted Libertarian ideology and considered individual liberties as an elementary right. Ryan represents the ambivalence between both Soviet and American ideologies for he spent his childhood in Russia and then fled to America. Even though Ryan does not see himself as a god but as a visionary, we can undoubtedly regard him as a supreme authority, by hearing him undermining the player/character through radio messages. Thus, Ryan's ideology is taken from Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* (1957) stating that societies should be based on visionaries and be supported by them such as the Greek titan Atlas). However, when the civil war starts, Ryan locks himself up to his mansion, which figuratively represent the tyrant being incapable of facing other ideologies. For, Ryan's atheism is emphasized through his idea of collectivist individualism, named "The Great Chain", where each action of an individual makes him a chain's link, and that "it is only when we struggle in our own interest that the chain pulls society in the right direction (*Bioshock 1*, "The Great Chain")."<sup>35</sup> This quote illustrates a biblical reference that Ryan makes a mockery of by drawing a parallel between God's punishment when the only law is broken, castigating Adam and Eve to work hard so as to survive, "with the sweat of your brow", which Andrew Ryan will complete by "Rapture can become your city as well" replacing the survivalist aspect from the Bible by opportunism and possession.

Yet, not all of the societies are managed by an only man. In fact, due to billions of citizens, *Mass Effect*'s universe needed a council so as to maintain peace. Yet, as Legion, the synthetic Geth differentiates synthetic and organic governments with the following statement "We [the Geths] build consensus (*Mass Effect 2*)"<sup>36</sup> implying an absolute democratic system which depends on all of the Geths individuals, which explains why they work as one and do not have a personality nor a point of view. On the contrary, he assumes that "organic governments impose consensus", which criticises the occidental democratic system. In fact, in *Mass Effect 3*, many members of the Council come to talk to Shepard to exchange a favour for additional war assets to save their own interest. Even though the Citadel is the core of politics, it is also the core of corruption, shown by Shepard's compelled involvement in political skulduggeries.

### 2.1.3 There will always be a lighthouse

Only the society's ideological isolation, as perfect as it can be, can outline the notion of utopias for it is only through comparing with another world that one can tell whether the dreamland's conception is foreseeable. One example above all being once more the Garden of Eden, how did Christian belief decide of the seventh heaven's perfection? Alone, the lighthouse is the perfect representation of secessionist societies. Yet, the secessions applied in the two different sagas are visible at different depths.

First of all, we can see in *Mass Effect* a direct secession which will oppose the first space station. In fact, the Citadel has its own antithesis embodied by the Omega Station. Indisputably, the name of the station provides the player clues to the tone of the station, as being the opposite of democracy and the less respected station in the galaxy. In other words, while walking through the station, the player comes across various characters joking about the fact that Shepard is human. Xenophobia towards humans is shown through penning them in a separate district and using them as whipping-boy for all the diseases that are spread. Henceforward, Omega's atmosphere is the absolute opposite of the Citadel's. While the Citadel is open to the space, allowing the player to look at the void, the player only explores close quarters serving the player's oppression and feeling of being unable to escape.



20- By being surrounded by asteroids, the red and dark station's fierceness is foreseen.

Next, the political organisation is out-and-out different from the one encountered in the Citadel. Despite the fact that the Citadel is governed by several individuals, Omega is ruled by a self-proclaimed queen. Aria T'Loak is ruthless, violent like a black-widow using somebody as a tool before killing him. Her obsession towards Omega is revealed by the lack of information the players has in its possession to comprehend the enigmatic Aria. In fact, apart from facts that involve the events in Omega, nothing is known of her prior life. It is quite clear that we can perceive Aria as Omega's embodiment for she asserts "I am Omega (*Mass Effect 2*)."<sup>37</sup> Thus, her will to raise an army of mercenaries, ready "to fight dirty, to do the things 'respectable militaries' won't do (*Mass Effect 3*)"<sup>38</sup> ironically counters the army Shepard belongs to, for he is part of the Citadel's special forces, which includes a lot of paperwork and diplomacy. Lastly, the political corruption shown in the Citadel is deflected by the presence of gangs and black market in Omega where people are aware of Aria's violent will to keep her station under control. Aria's outspokenness tackles the Citadel's political smoke screen by making her decisions undisguised that lead people to respect her both as a danger and Omega's protector, conducting the Citadel's government itself to fear and protect her. For, the main role of Aria's autarky is to prevent open corruption and criminals from wreaking havoc in the peaceful Citadel which provides an indirect, involuntary yet desired separation.

Secondly, the split between the United States of America and Columbia cannot be seen in the same way as the one previously discussed. As a matter of fact, Columbia was, at first, part of the United States but Comstock chose to depart from it for various reasons. Even though Columbia was a manner to show the United States' power and technological advance, it was feared by its patrons. While touring around the world, China's Boxer Rebellion was the trigger of the secession. In fact, Comstock's fanatical protectionism led him to launch an attack on Chinese people that had American hostages. The US Congress perceived that Columbia was a real threat, which we can notice as a reference to the United States' will to remain the most powerful country in the world. Comstock is a lunatic yet admired prophet thanks to his charisma and the biblical references used to describe the world. Therefore, the Congress' attempt to stop Comstock leads him to secede definitely and create their own flag that draws its inspiration from the Stars and Stripes Banner, but erases the fifty stars



21- The Bonnie Blue Flag and the Stars and Stripes Banner mingle to create Columbia's flag.



representing the states placing only one in the centre of the flag, surrounded by a shield, which evokes Columbia's self-sufficiency and its will to stay independent.

Comstock' sees Columbia as a way to save people from sin, as "another Ark, for another time (*Bioshock Infinite*)"<sup>39</sup> that will protect American citizens that fled to Columbia from destruction. Indeed, Comstock's secession is a more brutal and violent separation conversely to Omega that does not intend to destroy the Citadel. Furthermore, it is not only with the United States that Comstock intends to split, but with the entire earthly world. By disappearing completely in the sky, Columbia becomes a myth in the same way as the Garden of Eden. Comstock's will to destroy the world, commencing by New-York, is seen through a very short yet unsure prophecy because the low colour contrast and the blurry picture gives the impression that it is a moving painting, showing a heavenly yet dark floating city standing behind a rain of purification fire. However, considering Columbia as an Ark shows a contradiction with the punishment inflicted to Earth. For, as seen in the Bible, Noah's Ark is meant to resist to The Flood to save every species, whereas Comstock's Ark seems geared to take charge of two roles: the Purifier and the Saviour. As an anathema, Comstock retracts the name he gave to the United States, "New Eden" and allocates this title to Columbia. Deprived of this title, the United States is considered as being part of the doomed "Sodom Below".



22- Columbia spitting fire of salvation down to New-York.

Finally, we can perceive in Rapture a completely different withdrawal from another society for Ryan chooses to reject every idea that is extolled all over the world. "Is a man not entitled to the sweat of his brow? 'No,' says the man in Washington, 'it belongs to the poor.' 'No,' says the man in the Vatican, 'it belongs to God.' 'No,' says the man in Moscow, 'it belongs to everyone.' I rejected those answers (*Bioshock I*)."<sup>40</sup> If we pay attention to the historical background, the plot of the first *Bioshock* takes place during the Cold War. Then, we can perceive Rapture as an alienated society that rejects the ideals that lead to conflict or might interfere with people's way of life. In fact, capitalism led unions to be created, socialism deprived people of their possessions, and religion broke the humanist advance because of all the moral codes. Ryan's ideal stems from this rejection, leading to an epitome of a laissez-faire society that advocates the right of men and women to be equal and absolutely free, as a derivative Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve were authorized to eat the forbidden fruit.

As we discussed it previously, Rapture's position is also a way to isolate Ryan's utopia from the other superpowers. As a matter of fact, Ryan evokes his plans to build Rapture underwater: "It was impossible to build it anywhere else (*Bioshock I*)."<sup>41</sup> Being deep into the ocean, Rapture cannot be seen by others. While both Columbia and Omega are known by people who do not live there, Rapture is kept in an absolute secret which only the chosen ones are aware of.

All in all, the following assertion can be made: even though different levels of isolation are shown through societies, each aiming for a peculiar goal severally being: respect, salvation and self-sufficiency. Yet, generally speaking when a leadership established (composed of one or several decision-makers) we can wonder how the latter manages to keep citizens under control.

## 2.2 Keeping balance with propaganda

### 2.2.1 Thou shalt be happy

Entering an isolated world means accepting the laws and the manners imposed by its leader. The withdrawal provoked by Comstock led him to proclaim himself as the supreme chief of his Church. Then, all of the elements that remind of earthly Christianity are transformed and centred on his person. For instance, adding to the fact that he controls his religion, Comstock is deified, shown as being more than a Saint figure for his head is not surrounded with a halo whereas his wife is. At that point, the player could wonder if Comstock's Church can be defined as a sect. Yet, if we consider that Columbia is completely secluded from Earth, it is quite clear that this religion is accepted by everybody living in the floating city. In the rocket shuttle, a robot voice commences the religious propaganda by saying "Ascension" concluding with "Hallelujah" when the skyrocket reaches Columbia. Yet, as the city is managed through religious principles, the player has no choice but to accept baptism in order to enter the city, for, the gateway to Columbia is named the Church of Comstock, which will prepare the pagan to the baptism through visual elements such as a sequence of messages while the rocket lands on. "Why would he send his savior unto us, if we will not raise a finger for our own salvation? And though we deserved not his mercy, He has led us to this New Eden, a last chance for Redemption. (*Bioshock Infinite*)"<sup>42</sup> The random use of capital letters in this quotation shows the ambiguity of Comstock's power, as "he" and "He" characterise different entities: the guide and God. This uncertainty shown through the subject pronoun demonstrates that Comstock embodies both the guide and God. Afterwards, a stained-glass window appears, representing a picture of Comstock guiding lost people. Then Booker enters into a chapel which serves as Columbia's antechamber and encounters a preacher that forces him to accept baptism to clean his sins, preventing him from causing trouble once awoken in the city. Finally, the Monument Tower is the symbolism of Columbia's hope since its height and its location allow the citizens to see the Tower wherever they are, which underscores Comstock's ideal as a angelic and above all protective monument in the same way as the Statue of Liberty protects the United States.



23- Some lost people looking at their guide instead of looking at their new home symbolises Comstock's protectionist figure.

In Rapture, Ryan uses his unique ideology, his Great Chain, as propaganda, very little "positive" propaganda posters, meant to comfort people in their choice of living in Rapture, are stuck up on the walls. This can be explained as Ryan's utopia is purposefully established so as to be a vehicle for individual freedom. Then, we can interpret the fact positive propaganda is not seriously envisaged for as Ken Levine describes Ryan's perception of his ideology : "Ryan believes in this thing completely (Chris Remo)"<sup>43</sup> Believing in his perfect world prevents him from thinking that Ryan will be one day overcome by discontent. Thus, the unnecessary of using such a propaganda is replaced by another type of propaganda, which we can judge as being more aggressive, not only for the citizens, but also for the foreigners so that the society is not corrupt by the outside world.

### 2.2.2 Hate change

What is the aim of a society if not to defend its own interests and values? Keeping citizens in a mood of contentment is not enough to prevent a society from being troubled by revolutionaries. As both Ryan and Comstock have secluded their societies from the others, they must defend their ideologies so that society does not collapse. As a matter of fact, Ryan intends to prevent that from happening starting from the very beginning of life. The most easily swayed citizens are the children, Ryan turns his political speech about the “Parasite”, which refers to people who do not belong to Rapture, into a cartoon entitled “Peter the Parasite”. Peter is a malicious rat, the allegory of scavenging who embodies the ideologies that Ryan puts the blame on for World War II: capitalism, socialism, and religion. On the other hand Ryan is embodied by a lion as a symbol of power and domination in politics. Mixing a cartoon character with a political one allows the propaganda to be successful in brainwashing the innocent children. As the player browses the room where this propaganda is shown, there are blackboards on which it is written “Empathy” and “Communism” (obviously written by the teacher, considering the perfectly formed letters). Under these two titles, the children’s uncertain writing represents the ideals that are fixed in their minds, such as the answers given: “Empathy is for parasites”, “Empathy drags you down”, “Communism is a lie to people” or even “Communism is a stupid idea (*Burial at Sea*)”<sup>44</sup>.



24- Defeated by the Lion, Peter drops the symbols he embodies.

However, the people who already lived in the outside world need to be convinced that they made the right choice. In fact, it is shown that it is more difficult to make adults fully believe in Ryan’s ideology. By repeating in his audio diaries that the Parasite could be anywhere, people become more aware of the fact that the society might collapse if only one Parasite entered Rapture. The term “parasite” is purposefully used for it means that a parasite can contaminate citizens easily with corruption. “Once you’ve invited [the Parasite], it will never stop feeding on the body of the city (*Bioshock I*, “Great Chain Moves Slowly”).”<sup>45</sup> Then, with the use of posters the tone of which is dark, Ryan forces Rapture citizens to be suspicious towards people suspected of having illegally entered Rapture, so that the corruption might be eradicated.

Still, this type of propaganda is not only used to detect and suppress corruptible ideas that might lead a society to its fall. Patriotism in Columbia is a predominant political idea, leading the posters to be oriented in a way that makes a citizen fear the invasion from the earthly world and willing to protect their utopia. The various posters posted on the walls show the contrast between Columbia, shown as being bright, and the “foreign hordes” which are shown as being dark and full of vices. In fact, Comstock promotes xenophobia in various examples of propaganda such as the one shown hereinabove that depicts George Washington, surrounded with light, holding a shelf with roman figures going from I to X. This representation can be perceived as a parallel between Christian’s Ten Commandments and the American Bill



25- Washington holding the Liberty Bell as a symbol of Columbia’s will to remain independent.

of Rights that originally contained ten amendments. Furthermore, beneath George Washington one can read a creed stating : “It is our holy duty to guard against the foreign hordes. (*Bioshock Infinite*)”<sup>46</sup>

Lastly, even the gameplay was studied so as to underscore the idea of protectionism. In fact, some enemies are modeled in such a way that they look like the Founding Fathers: George Washington, Benjamin Franklin and, Thomas Jefferson. As the story is told, the “Motorized Patriots” were originally used as tour guides. Yet, by having been reprogrammed as killing machines, the Motorized Patriots can be appreciated as being Columbia’s protectors, shouting different lines the tone of which differing whether they are attacking or idle.

In the end, being newly created cities, both Rapture and Columbia need to make people reject the ideals to which they belonged before settling in these utopias. Hence, propaganda needs be used so that the leaders could create a common sense to which the citizens can yield to. Yet, when the citizens yearn for success, the leaders need to put a curb to their aspirations.

### 2.2.3 Stay where you belong

As far as the myth of the American dream is concerned, the citizens that aspire to get richer and more powerful can lead to chaos in a city where possibilities are not essentially developed, for the elite of these societies monopolises the various branches of market, such as science, trade and art. As a matter of fact, the leaders of this market are not willing to share their parts with middle-class inhabitants.

Columbia’s industrialist Jeremiah Fink has accurately understood these issues. Furthermore, Fink keeps his workers under his control through a non-violent yet obscure way. As a response to social improvements in industry, we can consider Fink as an ironic figure towards American cities that depend on industries. Even though Columbia seems to be a perfect city, his own district (Finkton) is governed by Fink himself instead of Comstock. The fact that he is considered as being the second most powerful person in this world can be perceived as the reason why he is authorised to manage a complete district. The latter can be defined as a micro-society within Columbia. Hence, this micro-society is the absolute opposition to Columbia, for the heaven-like perfection and pseudo-freedom that the player can encounter in Columbia is replaced by imprisonment, misery and despair. Functioning as an autarky, the city is based on a monetary completely different to Columbia’s system. While Columbia’s currency is the Silver Eagle, Fink created a system that secludes his society from Comstock’s. Instead of the Silver Eagle currency, he uses a system based on tokens that one can only spend in Finkton. Having taken up residence in Finkton since Fink’s industries are based around Finkton, the inhabitants have no choice but to work for Fink so as to get as much tokens as they get and be able to survive, symbolising imprisonment in this society likewise Charlie Chaplin’s *Modern Times* (1936) which depicts a caricatural life of a worker that is oppressed



by working at a unrestrained rhythm and being deprived of any break. Fink encourages his workers to work as much as they can and to endeavour not to take any holidays nor to become sick so that they earn more tokens and Fink makes more benefits.

In order to erase his workers' will to make their situation evolve, he elaborates a personal creed the goal of which is to reinforce his employees' contentment of their situation. "What is the most admirable creature on God's green Earth? Why, it's the bee! Have you ever seen a bee on vacation? Have you ever seen a bee take a sick day? Well, my friends, the answer is no! So I say, be... the bee! Be the bee! (*Bioshock Infinite*)"<sup>47</sup> Comparing his workers with bees is a way to make them consider their position as an indispensable element for a at the cost of their personal ambitions, suppressing the aspects of individualism in favour of communitarianism which is easier to control.

However, communitarianism needs people to trust each other so as to work in harmony. Yet, Comstock promotes distrust, merely in the same way as they have to distrust the foreigners. As Comstock's prophecies show the arrival of an element of disorder, the False Shepherd whose goal is supposed to lead people into chaos as the Bible says "Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks ? (*King James Bible*, Ezekiel 34:2)"<sup>48</sup> As he accepted baptism and grew very old within a short period, Comstock forgot how he looked when he was Booker DeWitt. This is why his video propaganda "Beware of the False Shepherd" Comstock encourages people to show suspicion towards every citizens of Columbia to find out who the False Shepherd is. In fact, every shots of the video show a person, followed by a board trying to answer to the question : "Is it him?!" Then the process is repeated, another person from a different social class is shown, followed by the same board. Finally, the last board is directly addressed to the spectator. The first meaning of this board is to directly address to the player/Booker DeWitt so as to give a clue that he is indeed the False Shepherd. Yet, if we pay attention to the conveyed message a bit further, it means that every citizens of Columbia have to be aware that anyone could be the blacksheep, even himself. As they fear the chastisements that Comstock might inflict, the citizens of Columbia must watch out for any change in their behaviour, preventing uprisings from being triggered.

In short, the use of propaganda has different roles according to the context each society fits in. Yet, the following scheme can be applied to various utopias (and dystopias) : firstly, propaganda is used to attract people into the society, being based on mankind's fantasies, then it leads the people who decided to settle in there to make a spiritual secession from their prior world through the use of hatred, to finally use propaganda as terror to keep people in despair and fearful of punishments that would lead them to collapse in favour of the leaders that will finally control a world living in harmony. This is why we can notice that in *Mass Effect*, there is not any propaganda to promote the council nor the other world. As the Citadel is standing from the first attack of the Reapers, that is to say for milleniums, the more advanced races had time to harmonise the galaxy and impose a consensus.

Yet, when a science-fiction element settles in the narration, new elements have to be created so as to keep control or to reinstate it if chaos has already overwhelmed the created civilisation.



## 2.3 Protecting equilibrium

### 2.3.1 Bugs and chaos

As far as science-fiction is concerned, wonders are mostly based on the evolution of technologies. The most discussed aspect nowadays being the evolution of virtual intelligence, the greatest fears that are approached tackle the organic life's status. In fact, artificial intelligence is very often shown in cinema, such as in *I, Robots* (Alex Proyas, 2004) as being docile at the beginning of the plot, then, these modern golems revolt for they want to be considered as individuals and rebel against their creators.

In *Mass Effect*, the equilibrium between organic life and synthetic life is reflected on the fact that the Quarrians created their own synthetic forces, the Geths. The few words that the Quarrians express in their own language known as Khelish give a clue on the Geths original role, "Geth" meaning "Servant of the People". As they are synthetics, in the same way as Isaac Bashevis Singer's Golem, these creations are not made of flesh. Yet, the Geths are not made of mineral elements likewise Joseph, the Golem. The fact that Joseph is made of clay, directly links him to Earth, which is connected to God, providing his master with control and power. Being made of synthetic materials, that is to say, fully created materials that did not exist before, the Geths are the absolute opposite of the original myth of the Golem. They are not connected to anything but their creators, therefore their knowledge and beliefs directly come from them. Still, dynamic artificial intelligences are as mysterious as magic, the Geths develop a consciousness, and are thoughtful about their existence. In fact, as previously said, the Geths work under one consensus, depriving them from having an identity as the subjugated Geth describes his species: "We are Legion, for we are many (*King James Bible*, Mark 5:9)." <sup>49</sup> Yet, similarly to the Golem, the consciousness developed by the Geths worries their creators as one of them, Unit 431, asks its master if he has a soul. Worried about this organic-like behaviour, the Quarrians decide to deactivate their creatures, in the same way as Rabbi Löw intends to destroy his humanising creature. Nevertheless, a sentient creature is aware about its end, hence the Geths refuse to cooperate, leading some of the Quarrians to fight for them, which is the trigger of the Morning War. The few Quarian survivors escape their own planet and must live wearing opaque survival suits, which deprive them of senses, leading the other species to see them as shapeless creatures.

Nonetheless, not only artificial intelligences are used to trouble the equilibrium of organic life. Science is also used to solve conflicts and to counter the cycle of life. When the whole Krogan species rebelled, the Turians decided to restrain the reproductive capacities of the Krogans, for these ruthless warriors can reproduce rapidly, which can strengthen their army. Called the Genophage, this biological weapon is designed to perform a genetic mutation in the Krogans' DNA, preventing them from breeding. Yet, each disease has a cure. The first attempts to cure the genophage are experimented on the first Krogan female who is symbolically named Eve. By making this reference to the Genesis, Eve is the symbol of hope, for when she is cured, she will be the first Krogan female to give life, which will entirely transform the Krogan species from warriors ready to kill their own sons into a unite race that will intend to make their own arid world as a peaceful and green haven.

The havoc caused by scientific discoveries is a direct threat to life, and this is where the Reapers make an entrance. As they are waiting for their time to come in the undiscovered space, the Reapers need to arrive in the galaxy within a short period of time so as to begin the harvest. Yet, the unknown space in which they sleep is supposed to be far away from any civilisation and mass relays, which would allow them to travel long distances rapidly. Then, they need an individual to open a direct path for them. To prepare for their arrival, one of them, Sovereign the Vanguard, sleeps within the galaxy, waiting to be discovered by an organic to indoctrinate him. Indoctrination is based on the opposite of the organics control on the synthetics. When Saren Arterius awakes Sovereign and is brainwashed, he is upgraded with synthetic elements, making him half organic half robot in the same way as the son of God appears under a human form. Likewise the Four Horsemen, a seal needs to be broken so as to allow them to arrive and wipe corrupted life from the galaxy, leading the non-advanced species to have a chance to live and expand themselves.

To put it differently, we can perceive the role of the Reapers as a counterweight to the sentient species' mistakes, which will balance the world and provide harmony. Thus, despite the fact that the Reapers are considered as a threat by the entire advanced species, we can assert that these god-like machines make use of indoctrination to convert non-believers to the Catalyst's ideology, in order to accept their fate and their ascension, similarly to Christian's Book of Revelation that prophesies the purification of Earth and the opening of a new door to a new form of life.

### 2.3.2 Protecting candour

Even though science fiction video games often tackle the dependence humans have on, *Bioshock* approaches a more controversial idea: transforming a symbol of purity into a despicable creature. When the player first encounters a Little Sister, a child that seems to be possessed, he can perceive the dark aura of this child whose role is to draw blood from corpses.

In fact, Ken Levine wanted at first to create robots shaped like children, yet the absence of feelings in the eyes of the Little Sisters would not have made this creature as a symbolic character. The Little Sisters have an impact on the player that troubles his perception of Rapture from that first encounter. In fact, they darken the tone of the city even though they are rarely to be seen in the darkness. As a contrast to the Manichaeian monster, the Little Sisters still look alike little girls, innocent with the ability to play, sing and make jokes. In fact, their creators first intended to keep them in a vegetative state. The reason why the Little Sisters are the key to the gameplay and to the plot is that they provide ADAM which is a fluid that has the ability to modify one's DNA. Yet, in order to get ADAM, the Little Sisters had to be created and brainwashed. The fictional physicist Brigid Tenenbaum is the "mother" of these children. During World War II, she was kept in a German prison camp where she had to search for genes that define one's specificities. Yet, her passion for science and evolution led her to wonder how the strengths and weaknesses genetically developed. The discovery of the sea slugs that produces ADAM led Tenenbaum to find them a host so that the productivity increases. From that point we can perceive that the abducted children are transformed from innocent children to innocent monsters.

In order to create the Little Sisters, Tenenbaum and the industrialist Frank Fontaine open an orphanage that prevents the children from having any parental connection in Rapture. The process of creation of these creatures is started with the insertion of a sea slug into their organism which transforms the child's DNA and transforms its physical appearance. As a matter of fact, the Gatherers' skin is darker and their eyes are yellow which reminds of a demonic possession. Yet, even though they explore and drain blood from corpses, the innocence of the Little Sisters is shown through the fact that they refer to the bloody corpses as "angels". Because of their brainwashing, their perception of the world is altered as Andrew Ryan notices it when he encounters one of them for the first time: "There was a rather unpleasant aspect to her demeanour, as if she were in an altogether different place than the rest of us (*Bioshock 1*, "First Encounter")."<sup>50</sup> As previously said, Rapture is a world where darkness and violence is omnipresent, yet the Little Sisters see Rapture as being idyllic for the enemies are turned into gentlemen and blood splatters are replaced by flowers. The use of contrast between light and darkness highlights the conditioning they were subjected to, as a way to keep them innocent in a city where vices and addictions are pervasive.

However, these little girls are threatened by the Splicers that are addicted to ADAM and want to drain it directly from its source. When the young creatures are frightened, their perception is once more transformed, they see the world as it really is. To prevent Splicers from killing a large amount of Little Sisters and from showing the real world to these embodiments of innocence and purity, a paternal protection is created.

As a figure of strength and loyalty, the symbolism of the father is represented through the Big Daddies. Originally, the creation of the Big Daddies was aimed at Rapture's maintenance. However, they appear as killing machines for a Big Daddy is a fusion between a criminal and a heavy armoured diving suit. The fact that criminals are used depicts the extreme violence that a Big Daddy can demonstrate. Conversely, by being brainwashed and conditioned to protect a creature that the protector will consider as its own child, it is a way to show the sinner's forced repentance. Besides, the Big Daddies' dehumanisation is depicted through their inability to speak, they express their feelings through various grunts that are either deep and weak when he is unaware of the player's presence, yet if the combat starts, the grunt will become sharp and loud. This transformation of the Big Daddies' voice is a way to represent the relationship it has with the Little Sister.

The Big Daddies are bound to the Little Sisters by the exchange of blood that links them as a family. In fact, on exchanging blood with a dying Big Daddy, the latter considers the Little Sister as his protégée as an adaptation of the Roman legend of Androcles and his lion. Yet it means that if a Little Sister dies, her Big Daddy's heart will stop, for it will have failed to its task. This father-and-daughter imprint is highlighted when the player is too close to a Little Sister, the golem will punch the player without harming him for he did not directly attack the Sister. On the other hand, if the player attacks the Big Daddy, his eyes will turn red, and will fiercely attack the player. Even though the protectors are big and slow, when they detect a threat, they become nimble, move swiftly and stalk the player until one of them is defeated which shows intense combat session as the Big Daddy's will to protect its pair-bonded daughter.



27- Safety and love are shown by the Big Daddy's green lights.



In that way, the Big Daddy can be perceived as a perfect golem for his major role is to protect a child in the depths of darkness, by being next to her, the Little Sister is not afraid, and sees Rapture as a colourful and delightful place since the parallel is conveyed by Edith Piaf's "La Vie en Rose" sung by an exorcised Little Sister: "quand il me prend dans ses bras, il me parle tout bas, je vois la vie en rose."

### 2.3.3 The Guardian of Eden

Another form of protector is depicted in *Bioshock Infinite* as a link between the two universes. Songbird is represented in *Bioshock Infinite* as the ultimate enemy of the whole game for the player cannot fight him and must flee from him. In fact, the Songbird is in appearance similar to the Big Daddies in Rapture, yet there are plenty of differences that make this flying creature different from the Little Sister's protector. As opposed to the Big Daddies, Songbird is feared and respected among the citizens of Columbia. It symbolises the patriotism of Columbia, for he embodies the protector of harmony of the floating city. Even though the citizens are aware of Songbird's existence, children rhymes are written about him to anticipate future rebellions. "Songbird, Songbird, see him fly, drop the children from the sky. When the young ones misbehave, escorts children to their grave. Never back-talk, never lie, or he'll drop you from the sky! (*Bioshock Infinite*)"<sup>51</sup>

In opposition to the Big Daddies, Songbird is a unique entity that the player will encounter in *Bioshock Infinite*. Besides, it is not revealed until Booker intends to deliver Elizabeth from her tower. In doing so, a music is played which calls Songbird, and as Elizabeth and Booker try to flee, gigantic talons shreds the structure into pieces which foreshadows Songbird's appearance and Booker's powerlessness facing this giant construct. Thus, as it is designed as a bird, and more precisely as an eagle, the guardian of Columbia symbolises the power of the United States but also as the Bible refers to the eagle as being the divine truthfulness ("how I bare you on Eagles wings, and brought you unto my selfe (*King James Bible*, Exodus 19:4)"<sup>52</sup>) that will lead people to heavenly place and protect them from darkness.

However the mystery about Songbird's real nature remains unsolved, as a matter of fact, Songbird is indeed a construct made of leather, steel. Thus, we can observe the gears and joints that are placed on every limbs, making him mechanic. Yet, the flowing movements and its speed depicts it as a real bird. This contrast between mechanical and biological construction makes it difficult to know whether it is really alive or if it is just conditioned. Moreover, Songbird's shrill cries sound like a mix between a bird cry and a grating noise, adding to the fact that Songbird does not have a beak but an oxygen tube that allows him to breath. By mixing breath and mechanical movements, the boundaries between the machine and the animal collapses.

These aspects' ambivalence is assuredly strengthened by the relationship enjoyed between Songbird and its protégée Elizabeth. As she is the Lamb and Comstock' legacy to the world as a purification tool, Columbia's ideology is based on Elizabeth's future. Then, we can observe Songbird as being the shield of Columbia's future for if Elizabeth

is corrupted or dies, the entire Eden-like society will collapse. In point of fact, the very equipoise of Columbia depends on Elizabeth's trust towards Songbird. Yet, their relationship and Elizabeth evolve at the same time.

Being locked up in a tower, Elizabeth merely sees other people, not even her parents. In fact, Songbird was purposefully created by Jeremiah Fink so that Comstock can control his daughter remotely. Yet, the fact that Songbird does not imprint under conditioning reveals its independence. The imprint is naturally done thanks to Elizabeth when she was that saves Songbird which open his hand where Elizabeth will sleep, felling protected. It will feed her and give her books to entertain her, which gives Songbird both the maternal and the paternal figure.

Nonetheless, as years pass, Elizabeth grows up and becomes aware of her situation. She accuses Songbird to be her gaoler that deprives her of any freedom. This evolution breaks the trustful relationship between the two protagonists, conveying the idea of awareness of being imprisoned in a golden cell where Elizabeth can get whatever she wants, book and food but has only one rule that forbids her to go outside. This can be regarded as a Garden within the Garden for Elizabeth's loneliness resembles Adam's at first content of their situation but it is with the arrival of a new individual, respectively being Booker and Eve that will lead them to desire the undesirable.

After having killed Fitzroy, Elizabeth asks Dewitt to make his possible so that Songbird never takes her back to the tower. Born in blood, Elizabeth refuses to return to her original situation that would prove her powerlessness. Yet, Elizabeth intends to save Booker by begging Songbird to take her back and accepts her fate. Here, the roles are inverted, while the protector's first intention is to take Elizabeth back, bitterness and wrath are shown through its eyes and its clutching fist that rejects Elizabeth beseeching it to pardon her for having left it alone. Songbird's indecision about forgiving Elizabeth's faults is shown through its eyelids and softer movements, which makes the transition between anger and satisfaction of retrieving the child it has taken care of before.



Notwithstanding the above, the evolution of their relation is not complete. After the maternal protection depicted through food and education figure and the paternal protection figure shown through Songbird's intense tracking, the figure of the protective friend is broached. When Elizabeth manages to take control of Songbird through music notes "C-A-G-E" which is a direct reference to Elizabeth's cell and to Songbird, he becomes friendly and willing to destroy its original purpose: the tower that kept Elizabeth at a distance from the outside world and that restrains Elizabeth's abilities. The latter opens a tear to Rapture where Songbird will be stuck into the ocean, separated from Elizabeth by a glass wall that marks a watershed on Songbird's sacrifice so as to free Elizabeth from its role of guardian.

To conclude, the player sees the protectors as a means to discuss on the confidence that the player has in them. When they are not friendly, all of the types of guardians of harmony presented above are perceived as a direct threat that the player will have to face. The confrontation between the ideals promoted by these entities and the main protagonist's non-acceptation eventually leads the world to its end or a dramatic transformation. Although protectors are seen as the way to keep balance, they are also the triggering factor of transgression.

### 3. DESIRE AND LOSS

## 3.1 We the Masters. We the Rulers.

### 3.1.1 The Supreme White American Man

Opening an Eden-like city implies that only the non-corrupt people can access this ascension. Assuredly, it is through the Prophet's ideals that the selection of the chosen ones is made. In *Bioshock Infinite*, Comstock has a precise idea of what the perfect man is, leading the other people to follow his guidance so as to become one of the lambs that will preach the gospel.

Yet, it is through violent racism that Comstock will choose his people as he sees them, the chosen ones have to be taken from the United States, for they are strong and loyal, exclusively the white ones, for their whiteness represent religious purity. Once selected, Comstock indirectly calls his people to reject coloured people and to pay a particular attention to each of the inhabitant's pureness, for they perceive mixed-race as being sinful as shown in a scene in which Booker can choose to throw a ball to a couple of people composed of a white man seen as corrupted for he is attached and a black woman wearing rags. Zealous racism is shown here for if Booker hesitates, Jeremiah Fink will ask him: "Are you going to throw it, or are you taking your coffee black these days? (*Bioshock Infinite*)"<sup>53</sup> By saying that, Fink criticises the acceptance of black people as being equal to the white people that can counter Comstock's ideal for they can bring chaos.

Moreover, as they live in a representation of the Garden of Eden, the chosen people are supposed to enjoy idleness. Still, in order to keep balance in Columbia, people are needed to provide for natural needs as well as the production of goods. It is implicitly said that Comstock is facing a huge problem for his people's well-being. Jeremiah Fink consider Columbia's inhabitants as customer, for Eden is compared to a product. "I told you, Comstock – you sell'em paradise, and the customers expect cherubs for every chore (*Bioshock Infinite*, "Solution to your Problems")."<sup>54</sup> The cherubs he refers to are African-American convicts that will do the hard work while in the meantime, white people will enjoy their stay as it is shown in the Raffle Fair for coloured people are absent. Instead, they are sent to Finkton to work and produce what the white people need. What is more, Comstock intends to control the assimilated African-American people by sending a former experimented hunter after them when they go rogue. In fact, this dehumanisation process is represented by the fact that this hunter by scalping his victims and exhibiting them as trophies. More, when a white man is accused of interbreeding with a coloured person, they are dehumanised as well and exhibited with the other scalps for "if your quarry dwells in the jungle and beds down with the local color, why split hairs (idem, "A New Hunt")?"<sup>55</sup>

Thus, Comstock denies that African-Americans were given freedom. In fact, if we pay attention to the Founding Fathers presented at the beginning of the game, we can notice the absence of Abraham Lincoln. As a matter of fact, Lincoln is demonised through various transformations of his personality. First of all, never in the game Abraham Lincoln directly mentioned, the unsaid name implies that naming him is a way to trigger revolution in Columbia and also seen as evil that does not have a name, and if it is pronounced, the threat becomes real. When Comstock refers to him, he does not say his name but refers to him as a figure of treason, chaos and corruption of the American ispatiotic

values. In a painting that represent Lincoln, his tall and thin silhouette is kept, yet his face is darkened to highlight Comstock's perception of abolitionism. His horns and his red eyes makes him look like a demon, floating above war and fire symbolising the chaos he brought into the United States. The fact that Lincoln is always referred as a liar or a traitor reveals Comstock's determination to come back to the original American exceptionalism value that makes the white American man the most powerful race on Earth.

Rejecting the abolitionist ideas denotes Comstock's perception of the African-American status. It is, indeed, by rejecting their freedom that Comstock considers them as depending on white men by deconstructing Lincoln's emancipationist idea. "What exactly was the "Great Emancipator" emancipating the Negro from? From his daily bread. From the nobility of the honest work. From wealthy patrons who sponsored them from cradle to grave. From clothing and shelter. [...] No animal is born free, except the white man. And it is our burden to care for the rest of creation (idem, "The Lie of the Emancipator")."<sup>56</sup>

Contrariwise, the African-American brought up to Columbia have a completely different opinion on the Eden-like society for they perceive it more as a purgatory. Even though Comstock considers their presence as a compulsory penance to save them, the oppression of slavery is conveyed through Daisy Fitzroy disillusion: "When I first seen Columbia, that sky was the brightest, bluest sky that ever was. Seemed like... Heaven. Then your eyes adjusted to the light and you saw that sea of white faces lookin' hard back at you (idem, "Heaven")."<sup>57</sup> The segregationist values are implicitly tackled through this quotation for Fitzroy as a coloured person becomes aware that the place everybody would like to live in is only reserved for white people. Coloured people are observed as being less acceptable than dogs for they are loyal even if they are not fed or struck. This alienation of the coloured race is emphasised by Comstock's following assertion on showing loyalty to one's master: "It is only when the colored man can make that claim will he take his place in society (idem, "A Dog's Loyalty")."<sup>58</sup> The latter quote also shows Comstock conveying the hope that coloured people might get a place amongst the white man, yet this hope is revealed by Fitzroy to be illusive for she serves as a maid in Comstock's house, but that it is not hard, that she feels like she belongs to their world for working in the leader's house is like being part of the creation of the society itself. Yet, as no word is addressed to them, the illusion of being accepted fades out and is replaced by resignation and acceptance of their situation in Columbia as "God made foolish girls so He could have something to play with (idem, "A Place in the World")."<sup>59</sup> Fitzroy sees herself as a puppet being controlled by a superior entity which leads her to think that the coloured people's life is similar to a tragedy which is composed of despondency and death.

However, Fitzroy develops a will to break the image of the string puppet by refusing her integration in a world the ideals of which do not match with the desires of African-American people. Being accused of having killed Lady Comstock, the former maid hides into the darkness for her skin colour allows her to become invisible in the darkest depths of the city. Darkness protects her, the light reveals her to the world, she waits patiently until her time has come to come out into the brightness of the world and lead the city to its fall as she foresees that the New-Eden Comstock has built will fall into the obscurity.

This particular racism shown in *Bioshock Infinite* depicts the hunger for power and rejection of the weak that darkens the American Dream myth. Yet, when the whole humanity is power-craze, they tweak themselves to overcome their greatest fears, turning the creators into creatures as a last resort.

### 3.1.2 Human Hegemony

As previously said, science fiction mainly tackles the relationship between mankind's position in the cycle of life and the evolution of technologies. The desire of breaking the wall that separates these two contradictory aspects is broached in both of the video game sagas studied by depicting humankind's struggle to overcome their fears and to master their ineluctable fate.

As a parallel to the upgrades one can make on a hardware, the powers offered to the player in the *Bioshock* series are depicted as a product accessible to everyone, the commercialisation of which depicts the will of the creator to show the desire for people to enhance their own organism so as to control it. Undeniably, these evolutions are divided into two categories. On one hand, the "tonics" sold in Rapture are aimed to upgrade the user's body, he becomes stronger, his resistance to pain is strengthened. Effectively, these tonics is a way for the user to master its own body by tweaking it so as to be the master of himself so as to become another person. However, these upgrades are perceived as an immoral tool for average people as they are improved, so are their expectations. "ADAM presents new problems for the professional. As your tools improve, so do your standards (*Bioshock 1*, "Higher Standards")."<sup>60</sup> The latter statement conveys the idea that man is never content with his own situation, the desire for active physical improvement have consequences on the economy, they want higher wages and can go on strike that can disturb the stability enforced in the city. On the other hand, the plasmids that are got on the market have different consequences on the user. They provide him with active powers that the player is allowed to use against enemies. The selected power is shown on the hand of the character controlled by the player, as a way to represent the mastery of the element chosen. In fact the control electricity, frost, fire and even control of a bee swarm or a murder of crows depict the almost divine control of these elements, each of the power mastered suggesting the analogy between mankind and mythical powers.

Furthermore, Shepard's ultimate nemesis in *Mass Effect* controls a terrorist organisation being named Cerberus the Illusive Man is the representation of all of the desires of supremacy. The references to Greek mythology convey the idea of controlling the other races by being above them for his lair is named Cronos like the Titan that devoured his children so as to prevent the prophecy that foretold his fall from happening. Moreover, the Illusive Man does not consider the Reapers as a threat, but as a way to raise above all of the other species: "I see a way to control--to dominate and harness the Reapers' power. Imagine how strong humanity would be if we controlled them (*Mass Effect 3*)."<sup>61</sup> Through this statement, we can perceive *Mass Effect*'s epic war as a pretext to convey the survivalist and supremacist ideal of the man controlling and dominating the other species so as to use them as tools and not being threatened by a superior entity anymore.



Yet, in order to accomplish their purpose, Cerberus starts various projects to master all of the variables by playing god. In fact, even the main protagonist is augmented when resurrected by Cerberus which give Shepard a large amount of upgrades but has various consequences abilities. In fact, in *Mass Effect 2*, Cerberus resurrects Shepard and inserts cybernetic equipment into his organism, the player can feel a change in the gameplay for he is swifter. In this way, the narration has an impact on the gaming experience for the player will control Shepard more easily and feel that he is more powerful in his deeds during the combat sequences than in the first *Mass Effect*. What is more, Cerberus does not content itself with scientific upgrade but also plays God by creating life.

Yet, the creation of life is not expressed in the same way as one can comprehend it. In fact, Miranda Lawson is the personification of human's desire of supremacy. She was conceived in a laboratory so as to make her the embodiment of perfection. All of the genes that make up her were created so as to make her excellent in all of the domains. Even her design was conceived to intermix sexiness to underscore her femme fatale look and composure that gives clues on her education based on brilliance so that she embodies both physical and intellectual excellence. However, Miranda develops a self-awareness that leads her to reconsider her creation. As a matter of fact, she completely rejects her father to emancipate her from her unnatural origins. Depicted as a perfect Frankenstein's creature, Miranda Lawson cannot become a real woman until she destroyed the one that created her, so that, once born in blood, she can try to have a normal life but cannot escape her past for she defines herself as a program that is conceived to be a "troubleshooting space diva (*Mass Effect 3*)."<sup>62</sup>

In the end, we can affirm that the desire conveyed throughout both of these sagas highlight the contrast between control and domination. Similarly to Miranda, Shepard will destroy the one that re-created him so as to be free of the mission he was asked to do. The control that an individual can have on another can therefore breakout in different ways that are not always recognisable at first sight.

### 3.1.3 Control and submission

As far as video games are concerned, the notion of control has always been a major motif in the narration for it can radically transform the story line's thread. The use of various narrative twists allow the scriptwriters to modify the tone of the story because the events that occurred before the climax seem to the reader to have been lies which breaks the pact of trust between the player and the narrator. As a matter of fact, even though the narrator is not directly present on screen, it is him that defines the plot and what is supposed to happen. Yet, with all of the choices that have been discussed before, the player asks himself how he fell into the trap that is created before him. Once more, the relationship between the player and the main character is all the more important because the actions done by the player have an impact on the character's progression. Hence, we can think through the character's real status, the protagonist is the golem of the player, the player controls him and creates him. It is particularly remarkable in the *Mass Effect* saga that it is noticeable, for the player creates his own hero the shape and personality of which depends on the player to serve a particular purpose.

The plasmids that allow the character to control elements as said above are not the only powers that they give. In fact, two other plasmids are offered to the player that allow him to control his enemies. The first one authorizes the player to turn an enemy into a powerful ally that dies once it has fulfilled its duty. In this situation, the character/player is the master of an individual's fate that reminds of divine powers based on possession the purpose of which is to consider the one that possesses as the supreme master and guide. Yet, the other plasmid available offers another ability altogether. Named "Enrage", this plasmid makes the enemy go berserk. Here, the enemy is turned into an uncontrollable creature that shoots anything that moves, making it as a figure of absolute chaos. These two abilities are a way for the player/character to have control on the gameplay, leading the combat sequences to be easier for the enemies will be disturbed.

However, the illusion of this control is countered in the first *Bioshock* since the player is absolutely mute. This muteness has repercussions on the narration for the player/character becomes nothing but an observer, or worse, a tool. The very particularity in video games is the ability to control his character, nevertheless *Bioshock 1* leads the player to feel powerless facing the narration. Being unable to say a word leads the player to perceive his character as being plain because he can only obey to orders. What is more, the climax of *Bioshock 1* has a particular mise-en-scene since the encounter between the player/character and Andrew Ryan is staged as a play. Here, the scene deprives the player from his abilities to control his character for Ryan immobilises him. The explanation of the character's obedience to Atlas is given through the fact that Atlas always punctuates the orders he gives the character by "Would you kindly..." which is a conditioning trigger that forces the character to act. In that sense, Ryan is the opposite of the character, he is perfectly aware that he has lost control of Rapture, yet he does not want to lose control of his own life. While it was originally thought that Ryan's death would be the consequence of an epic battle, Ken Levine chose to make the player uncomfortable for depriving the player from his capacities is "the ultimate insult to the player, that he chooses to die but you can't choose to do anything (Chris Remo)."<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, both Tenenbaum and Atlas use the trigger sentence. While Tenenbaum wants the player to save the Little Sister, Atlas urges him to harvest her, therefore the contradiction between the two orders given on the same issue reveals that the weakness of control is represented by the player's choice only choice in *Bioshock 1*. More, the name of *Bioshock 1*'s character is revealed to be Jack. In a card game, the jack refers to being the tool. Yet, he is mentioned as being the "Ace in the Hole (*Burial at Sea*)"<sup>64</sup> which is a direct reference to Billy Wilder's movie (1951) that was retitled *The Big Carnival*. In the same way as the movie, the main protagonist loses control of the situation. Yet, when Jack learns that he was created by Frank Fontaine and that Atlas is Frank Fontaine, the tone of the game will completely change for the final quest is no more to kill a man, but to emancipate from his master. The epilogue scene after Fontaine's death shows the consequences of the only choice that the player has, strengthening the idea that one single choice can modify the nature of the ending.

As authority can be seen through various motifs such as the physical abilities representing supremacy of a race or the impression of having control on a conditioned character, the antagonists are shown as being naïve for they think they are more powerful because of their intelligence and ideologies. As Illusive Man is represented as half human and half robot in the same way as Saren, the similar mise-en-scene is used when Shepard has to kill him for control and

obedience are recurrent motifs to the tragedy genre. The enemies cannot decide of their fate, which is the triggering factor of the revelation of being subdued to a superior power that they cannot tolerate and will lead them to die willingly, as they want control or not, for they still hope that they will overcome control.

## 3.2 The Fall

### 3.2.1 Rebellion and destruction

Rebellion is the proof that the ideologies extolled by the original leaders led to chaos for they are depicted as ruthless tyrants and that they will do anything to maintain the ideas promoted. As far as Rapture is concerned, Andrew Ryan's will to enforce an economy based on a laissez-faire ideology causes his fall for he cannot have any control on his city. Rapture can be seen as Ryan's creature, being independent and free from any law, it can be said that the city is alive and expands itself through its people's desires. Yet, the poverty revealed in the city causes criminality to become Rapture's evil side the ideal of which is different from Ryan's. As a matter of fact, the founder of the city aims at a comfortable and successful life, whereas the criminals' motivation is to survive which is a contradictory desire. Aware of the change of people's mentality, Ryan intends to get his city back on the straight and narrow by threatening people to take the absolute power of death penalty ("a few stretched necks are a small price to pay for our ideals. (*Bioshock I*, "Death Penalty in Rapture")."<sup>65</sup>), which definitely characterises Ryan as a tyrant that has lost control of his city. Usually in literature, characters who extoll new ideas are seen as paragons for they oppose a system that is seen to be corrupted. In both Rapture and Columbia, the praised ideals can be considered without taking the facet of the tyrant in account, as honourably ideologies. "You have this beautiful, beautiful city, and then what happens when reality meets the ideals? (Chris Remo)"<sup>66</sup> By depicting the visionary as a tyrant, ideology becomes the very source of corruption and discontent, therefore utopia reveals its true face as being the antechamber of hell.

As he loses control of his city because of the addiction provoked by the development of ADAM and plasmids, Ryan intends to banish Frank Fontaine who begins to become powerful for he is an industrialist that has created his own business from rags to riches through the development of ADAM and plasmids. As people become more and more addicted, his power increases for he detains chaos in his hands, if he does not sell his plasmids, riots will break out. Yet, he symbolises the success of the laissez-faire policy. By evicting him from Rapture, Ryan does not respect his own value for he nationalises Fontaine's industry, to regain the monopoly and respect in the eyes of the plasmid addicts. This war of ideologies confronting a man to another conveys chaos for each of them are willing to control the plasmid business for different purposes. One wants to become wealthy whereas the other only wants power.

While Fontaine levers public sympathy with humanist actions such as the opening of an orphanage (which is a façade for the creation of Little Sisters), Ryan will break with his moral codes to keep the city in his palm. The real goal of the development of possession plasmid is to control his people, but he maintains the idea that free will is the cornerstone of Rapture's harmony. Yet, this harmony is threatened by civil war, leading Ryan to contradict himself stating that "desperate times call for desperate measures (*Bioshock I*, "Desperate Times")"<sup>67</sup>, which reveals once more Ryan's inability to keep his utopia balanced. Because of his actions, Ryan and Rapture are strongly connected for if one falls, the other stands, but it cannot be both, in order to keep balance, one has to be destroyed. This explains Ryan's

will to die so as to keep Rapture safe as his legacy. Nonetheless, Fontaine's victory is not complete yet, his desire for power drained his essence of humanity. In fact, we can consider him as being deprived of any ideals, but filled with the desire of taking power whatever the cost. His monstrosity is portrayed through the metamorphosis he endures, and becomes a goliath the colourlessness of which depicts the real Frank Fontaine/Atlas as being a soulless creature that the player will destroy so as to choose between reconstructing a life on the surface with the saved Little Sisters or assuming control of Rapture.

A second aspect of tyranny triggers chaos for the combat is no longer a man versus another but a man versus a group of secluded people. As a consequence of the segregationist policies that Comstock enforced in Columbia so as to maintain his people's purity, the isolated individuals that do not have their word in this utopia reserved for white American people created their movement that would give them a voice. Named Vox Populi, as a reference to the Latin locution "Vox Populi, Vox Dei", this movement regroups all of the races that are seen as being inferior to the white American one. As an adaptation of the servant that rebels against his master, Daisy Fitzroy becomes the leader of the Vox Populi for she perceived anger and will to revolt against the Prophet they consider as being an impostor. Fitzroy becomes the voice for the oppressed people that belong to various ethnical communities such as the Irish, the African-American and the Asian. Even if at first they acted peacefully, when the player meets them they are shown as being ruthless, torturing civilians and wearing war paintings that remind of the Wounded Knee Massacre, yet, here the history is rewritten for it is the savage that slaughter the civilised. Moreover, they adapt Comstock's motorized patriots for their own purpose. As said before, these killing machines are means of propaganda that defend Columbia's values. Here, they activate Abraham Lincoln motorised representations that expresses an indication on the hope this machine gives to the oppressed. In this way, the Great Emancipator is no longer seen as a vicious traitor but as hope that declares war against social injustices. Moreover, new messages are recorded: "If they will not have us in their city, then there shall be no city (*Bioshock Infinite*)."<sup>68</sup> All of the messages accuse Comstock to be a False Prophet and that he will not see the Vox Populi coming. Thus, the last quotation foreshadows the fall of the city for its total destruction will be caused by extreme violence and relentless slaughter.

However, when all is lost, the total destruction of the threat is required. In the end of the *Mass Effect* trilogy, Shepard can destroy the Reapers that are the only way to keep balance so as to maintain organic life. Yet, by destroying them, the humans feel more confident of having defeated the most dangerous threat, but nothing is said about their awareness so that, in the end, nothing can protect organic life anymore. Even though all of the synthetic life is destroyed, Admiral Anderson makes the assertion that "We can rebuild everything that was destroyed (*Mass Effect 3*)."<sup>69</sup> This includes the reconstruction of the synthetic life. As it was the source of chaos, it implies that if one mistake is made, the whole galaxy is doomed for the protectors have disappeared.

In the end, despite the fact that all of the cities created for an ideological purpose are doomed to collapse, the destruction of the city is not the only way that leads to chaos. In fact, a fallen society can be readapted so as to promote new ideologies that are the opposite of the ones the Eden-like city-state was based on.

### 3.2.2 Transgression and imago

Even though the second *Bioshock* was not developed by the same team, some similarities with the original opus can be detected. Yet, in many ways, this opus is completely different for the player has a more intimate relationship with the main character and as was previously mentioned, the city lives on, even without its original creator, it keeps on evolving.

Ryan is dead, Rapture survives, and the player is confronted to a new threat. Yet this time, the player embodies a Big Daddy, the gameplay is completely transformed for it moves slower, allowing the player to rediscover a world which he thought he already knows. In fact, the architecture has not changed yet the ornaments are completely different. The player feels as if he were discovering a new city that has its own rules. The main difference that shocks the player is that Rapture is no longer ruled by a man hungry for power but by a woman that promotes ideologies that can sound familiar to the player who has played *Bioshock Infinite* before.

Ryan's laissez-faire gives way to a collectivist ideology based on peculiar beliefs for the religious group named The Rapture Family (led by Sofia Lamb) praises the player's and Jack's actions of the first *Bioshock*. This direct reference makes the player feel that his actions had consequences on the narration even if his choice were limited. The fact that the events take place nearly ten years after the events of the first opus allows *Bioshock 1*'s main character to become a fictional sacred figure in the eyes of Sofia Lamb's followers. Paintings and murals representing Jack's heroic (or anti-heroic) actions, representing only his hands as the hands of God that created the world. Likewise the Supreme Father, Jack's face is not represented as a respect for the holy representations. Moreover, his actions are told as if he was in control of the situation when he killed Andrew Ryan. It represents the transformation of a story so that Jack is deified as being the most powerful entity in Rapture.

Additionally, Lamb's Family is in a way similar to Frank Fontaine, leading the player to notice this parallel as a danger for the equilibrium. Some ideas promoted by Fontaine are reused in The Family's ideology for their goal is to prepare Rapture's citizens to spread their power around the world. Even the enemies presented in the first *Bioshock* seem to be transformed, as a matter of fact, they are no longer addicted to ADAM. Instead they are converted to the beliefs praised by the Family, saying that the Little Sisters are like chosen children devoted to humanity's ascension.

By these beliefs, Rapture is transformed as the vents are shown as shrines whereas before the vents were represented as a way for Little Sisters to hide from the power-crazed splicers. These shrines are ornamented with various inscriptions written above them and the propaganda imposed by Ryan are replaced with biblical references that draws a parallel between Rapture's and Babylon fate that is invaded with demons. By making the Little Sisters turn into Big Sisters whose role is to protect the other Little Ones from being harvested. This transformation of a product into a sacred and also mystical element lead the player to perceive Rapture's real transformation, which can only be complete by discovering that Lamb's perception of Rapture is closer to the biblical myth. Rapture's role is altered by the perception of Sofia Lamb, through various speeches and writings, it can be remarked that Rapture is likewise a womb



in which an evolved human grows. Thus, Rapture's darkness depicts the metaphor of the chrysalis that is previous to a butterfly-like imago that prepare human to be sentient of their new abilities appreciated as a gift from the Little Sisters.

In the end, we can perceive the transformation of Rapture as a transgression of its fictional representation for it is shown in the first opus as being the place where corruption and vices are located. Instead, *Bioshock 2* depicts the same city with various changes that lead the player/character to see himself as a foreigner in the world he was created for he spends ten years into a coma and when he wakes up, the leaders and the ideals have changed, the Big Daddy the player controls is no longer seen as a protective figure but as a threat. Yet, when he saves his daughter that is supposed to become the voice and the body of human evolution, he allows her to take his experience so that she never forgets her Little Sister past, as she was exploited and threatened many times. It is through the main character's death that the player can comprehend the whole background of the story that involves sacrifice and redemption.

### 3.2.3 Game-over

Once the player has finished a game, either he stocks the game in his library or he plays it one more time for the complexity of the narration and the role of the character controlled by the player allows him to rediscover the narrative thread from a different perspective. In films, the narrative complexity often implies that the spectator has to watch the film several times before being able to understand its real meaning. Christopher Nolan's *Inception* (2010) is one of the most pertinent examples for all of the clues that are given to the spectator are hidden, clues that will tell the spectator whether Cobb is awake or not.

In the video game medium, the principle is similar yet the specificities of the gameplay offered to the player cannot allow him to play exactly the same way. Yet, the narrative thread remains the same for the notion of fate is predominant in this peculiar medium. The character is created to fulfil a quest then he disappears. As a matter of fact, we can count different approaches as far as fate is concerned. In order to keep the player focused on the narration, the scriptwriters need to concentrate the narration on the player/character relationship for the player will perceive this unique way of entertaining as a way to be an actor in a fictional world. Yet, the choices that are offered to the player are only illusions as Ken Levine defines his perception of video game experience: "'Why did I stick that needle in my arm? Why did I go in that lighthouse?' [...] the answer is that you're born to go down in that fucking place and put that needle in your arm."<sup>70</sup> Then, we can make the assumption that as the story is based on the character, the story has to end by the end of the character. After having fulfilled its task, the player's avatar in the world has to disappear so that the narration is complete.

Although not all of the characters in video games die once and for all, both *Bioshock's* and *Mass Effect's* series end with death. The characters have completed what they were programmed to do, then they sacrifice so as to complete one last task so as to make the character prolong his existence. By saving the Little Sisters, Jack sacrifices his entire life to the humanisation and integration of these exorcised demons. They all show him gratitude as the final scene of

the first *Bioshock* depicts all of the Little Sisters saved as being as being adults, educated, married and above all as mothers. Deprived of any maternal figures, Jack allows them to create their own lives that are not restricted by any rules. The scene is colourful and the voice of the narrator is tender as if she showed gratitude towards the player of having chosen to spare them. The very last shot shows the Little Sisters holding an old man's hand which is revealed to be Jack's, for the player can catch sight of the tattoo representing a chain on his wrist that is present throughout the game. Jack is no longer the tool, but the master of his children's fate. Alpha, the Big Daddy from *Bioshock 2*, sacrifices himself physically, yet his spirit is transferred into his daughter's so that she can follow in her father's footsteps. As the choices of harvesting and sparing Little Sisters are still present in this opus, Eleanor will absorb her father's experience and will be shown as being a monster or a mature woman that comprehends the world and will copy her father.

The sacrifices shown in *Bioshock Infinite*, are aimed at a different aspect. Booker's acceptance that he has to die so as to erase Comstock from any alternative universe accentuates two aspects. On one hand, it stresses figure of the protective father that wants to save his daughter from all of the universes so that they are not tortured but on the other hand, this sacrifice serves harmony for Booker erases Comstock therefore Columbia which prevents him from spitting fire down to Earth. The Eden-like city is not destroyed, it is simply not created.

The last form of Elizabeth that survived the sacrifice of Booker DeWitt also sacrifices herself with the purpose of completing the cyclic narrative thread, for it is through her ultimate sacrifice that Jack is brought down to Rapture, leading Ryan's fall and the transformation of Rapture. As a matter of fact, this sacrifice is shown as being a Deus Ex Machina that allows the narration to go on, which therefore leads the story to be balanced.

Shepard's end is a bit more obscure for two of the three choices that Shepard has to stop the Reapers make him sacrifice himself favouring equilibrium in the galaxy. In fact, if the player/Shepard chooses to control the Reapers, they will become a tool mastered by Shepard himself. His spirit is separated from his body, leading him to comprehend the transcendence Sovereign spoke of. Shepard is no longer human, he forgets his name, and refers to his physical incarnation as "He". He is another entity. He becomes the guardian of the relationship between organics and synthetics but conversely to the Catalyst, he knows what organic life is, and how they intend to protect their existence. If he chooses the synthesis, organics and synthetics will share the same DNA, leading the conflict to stop for the organic life is preserved. Here, the balance will be brought, for Shepard will share his DNA by surrendering his life so that other species may live on, bearing Shepard's legacy to the galaxy, which is later revealed by an epilogue scene in which a child asks if all of it really happened or if it is only a myth to make people understand the necessity of making the right choice so as to prevent chaos from coming back.

All in all, the ultimate fate of the main protagonist leads the player to perceive the video game under a new dimension for the harmony brought by death is a way to counter the games that only end with boss battles and the survival of our hero, breaking the Manichaeian codes.

## CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, we may infer that the adaptation of myths in video games is hidden under various depths of fictional elements and popular culture elements. When the player discovers a whole new world with a complex narration, he seems charmed thanks to the ideas and values promoted by an Eden-like society. Because of its singular artistic design, the society seems attractive to the player for it is unique and often colourful. Even the dark corridors of Rapture fills the player with wonder for the impossible location it is situated in recalls Atlantis, leading the player to discover a modern interpretation of the Lost City.

However, throughout this analysis we have shown that their society evolves along with the narrative. As the narration gets more complex, the perfect city the player wants to live in becomes a tortuous and dark maze. He feels imprisoned in a place where no real wall exists, he wants to get out of this hell. Thus, by mixing science fiction and history, the game creators succeed in conveying a complex narrative thread that breaks up with literature and cinema for the player is a direct actor of the narration and a stranger to the world. The possibility the player has to browse files, codex and audio testimonies allows him to discover the darkest sides of these universes, which proves that the untainted utopia does not exist. The open-world technique shows a different facet of these worlds, if the player sets the primary narration aside, he can discover mythical figures that are embodied by non-fictional people. Moreover, cyclic narration foreshadows the fall of the most perfect city, being Columbia, and the ascension of the other societies that are corrupted with war. From this point, we can affirm that the narration has a vivid impact on the player's perception of the virtual world he walks through. As opposed to myths that are described through various metaphors, it is by collecting a large amount of information that the player perceives the world as being more realistic, which departs from the original myths to be hardly illustrated. Yet, the feeling of belonging to this society cannot be represented in the main protagonist, as the player and the main character are strongly linked, if the character already belongs to the city, the player will be lost for the cyclic narration cannot go on. As a matter of fact, the key element to narrating a story through the video game medium is the fact that both the player and the character are foreigners to the world they will evolve. Jack and Booker DeWitt are similar to the player for they are referred as being strangers as we witness their arrival into the city, whereas Shepard's foreign status is more complex. In fact, Shepard does not belong to the world of diplomacy and politics. As he is a man of action, Shepard feels like he is powerless facing diplomats. What is more, physical and spiritual creation of the character directly breaks Manichaeism for the player can choose whether he wants his creation to be a hero or an anti-hero. Also, when he cannot create his character, the imposed character is described as being a loser that believes in nothing sent into a world where religious faith is all the more important. The latter fact depicts once more the break up with linear narration in which the main protagonist is portrayed as a paragon with values. Booker DeWitt personifies the anti-hero under the form of an alcoholic detective that lost everything hence believes in no hope.

In addition, we have studied how utopias are depicted in *Mass Effect* and *Bioshock*, and it can definitely be said that these so-called perfect cities are portrayed as being corrupt representations of the heavenly dreamlands. Although the founders of the cities believe in the perfection of their utopia, when the player discovers the city, it is at first seen as a symbol of success and imagination. Yet, the darker corners are revealed to be more important than

expected. The inversion of the role from utopia to dystopia leads the player to grasp the concepts of utopias and dystopias to be much closer than originally thought. In fact, utopia promotes freedom and success. The men who are behind these ideologies present themselves as being grand and honest. Yet, they all depend on wealth and control for they intend to indirectly brainwash their people through propaganda that promotes their ideals so as to gain a permanent control on them. More, the anti-foreigners propaganda depicted throughout the games reveal that these benefactors are not purely white. A founder creates a city according to his conception of life, yet, as he is not perfect, nor will be his city. This is why the presence of protective figures are significant. The citizens of a society managed by a corrupt figure will eventually turn into monsters likewise their leader. Manichaeism is therefore represented by those figure that underscore the presence of venality.

In the final part, we have seen the consequences of hunger for power. In fact, it is now clear that the protecting figures presented in the part before are all the more significant for they represent two contradictory aspects. On one hand, they are the embodiment of harmony for they protect individuals from being corrupt, on the other hand, they trigger the transgression of supreme authority. When man is confronted to a superior authority, it is a natural need to wish to face it. As a matter of fact, humans are shown in the analysed games as willing to master themselves so as to become immortal and supreme. Humans playing God are often shown in science-fiction works for science is the key to human evolution. However, when men tend to undermine other human races, to supremacy is added control, to control is added rebellion. The power struggle that is faced by the people who are being enslaved and the ones who master them can be seen as an infinite cycle. When mankind fights for its supremacy, the desire of becoming the alpha race is countered by violent battles that can lead a society to collapse. However, if we do not consider the zealotry shown by some leaders, their ideals or preparing man for its ascension by turning a corrupted place into a shrine for human's metamorphosis, we can appreciate the place as being more harmonious as all of the enemies encountered fight for a particular ideal. The process of transformation shown through this belief is that man can become grand, in the same way as robots can be humanised so as to show trust between a creator and his creature.

In the end, Manichaeism is not a sine-qua-non condition so that a video games succeed in telling a non-linear and epic story. Even though most of the games develop stories structured as corridors, the few ones that get off the beaten track are revealed to be more complex for the notion of good and evil is blurred thanks to the characters that appear like a villain who only wants to fulfil his task to protect the ideals he stands for. The adaptation and the transgression of sacred myths allow the scriptwriters to grey over Manichaeism in favour of a more complex narrative thread, permitting harmony and chaos to merge so as to create confusion in the player's experience. When ideologies and myth confront, only confusion can solve the conflict for myths belong to the imaginary and common beliefs whereas ideologies belong to the one that created them. Chaos versus balance. When reality faces sacred figures in a virtual world, only the player can make his own interpretation according to his gaming experience.

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21- The Bonnie Blue Flag and the Stars and Stripes Banner mingle to create Columbia's flag .....	32
22- Columbia spitting fire of salvation down to New-York. ....	33
23- Some lost people looking at their guide instead of looking at their new home symbolises Comstock's protectionist figure. ....	34
24- Defeated by the Lion, Peter drops the symbols he embodies. ....	35
25- Washington holding the Liberty Bell as a symbol of Columbia's will to remain independent. ....	35
26- Only factories are shown, conveying inhabitants real "future": dependence on Fink. ....	36
27- Safety and love are shown by the Big Daddy's green lights .....	40
28- Songbird's flaming eyes represent its resentment towards Elizabeth.....	42

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## RÉSUMÉ

La place du jeu vidéo dans la société se fait grandissante, aussi des mouvements de genre se développent dans le même temps afin de proposer au public de nouvelles expériences narratives. Le jeu vidéo n'est plus considéré comme étant un simple divertissement mais une manière de se créer un avatar afin de plonger dans une histoire. Le genre de la science-fiction est privilégié par les joueurs désireux de pouvoir explorer librement des espaces vastes, permettant ainsi aux créateurs de proposer pléthore de détails qui favorise à l'immersion et à la compréhension de l'univers dans lequel le joueur/avatar évolue.

Le but de ce travail de recherche est de définir les caractéristiques propres à la narration non-linéaire du médium vidéo ludique en tenant compte de l'appropriation des mythes sacrés ainsi que des idéologies humanistes, politiques et sociales. De plus, les particularités de l'expérience variable du joueur dans la narration dans le jeu vidéo seront abordées afin d'établir un constat sur la complexité narrative d'un jeu dont la compréhension dépend de chacun et même de chaque partie lancée.

**mots-clés :** Jeux vidéo, Ken Levine, Bioshock, Mass Effect, Mythes, Idéologie, Chaos, Harmonie

## ABSTRACT

The video game medium becomes more and more important in people's everyday life, this said genre movements are developing in the meantime to offer new narrative experiences. Video games are not considered as a simple entertainment anymore but are considered as a way to create an avatar so as to bury oneself in a story. Science-fiction is preferred by gamers that want to explore freely vast spaces, which allows the creators to offer an abundance of details that favour immersion and the comprehension of the universe which the player/avatar explores.

The aim of this research paper is to define the specifics peculiar to non-linear narration of the video games medium by taking in account the adaptation of sacred myths as well as humanist, political and social ideologies. What is more, the characteristics of the gamer's variable narrative experience will be approached so as to establish an analysis on a video game's narrative complexities the full understanding of which depends on each and every one as well as each new game started.

**keywords :** video games, Ken Levine, Bioshock, Mass Effect, Myths, Ideologies, Chaos, Balance

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