Don't Fear the Reapers, Fear Multiculturalism: Canadian Contexts and Ethnic Elisions in *Mass Effect*

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Canadian company BioWare's series of three Mass Effect games (2008-12) is considered a benchmark for a type of video game invested in ethical reflection and attempted psychological depth. Mass Effect's space opera environment featuring a wide variety of alien species with differing cultural values and priorities has legitimately been read as supporting multicultural respect through its gameplay and narrative content. Players are repeatedly forced to make decisions with respect to such issues as the morality of arbitrating upon the fate of different species or the limits to which one will go in compromising one's culturally-learnt values in the service of an objective perceived as positive.

At the same time, the games' generally sensitive treatment of difference can be seen to be using certain science fiction conventions to elide particular aspects of Canadian cultural history and politics which have proven resistent to self-congratulatory discourses concerning the conviviality of the non-coercive nation. This article examines the games' leveraging of the interface between cultural values by way of their status as Canadian cultural documents, and therefore as thoughtful participants in conversations about multicultural respect, and in the process highlights two issues which exemplify gaps in the games' would-be respectful politics of difference: 1) questions of Indigenous ownership, priority and hierarchy; 2) the common science fiction thought experiment that ethnic identity scripts will have largely disappeared as populations become more genetically mixed. Both of these thematic areas are conundra which Mass Effect, science fiction in general and multiculturalist discourses all have difficulty dealing with. Although the three initial Mass Effects are among the most rewardingly considerate commercial video games ever made, that does not mean the games represent the last word in video game, or Canadian, processing of values, community and history.