

# Third Crusade and “Assassins Creed: Bloodlines” Video Game Universe

Nenden Rikma Dewi S  
English Department  
Universitas Komputer Indonesia  
Bandung, Indonesia  
nendenrikma@gmail.unikom.ac.id

**Abstract**— Video games usage as one of the sources to learn humanities subjects such as literature, history, politics, economics, social, culture and others in human’s life becomes main focus of this paper. It is essential to conduct this research since it relates with how millennial comprehend history through their high-tech devices. The paper suggests using video games as one of the interactive methods to comprehend history and literature as a unity. A qualitative method is applied to apprehend how video games perform and distinguish fact and fiction intertwining in Assassins Creed’s video game universe. In reality, men are unable to change history directly yet in their involvement inside the video games can change it. It also helps players in recreating or composing alternative history on Third Crusade War in Acre. Such game is called as “serious game,” since it is not only allowing them to play but also to learn, understand, even recreate history based on their perspective. To discuss this issue, a console platform game made by Ubisoft in 2007, named Assassin Creed is used. This game uses third crusade event as a play universe when a player shall accomplish various missions to eliminate all Knight Templars in Acre. The result shows that by using video games, history can be recreated, revisited by any player as well as involved, in particular, historical events.

**Keywords**— *history, literature, player, serious game*

## I. INTRODUCTION

A study entitled “Third Crusade and ‘Assassin’s Creed: Bloodlines’ Video Game Universe” is conducted to discuss depiction of Third Crusade event in Assassins Creed video game which is analyzed using game studies approach. This study investigates history fabrications in video games universe by focusing on its narrative aspects, mostly on its characters and setting. The video game is Assassin’s Creed: Bloodlines developed by Ubisoft in 2007 in console platform edition. The game is chosen as the most representative game in adapting history of Third Crusade 1159 which portrayed a battle in struggling Jerusalem between Richard ‘the Lionheart’ and Salahuddin al-Ayyubi—known as Saladin. It is important to discuss this issue, since this historical event was one of the most contradicted histories seen in different perspectives among Muslim and Christian. Nicolle and Hook mention the event as a more complex issue involving political and cultural of Christian and Islam world [1].

Related to the study, there are some preliminary researches. First, a study entitled “Counter-Hegemonic Commemorative Play: Marginalized Pasts and the Politics of

Memory in the Digital Game Assassin’s Creed: Freedom Cry” by Emil Lundedal Hammar. Hammar argued that digital games hold a great potential in influencing cultural memory which related with past, contemporary forms of marginalization [2]. Second, Mirt Komel’s “Orientalism in Assassin’s Creed: Self-orientalizing the Assassin from Forerunners of Modern Terrorism into Occidentalized Heroes. Komel discussed Orientalism being portrayed and distinguished in Assassin’s Creed that associated with extremism and terrorism [3]. He used cultural studies approach and reached a conclusion that a game is never just a game, culture is never just culture.

Last but not least, a study entitled “Assassin’s Creed: a Multi-cultural Read” by El-Nasr, Al-Saati, Niedenthal and Milam which discussed game play experience and perceptions from different culture shaped by one’s emotional values, expectations, knowledge and attitude culture. They are discussing the game play through cultural view point and the result is players’ experiences in the game play are influenced by their culture, previous knowledge and experiences [4].

Nevertheless, none of the researches are discussing definite relation between characters and setting within the video games with the historical event of Third Crusade. Komel, however, connected it on how Western sees Eastern, especially Islam, in 9/11 incident [3]. Based on those information, this study suggests on video game usage as a fruitful source in learning and improving players’ curiosity on history and other disciplines as well as encouraging them to have critical thinking.

Such game is known as a ‘serious game’, however it has no tendency to mention other games are not serious. ‘Serious Game’ has an ultimate objective to educate instead only for mere excitement. Michael and Chen stated that United States Army used America’s Army video game as a recruiting tool among civilians [5]. It means that video game can be treated as a tool to entertain but also to train and learn how to think critically. Such hypothesis can be comprehended by playing the game directly and taking notes to be presented in this research.

## II. METHOD

In order to discuss the issue comprehensively and objectively, this study apply naturalistic observation. It means to interpret and understand how history is depicted in the

video game's universe, researcher needs to get involve in the game play. As stated by Cozby that naturalistic observation is used when he or she wants to describe and understand people in a social or cultural setting, live, work and experience the setting [6].

Data are taken and collected from the game play screen by making screenshots during the play. It is in line as Cozby proposes that "data in naturalistic observation studies are primarily qualitative in nature; that is, they are the description of observation themselves rather than quantitative summaries." Thus, technical steps in doing analysis containing research questions, exploratory questions and approaches are described as in Fig. 1 below.

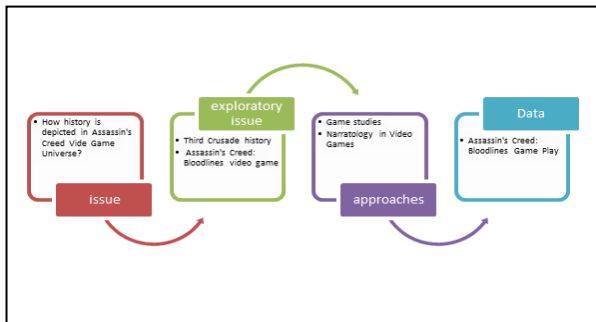


Fig 1. Methodological steps

Data taken are pictures of scenes from Assassin's Creed: Bloodlines. The taken data from game play are analyzed by making connection between the video game universe with historical background of Third Crusade. Each taken scene displays either character or setting related with the Third Crusade historical events.

### III. RESULTS

Result of this study exposes that character and setting are two important disclosures in the Assassin's Creed universe related with Third Crusade event. Thereby several data taken from game play to show how characters and setting can set up the mood and theme of the game related with the historical events of Third Crusade 1191 in Acre.

#### A. Setting disclosure

Setting is one of important element in a narrative, whether it is a traditional or modern narrative. Its existence helps players in understanding background of particular universe, so that they are able to interact in accordance to it. In Assassin's Creed video game, the game play is begun by giving the information or context of the narrative, as can be seen in Fig 2.

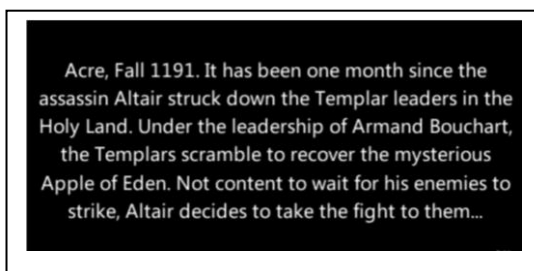


Fig 2. Acre, a Templar site

Acre is located in Mediterranean coast which had became a place in struggling the Holy Land between Muslims and European Crusaders. The game play is started by giving information towards players about the setting and characters in the play. This preliminary knowledge is important to the players so that they can relate with missions onwards. Cyprus is the main land inside Assassin's Creed universe which covered several main sites.

Limassol is a city within Cyprus where Altair executes his missions to kill Templar soldiers and defeated the Grand Master. Its location is important since it contains a safe house for Altair and other assassins to gather information and keep their precious belongings. Players also can synchronize their journey after reaching high buildings and the safe house. By making synchronization, player is saving current stage. So that if they are failed in accomplishing the mission, they are able to continue their game in the last scene.

Limassol itself is a city with lots of historical ports, buildings and old markets which all together connect the present and the past—in the game play. Players are induced to seek more information about the site and comprehend the intertwined history—King Richard the Lionheart set foot and married in Limassol.

Cyprus becomes an island in Mediterranean Sea where Templar's stronghold under King Richard "The Lionheart" existed. It also becomes the main battleground between the Assassin and Templar. In the game play, Altair played by the players needs to complete particular missions in Cyprus.

As an island with rich history, Cyprus has long history of settlement from around 9000 years ago which is a perfect setting for players to comprehend reasons its selection as the main place in Assassin's Creed universe.

Kyrenia is a city turned into a state ruled by the Templars and becomes a major base for Templar. One of important site in Kyrenia is The Saint Hilarion Castle. During the game play, players can synchronize Altair's genetic memories. Besides Saint Hilarion Castle, there is another major castle of Templar in Kyrenia. It is known as Buffavento Castle.

Buffavento Castle is also located in Kyrenia and becomes Armand Bouchart house. Buffavento is also known to have a large prison area, so that Altair needs to escape from this site without being detected.

#### B. Characters depictions

During the game play, players are introduced to many characters and non-person character (NPC). Some of them have roles in giving missions to be accomplished by Altair, and some should be assassinated by him.

Robert de Sable died in 1191 battle and left no successor. His position as Grand Master is next taken over by Armand Bouchart. In the game play, Bouchart has relocated Templar's Archive to an unknown location in order to protect it and avoid rebellion. Bouchart's position is achieved since de Sable does not having any descendent as his successor. His position yet is insecure due to the existence of Maria Thorpe as in Fig. 3



Fig 3. Maria Thorpe

Maria Thorpe is known as a former steward of Robert de Sable. She becomes one of the ultimate enemies defeated by Altair in the beginning of the play. She is captured by Altair and taken to the Safe House, but she is succeeded to escape during the journey to Cyprus. Next, she turns into Altair's wife. Altair is actually one of Saladin's branch army which had no information on a truce made by Richard and Saladin.

King Richard 'The Lionheart' is the European armies commander, and Saladin is Muslims armies commander. Both armies are fighting in the Third Crusade in 1189-1192 as an attempt to reconquer Holy Land from Muslims under Saladin. Altair is an assassin operated under Saladin's Saracen and he does not realize about the reconciliation. He just know the information when he recaptured Maria Thorpe as in Fig. 4.



Fig 4. Richard The Lionheart and Saladin

Cyprus has no legitimate ruler, as the result Isaac Comnenus proclaimed himself as the Emperor of Cyprus. He helps Cypriot Resistance Templars in Limassol Castle and has deposed in Templar dungeon for having quarrel with King Richard.

Fredrick the Red is a leader of Templar in Limassol and known for his brute manner. Fredrick has an equal rank in Templar Order with Bouchart so that Altair is operated to assassinate him. In the game play, Altair has succeeded to kill him as one of the ultimate enemies. However, he is often experiencing dilemma as an assassin which can be known as in Fig. 5 below.



Fig 5. Empedocles

Altair is found often taking quotes from Empedocles. He is a philosopher living in Sicily and a poet. His poems are hidden and found by Enzo Auditore da Firenze. Altair quotes his poetic ideas and often argues it during the game play.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

Based on the result, video game's universe of Assassin's Creed: Bloodlines is correlated with historical events of Third Crusade in 1191. Two main locations as the video game setting are Limassol and Kyrenia which both located in Cyprus. In the game play, Cyprus is also known having large busy ports as well as a major military site. This is related with an event occurred under King Richard when Roger Malus Catulus ship was drowned with Richard's Great Seal in Cyprus [4].

Meanwhile, Acre as the main setting of the story as mentioned in Fig 1, becomes an important starting point to comprehend the historical event. Acre is located near to Holy Land, Jerusalem, and becomes the point of Saladin's garrison. He defeats the European crusaders in Acre and gains victory. In the game, Altair Ibn La'Ahad is one of eminent Assassins from Levantine Brotherhood along with Saladin. Assassins are the most feared killer which hold strong principles. During the first play, players are introduced to three tenets of Assassin's way of life. The tenets are never hurt an innocent person, always in discreet and never compromise the clan. Thus, Altair is portrayed as an intelligent and prominent assassin who is never failed in accomplishing his mission.

His main mission is to assassinate the Grand Master of the Templars, Armand Bouchart. In Third Crusade history, the Grand Master of the Templar is Robert de Sable as a successor of Gerard de Ridefort [4]. Meanwhile in the game de Sable was killed and replaced by Armand Boucart as the Grand Master. Armand allows Maria to stay in Limassol Castle and becomes part of the Templar, yet he disbelieve her with the authority. As the result, she has no power to help her facing Altair and becomes his hostage.

Altair receives information about Cypriot Resistance movement in its safe house and has assigned to investigate further. One of Altair informant is Alexander, a Saracen. In the Third Crusade history, Saracen is known as Bedouin. During the game play, there is a statement mentioned by Maria that King Richard made a truce with Saladin and it ended the battle. It means that the setting of Assassin's Creed is after the truce which is known as Ramla Reconciliation and shows that both sides are allowing their people to make pilgrimage to the Holy Land [5].

During the game play, players are led to get involved in an historical event in the Third Crusade. They are aware that a game may use historical context as the universe and is still entertaining. The most important aspect of a game is its entertainment aspect and becomes one of consideration of any game developer company. They compose and arrange plot, character and setting in order to make the game universe as real world's simulacrum.

To create and re-create the simulacrum, the game developer can be inspired by any pretext such as history or literature. Then the pretext becomes main background of the game and may lead to a 'serious game'—the game involves educational purpose. Players unconsciously learn and relate the information within game play universe with histories or events in real world's history.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Results show that players will have knowledge and interact with the given information to accomplish mission. Yet, at the same time, players are also learning about history which in real life was ended peacefully. Universe of the Assassin's Creed video game can be treated as a representation of the post-Third Crusade historical event. Thus, players are not merely entertained by the game but also trained their critical thinking to understand the issue.

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