```
This is an altar devoted to the King of
            the Spire.

                                    CREATURES:
                                    None.

                                    OBJECTS:
                                    None.

                                    FEATURES:
                                    a) Religious Altar
                                    b) Stone
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Stm:          Pai:          Air:          Bld:          Poi:
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Simone Heidbrink, Tobias Knoll (Eds.)

Religion in Digital Games Respawned

Special Issue

Volume 10 (2016)

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Towards "a New Province of Humanity"!

Introduction

Simone Heidbrink, Tobias Knoll

On April 4th, 2016 a book named 'Empires of EVE: A History of the Great Wars of EVE Online' was released to the public. Funded by an enormously successful Kickstarter campaign[1] in 2014 and written by Andrew Groen, it takes a historical approach towards the science fiction MMORPG *EVE Online*, which launched in 2003 and is still popular to this day. Groen himself sums up the book as follows:

> "It's a story about war and politics and betrayal and of course, internet spaceships. Beyond that, I've searched extensively and I believe this may be the first history book ever written about humans living in a digital world."[2]

The Foreword of 'Empires of EVE' is opened up with a bold statement: "EVE is real". For Groen – and according to him, many players of *EVE Online* – calling the virtual Space of *EVE Online*'s universe a real one means trying to redefine "what constitutes a real space":

> "The building blocks of EVE Online's universe – called New Eden – are ones and zeroes rather than ordinary Earth elements, but what Earth and New Eden have in common is humanity. Jealousy, ambition, revenge, greed, hatred, and friendship are at the core of EVE Online. Human emotions and work make up the soul of New Eden, and you'll find every emotion there that you would in the traditional world.
>
> In that sense, New Eden is very much a new province of humanity, and its history is worth preserving." (Groen 2016, Foreword)

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1   The campaign reached its funding goal of 12.500$ within 7,5 hours and surpassed it by another 83.200$, totaling 95.729$ or 765% of the original goal.
2   See https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/sciencegroen/a-history-of-the-great-empires-of-eve-online/description.

The editors of *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* wholeheartedly agree with this assessment. We are also convinced, that it is not limited to the world and community of *EVE Online* or the scholarly field of history but rather applies to the whole medium of digital games and all social and cultural sciences, including those focused on religion.

We are sure that our authors (and hopefully also our readers) will support this notion as meanwhile do other authors, publications[3] and scientific journals, among them the newly founded journal *Gamevironments* (http://www.gamevironments.uni-bremen.de/).

In their inaugural issue (Radde-Antweiler, Waltemathe & Zeiler 2014: 14ff), the editors of *Gamevironments* follow a very similar approach to the theoretical outlines we have propagated in our programmatic article (Heidbrink, Knoll & Wysocki 2014) in the first special issue "Religion in Digital Games. Mulitperspective and Interdisciplinary Approaches", namely the combination of actor-centered and game-immanent approaches towards game research. However, in their enthusiasm it seems they have forgotten to acknowledge our paper (however, they did reference <u>the issue</u> at least). But we are positive, the *Gamevironment* editors and the scientific community are well aware of this lapse, so no hard feelings on our side.

All in all it's an important impulse to have an increasing number of researchers looking at several aspects of religion in digital games – be it in *online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* or any other journal. And a great variety of new perspectives on the topic we proudly present in this brand new special issue "Religion in Digital Games Respawned"!

The first contribution *'Nothing is true, everything is permitted'* was written by **Frank G. Bosman** and explores *The Portrayal of the Nizari Isma'ilis in the Assassin's Creed Game Series*. Bosman takes an in depth look on the depiction of the eponymous 'Assassins' in Ubisoft's action adventure game series and compares in great detail the narrative of the series with the historical 'Assassins' of the twelfth century.

Following up is **Roman Ohlendorf**'s *Playing with the legend – Ostension and Extra-Textual Production in Minecraft*. Taking both a game and folklore studies approach and drawing on the concepts of fan-production, ostension and remediation, Ohlendorf examines the origin of *Herobrine*, a legend created by the fans and players of Mojang's enormously popular *Minecraft*.

Stefan Piasecki's *Redemption through Annihilation?!* Focuses on *Game Designer's Views on Religion, Culture and Society and Its Influence on Digital Games*. He presents the results of an explorative study amongst young game developers and addresses questions like "What do game

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3   Among others the recently published 'Digital Methodologies in the Sociology of Religion', edited by Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor and Suha Shakkour (2015) also contained several articles on the methodology of research of religion in games and virtual reality.

developers think and believe in political and religious matters, what role do they ascribe to themselves and their productions in it? How do developers comprehend their role?"

Next, *Praise Helix! - Christian Narrative in Twitch Plays: Pokémon* by **Jenny Saucerman** and **Dennis Ramirez** examines the influence of Christianity on the religious narrative which was created by the participants of *Twitch Plays: Pokemon* in 2014. Saucerman and Ramirez postulate that drawing from established christian religious symbols, imagery and structure created the basis for a "shared meaning and experience" for members of the community.

Last, we are happy to provide you with an interview with **Mark R Johnson**, game studies scholar at the University of York and creator of *Ultima Ratio Regum*, an ambitious but very successful game project aiming at creating "the most culturally, religiously and socially detailed procedural world ever generated"[4]. Mark also provided the title image for this issue which depicts a temple within *Ultima Ratio Regum.*[5]

We, the editors of *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* hope that you will enjoy this special issue on *Religion in Digital Games*. If you would like to submit a paper for a future issue of *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet*, feel free to send an abstract or full article to online.religion@zegk.uni-heidelberg.de. We will gladly consider the publication of further articles related to religion and video games[6] as well as any other topic fitting the scope of the journal.

For further information please see http://online.uni-hd.de. If you want to be kept up to date on things like new releases and call for papers then you can follow us on *Facebook* (https://www.facebook.com/onlinehjri/) or subscribe to our *Newsletter* by sending an e-mail (no subject) to the following address: *listserv@listserv.uni-heidelberg.de*. The text must be as follows (case sensitive):

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4   See http://www.ultimaratioregum.co.uk/game/info/.
5   See http://www.ultimaratioregum.co.uk/game/2015/03/14/procedural-altar-generation/.
6   Please note that the articles for this issue where drawn from submissions for our regular issue which was released in December 2015. A full issue on religion in digital games is in planning and an official call for papers is already in the works. Of course you can send us your abstracts or full papers for review at any time!

Literature

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Biographies

SIMONE HEIDBRINK is a junior researcher at the Institute of Religious Studies, University of Heidelberg, Germany. After majoring in Religious and Japanese Studies at the Universities of Heidelberg and Nara (Japan), she received her Master's degree in 2005. Simone is now about to finish her doctoral thesis on a Christian liturgical reform movement called "Emerging Church" which relies heavily on Web 2.0 Internet applications to distribute their views on Christianity, theology, and the role of rituals. From 2005 to 2011 she was a member of the Collaborative Research Center 619, "Ritual Dynamics" in the context of which she conducted also research on the virtual 3D environment Second Life. Simone's research focus is Rituals Studies, religion in museum contexts, (digital) Media Studies, the methods and theories of internet research as well as religion in digital games and gaming.

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TOBIAS KNOLL is editorial assistant for "Online – Heidelberg Journal for Religions on the Internet" and PhD candidate at the Institute of Religious Studies, University of Heidelberg. Tobias is currently working on his doctoral thesis on religious implications and reception of moral decision making systems in digital games like *Mass Effect*. His general focus of research is contemporary religion and player agency in video games as well as reception of and discourse on religion in popular "geek and nerd" culture.

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