1

Podcast Transcript

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Science Fiction, Video Games and Religion

Podcast with **Benn Banasik and Tara Smith** (27 May 2019).

Interviewed by **Raymond Radford.**

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Raymond Radford (**RR**): *My name is Ray Radford. I am the social media editor of the RSP. And today we have a couple of my fellow PhD candidates along with me: Benn Banasik and Tara Smith. Hi Guys!*

Tara Smith (**TS**): OK. How's it going?

Benn Banasik (**BB**): Hi.

RR: *So do you want to tell us a little bit about your dissertations?*

BB: Sure! Ladies first!

TS: Oh, OK. Yes, let's jump straight in. So I'm doing my PhD on science fiction as social fiction. I'm interested in the religious aspect incorporated within science fiction. And I'm doing some interviews in America at the Nebula science fiction conference, which I'm hoping to sort-of see how much writers are incorporating their own social concerns for the future into the work that they're writing. I did my honours on Frank Herbert's *Dune*, focussing on the eco-religious aspects of that. And yes, so I guess religion is incorporated in a lot of different aspects in the work I'm looking at. But so is science fiction as a genre, as well.

BB: Yes. So I did my honours focussing on Origen of Alexandria and the Jewish elements of his work. So I was looking at Jewish and Christian interrelations and interactions within the third and fourth century. That led me into looking at apophatic theory, and getting really deep into that, particularly from the Christian perspective, but also from the Jewish perspective. My PhD topic is taking those elements – unending aspects of theological engagement with God – and investigating video games

through that lens. So, looking at the perpetual journey of video games and video gaming as a religious endeavour, and what that actually means for people. So I'm doing some social surveys looking at people's interactions in video game space, as well as people who interact with religion – whatever that means today, and that's a negotiated term – and then synchronising their responses to see if there are any similarities. And then doing more of the theoretical work in the background, as well.

RR: *I like that it's a bit of step from Origen to video games!*

BB: It's a negotiated step!

RR: *Yeah. It's very tentative, I like it. In case you haven't been able to guess, in today's podcast we're going to be focussing on religion, video games, science fiction, popular culture and just the way that these are all entwined within . . . those who look for them or seek to get something out of them . . . I guess is a good way of explaining it. Quick question: have you guys read the* Nine Billion Names of God *by Arthur C Clarke?*

TS: I've got it on my bookshelf, but I've got a big, big pile and I'm hoping to get to it. I know it's been on a lot of lists of things to read.

BB: I have not.

RR: Well it's the . . . I was thinking about it earlier this morning. And it's basically a group of monks in Tibet writing down the nine billion names of God because they think that when that happens that God will destroy the universe or, you know, everything will become fulfilled and then the universe will end. So they get to a point and they go, "Oh, this is going to take too long. So they rent a computer from a couple of Americans. The Americans come in and three months later it's done. The Americans are like, "Oh it's not going to happen. The computer's not going to write down all these names of God. And then they'll blame us when nothing happens." And then it ends with them looking up and the stars are blinking out.

All: (Laughter)

RR: *I thought that was a good analogy of how religion and technology can work together, especially in classic science fiction – which is where you're looking, Tara.*

TS: Yes, definitely. There's a few . . . there are so many works of science fiction, and technology is

such a key theme. One of my favourites is HG Wells' *The Time Machine*, and just how he develops . . . it's one of the first mentions of a time machine – a classic science fiction trope – and transporting somebody to the future. And it's such a good story because you have, you know, the classic inventor and he's thrown into this world of these two human races which are basically the sort-of English bourgeois class. And it's taken to the nth degree, where they've formed two different species – the Eloi and the Morlocks.

RR: Yes.

TS: And they sort-of . . . it's just such a funny little quirky exploration of, you know, how races . . . not races, but how some classes could develop in the future (**5:00**). And I feel like there's a real little comic element to that as well. But just how . . . what a good story it is.

BB: I think that's an interesting thing and this is where your and my PhD's actually interact, here. And that's the way that we think about religion in general, and how it interacts with other gaming, social media and technology in that regard. So that element of religion inside Sci-Fi, I can see some similarities in that regard for *Second Life*. Where you have people that are creating elements of a worldly environment inside a digital space. So people purchase off spots of land actually in *Second Life*. And there's been lots of words written about *Second Life*. Probably more words written about *Second Life* than actual players of *Second Life*. Because it's not actually that popular anymore. Nevertheless, it is interesting see that human interaction in an open space. . . and given the freedom, people set up farms, work places and religious institutions. And they are largely representative of things which happen in the real world, or best practices which people try to aim for in the real world. And I see that through Sci-Fi, as well.

TS: Yes, what's interesting is they opt for quite mundane realities, you know? If you're given an option to be an avatar you can do anything you want. And what people want to do is they want to keep farming, and they want to just keep living and forming relationships. You kind-of would imagine that they'd choose something a bit more out of this world. The sort-of everyday is what they like to recreate in those realities.

BB: It's things like *FarmVille*

RR: *Or* Farming Simulator. *These things that you can get now which are just simulating the real in virtual reality.*

BB: So, for me, those elements and *Stardew Valley* is one of those games that I'm studying as part of my PhD. And I've asked people to engage with this survey. And it's been my most popular survey, as well.

RR: *Maybe you just want to explain* Stardew Valley?

BB: OK. So for those who haven't interacted with it, it is a farming simulator. You're transported to a farm which is in your family, and you're given the space to do whatever you like. You can construct fences and have animals, or you can till the fields. And there's different seasons. And you can interact with people in the village that is close by. And you can also do fishing other mundane tasks. It's this perpetual engagement with this space, though, that I think actually quantitates a religious experience. But that's outside of what the first grouping of religion and technology is that I see. The first one being religion inside the technology. That aspect of creating a church in *Second Life* is not the same engagement which someone would have by hoeing the fields in their little farm, inside *Stardew Valley*. That's a different experience. And it quantitates a different response. And it's different. Both of those architectures don't have ends. So they're both spaces to involve, but it's about what the player does in those spaces. *Second Life* is more of an open field. And games like *Elder Scrolls* or *Sky Room*, they're closed environments. So you have these religions that are actually represented in those spaces, and they may be made up. From that, I think we have Sci-Fi in religion. So it can come outside of the computer.

TS: Yes. And you can really see some example of that in science fiction. Some examples that come to mind is obviously Frank Herbert's *Dune*, which is just such a rich tapestry of different religions. I mean, I think he sort-of identified himself a little bit as a Zen Buddhist. So you have these sort-of very clear Zen ideas, but then also very overt references to Islamic religion. You've got other eco-religious sort-of aspects to it. And so many different examples. And I think that's so interesting, as a reader, is you try and navigate the space of so many different philosophies and ideas. And I think Frank Herbert really just wanted you to try and work it out. And I think, in his books, he really tries to get you to question sort-of where you want to take the book, and who you think the goodies and the baddies are. And he doesn't really spell it out. And I think that's why they're such a good series. (**10:00**) And the other example, of course, is Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*, which is about the Martian, Valentine, who sort-of comes on earth, and creates his own church – the Church of All Worlds. Which is this very sort-of sixties, free love, sort-of pagan church. Which is such a contrast to the religious, very strict kind-of world he finds himself in. And he kind-of creates this space. And then it's actually

being used and created in religion outside of the novels: Oberon Zell-Ravenheart and Morning Glory. I think they're based in America, and they have concepts they've borrowed from books like "grok" kin which is a term in the book used in the water rituals – they do their own sort-of water rituals. And they call themselves water kin. They're called "Nests" that they group themselves in. And all these sort of things are borrowed from novels, but they've obviously taken it as their own, and sort-of brought their own very pagan, probably even more pagan aspects to it, and created their own little religion. I think that's just so interesting, where you have science fiction directly impacting religion in that. But there's also, of course, religion in the novels itself. So you've got these two ways that it's diverging.

RR: *Let's just go back to Heinlein, for a second. Because writing something like that, in the 1960s – especially 1960s America, was completely antithetical to the standards and practices, if you will, of American society at the time. Which brings us to the idea that science fiction is social fiction. So you know, he's sort-of writing this idea that in the future, possibly, we have comradery and free love. And we're not being jack-booted into oblivion by fascist governments or anything like that – which a lot of 1960s science fiction was about – apocalyptic, and all that kind of thing. So do you think some social aspects of society influence . . .?*

TS: Oh, definitely. Of course. I think that's a huge impact. You obviously write to what your surroundings are. But I think science fiction uses our social fictions. Because it's set in the future – and all of these works are set quite far into the future – the writers can sort-of explore new ways of looking at . . . and that's why you have utopias and dystopias. You can look at completely different, new ways of thinking and taking of the world to a different place. And that's why I think it's so powerful. And, in terms of religion, you can imagine different ways of how religion might look in the future. And with technology, you can see maybe how technology could be used, taken to it's very most extreme view – sort-of as warning and as a guide. That's why science fiction is so useful. And probably with gaming you see similar aspects of the reality and real life impacting fiction. And the lines are getting blurred. And with technology. Our kind-of idea of having distinct categories is sort-of dissolving.

BB: True. I think and we're talking about this intermediary space between religion and Sci-Fi, or Sci-Fi, technology and religion. And there are elements that are in both. My thesis looks at the religious endeavour of the technology. So there is actually a third category we can look at. But to flow into that second category, you have elements, now, of technology and Sci-Fi being implemented in religions. And they're commonly done. We had the Pope App that was launched, which has the "Click to Pray". And Pope Francis was actually launching the app – he's a bit of a technophobe, (self-) admittedly, a

technophobe – and he asked the priest next to him whether he'd actually done it by clicking the prayer, making sure that he actually prayed at that point. Which is quite jovial I think! There is an android monk who has been created. And you can go, and the monk then offers constant prayers. And you have different elements of technology which is enabling people to practise their religions in unique and different ways. What I think that you can see, and where this crossover is, is the elements of religions that are from Sci-Fi or from technological basis, becoming religions in themselves. So the Church of All Worlds, yes, is a good example. Jedi – I know that there was protest religion for the census four years ago (**15:00**). The numbers dropped off but there are certain people that do practice what is known as . . .

RR: *There are registered temples in the United Kingdom, I believe.*

BB: Yeah. And the sociological aspect of . . . I guess our department in a university and Western universities in general, is that we have to take people for what their words are. And if they say they are practising a religion and "We believe that we are practising a religion", who are we to question that? So they are seen as equal footing. But what I think is interesting is the technological element, or the video gaming element as a religious endeavour in itself. And Sci-Fi actually as religious endeavour, and using those texts as religious texts.

TS: Definitely. Especially if we see science fiction as technology itself. As a definition you could call fiction and science fiction technology, just the reading of it. Because I think the definition of technology is like – we probably should have . . .

RR: *I think the definition of technology is the same as the definition of religion. It's different to whoever's discussing it, I guess. And that's the big problem with Religious Studies is that it's a different meaning to everybody.*

BB: That's true. Whether we're using mundane tools or super computers creating digital spaces to deal with . . . they are both outside of the human experience, in its unique and abstract from. So if we think of it in that regard. So, myself as a human: how do I interact with the world? And my choice is – me, myself – is to sit at home and play video games, occasionally, when I get time. But involving ourselves in some sort of experience using a tool. That is, in itself, a technology. And I think that's the boundary. And that's all we can say about it. Because otherwise you get drawn into, "Well, is a Dolo Matrix computer system actually as equal technology as something as an iphone today?

TS: Yeah. I guess I'd want to just say that science fiction can be used as a tool almost like a form of technology, itself. And if we're looking at science fiction like that, I think we can connect. We have similarities in our PhD topics and what we're interested in. And that science fiction can be used both as a guide to these developments of technology . . . in the sense of, when we're exploring topics like AI and cloning and looking back at the writers who were already thinking about this sort-of fifty years ago, and trying to project that into the future. That's such a useful tool for us. But also science fiction being used as a way of shifting perception. And this is Darko Suvin's definition of estrangement. So, good science fiction creates a sense of a new reality, a new perception, a new way of thinking. And that's what I think is the key for science fiction, is really shifting what we think. And by setting new social realities in the future – whether that's exploring different ways of looking at gender, different ways of looking religion – it's allowing us to really shift our perception, and grow as a civilisation, and that's what I think the key is.

RR*: I think one of the really good things about science fiction is it actually provides us a glossary for terms for technology now. So things like when Arthur C Clarke first used the term satellite, it hadn't been used before. And now we are all calling these things orbiting the earth satellites. But even things like when Steve Jobs first announced the ipad, or the iphone, he was calling it a "magic tablet", because you were essentially using your finger like a wand. And sort-of taking these terms from literature and them importing them into technology.*

BB: It's a very . . . that speech which Jobs gave at that Apple conference and there's the ipod

RR: *The ipod – even earlier! Yes*

BB: So that was where he pulled out the ipod and is talking about the beautiful cover art and how to actually listen to sounds and everything like that. But that element of talking about the finger touching onto the screen, or touching onto the dial at the time – so the circular dial – and being able to choose different things. And then the glass screen being fitted afterwards. It's a really charismatic performance which he actually is creating. And it blurs the lines of, you know, a traditional religion, into that regard (**20:00**). And there's people that have written on this: the dress code that he'd apply . . .

RR: *Oh, the turtle neck?*

BB: Turtle neck, the black, and speaking in certain ways, no visible microphones and this sort-of darkened room but a crowded audience, so you have that sense of being drawn into something like a

church. It's very organised. And it's quite amazing seeing that line of technology almost manifesting itself into a religion and religious experience.

TS: Definitely. It's like all the geek culture now is becoming like sort-of what we are in science fiction and gaming, the geek culture – not exclusively, but I mean that how we make meaning and how we connect to the world is really changing I feel. And it doesn't make it any more or less religious. It's still people still getting sort-of a religious experience doesn't always have to be what we typically understand religion for. And I think that's why, as studies of religion students, our definition is constantly trying to change and fit into new paradigms. And I think that's what – not everyone agrees – but I think that what is important to have different ideas and trying to constantly rethink what we think is technically religion. And not dismiss things that don't necessarily fit into what we thought.

BB: I agree and that's a large part of my PhD, actually, is going to engage with, "What is religious experience?" And so William James actually coined that phrase, and uses religious experience in a certain way. And he's using that on the basis of quoting from people like Tolstoy which then Albert Camus, and later writers, actually engage with as well. I actually think there is a misreading here that we – as people that are studying theology or philosophy or religious studies or religion in general – we've actually taken a lot for granted. And it needs to go back and look at what these writers are talking about. So where Tolstoy, in *My Confession*, he paints the picture of being in the well and hanging from the sides of the well, seeing a snake that is about to bite your hand. And then there's this little sapling with some sap that's dripping forth almost a honey. What do you do in that experience? Do you fall? Do you accept that you're going to fall? Do you try and fight on? Or do you joyously eat the sap and accept that that is going to be your lot in life? Camus and Tolstoy, they're engaging with these things – this absurdism of accepting your lot in life, and actually engaging with it as much as you can, and doing the best that you can in that space. That's where I see these similarities of religious experience of somebody who plays that *Stardew Valley,* as to someone who's sitting in the church pews, or engaging with pilgrimage and going to the mountaintops. And I can see the same languages being used with these different people. Now it's not every person that's going to get that experience. I don't think that the casual gamer who's jumping on line to play with their friends, playing *Call of Duty* or whatever the game is, is going experience that. Nor do I think that games like Mario Parties, which are a social event, may give you those feelings. They may, but it is not necessarily the case that every person that engages with reading Sci-Fi is going to have the divine experiences of questioning what it is to be human and what it is for reality. But some texts definitely do. And some games definitely do.

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9

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RR: *I think a lot of the text where it comes down to questioning reality, or questioning what it is to be human, comes down to if the book is really well-written you can sortof start thinking about that. But I think it's something else where the book starts giving you religious fervour. Sort-of like . . ., trying to think of a good example . . .those sort of books where . . . things like* Snow Crash *by Neal Stephenson, which gives a good example of the internet, being written in 1993, is sort-of the next precursor to* Neuromancer *to explore the ideas of virtual reality, and all that kind of thing. But I don't see any religions being made around it, or it being held up in high esteem as . . . . I think it's up there with* Dune (**25:00**)*. It's one of my favourite books. But that concept of religion and technology is, yeah, I think it's sort-of . . . people pick and choose what they want to take from that, I think.*

BB: Yeah. Well there is curation of course. But I think that if . . . and what my study is finding is you ask people set questions – and I'm asking people the same questions if they're from this religious experience and they identity as religious, or they identify as players of *Elite*, or *Stardew Valley*. And we just copy and paste out the names of religious experience to playing *Elite*. And you find the responses are very similar. Which means that there is something that people are getting out of this that it is quite religious.

RR*: I just want to quickly ask Tara . . .because you haven't done your research part of it yet. You're going over to America, as you said, in a couple of weeks to ask people questions. Is there anything in particular you feel that you want to get out of them?*

TS: I guess I just want to see some awareness . . . and I think that's going to be with writers that are writing specular fiction; that they are trying to create a force of social change for the good. I think that there's a certain . . . and it's not all writers, but I think a lot of science fiction writers, especially, are trying to create a better world through their writing. And I think that's a unique aspect of science fiction

RR: *People like Kim Stanley Robinson with the environmentalist message.*

TS: Exactly, yes. And so what I want to do, there's a few things that I'm looking at. I'm looking at AI, I'm looking at environment, I'm looking at interplanetary travel, so there's a few themes that I'm looking at. But I'm just trying to see: if they're concerned about climate change, is that being reflected in their writing? And I think that obviously it will. But I just want some sort of confirmation that young writers – and I'll probably get a range a people at Nebula, so all different periods of their writing experience – but that's like a real . . . . That it's sort-of at the forefront of their writing. And I

think it will be. And that's why I think it's such a unique genre. Because it's concerned with the same questions that philosophies are concerned with: "Who are we?"; "Why are we here?"; and also, making the world better. And I think you'd be hard-pressed to find people who don't want to make the world a better place. And we're in such an era the moment where people are feeling very fatigued and very depressed with the kind-of state of affairs. And I feel like that's why it's so important.

RR: *Do you think things like science fiction and video games give people the hope . . . that they find themselves doing these things in order to better feel better about things, about the world? Give some form of meaning, some form of credence?*

TS: You mean like escapism?

RR: *Escapism, yeah.*

TS: Sort-of, but I also think more of a warning. Speculative fiction that's set in the future and shows a very bleak . . . where technology's gone totally terrible, and it's like this very bleak world, we can go: "Ok. Should we, maybe, alter the way that we're progressing with artificial intelligence? In reality, can we do some measures to try and, maybe, not get to that place? Or how can we change the way we interact with Facebook or our iphones, to maybe then impact the future? And that's what I'm hoping science fiction . . . . What I think science fiction does is it also acts as a warning – not just that escapism from reality. That's definitely an aspect of it, but also a warning in the dystopia of what our realities could become.

RR: *Yes. Benn?*

BB: Yes! (Laughter) I think . . .

RR: *Because I've got to admit I'm very much a video game player and I play for a multitude of reasons. None of them are religious – it's usually to avoid other people.*

BB: And that's, I think, where most people do find themselves engaging with this space. But it doesn't necessarily mean that you cannot get the same experience there that someone who is having an openly religious experience is. So they can be one and the same. I'm not necessarily concerned or even really interested in why people engage with video gaming or religion. Because I think that becomes a whole quagmire of thought, based on family background, social background, and then you have to almost get into the psychology of someone who is engaging that way (**30:00**). All I'm interested in is flat-lining

the approach. So classifying people as: you're either playing, or you're not playing these games. And I then asked the question well, "Why are you playing these games? Why are you continually playing a game which is meant to only have a ten or twenty hour engagement? Why have you played that for four or five hundred hours? Why do you continue to play *World of Warcraft*?" Once you've got to the end, you've got your character maxed out, and you're one of the toughest in your group. And, yes, you perform in a certain role in a team environment. But it brings people back. It's not physically possible to finish every element in a lot of these games. And they are sand boxes, many of them. But some of them aren't. And this is the interesting thing. There's people that have played games which are meant to be coin-crunchers – arcade experience games, that you're meant to only play for two or three minutes, and then you give way to the next person at the arcade to put another quarter in there, and that's what those games are developed with – people that play those games for eighteen to twenty hours at a time on a single credit. *Nibbler* for example. It's not a great game. It's a snake that is going round a field constantly – same type of field. That's not a great experience, it looks like, from someone who stands back. But people try and do that because they're trying to get the world record. But they're returning to it constantly, because they're obviously enjoying that experience. Otherwise they wouldn't be doing it. And that, I think, is really interesting. Where you can have what looks like a very mundane task, and it gives that sort-of perpetual feeling of engagement. And it keeps drawing people back, over and over again. If I can share a quote?

RR: *Yes, please.*

BB: So this started off on a Tumblr site and it's been copied across to a website. And it's called Journey Stories. And the user Jitterfish shared this, which I thought was quite interesting. It's about *Journey* the video game. So *Journey* is a game where you are a cloaked avatar. So you're a cloaked figure that appears in a vast dessert landscape. And you don't see anything, except for a light on a hill in the distance. And there's very little actually in the field of play, initially. And it draws you to constantly march towards . . .

RR: It's very linear.

BB: Yes – very, very linear. You do interact with another person in the game. So it's not – spoiler alert! It's a ten year-old game, I think we can spoil it! The other person that appears in the game is actually another user who is playing the game at the same time, somewhere else in the world. So it's a live experience. And it's not initially clear that you have that experience. Now, Jenova Chen actually studies flow, studies philosophy, writes a little bit about religious experience in that regard, but not so

much. But he was interested in creating this experience where he'd engaged with users in a very limited way. So you only have a set tone, so you can set off this tone. And that's it in the game. So you can jump, set off a tone and walk. Very, very limited. So Jitterfish writes: "Is it possible to have a religious experience in a video game? Because I just danced for twenty minutes with a complete stranger in the final level of *Journey*. When we got to the end I learned that the final part of the mountain, just before you walk into the light, if you run into your companion and jump you can fly into the air. We synchronised our jumps until we were floating above the light, twirling and dancing and laughing. And I just – I don't even know, man. I'm crying. So many feels! Carlos G. Nice, if you're reading this, you're amazing."

RR: *It's kind-of sweet.*

BB: And that for me is – it is a very sweet experience. And I have had very similar experience, playing the game, where I walked and played with someone from the beginning to the end of the game. It's only happened once since I've played it, and I've played it a number of times through. And then you float back to the beginning and you lose connection with that person. So, yes, there is this interaction that you're getting which is a divine experience. And that is quite magnificent for a game to actually give you that experience.

RR: *I guess that brings me to my last thing I want to talk about, and that is perception of reality within video games (**35:00**). Because I mean, that's quite a nice story here. Journey is, what, five hours long?*

BB: Not even that. It can be two to three. And that's if you go all the way through it.

RR*: But for that two or three hours, that's your reality. Where do you see technology, video games, science fiction sort-of leading in regards to reality?*

BB: I think with the freedom of human experience now being shaken, and what it actually means to be human, it gives people a place for free expression – this is video games. So the expression . . . I think the narrative is interesting, which is given to players, and given these choices. So if you play *Last of Us* or something like that, this is quite an amazing experience. But they are somewhat a "choose your own adventure" game. Maybe a little bit more complex, but generally that's what they are. The experiences where players push that boundary can be in linear experiences, but generally it is in these sandbox, larger games, where people break that narrative and then exist within the space. That's what I find fascinating. And that I think is something unique to our generations now, where we're looking at

technology, in this regard, as a place where we can go home and interact in those environments –and "be the best that we can", to take the Pokémon phrase! And that very best that we can may not necessarily mean that I am even known by my name as Benn, anymore. It may be that I've taken on a persona, and am existing in this space, and am free to do so because of the limitations being removed. And then that pulls onto things that people like William Bainbridge, who has a background in Theology, looks at world of Warcraft in that regard, actually spoke about how his sister has passed away, and in creating an avatar and naming that avatar after her, and engaging with that avatar, and imagining a persona of her experience in there, that really opens up possibilities of what gaming can actually provide.

TS: Yes. I think science fiction is such a useful way of exploring different realities and new realities and I mean when I was I think about fifteen was when I read Olaf Stapledon's *Star Maker* and his *Last and First Men*. And they were just such big perception shifts for me. And I just remember in Star Maker – and I've written an essay on it since then – but this massive cosmic journey that you take through all these different universes and worlds, and you meet all these different alien lives, so different from yours. You've got these amazing creatures that he creates. And the whole purpose of the journey is to meet the Star Maker and meet who created all this life. And you get this feeling of this real, depressed . . . all these civilisations that can't quite reach this perfect state. They just can't quite get there. And this big quest. And you know, towards the end, the actual meaning of the Star Maker is not what you expected. You end up coming back a bit disappointed. And you return back to – the character's unnamed – but you return to this grassy hill in England in the dark, looking up at the stars. And you sort-of feel this sense of awe, but also a little bit of this sense of loss. And the two things that Stapledon gives you – as a final conclusion, two pillars that we can really rely on – is a sense of community and a connection with people, and the sense of this cosmic awe and the striving to know that, even if we never reach that. And I think that really fits in well, Benn, with your perpetual journeying and also those two elements in *Journey* that you talked about: doing the *Journey* with somebody else, and that kind of connection with another person; and also this striving for something that you never really can get. And those two features are just such a sweet little reminder of what, I think, is this way that this profound effect that reading good science fiction and playing good games can have on you as an individual.

BB: Totally.

RR: *I think we may have to leave it there. Benn, Tara – thank you very much!*

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14

Podcast Transcript

Version 1.1, 22 May 2019

TS: Thank you.

BB: Thank you (**40:00**)

If you spot any errors in this transcription, please let us know at editors@religiousstudiesproject.com. If you would be willing to help with transcribing the Religious Studies Project archive, or know of any sources of funding for the broader transcription project, please get in touch. Thanks for reading.

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