crucial problem of the purposes (or non-purposes) of play in our time.

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Virtually Sacred: Myth and Meaning in *World of Warcraft* and *Second Life*
Robert M. Geraci
New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014. Appendix, notes, references, index, and images. 348 pp. $35.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780199344697

Virtually Sacred: Myth and Meaning in World of Warcraft and Second Life is in many ways a natural follow-up to Robert W. Geraci's 2011 book *Apocalyptic AI: Visions of Heaven in Robotics, Artificial Intelligence, and Virtual Reality*. His latest work is erudite, lucid, and a poignant and significant contribution to the flourishing multidisciplinary study of games and virtual worlds. It also adds to the recent body of scholarship examining the nexus of virtual worlds, sacred traditions, meaning making, and myth, including sociologist William Sims Bainbridge's *eGods: Faith Versus Fantasy in Computer Gaming* and psychologist Nick Yee's *Proteus Paradox: How Online Games and Virtual Worlds Change Us—and How They Don't*. *Virtually Sacred* stands firmly alongside such works, offering a theoretical premise derived from the social sciences in general and the sociology of religion in particular.

Beyond Geraci's ambitious theoretical premises, he also spent extensive time in and out of virtual game worlds conducting ethnographic research replete with interviews and surveys within guilds of *World of Warcraft* (2004) and communities of *Second Life* (2003). Geraci balances quantitative and qualitative findings and observations with insightful anecdotes highlighting everyday occurrences of virtual-world residents. At times he openly acknowledges when the two approaches conflict or need not express religious impulses exclusively. All this teeming with an approachable style of writing and prose makes Geraci's case equitable. He has also supplied ample endnotes and an invaluable appendix on his own methodologies and sources. Any scholar pursuing similar work will want to consult this generous supplementary material.

Chapters 1 through 3 lay out Geraci's experiences in *World of Warcraft* and his own efforts to acknowledge its strength as a prefabricated mythos and lore-driven domain. As such, the first few chapters reveal Geraci's suggestive insights into the discourse of myth and meaning as a cohesive story and game world. He further develops a brief account of key progenitors of *World of Warcraft* and games with similar thematic and aesthetic tendencies toward myth making. Naturally, the mythopoeia of Tolkien and the genre of high fantasy stand out as canonical, along with science fiction in general as a model for "modern mythology" (pp. 28–31). These, alongside the highly influential table-top role-playing game Dungeons & Dragons, readily demonstrate content culturally transmitted with an appeal for myth and magic. However, the operative and more deeply entrenched mythos, as Geraci suggests, may very well

be the players' intervention with a cosmic struggle between good and evil, enabling room for ethical concerns and reflections, while yielding transcendent-like experiences within the major tides of this underlying mythos.

Geraci dedicates chapters 4 through 6 to analyzing *Second Life*'s more opaque engagement with religious community building, social experiments with its open-world reliance on user-generated content, and fabrication and identity construction. Much like *World of Warcraft*, *Second Life* also draws on the canonical texts of science fiction and cyberpunk like William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) and Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* (1992). As Geraci reveals, the porous world of *Second Life* is not so much lore driven (though lore-driven lands exist), but rather cosmo- and mytho-plastic. In other words, residents can either migrate or expand their traditional religions and ideologies into the virtual world, or create religions unique to the world. *Second Life*, as Geraci demonstrates, can even serve as a compelling platform for the seemingly spiritual aspirations of movements like transhumanism.

Geraci relies mostly on the dominant, Western traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, though he does make efforts to reach beyond them. His correspondence with Philip Rosedale, founder and creator of *Second Life*, reveal Rosedale's own inspirations from Hinduism and Buddhism. However, one may find Geraci's reliance on David Chidester's definition of religion, "the negotiation of what it means to be human with respect to the superhuman and the subhuman" (p. 14), to be rather restricting, albeit broad in its own implications—there is room for contestation.

Chidester's concepts of "holy shit," and "authentic fake," tend to bleed into Geraci's own arguments in a way that may leave the reader conflicted over the author's intents and uses of religious material. His treatment of scripture in light of the ludic context may be off-putting to some readers. Others may find that Geraci's reflections merely shed light on the already pervasive tension between religious tradition and the virtual frontier. For example, the Catholic Church's resistance to allowing the Eucharist in *Second Life* leads to potential—perhaps inescapable—theological quandaries, such as the question of whether virtual wafer and virtual wine are authentic and efficacious? At other times, he elevates virtual world behavior, while potentially trivializing the miracles recounted in scripture. As the author asks, "Is a video game character who can be played, whose accomplishments are one's own, any less real than an angelic resurrection or a parted sea that can be neither seen nor felt in the here now?" (p. 99).

However, this is perhaps the strength of virtual worlds, worlds into which play studies scholars can venture and expound upon the *Virtually Sacred*: "[Virtual Worlds] provide places for playing out our religious thoughts and simultaneously are inscriptions of them" (p. 9). Such remarks call to mind the potential efficacy and transformative quality of Johan Huizinga's magic circle in *Homo Ludens,* formulated as an area within which no distinction exists between space marked for sacred purposes and space marked for sheer play. In his closing chapter, Geraci proposes that we are, and perhaps always have been, the conduits, couriers, players, and agents of

the sacred. Now we are simply migrating these tendencies to our virtual worlds. As a concept and metaphor, the "spiritual marketplace" is, of course, not at all exclusive to contemporary life (consider the mercantile language of Paul or venerated sites and activities of Hermes.) Its pervasive access, however, has empowered practitioners to become deeply creative with their spiritual odysseys.

Virtually Sacred poses questions worth serious consideration. Does transcendence and meaning come with a cost? Is it transferrable via products of commerce? Or is it free-to-play? With the sacred affordance given to our virtual and gaming worlds, along with religious identity and community building, there is perhaps no better time than now to assert critical approaches and expound on the variety of those religious experiences and traditions represented or reassembled.

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Game After: A Cultural Study of Video Game Afterlife

Raiford Guins
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Appendix, notes, bibliography, index.
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A new generation of video game historians must preserve the medium's heritage before it disappears. In Raiford Guins's compelling journey as an adventuring media archaeologist, arcade machines from the heyday of arcade video games are an endangered species: they rot away in dumps, corrode on beachfront boardwalks, and succumb to the indignities of a ceaseless tide of button mashing without the care to keep them running. While threatened in the wild, some fortunate games have been removed from their natural habitats and placed into preserves ranging from museums, private collections, and historically minded arcades. By exploring and documenting the many ways in which people and institutions preserve digital games, Guins challenges the status quo of game history, surveys, and underused artifacts and archives in the United States, and invites others to follow in his footsteps to write a richer history of video gaming. Crucially, Guins's project is not to engage with games-as-artifacts merely to recapture the authenticity of the play experience at the moment of its release as a consumer product. Instead, he seeks to trace the path of games as they travel through time and space and in so doing take on different meanings, cultural environs, values, and epistemologies.

Following Erkki Huhtamo, Guins chides video game historians for not moving beyond the "chronicle era," (p. 22) characterized by collecting information from written sources often provided by manufacturers or regurgitated by the enthusiast press with little analysis or theoretical motivation. In opposition to the written accounts of early game history, Guins provides an overview of the collection and presentation of games in museums in chapter 1, using the remains of the Atari *Pong* prototype from 1972 (the harbinger of the coin-operated video game industry) as an exemplary iconic object and Ralph Baer's fragile "Brown