"In You All Things": Biblical Influences on Story, Gameplay, and Aesthetics in Guerrilla Games' *Horizon Zero Dawn*

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ABSTRACT

This article considers several instances of biblical reception in the science-fiction role-playing game *Horizon Zero Dawn* (Guerrilla Games/Sony, 2017). The game's characterisation of technology, science, and religion has led some commentators to understand *Horizon Zero Dawn* as presenting a firm rejection of religious narratives in favour of scientific perspectives. However, closer examination of the game's biblical influences reveals that *Horizon Zero Dawn* employs religious ideas of the past and present to articulate its vision of a post-apocalyptic future.

The integration of biblical material into the story, aesthetics, and gameplay of *Horizon Zero Dawn* provides multi-layered interactions with specific characters, images, and ideas from the Bible. The game engages with the narrative of David and Goliath, the plague imagery of the Exodus narrative, and New Testament apocalyptic imagery in order to tell a story of ecological collapse, global apocalypse, and technological re-creation. Investigation of its biblical influences demonstrates that *Horizon Zero Dawn* embraces religious narratives insofar as they may be integrated into the game's discussion of human responsibility, environmental sustainability, and the existential concerns of its post-apocalyptic scenario.

KEYWORDS

Biblical reception; Video games; *Horizon Zero Dawn*; Guerrilla Games; Science fiction; Apocalyptic; Post-apocalyptic; Artificial intelligence (AI); Biblical imagery; Creation and re-creation; Genesis; Exodus; David and Goliath; Jesus; Revelation; Biblical plagues; Environmental ethics; Religion in video games; Storytelling in video games; Gameplay; Mythology; Myth-making

Horizon Zero Dawn (*HZD*) does not wear its biblical allusions on its sleeve.[1] Released on PlayStation 4 to considerable critical acclaim in 2017,[2] this post-apocalyptic, science-fiction role-playing game has sold over 10 million copies worldwide.[3] It is replete with references to mythology and the ancient world—but its biblical influences are among

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[1] *Horizon Zero Dawn*, Guerrilla Games/Sony Interactive Entertainment, 2017, PlayStation 4.

[2] "Horizon Zero Dawn Global Sales Exceed 2.6 Million," *Guerilla Games*, 16 March 2017, tinyurl.com/4ejr3spa.

[3] Hermen Hulst, "Horizon Zero Dawn Celebrates Second Anniversary, 10 Million Copies Sold Worldwide," *PlayStation Blog*, 28 February 2019, tinyurl.com/4xewafpw.

some of its most subtle. The connection is ambiguous enough that the degree to which *HZD* contains biblical material has been contested among some fans.[4] *HZD* rarely adapts biblical material through direct re-tellings; rather, inspiration drawn from the Bible is woven into the fabric of the game. In this article, I will elucidate several cases in which *HZD*'s interactions with stories, characters, and imagery from the Bible have significantly contributed to its world-building, narrative, and gameplay mechanics. There is no single "interpretive key" to understanding the array of *HZD*'s biblical references; in video games, such intertextual connections have the capacity to be both multifaceted and multimodal.[5] To be sure, others may find facets to the game's biblical allusions that are not explored here. It is my contention that *HZD* goes beyond surface-level allusions to the Bible to engage with biblical material as part of the ethical and existential dimensions of its interactive science-fiction story. I encourage readers to (re-)play the game to discover how its use of biblical material shapes their own subjective gameplay experience.[6]

In *HZD*, the player must navigate a distant-future, post-apocalyptic world as Aloy, a girl born 'without a mother' into a strongly matriarchal society of hunter-gatherers. As the player begins to unravel the mysteries of Aloy's origin, she encounters the remnants of an ancient (but technologically-advanced) civilisation, long since extinct. Aloy discovers that the world was once destroyed by an uncontrollable proliferation of highly advanced robotic war machines, which were controlled by rogue artificial intelligences with no purpose except to consume. The plague generated a global-scale military conflict, and destruction and toxification of the ecosystem. This led to the mass extinction of all life on Earth thousands of years before Aloy was born. Aloy's existence, and the existence of her world, was made possible only through the efforts of Elisabet Sobeck and her team of 22nd-century scientists, who left behind a sophisticated AI to "re-seed" the planet and recreate a viable ecosystem through an initiative known as Project: Zero Dawn. *HZD* presents a cautionary tale of ecological collapse brought about by the hubris of human

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[4] See, for example, "Horizon Zero Dawn and the Bible," Discussion thread on Reddit, tinyurl.com/ynadvdj6. For an analysis of fan reactions to religious content in video games, see Lars de Wildt and Stef Aupers, "Pop Theology: Forum discussions on religion in video games," *Information, Communication & Society* 23 (2019): 1444–62, doi:10.1080/1369118X.1577476.

[5] Mark Cameron Love, "Not-So-Sacred Quests: Religion, Intertextuality and Ethics in Video Games," *Religious Studies and Theology* 29 (2010): 200, doi:10.1558/rsth.v29i2.191.

[6] On the methodological imperative of gameplay as part of video game research, see Gregory Price Grieve's contribution in Heidi A. Campbell et al., "Gaming Religionworlds: Why Religious Studies Should Pay Attention to Religion in Gaming," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 84 (2016): 654–57, doi:10.1093/jaarel/lfv091.

expansionism and exploitation of Earth's resources.[7] Through its narrative, the game engages with questions of personal agency, individual and communal ethical responsibility, and the relationship between religious and technologically-advanced perspectives on the world.[8]

In order to provide an appropriate context for an analysis of biblical influences in *HZD*, I will begin by discussing the game's reception of religious texts through its characterisation of a religious origin story told by inhabitants of its post-apocalyptic future. This will enable us to assess how the game interacts with the following biblical material: (1) the story of David and Goliath, which formed the building blocks for *HZD*'s gameplay mechanics and aesthetic, as well as certain story elements; (2) imagery of the plagues of Egypt and allusions to Pharaoh, Aaron, and Miriam from the biblical Exodus narrative, which are used to express *HZD*'s cautionary ecological tale and explore human moral responsibility towards the environment; and (3) New Testament apocalyptic imagery and Gospel references. The latter help to construct the game's post-apocalyptic genre and the characterisation of Aloy and Elisabet as salvific figures, wherein allusions to Jesus serve to define who they are—and who they are not. The goal of this article is not to project complete biblical narratives onto the story of *HZD*, but to trace instances in which biblical material has been used to shape the story and development of this highly influential triple-A game. Doing so will allow us to tease apart how biblical reception, so embedded, may contribute much more than a recognisable visual aesthetic or mythic narrative framework. The integration of biblical material in *HZD* provides one method through which the game enters into dialogue with theological and ecological questions, combining religious imagery of the past and present in order to convey a world of the future.

Knowledge, ignorance, and the reception of religious narratives

Before assessing specific instances of biblical reception in the world of *HZD*, it is important to establish the tone with which the game interacts with religious narratives. Such context is required to guide any analysis of how the game's creators have received and presented biblical material, especially within a game frequently questioning the beliefs which shape human cultures and their moral values.[9] As is common in narrative

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[7] Janine Tobeck and Donald Jellerson, "Caring about the Past, Present, and Future in William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* and Guerilla Games' *Horizon: Zero Dawn*," *Arts* 7 (2018): 66, doi:10.3390/arts7040053.

[8] Tobeck and Jellerson, "Past, Present and Future," 68.

[9] Tobeck and Jellerson, "Past, Present, and Future," 66, 68.

video games, *HZD* is infused with intertextuality, drawing on many different cultural references and sources (including, but not limited to, religious and mythological narratives and motifs). Not all such "intertextual echoes" carry equal weight: some may be the subject of substantial exploration and critique within the game; others may simply be "throwaway" references, or concepts cited (and perhaps roundly rejected) without any serious engagement at all.[10]

The strongly humanistic thrust of the game's story has been cited as evidence against the idea that *HZD* engages meaningfully with the Bible, due to the game's emphasis on a scientific perspective on the world.[11] In this view, it is a "great irony that […] the story borrows much of its shape from the biblical narrative."[12] However, the game's argument in favour of scientific literacy does not prevent it from utilising religious or mythological motifs in the telling of its story.[13] Additionally, religious narratives are acknowledged as a legitimate (though not unproblematic) way in which people groups make sense of their environment, identity, and origins. The game's attitude towards religious narratives, including biblical material, is shown most fully through the origin story of Aloy's tribe, the Nora.

The Nora's origin story provides an account of the creation of all life (including the machines that roam the world) by their goddess, All-Mother. The player (as Aloy) can listen to a version of the Nora's origin story in the mission "Mother's Heart," where it is presented as an oral history being passed down to younger generations. It commences: "In the beginning… all life came from All-Mother." The initial phrase borrows from the opening words of Genesis: "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth…" (Gen 1:1). This phrase is deeply associated with biblical creation narratives, which have permeated Western concepts of cultural and religious creation myths.[14] Against this cultural background of biblical reception, the use of this familiar motif immediately identifies the Nora origin story as a religious creation narrative.

Additionally, the Nora's narrative broadly follows the pattern of creation, fall, and redemptive sacrifice, and as such resonates with certain readings of the biblical

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[10] Love, "Not-So-Sacred Quests," 199–200; 208.

[11] Kyle Keating, "Horizon Zero Dawn and the Technology That Enslaves and Saves Us," *Christ and Pop Culture*, 10 November 2017, tinyurl.com/kjtfp5vu.

[12] Keating, "Horizon."

[13] For an in-depth analysis of religious motifs in *HZD*, see: Lars de Wildt, Stef Aupers, Cindy Krassen and Iulia Coanda, "'Things Greater than Thou': Post-Apocalyptic Religion in Games," *Religions* 9 (2018): 169–189, doi:10.3390/rel9060169.

[14] R. R. Reno, *Genesis*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010), 19.

metanarrative (especially within some Protestant Christian perspectives). The Nora's account of a "fall," in which human beings come to act contrary to their creator's intent, holds that machines are responsible for tempting humans away from All-Mother. Technology thus assumes the role of the serpent which tempts the first humans in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3). With the Nora tribe alone remaining "faithful,'" the machines are said to have lured the other tribes away from All-Mother with promises of greater protection and technological convenience: "Though they took of Her bounty, they wanted more. […] And so the faithless left with the machines." Before long, the machines "betrayed" humanity and enslaved them in their "cities of metal." Finally, in a confrontation that echoes the battle between the great dragon and the mother described in Revelation 12, the most powerful of the machines ("the Metal Devil") attempted to kill All-Mother by launching an assault on the Nora's sacred mountain—that is, All-Mother's corporeal body.[15]

The Nora storyteller grounds her story in the physical evidence of their world, most notably the gargantuan inert machine which can be seen half-buried, half-wrapped around the mountain: "She struck [the Metal Devil] down, forever. As you know, for his lifeless body is up there still…" This line has particular impact for those players who have noticed the shadowy silhouette of this ancient machine against the horizon as they have navigated through the first region of the game. The crumbling remains attributed to the "world of metal" constructed by the machines (which are strongly reminiscent of 21st-century western architecture, vehicles, and transport infrastructure) can be seen in the ruins scattered throughout the landscape. The inclusion of tangible structures within the game provides an indication that this mythological retelling is not entirely removed from the history of the Nora's world. Nevertheless, the player is encouraged not to be entirely satisfied by the Nora's interpretation of their origins: Aloy has already seen evidence of a bleaker and more complex history in the underground bunker discovered in the very first playable scene of the game.

As Aloy uncovers this history of her world, revealed through holographic, audio, and written records, she finds the story behind the story of her people. It is a more complex and confusing history than the one told to Nora children, and requires an understanding of non-human forces in terms of ecology and technology rather than an exclusively religious framework. In order to make sense of what she finds, Aloy must learn that the intelligence the Nora call "All-Mother" is not a deity as the Nora have understood it, but an exceptionally sophisticated machine. For this reason, one review of the game

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[15] Bruce Byrne, *Horizon Zero Dawn Collector's Edition Guide* (Hamburg: Future Press, 2017), 610.

argues that the tribe's "religious beliefs are shown to be mere superstitions, primitive explanations for things that only science could truly explain."[16] However, *HZD* is not so dismissive of religious narratives. While the game's official guide describes the Nora's origin story as "Nora myth," it also confirms that this mythology is seen to be rooted in the reality of Aloy's world.[17]

In their analysis of religion in *HZD*, de Wildt et al. argue that the Nora's worship of the machine as All-Mother serves to illustrate their "ignorance."[18] This is broadly accurate, in the sense that the tribal societies of Aloy's world are ignorant of the technological roots of their civilisation. However, this understanding does not do justice to the game's presentation of the role of religious narratives in transmitting knowledge and ideas. The Nora lack the context to understand their origins from a technological perspective; but their rendering of their world's history through myth still offers a meaningful reflection of ways in which their world is structured. For instance, the machine the Nora worship was created to be "an immortal guardian […] Mother Nature as an AI."[19] Hence, the Nora's deification of this technological intelligence as their eternal protector and source of all life actually corresponds to its intended purpose. The tribe's sacred mountain is indeed the place of their origin, though the Nora's ancestors were not birthed from a single "womb" but a suite of highly advanced incubators hidden within the mountain. The facility, which was once designated the "Cradle," has been interpreted by the Nora according to their reference points for the origin of human life: the body of a mother.[20]

The Nora's creation narrative mythologises their beginnings—not as religious deception, but as an articulation of the tribe's collective memory. Without access to the scientific or cultural context by which to understand such technology, the Nora do not possess the vocabulary to grasp their technological origins. What the Nora do understand, however—and express through tribal belief and tradition—is that they emerged from their sacred mountain (within which the "Cradle" resides); that a non-human intelligence is responsible for their existence and has made their survival possible; and that each component of their environment was designed to exist interdependently as part of the same ecological whole which must be respected and kept in balance. Each of these ideas corresponds to the technological reality of their world, albeit expressed through non-technological concepts. There is much truth in the Nora's beliefs about their origins, but

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[16] Keating, "Horizon."

[17] Byrne, *Guide*, 610.

[18] de Wildt et al., "Post-Apocalyptic Religion," 184.

[19] Sobeck's description of GAIA in holographic recording, "The Good News."

[20] Paul Davies, *The Art of Horizon Zero Dawn* (London: Titan Books, 2017), 43.

the Nora are shown to contextualise what they can understand into a belief system which nonetheless diverges considerably from the historic accounts found by Aloy.

The game's characterisation of the Nora's origin story demonstrates a complex understanding of the relationship between history and myth. As the official art book notes, "there is truth to the stories [Aloy's] people tell about the Old Ones."[21] However, with the new information and understanding which Aloy brings them, the Nora are also expected to adjust to a fuller appreciation of their own identity and the nature of the world in which they live. Aloy consistently challenges the Nora's isolationism throughout the game, but it is with a greater scientific understanding of their world that all spiritual justification for their sense of racial and religious supremacy is undermined. Aloy confronts her tribe on this issue during the mission "Heart of the Nora," in which she uses her newly-acquired historical and cultural understanding to challenge their religious dogmatism. Historical accounts and scientific discoveries are to be integrated into the self-understanding of the tribe and the individual, and may demand changes in behaviour, modifications of belief, and a greater sense of moral responsibility in response to new ideas. Through Aloy's recovery of physical artefacts and digital historical records, therefore, the game also makes the point that religious narratives are not the only (or the best) means to access the past.

The essential dichotomy of the game is not science versus religion, but knowledge versus ignorance (especially wilful ignorance). During the mission "The Mountain that Fell," Aloy stumbles across a holographic recording of technology magnate Ted Faro, who makes the unilateral decision to erase the database that was intended to pass on the sum of human knowledge to future generations:

> Ted Faro: I can't stop thinking about the ones who'll come after us. Those innocents. [...] We're going to give them knowledge? Like it's a gift? [...] It's not a gift, it's a disease! [...] It's not too late. If we're willing to sacrifice. [...]

> [Scientist]: A sacrifice? It's not a sacrifice, it's cultural obliteration [...] millennia of culture—

> Ted Faro: I'm sorry. [...] But sometimes, to protect innocents... innocents have to die.

Faro proceeds to murder Earth's remaining scientists, literally and symbolically wiping their knowledge from existence. Despite his attempts to justify his actions as protecting future generations from being destroyed by too much knowledge, Faro is indubitably the villain of the piece for his misuse and erasure of knowledge.

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[21] Davies, *Art*, 162.

By contrast, attempts to gain or pass on knowledge, even in religious or metaphysical form, are upheld by the game's narrative as worthwhile and necessary tasks for human flourishing. Despite the loss of their great body of knowledge, the Old Ones' design for a balanced ecosystem is enshrined in Nora myth.[22] Warnings about human hubris remain in the cultural consciousness of the Nora and other tribes, transmitted through their religious and cultural lore—which has been derived, in part, from the technology and ecosystem that Sobeck and her scientists created. In the cut-scene that follows Aloy's discovery of Faro's final crime, Aloy expresses the view that the Old Ones' legacy was not "turned to dust" but disseminated "among the world they made." For Aloy, their creation of a new Earth embodies their cultural insights, technological capabilities, and "hope": "The world we are living in… it's a monument to what they died trying to accomplish." In the absence of a formal historical and scientific record, mythology keeps the lessons of the former world, and the origins of the planet's post-apocalyptic existence, from being entirely forgotten.

In the Nora's origin myth, intertextuality with biblical narratives is not so much a means for the game to endorse or reject biblical material.[23] Instead, biblical allusions provide familiar touchstones by which to frame a broader comment on the role and value of religion in society. In this way, the game presents religious narratives as constituting a limited perspective, but one which can preserve and transmit truths about the world.

David vs Goliath, Aloy vs Machines: Conceiving Character, Gameplay, and Aesthetics in *HZD*

In view of the game's acceptance of religious narratives as one way in which people make sense of the world, *HZD*'s reception of the Bible should not be understood as inherently hostile. As well as forming part of the game's conversation regarding scientific and religious worldviews, the Bible was a major source of inspiration for key concepts within the game. One of the most thoroughly integrated sources of inspiration, which was used to form both the protagonist's character and elements of gameplay, is the biblical story of David and Goliath (1 Sam 17).[24] While the story of David and Goliath informed key components of gameplay—and thus the very character of the *HZD* experience—it is important to note that no explicit reference is made to David and Goliath within the game itself. *HZD* has not sought to retell or adapt the story of David and Goliath, but to draw

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[22] "Mother's Heart"; Byrne, *Guide*, 610.

[23] Love, "Not-So-Sacred Quests," 196.

[24] Davies, *Art*, 13.

upon the dynamics of the story and its characters in order to conceptualise elements of character, gameplay, and the overall aesthetic of the game. In so doing, the game designers' reception of the David and Goliath story has a fundamental role to play in the construction of Aloy and her world.

According to the game's developers, the design of player character and main protagonist Aloy grew out of a "core concept influenced by the story of David and Goliath."[25] This biblical tale is familiar to many in Western culture: in his narrative commentary on 1 Samuel, Keith Bodner notes that "the showdown between David and Goliath is probably one of the best known episodes in the Hebrew Bible."[26] Such is the popular reception of the text that this "story of victory against the odds" has resulted in "David and Goliath becoming part of a cliché."[27] Commenting on the nature of the story's influence on the development of *HZD*, the official publication *The Art of Horizon Zero Dawn* explains: "Early concept paintings portrayed gigantic, ferocious machines contrasting with a tiny figure in the foreground."[28] In the biblical story, the young Israelite David defeats Goliath, a heavily-armoured Philistine warrior, in single combat. Despite being considerably smaller and less well-equipped than Goliath, David uses speed and skill to bring down his opponent: "David ran quickly towards the battle line to meet the Philistine [Goliath]. David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground" (1 Sam 17:48–49).

The game's reception of David and Goliath hinges on the image of a small figure facing off against a much bigger opponent. This is shown in the bold aesthetics of *HZD*, which from the beginning portrayed its lead character as a diminutive figure overshadowed by enormous machines.[29] This arrangement became an iconic feature of the game's aesthetic, carried through to *HZD*'s box art. On the front cover of the game, Aloy braces herself for combat while an enormous, dinosaur-like machine looms over her amid the grassy terrain.[30]

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[25] Davies, *Art*, 13.

[26] Keith Bodner, *1 Samuel: A Narrative Commentary,* Hebrew Bible Monographs 19 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009), 177.

[27] Hugh S. Pyper, "1 and 2 Samuel" in *Fortress Commentary on the Bible: The Old Testament and Apocrypha*, ed. Gale A. Yee, Hugh R. Page Jr. and Matthew J. M. Coomber (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 373.

[28] Davies, *Art*, 13.

[29] Davies, *Art*, 13.

[30] For a larger variant of this image, in which Aloy is surrounded by snow, see: Davies, *Art*, 1.

The dramatic difference in scale between Aloy and her technological opponents is borne out in the gameplay. As Aloy explores the world, she faces machines so large that they "can trample her underfoot."[31] Aloy does not face down a single gargantuan foe, as David does in his duel with Goliath; instead, she inhabits a world full of powerful enemies, any one of which could be her last encounter. When facing the largest of these, such as the Thunderjaw (the machine depicted on the cover art) or the marching, tank-like Deathbringer, her melee attacks can reach little higher than their enormous metal feet. The player finds that Aloy is also frequently dwarfed by her environment: ruins of buildings and machines tower over her in the open world; sprawling underground facilities ("cauldrons") are packed with technology that is made to match the gigantic scale of the machines, not human interlopers.[32] The effect is seen further as Aloy traverses the awe-inspiring landscape of mountains, crevasses, deserts, and forests which make up her world, where she appears as a small figure against sprawling backgrounds.[33]

Aloy encompasses human vulnerability but also intellectual prowess, allowing her to out-manoeuvre her mechanical opponents. The comparison the creators made between David and the game's protagonist led to the conception of Aloy as "a character who was skilled, smart, strategic and agile."[34] Like David facing Goliath, Aloy is characterised as overcoming her opponents with intelligence and precision rather than relying on raw power. Remarks regarding David in the *Fortress Commentary on the Bible* might apply just as well to Aloy: "a new champion emerges who wins by cunning and skill rather than by strength or force of numbers."[35] In *HZD*, a ranged play style fosters quick thinking and strategic deployment of weaponry by the player, who will likely find that exclusive use of close-range fighting will lead Aloy to a quick death.[36]

Throughout the game, Aloy must engage in combat with formidable enemies which are vastly superior in armaments and scale. Within the game's combat system, Aloy is able to switch deftly between a variety of ranged weapons, including a sling (which launches bombs rather than stones) and various specialised bows. By contrast, she possesses only one close-range weapon: her spear, which is used primarily for close-range defence, stealth attacks, and technological interfacing.[37] Thus the game establishes another

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[31] Byrne, *Guide*, 131.

[32] Davies, *Art*, 178–9.

[33] For examples, see: Davies, *Art*, 162-3; 171–9.

[34] Davies, *Art*, 13.

[35] Pyper, "1 and 2 Samuel," 373.

[36] Byrne, *Guide*, 26-27.

[37] Byrne, *Guide*, 89.

connection between Aloy's fighting style and David's encounter with Goliath: both entail identifying the weak point in a particular enemy's defences "that a clever opponent could exploit" using the appropriate fighting strategy.[38] While David's choice of stone and sling may seem humble to modern readers, they comprised a weapon of war which would be tactically advantageous against a large opponent laden with heavy armour (as indicated by his victory in 1 Samuel 17:50).[39] When encountering a foreigner who wears heavy metal-plated clothing, Aloy remarks that she would have no trouble besting him in combat because of how severely his armour would slow him down.[40] Here, Aloy's comment echoes David's refusal to wear heavy armour to battle Goliath (1 Sam 17:39).

Before the player is given the opportunity to engage in combat, Aloy is first taught to employ covert tactics to navigate the ever-present threat of the machines. In the tutorial mission "Lessons of the Wild," the player is required to collect rocks from beside a stream, which Aloy will throw to lure a machine into a trap. Those familiar with the David and Goliath story may recall that, when preparing to face Goliath, David "chose five smooth stones from the wadi" (1 Sam 17:40).[41] In the biblical narrative, David goes on to sling one of these rocks at his opponent. In *HZD*, the rocks selected by the player are not used as weapons in themselves but to demonstrate the importance of strategy in combat, as established in the following exchange between Aloy and her mentor:

> Rost: There's the herd [of machines]. Alright, it's time to throw some rocks.
>
> Aloy: But rocks can't hurt machines, right?
>
> Rost: No, but they can distract them, draw them into traps...[42]

Aloy cannot use rocks to inflict damage against the machines, as David does against Goliath. Certainly, the image finds more immediate parallels with civilians throwing stones at armoured tanks in modern-day militarised zones. However, as is often the case in video games, the scene offers more than one layer of intertextuality.[43] The parallel between Aloy's lesson and the David and Goliath story does not rest on the use of a rock as an effective weapon. Rather, Aloy's collection and use of the rocks underlines the game designers' reception of David as a resourceful and quick-witted character. Like David, who chooses a long-range weapon and selects his own ammunition rather than facing his opponent head-on with sword or spear (cf. 1 Sam 17:45–47), Aloy learns how to use skill

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[38] Bodner, *1 Samuel,* 178.

[39] Pyper, "1 and 2 Samuel," 373.

[40] Dialogue between Aloy and Erend during the mission "Mother's Heart."

[41] "Wadi" may also be rendered as "stream" (NIV) or "brook" (ESV).

[42] Dialogue from "Lessons of the Wild" mission.

[43] Love, "Not-So-Sacred Quests," 197.

and dexterity to fight the machines on her own terms. In *HZD*, the goal is not victory so much as survival. The mission thus teaches players that the basics of the game's combat rely on planning, situational awareness, and careful execution of strategy.

The player's success in combat, which relies on utilising at least some measure of agility and accuracy against overpowering enemies, is also borne out as a fundamental feature of Aloy's character within the game's story. Aloy's dexterity and potential for fierce accuracy is established not only as a preferred combat style but as a distinctive character trait. Shortly after "Lessons of the Wild," a Nora boy throws a rock at a young Aloy, which strikes her on the forehead. Apparently possessing the upper hand he throws another, only for Aloy to catch it out of the air. The player can then decide whether Aloy will throw the rock back or simply drop it. If the choice is made for Aloy to throw the rock back (either to strike a third rock out of the boy's hands or to "aim for his head"), Aloy is shown to be preternaturally agile. (If the player decides to aim for the boy's head, she only fails to hit her mark because Rost, her guardian, intervenes.) Although this sequence is not evidence for the influence of the David and Goliath story *per se*—its only commonality being the throwing of a rock—it parallels the image of David throwing his stone with deadly accuracy. This scene further establishes Aloy's physical capability by presenting it through a character moment in the story as well as through the gameplay. In other words, this scene reinforces Aloy's role as a character who uses her speed and her wits to survive.

The inspiration drawn from the narrative of 1 Samuel 17 provides a pertinent example of how biblical reception may inform not just a story idea, but the very mechanics of gameplay. The designers' use of their David and Goliath concept, in which the player adopts a vulnerable but ultimately superior role similar to that of David, directly "guide[s] the player to [the] playstyle" envisioned by the game's creators.[44] By engaging with the game's combat design, patterned loosely on the dynamics of David's battle with Goliath, the player is steered towards fulfilling Aloy's characterisation as intelligent and quick-witted in the way she navigates the world and deals with intellectual and physical challenges. This helps foster congruence between what the player is doing in gameplay and how Aloy is presented in dialogue and cut scenes, so that the game's presentation of Aloy's character remains convincing both within and outside of battle.[45] In this way the "David and Goliath" dynamic, as conceived by the game's designers, forms a unifying undercurrent to the player's experience of the game. Another biblical narrative inspired the history that led Aloy to face such overwhelming odds: the biblical story of the exodus.

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[44] Davies, *Art*, 13.

[45] Byrne, *Guide*, 628.

Environmental Ethics in Faro's Plague, Aaron's Conflict, and Miriam's Technology

If the tale of David and Goliath shapes Aloy's character and the intended play style, then the plague imagery of Exodus helped inspire the story of Aloy's world. *HZD*'s plague imagery recalls the biblical accounts of the plagues of Egypt, described in Exodus 7:1—10:20. Allusions to the Exodus story are particularly prominent within *HZD*'s world-building narrative, which recounts how the Earth as we know it was destroyed and Aloy's world created. The destruction of Earth is portrayed within a future that is not all that distant from our present experiences of climate change and the penetration of technology into everyday life. Through this proximity to the real world, full ecological collapse (precipitated by human actions) is posited as a possible future for our planet, for which—in the view of narrative director John Gonzalez—"a real-life robot apocalypse" is "obviously a real danger."[46] The world-ending "plague" of robots therefore functions as a cautionary tale for the game's audience, with its story of errant technology forming an ecological parable exploring humanity's responsibility towards, and reliance upon, the natural world. Plague imagery is a core element of the game's comment on humanity's impact on the environment, and is firmly associated with the biblical plagues through allusions to three figures of the Exodus narrative: Pharaoh, Miriam, and Aaron. References to these biblical characters are used to explore themes of moral responsibility in the face of human-wrought ecological collapse.

HZD makes use of Exodus plague imagery to express a contention that the two narratives hold in common: namely, that "over-exploitation of human and natural resources [lead] to ecological collapse."[47] In the Exodus narrative, God sends Moses to lead the oppressed Hebrew people out of their slavery and exploitation in Egypt. When Pharaoh refuses to allow the Hebrews to leave, the land is afflicted with a sequence of catastrophic plagues that threaten land, livestock, and human lives. Environmental devastation occurs through chaotic ecological imbalance, which is characterised by extreme generation (in the form of animal swarms) as well as by disease, darkness, and death.[48] The Egyptians' water source is polluted when the river Nile turns to blood (Exod 7:14–24). Frogs, gnats, and flies interfere with the Egyptians' ability to live in clean, comfortable spaces (Exod 8). Humans and animals alike are afflicted with disease (Exod 9:1–12) while extreme weather conditions make the world temporarily uninhabitable

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[46] Interview with John Gonzalez in Byrne, *Guide*, 628.

[47] Ched Myers, "Nature against Empire: Exodus Plagues, Climate Crisis, and Hard-Heartedness," *Direction* 49.1 (2020): 12.

[48] William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,* The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 345–346.

outside of human shelter (Exod 9:13–35). A huge swarm of locusts consumes all remaining sources of food (Exod 10:15). Finally, three days of darkness overshadow Egypt (Exod 10:21–29) before human lives are directly destroyed by God who passes over the land (Exod 12:29–30).

Faro's mechanical plague parallels many of these catastrophes. As a result of the robot swarm, the inhabitants of Earth suffer the pollution of water sources, famine, disease, toxification of the atmosphere, and the invasion and destruction of human and animal habitats. Ultimately, the complete collapse of the ecosystem and the machines' consumption of all organic matter on Earth echoes the effects of the Egyptian plague of locusts: "nothing green was left, no tree, no plant in the field, in all the land of Egypt" (Exod 10:15). Finally, there is death—not merely of firstborn people and animals but all life on Earth (cf. Exod 12:29–30). *HZD* takes the plague imagery of the Exodus narrative and magnifies it on a planetary scale.

The Exodus plague narrative forges an inextricable link between human responsibility and environmental crises.[49] The story maintains an acute cultural relevance "as we grasp for metaphors to make sense of climate apocalyptic," especially during a time when "we've reached new levels of both scientific clarity and political denial about the historical ultimatums we face."[50] Faro could have prevented environmental catastrophe if he had not been so determined to ignore the consequences of his actions to secure his own position of power (compare Pharaoh's similar response in Exod 10). Recorded conversations between Faro and his advisors suggest that he could have stopped the robot swarm before it began if he had simply installed a failsafe which would have made it possible to deactivate the machines. Faro refuses to take responsibility for the environmental impact of his business practices or the robotic plague which results. In contrast, Elisabet Sobeck is established as a more ethical figure through reference to Moses's sister, Miriam (described as a "prophet" in Exod 15:20). Aloy learns that Sobeck was once a prominent scientist working for Ted Faro at Faro Automated Solutions, but left the company on moral grounds because of Faro's turn towards militarisation. Sobeck founded "Miriam Technologies" in order to advance environmentally sustainable "green" robotics.[51] As well as positioning Sobeck in opposition to Faro (paralleling how Moses and

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[49] Terence E. Freshen, *Exodus*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), 106–107.

[50] Myers, "Nature against Empire," 8. See also: Thomas B. Dozeman, "Exodus," in *Fortress Commentary on the Bible: The Old Testament and Apocrypha*, ed. Gale A. Yee, Hugh R. Page Jr. and Matthew J. M. Coomber (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 151.

[51] Byrne, *Guide*, 606.

his siblings are placed in opposition to the pharaoh of Egypt), the naming of Miriam Technologies emphasises the divergence of Sobeck's work from the capitalist ethos of Faro Automated Solutions. The reference to "Miriam Technologies" in Sobeck's biography underscores her rejection of Faro's autocratic decision to prioritise wealth and power over the preservation and protection of the environment.

HZD's narrative suggests that the creation of ethically-minded alternative technologies is admirable, but it is not enough to ensure our survival. Rejection of Faro's philosophy cannot prevent his actions or reverse their impact. Since Faro's power, wealth, and influence endured after Sobeck left his corporation, Faro is shown to become unfettered in his corporate expansion, disseminating his armies of robots into every continent. Earth's first and only trillionaire in an aggressively capitalist society, and owner of his own "private army," Faro cannot be intercepted or restrained by a higher authority.[52] He embodies an excessive degree of power and autonomy. Even the towering figure of a pharaoh in the ancient world (to whom Faro is implicitly compared) would have been restrained by political and religious duties and limited by borders; Faro manipulates, and effectively controls, city states around the globe.[53] *HZD* uses Faro as a cautionary tale in which an individual is able to amass enough power and wealth that they are in a position to do irreparable damage to social, political, and natural environments in their search for increased personal gain.[54]

In the biblical story, God is capable of causing and ending the ecological crises at will (e.g. Exod 8:31; 9:33); but Faro loses all control of his creation. As a result of Faro "playing God" with the use of natural resources and the fate of entire continents, the robot swarm devastates the planet. When it becomes clear that Faro's error will ultimately destroy all organic life, he turns to Sobeck in the hope that she will find a solution—and preserve his reputation. Sobeck informs him that tackling the robot swarm will require extreme measures (as told in a holographic recording during the mission "Maker's End"). In order to buy enough time for Sobeck's plan to succeed, humanity must slow the encroaching plague long enough to build the AI which will restore the planet's ecosystem. Under the command of General Aaron Herres, countless individuals are sent to fight the advancing robots with no hope of survival, believing they are aiding a plan which will save what remains of their home and their loved ones. Herres shares his first name with the biblical figure of Aaron, who proclaims the will of God to Pharaoh on behalf Moses

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[52] Byrne, *Guide*, 606.

[53] As seen in supplementary audio and text files ("datapoints") the player can find at the ruins of Faro Automated Solutions during the mission "Maker's End."

[54] Tobeck and Jellerson, "Past, Present, and Future," 66.

(Aaron's brother). Aaron not only delivers warning of the plagues as a "prophet" (Exod 7:1); he actually performs some of the devastating "signs and wonders" which constitute the initial plagues (Exod 7:3). Herres does not instigate the Faro plague, but he "inspire[s] millions of innocents to sacrifice themselves in battle" despite knowing their deployment will mean certain death.[55] Finally, Herres delivers "the bad news": that it has been clear all along that the crisis cannot be averted, and all hope for their current world is lost.[56]

The connection between Herres and Aaron, though subtle, serves to reinforce the moral complexity of Herres's military actions and his role as mouthpiece for Project: Zero Dawn. Even knowing that his efforts have made a new world possible, Herres is overwhelmed by guilt for his involvement in the war against the Faro plague and the mechanisation of the armed forces that made Faro's swarm possible: "I have presided over the greatest wholesale slaughter of military personnel in the history of... history. […] Even before the swarm, I was helping death along."[57] As in the association between Sobeck and Miriam, the reference to Aaron places Herres in opposition to Faro: whereas Faro tries to abrogate responsibility for his actions, Herres displays deep remorse for the bloody role he plays in humanity's last stand against the machines. Herres sees in the future reinstantiation of life on Earth a chance for humanity to do things differently: "It is my hope that there will be no need for men like me in the world to come."[58] Herres believes that a better world is possible, but he recognises that he has no part in its construction. The hope for humanity's future, and a new world with a new order, resides with Elisabet Sobeck.

If video games can be a form of interactive myth-making, as Vivian Asimos proposes, *HZD* reaches for familiar religious and mythological narratives to help form its own "lore."[59] Through its application of biblical plague imagery, the game points back to human (religious) history as a way of conceptualising humanity's (technological) future. The Faro plague is not a means of re-telling the Exodus narrative in a science-fiction setting. Rather, like the game's reception of David and Goliath, the names and imagery associated with the biblical plagues of Egypt form part of the game's mythological texture. *HZD*'s story and world-building is compatible with parts of the Exodus narrative precisely because both

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[55] Holographic recording entitled, "The Bad News."

[56] Holographic recording played during the mission "Deep Secrets of the Lost."

[57] Dialogue during mission entitled "The Grave-Hoard."

[58] Dialogue during mission entitled "The Grave-Hoard."

[59] Vivian Asimos, "Playing the Myth: Video Games as Contemporary Mythology," *Implicit Religion* 21 (2018): 93, 95, doi:10.1558/imre.34691.

connect the ethical with the ecological.[60] Both raise existential questions about the relationship between humanity and the ecosystem of which they are apart, but which they can disproportionately affect through their actions. Both examine human power in the context of human limitation: we have the power to destroy our world; but after such destruction has been set in motion, are we able to save ourselves?

Forging a Post-apocalyptic Narrative Through New Testament Allusions

Faro's plague is conceptualised as a world-ending "apocalypse."[61] The language of apocalypse is closely associated with New Testament eschatological imagery within both the science-fiction genre and western culture more generally.[62] As in film, literature, visual arts, and other popular media, video games have drawn upon (and contributed to) popular visions of the apocalypse.[63] These portrayals have been profoundly influenced by Christian religious imagery, which is itself inspired by the narratives and imagery contained in the biblical book of Revelation.[64] *HZD* overtly acknowledges this connection between the western apocalyptic imaginary and the Bible in a supplementary "Datapoint" recording. Scientist Travis Tate declares that his mother, whose preferred section of the Bible was Revelation, had been right about the coming "End Times" which will occur "on account of sinful lifestyles." The facetious tone of the recording raises an implicit critique of religious attitudes to the end of the world. At the same time, Tate is forced to admit that, at least in some sense, "she was right!"[65]

As part of this apocalypse, the plague imagery of Faro's robots thus evokes the eschatological plagues of Revelation, which in turn draw on the plagues of the Exodus narrative.[66] Elsewhere, characters utilise religious terms for the destruction of their world and their hope for its recreation: one Datapoint refers to Elisabet Sobeck as "play[ing] the savior and the martyr" while another cites a personal desire for

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[60] For a detailed analysis of this connection in Exodus, see: Freshen, *Exodus*, 106–109.

[61] For example, by Aaron Herres in the holographic recording, "The Bad News."

[62] De Wildt et al., "Post-Apocalyptic Religion," 169. See also: Connor Pitetti, "Uses of the End of the World: Apocalypse and Postapocalypse as Narrative Modes," *Science Fiction Studies* 44 (2017): 439–440., doi: 10.5621/sciefictstud.44.3.0437.

[63] Natasha O'Hear and Anthony O'Hear, *Picturing the Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation in the Arts over Two Millennia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 239.

[64] O'Hear and O'Hear, *Picturing the Apocalypse*, 243.

[65] Datapoint, "Interview: Travis Tate."

[66] Ian Boxall, *Revelation: Vision and Insight. An Introduction to the Apocalypse* (London: SPCK, 2002), 64, 72.

"atonement."[67] In its use of religious apocalyptic language, *HZD* conveys an imagined (but not so far-flung) future in which some individuals fall back on their (western) cultural understanding and imagery of the end of the world in order to grasp their fate and that of the planet. In so doing, the game also leans on this selfsame cultural imaginary to convey the significance of its story on a metatextual level.

As well as situating the game's action after an apocalyptic event, *HZD* conveys a post-apocalyptic narrative in the sense that it critiques the apocalyptic genre. Connor Pitetti distinguishes apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic narratives according to their presentation of history.[68] Both are organised around "cataclysmic events" which cause irrevocable change to the world order (such as Faro's plague); but while the apocalyptic genre posits the apocalypse as a clear and defined rupture in which old and new worlds do not intersect, post-apocalyptic narratives present a future which continuously unfolds from the past.[69] In *HZD*, the decisions of the past continue to exert significant force upon the future, as seen through the impact that Faro's plague and Project: Zero Dawn continue to have on Aloy's world. This non-linear conception of history stands in contrast to the traditional linear progression of apocalyptic narratives wherein the old world is disconnected from the new, as in biblical apocalyptic texts to which the game alludes.[70]

The comparisons and contrasts made within *HZD* between New Testament apocalyptic motifs and the game's own story of destruction, salvation, and re-creation help to define *HZD*'s post-apocalyptic character. For example, the vision of new life captured in New Testament apocalyptic texts is described as "new heavens and a new earth," which are fashioned by divine agency out of the crucible of destruction (2 Pet 3:11–13; cf. Rev 21:1). The new order is entirely distinct from the former reality, which has completely "passed away" (Rev 21:4).[71] *HZD* establishes its own story of new organic life formed by an artificial intelligence that endures from the time of the apocalypse, and uses the old Earth and its fauna as a template for the world to come. Though this has been interpreted as "basically a science fiction retelling of the Noah's Ark story," re-populating the Earth in *HZD* is no simple matter of waiting out the apocalypse until the tide of robots has receded.[72] It is truly *post*-apocalyptic, in that the story continues to evolve far beyond

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[67] Datapoints "Rest in Peace" and "Interview 2: Brad Andac."

[68] Pitetti, "End of the World," 437–454.

[69] Pitetti, "End of the World," 438.

[70] Pitetti, "End of the World," 440.

[71] Pitetti, "End of the World," 440.

[72] Blake Hester, "*Horizon Zero Dawn* and the Morality of Playing God," *Paste Magazine,* 25 May 2017, tinyurl.com/4nbatzpn.

the end of Sobeck's world. Earth undergoes an untold number of creation and extinction events as the AI attempts to establish a suitable biosphere. As in the extreme ecological imbalance portrayed by the Exodus plagues, destruction and creation intermingle in a manner that seems more complex than in the progression of uncreation to recreation suggested by the comparison to the Noah's Ark story.[73] Only when the biosphere acquires ecological balance and stability is life allowed to evolve to create a self-sustaining ecosystem suitable for human habitation. Aloy's world emerges from a process of trial and error over many thousands of years, and continues to be shaped by the decisions and technology made by the Old Ones.

Similar distinctions are made in the way *HZD* interacts with the concept of salvation. Uniquely among her contemporaries, Sobeck is capable of granting life after death—for the planet, if not for individual souls. Sobeck is the author and messenger of Project: Zero Dawn, the only hope for the planet's survival after the apocalyptic Faro plague. She delivers her plan in the holographic recording "The Good News." Combined with her salvific role, this title introduces a direct comparison between Sobeck and Jesus, who bears the "good news" of the Gospel (e.g. Mark 1:1; Luke 4:18). The parallels between the "Good News" of Jesus and the "Good News" of Sobeck is heavily qualified within the game itself. While the Gospels proclaim Jesus to be the salvation of all humanity (as in John 3:16; 4:42), Sobeck can offer no salvation for her own generation or the world as they know it. Furthermore, Sobeck's salvific role is complexified by her decision to give up on her own world (and send innocent people to die under Herres's command) in order to attain any hope for the human race.

Nevertheless, Sobeck also dies a sacrificial death to protect Project: Zero Dawn against the incoming plague of machines. The project survives and GAIA, the governing artificial intelligence which Sobeck designed, eventually succeeds in creating a new ecosystem. GAIA is named in reference to the Greek mother earth goddess; its subroutines are also given the names from the Greco-Roman pantheon, categorising them beyond mere computer programs as governing intelligences capable of creating—and controlling—life.[74] Human beings are re-created millennia after their extinction using technology capable of growing embryos from human DNA. Human beings are thus introduced, fully formed, into the world GAIA has made.

Perceiving the parallels between *HZD*'s story of destruction and re-creation and the biblical metanarrative, one critic has concluded: "In the end, Horizon Zero Dawn is a

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[73] Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 345.

[74] De Wildt et al., "Post-Apocalyptic Religion," 182.

story about creation, its fall, its redemption, and its restoration, but one in which technology is the true religion and artificial intelligence the ultimate god."[75] Yet GAIA's re-creation of life on the Earth is *not* the end of this story. GAIA may be venerated as a goddess by the Nora, but even this incredibly sophisticated creator-AI is not all-powerful. Confronted with its own imminent demise, GAIA channels the resourcefulness of its maker and leaves behind a "genetic copy" of Sobeck: an infant who emerges from a Cradle facility, is found by the Nora, and raised as a girl named Aloy. Even thousands of years after its creator's death, GAIA relates to Sobeck as the source of salvation—for humanity, for the planet, and ultimately for GAIA itself. In "GAIA's Dying Plea," the AI addresses Sobeck: "Somehow you will find a way. In you, all things are possible." The latter phrase forms a compelling allusion to Jesus' prayer before his arrest and crucifixion: "He said, 'Abba, Father, for you all things are possible...'" (Mark 14:36).[76] With this allusion, GAIA accords Sobeck divine status, at least figuratively; after all, Sobeck is GAIA's creator, the designer of GAIA's systems and thought processes, and thus the true author of the world GAIA created.

When GAIA uses Sobeck's genetic material to create Aloy, Aloy's birth is presented as a kind of resurrection. As the "second coming" of Sobeck, who is established as the hope for humanity's salvation, Aloy is paralleled even more strongly with Jesus. Details of Aloy's life are patterned after the Gospel narrative, albeit with technological rather than divine origins: Aloy has an apparently miraculous birth; she is rejected by the religious authorities of her tribe; she takes on religious itinerant status; and some believe her to be to be the progeny of a deity.[77] When Aloy's tribe declare her their "anointed" during the mission "Heart of the Nora," however, Aloy emphatically rejects their veneration. The religiously-charged language of "anointed" conveys the instant mythologising of Aloy's character and actions in a way that runs entirely contrary to the reality of Aloy's experience. Aloy carves out her own individuality and claims ownership over her identity throughout the game, culminating in this rejection of a salvific title. Through this narrative turn, *HZD* firmly asserts discontinuity between Aloy and the figure of Jesus Christ, and through their comparison advocates a different, more humanistic, path to the Earth's ultimate survival.

Christ and Pop Culture, an online Christian magazine, has argued that *HZD*'s "final answer for our apocalyptic problem cannot fix what ails us," because nothing less than

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[75] Keating, "Horizon."

[76] A similar phrase appears in Mark 10:27 (and its parallel in Matt 19:26): "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

[77] Cf. Luke 1:26–38; Luke 4:16–30; Matt 4:23; John 1:1–18.

Jesus Christ is the sufficient source of redemption.[78] By this measure, since *HZD* does not unequivocally affirm the religious worldview some may wish to find in its story, the game's interactions with biblical ideas and narratives fail to deliver. As a post-apocalyptic narrative, however, *HZD* does not permit its audience to turn over human agency and responsibility so easily. Whereas Jesus accepts his salvific task to go where his disciples "cannot follow" (John 13:36; Matt 26:36–46 and parallels), Aloy insists that she will choose her own destiny. In keeping with the game's emphasis on communal and personal ethical responsibility, Aloy resists the role of a lone saviour figure while simultaneously choosing to respond to a world in need.[79] In the final mission she refuses to take on the last battle alone, instead confronting other characters—and, implicitly, the player—with the ethical imperative to share in the responsibility of protecting and saving the world.

Conclusion

HZD does not seek to import biblical narratives wholesale into its story arc, but to interact with the Bible insofar as particular allusions and motifs contribute to the language, imagery, and narrative concepts of the game's story and world-building. The integration of biblical material as one component of a larger philosophical and ethical conversation challenges the notion that *HZD* presents religious narratives as incompatible with rational or scientific thought, and instead points towards a more complex consideration of religion within the game. The creators' reception of David and Goliath, as well as the plague imagery of Exodus, shaped the development of *HZD*'s characters, aesthetic, and gameplay, without the need to restrict the game's story to reflect that of the biblical narrative. Likewise, specific New Testament allusions found within the game delineate *HZD*'s post-apocalyptic narrative and a humanistic conception of salvation and re-creation. *HZD* complicates the distinctions between science and religion by re-purposing familiar Gospel allusions so that they are utilised by an artificial intelligence but rejected by the human protagonist.

It is clear through the above examples that *HZD*'s use of biblical material runs much deeper than a borrowed christological storyline. In fact, the game does not attempt to reproduce the material from which it draws inspiration, but to integrate it into the game's world, characters, and language. It is therefore no great "irony" that *HZD* engages so thoroughly with biblical material as it grapples with its questions of morality and planetary redemption; these interactions provide much of the game's ability to articulate human

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[78] Keating, "Horizon."

[79] Tobeck and Jellerson, "Past, Present, and Future," 68.

fears, hopes, and ideas about the future. In so doing, *HZD* both engages with and critiques religious structures and belief; the game does not fully reject religious narratives in the use of its biblical sources, but nor does it fully embrace them. Ultimately, *HZD* recognises the role of religious narratives for making sense of one's world even as it questions the sufficiency of such narratives for comprehending one's world fully. More forcefully, the game asserts, through Aloy, that it is morally unacceptable to merely hope and wait for someone else to save us from the consequences of our actions. To depend on divine intervention is to shirk our ethical responsibility toward ourselves and others—for the future is of our own making.

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