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The Story of a Video Game: Reading the *Assassin's Creed* Universe

A Thesis
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Introduction

I have lived my life as best I could, not knowing its purpose, but drawn forward like a moth to a distant moon. And here, at last I discover a strange truth. That I am only a conduit for a message that eludes my understanding. Who are we, who have been so blessed to share our stories like this? To speak across centuries?

--Ezio at the end of *Assassin's Creed Revelations*

Recently, video games have come under the eye of scholars from many fields. Seemingly simple questions like “what is this thing? Why does it exist?” and the like are being asked about this new narrative form (Bogost x). Ian Bogost’s book *How To Talk About Video Games* is a compilation of several of his recent essays about videogames and gaming. In the introduction he advocates the need to look at games critically, not simply as a player-reviewer who looks at the external artifice and grades it on a scale of 1 to 10, but as a critic who can look at the existential and hermeneutic import of talking about what games can teach us. He states that this book is full of “attempts to take games so seriously as to risk the decent into self-parody” (Bogost xiii). Bogost is leading the way for others to not ignore what games can offer, to instead write about them, argue with or against them, and analyze them as we would a great literary novel. He gives several examples of how we can look at and talk about games. In one chapter he focuses on

Journey, a PlayStation-exclusive game that has received a lot of attention in the gaming industry. He doesn't praise the graphics, sound, or story as the keys of this success; instead, he concludes that the game is "about the feeling of being somewhere, not about the feeling of solving something" (Bogost 16).

According to Bogost, aspects of the game come together to create this "feeling of being somewhere" and this shows "that the world is fashioned from its still tiny details as much as its cities" (16). Video games create a story world where many feelings and emotions can emerge, beyond those of just solving or playing the game. Like novels and other artworks, they can evoke visceral emotions, and create worlds for readers or players to get lost in. His question of "What is this thing?" (Bogost x) has many possible answers, all of which can be correct. In his exploration of *Journey*, he finds that despite all the other bells and whistles, even the simple feeling of transport to another world is enough.

Jim Collins uses on the concept of world-building in his important analysis of the contemporary moment, "The Use Values of Narrativity in Digital Culture." He asks "how [new media interfaces] change the way we tell stories?" (Collins 641). While Bogost's explores what games are, Collins is interested in how media changes our narratives. Collins' article does not perform close readings of video games; instead, he uses the general term digital culture to mention games, internet, e-readers, computers, and the like. With the near ubiquity of digital media in large parts of the globe, Collins argues, a major shift is occurring in the ways that narrative is used and should be explored. Digital culture is created when "digital technologies create new *ways of knowing* and new ways of encountering culture" (Collins, 641). But how do video game and other media "create new *ways of knowing*"? Collins notes, "literary narratives are no longer necessarily literary, at least not in the sense that they are to be found in books"

(Collins 651). By analyzing how video games shape narrative we can identify how digital media reinvents what we know, and how it teaches us to encounter the world in new ways. He argues that we “have to account for how narrative texts—whether they be novels, films, television programs, or web series—are shaped by how we acquire, curate and ‘play’ them across ever more diversified formats within the devices which are the repositories of all our cultural stuff” (Collins 641).

Collins uses the example of the transmedia explosion of Jane Austen in the past two decades toward what he calls multimedia “Austenland” to center his argument. He uses the term “Austenland” to house all the different iterations and remediations of the worlds created from Jane Austen’s novels. In order to explore a fictional world, reading the original text alone is no longer sufficient. A reader must also be able to “read” the fictional world that expands from the original text. Collins writes “world building is an essential aspect of digital literacy because literacy is not just a matter of mastering the mechanics of reading—it also involves ways of operating within Austenland and understanding what animates different forms of passionate reading” (Collins 648). Many video games demonstrate a form of “*world building* that exceeds any top-down/bottom-up dichotomy because it proliferates horizontally as well as vertically across centuries” (Collins 644).

I propose that *Assassin’s Creed* is another ideal contemporary example of world building. In about a decade it has become a large fictional world that continues to move, in Collins’ language, horizontally as well as vertically across different media. This fictional world is now being called the *Assassin’s Creed* Universe. This game, like the serial TV noted by Collins, “feature[s] continuous narrative development across eighty plus hours of [game] material, all demanding the kind of close attention normally reserved for the most ambitious literary novels”

(640). While Collins is describing television serials, it is quite fitting in describing what I aim to do in the following pages. I will first explore the digital interface used by video games. Second, I will detail the narrative of the first three games, exploring the foundational aspects that remain constant in the fictional world. Each game, I show, deserves “the kind of close attention normally reserved for the most ambitious literary novels” (Collins 640); therefore my exploration of the first three games is an attempt to start the conversation of what a close reading of a video game can offer. Finally, I will look at how the game universe interacts, plays with, and uses other media and other narratives to expand the fictional world.

The Interface(s)

Video games have evolved and changed since their first creation in the late 1900s. Digital games started in the public sphere with arcades, but the development of the “home consoles marked a period of transition from playing in public space to playing in private space” (Paul 68). The three major companies currently in the video game console industry are Nintendo (Wii U released 11/2012), Microsoft (Xbox One released 11/2013), and Sony (PlayStation 4 released 11/2013). The most recent generation of consoles, far from “the Odyssey’s failure in attempting to change the site of play” (Paul 70) in the late 1960s, have revolutionized the way we play video games, which themselves have evolved “from a minority hacking practice of university labs in the 1960s and the arcades of the 1970s to a global multibillion dollar industry with the successes of home consoles and computer games since the 1980s” (Jagoda 192).

Every day in 2016 we are bombarded by digital screens, computers, phones, and television sets -- all fit a picture onto a box that we either have in our hands, homes, or work spaces. Under the Television of many homes you will also find a game console. These boxes are

progressively entering more and more homes. With advertising campaigns based on the center of home entertainment, consoles are not only targeting the gaming community, but all homes, and whether ones plays video games with them or not. These companies are attempting to create a product that is the central passage-point for all entertainment media in your home.

The console is typically black, white, or gray and can be placed horizontally or vertically to accommodate different home spaces. Its goal is to blend into the home of its user for a more immediate experience. Remediation, in the influential account of Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, is a dynamic feeling of oscillation between immediacy and hypermediacy. Immediacy is the desire to have “a more immediate or authentic experience” and the “promise [of a] transparent, perceptual immediacy, experience without mediation” (20, 22-23). Conversely, hypermediacy makes us aware of the interface, and highlights interactivity, like a “patchwork layout” where “the user is repeatedly brought back into contact with the interface” (31, 33). Although Bolter and Grusin do speak a bit about computer games, their 1999 account is dated now, and I want to elaborate and then complicate the account they present between immediacy and hypermediacy. The relationship between player and game is moderated through a game console; therefore, remediation is a useful vocabulary to capture this relationship and establish its importance.

In 2016, home consoles allow a player to connect with people all around the world by creating massive online multiplayer networks. Sony for example boasts on its official website that “Since launch [in 2006], PSN [PlayStation®Network] has evolved into a true online entertainment hub with more than 90 million registered accounts worldwide and continues to grow with tons of great new content and services, delivering a seamless connected gaming and entertainment experience across multiple devices and platforms ... [and] delivers more ways to

instantly play, watch, stream, listen, chat and share, offering the best in games, TV and movies, sports and music.” (PlayStation). Nintendo has the “Mii verse [which] is a service that lets you communicate with other players from around the world” (Nintendo), and Microsoft -- the pioneer of the online gaming capability on consoles -- states that its Xbox Live service provides “the most advanced multiplayer” environment and allows you to “stay connected and share with friends” by allowing users to “record your most epic multiplayer moments, effortlessly save them to the cloud, and use Upload Studio to personalize your clips and share with friends or on Twitter. You can also stay up-to-date with your friends’ current activities with the new friends section. See the most popular games your friends are playing, and a Gamerscore leaderboard to see who has improved their Gamerscore over the last 30 days” (Xbox). These networks allow for the immediate sensations of other players and friends without having to leave your living room, yet it creates multiple windows, and interfaces pushing the player into a hypermediate environment.

Calling attention to the interface presents the value of the console for consumers beyond the price tag. The video game industry is always “rethinking what a console was and transforming it from something that simply played video games into a black box that provided myriad entertainment options” (Paul 82). With each new generation the expectation of increased technology leaves the three giants in the console industry looking to create a more immersive experience. The “newly introduced console option is better because the graphics are superior, the experience is more responsive, and the games feel ‘more real’” (Paul 77-78). Nintendo’s Wii in 2006 changed the way video games were played with the introduction of motion control. It introduced the promise of “a more immediate or authentic experience” (Bolter and Grusin 20).

Nintendo's console was specifically designed for motion control, with the controller moving from a horizontal two-hand control to a one-hand vertical controller. The controller when pointed at the screen allows the player to effect the game in the similar way a mouse allows control of a screen on a computer. The difference is that a game encourages the user to stand and move with the game. Accessories were released to accompany Nintendo's Wii such as "The Nunchuk [which] has similar motion-sensing technology, along with two buttons and a Control Stick. This allows you to move characters around while performing more specific and complex actions with the Wii Remote Plus controller." A Wii Fit Balance Board "lets you get off of your couch and into the game for a more active experience", and the Wii Wheel "lets you steer like you're driving an actual car and makes gameplay more realistic" (Nintendo.com).

Nintendo's first controller, from which the modern control evolved, consisted of a directional cross on the left. The player's left hand controls movement, up, down, left, right. The right side of the controller had two buttons labeled "A" and "B," the first for jumping and the other for other functions such as grabbing items, running, etc. The center of the controller had a start and select buttons. Over the years the controllers have evolved as games and game consoles allowed more movements and options within the game, but the foundation has remained the same. Modern video game controllers are "molded to be held in two hands" (Paul 76). The controller requires the player to use both hands, the left controls movement and the right controls most other functions, with a central button to pause or control the main interface. The controller, like most early technology, had a wire that had to be plugged into the console to function. Many of today's controllers still have a wired options, but most are "wireless" in that they do not need to be physically plugged into the console to function; therefore, have a button with the consoles logo to control the on off function of the console much like a TV remote does. A wireless

controller allows for immediacy with the illusion of not being “plugged in,” an illusion that is shattered when the battery runs out in the middle of your game.

Most games are created with different versions for the different consoles, where the game is almost identical except for the control functions. Whereas in *Assassin's Creed* you use Xbox button “A” to jump, in the PlayStation version the jump action is controlled by the “X” button. The buttons are labeled differently but offer the same functionality. With a consumer-driven industry games developed for multiple platforms may offer exclusive extra content on one platform over the others. The exclusive content is typically not story changing, but provide “extras” such as extra missions, additional maps, or weapons. The additional information that pertains to the story found in the exclusive content is not vital to the progression of the game, but adds a layer to the world of the game.

The control variations between consoles for the Xbox and PlayStation are typically just in the name of the buttons. There is a corresponding button for each control on the other. This is not just for the games that are produced for multiple platforms but transcends a universal understanding of corresponding buttons. In my earlier example of the action “jump,” for Xbox that would be an “A” button, for PlayStation that would be an “X” button. This occurs not just in *Assassin's Creed* but for most games – the buttons are roughly in the same position on the controller and command a similar function. This is important because the buttons then acquired a universal meaning. “A” and “X” buttons are typically understood as the main action buttons. By having buttons that correspond, a sense of immediacy is created. The player does not have to relearn, nor consciously think about, the controls each time a new game is played. Instead the player develops a reflexive common use for the buttons on the controller. *Assassin's Creed* has produced several games and they all have a similar control structure, with slight variations as

new capabilities are added. For example, in the first game climbing buildings may require the character to jump and grab a ledge that is slightly out of reach. In the second game a new feature is introduced, where the player can reach higher ledges by “jumping twice”. The jump is executed by pressing the jump button twice. The Xbox buttons on the right side of the controller starting from the bottom and moving clockwise are “A, X, Y, B”, for PlayStation these are “X, Square, Triangle, Circle”. The “X” button is on both controllers but due to their positions do not correspond to the same action in a game. The same button label for buttons that typically execute different actions is a form of hypermediacy. It forces the user to pay attention to the interface.

Video games are inherently in states of constant remediation, fluctuating between a state of immediacy and hypermediacy. This relationship has been driving the game console industry for years. The physical interface is “a key aspect of any media form [it] is the means by which it is engaged” (Paul 68). The use of a console is the means by which video games are accessed. Paradoxically, as I’ve indicated above, presenting the player with an immediate experience through the use of a console can also create effects of hypermediacy. This new consumer base that Nintendo was reaching with motion sensing games forced “Sony and Microsoft developed their own versions ... the PlayStation Move that promoted the tagline ‘This Changes Everything,’ while Microsoft offered the Kinect, promising that ‘You are the Controller’” (Paul 76). The difference is that while Nintendo’s console was primarily designed for motion control, Sony and Microsoft responded with accessories that would allow motion control. Sony’s PlayStation Move similar to the Nintendo Wii issued a redesigned controller and a camera that would read the signal from the controller. Microsoft’s Kinect was just a camera that would attach to the Xbox. It could *see* your movements and *hear* your voice commands. Nintendo created an immediate experience by asking the player to move with the game, but Sony and Microsoft’s

products highlighted the interface needed to create that experience. While the promise of immediacy loomed in these console additions no game flushed out and demonstrated enough for a revolutionary change in the gaming experience. The launch of the newest generation consoles did include a Kinect for Xbox, where the voice feature and looming possibilities of games that offer more immediacy still looms in the background of the current gaming world.

Sony has made investments in 3D gaming and Microsoft is working on IllumiRoom, which “uses a Kinect for Windows camera and a projector to blur the lines between on-screen content and the environment we live in allowing us to combine our virtual and physical worlds” (research.microsoft.com). The market for blurring the lines between reality and fiction is a concept that is prevailing in the gaming industry. Currently; however, it is mainly a supplement to the power that their consoles already afford users, such as the online multiplayer network, which attempts immediacy differently.

The online capability shifted game design for the consoles as several games are released with two parts: the narrative and the multiplayer part. Headsets with sound and voice sell on respective console websites for anywhere between 20 and 70 dollars, just about the same as the controllers themselves. Why does an accessory cost as much as the key component of the device? Because the ability to hear and speak with fellow players in the online network, as well as detaching from the physical location of the connection is necessary. A headset enables a user to connect with the game world while canceling out any outside noise; the user is engaged through sight, hearing, and touch with the virtual worlds as mediated by the game console. A multiplayer experience fully engulfs real people in one world. The immediate experience is enhanced by knowing that you are not playing a pre-programmed narrative with NPC’s (non-

player characters), but with real people. It is hypermediacy because of the added interface (headset) needed to access this experience.

Another essential interface for the video game is the screen. The visual aspects of a video game can enhance immediacy, or call attention to the interface and trigger senses of hypermediacy. If done purposefully it can enhance the narrative by creating “new ways of knowing and new ways of encountering culture” (Collins, 641). The goal of playing a game much like that of reading a book is to immerse the reader/player in the world of the story. The game consoles are typically advertised with large screens, where the player and family also watch TV and experience other entertainment activities. A large clear screen will allow the player to feel more of the environment of the game by simply taking up more space in front of the player’s eyes. A large screen also allows the game to develop the details of the world they want the player to experience. A horror game like *Silent Hill* will show a dark, gritty screen, which if played on a small screen could be lost to the player if the room is well lit. One of the key features of *Assassin’s Creed* is its setting. The player can have the character scale buildings such as large Italian churches of the Renaissance the intricate details of the windows, and architecture could be lost on a lower resolution screen. It doesn’t affect the narrative directly, but does not allow the full experience of stepping into the streets of Florence or Rome. The higher resolution screen enhances immediacy, while at the same time calling attention to the need of the screen in order to create the immediate experience.

In addition to the setting of the narrative a large screen will also enhance facial features, details on clothing, weapons, or other items. In *Assassin’s Creed*, clever details about the characters and weapons help enhance the immediacy of the world. When the game first released in 2007, the main character of the game, Desmond, wore a plain gray hoodie. In later games, the

shirt under the hoodie is detailed with an eagle, a symbol used throughout the fictional world. Ezio, an assassin in the game, is struck by a rock, causing a scar on his lower lip. Desmond has a scar in the same location. The detail of his scar can be lost if the screen is of a lower quality. These features do not change the narrative, but enhance it. The screen can define the level of immediacy that a player attains with a game, but serves as constant reminder of the hypermediate nature of games.

The Game(s)

The gaming world is currently producing games that are taking advantage of the vast online networks and the visual and storytelling capabilities that game consoles allow. Although, there are several game series that show the evolution of the games. I chose *Assassin's Creed* because it attempts to follow one linear, if multifaceted, story line. Starting in 2007 each new game has picked up where the last one left off. The games have developed into serials, not unlike seasons of television and serial fiction, and have people waiting and speculating on what will happen next. *Assassin's Creed* also -- unlike other popular franchises such as *Elder Scrolls*, *Call of Duty*, and *Grand Theft Auto* -- continuously exploits a dual narrative. The first story is set in the present and is the connection from game to game. This narrative creates cliffhangers between the games. The second, framed, narrative is a memory set in the past. This narrative has a resolution for the conflict presented at the start of the memory. While the present day narrative connects the games, the memory narrative is the narrative that contains the details of the fictional world. The trailers and other promotional materials for the games advertise the memory narrative, with no mention of the present day narrative. *Assassin's Creed's* dual narrative also serves as a mirror of the gaming experience. The present day narrative accesses the memory narrative in a similar way that a player accesses the video game narrative.

The dual narratives, although they appear to serve distinct functions, are inherently one total narrative. The game is not an allegory in the traditional sense, keeping two narratives referring to one another across an interpretive gap that is typically not spanned or collapsed. Rather, in *Assassin's Creed* the two stories bleed into each other as the games progress. The blending of the two narratives is intertwined by deliberate presets in the games. The mirror of the player experience; however, remains an element. I opened with Ezio's poetic "Who are we, who have been so blessed to share our stories like this -- to speak across centuries?" (*AC Revelations*). While this quotation is targeting the blended narrative of the game, it also calls out to the player in a display of hypermediacy to pay attention to the experience of a story "like this".

Assassin's Creed

Released in the fall of 2007, *Assassin's Creed* introduces the story of Desmond Miles and his ancestor Altair Ibn La'Ahad. Desmond's narrative takes place in the fall of 2012. In the opening scenes of the game, we learn that he has been kidnapped and forced into the Animus, "a projector that renders genetic memories in three dimensions" (AC). The machine is a large box that Desmond lies down on; it has a monitor on one end to record the information, and a visor that glides over Desmond's face. For the player this visor serves as a menu that records and lists the progress in the game. Dr. Vidic explains, "our DNA functions as an archive. It contains not only genetic instructions passed down from previous generations, but memories as well. The memories from our ancestors" (AC). The Animus "lets you decode and read these DNA files" (AC). The menu on the visor is a double helix that straightens out and allows the selection of a specific "DNA" strand. The helix at the beginning of the game is hollow but fills in as the player completes the memory sequences successfully. The Animus technology is key to linking the two narratives in the game. Desmond in the present day and Altair in the past.

The game opens with a scene in the past where the other characters have no faces. The player attempts to move Altair through the environment, while external voices speak to Desmond and state that he seems to be rejecting the treatment. The game then moves to the present day where Desmond wakes up and demands to know why he is being held hostage. Dr. Warren Vidic, one of the voices heard in the dream like sequence that opened the game, tells him he has “something that my employers want locked away in that head of yours” (AC). Dr. Vidic and Lucy Stillman, his assistant, monitor and lead the genetic memory experiments of which Desmond is Subject number 17. They are employees of Abstergo Industries, a company controlled by present day Templars. At first Desmond claims to be a bartender and asks Dr. Vidic “what do you want me to do? Teach you how to mix a martini?” (AC). Desmond is actually, unknowingly, part of the present day Assassin Order.

The Assassins and the Templars are feuding factions that for centuries have sought an ancient artifact. The Templars want to use this ancient artifact for some vile purpose, and the Assassins will keep it hidden away. Altair, an assassin in the year 1191, hid the artifact from the Templars. Through the Animus Desmond can access his ancestor’s memories and reveal the location of the artifact to the Templars. Unfortunately, “there is a problem...when [they] try and open the memory, [Desmond’s] mind withdraws” (AC). Since the narrative cannot jump directly into the memory, Desmond must start from “a memory [he] can synchronize with, and move forward from there” (AC). Altair’s story is now sectioned into memories that Desmond needs to access in order to increase synchronization. The goal is to reach the memory that will reveal a truth that the Assassins have kept hidden from the Templars for hundreds of years.

Desmond enters the Animus and the player is now in control of Altair. The assassin has the same facial features as Desmond. The illusion of having similar faces reinforces the ancestral

link, but also embeds the narrative with motive. Desmond, after 16 other subjects, will finally be able to access a long lost secret. The first sequence is a tutorial that familiarizes the player with “the Animus’ control system” (AC). The tutorial, as well as any loading screens between memories, will be set in the Animus. The scene is foggy with flashes of numbers, and data, as if inside a computer. The player can move Altair around in this white space, while waiting for the next part of the game to load. The constant reminder that Desmond is playing his ancestor’s memories like a video game, with menus, loading screens, and even a HUD, creates the immediacy for the player. These features are part of the structure of a game, but by adding Desmond’s present day narrative, it allows for an incorporation of these features as part of the Animus.

The Heads-Up Display (HUD) will only be visible on the screen when in control of Altair. Beginning from the top left the player will see the Synchronization Bar. This bar “measures your synchronization with your ancestor” (AC). Moving outside of the playable area, combat, or falling, can cause the bar to decrease. This will desynchronize Desmond, and the player will be reset to an earlier save, or checkpoint. The bar length (synchronization) will increase as the player progresses through the game, by completing main missions, gathering collectibles, or completing side missions.

The synchronization bar also contains the Abstergo logo. The HUD is a feature of the Animus, a product of Abstergo. The logo’s purpose on the Synchronization bar is to serve as a Social Status Icon. This changes color to indicate, “Exposed, Cool Down, Vanishing, Vanished, [and] Anonymous” (AC). If the player is “Exposed”, Altair will be sought out by the enemy and potentially killed, which could cause desynchronization because that is a deviation from the events that actually occurred. There are also tasks that the player must complete without

detection. If “Exposed” during one of those tasks, the task will be reset and the player must attempt to complete it again. The Social Status Icon will change as the player moves Altair out of sight by, for instance, blending into a crowd, sitting on a bench, or hiding in a haystack. In the cinematic trailer of the game Altair assassinates his target, and to escape runs through crowds, and jumps across rooftops. He reaches a closed door, the guards surround him, and just as it appears that he will be caught the door opens to reveal a crowd of scholars in white robes. Altair vanishes with the crowd. The player can imitate such moments in the game by escaping his pursuers and remaining synchronized.

The HUD on the top right shows a section of the control. The right of the control has four buttons in a cross shape. In the game, the top button controls the head; the right button is the “Empty Hand” or the right hand of the character. The left button is the left hand or the “Armed Hand”, and the bottom button is the legs (walking, running, and jumping). The actions produced by these buttons can be high or low profile. The display defaults to display the stealth actions (low profile). To display or activate the high profile actions the player must hold the right trigger button on the control. In low profile the legs button makes the character walk, in high profile the same button makes the character run. The arms and legs buttons have a dual purpose depending on the player’s option to handle the situation presented in the game. The head button activates a first person view known as Eagle Vision, a “sixth sense [that] helped your ancestor understand the intentions of the people around him” (AC). Eagle Vision can only be activated when Altair is standing still. The screen will zoom into a first person view that will highlight other characters in view. The player can look around him by using the directional controls of the game; only the field of vision will move while in Eagle Vision. The other characters will glow in a different color depending on their purpose. For example, enemies will be highlighted in red, allies in blue,

targets in yellow, and white for information. In crowded streets, this view will help identify how characters tied to the narrative.

The ability to use Eagle Vision makes Altair an especially skilled assassin. The eagle is a symbol deeply embedded into the narrative of *Assassin's Creed*. Altair's name is a reference to the eagle. The cinematic trailer of the game uses an eagle's cry as Altair begins to move towards his target like a signal to indicate the start of the mission. After assassinating a target, Altair stains an eagle's feather with the targets blood as a record of the assassination. The game asks the player to climb to the top of tall buildings, where you typically find an eagle resting, or soaring above the area. Reaching these "Viewpoints" highlights and unlock areas of the map. After climbing up, the way down is with a Leap of Faith. The player makes Altair jump of the edge of the building, first extending his arms to the sides then extended back, like an eagle's wings, as he falls. The dive is reminiscent of an eagle diving for its prey. The Leap of Faith can only be preformed successfully in the game if there is a haystack at the bottom of the jump because the assassin can only land safely in the hay. The assassins' outfits are white robes with a hood. The hood has a point that resembles an eagle's beak. The robe has two tails, which resemble the eagle's tail during a Leap of faith, a red cloth belt with a leather utility belt over it, leather boots, and bracers. The belt holds his sword, and throwing knives or a short blade (during close combat), and on the left bracer the Hidden Blade, that is a unique weapon used by the assassins for stealth kills.

The HUD also displays the weapons with which the character is currently equipped. The lower hand corner corresponds to the directional pad on the controller also located on the left side. The top button corresponds to the Hidden Blade, the left button to the throwing knives, the right button to the sword, and the bottom button is for unarmed. Altair's Sword has a point on the

hilt which resembles the beak of an eagle. These four weapons are the only ones the player has access to in this game. A miniature GPS version of a map is located in the bottom right of the screen. It identifies places that are nearby or displays the distance to a target location. The player can remove any of the HUD displays in the options menu, to adjust his or her experience with the game.

The majority of the game is in Altair's memory. Desmond fades into the background as the player is introduced to the famed assassin. Altair's narrative opens with a voice stating "wait ... there must be another way ... this one need not die" (AC), but the images that follow show Altair grabbing a man and sinking his Hidden Blade into the back of his neck. The scene opens to show two other assassins standing in a cave with Altair. One praises Altair stating, "fortune favors your blade" (AC). Altair responds "not fortune. Skill. Watch a while longer and you might learn something" (AC). The third assassin responds, "he will teach you how to disregard everything the masters taught us ... I would not have drawn attention to us. I would not have taken the life of an innocent" (AC). The Animus' tutorial ends by reminding Desmond and the Player that "following the Assassin's Creed, your ancestor's way of life will assist you with staying [synchronized]. ... the creed consists of three tenants: first, never hurt an innocent person, second, always be discreet, third, do not compromise the clan" (AC). In the scene that follows the tutorial Altair is accused of disregarding the Creed, by murdering an innocent, and calling attention to himself. Altair's response to the accusation is "nothing is true, everything is permitted," a quote that defines the Creed. Altair defines these words as, "it matters not how we complete our task, only that it is done" (AC). The other assassin attempts to correct him but Altair is firm, declaring "my way is better" (AC). This scene structures the narrative of the game inside the genetic memory.

Altair is a skilled assassin living in Masyaf, an assassin town. He scoffs at the tenants and believes that he knows best. The mission is to retrieve an artifact the Templars have unearthed. When the assassins reach the section of the cave where the artifact is located, they hear Templars speaking. One of them a powerful enemy of the assassins, Robert de Sable. Altair sees this as his chance to eliminate the threat, but his fellow assassin asks for “discretion” as it is not necessary. He pleads, “do not compromise the brotherhood,” but Altair will not pass up the opportunity “to be rid of him” (AC). Altair silences the other assassin by stating, “I am your superior, in both title and ability. You should know better than to question me” (AC). The attack is foiled. Altair returns to Masyaf without the artifact, and Robert de Sable still alive.

Al Mualim, the Mentor of the Masyaf assassins, asks Altair for the other two assassins. He responds that they are dead, but Malik, one of the assassins that accompanied him, enters to state that he survived, and blames Altair for the death of his brother. Malik states that Altair’s “arrogance nearly cost us victory today” (AC). Malik retrieved the artifact. Al Mualim chastises Altair, telling him “there are rules. We are nothing if we do not abide by the Assassin’s Creed. Three simple tenants which you seem to forget” (AC). Two assassins hold Altair as Al Mualim calls him a traitor and stabs him in the abdomen. The scene ends dramatically as the narrative is returned to the present day.

Dr. Vidic and Lucy argue over the length of Desmond’s session in the Animus. Lucy believes it is too risky to continue “he’s been in there way too long” (AC), but Dr. Vidic insists that they “are still so far from where we need to be” (AC). They go into a conference room adjacent the room with the animus. Desmond is allowed to walk around the room, but not able to go into the conference room. The player can guide Desmond into his bedroom, and the bathroom that shares a wall with the conference room. Through the vent, he is able to hear part of the

conversation occurring between Lucy and Dr. Vidic. They discuss the length of time that Desmond should spend in the Animus. Lucy indicates that if they “push him too hard he will shut down, and then we’ll have nothing” (AC). The game presents the second problem of the Animus, not only does Desmond need to traverse several memories to become synchronized with his ancestor, and retrieve the desired memory, but he also cannot spend unlimited time in the Animus. This will cause him to “shut down” (AC). The game intertwines the present day and memory narratives by forcing the player to cycle in and out of the Animus.

The player always has the option to exit the animus and end the game, but the narrative also has staged checkpoints that force the player to exit the animus. The staged checkpoints help create tension in the narrative, like Altair being stabbed by Al Mualim, but also develop the present day narrative. During the breaks, Desmond is able to talk to Lucy and Dr. Vidic.

Speaking to them slowly reveals the intentions of the Templars in the present day. Dr. Vidic reveals that in order to eliminate corruption, a “comprehensive systemic intervention” (AC) is needed. He clarifies to indicate that this would involve a “re-education” of the masses, but he does not reveal the Templars methods of enacting this resolution. Later in the game, Desmond questions the history in Altair’s memories. Dr. Vidic responds with “it doesn’t match what you read on an online encyclopedia? What your history teacher taught you?” (AC). Dr. Vidic’s dismissive comments do not change Desmond’s mind, he mentions source materials, letters, and books that conflict with the history he sees in the Animus. Dr. Vidic clarifies with “anyone can write a book, and they can put whatever they want on its pages ... I believe there’s also a book that claims the world was created in seven days, a best-seller too” (AC). He highlights the assassins phrase “nothing is true, everything is permitted” to end the conversation. The breaks also allow Desmond to learn of attempts by the Assassin’s to free him. Dr. Vidic

remarks at one point “that there aren’t any assassins left” (AC). Abstergo has been hunting down the “enclaves, desert communes, and what not” where the assassins reside.

During one break, Desmond is able to steal Dr. Vidic’s Access Pen. A key to the computers and his room. This gives Desmond the opportunity to leave his room after Lucy and Dr. Vidic lock him in for the night. Although he cannot escape, he is able to investigate Dr. Vidic’s desk and computer. The player is now able gain more knowledge on the state of the world in the present day. This includes information regarding the assassin’s raids, the animus, and previous Subjects. The emails Desmond reads have dates in September, but do not include the year. The game takes place in 2012; therefore the emails should be dated 2012, but not including the year allows the immediacy of the present day without a jarring 2012 on the screen. The player would have ideally played the game in late 2007 or 2008 when it was released. This investigation is not a required event in the game. Some players can play the entirety of the game without this added discovery.

The present day narrative at first seems less interactive, but actually requires a different type of interaction with the game world. The player is required to take steps and read information to piece the world together, while Altair’s narrative is presented to the player while progressing through the game. After each break, Desmond sleeps, and the next day they continue the exploration of Altair’s memories.

In the Animus, Desmond embodies Altair, after a climatic cut of the first present day interruption. He stands before Al Mualim, shocked to be alive. The mentor accuses Altair of being “arrogant and over confident” (AC). Altair displays his arrogance by questioning the guidance Al Mualim provided. He states, “were you not the one to say, nothing is true, everything is permitted?” (AC). Al Mualim responds that Altair does not understand the meaning

of the phrase, “it does not grant you the freedom to do as you wish. It is a knowledge to guide your senses. It expects a wisdom you clearly lack” (AC). Al Mualim tells Altair that it would only be fair to kill him for what he has done, but it would be a waste of Altair’s talent. He offers Altair “a chance at redemption” (AC). Altair is stripped of his “possessions, your rank as well, you are a novice, a child once more” (AC). He is to “earn [his] way back into the brotherhood” by completing a series of tasks (AC). The tasks involve him gathering information, and completing the assassinations of prominent characters in the world of the game. These targets are corrupt men in power and, conveniently, members of the Templar order. The tasks start simple and become more complex as the narrative progresses. As Altair reports the success of his task, a weapon is restored. In this fashion, the player accumulates skills, gains new abilities, and access to additional locations. This structure allows the difficulty of the game to increase as the player moves forward, which prevents a repetitive and dull experience. The game creates a narrative where it is possible for the player to be in control of a master assassin, as he re-learns the tenants of his Creed and regains combat skills. The player shares this experience with Altair while learning more about the fictional world of *Assassin’s Creed*.

Altair’s world is comprised of four cities: Masyaf, Damascus, Jerusalem, and Acre. In addition there is “the Kingdom,” which includes the roads and small settlements that connect the four main cities. The Kingdom roads are blocked by an Animus-created force field that prevents some movements by indicating that the “subject cannot access memory at this time”. Even within the cities, there are certain locations that only become accessible as the story of the game progresses. The message that a memory cannot be accessed is a reminder of the Animus interface. Neither Desmond nor the player can alter Altair’s memory.

Altair's history is to reveal the location of an ancient artifact that the assassins hid from the Templars. In the first scenes, we learn that the artifact is in Al Mualim's possession. Each time Altair assassinates a primary target, the game pauses for a cinematic scene. Altair speaks to each Templar target as they reveal parts of their motives. Altair begins to discover that "nothing is true" as he learns the secrets of the Assassin/Templar conflict, and the power behind the artifact. In one conversation with Al Mualim, Altair learns of the Templars' intent. Al Mualim assures Altair that "they cannot succeed in their mission ... [because] their plans depend on the Templar treasure, The Piece of Eden, but we hold it now" (*AC*). Altair responds, "it is just a piece of silver" (*AC*). Al Mualim informs him, "this piece of silver cast out Adam and Eve, it turned staffs into snakes, parted and closed the red sea, Ares used it to start the Trojan War, and with it a poor carpenter turned water into wine" (*AC*). The artifact, also referred to as the Apple of Eden, allows the holder to control "the hearts and minds of whoever looks upon it, whoever tastes of it" (*AC*). After hearing that the artifact can create an environment where "everything is permitted", Altair is more determined to stop the Templars from regaining control of the Apple.

In the final assassination, Altair targets Robert de Sable. The death of the Assassin's greatest enemy is a bittersweet event as it reveals to Altair that the leader of the assassins, Al Mualim, is actually a Templar. Robert de Sable tells him that "the only difference between your master and I is that he did not want to share" (*AC*). Altair returns to Masyaf. Al Mualim has used the Apple of Eden to control the assassins and has ordered them to kill Altair. After a few rounds of assassins, a familiar face aids Altair. Malik, from the opening scene, tells Altair that after they last spoke he returned to the ruins where the narrative began. He found "Robert had kept a journal, filled its pages with revelations. What I read there broke my heart, but it also opened my eyes" (*AC*). Malik assists Altair in diverting the attention of the hypnotized assassins. Altair, now

a changed man, asks Malik “if you can avoid killing them” (AC) to which Malik responds “yes. Though he has betrayed the tenants of the creed, it does not mean we must as well” (AC). The narrative that began with Altair breaking the tenants now ends with him leading the Assassins out of a corrupt leadership

This final battle against Al Mualim reveals to Altair that the Apple of Eden only creates illusions. The conversation they had in the study where Al Mualim reveals the secret of the artifact, was an attempt to control Altair. The attempt was unsuccessful, because Altair was somehow able to see past the illusions that the artifact creates in the minds and hearts of those it controls. Al Mualim tells Altair that he offers the world an alternative to the illusions they follow now, of “gods who retreat from this world that men may slaughter one another in their name” (AC). Altair kills Al Mualim, and states he will destroy the Piece of Eden, but as he approaches it he is unable to. The Artifact projects a map. Altair’s narrative ends, and the player is returned to the present day. Dr. Vidic happily announces that they have the map. The Templars were never after the artifact that Altair hid, rather they were after the map that revealed the location of other artifacts. Dr. Vidic is speaking to a voice that appears to be in charge. The voice states they only need one, but will collect the others as a precaution. He also tells Dr. Vidic that they have what they need, and to kill Desmond. Lucy comes to his rescue, clarifying that he may still contain useful information. The voice agrees. Dr. Vidic and Lucy leave the room to get started on the search, but he tells Desmond not to “get too comfortable” (AC).

Desmond gets off the Animus and the screen shifts to a first person perspective as he sees a red symbol on the floor before him. He looks to the door as Dr. Vidic and Lucy are exiting and there are strange symbols on the floor there as well. His vision returns to normal and he walks to his room. As he gets ready to lie in the bed. The screen again becomes active and he sees

symbols on the wall above his bed in what “looks like, is that blood? What the hell where they keeping here before me? And what happened to him? What does it mean, I wonder?” (AC). Altair frees the assassins from the corruption of a Templar. A comfortable end to his narrative; however, Desmond’s story ends with a bleak fate of Templar rule, death, and mysterious symbols painted in blood.

Assassin's Creed II

In the Fall of 2009, Ubisoft released the second installment of the series. *Assassin's Creed II* launched with the promise of a new assassin, a new landscape, and a new story. The game’s opening cinematic tableau is a series of clips from the first game with a voice over from Desmond. This is his monologue:

My name is Desmond Miles. I’m a prisoner of war. A war I never knew existed. Waged by two groups I never thought were real, Templars and Assassins. The Animus showed me the truth. The things I’ve seen, the things that’ve been. A thousand years of history flowing through my veins, brought to life by this machine. They’re using it, using me, to search for something. They call it the Apple. It’s an artifact, one of many so-called Pieces of Eden. Templars collect them. It’s how they stay in power. And if the Templars get their hands on another one everything will change. They want to make us all their slaves. When they first brought me here, I was afraid of what would happen if I tried to fight back. Now...now I am afraid of what would happen if I don’t, but I can’t do it alone. Maybe I don’t have to. I met someone. Her name is Lucy. I think she is on my side. She is gone now. Was taken away by that bastard Warren Vidic and his Templar masters. I don’t know what will happen to her. Or what’ll happen to me. All I know is I need to get out of here, and I need to do it soon. My name is Desmond Miles and this is my story.

He summarizes the present day narrative with a dramatic opening to the second game. In the scene that follows, Lucy enters Desmond’s locked cell. She demands that he get into the Animus, “before they figure out what I’ve done. If we’re not out of here and on the road before then...” (AC II). She is a double agent with ties to the present-day Assassins. Desmond is shocked and

confused, but Lucy promises, “I’ll answer ALL of your questions. Later. But right now, I need you to just shut up and do what I say. So please - get in the Animus” (*AC II*). He gets in the Animus and sees Lucy collect files for Subject 16 and Subject 17. In the Animus, the player witnesses the birth of Ezio Auditore da Firenze, before returning to the present day.

Lucy leads Desmond out of Abstergo. She takes down a few guards that attempt to stop them. Desmond is shocked to see several cubicles with “Is it Animus-es? Or Animi?” (*AC II*). They reach a door that Lucy is unable to open because “it must be on a separate system and I don’t have the code” (*AC II*). Desmond uses Eagle Vision to see fingerprints over the numbers 2, 3, 4, and 7. After a few combinations, the door opens. Lucy is shocked to see Desmond’s ability to enter the correct code. Desmond tells her he is not sure how he was able to do it. They enter the elevator, and Desmond questions “what was that in the Animus? Subject Sixteen?” (*AC II*). Lucy clarifies that they need to escape because she has discovered that the “Templars ... are only part of the problem.” (*AC II*), but she will explain later. The elevator stops and they walk out into a parking garage where Lucy has Desmond get in the trunk of a car. They arrive in a warehouse before she reveals her intentions. She tells Desmond that the Assassins are “losing this war...The Templars are too powerful” (*AC II*). Their plan is to train Desmond “turn you into one of us” (*AC II*). He is apprehensive stating that “you’ve seen me in action -- I’m no good at this” (*AC II*). Lucy explains that through the Bleeding Effect Desmond can “follow in his [ancestor’s] footsteps, you’ll learn everything he did-just like he did. Years of training absorbed in a matter of days” (*AC II*).

The Bleeding Effect is a side effect caused by “prolonged exposure to the Animus” (*AC II*). Desmond’s ability to use Eagle Vision, the assassin’s sixth sense to view things beyond what regular vision afforded, is active for the first time at the end of the first game. It revealed the

strange symbols painted above Desmond's bed in the Abstergo facility, and the fingerprints that unlocked the final door to his escape with Lucy. The Bleeding Effect allows Desmond to absorb skills from his ancestors through their memories, but can also result in "degradation of cognition, temporal hallucinations, multiple-awareness issues, [and] overlapping realities" (*AC II*). The Bleeding Effect is the blending of the present day reality with genetic memories. Its detrimental effects could cause Desmond "not [to] need the Animus to visit with [his] ancestors" (*AC II*), not a "bad thing, assuming [he] could control it. Up until now, though...no one has" (*AC II*). The strange symbols Desmond found at the end of the first game were painted in blood, by Subject 16. Desmond's predecessor fell victim to the Bleeding Effect leading him to commit suicide. In the game, Desmond begins to hallucinate, but Lucy dismisses the symptom since the hallucinations do not last longer than thirty seconds. Shortly after Desmond begins to have vivid dreams of memories, but remains able to maintain his consciousness. He is able to subdue the negative consequences of the Bleeding Effect, and harness the benefits.

The present-day narrative episodes in *Assassin's Creed II* are less frequent than in the first *Assassin's Creed* game. The player always has the option to leave the animus and explore the warehouse where Desmond is able to interact with Lucy, and his new companions. In *Assassin's Creed II* Desmond meets Shaun Hastings and Rebecca Crane, two present day assassins. Shaun Hastings is "in charge of maintaining our knowledge archives -- it's like a digital library" (*AC II*). Both he and Rebecca Crane will be monitoring Desmond's Animus sessions. Shaun's role will be to create "database entries you can consult for additional information". This will include "anything of note-people, places, events, etcetera" (*AC II*) that Desmond comes across in the Animus. The information will include historical, fictional, and satirical remarks that do not necessarily contribute to the story but do add color and

dimensionality of the world of the game. Rebecca is in charge of maintaining and managing the Animus 2.0. The redesign is “twice as awesome as anything you’ll find at Abstergo. The Templars might have deeper pockets than us, but they’ve got no ambition. No passion! No competitive edge!” Therefore, Rebecca claims, “anything they can do. I can do better. Faster, too!” (*AC II*). With these new allies, the present day is embedded into the memory narrative. Desmond’s staged breaks from the Animus are less frequent, but the player is constantly bombarded by icons on the screen indicating a database entry as Ezio walks past iconic landmarks of Italy, people, or events.

There are also occasional interruptions of Rebecca and Shaun speaking to Desmond as the player controls Ezio on the screen. In one instance, as Ezio’s hometown is rendered by the Animus for the player to explore, Shaun interrupts, “I’ve got a little request for you. I’ve identified several strange markings that I’ve discovered right across Renaissance Italy. Now, I don’t know what they’re doing there, but I want you to help me find out. Rebecca has marked their general location in the database with an eye icon and she’s made them glow as well. Keep an eye out” (*AC II*). The strange markings are one of several collectibles in the game. These markings are only visible to Desmond, not Ezio. The markings are puzzles that reveal Templar and Assassin secrets. The puzzles involve altered Renaissance art. The images are altered to include the Apple of Eden, and unlocking them gathers pieces of a deeper truth. Other collectibles are part of Ezio’s world. For example, his younger brother tasks him with retrieving eagle feathers, and he does so throughout the game. The HUD display is very similar to the first game. The map has more icons as there are more collectibles, points of interest, and factions. In this game Ezio can complete side quests for three factions, the mercenaries, the thieves, and the

courtesans. These factions all have ties to the Assassin Brotherhood, and give the player the ability to complete missions using different methods of distractions, combat, and stealth.

Ezio Auditore da Firenze is Desmond's ancestor who lived during the Italian Renaissance. In this game, the player is able to visit the cities of Florence, Venice, Tuscany, Forli, the Auditore family Monteriggioni Villa, and (briefly) Rome. In these locations Ezio meets historic characters, climbs revered architecture, and enacts vengeance. Ezio becomes an assassin abruptly when Templars execute his father and two brothers. A convenient absence from his home when his family was taken away spared Ezio from the same fate. He takes his sister, and mother to Monteriggioni Villa. Like Masyaf, in the first game, Monteriggioni is controlled and managed by Assassins. There his uncle Mario Auditore, who leads the small town of assassins, guides Ezio in the ways of the Creed. *Assassin's Creed II* has currency and the economic feature allows Ezio to purchase upgrades for the town, as well as new weapons, and variations to the assassin's outfit. His narrative leads him through a series of assassinations of Templar agents responsible for his the execution of his family. The hunt for these Templars leads him to Rome for a final battle against Rodrigo Borgia.

This Templar has uncovered an ancient Vault. Rodrigo Borgia tells Ezio that "God! It's God that dwells within!" (*AC II*). He believes that The Apple of Eden was "MADE for felling Gods" (*AC II*), and that this will allow him to gain the power of a god. Ezio finds it hard to believe that "God lives beneath il Vaticano?" and replies quizzically "God is meant to be all knowing. All powerful. You think a couple of ancient relics can harm him" (*AC II*). This battle similar to the one between Al Mualim and Altair comments on theology. Rodrigo Borgia even makes a familiar remark, "You take your image of the creators from an ancient book-a book, mind you, written by MEN" (*AC II*). In the first *Assassin's Creed* game, Dr. Vidic makes a

similar dismissive comment towards the bible. This time it is not just a Templar who makes the comment, but a man who becomes the powerful Pope Alexander VI. Ezio's battle with Rodrigo ends with Ezio stating that "killing you won't bring my family back ... I'm done" (*AC II*). He recovers the Apple and enters the Vault. There he sees a vision of a woman, who explains they are not gods. "We simply came ... before" (*AC II*). She faces away from Ezio and speaks directly at the screen, as if speaking to the player. She continues, "you may not comprehend us. But you will comprehend our warning" (*AC II*). Confused Ezio responds, "none of what you are saying makes sense" (*AC II*). The woman, who calls herself Minerva, snaps at Ezio: "Our words are not meant for you" (*AC II*). Ezio looks around and exclaims, "There's no one else here!" (*AC II*). Minerva explains that she does "not wish to speak with [Ezio] but through [him]. You are the prophet. You've played your part. You anchor him, but please be silent! That we may commune" (*AC II*). Minerva reveals new information in her monologue:

Listen: when we were still flesh and our home still whole, your kind betrayed us. We who made you. We, who gave you life! We were strong. But you were many. And both of us craved war. So busy were we with earthly concerns, we failed to notice the heavens. And by the time we did...The world burned until naught remained but ash. It should have ended then and there. But we built you in our own image. We built you to survive. And so we did. Few were our numbers. Your kind and mine. It took sacrifice. Strength, Compassion. But we rebuilt. And as life returned to the world...We endeavored to ensure this tragedy would not be repeated. But now we are dying... And time will work against us. Truth turned into myth and legend. What we built, misunderstood. Let my words preserve the message and make a record of our loss. But let my words also bring hope. You must find the other temples. Built by those who knew to turn away from war. They worked to protect us-to save us from the fire. If you can find them... If their work can be saved... so too might this world. Be quick! For time grows short. And guard against the cross-for there are many who will stand in your way. It is done. The message is delivered. We are gone now from this world. All of us. We can do no more. The rest is up to you, Desmond.

Ezio's questions "who is Desmond? I don't understand ... please, wait! I have so many questions!" (*AC II*), but the image of Minerva fades into darkness. Ezio's narrative ends as the screen fades to black. Desmond's voice is heard as the credits scroll across the screen. An epilogue shows Desmond waking up from the Animus. His companions scrambling to gather their things. Shaun tells him "it was only a matter of time before they discovered us" (*AC II*). Lucy hands Desmond a Hidden Blade and they proceed to fight off the Templars. The Templars retreat and the Assassins escape in an uncertain direction. With Desmond questioning the last moments of Ezio's memory, Lucy tells him that this is the threat she suspected to be larger than the Templar/Assassin conflict. He responds, "The sun is? What's it going to do? Cook the Earth?" (*AC II*). The impending crisis is unclear, but the fate of the human race appears to be in the hands of Desmond and the Assassins.

Assassin's Creed Brotherhood

In 2010, *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood* arrived to continue the story. This game continues not only Desmond's narrative, but Ezio's as well. At the end of *Assassin's Creed II* Ezio does not assassinate Rodrigo Borgia, a mistake whose consequences will be played out in *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood*. This game opens with a monologue from Desmond;

I don't think anyone ever expects to wake up one morning and find themselves caught in the middle of a war between two secret organizations. I know I didn't. But here I am. On one side are the Templars, better known these days as Abstergo Industries. They're in the business of control. Politics. Economics. Technology. They won't stop until every single one of us serves them. Literally. Fighting against them are the Assassins, a group dedicated to safeguarding humanity's free will. I was born into the brotherhood. A couple of weeks ago the Templars found me. They took me prisoner. Strapped me into a machine they'd built and put me to work. It's called an Animus. And it's where I spent most of my

time. Exploring the memories of my ancestors, discovering entire lives locked deep inside my DNA. First, I revisited the life of Altair Ibn-La'Ahad, an Assassin from the Crusades. The Templars wanted the location of something known as a Piece of Eden, an ancient artifact capable of bending people to their will. Once the Templars had what they were looking for, they decided my usefulness had come to an end. But Lucy saved me. Lucy. When things were at their worst, she revealed herself to be an Assassin and helped me escape. I was hoping that would be the end of my misadventures. But we were just getting started. Back into another Animus I went. Now, I'm reliving the memories of Ezio Auditore da Firenze, my ancestor from the Renaissance, searching for a path forward. Through the bleeding effect, I'm becoming an Assassin in more than just name. It will come in handy, as the Templars prepare to enslave us all. They've found us. They've crashed our hideout and we're fleeing the scene, looking for a place to hide. Only, there isn't any and time is running short. My name is Desmond Miles and this is my story.

After Desmond recaps the present day narrative the scene moves to Ezio in the middle of a battle. The scene cuts to an animus loading screen, and Rebecca tells Desmond that the Animus is having technical difficulties. She resolves them and the narrative resets to an earlier memory.

This time Ezio is in the Vault hearing the last words of Minerva. She vanishes, and Ezio leaves the Vault, at the entrance he is greeted by his uncle Mario, and they flee Rome together. Ezio returns to Monteriggioni in 1500. The player is asked to complete a few side tasks in the town. Ezio assist his people and they are grateful. He then enters the house where he tells his family and Allies what he saw and heard. He tells them of "a moving painting of the goddess Minerva" that "called out to a phantom, Desmond, as if he were there, standing beside me. After her warning, she vanished" (*AC B*). The game recalls this ominous message four times in the first few scenes of the game. The original event occurred in *Assassin's Creed II*. Almost a year later, in *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood* the narrative reinforces the importance of this scene. Told in Desmond's monologue, Ezio's opening scene, Ezio speaking with his Uncle Mario, and finally retelling it to a group of his allies, it not only conveys the transfer of information to the other

characters, but highlights the information for the player. Ezio's homecoming is short lived. Monteriggioni is under attack by the Borgia, and Ezio must keep them out of the town until the innocents have a chance to escape. In the battle Mario is killed and the apple stolen by Cesare Borgia. Ezio is wounded, but manages to escape with his mother, sister, and several of the town's people through a secret underground passage hidden behind a statue of Altair. Ezio asks his sister to take their "mother to Firenze" (*AC B*). He will go to Rome to take on the Borgia. On his way, Ezio faints from his injuries and falls off his horse. The memory ends and Desmond wakes up from his Animus session.

The team has traveled to present day Monteriggioni. Lucy is "convinced we need to get our hands on Ezio's Apple of Eden" (*AC B*). She believes "Minerva altered it somehow when she 'touched' it," and that it holds the key to stop the end of the world. Rebecca found that Apple was hidden "sometime in 1507" (*AC B*); however, finding the apple is not that simple, "when I try to access that DNA sequence, he seems to be ... remembering something else" (*AC B*). The inability to access the information they need spurs a conversation between the present day assassins. Desmond asks if the file is "like a memory inside a memory?" (*AC B*). Lucy clarifies that "Subject 15 exhibited memory-within-memory-like-patterns, but she was pregnant. The memories of both the fetus's father and mother were competing" (*AC B*), which is not the case with Desmond. She goes on to say "We couldn't access Altair's later memories until Desmond had improved his synchronization" (*AC B*). This conversation now justifies the present day narrative of having Desmond access more of Ezio's memories in search of an ancient artifact. The plot is very similar to the first *Assassin's Creed* game – that is, a race to a secret that will determine the fate of the world. *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood* offers more than a repeat of the first *Assassin's Creed* game.

In the present day of the game, Desmond uses the Bleeding Effect to find the secret tunnel under Monteriggioni that Ezio escaped from at the beginning of the game. Once underground the team is able to hide from Abstergo surveillance. The Assassin set up the Animus for Desmond to continue exploring Ezio's memories. Monteriggioni, which has been preserved as a tourist site can be explored at night. This is the first game that allows Desmond the freedom to explore the outside world. He is still confined to the border of Monteriggioni, but at least he can get some fresh air. Desmond can also collect items scattered in the town. The items do not influence the story, but are trinkets from the past, such as Mario's Sword, Ezio's Belt, etc. The present day narrative functions the same way as previous games, with staged breaks from the Animus for idle chatter or tasks to be completed. The present day narrative now relies on the information found in the memory, whereas in the first game they ran parallel to each other. Altair taught the player about the Assassins, with Desmond the player learned about Abstergo and the Animus. In *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood*, Desmond's next action will depend on what he learns from Ezio.

Ezio works to kill Rodrigo Borgia, who he spared in the previous game, and retrieve the Apple of Eden that his family has stolen. The narrative, as in other games, consists of a series of Templar targets that he must eliminate on the road to facing the central enemy, Rodrigo Borgia, better known in his time as Pope Alexander VI. *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood* introduces a new feature in the assassin's arsenal. Ezio must build the Italian Brotherhood. The player must recruit and mentor young assassins. That can be used to eliminate targets from a distance, or aid Ezio in battle. Along with the Brotherhood quests there are new collectibles, treasure, and faction side quests. Ezio also has a larger arsenal of weapons at his disposal like poison darts, smoke bombs, crossbows, as well as different Assassin outfits. In the end Ezio recovers the Apple of Eden, and

removes the Borgia family from power. Ezio's final scene, shows him placing the Apple in a cave similar to the Vault in *Assassin's Creed II*. The stone door closes and the camera zooms out to reveal the Apple is hidden under the Colosseum.

As the present day assassins prepare to head out, their power goes out. Rebecca states that they weren't able to retrieve the password to the Stone door before the power cut off. Desmond uses his Eagle Vision to locate a "symbol [that] matches the one on the door to the Vault" (*AC B*). Along with the Symbol, there are three sets of numbers 1419, 1420, and 1421. Shaun reveals to the group their meaning: "The tetragrammaton. The 72 names of God. You see? They're all contained within three verses. Exodus 19 through 21. And -- get this -- you'll like this. If you arrange the four Hebrew letters in God's name within an equilateral triangle, their numerical values add up to the same number: 72...[and] Construction on the Colosseum began in the year 72" (*AC B*). Now that they have found the password, the assassins leave Monteriggioni and arrive at the Colosseum. Desmond climbs into the depths of the structure, while Lucy helps Rebecca and Shaun find an alternative route.

As the player moves Desmond through the obstacles, phantoms manifest themselves from the bleeding effect. Desmond does not make any mention of them, but their presence seems to indicate that Desmond is not in control of the Bleeding Effect as previously assumed. Desmond reaches the ruins beneath the Colosseum and finds the projection of a woman like Minerva, but she is dressed differently and has a different voice. She appears to be a recording that recites, before vanishing, "we commit to this space the epilogue of our ending" (*AC B*). As Desmond continues he finds another recording. This time she reveals "in the beginning, we set our truths to parchment. To stone. To the memory of men. These proved impermanent things. Cleansed by fire. Cleansed by famine. Cleansed by flood. All the world is innocent once more. Innocent and

ignorant” (*AC B*). She then vanishes. Desmond climbs out of the ruins and finds himself inside a church. He lets the other assassins in, and Shaun, as a historian, clarifies that they are in “Santa Maria Araceoli. See those columns along the aisles? They’re lifted from Roman ruins. Now, supposedly, this church was built on top of the ancient Temple of Juno” (*AC B*).

Juno, the woman who appears, recites a message, and then vanishes, continues to appear as Desmond unlocks a hidden stone elevator in the church that leads to the Vault where the apple is hidden. Here only Desmond sees her apparition, and each time she speaks her voice fills with disdain for the human race. In her last message she tells Desmond that he “will know only when it is too late” (*AC B*). Desmond touches the Apple and his companions freeze. Juno reveals,

Your DNA communes with the Apple. You have activated it ... On the 72nd day before the moment of awakening. You, birthed from our loins and the loins of our enemies. The end and the beginning, who we abhor and honor. The final journey commences. There is one who would accompany you through the gate. She lies not within our sight. The cross darkens the horizon. [Desmond is moved by Juno]. The path must be opened. You cannot escape your part in this. The scales shall be balanced. [He moves towards Lucy with a drawn blade]. You know very little we must guide you. Cease your struggle. [Desmond stabs Lucy in the abdomen]. It is done. The way lies all before you. Only she remains to be found. Awaken the sixth. Go. ALONE!

Desmond faints and the screen goes black. The credits scroll on the screen and after a few minutes, agitated voices are heard. One unknown voice states, “he has gone into shock” while the other responds “put him back in the machine. It’s the only way to fix this” (*AC B*). The short epilogue serves as a tool to continue the narrative. With Desmond in the Animus, even if he is unconscious, the player can still access Ezio’s memories.

The games create a world that has many facets. The narrative continues beyond these three games, and even beyond games and into other media forms, as we will see below. Desmond Miles tells his story and the story is not “clean” nor straightforward. Assassins

disguised as Templars, Templars disguised as assassins, an ancient race that created power artifacts, and the end of the world all serve to complicate a vast narrative that leaves more questions than answers in its path. These questions can be attempted with focuses on theology, history, art, gender, weapons, and countless other topics for thorough analysis and still leave questions unanswered. The *Assassin's Creed* narrative is so large that it bled out of the games and into other media creating new narratives within the same fictional world.

The Larger Fictional World of *Assassin's Creed*:

Guides & Print Books

A narrative that expands the bounds of its original medium is a story that has reached an audience and made itself present in the world. Like great works of literature that survive by moving from the print pages of a book to the stage, the screen, audio, additional print editions or retellings, and so on, the narrative that *Assassin's Creed* is expanding and revolutionizing what a video game narrative can be. The games have a story line that continues to expand in each media that it uses. We might even say that the bleeding effect that Desmond experienced in the games is something the series is also experiencing with different media. The codex book, for example, is one of the longest standing media that exists today. *Assassin's Creed* has found itself expanding even into print media by the use of strategy guides, novels, and reference books.

Strategy guides are common and popular print materials sold with or as supplements to the game experience. Although most console and PC games have some type of print guide, creating these materials as more than a “walkthrough” and incorporating the game world allows them to exist as part of the fictional world. I will discuss three types of guides in relation to the *Assassin's Creed* universe: printed instructional booklets included in the game case, printed strategy guides sold as supplements, and online databases.

Games are currently produced in a disc format, like movies come in a hard plastic case, like books the cover of the case has the name of the game, cover art, and authorial information. For game DVDs, the case opens on the right, has the printed materials on the left side and the disk on the right. *Assassin's Creed IV Black Flag* (2013), which was produced in two disks (disk one for the single player story, and disk two for the multiplayer story) has a page where the first disk sits that like a printed page turns to reveal the second disk. Because the games have been released over 9 years, we are able to see small changes related to the games but not inherently significant to the game world. The instructional booklets have experienced a significant change. Starting with *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood* (2010), the booklet was shortened to a paragraph on “accessing the in-game manual” which “is conveniently embedded within the game itself ... not only does the in-game manual make it quick and easy to get the answers you need, but it will never get worn, torn, or lost” (Ubisoft). Including this information in the game addressed the need to have this information be part of the game world. This is a way to make the experience immediate by eliminating the external instructional printed materials, yet this also highlights the hypermediacy of an additional interface/menu when playing.

This is a change from the first two games, *Assassin's Creed* (2007) and *Assassin's Creed II* (2009), which are the only two games in this series that have printed instructional booklets included with the game. Since my booklets are not “worn, torn, or lost” I can cite them (although the booklets are from two different game consoles, which means if there are differences specific to the game console, I will not be able to address them). The booklet printed in 2007 is 24 pages; the second printed in 2009 is 10 pages. The reduction in pages shows that the movement away from the printed booklet was already beginning – indeed, a year later, in 2010, it was reduced to a few sentences. (At the same time, it is possible that the reduction in pages could also be due to

the 2009 printing being part of a sequel.) Since the 2007 *Assassin's Creed* introduced the game, this booklet has the task of defining terms and information of the game world.

The booklets contain an overview of the controls and objectives of the game, a type of printed tutorial which goes over the basics such as what each button on the control corresponds to in the game, such as the heads-up display (HUD), icons, etc. The first page of both booklets features a table of contents. The 2007 booklet has six sections (Controls, Heads-up display, Interaction loop, Objectives, Game Structure, and Menus), and the 2009 booklet has five sections (Controls, HUD, Gameplay loop, PSP system-PS3 connectivity, and UPlay). The controls section begins by labeling a picture of the game controller, and continues to subsection titled Animus controls. The 2007 booklet begins: “The Animus allows the subject to control his ancestor through a combination of standard and contextual buttons,” and the 2009 booklet begins “The Animus 2.0 allows you to control Ezio through a combination of standard and contextual buttons.” These two sentences are very similar, the structure of the booklets is similar, and this demonstrates the structure and standard practice of these type of printed materials but this also demonstrates different ways of attempting immediacy.

As I described above, the Animus is the machine that allows Desmond to access his ancestor's memories, and in the games it changes its form. The instructional booklet addresses it as “2.0” (as is done in the game), and this highlights the importance of the game world, to an extent treating it as real. In a later section, there is a reference to “the Animus 1.0”. The Animus is not a real machine, of course; it only exists within the fictional world, and using distinction of 1.0 and 2.0 makes the printed booklet a part of the fictional world. The sentence changes its narrative from third to first person, from “allows the subject” to “allows you”. The booklet can be addressing either the player or Desmond (character). Desmond uses the Animus 2.0 and the

use of “you” makes it a viable option of immediacy by assuming Desmond is reading this instructional booklet. However, this is actually hypermediacy, calling attention to the fact that there is a player. Both are possible because the 2009 booklet goes on to address Ezio as “the ancestor” and “your ancestor” in different sections. The inconsistencies in the terminology allow both possibilities to exist, demonstrating the bleeding and blending of the real world and the fictional world that *Assassin’s Creed* thrives upon.

The 2007 booklet might seem more removed from the world of *Assassin’s Creed* with its use of “the subject” and “his ancestor” versus the use “you” and “Ezio”; however, it is actually a clearer attempt to be part of the gameworld. The first page after the table of contents is what appears to be an email from Lucy Stillman to Dr. Warren Vidic with the “Subject: Re: Animus Functionality & New Subject”. The email reads:

Warren,

As requested the other day in our weekly meeting, I’ve begun preparing the files on our new subject, #17 Desmond Miles, and his ancestor Altair (born circa 1165 – death unknown).

Please find attached my first draft of the Animus control & feedback system for the board presentation next week. Feel free to make comments or suggestions.

Cheers,

Lucy

The booklet continues with a description of Desmond and Altair that includes things such as weight, height, and even Desmond’s blood type before moving onto the actual instructional text of the Controls section. The fictional world of *Assassin’s Creed* began in 2007. The instructional booklet to this game has the duty not only of providing the player with instructions on playing

the game, but also has to introduce the game world. Doing so by having the player read an email where the instructional booklet is actually a draft attached to an email that is to be revised and presented to a “board” that will approve the project of Desmond exploring “his ancestor Altair[‘s]” memories is an act of immediacy. The player is immersed in the game world before even placing the disk in the console.

The first sentence of the booklet, as stated earlier, starts “the Animus allows the subject to control his ancestor.” This is not actually less immediate than “the Animus 2.0 allows you to control Ezio”, as it first appears, but more immediate since it is a draft of a project to be presented in the fictional world of the game. The booklet is an artifact of the game world and maintains its role by having a text that appears similar to handwriting as Dr. Vidic’s notes. In the Controls section, Dr. Vidic comments, “When we switched the Animus control scheme to use standard video-game controls...”, an acknowledgement of having instructions on using the Animus reflect the game control since Desmond doesn’t sit in front of a game console or computer but lays in a bed like machine and appears to access and control the memory like we would a dream (a dream that is being watched and recorded). This brings attention to the booklet being read by the player as an interesting way of introducing the game narrative, and creates a reason for the controls to reflect “standard video-game controls”. This interaction of immediate and hypermediate moments in the booklets show the desire for the fictional world of video games to also live in our world. In these early games, with the story just beginning, the printed materials show how the gameworld exists across different media.

Although the printed instructional booklets have been phased out and incorporated as part of the game menus, there is still a printed guide that continues to be produced, and those are strategy guides. Two large companies that have and are producing strategy guides for the

Assassin's Creed games are Prima Games and Piggyback. According to its website, Prima Games "is the world's leading publisher of strategy content for PC and console video games" (primagames.com). The company has been publishing strategy guides for 25 years and has "evolved with the gaming world, from the very first print guides published of the NES, to our most recent online guides with interactive maps and streaming videos" (primagames.com). The print guide has evolved like the instructional booklet but has not disappeared. The guide is supplemental to the game, but still part of the fictional world. It allows for the existence of the narrative beyond the game disk. Prima Games states that their "print guides are known all over the world, with complete walkthroughs, detailed maps and helpful screenshots. Our collector's editions contain exclusive extras such as pull-out maps, downloadable content, lavish art sections, lithographs, or even in-game DLC" (primagames.com). Advertising "exclusive extras" from the fictional world can convince a fan of the narrative to purchase one guide over another. The exclusive content does not necessarily add to the narrative, but always adds to the experience of a player with the fictional world of *Assassin's Creed*. A "pull-out map" or "lavish art sections" are created and sold for the purpose of expanding the fictional world of the game. The game does not end when the player completes the series of events contained on the game disk but continues to grow by using other media.

Although strategy guides like the instructional booklet have in recent years moved from existing in print to online versions, the printed guide is still produced. Piggyback has published guides "over the past eighteen years" and "across a wide range of markets" in the world. Prima Games and Piggyback both produced guides for *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood*. The game released on 2010 is the third console game produced in the *Assassin's Creed* series and a sequel to Ezio's memory in *Assassin's Creed II*. This game introduces several new features to the

Assassin's Creed world and Desmond's present day story. Prima Games has an online strategy guide and Piggyback produced a print strategy guide. Both guides have different things that they offer and demonstrate the ways that strategy guides are able to expand the fictional world of the game.

Piggyback details the content of their guide as “user friendly”, “with a focus on practical, high-level information”, and “a detailed 20-page review of events across the entire *Assassin's Creed* series to date” with “all optional activities laid bare in a huge and utterly comprehensive 46-page Side Quests chapter.” The importance is placed on the details that the guide can reveal from the *Assassin's Creed* world. The description of Piggyback's guide also states that it “scrutinizes every aspect of the Brotherhood experience” (piggyback.com). This attention to detail makes it clear that the fictional world is vast and full of things to experience, and a guide can help a player reach a higher level of immersion into the *Assassin's Creed* universe. Prima Games also describes its online guide as “user-friendly” with “highly detailed area maps” (primagames.com). Again, the focus is on the details that the guide can provide to ensure that the player has “a successful and rewarding path through” (primagames.com) the game. The guides are created to “help you enjoy each moment of discovery” (piggyback.com). Full of colored images, maps, and information the strategy guides whether online or in print aim to serve the same purpose.

The Piggyback print guide's introductory sentences address the player as “eager to jump into *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood* straight away” (8). Prima Games introduction page addresses the game as “the biggest and most in depth game of the series so far, with the largest explorable area yet created” (primagames.com). Piggyback focuses on the player's excitement to play the game and Prima Games on the reasons the player should be excited to play the game. The game

is full of things that fill the player with excitement to play, but without the guide that experience may not be as full and rewarding. The strategy guides can provide a path through “the largest explorable area yet created” (primagames.com). The strategy guide provides more than a walkthrough of the game, it also contains maps, strategies, and narrative content making certain sections of the guide “loaded with coronal mass ejection-grade spoilers” (primagames.com). The difference that distinguishes the Prima Games guide from the Piggyback guide is the media on which it is experienced.

Prima Games has the guide laid out on interactive webpages, and Piggyback allows the player to experience the guide in print. The images and text are the same, but the experience is quite different. The images on the print edition are of a specific size and resolution, but on the computer they can be viewed differently depending on the computer that is used. The print text is more immediate because its images and maps are in full color and the player can touch a part of the *Assassin's Creed* world. The online version of the guide allows a player to quickly search the guide for specific information, but the resolution of the images depends on the computer used to view them. Instructional booklets and print strategy guides are created alongside games in collaboration with Ubisoft (in the case of *Assassin's Creed*), but the development of online webpages has allowed fans of the series to also create a type of guide that I will refer to as online databases.

The *Assassin's Creed* Universe began with Desmond and Altair the game that had the task of introducing the narrative that would expand beyond a test room in Abstergo Industries and the memory of middle-eastern cities in the twelfth century. As most games do, *Assassin's Creed* (2007) also contained collectibles and side quests. In Altair's memories, the collection of Flags and Templars gave players the task of scouring the countryside, city streets, rooftops,

buildings, etc. The *Assassin's Creed* sequel in 2010 only increased the category of “collectibles.” Replacing Flags and Templars, players now had to search the Italian cities and countryside for “feathers, glyphs, statuettes, codex pages, seals, and treasure.” This aspect of the games has remained a part of the game world. The in-game objects that needed to be located are not required for the main story line to reach its end; however, they add depth to the narrative.

The instructional booklet included with the 2007 game under the section “Objectives” contains a subsection on Flags that states collecting flags “was a popular way to lay claim to an area, but in the assassin’s mind, these were false claims. They seemed to believe that the Holy Land belonged to no one and everyone.” Dr. Vidic’s note below this section states, “I thought Desmond’s ancestor was an assassin, not some flag-stealing Robin Hood.” The task of collecting flags folded into the narrative: “I suppose that performing these activities helps our subject synchronize with his ancestor.” If the player collects the flags, synchronization, which increases the health meter, is increased. The collectibles are introduced as a way for Desmond to connect and have more control over the genetic memories. Not having full synchronization will force Desmond out of Altair’s memories and for Abstergo this would be a failed attempt to find the Appel of Eden. As the game narrative continues into other games, the collectibles will have varying degrees of connection to the narrative.

In the opening section of *Assassin's Creed II* (2010), Ezio has a conversation with his younger brother, Petruccio, who is ill. Petruccio asks Ezio to collect eagle feathers for him, for a reason that is never revealed in the game. Later when Ezio’s father and brothers are executed, his mother is so grief-stricken that she is left in a zombie like state for the rest of the game. The player continues to collect feathers and place them in a chest in Ezio’s mother’s bedroom. Collecting all 100 feathers gives the player a reward of a family cape that can be worn as part of

Ezio's assassin outfit. The narrative reward; however, is that of a short scene where Ezio hugs his mother and she speaks "Thank you, Ezio, for not forgetting about me" (AC II). This is a narrative branch of Ezio's story. Ezio is forced to grow up and become an assassin when his family is suddenly betrayed. The short scene at the beginning with his younger brother gives the collectible aspect of the game a connection to the narrative. Ezio collects feathers in memory for his younger brother and for his grief-stricken mother. At the end the reward is that Ezio's efforts are appreciated and his mother hugs and speaks once again. Not all collectibles are as emotionally influenced, but there is always a reward for the player that takes the time to seek out every flag, feather, or treasure chest.

The reward can be in game weapon, outfit piece, or achievement/trophy, which is displayed to other players. The search for these collectibles can be aided by strategy guides purchased from Prima Games or Piggyback, as we've seen. Such aid can also come from a fan-created webpages, videos, or "walkthroughs." While there are vast websites like IGN.com, Gamefaqs.com, and Gamespot.com that contain game cheats, facts, and walkthroughs for many different games, there are also websites solely dedicated to the *Assassin's Creed* Universe.

Launched in 2008 Assassinscreed-maps.com contains interactive maps of the 2007 *Assassin's Creed* game collectibles. The maps are copies of what is visible in the game. The user has the ability to select a specific map that has been numbered. Each number icon corresponds to a flag location. Hovering your mouse over a number brings up a small pop out window that contains a screen shot and short description of the flag location. A checklist below the map allows the user to check off any flags that have been found. This allows the player to track his or her progress through the game. The Templar locations are identified by a green dot, and like the flags placing the mouse over the green dot shows an in game screen shot and short description.

While there were always “plans to update the site with all the AC games” in 2012 the site’s creator wrote that “not long after AC2 came out I had a total HDD crash and lost all my AC2 work, and that totally put me off” (assassinscreed-maps.com). The 2012 note seems to be the last activity on the site, however, the maps that this site created are available on a different website that continues to add to their *Assassin’s Creed* database.

The interactive maps with collectible locations for *Assassin’s Creed* (2007) are also available on thehiddenblade.com. This website also links to YouTube videos of the flag locations in each city. Below the videos is a table of contents for example “Flags 5-9, 1:45” means that those flags are found at that time of the video. The website’s main purpose is to organize *Assassin’s Creed* videos. A menu on the left side of the page begins with Syndicate videos and proceeds backwards in time to find AC1 videos at the bottom of the menu. Each game is then divided “by collectible, by FAQ, by target, by assassination style, by memory block [or] by sequence, and by location” (the hiddenblade.com). Some entries have no videos or information metadata attached while others have several videos. The “by assassination style” section for AC1 was divided into “Stealth, Air to Assassinate, Stunt, Blitz, Punching Bag, Turkey Shoot, Early Death” (thehiddenblade.com). The “Air to Assassinate” section contained 14 videos, which is not surprising since this is an encouraged aspect of the game. Air assassinations in later games become part of mission objectives. I would define this website as a database because it categorizes and sorts *Assassin’s Creed* videos. An expansion of the *Assassin’s Creed* Universe that uses a different media to allow players to discover things about the fictional world, and share in other players’ experiences.

As the world of *Assassin’s Creed* grows so do the types of online databases that could be created. An interactive map walkthrough of collectibles or a collection of videos can be useful,

but in 2013 a website “with the goal of being able to provide analyses, data and information as clear and reliable as possible for the *Assassin’s Creed* community” (accesstheanimus.com) was born. The website Accesstheanimus.com states that its objective is to “give an explanation for the many mysteries of the plot” (accesstheanimus.com). The team responsible for this website has created a part of the *Assassin’s Creed* universe. Their “Who are we?” section of the website lists individual information in the form of database entries, with name, title, sex, eyes, height. Each entry can be clicked on for a list of their work on the site. Beyond the website, the group manages Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube accounts. Their most recent entry from May 2016 is for a launch of a Comic Book Archive a “series of articles [that] will be entirely dedicated to the *Assassin’s Creed* comics” (accesstheanimus.com). This website attempts to create a database of criticism written about *Assassin’s Creed*. The existence of this website solely dedicated to writing about the *Assassin’s Creed* games and other parts of the fictional world demonstrates the vastness of the narrative.

Assassin’s Creed is clearly now more than a series of video games. They do not end and begin with the console and screen. From the beginning, there have been external materials to accompany the game world. Instructional booklets attached to the game with an attempt to be an artifact of the game such as the 2007 booklet, strategy guides that attempt to detail the world of the game for an enhanced player experience, and online websites that can help identify collectibles, categorize video of gameplay, or create a database of articles, are just a few ways that the *Assassin’s Creed* games have been expanded and shared. These external print materials or websites are a reflection of the game and the narrative found in the games. The accesstheanimus.com website with the launch of its Comic Book Archive recognizes that there

are developing narratives within the Fictional world of *Assassin's Creed* but outside of the boundaries of the game.

Narrative is a word typically attached to novels, therefore it is fitting that the narrative of *Assassin's Creed* has moved from the screen to the page. The expansion of the fictional narrative of *Assassin's Creed* to a novel first began in 2009. Shortly after the release of the *Assassin's Creed* sequel, the novel *Renaissance* was released. Oliver Bowden, the author of the series, has published one book a year since *Renaissance*, until 2014's *Unity*. The novels are based on the game series. *Renaissance* follows Ezio on his quest to become a part of the Italian Assassin Brotherhood, and avenge his family. The game begins with Desmond, however, the novel does not focus on the present day story and begins with Ezio's story. The opening of the novel is similar to the opening in the game. Ezio's is introduced with a group of young men that have been gathered to teach the man who has been slandering his family's name a lesson. The novel depicts this opening this way:

a young man, only seventeen years old, but tall and proud. Surveying the neighborhood below keenly, he put a hand to his lips and whistled, a low but penetrating sound. In response, as he watched first one, then three, then a dozen, and at last twenty men, young like himself, most clad in black, some with blood-red, green, or azure cowls or hats, all with swords and daggers at their belts, emerged from dark streets and archways into the square. The gang of dangerous-looking youths fanned out, a cocky assuredness in their movements.

This sets a different tone than the game. Where the opening focuses from an aerial view of the city to an archway where several young men run towards a bridge where others are already gathered. None of the young men have their faces or heads covered, and are actually dressed in civilian clothing. The men don't even have visible weapons. The novel continues "The young man looked down at the eager faces, and pale in the moonlight, gazing up at him. He raised his

fist above his head in a defiant salute.” Ezio does stand in front of the men and raises his fist to state “We stand together!” -- as in the novel; however, the differences convey a slightly different take on the story. The main plot of the story seems to remain the same. Ezio has gathered men to fight Vieri de’ Pazzi, who has been slandering his family name, and some details such as an interruption of Ezio’s speech by a “rock, hurled from the direction of the bridge, [that] landed at his feet” are mirrored from the game. This fight, in the game, is set up as a street brawl where these men use their fists. The game uses this as an introduction to the combat system used in the game and since this is the player’s first experience with fights in the game it is simpler not to involve weapons. While the novel can take liberties such as placing Ezio on a rooftop to direct a much sinister looking group of young men who “raised their fists, some drawing their weapons and brandishing them”. This scene nonetheless sets up the introduction of Ezio’s older brother Federico, as well as the execution of his family that will set the whole narrative into motion. The game sets Ezio up as a young man completely unaware of his ties to the Assassins. The book, however, gives the impression that this young hooded man commanding others who carry weapons may already have some investment in the Assassin’s way of life. These subtle differences allow for the novels to recreate the *Assassin’s Creed* narrative in a different media. Changes to the narrative would allow for an expansion of the fictional world while also being a remediation of it.

On February 18th 2016, about six years after the publishing of *Renaissance*, Ubisoft announced an associated Young Adult Book Series. The series is partnered with Scholastic and will be authored by Matthew Kirby. The series will be called *Last Descendants* and is expected to be released in September of 2016 with a sequel to follow in January of 2017. The books feature “a group of teens caught up in the centuries-old Assassin-Templar feud” (Scholastic) and

will like the games be “set concurrently in the present-day [as well as] 1860s New York City, and during the Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire” (Scholastic). Owen, the main character, lost his father due to an accusation “of a crime Owen is certain he didn’t commit” (Scholastic). Owen is aided by Monroe to use the animus and explore their genetic memories to find “an ancient and powerful relic long considered legend -- the Trident of Eden” (Scholastic). The book like the game promises to be a dual story. Both Owen and his ancestor will be tested in their own times. In the games, Desmond’s story developed alongside the narratives of his ancestors. All in search for an ancient artifact known as the Apple of Eden, which has been a long contested artifact between the Assassins and the Templars. The novel’s intended audience is for “readers ages 12 and up,” which is an interesting choice since the games are rated M for Mature (i.e. 17 or older). Once the books are available for reading, it would be interesting to note narrative choices made depending on the audience, or is violence in books considered less gruesome than in video games? The expansion of the *Assassin’s Creed* universe is not limited to the narrative created in the game, and as it expands new narratives can be revealed. A young adult book series will certainly create new avenues for the fictional world the games created, but another avenue that the fictional narrative has created is reference books.

While strategy guides attempt to detail every aspect of the game, these additional print books attempt to detail parts of the *Assassin’s Creed* world not included in the games. Reference books that have been created for the *Assassin’s Creed* series include encyclopedias, art collections, and reference texts as artifacts of the game. *Assassin’s Creed* is not the only game for which reference books have been created. Video games with large fictional worlds and a large fan base are able to expand into these types of texts. The players of these games have been lured by the game and the books allow the players to immerse themselves in the world that they

have spent hours in. The fictional world is more immediate when a player can hold a reference book, which is physical artifact of the game world.

The *Assassin's Creed* Universe currently contains three encyclopedias; however, only the second and third editions are available for purchase on the Ubiworkshop.com website. The second edition was printed in 2012. A description of the encyclopedia lists that it “is the definitive guide to a universe that spans over many different platforms and media” and was “created hand in hand with the Assassin’s Creed Dev Team in Ubisoft Montreal” (Ubi Workshop). The encyclopedia is a hardcover text with over 120 pages of new content, and totaling 384 pages. The content includes high resolution images and art work of the games, as well as informative and historical descriptions. For a quick glance inside the 2nd edition a fan created 6-minute video titled “Assassin’s Creed Encyclopedia- 2nd Edition Unboxing” is quite useful. The *Assassin's Creed Encyclopedia 3.0* which came out a few years later, is boasted to have “more than 390 pages of content” (Ubi Workshop). The second edition is focused on adding *Assassin's Creed III* content. That latter game placed players in the middle of the American Revolution, the next game gave players the ability to explore the Golden Age of piracy, which is the content added in the 3.0 edition of the encyclopedia. The full color images and the descriptions of historical settings, characters, and weapons can make this encyclopedia a nice addition to the game world. The game adds the ability to command and sail a ship in the Caribbean looting and battling other ships, as well as swimming in the ocean, and meeting interesting characters like Blackbeard, Jack Rackham, Mary Read, Anne Bonny, Charles Vane, and Bartholomew Roberts. Characters met during the aren’t the only ones worth documenting, reference books that are presented as objects of the fictional *Assassin's Creed* world include an Employee handbook, and a Lost Journal.

Assassin's Creed IV Black Flag introduced several new elements to the narrative. Desmond the present day anchor died at the end of *Assassin's Creed III*. How could the games continue without Desmond? Would there be a new present day character whose memories could be accessed with the Animus? The answer was the attempt to blend the player's reality with the fictional game world. The game was now produced by Ubisoft in conjunction with Abstergo Entertainment. Both logos are displayed in the opening of the game. With Desmond gone the narrative now had the Templar-run company producing video games, and the player would now be an Employee of Abstergo. In *Black Flag*, present day collectibles lead you to find out that Desmond's body was recovered by Abstergo. This allowed them to upload Desmond's DNA to the cloud where his ancestor's memories could be accessed by Abstergo employees. The 2013 game introduced the player to the world of Abstergo entertainment. As an employee, it is the player's task to explore Pirate Edward Kenway's memories for content that would be used in Abstergo's next video game. The game series continues with the premise of having the present day character be a bystander employee who gets caught in the narrative of the previous games. The Employee handbook was released in November 2014 at the same time as the *Assassin's Creed Unity* game. The ancestor used in *Unity* is French Assassin Arno Dorian (or Case File 44412 in the employee handbook).

The reference book is full of historical pictures and letters that appear to be taped or paper-clipped to the pages of the employee handbook. The opening letter explains a bit about the storyline and states that the attached "files [are] for your perusal. I suggest you read through this one section at a time concurrently with your own experiences in the Animus. In other words, once you've completed the 'Childhood Through Imprisonment' portion of your experiment, read St. Claire's evaluation of Fraser's report before you write up your own" (Golden). The employee

handbook is an object that inserts itself in the game world by placing the player in a position to play the game and then read through that section of the file “before you write up your own” report. The reason this book could not exist in the game world is because the previous employee working on Assassin Arno Dorian “deleted all soft copies of his files. These hard copies that Aidan printed out of his critiques—with notes by St. Claire, Lemay, and Fraser himself—are all that remain” (Golden). Although the act of having the player both play and read along with the game seems to remove the player from the fictional world by forcing the player to move from the screen to the page and back to the screen, it can actually immerse the player in the game world. The player is playing the seventh game in this series because the narrative has created a desirable experience. After seven games, a few mini games, some novels, how can the game continue to produce new and interesting experiences without drastically altering the game play? The solution is new ways of engaging the player, even self-consciously. The *Assassin’s Creed* universe has grown so large that it is only normal to seek new ways to experience its core story, which is why it has expanded to new media such as novels and reference books. The luxury video games have that literary novels don’t have is that they are already a visual experience. A video game narrative is told in artistic renderings of characters, places, objects, costumes, etc. Collections of the artwork in these games are probably the most numerous of the reference books produced for Assassins Creed.

After playing as Ezio for a few years, a new Assassin was introduced with the launch of *Assassin’s Creed III*. The game launched players from renaissance Italy to the American Revolution. Along with the game, a reference book titled “The Art of Assassin’s Creed III” was released. It is 144 pages of a “breathtaking collection of artwork [which includes] sketches, concept art, and behind-the-scenes commentary from the artists reveal Connor’s journey from

chaotic city streets to blood-soaked battlefields in the hostile American wilderness and beyond” (McVittie, back cover). The intent of this reference book is to tell a narrative of the *Assassin’s Creed* game with the images used to create the game. The book gives the player a different perspective from which to interpret Connor’s narrative. A player is able to experience an aspect of the game that is not found in a strategy book or a novel. The visual component of the games are given their own platform to contribute to the narrative. *Assassin’s Creed* has created a “sweeping narrative covering the Crusades in medieval Jerusalem to the pirate-infested oceans of the Caribbean and the bloody battles of the French Revolution”, and as of Fall 2015 the reference book “spans every major character and every iconic historical setting—from the enigmatic Altair to Syndicate’s renegade Assassin, Jacob—to form the most comprehensive collection of Assassin’s Creed artwork ever assembled” (Miller). This collection, the employee handbook, and the encyclopedias are parts of the *Assassin’s Creed* Universe, but they don’t only inhabit it, they promote and enhance its narrative. The visual and interactive experience of playing the games isn’t enough to create the world that Desmond, Altair, Ezio, and others inhabit. While the games expand into guides, exclusive websites, novels, and reference books, the games return to the screen in a less interactive role.

Other Media & Other Games

The *Assassin’s Creed* narrative was born as a video game. Desmond, Altair, and Ezio, the three first playable characters of the series, introduced many aspects of the *Assassin’s Creed* world. The world, however, has many characters and many histories left unwritten. With the news that soon a new story will be told with a young adult book series we can see that new stories are now being told outside of the games. The book series, however, is not the only new

narrative. In December 2016, movie theatres will be premiering a new narrative within the *Assassin's Creed* Universe. This film, however, is not the first released for the series.

In *Assassin's Creed II* we are introduced to Ezio Auditore da Firenze and his story of vengeance. Early in the game, Ezio's father and brothers are executed, leaving him to learn that they are Assassins. Ezio is taught to be an Assassin so that he may both continue his father's work and avenge his family. The short film that was released along with this game in 2009 is considered a prequel to the game because it focuses on Giovanni Auditore da Firenze, Ezio's father. The film introduces the conflict that leads to his death and the beginning of Ezio's story. Titled *Assassin's Creed: Lineage*, the film helps enhance the world that the player will encounter in *Assassin's Creed II*. The film ends where the game will pick up, and Ezio's like Desmond's narrative expands through several games. (*Assassin's Creed II*, *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood*, and *Assassin's Creed Revelations*, were re-released in 2012 as the *Ezio Trilogy*.) Desmond is the present day link for the start of the series, but Ezio served as a way to introduce and expand the narrative of the ancient conflict that affects Desmond in the present day. The release of a film that focuses on Giovanni allows the player to be immersed in Ezio's story without asking the player to play as other characters in the game. While the player only plays as Ezio in the game, we can still experience the other characters that are key motivators of the plot. The film does not speak or touch on the present and therefore, it is a clever move to use a different media to explore a different part of the world. In the game we can play as Ezio, but the film creates a window where we can learn about Ezio's father without disrupting the structure the game has created between the present and Desmond's genetic memories.

The film to be released in December of 2016 will introduce a completely new narrative that will have both a present day and a past. The brief description found on both Ubisoft's and

Fox's websites states that the present day character is named Callum Lynch and "through a revolutionary technology that unlocks his genetic memories, [he] experiences the adventures of his ancestor, Aguilar, in 15th Century Spain" (Fox). There are details that appear to remain consistent with the narrative introduced by the games. Callum and Aguilar's names have meanings tied to Dove and Eagle, and given the use of eagle in the games, this is not likely a coincidence. The trailer also opens the shots of the past with an eagle soaring across the screen. This is something also done in the trailers of the games. It will be interesting to see how the symbolism popularized by the game will be used in the film. This description, along with the trailer, have revealed some details that spur speculation on the uses of key elements of the *Assassin's Creed* Universe.

The "technology" mentioned in the description is the Animus, but the trailer of the film shows a machine that is vastly different from what is in the games. The film appears to be using an arm-like machine which lifts Callum in to the air. He appears to have full mobility of his arms and legs in the present day as he explores his ancestor's memories. In the games, movement for the present day character has been very limited. The Animus started as a bed like machine where a visor type screen glided over Desmond's face, then evolved into a chair that cradled the back of Desmond's head, and finally evolved into a computer screen, keyboard, and headset. In the Animus, Desmond is in a dream-like state when accessing his ancestor's memories, but does acquire skills and abilities from his ancestors through the bleeding effect.

The description of the film goes on to state that Callum "amasses incredible knowledge and skills to take on the oppressive and powerful Templar organization in the present day" (Fox). These same words can also be used to describe Desmond's experience with the bleeding effect. Is Callum's bleeding effect portrayed through his use of this new animus? The trailer shows

hidden blades attached to his arms, and he seems to be in control of his body as the machine lifts him up. A short article on Ubiblog speculates on the portrayal of the bleeding effect. An image from the film shows Callum “hunched in a cell” sketching. On the wall there are several sketches that reveal “shadowy figures and ghostly faces” (Reparaz). The article states that this image “reminds us a little of Desmond’s old cell from the first *Assassin’s Creed*, but with eerie charcoal drawings instead of mysterious glyphs drawn in blood” (Reparaz).

The first *Assassin’s Creed* game ends with Desmond using Eagle Vision for the first time. His acquisition of this skill from the use of the Animus is the first sign of the bleeding effect. By using the eagle vision, he is able to see images (letters, numbers, and doodles) that appear to be drawn in blood. The artist of these was Subject 16, who is Desmond’s predecessor in the game. Subject 16 suffered from the bleeding effect, which led him to commit suicide after painting the glyphs that Desmond sees at the end of the game. The film is telling a new story, but the elements that the game introduced are still present, or at least they appear to be for followers of the series. The film will most likely add a new element to the *Assassin’s Creed* universe, but until it is released, it will be hard to say what impact it will have.

The narratives created in the film are different uses of the *Assassin’s Creed* universe: one as a prequel to the game narrative, and the other as a new standalone narrative. But both use elements from the stories created by the main console games. The print materials, webpages, and films are just a few ways of the narrative expanding into other media forms.

The video game industry is typically divided into games produced for consoles and those produced for handhelds. There are also mobile games, produced for android and apple phones and tablets, however, I will not address these types of games. The *Assassin’s Creed* narrative was born as a console game, but has had chapters of the narrative sectioned off in the form of

handheld games. To date the handheld games produced have not included a present day story, so the focus is on the past. The use of the Animus, or a present day character is left aside, to focus on the “ancestor story.” Starting in 2008, *Assassin’s Creed Altair’s Chronicles*, and later in 2009 *Assassin’s Creed Bloodlines*, and *Assassin’s Creed II Discovery* were released. These three handheld games followed the stories of Altair and Ezio, the two ancestors introduced in the console games.

Altair opens the *Assassin’s Creed* universe; however, he is only playable in the first game. He does make an appearance in *Assassin’s Creed Revelations*, but that will not be until 2011. In 2007 when the game was introduced, the narrative of Altair is that of a great Assassin who led the brotherhood into greatness. He is characterized as mysterious, with little information known about him in the present day. He never removes his hood in the game, so his face is always concealed. The ability to play more of his life through the two handheld games allows the player to see how Altair honed his skills to become the mentor of the Assassins in Masyaf and experience the battle he waged against the Templars. Similarly, *Assassin’s Creed II Discover* adds to Ezio’s story by introducing more of his missions and battles against the Templar order. These handhelds do not change the main narrative played in the console games, but does add new episodes to the larger world of a centuries old battle between the Assassins and the Templars.

These games allowed more world- and character-building in the narrative. In 2012 a new handheld was released that added more than background on the console games. In 2012, *Assassin’s Creed Liberation* introduced the series’ first playable female assassin, Aveline. Although this handheld still leaves out the present day story, Aveline introduces a new historical perspective on the Assassin/Templar conflict.

This game was released in the same year as *Assassin's Creed III*, which focuses on the American Revolution in the northern part of the country. Aveline's story takes place in 1765 Louisiana. She is "an assassin of mixed French and African heritage" whose "journey [will take the player] from the crowded streets of New Orleans to New York's blood-soaked battlefields, from voodoo-haunted swamps to ancient Mayan ruins" (Ubisoft). A different part of the American Revolution is told in the handheld game that introduces a female assassin who can adapt to different situations. She is able to switch between confronting "opponents directly with the traditional Assassin Persona; don the Lady Persona to charm them into vicious traps; or employ the Slave Persona to incite a riot and elude ... pursuers" (Ubisoft). The shifting of different personae that Aveline is able to adopt introduces a new form of Assassin. Prior to Aveline and Connor's stories, the player had only played the assassins Altair and Ezio. Connor and Adeline make one thing clear: "the world that the Assassins live in has become far more deadly. And so have you" (Ubisoft). With new arsenals of "tomahawks, [and] rope darts," a "machete, [and] poison-dart blowpipe" (Ubisoft), these assassins introduce a new way to eliminate those who threaten liberty. In 2014, this handheld was released for the consoles in a game along with *Assassin's Creed III* and *Assassin's Creed IV Black Flag* in a game titled *Assassin's Creed: The Americas Collection*.

Adding this handheld to the collection with two console games highlights the contribution of Aveline's narrative to the *Assassin's Creed* Universe. As noted above, the handheld lacks a present day story, but is still incorporated into the present day story told in *Assassin's Creed IV Black Flag*. This game included in *The Americas Collection* is the first game after Desmond's death. The introduction of a new present day character is cleverly disguised as a first person view, making the player the new employee of Abstergo Entertainment. The company

is a game developer partnered with Ubisoft to create the very game you play as an employee. The employee's role is to explore Edward Kenway's memories as a Pirate Assassin for game content. In the present day introductory scene, your guide tells you that Abstergo Entertainment has been in existence since 2010. She points to a screen with an image of Aveline in her assassin outfit and states "maybe you saw Liberation? That was our first title powered by Animus tech" (*AC BF*). The first game that Abstergo Entertainment produced was *Assassin's Creed Liberation*. As a handheld the game is part of the *Assassin's Creed* Universe but it tells a different narrative and allows the main narrative to use it as a way to immerse the player into the fictional world. *Assassin's Creed Liberation* is a product of the fictional world that a player can experience, just like people in the fictional world.

Incorporating the handheld game into the *Assassin's Creed* fictional world is not the only way the narrative can be expanded. In late 2015 and early 2016, three short games were released as a trilogy titled *Assassin's Creed Chronicles*. The chronicles like the handhelds leave out the present day story, but in exchange provide a new look to the *Assassin's Creed* games. The games are in so-called "2.5D," so while the landscapes are not as realistic as the other games, the scenery is colorful, and artistically portrays the distinct cultural and historical narratives explored in the three games. *Assassin's Creed Chronicles* is described as a "fresh genre for the series" with "each chapter [containing] a new beginning and comes with a unique hero from the *Assassin's Creed* universe in a never-seen-before setting" (Ubisoft). The assassins in *Chronicles* have been mentioned in the *Assassin's Creed* narrative, however, this allows the player to explore the other Assassins that we know exist but have never before been allowed to play.

The first chronicle takes place in China in 1526, "as the Ming dynasty starts to crumble" (Ubisoft). The assassin is Shao Jun, who is fresh from her training with Ezio Auditore. In

Assassin's Creed III a Database entry reveals her history. In her teenage years she “was one of the favoured concubines of the Chinese emperor Zhengde”, and shortly after the emperor’s death “in 1521 the Assassin Order ... infiltrate[d] the emperor’s compound and free[d] some of the concubines, Jun among them” (*AC III*). Shao Jun became an assassin, but after the “Brotherhood in eastern China was decimated,” she (one of two survivors) fled “Asia entirely” and “travelled to Italy to seek the advice of Ezio Auditore” (*AC III*). Her interaction with Ezio is not explored in the main narrative, but in an animated film. In 2011, *Assassin's Creed Embers* depicts the final years of Ezio’s life which include Shao Jun and a mysterious artifact. Her story now continues with her as a protagonist in the game. In *Assassin's Creed Chronicles: China* Shao Jun returns “to her homeland with a vendetta” (Ubisoft). In the trailer for *Assassin's Creed Chronicles* each assassin is given a quote to highlight their narrative. Shao Jun’s narrative is: “Until you have experienced the thirst for vengeance, you cannot know the rage it fuels” (Ubisoft). Shao Jun’s journey finally has a chapter in the *Assassin’s creed* universe all her own.

The second narrative of *Assassin's Creed Chronicles* introduces Arbaaz Mir, who lives in 1841 India. A tense time for “the Sikh Empire and the East India Company” (Ubisoft). Arbaaz Mir is tasked with retrieving an item that has been stolen from the Assassin’s Order. The item is now in the power of a Master Templar. Arbaaz Mir must “steal back the item, and protect his friend and his lover” (Ubisoft). The style of this game is similar to the China chronicle, but the story is slightly different. While Shao Jun thirsts for vengeance, Arbaaz Mir’s narrative is described this way: “Until you have found a cause worth fighting for, you cannot know what you will sacrifice for it” (Ubisoft). His journey was first introduced to the *Assassin's Creed* universe in the form of a graphic novel in 2014. *Assassin's Creed Brahman*, the title of the graphic novel, which unlike the game does include a present day component to the story. The ancestor story is

very similar to the one presented in the graphic novel. Arbaaz Mir's name also makes an appearance in the main narrative. In *Assassin's Creed Syndicate*, the Cane-Sword is introduced as a new type of weapon used by the assassins. Arbaaz Mir's Cane-Sword, an unlockable weapon in the game, is described as "a beautiful, efficient weapon bearing the intricate work and emblems of the Indian Brotherhood" (AC Syndicate). Both Shao Jun and Arbaaz Mir are mentioned in details of the main narrative. Nikolai Orelov the assassin in the last Chronicle also makes an appearance in the main narrative.

In the final installment of the *Assassin's Creed Chronicles* trilogy the player meets a man who's quoted in the trailer stating "until you have been disgraced, you cannot know the fire that burns for redemption" (Ubisoft). In 1918 Russia Nikolai is tasked with a final mission before he is allowed "to leave with his family" (Ubisoft). The mission to steal an artifact from the Templars becomes more complicated when Nikolai Orelov decides to save a young girl who he must protect from both the Templars and Assassins. Nikolai Orelov first made his appearance in the *Assassin's Creed* universe in the graphic novels *Assassin's Creed: The Fall* (2012) and *Assassin's Creed: The Chain* (2013). The graphic novels also include the present day narrative. Unlike Arbaaz Mir's present day counterpart, Nikolai Orelov's memories are accessed by a familiar name: Daniel Cross, the man who antagonizes Desmond in the main narrative, is the great grandson of Nikolai Orelov. In the main story, Daniel Cross is a feared Templar who is hunting Desmond. The conflict ends with Desmond killing Daniel Cross in *Assassin's Creed III*. All three assassins in *Assassin's Creed Chronicles* have been present in the *Assassin's Creed* universe, but it is fitting that they have a video game to explore their narratives. Narratives are intertwined with the main narrative of *Assassin's Creed*.

The fictional world of *Assassin's Creed* was created as a video game, but as I have shown its narrative has expanded into a entire multimedia universe. Video games, novels, and films are some media that the narrative has expanded to include. Characters such as Desmond, Altair, and Ezio were the initial protagonists in the series, but now we can look to Shao Jun, Callum, Owen, and even Daniel Cross as new protagonists that will guide us through a world, increasingly globally representative, that can house dozen of other Assassins or Templars and their ancient conflict over the fate of humanity.

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