Heroes of Old, Warriors of Renown: Historicizing the Role of Nephilim in Popular Culture

by

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Abstract

The identity of the Nephilim, mysterious figures found in the Hebrew Bible, has puzzled biblical readers for over two thousand years. Yet in the last half-century, a significant increase in interest in these shadowy beings has been displayed both in religious settings and popular culture. The biblical text contains only two brief mentions of Nephilim in Genesis 6:1-4 and Numbers 13:32-33, with the prevailing ancient conception imagining them as monstrous giants. There are conflicting views on whether they are their own race or if they are the offspring of humans and rebellious angels, and this ambiguity allows Nephilim to be presented in a variety of ways: where once these creatures were conceptualized as giants, today they are depicted as anything from teenage superheroes to terrible ancient gods. This thesis analyzes the reception history of Nephilim, tracing their ancient literary influences to their proliferation in modern novels, films, video games, and more. Regardless of a text's proclaimed religious allegiance, Nephilim always represent some concept of primordial chaos – the ancient fear that civilization is a step away from plunging back into anarchy and disorder. Nephilim serve as a striking example of what Charles Taylor calls the post-secular, a time where the divide between the "religious" and the "secular" is becoming increasingly dulled.

To best understand the resurgence of interest in Nephilim, I analyze the various contexts they are found in through an academic approach akin to those used by Monster Studies scholars such as Timothy Beal and Stephen T. Asma, focusing primarily on Sigmund Freud's concept of the *unheimlich* regarding aspects of horror and monstrosity. Doing so helps explain the resurgence of these creatures in popular media and why they have been increasingly associated with esoteric horror narratives as opposed to the biblical tales they originate from. I examine dozens of examples, beginning with their first fictional appearance in Madeleine L'Engle's 1986

novel *Many Waters*. Here, Nephilim are shapeshifting angels who have been barred from heaven and engage in sexual misconduct with humans. This began a trend that spanned genres and mediums, with some distinct examples such as *The X-Files* television series and *The Mortal Instruments* novel series. Both texts depict Nephilim as the descendants of angels but with vastly different forms and narrative functions. This study explores how these sources (and many others) make claims on concepts of heroism, victimhood, gender, and birthright by utilizing the Nephilim mythos.

This thesis is dedicated to my grandmother, Justice Sherrill M. Rogers, whose support has never faltered and whose wisdom has never failed.

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Contents

Introduction

In 1957, objectivist philosopher Ayn Rand published her popular *Atlas Shrugged*, a fictional novel depicting a dystopian future of the United States, caused by the heavy hand of government business regulation. The title invokes the eternal duty of the titan who was forced to uphold the Earth and the heavens on his shoulders. Were he to revolt against this punishment and simply shrug, the world would be totally changed forever. This novel was originally written in English but was translated to Hebrew in 1960, a time when the state of Israel was constructing its national identity and placing heavy emphasis on Jewish traditions. Publishers likely decided that a title referencing the Greek mythos was in poor taste, and thus the Hebrew edition was titled מרד הנפילים, *Mered HaNephilim* or "the revolt of the Nephilim."[1] While the title *Atlas Shrugged* carries distinct meaning to many contemporary English-speaking audiences even today, most readers at the time would have less context for what a revolt of something called Nephilim could mean. This was seemingly the first piece of English fiction to make use of the word – even if it was in a Hebrew translation. The term was also considered culturally significant enough that a rebranding was worthwhile. Interested fans would certainly have to ask: who are these Nephilim? What does their revolt have to do with capitalist rebellion against oppressive laws? Even amongst those few that could answer these questions at that time, there is a slim chance they would all agree on the identity of these creatures.

The first time that the Nephilim were utilized in an English-language artistic project aimed at a secular audience came years later, with the formation of the English gothic-rock band Fields of the Nephilim. Though their lyrical content makes no complicated claims about the Nephilim or their origins, the name of this band provides a sense of mystery and biblical weight to an already esoteric example of genre music. This ambiguity would prove to be nigh-prophetic: Nephilim have come to represent a complex cultural nexus, belonging to sacred Jewish and Christian traditions but also finding themselves in the aesthetic catalogue of occult, horror, and fantasy fiction content creators. Among this fictional content, authors align themselves both along religious (self-defined Jewish or Christian) and secular lines. Nephilim take many different forms across these works, from shapeshifting angelic figures to disfigured children, superpowered teens, the four horsemen

[1] Ayn Rand Institute, "Foreign Editions," October 4, 2019, https://ari.aynrand.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/ARI_FAQ_Foreign-Editions2_20191004.pdf.

of the apocalypse and giant nigh-indescribable monstrosities. These diverse representations have ties to centuries of debate over the complicated and mysterious text of Genesis 6:1-4 (the passage that introduces biblical readers to the Nephilim) but interest in these beings has surged within the last 50 years or so in academic, religious, and entertainment spheres. This thesis seeks to answer why there was a sudden shift in popularity with regards to Nephilim, particularly as they are used in fictional narratives and world-building projects, and why they have done so in several different forms.

In a sense, this project began while I was taking an undergraduate course on the Hebrew Bible. While studying the Book of Genesis, my instructor asked the class if anyone knew who the Nephilim were. Having recently completed yet another playthrough of Blizzard Entertainment's *Diablo 3*, I confidently raised my hand and answered that "they are half angels, half demons." My instructor responded with something along the lines of "what are you talking about? They were giants." I was of course somewhat embarrassed, but I also felt that there must have been a reason that I had run into several interpretations that fit my description. Hence, an investigation was formulated based on answering a seemingly simple question: why was I so confident in my answer? Better yet, was it possible that we were *both* correct? As it turns out, both my instructor (who later became my supervisor for this project!) and myself were correct to a degree. If one is a scholar concerned with the most historically prominent interpretations of the biblical passages referring to Nephilim, then the most accurate answer would indeed be giants. If one is a young adult interested in fantasy video games and supernatural horror films, then half-angel is closer to the truth.

A complicated history of interpretation in both religious and academic spheres has led to a rich, diverse set of possible readings of passages involving the Nephilim, one that is still debated in both spheres to this day. This project, however, is dedicated to understanding the even broader range of depictions found in popular culture, in texts that lay no claim to either religious or scholarly truth. These are the texts being encountered by many people who may not be invested in either camp, those who are simply intrigued by the occult, the supernatural, and the bizarre. People that have never read the Bible nor stepped foot into a Religious Studies classroom have their own thoughts on who the Nephilim are and even engage in debates on the topic in various on-and-

offline forums. This thesis seeks to provide a modicum of clarity to a befuddled cultural phenomenon.

To best understand the interconnectivity of the representations of Nephilim found in modern theological and fictional projects, we must discuss and establish the various positions within this ancient debate about their identity. This will aid the reader in recognizing the significance of the current discussions inadvertently taking place in contemporary sources. Thus, I will summarize the reception history of Gen 6:1-4 by relying on the historical work of scholars such as Jaap Doedens, Ronald Hendel and Annette Yoshiko Reed. Once I establish a succinct idea of how these creatures have been viewed historically, this thesis will take the position that Nephilim in their angelic, giant, and humanoid forms can all be viewed as *monstrous*, so I will consider and evaluate the methodologies of scholars across fields such as monster studies, folklore, and occult studies.

After establishing my theoretical lens, I will take a semi-chronological approach to investigate Nephilim in popular culture. I have identified three general branches of interpretations found within these popular texts: fallen angels, primordials, and angelic hybrids. The final three chapters are divided based on these categories, beginning with the first fictional representation of these beings (which are fallen angels in Madeleine L'Engle's *Many Waters*). Each chapter will then trace the history of the related representation as they appear in their respective media, with special attention given to the physical attributes and "powers" that are attributed to the Nephilim, as well as their more general literary purpose in each text. In doing so, I hope to make it apparent how both ancient texts and new thinking has influenced both *how* and *why* Nephilim became such popular figures in fantasy fiction.

The sheer breadth of depictions means that not every form or text can realistically be discussed, but I tried to be as expansive as possible in my research. The most culturally significant and influential pieces of media (both to Nephilim generally and to audiences at large) are all addressed to display just how diverse contemporary interpretations have become. One thing that I will make note of throughout the thesis is any time a piece of media uses an alternative spelling of the term itself, "Nephilim," as it represents how little connection there is between academic and popular engagement with understanding the Nephilim and their origins.

As the forms of Nephilim are incredibly diverse, it stands to reason that the motives for their inclusion are diverse as well. Their monstrosity can symbolize very different things from one text to the next. Nonetheless, there are some general patterns that emerge that will be displayed throughout this thesis. First and foremost, fictional Nephilim are often characterized as ancient and mysterious. Whether they have lain in wait for millennia or are just awaking now for the first time in thousands of years, the Nephilim are champions from a forlorn era, misunderstood and frightening. They are giants from our past that cannot be fully understood, as the context they were created within no longer exists. In this way they are much like the Bible itself, as an increasingly post-secular contemporary West comes to terms with the immeasurable influence this text has had on laws, our morality, our literature, and our culture itself. Regardless of how secular we believe we have become, these biblical creatures emerge to remind us that we can never truly escape our collective past. Some texts find this to be an unfortunate truth - they bring chaos to a world that is trying to establish a new social order, or their stubborn adherence to the past challenges the fragile order that remains from a better, sacred time. Other texts see them as heroes, even saviours – by bringing an old power into a new world, we can synthesize the ancient "sacred" with the modern "profane" to create something better than we have ever experienced. To do so, however, would mean fundamentally changing who we consider to be monsters and Others.

Over the course of this thesis, the terms "sacred" and "profane" will be used several times. The intent is not to claim that there are indeed things we can definitively call sacred, or definitively call profane. Instead, the terms are used in relation to an imagined division that is frequently present in the texts examined throughout. They are utilized to point at a consistent discourse found in popular culture that points at a common conception of "religion" and "religious" as the mediator between the sacred and the profane. Though these terms are rarely explicitly used in these popular culture sources, there is often an implicit yet ill-defined dichotomy between the sacred and the profane, divine and mundane, etc. Thus, the terms provide a useful categorical descriptor for these camps that are frequently imagined to be at odds with each other.

Though the focus of this thesis is on the Nephilim themselves, it aims more generally to encourage readers to seriously consider the implications of the shifting interpretations of monsters and other mythological figures as they appear in popular culture, especially when they have religious significance outside of a context of entertainment fiction. In a digital age where concerns

over misinformation continue to grow, it is important to understand and measure the effects that popular culture – unintentionally or otherwise – has on popular theology and religious thinking. As will be discussed in Chapter 1, there are a significant number of people that still believe the biblical Nephilim continue to walk to this day – easier to believe when they seem to show up more and more frequently on television and in films. Though we as scholars have (mostly) closed the book on acceptable solutions to the biblical origins of the Nephilim, significant popular interest and debate has been presented in these beings. It is imperative that we record this shift and its proponents as it could lead us to further understanding of layman religious activity and both the interests and anxieties that drive it.

Chapter 1: A History of Interpretations of the Biblical Nephilim

While most monsters have a central physical trait that defines them – vampires have fangs, werewolves take on a beastly shape, ghosts take on an incorporeal form, etc. – Nephilim cannot be pinned down to any singular monstrous element. They can look like regular human beings with superpowers; they can be physically disfigured and unable to perform any supernatural traits; they can simply be giants; or they can have no relationship to a humanoid shape at all. The reason for these various types seems to stem from the ambiguous nature of the biblical passages that are concerned with Nephilim, as they have led to various readings and understandings of the nature of these beings over the last two millennia. This chapter will summarize some of the most significant interpretations of these texts to note the ways that the Nephilim changed over time in both Jewish and Christian thought.

Where the Confusion Begins: The Biblical Text

There are two instances of the word "Nephilim" (in Hebrew, נְפִלִים, *nĕpilîm*) *in* the Hebrew Bible, found in Genesis 6:4 and Numbers 13:33, and no instances of the term in the New Testament.[2] In both passages, the text assumes that readers would be familiar with the Nephilim and the term seems to be little more than a point of reference. The texts do not deem the term worthy of expansion. Both uses are additional remarks meant to emphasize the point of their respective passages, as opposed to claims about whatever the term *nĕpilîm* refers to specifically. Robert Alter's translation of Genesis 6:1-4, a passage that introduces the 'sons of God' and utilizes their misconduct as justification for the deluge sent by God, reads as such:

> [1] And it happened as humankind began to multiply over the earth and daughters were born to them, [2] that the **sons of God** saw that the daughters of man were comely, and they took themselves wives whosoever they chose. [3] And the LORD said, "My breath shall not abide in the human forever, for he is but flesh. Let his days be a hundred and twenty years." [4] **The Nephilim were then on the earth, and afterward as well**, the sons

[2] Some scholars see further examples of uses of the term. For example, Ronald S. Hendel contends that נְפִלִים in Ezekiel 32:27 also references the Nephilim (with slight grammatical deviation), but this was seemingly inconsequential for early exegetical interpretations of the nature of Nephilim, and thus will be left for others to discuss. See "Of Demigods and the Deluge: Toward and Interpretation of Genesis 6:1-4," *Journal of biblical Literature* 106, no. 1 (1987): 21-23.

> of God having come to bed with the **daughters of man who bore them children**: they are the **heroes of yore, the men of renown.** [3]

Then, in Numbers, Moses sends spies into Canaan in search of a new homeland after their exile from Egypt and subsequently Mount Sinai. The spies return to camp after investigating Canaan, and despite Caleb's initial surety that they would be able to conquer the land for themselves, his companions retort:

> [31] But the men who had gone up with him said, "We cannot go up against the people for they are stronger than we." [32] And they put forth an ill report to the Israelites of the land that they had scouted, saying, "The land through which we passed to scout is a land that **consumes those who dwell in it**, and all the people whom we saw in it are **men of huge measure.** [33] And there did we see **the Nephilim, sons of the giant from the Nephilim,** and we were in our own eyes like grasshoppers, and so we were in their eyes.

At first glance, not much is revealed about the Nephilim in either of these instances but there are some specific details that can be defined. Perhaps the first issue that arises is understanding what the term *nĕpilîm* itself means. The word probably stems from the root נפל, "to fall." Thus, its most literal meaning would be "ones who are fallen" or "fallen ones."[4] While the original intent of the term may have been to evoke a concept of warriors who had fallen in battle as opposed to any kind of supernatural being, angelic or otherwise, the term eventually came to be its own title for a specific category of creatures.[5]

Genesis tells us that the Nephilim were on the Earth in the time of Noah, and afterward as well. In Alter's translation, it seems that the Nephilim's existence is the result of human women bearing children that were fathered by the mysterious "sons of God." They were heroic figures known as warriors, regardless of their parentage. Numbers then reveals some further details: the men that were seen in Canaan were considered Nephilim due to their giant size and their likely heritage from the Nephilim of yore. Even though the land seemed to consume all who dwell in it, these Nephilim remained. Though Alter takes the final verse of Gen 6:1-4 to mean that the

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[3] Bolding added for emphasis. Though Alter only has verse numbers along the margins of his publication, I have added the numbers to the places that more common translations use for the sake of delineation. Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary,* vol. 1 (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2019), 25. Unless otherwise noted, all Hebrew Bible quotations will be from Alter's translation.

[4] On the possible literal translations of *nĕpilîm,* see Ronald S. Hendel, "'The Nephilim were on the Earth': Genesis 6:1-4 and its Ancient Near Eastern Context," in *The Fall of the Angels: Themes in Biblical Narrative,* edited by Christoph Auffarth and Loren Stuckenbruck (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 21-22.

[5] Hendel notes that the plural form of the root נפל in 2 Sam 1:19, 25, 27 and Ezek 32:33 clearly references slain human warriors, while later traditions saw these Nephilim as their own unique race of giants. "The Nephilim were on the Earth," 21-22.

Nephilim were children born of the union between sons of God and daughters of men, and translates it as such, it is not entirely clear if the Nephilim were the sons of God, their children, the heroes, or merely contemporaries of the heroes.[6]

Jaap Doedens provides three possible solutions to the mutual relationship between the Nephilim, sons of God, and *haGibōrîm*:

> 1. The נפלים [Nephilim] are identical with the "sons of God."
>
> 2. The נפלים [Nephilim] are identical with the "heroes of yore" (גברים)
>
> 3. The נפלים [Nephilim] are neither identical with the "sons of God" nor with the "heroes of yore."[7]

By viewing the passage as a source of background information and narrative development, Doedens breaks down the literary structure of the verse phrase-by-phrase to determine each phrase's subsequent purpose. He claims *these are* (Alter: *they are*) refers back to the first word, "the Nephilim," so as to explain them as the famous warriors of old and uses this to challenge ideas that Nephilim could either be identical to the sons of God or their own separate group.[8] For the purpose of this thesis, the complicated work of identifying the Nephilim need only be summarized. Doedens's organization of various solutions historically offered to the problem of identity serves its intended purpose: to display a broader system of categorization that can be applied to exegesis, and thus to the contemporary understandings of Nephilim that have emerged in the 21st century.

There is a distinct difference in how contemporary readers (scholars, clergy, and laypeople alike) read the Bible today and how those within early Israelite and Jewish cultures would have engaged with the material. In the ancient Near East, a collage of literary materials, such as the Bible, was a typical occurrence: writers would introduce ethnographies, fragments of mythological tales, and so on, into their own narratives and redactors could include other textual materials that accentuated the theme of the text at large.[9] This would not necessarily be considered a contradictive, plagiaristic, or fragmented method of authorship, and though text-critical readings

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[6] Claus Westermann makes note of the two narrative threads of verse 4, dividing the verse into 4a and 4b, arguing that the passage was heavily altered to provide an origin story for the הַגִּבֹּרִים, *haGibōrîm* (Alter's "heroes of yore") by adapting a Canaanite myth that would have been well known at the time. *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, translated by John J. Scullion, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 365-371.
[7] Jaap Doedens, *The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4: Analysis and History of Exegesis* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 65.
[8] Doedens, *The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4,* 65-71.
[9] Alter, *A Translation with Commentary,* vol. 1, 4-6.

of the Bible dominate contemporary discussions of *who* exactly wrote *what,* early authors and redactors found no issue in including extant material. This is important for understanding the myriad interpretations of what, exactly, *nĕpilîm* means, as it appears that Gen 6:1-4 may indeed be a fragment from another tale.

Alter provides a translation that is informed by Semitic philology and archaeology, one that is concerned with literary expression and the intended artistry behind the grammatical particularities of the Hebrew found in the Tanakh.[10] This is useful for better understanding the early exegetical works that would have been written by people with a rich understanding of the language used and the mythic importance of specific references, but it should be noted that he goes against the grain in some parts of his translation. For example, the King James Version does not translate *nĕpilîm* as a proper noun, but simply as a term for giants.[11] While many biblical translators take בְּנֵי עֲנָק, *bĕnê ʿănoq* in Num 13:33 to mean "sons of Anak" or Anakites (a separate tribe from those listed in Num 13:22), Alter argues that the term is not an ethnic designation and is instead a word that simply means "giant" in the same way English speakers would use it as a noun.[12] Therefore, the "sons of the giant" referred to all those that lived in Canaan, who were all Nephilim or at least descendants thereof. So, while early Israelites and the Jews of the Second Temple Period likely would have understood this passage to be about the Nephilim as a whole, later interpreters instead took this reference to mean that the Anakite tribe was made up of the last of the giants living in Canaan.

For any number of reasons, most texts that are concerned with the Nephilim (whether they are fictional, religious, or scholarly) tend to focus on the Gen 6:1-4 passage. Numbers provides the useful distinction that they were indeed large (even if Alter is incorrect about the use of *ʿănoq*, Moses' scouts were still "like grasshoppers" compared to the Nephilim), though no further details are given. Genesis, on the other hand, describes them as *the* heroes of yore and *the* men of renown. This was not just a reference to their skill in battle: these Nephilim were heroes that the audience

[10] For more on Alter's methodological concerns and his philosophy while approaching the Biblical material, see "Introduction to the Hebrew Bible," in *A Translation with Commentary*, xiii-xlii.
[11] I.e., Gen 6:4 reads as "There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that," etc. In the same passage the English Standard Version includes a translators note beside the term Nephilim, "or giants."
[12] Alter, *A Translation with Commentary,* vol. 1, 522.

would have surely recognized at one time. But perhaps more importantly, readers were also expected to be familiar with their mysterious fathers, the so-called sons of God.

To determine who the Nephilim were, it seems imperative to understand who exactly their parents were. The sons of God and the daughters of men had children together, and that led to the creation of warriors that were evidently far larger than regular humans. While my own project focuses on the Nephilim, as discussed below most ancient exegesis of Gen 6:1-4 is only tangentially concerned with the giants themselves and instead focuses on their fathers, the sons of God, and the crimes that they committed that justified the limiting of human lifespans and the annihilating deluge.

Scholars typically agree that the fragment that became Genesis 6:1-4 likely came from another ancient Near Eastern mythological source. Alter calls the fragment "obviously archaic and mythological," supposing that the tale has ties to similar Greek (and by extension, Hittite) stories about the semi-divine children of gods and humans becoming heroic figures and legendary warriors.[13] Male gods being drawn to the beauty of mortal women is commonplace in ancient Greek narratives and these narratives also tend to include powerful, heroic offspring. This is compounded by the style of language used at the end of the passage, which Alter describes as reflecting "a certain epic heightening" that causes his that suspicion the line was used either as "a citation of an old heroic poem or a stylistic allusion to the epic genre."[14] Ronald S. Hendel sees the passage as evidence of a larger text influenced by mythic narratives from surrounding cultures, truncated by later authors[15] either because the full story would have "detracted from the dramatic sweep of the primeval events before the flood" or to create discursive boundaries regarding what should be said of the sexual union of gods and humans.[16] Indeed, Westermann, Doedens and Hendel all note the relationship of the phrase "sons of God" with the Canaanite "sons/children of El," figures who played a prominent role in the Ugaritic literature of the Late Bronze Age.[17] Yet

[13] Alter, *A Translation with Commentary*, vol. 1, 25.
[14] Alter, *A Translation with Commentary*, vol. 1, 25.
[15] Utilizing the documentary hypothesis, Hendel views the repetition of "key-words" or *Leitwörter* in Gen. 6:1-4 as evidence that "J" is responsible for the edits. "The Nephilim were on the Earth," 12.
[16] Hendel, "The Nephilim were on the Earth," 16, 33.
[17] Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary.* 369. Doedens spends significant time with this context throughout his text by evaluating the term "sons of God" against its use in literature from nearby cultures and the uses of similar terms in other Biblical texts. See particularly Chapter 4, section 5, "Mythological Divine Beings-Interpretation," in *The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4.* 205-244; Hendel, "The Nephilim were on the Earth." 23-24.

this idea that the Genesis text is utilizing the mythos of other traditions, particularly ones that imply the existence and interaction from gods other than the Israelite YHWH, would be difficult to justify in the later monotheistic attitude of Jewish thought.[18]

While it may seem difficult to imagine Israelite scribes intentionally including passages about demi-gods, the reasoning for this reading primarily revolves around the term בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים, *bĕnê hāʾĔlōhīm* "sons of God." *Bĕnê hāʾĔlōhīm* can translate in at least two ways: the typical translation, as a definite name for a singular, proper "God," or as a pluralized "the gods." Both "sons of God" and "sons of *the gods*" are potentially appropriate, but one can imagine the nightmare this passage would create for a developing priestly caste professing the dominion of a single God. Thus, various understandings of the sons' identity became an important topic not only for scholars of ancient Judaism, but for ancient Christian writers and theologians as well. The remainder of this chapter will give an overview of how some of the most influential interpretations of the sons of God and Gen 6:1-4 came to exist, with special attention to what that meant for the identity of the Nephilim themselves. This will be done in a chronological manner on a text-by-text basis, but it will be informed by Doedens's division of mainstream interpretations into Angels, Mighty Ones, and Sethites.

The Angelic Descent Myth in the Second Temple and Intertestamental Periods

The earliest exegesis on Gen 6:1-4 comes from the pseudepigraphal *Book of Watchers.* The oldest known manuscript of this text dates to the first half of the second century BCE, but it was most likely written sometime in the late third century BCE.[19] *Watchers* is a compilation of what Annette Yoshiko Reed identifies as five independent units or fragments.[20] It proved to be a popular text, as evidenced by the six copies found at Qumran in 1952,[21] and Reed argues that *Watchers* is likely a significant influence on the Septuagint translation of the Gen 6:1-4 passage.[22] Once

[18] For a succinct summary of the development of monotheism in Jewish thought and the context surrounding it, see Shaye J.D. Cohen, *From Maccabees to the Mishnah,* 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), especially 80-85.
[19] John C. VanderKam, *Enoch: A Man for All Generations* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), 25.
[20] *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 24-27.
[21] VanderKam, *Enoch: A Man for All Generations,* 25-26.
[22] See Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity*, 116-118.

compiled, *Watchers* became a unified independent work that was eventually added to a larger compilation commonly known as *The Book of Enoch* or 1 Enoch, making up the first 36 chapters of that text. 1 Enoch has a third-person narrator describe the visions and cosmic journeys of Enoch, the seventh descendant of Adam, who "walked with God" and lived for 365 years (Gen 5:22-24). Enoch is presented as a scribe throughout the text, chosen to record the events taking place in heaven. George W.E. Nickelsburg and John C. VanderKam note in the introduction to their translation that a particular section of the text, chapters 6-11, appear to be a retelling of Gen 6-9 that identifies the events of the antediluvian past with the current issues of the author's time.[23] Reed calls this general narrative the "angelic descent myth," finding its themes to be reused and extrapolated in later texts from the same era (including in the Book of Revelation).[24] While the following summary may seem overly detailed, it is important to note many of the events that take place in this text as they become foundational to many of the details associated with Nephilim in contemporary popular culture.

This text begins by detailing the initial descent of the angelic watchers from heaven.[25] The "sons of men" had beautiful daughters so "the watchers, the sons of *heaven*," took wives from among them (these Watchers are sometimes referred to by their Greek name ἐγρήγοροι, transliterated as Grigori, which will become prevalent in 21st century popular culture as discussed in Chapter 5).[26] In all, there were two hundred watchers that descended, led by Samyaza and nineteen subordinates including angels named Ramiel, Kokabel, Baraqel, Samael, and Azazel (1 Enoch 6:1-7).[27] Once on Earth, the watchers chose human wives. From these marriages are born giants, called Nephilim, who also begot another race called Elioud,[28] and these descendants of the watchers "were growing in accordance with their greatness." The Nephilim and their children are characterized by their hunger and overconsumption, which causes them to break the dietary

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[23] *1 Enoch: A Hermeneia Translation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 2.
[24] See Chapter 2 of Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity*, 58-83.
[25] For more on the watchers as an angelic category, see Gustav Davidson, *A Dictionary of the Angels: Including the Fallen Angels,* s.v. "Watchers," 2nd Free Press ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 311-312.
[26] Unless otherwise noted, all 1 Enoch quotations will be from Nickelsburg and VanderKam's translation. Emphasis my own.
[27] The translators have chosen to present the oldest known versions of many angelic names as represented by the Aramaic fragments of 1 Enoch found at Qumran. However, the names were "often corrupted in the Greek and Ethiopic." The corrupted versions of those names proved to be more popular, especially in contemporary fiction, so names such as Shemihazah, Asael, Samshiel and Sariel (as they appear in Aramaic) will instead be referred to by their more common anglicized names: Samyaza, Azazel, Samael, and Uriel. See footnotes of Nickelsburg and VanderKam, *1 Enoch: A Hermeneia Translation*, 24, 26.
[28] Nickelsburg and VanderKam label this term as presumably corrupt. *1 Enoch: A Hermeneia Translation,* 24.

restrictions against meat that would have existed at this time according to the biblical text (Gen 9:3). First, they eat all the food grown by humankind, and once that food is gone, they begin eating anything with meat they can find, including birds, beasts, creeping things (insects), fish, and even human beings. Once they can no longer find even these sources of food, they turn on each other and devour one another's flesh while drinking the blood of their victims (1 Enoch 7:1-6).

Following this description of defilement, the forbidden knowledge that was shared by the angels to humanity is detailed. Chief among these secrets are those taught by Azazel, which include the creation of weapons via metalworking, how to create jewelry by using silver, gold, and precious stones, and finally how to create cosmetic items such as eye paint. These secrets alone led to godlessness on the Earth, but the other angelic chiefs taught things such as sorcery via "the cutting of roots" and divination by seeking signs in celestial bodies.[29] In response to these evil secrets being spread amongst humanity, a cry went up to heaven seeking aid (1 Enoch 8:1-4).

The pleas of humanity are finally heard, and four figures identified as archangels (Michael, Uriel, Raphael, and Gabriel) look down to the Earth and see the evil that is taking place. They approach the Lord of the Ages, God, informing him of the events taking place and asking what ought to be done in response (1 Enoch 9:1-11). God responds by giving each of these angels a specific command to carry out, including the protection of Noah and his family, the destruction of the Nephilim, and the arrest and imprisonment of the Watchers, where each is bound together in "the valley of the dry earth" to wait until the final day of judgement. Raphael is commissioned to execute a most dire sentence upon Azazel due to his crime being considered the most egregious among the watchers. Azazel is to be bound hand and foot, cast into the depths of the Earth, and covered with darkness so that he cannot look to the skies and beg forgiveness. The archangels are instructed to ignore any petitions from the watchers as they are made to watch their "half-breed" children kill each other. (It is noteworthy that the term half-breed is used in a string of insults in multiple places, pointing at a general distrust of the children of two peoples. This theme remains relevant in contemporary Nephilim narratives.[30]) The final instruction is to flood the Earth, symbolically showing that the corruption of the land has been washed away (1 Enoch 10:1-22).

[29] For example, Baraqel taught the signs of lightning flashes, Kokabel taught the signs of the stars, etc. See 1 Enoch 8:1-4.
[30] Half-breeds are mentioned in 1 Enoch 10:9, 15.

1 Enoch is one of the earliest known sources to expand upon angelology. It likely predates biblical texts such as Daniel 7-12[31] and is considered to have had direct influence on many foundational works of apocalyptic literature, and by extension, early Christian and Jewish mysticism.[32] The archangels Michael, Gabriel, Uriel, and Raphael all have their earliest known appearance in this text and continue to be associated with the Nephilim in contemporary popular culture. Other named angels such as Samael and Azazel are more difficult to date, though they become important figures in both Jewish and Christian demonology. Samael was later tied to Jewish traditions of the adversary of Job and the serpent who tested Eve in the garden of Eden, sharing many resemblances to the Christian Satan and in some places even conflated with the figure.[33] Azazel dates to Leviticus 16, though he would not have been understood to be an angel by the authors of this text. The term לַעֲזָאזֵל *laʿAzāʾzēl* has had a storied history of debate among scholars since late antiquity, but modern archaeological data suggests that the inscription implies a sense of ownership, and thus, Azazel would be a figure of some kind to which Aaron must sacrifice.[34] Regardless of Leviticus' original intended meaning, Azazel has come to represent sacrifices made to pagan gods and demons.[35] Interestingly, the leader of the watchers, Samyaza, proved to not be nearly as popular as his lieutenants in the coming centuries of religious literature, possibly because there was no biblical passage that was easily associated with him, but he resurfaces in contemporary popular fiction.

Several texts followed 1 Enoch in the Second Temple Period that discussed the Nephilim as a by-product of angelic descent, and a few made further contributions to their mythological history and nature. Early apocalyptic texts such as *Jubilees* (170-150 BCE) and the *Book of Giants (~1st century BCE),*[36] works found among the sectarian Dead Sea Scrolls, often reference the

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[31] Though there is debate on the possible ancient dating of Daniel, most biblical scholars agree that the back half of the text was likely written in 167-164 BCE. See John J. Collins, *Daniel: With an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1984), 101-102.
[32] See George W. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1-36;81-108,* edited by Klaus Baltzer (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 68-108, especially 68-87.
[33] Gustav Davidson, *Dictionary of the Angels, s.v.* "Samael," 255, and *The Jewish Encyclopedia,* s.v. "Samael," accessed January 18, 2022, https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13055-samael.
[34] Alter, *A Translation with Commentary*, vol. 1, 421-422.
[35] "And he shall put lots on the two goats, one for the LORD and one for Azazel." See Allan Edwin Charles Wright, *'Better to Reign in Hell, Than Serve in Heaven': Satan's Metamorphosis From a Heavenly Council Member to the Ruler of Pandaemonium* (Delaware: Vernon Press, 2017), 55-57, and *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Azazel (Scapegoat, Lev. xvi., A.V.)," accessed January 18, 2022, https://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/2203-azazel.
[36] Dating the *Book of Giants* is complicated, but it seems to be from the second half of the first century BCE. VanderKam, *Enoch: A Man for All Generations,* 125.

angelic descent myth. *Giants*, as one might imagine, discusses the Nephilim at length and expands upon their time on Earth prior to the flood. Here the Nephilim are a warlike race of giants that have conquered the Earth and fear the inevitable coming battle with heaven. In preparation for the war, the Nephilim experiment with man and beast, creating hybrid monsters to bolster their forces. This acts as an origin story for creatures such as minotaurs and lamiae. As further evidence of the author's concern with explaining the tales of nearby cultures, the figure of Gilgamesh, the ancient and legendary king of Babylon, is counted amongst the number of the Nephilim.[37] The Nephilim were molded by these ancient authors to help work through issues contemporary to their time,[38] a treatment that would become familiar by the 21st century.

The idea that Nephilim were the giant sons of angels was not limited to sectarian apocalyptic texts found at Qumran. The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (c. 37 CE – c. 100 CE) discusses the rebellious watchers and their giant children in his *Jewish Antiquities*, noting that Jewish tradition resembles the tales of giants told by the Greeks.[39] There is evidence of direct references to 1 Enoch, and to the angelic descent myth more generally, in several of the writings that became the New Testament (Matthew, 1 Corinthians, Hebrews, 1 & 2 Peter, and Jude).[40] These quotations and references imply that the concept of corrupt angels having children was pervasive, if not of utmost importance, in both Jewish and Christian thought at the turn of the 1st century CE.

While 1 Enoch and its kin were popular during their time, most of these texts lost their favour in canonical lists by the 1st century CE. 1 Enoch became an integral part of Ethiopian Christian traditions, but the text was lost to the rest of the Christian world in the coming centuries. The single text that seemed to have the most influence on how people understood the Nephilim was the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible, as the translation itself carried its own

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[37] For more on this subject, see Matthew Goff, "Gilgamesh the Giant: The Qumran *Book of Giants'* Appropriation of *Gilgamesh* Motifs," in *Dead Sea Discoveries* 16, no. 2 (2009): 221-253. https://eds-p-ebscohost-com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/eds/pdfviewer/.

[38] For example, Stuckenbruck suggests that the Book of Giants may have been written partially in response to an ancient debate about the origins of culture and civilization (the two primary sides arguing that civilization either began in Egypt or Babylon). Loren Stuckenbruck, "The "Angels" and "Giants" of Genesis 6:1-4 in Second and Third Century BCE Jewish Interpretation: Reflections on the Posture of Early Apocalyptic Traditions," in *Dead Sea Discoveries* 7, no. 3 (2000): 354-377, https://www-jstor-org.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/stable/4193170?.

[39] *Jewish Antiquities, Volume I: Books 1-3,* translated by H. St. J. Thackeray (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930). 35, accessed December 7, 2020, https://www-loebclassics-com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/view/LCL242/1930/volume.xml

[40] Discussed further below.

interpretive understandings of Gen 6:1-4. In many contemporary Bible translations, *nĕpilîm* is simply translated as "giants," a tradition that began in the 3rd century BCE when Greek translations rendered Nephilim as γίγαντες, *gigantes*.[41] This Greek translation became the basis upon which many early Christians built their understanding of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. This decision in vocabulary could have been based on many factors, but it informs us that the Jewish scribes of the third and second century understood the Nephilim to be akin to the giants that were present in Greek mythology.

The first evidence of deviation from this idea comes from the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE – 50 CE).[42] Though he still interpreted the "sons of God" to be angels, he took Gen 6:1-4 to be allegorical in nature. In his *On Giants*, he describes these angels as the "demons" referred to by philosophers from outside of Israel, spirits that guide wicked men away from virtuous behaviour.[43] Because these men are led astray, their children are "born of the earth, who are hunters after the pleasures of the body" and thus focus their time on training and martial prowess instead of on learning and their spiritual devotion.[44] Philo expands on this idea in *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, seeing the angelic sons of God as allegorical for virtuous men, where the daughters of men and their offspring remain depraved and concerned only by the flesh.[45] Though this concept is rather vague, and Philo gives no definitive answer on whether it was possible for angels to have children with humans, it enables a wider range of interpretation that begins to take place in earnest as Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity start their path of separation.

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[41] Hendel, "The Nephilim Were on the Earth," 21.
[42] Doedens, *The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4*, 85-86.
[43] A Hellenistic Jewish scholar such as Philo would have been familiar with works that discussed the "daimōn" such as Plato's dialogues. On the daimon in Platonic philosophy, see Steven G. Smith, "Demon Thinking and the Question of Spiritual Power," *Heythrop Journal* 55, no. 2 (March 2014): 173-187.
[44] Philo, "On Giants," in *The Works of Philo Judaeus: The Contemporary of Josephus, Translated from the Greek*, edited and translated by Charles Duke Yonge (London: H. G. Bohn, 1854-1890), 58-60. http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/yonge/index.html
[45] Doedens, *The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4*, 86; "Questions and Answers on Genesis, I," *The Works of Philo Judeaeus,* 92.

The Sons of God in Judaism from the Classical to the Medieval Period

Rabbis began to reject the angelic reading of the sons of God by the second century CE. Though there was no scriptural recording of oral rabbinic tradition until much later, the *Genesis Rabbah* records an interpretation of Gen 6:1-4 that is attributed to the legendary Jewish scholar Shimon bar Yochai (c. 2nd century CE). Yochai called the *bĕnê hāʾĔlōhīm* the "sons of the nobility," cursing those that persisted in calling them the "sons of God."[46] Doedens notes that this likely influenced Symmachus's (c. late 2nd century CE) use of οἱ υἱοὶ τῶν δυναστευόντων, "the sons of the rulers" when translating the Hebrew Bible into Greek. Yochai's general interpretation of *bĕnê hāʾĔlōhīm* continued into the medieval period for the most prominent Jewish commentators, with figures like Rabbi Yudan (4th century CE),[47] Rashi (1040 – 1105 CE), and Nachmanides (1194 – 1270 CE) all rejecting the concept of fallen angels and attributing the deeds of Gen 6:1-4 to a ruling elite of human beings. Some interpretations saw these elite as superior in intelligence or in physical strength, which ensured heroic and powerful progeny, but their relationship with mothers of inferior standing led to evil actions and to the moral decay of the world.[48] By the medieval period, some commentators such as Abarbanel (1437 – 1508 CE) were interpreting the sons of God to be the descendants of Seth, third son of Adam, whose godly moral standing separated them from the sinful daughters of Cain until they finally had children together.[49] This view, called the Sethites-interpretation by Doedens, originated in early Christian thought and will thus be discussed below. The sons of God and their offspring remained human, regardless of their specific identity.

Though Rabbinic interpretation was relatively unified on the subject, a few important deviations exist. One comes from *Targum Pseudo-Jonathon*, an early medieval Rabbinical translation and commentary on the Torah that is notoriously difficult to date.[50] This Targum translates *bĕnê hāʾĔlōhīm* as "sons of the great ones," which falls in line with Rabbinic tradition, but expands upon the Nephilim and challenges their supposed humanity.[51] The Nephilim are

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[46] Qtd. In Doedens, *The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4,* 107.
[47] Yudan was one of the *Amoraim*, Jewish scholars who lived in Palestine. *Encyclopedia Judaica,* s.v. "Yudan."
[48] Doedens, *The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4,* 80-81, 107-109.
[49] Doedens, *The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4,* 109, 173.
[50] Though there is no academic consensus on the dating of this text, it seems likely to be from after the development of Islam in the 7th century CE. Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity*, 213-214; Doedens, *The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4,* 82-83.
[51] Doedens, *The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4*, 82-83.

themselves fallen angels, taking the verbal root "to fall" in conjunction with the theological concept of a fall from grace.[52] According to *Targum Pseudo-Jonathon*, there are only two Nephilim: Samyaza and Azazel, the two most prominent figures in the Enochic angelic descent myth. They are on Earth *while* the sons of God are committing moral transgressions with the daughters of men – not necessarily a coincidence, but not connected through any kind of parental relationship either.[53] This is possibly the earliest attempt to separate the Nephilim from the sons of God, but the issues of dating this text and the fragments preserved within make it impossible to determine with any surety. While this is an intriguing shift from mainstream Rabbinic thought, it seemingly had little purchase on the tradition as a whole.

The most substantial departure from the mundane human reading of Genesis 6:1-4 within Jewish tradition was in the mystic works referred to as Kabbalah. Though Kabbalistic writings had little overall effect on mainstream Jewish thought during the times contemporary to their authorship, these texts became associated with esotericism in the romantic period and have remained an integral part of the aesthetics of esoteric fiction and interests in the 20th-21st century.[54] Kabbalistic literature was made deliberately cryptic so that the uninitiated could not learn the secrets found within these texts, making the study of these texts difficult.[55] These writings had a marked interest in angelology, demonology, and eschatology, among other topics that we might call "supernatural."[56] One might imagine that texts concerned with angels might indeed recede to the angelic interpretation of Gen 6:1-4, but most Kabbalist authors saw *bĕnê hāʾĔlōhīm* and their offspring as human. Debate existed on the extent of their divine attributes and the mystic powers they commanded, but in most cases, they were still considered to be material in nature.

The central text of Kabbalah, the *Zohar*, has a passage that refers to Adam and Eve as "children of God," meaning in turn that the "sons of God" refers to an older generation that was

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[52] Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity,* 214-215.
[53] Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity*, 214; Doedens, *The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4,* 66, 82-83.
[54] For more on the relationship between Kabbalah and esotericism, see Boaz Huss, *Mystifying Kabbalah: Academic Scholarship, National Theology, and New Age Spirituality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).
[55] Bernard J. Bamberger, *Fallen Angels: Soldiers of Satan's Realm* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 2006). 164.
[56] For more on the models of Kabbalist thought and their interactions with each other from the 12th century onward, see Moshe Idel, "Part 1: Models in Kabbalah and Hasidism," in *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic,* 31-146 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

closer to the physical perfection of the humans born in the Garden of Eden.[57] Even though their physical superiority was diluted by the daughters of men, their children were still capable of great feats of strength, thus making them prime candidates for the warrior status of the *gibōrîm*. This same passage includes Adam and Eve among the Nephilim due to their "fall" from grace. However, as Bernard J. Bamberger notes, in the later development of the *Zohar* the author abandoned this approach to understanding the sons of God and readapted the angelic descent myth to explain how the secret rituals and spells found in Kabbalist literature were discovered on Earth. Several of the editors that followed the original author of the *Zohar* expanded on the specifics of the knowledge revealed by angels, especially by the angels Samyaza and Azazel.[58] The repetitive reappearance of the angelic descent myth in Jewish thought shows that while Nephilim and their compatriots eventually became considered mundane, they remained intwined with the greater field of angelology and tied to a supernatural category.

The Sons of God in Christianity from the New Testament Onwards

The earliest texts of Christianity have tantalizing pieces of information that conceivably refer to the angelic descent myth as it is described by texts in the Enochic tradition. A few quotations and references stand out in the writings that became the New Testament, as well as from some authoritative though non-canonical works. To be clear, none of these texts directly discuss the sons of God and thus the concept sees no development in these works, but it appears that the angelic descent myth was the most authoritative understanding that existed at the time. As will be seen, this caused various issues in later exegesis.

Matthew 22 seems to directly quote 1 Enoch with the intent of alluding to the punishment of Azazel.[59] The apostle Paul (5 – c. 64 CE) seems to refer to the angelic descent myth in 1 Corinthians when addressing the issue of head coverings during prayer, *because of the angels* (1

[57] *Encyclopedia Judaica*, s.v. "Zohar;" Bamberger, *Soldiers of Satan's Realm*. 178.
[58] Bamberger, *Soldiers of Satan's Realm*, 178-180; Doedens, *The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4*, 110n194.
[59] Matt 22:13; see David C. Sim, "Matthew 22.13a and 1 Enoch 10.4a: A Case of Literary Independence?" *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 15, no. 47 (July 1992): 3-19, particularly 6-13. Sim notes the various texts Matthew seemed to draw upon when writing, which included other prominent Enochic and apocalyptic works.

Cor 11:2-16).[60] 1 Peter depicts Jesus preaching to spirits in prison that did not obey during the times of Noah (1 Peter 3:18-20), which could be human, but 2 Peter specifically discussed the angels that sinned prior to the flood and were cast into the deepest darkness (2 Peter 2:4).[61] Jude discusses the angelic descent myth when elaborating on the harsh punishments that are in store for sinners (Jude 6) and later explicitly quotes 1 Enoch 1:9 (Jude 14-15).[62]

Genesis 6:1-4 proved to be tricky for early Christian writers and theologians. For some, their proximity to the text and the above references made it apparent that 1 Enoch was indeed authoritative, and thus, the sons of God were to be understood as angels that fathered monstrous, giant children. This reading, however, proved to be troublesome from an early stage, with Church Fathers developing increasingly complicated angelology beginning in the 2nd century. For example, authors such as Justin Martyr (c. 100 – c. 165 CE) discussed the immaterial, and therefore sexless, nature of angels. Interestingly, he also claimed that it was because of their love of human women that demons were first created.[63] When Origen (c. 184 – c. 253 CE) wrote *De Principiis*, he addressed the Church's canonization of angels but determined that they needed to decide once and for all what their physical nature was. His argument that angels were beings made of pure light, and thus unable to physically interact with humans, proved to be persuasive for many and remains a normative position to this day.[64]

A historian named Julius Africanus (c. 160 – c. 240 CE), a contemporary of Origen known for calculating the age of the Earth (at approximately 5500 years old) in his *Chronographiai*, has the earliest written rejection of the angelic interpretation of the sons of God among Christians. Approximately 1200 years before Abarbanel, Africanus puts forward the notion that the sons of God were the descendants of Seth and that their wives were the descendants of Cain.[65] Reed notes

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[60] See for example L. J. Leitart Peerbolte "Man, Woman, and the Angels in 1 Cor 11:2-16," in *The Creation of Man and Woman: Interpretations of the Biblical Narratives in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, edited by Gerard P. Luttikhuizen, 76-92 (Leiden: Brill, 2000) 85-90; *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity*, 188-199.

[61] Nickelsburg, *A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch*, 86; VanderKam, *Enoch: A Man for All Generations*, 172.

[62] Nickelsburg, *A Commentary on the Book of Enoch,* 86.

[63] Martyr references Mark 8:25 "They neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but shall be as the angels in heaven." "Second Apology of Justin" and "Objections to the resurrection of the flesh" in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. I, edited by Philip Schaff, 791-805, 502-518 (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1885), 793, 508. https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.html

[64] See Origen, "De Principiis" in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. IV, edited by Philip Schaff, 561-829 (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1885), especially 564, 599, 733-734. https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf04.html

[65] Doedens, *The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4*, 138-141.

that the idea likely did not begin with Africanus: he was writing from the context of a chronographer who was attempting to define human history in harmony with the biblical account and seemed to present the Sethite interpretation as one that was already obvious. This was possibly influenced by Christology that saw Jesus, himself a descendant of Seth, as the "Son of God" which places him amongst the *bené HaElohim.* Interestingly, Africanus does not drop the angelic descent myth entirely; indeed, he retains the angelic instruction motif to help explain the swift development of human technologies, but the concept of humans mating with angels begins to lose its sway.[66] Bamberger suggests that the concept may have its origins with Gnostic sects who venerated Seth and/or Cain.[67]

Soon, figures such as Ephrem (c. 306 – 373 CE) and Hilary of Potiers (c. 310 – c. 367 CE) dismissed the angelic interpretation and adopted Africanus's Sethite view. This idea spread relatively quickly through the ranks of significant Christian thinkers and officials, evidenced by Bishop Philastrius of Brescia (d. c. 397 CE) declaring the view of giants as the progeny of angels to be heretical in the late 4th century.[68] This concept went from being accepted at a nearly canonical level to being heretical, hinting at an egregious shift in thought over the centuries. Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430 CE) addressed the subject in his *De civitate Dei*, adopting the Sethite view and expanding on it. For Augustine, Gen 6:1-4 intentionally equates these human descendants of Seth to angels, implying that their righteous actions had previously made them closer to God and they were indeed "messengers" of His word.[69] He also addresses the quotations from Jude, saying that Jude's testimony was evidence that there was *at one point* scripture written by Enoch, but that the available text of 1 Enoch was inauthentic.

In general, this shift begs the question as to what was now thought about the nature of the Nephilim and their supposed giant qualities. For many of these thinkers, the answer was quite simple, and that simplicity was bred from the resources available and the context of the time. Many early Christians utilized the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible and would therefore see the word *gigantes* instead of the much more ambiguous *nĕpilîm*. Africanus, like most others, did not seem particularly concerned with the giants. In *De civitate Dei,* Augustine briefly discusses

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[66] Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity*, 221-226.
[67] Bamberger, *Soldiers of Satan's Realm, 79.*
[68] Bamberger, *Soldiers of Satan's Realm,* 79-81.
[69] Doedens, *The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4*, 154-158.

the Nephilim, stating that "the divine book [shows] plainly enough that there were already giants on earth in those days when the sons of God took as wives the daughters of men."[70] Interestingly, this implies that Augustine and his contemporaries were reading 6:4a and 6:4b as separate clauses, not necessarily seeing the giants as the progeny of the sons of God. Citing Pliny the Younger's proverb, "the older the world becomes, the smaller will be the bodies of men,"[71] Augustine states his belief that the term *gigantes* simply refers to atypically large humans:

> But I do not think it miraculous, about giants, that is to say about extremely tall and strong people, that they could have been born of humans, because, also, after the flood such ones have been found to exist, and even in our times there existed human bodies which were giant-like in an incredible way, not only from men but also from women.[72]

On Augustine's word, 1 Enoch and its interpretive hold on Gen 6:1-4 was dropped from the Catholic (and even Eastern Orthodox, in time) milieu, and the Sethite interpretation of Gen 6:1-4 remained virtually unrefuted in Christian circles until the 20th century.[73] The sole exception to this abandonment is in Ethiopia, where the text has had a canonical status since the earliest days of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and tradition holds that the text was originally written in Ge'ez. Here, the angelic interpretation of Gen 6:1-4 has been practiced unabated despite the shifting exegetical landscape of their European and North African contemporaries.[74]

The Legacy of the Sons of God and the Nephilim in Today's Discourse

It is important to signal how concepts on the Nephilim shifted from the 20th century onwards, as (relatively) recent developments have affected their presentation in popular media. As discussed above, most biblical scholars view Gen 6:1-4 as a fragment from another tale used to provide rationale for God's harsh actions in the flood narrative. This means that scholars typically agree that the *bĕnê hāʾĔlōhīm* were themselves gods or demigods from other cultures who

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[70] Augustine, *City of God, Volume IV: Books 12-15,* translated by Phillip Levine (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 553.
[71] Qtd. In Stephen T. Asma, *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 75. Asma ties Pliny's belief to ancients digging up the bones of dinosaurs or other large creatures and assuming that they belonged to humans.
[72] *Questions on the Heptateuch,* qtd. In Doedens, *The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4*, 154-155.
[73] Bamberger, *Soldiers of Satan's Realm, 80.* Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity*, 227.
[74] Doedens, *The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4*, 95. For more on 1 Enoch's role in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, see Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Hermeneia Translation*, 104-108.

committed reprehensible sexual acts with human women. From these encounters were born the *nĕpilîm,* also referred to as *gibōrîm,* who would be the semi-divine heroes found in the epics and poems of the Mediterranean and Near Eastern world. Debate exists on the specifics, but this is the consensus in academic circles of the basic structure of the fragment.

That consensus, however, ends as soon as one leaves the academy. Several mainstream churches, including the Catholic Church and the Church of England, adhere to the Sethite doctrine into this day. Even so, clergy within these churches are unlikely to have a particular opinion in one direction or another. Modern Judaism is similar, with most Rabbis seeming to interpret Gen 6:1-4 as mundane or at least human-centric, adhering to the Mighty-Ones interpretation that was spawned from the 2nd century. In both religious traditions, most contemporary clergy and teachers are more likely to encourage readers not to get lost in the specifics and to recognize that regardless of the literal or allegorical intent of the passage, the message remains relatively the same across institutional lines: sexual immorality and sinful behaviour was part of why humanity was nearly wiped off the face of the Earth.

It is where exceptions to this rule occur that we find the reason for the current study. Within the last few decades, considerable attention has been given to 1 Enoch, sparked in part because of the text's prominence in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Scholars have re-engaged it with increased scrutiny, finding that the Ethiopic translation was remarkably close to the original Aramaic document. It also hinted at the importance of apocalyptic literature in sectarian Jewish groups such as those that lived at Qumran. Suddenly, it became apparent that this was a text of importance for at least one in-group of incredibly faithful followers of biblical law, a group that seemed to be an ideal type for an increasingly fractured Church structure in the 20th century.

Enochic literature has seen particular interest from American Evangelical groups that are concerned with utilizing archaeological practices to prove biblical tales, as well as conspiracy theorists that see evidence of a global cover-up of giants, extra-terrestrials, and other supernatural creatures from the Earth's ancient past. These groups often go hand-in-hand, and popular interest in the mysterious Gen 6:1-4 passage seemed to first be spawned with another trend in public fascination: reports of unidentified flying objects (UFOs) and the subsequent spread of ufology and the ancient astronaut theory.

Morris K. Jessup, an American astrophysicist, wrote the aptly named *UFO and the Bible* which was the first known attempt to seriously investigate the possibility of extraterrestrials visiting the Earth in biblical times, though it was swiftly debunked by historians and biblical scholars alike.[75] As Jessup explained, he did not intend to blaspheme Christianity or reduce its validity. Instead, Jessup aimed to "rationalize and substantiate the Bible in light of modern science, common sense, and a host of bewildering and unexplained events of UFO nature."[76] He saw the Sons of God of Genesis 6 as the earliest evidence that there were beings not *quite* human that came to Earth. Their ability to mate with the "daughters of men" meant that they were close enough to humanoid to be akin to humankind, if still separate to a degree, and Jessup saw this as evidence that extraterrestrials were "shepherding" humanity through the practice of mating and political control.[77] He substantiated this argument by citing John 10:16, which he reads as Jesus's admission that he was one of several sons of God meant to shepherd many races across the universe: "And other sheep have I, which are not of this fold: Them also, I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one-fold and one voice" (John 10:16). For Jessup, "clearly this is a divine indication of life and intelligence, if not of actually humanoid beings, elsewhere in the universe" and evidence that the Bible was trying to tell its readers all along that we were not alone.[78]

Following Jessup there were several authors working within the ancient astronaut framework that cited Gen 6:1-4 as evidence of extra-terrestrial interference. Brinsley Le Poer Trench published *The Sky People,* in which he claimed unequivocally that "Sky People" have been visiting Earth for millions of years.[79] While Jessup was interested in a new approach to filling in supposed gaps between scientific and religious doctrine, Trench was more adamant of the truth of his outlandish claims.[80] One of Trench's points (later influential in the field of pseudoarchaeology and ufology) was that the Hebrew term *Elohim* is actually best translated as "gods." [81] Trench viewed all of the various names for God (YHWH/ "Jehovah," Adonai, Lord of Hosts, etc.)

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[75] Ronald Story, *The Space Gods Revealed: A Close Look at the Theories of Erich von Däniken.* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 14.
[76] Morris K. Jessup, *UFO and the Bible.* (New York: Citadel Press, 1956), 9, accessed November 24, 2021, https://ebookee.com/UFO-and-the-Bible_5033005.html.
[77] Jessup, *UFO and the Bible,* 52-53.
[78] Jessup, *UFO and the Bible,* 53-54.
[79] Brinsley le Poer Trench, *The Sky People,* Third Award ed. (New York: Award Books, 1975). 11.
[80] Though their methodology and conclusions vary, Trench cites Jessup's work in his bibliography.
[81] Trench, *The Sky People,* 21. While this is an interesting observation that has been discussed by various Biblical scholars, it is relatively clear that, grammatically speaking, the word is intended as a male singular proper noun though Trench is correct that *elohim* can mean "gods."

throughout the Hebrew Bible as references to different, individual Sky People, called *Elohim* by the ancient Israelites. Using this theory, he investigated the early chapters of Genesis and imagined the first and second[82] creation accounts to in fact be separate events, the first being a failed experiment on Mars by the Elohim and the second being a renegade attempt by Jehovah God – a former Lord of Mars - to continue the experiment on Earth. When it became apparent to the Elohim that humanity was destined for "degeneracy," they flooded Mars to eradicate Jehovah's proto-humans. Jehovah rebelled by instructing a chieftain named Noah to create a spacefaring Ark, thus saving mankind.[83]

Shortly after Trench came Erich von Däniken's *Chariots of the Gods? Unsolved Mysteries of the Past* (1968)*,* one of the most influential pseudoarchaeological texts to the present date. The biblical passages discussed by von Däniken would be familiar to Jessup and Trench's readers, with primary focus on Genesis and Ezekiel.[84] Like Jessup, an early passage of interest for von Däniken is the introduction of the Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4, whose giant children hinted at a non-human biology. He also conflated the Sons of God with the two messengers hosted by Lot prior to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.[85] For von Däniken, the "rain of fire and brimstone" compounded with the angel's urgency for Lot and his family to evacuate in a timely manner is evidence that the cities were destroyed by nuclear weapons, or something like it – for if God had a magical ability to punish only those he wished to punish, why use something so imprecise that Lot had to escape?[86] It is this sort of rhetorical question that von Däniken asked of each of his selected passages.

Von Däniken's *Chariots* proved to be massively popular and has created an entire genre of skeptic literature that doubts the official historical narrative regarding things such as ancient gods, architectural wonders, and human evolution. In his stead, texts such as Presbyterian minister Barry Downing's *The Bible and Flying Saucers* (1968) and NASA chief Josef Blumrich's *The*

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[82] First account is found in Gen. 1:1-2:4, second account in Gen. 2:4-2:25. It has been noted for centuries that there are seemingly two separate creation narratives in the first two chapters of Genesis, with differences in when various parts of the world were made (in the first account waters are created on the second day, but in the second account waters are created on the first day, etc.).
[83] Trench, *The Sky People,* 27-42.
[84] Story, *The Space Gods Revealed,* 15-19.
[85] To my knowledge, there is no other scholar that imagines the Sons of God to be categorically the same as the messengers of Genesis 19.
[86] Erich von Däniken, *Chariots of the Gods? Unsolved Mysteries of the Past*, translated by Michael Heron (London: Souvenir Press, 1969), 51-53.

Spaceships of Ezekiel (1974) were born. Documentaries about the "true" history of giants litter the internet. Many theories about the Nephilim find their way into broader conspiracy theories about the Anunnaki, Sumerian deities that have come to be seen as extraterrestrials.[87]

Some take this basic concept and reel it back into a more mainstream theological apparatus. In the early 2000s a prevalent evangelical preacher and businessman named Chuck Missler delivered lectures and sermons on the topic of Genesis 6 and the Nephilim in which he encouraged his audience to read texts like 1 Enoch and *Book of Giants* due to their closeness to the time of Jesus. Though he states that the texts are not necessarily divinely inspired, he claimed that people were simply wiser during this era due to their temporal proximity to the coming of Christ. In these lectures he adapted the angelic interpretation of the sons of God, warning that the current trend of genetic research and biological manipulation would lead to cataclysmic punishment at the hands of God. [88] For Jessup, Missler, and many like them, "the days of Noah" are upon us and the end times are near.[89] Our only hope is to repent and to reject the capricious actions of world governments that have led to the moral degradation of humankind.

The Nephilim could be morally corrupt humans, demi-gods, half-angels, alien hybrids – while some of these possibilities are more far-fetched than others, the simple truth is that we do not know exactly what the ancient Hebrews were referencing, and that unsolvable mystery makes the Nephilim even more alluring. It is within this uncertainty that fictional Nephilim have flourished. Over the last 40 years, authors have made use of many of the peculiarities discussed within this chapter to contribute to an increasingly complicated range of interpretations for these figures. Due to the mysterious nature of Nephilim in each source, as well as the myriad depictions they have had, any consumer of this kind of fictional media is more likely to have questions than answers when engaging with these texts. A new audience began asking the same question some scholars and theologians have pondered: just what (or who) exactly were the Nephilim?

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[87] First posited by Zecharia Sitchin in *The 12th Planet*.
[88] Chuck Missler, "Session 11: Chapter 6 – The Days of Noah," Genesis: An Expositional Commentary, Koinonia House, filmed 2003, video of lecture, 1:12:43, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eFiFcW84K_A.
[89] Matthew 24:37-39: "For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man."

Chapter 2: Nephilim as Contemporary Monsters

"What manner of man is this, or what manner of creature is it in the semblance of man?"

- Johnathon Harker, *Dracula* (1897).

When the rabbis of the classical and medieval period re-imagined the sons of God and the Nephilim as mighty men and their mighty children, they removed the traces of the supernatural that were likely originally intended in Genesis 6:1-4. Christians similarly de-mythologized the text, seeing the giants as particularly large, but otherwise mundane, human beings. Indeed, if Nephilim remained in a mundane position, it would not be fruitful to analyze them as monsters. But history decided otherwise, and by the turn of the 21st century Nephilim had found their way into the cultural and symbolic catalogue of the horror genre, sometimes in self-labelled Christian fiction but far more often in secular works. They have become a rare but nonetheless significant member of milieu of esoteric and occult fiction, signaling to audiences that the text will deal with issues of religious significance. Their form, however, is not consistent in their myriad appearances. Most of the time, Nephilim are depicted as human in form, at least on the surface, appearing to be as mundane as the next person to the ignorant eye. Though some exceptions exist, studying humanoid creatures and dubbing them monsters requires clarification. This chapter will discuss some of the methods that have been applied to the study of monsters in works of fiction, while drawing parallels between Nephilim and a perhaps more familiar creature, one which has seen an abundance of both popular and academic attention: vampires. In doing so, I will develop a framework to examine Nephilim with the final goal of understanding how and why they are depicted in such a varied manner across texts.

Western Folklore and "Secular" Popular Culture

Part of what makes today's Nephilim interesting is that despite their many forms, they are still tied together by the author's decision to utilize the word *Nephilim*. The name itself offers a sense of interconnectivity and biblical weight, tied to ancient texts that have been forgotten by mainstream Judaism and Christianity. To use the term means something *deeper* than simply using the word giant, or fallen angel, or whatever more common title that could represent the creatures in their work. As will be examined, Nephilim is the title given to various monsters that typically

would not be categorized together, such as tribal cat-like humanoids and half-demons. Despite the differences there is always a thread, however minute, that connects each example of Nephilim back to one of their various ancient interpretations. There is a widespread unspoken understanding that while Nephilim are amorphous and can be used in various forms, there are still boundaries. Authors do not, for example, use the name for fairies or zombies. Like vampires, "every age embraces the [Nephilim] it needs," but that vampire or that Nephilim still needs to be discernibly such.[90] Yet there is no Nephilim encyclopedia or academic work that compares them across cultural barriers,[91] no seminal work on them like Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. So where does this diverse, yet paradoxically unified, understanding of this word come from?

Mark Allen Peterson tackles a similar issue of commercialized religious figures, exploring how the *jinn* of Arabic folklore (invisible spirits with various powers and motives) became the wish-granting genie as we understand it. Peterson's overarching thesis is that "through repeated entextualizations, the free-willed, potentially dangerous jinn of Arab folklore have become the enslaved gift-giving genies of global folklore."[92] It is this focus on "repeated entextualizations" that becomes relevant to the task at hand, as well as the concept of how a monster (a label I will presume to apply to *jinn*) enters this realm of "global folklore." By following a chronological approach to depictions of *jinn* from the collection of folktales known as *Arabian Nights* to both Hollywood films and local Middle Eastern films, Peterson traces how the genie found an important, integral place in the corpus of modern fantasy as "a magical figure that can circumvent hard work... and other traditional modes of attaining the wealth necessary to fulfill the limitless desires associated with capitalism."[93] He concludes that "bereft of personal agency, set loose from its religious underpinnings, and tied to the notion of unlimited human desire that is at the heart of modern economic concepts about human nature, the genie has become an increasingly universal tool for exploring the contradictions between consumer desire and moral values."[94]

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[90] Nina Auerbach, qtd. In Tracy L. Bealer, "Of Monsters and Men: Toxic Masculinity and the Twenty-First Century Vampire in the *Twilight* Saga," in *Bringing Light to Twilight: Perspectives on a Pop Culture Phenomenon,* edited by Giselle Liza Anatol, 139-152 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 139.
[91] Such as Matthew Bunson, *The Vampire Encyclopedia* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1993).
[92] Mark Allen Peterson, "From Jinn to Genies: Intertextuality, Media, and the Making of Global Folklore," in *Folklore/Cinema: Popular Film as Vernacular Culture,* edited by Sharon R. Sherman and Mikel J. Koven, 93-112 (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2007), https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/usupress_pubs/34/, 93.
[93] Peterson, "From Jinn to Genies," 93.
[94] Peterson, "From Jinn to Genies," 108.

While Peterson's focus is on global vs. local folklore, this thesis is more interested in what we consider religious and how the "sacred" is divided from the "profane" in entertainment media. Peterson acknowledges that *jinn* are "an article of faith for most Muslims" and discusses the commodification of this belief to some degree, but it is not central to his work.[95] His discussion of a global folklore construes a system of intertextuality for monstrous figures and tales on a worldwide scale, but Nephilim do not have this same level of permeability. Instead, this text will consider Nephilim as part of a *Western folklore*, a trans-cultural knowledge base and collection of identity-laden tales that cannot be relegated to one particular region, but which rarely finds itself outside the boundaries of nations typically associated with "the West" – the United States, Commonwealth nations, Europe, etc. The shared folklore of these regions can be tied to many things, in some cases geographical closeness and in others shared history, but the commonality of Christianity undoubtedly plays its own part. Perhaps due to a history of westernisation and a complicated relationship with Christianity, Western folkloric themes often also emerge in Japanese media pieces, particularly in manga, anime, and video games, including a few texts that feature Nephilim.[96]

Within this milieu of Western folklore there seems to be an increased fascination with horror and occultism.[97] Due to Nephilim's association with angelology, Kabbalah and esoteric Christianity, all loosely part of what Christopher H. Partridge dubs "occult culture" or *occulture*, methods for analysing occultism in popular culture are useful to this study.[98] Kennet Granholm posits this rise of occultism in the public sphere is tied to what Charles Taylor calls the post-secular: "a time in which the hegemony of the mainstream master narrative of secularization will be more and more challenged."[99] This does not mean that secularism loses its grip entirely on societal structures and institutions but instead that there is an awareness of continued religious influence on public opinion: "one could say that the post-secular relates more to changes in

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[95] Peterson, "From Jinn to Genies," 95.
[96] On Christianity in Japanese popular culture, see Patrick Drazen, *Holy Anime! Japan's View of Christianity* (Lanham: Hamilton Books, 2017), and Adam Barkman, "Anime, Manga, and Christianity: A Comprehensive Analysis," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 9, no. 27 (2010).
[97] Christopher H. Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West: Volume 1, Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture and Occulture* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 187. Partridge claims that "the center of gravity is shifting from Christian culture to occulture."
[98] Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West,* 69-70.
[99] Charles Taylor, qtd. In Kennet Granholm, "The Secular, The Post-Secular and the Esoteric in the Public Sphere," in *Contemporary Esotericism*., edited by Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm, 309-329 (New York: Routledge, 2014), 317.

perceptions regarding religion, among scholars and laypeople alike, than to grand-scale societal transformations in themselves."[100] While this concept of the post-secular is typically used to discuss mainline religious institutions, Granholm proposes that it should be expanded to include "the esoteric" and its involvement in personal belief systems in this post-secular age.[101]

Of particular concern to this project is Granholm's championing of "popular culture as one of the most, if not the most, significant arenas to explore in the study of religion today in contemporary society," and he recognizes the increased influence of the esoteric on this area.[102] Granholm sees popular culture as such due to "an increasing erosion of the borders between the private and public spheres," exemplified by social networking sites on which numerous pages are dedicated to occult subjects that bring the esoteric into the open.[103] To emphasize the esoteric's grip on the public imagination, Granholm examines the occult influence in the *Stargate* television series and the immensely popular film *Avatar*. Both texts explore concepts belonging to the traditional realm of occultism, such as individual "ascension" to a higher mental status in *Stargate* and the concept of "a living, all-permeating nature" in *Avatar*.[104] Granholm discusses the reception of these concepts in both "secular" and "occult" audiences.[105] In both cases, secular audiences found these texts to be doorways to further exploration of esoteric subjects and individual concepts of spirituality. Conversely, occult audiences found their practices to be at best transcribed into entertainment, or at worst, commodified entirely. While this example deals with works of science fiction, a genre Nephilim are less likely to be found in, the point remains: occultism has grown to the point that it finds its ways into the popular fiction titles of today, and these titles are the arena in which one might investigate how the secular returns to what is considered sacred, or how that same sacredness is easily made to be profane.[106]

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[100] Granholm, "The Secular, the Post-Secular and the Esoteric," 317-318.
[101] Granholm, "The Secular, the Post-Secular and the Esoteric," 321. While this thesis paper unfortunately does not have the space to engage with it, Granholm provides an expansive conception of the esoteric.
[102] Granholm, "The Secular, the Post-Secular and the Esoteric," 324, 329.
[103] Granholm, "The Secular, the Post-Secular and the Esoteric," 324.
[104] This refers to the neural network of all living things being connected to a pseudo-consciousness in the film's world of Pandora. This even allows for the alien Na'vi to commune with their ancestors who have "returned" to this network via decomposition. Granholm, "The Secular, the Post-Secular and the Esoteric," 327-328.
[105] Granholm, "The Secular, the Post-Secular and the Esoteric," 325-328.
[106] Secular is an admittedly problematic term, one that has a murky definition in contemporary scholarship. The term is used here to refer to that which is at least imagined to be secular. On the contested categories of "secular" and "religious," see Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), and William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the*

Monsters and the *Monstrous*

This thesis will analyze contemporary cases of Nephilim that belong to the *monstrous*, even if they are depicted as predominantly human in nature but will not engage with examples of human groups that are labelled as Nephilim. That is to say, the *monstrous* will refer to an imaginative biological category that refers to beings that are decidedly not human, as opposed to how one might apply the term to "inhuman" and "unthinkable" deeds of political figures, murderers, or other human actors.[107] There is dual value in viewing the Nephilim as monsters, as it pertains in part to the earliest interpretations of Nephilim and to their re-emergence in Western imagination, but it also allows analysis of the eventual shift *away* from monstrosity that takes place in the texts that portray them. When the Nephilim first show up in fictional tales once again in the 1980s, they are decidedly evil and frightening creatures. Yet by the 2000s we begin to see them predominantly in the role of protagonists. By investigating what makes something monstrous, we unlock insight into what happens when you take a being's monstrosity away.

Stephen T. Asma makes note of the fascination with giants in the medieval imagination and connects this fascination with Enochian interpretations of Gen 6:1-4. Overall, he notes that this time period had an increased interest in monsters and what it implied for theodicy: if God is the only god, and is the creator of all things, then why did he create evil? At least in terms of monsters, the medieval answer largely boiled down to the idea that they were representations of God's creativity and authority, creatures that were frightening in their own right but also represented the awesome power that would be involved in subduing these creatures. To challenge God is to challenge the one that has control of these beasts, an obviously suicidal endeavour.[108]

Giants, or Nephilim, also came to represent the dangers of pride in a Christian context: be it Nimrod, Goliath, or the antediluvian warriors of renown, no matter how powerful these beings might be, their might was no match for God's. Indeed, the Enochian interpretation of Gen 6:1-4 suggests that it was the destruction of the evil giants, as opposed to man's own wrongful actions, that led to the deluge.[109] This claim implies that the narrative function of the giants, and thus the

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Roots of Modern Conflict (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), particularly chapter 2, "The Invention of Religion," https://oxford-universitypressscholarship-com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/view/10.1093/.

[107] For discussion on the various uses of the term monster, see Stephen T. Asma, *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 7-11.

[108] Asma, *On Monsters*, 63-66, 72-73.

[109] Asma notes that Nimrod was sometimes interpreted as a giant. *On Monsters,* 72-73.

flood itself, is to provide evidence of God's mastery over the Earth and its inhabitants instead of a narrative about punishing a wayward humanity. The text becomes one about violent authority instead of faithful obedience. While this answer certainly continues to influence contemporary views on the monstrous (and by extension the Nephilim), it does not provide much insight into their continued and varied appearances in non-religious media.

Admittedly, "monstrous" is a nebulous categorizing term, but work has been done to identify what makes something monstrous and what it means for examining that "something" if it is deemed as monstrous. While Asma's discussion of biblical monsters relates to their specific role in religious doctrine, Timothy K. Beal describes monsters on a more universal scale, calling them "paradoxical personifications of *otherness within sameness…* threatening figures of anomaly within the well-established and accepted order of things."[110] Beal makes use of Sigmund Freud's concept of the *unheimlich,* unhomely or uncanny, to better define this feeling caused by monsters. Freud uses *heimlich,* homely, to refer to anything that is familiar and thus inspires feelings of ease, comfort, and security. The inverse, uncanny, is not just something unfamiliar or novel, but something that is also frightening. It is something that has found its way into the home or the self but does not belong there, something that has feigned familiarity and nestled itself deep within ourselves. Freud uses this term primarily in respect to an *individual's* consciousness, that which the person is afraid of due to their own childhood experiences and adult development, but the term has since expanded.[111]

Beal applies the uncanny not only to the well-being of the self but also to the well-being of the culture and even the well-being of the "cosmos" (the "cosmic order" or laws of nature that we presume). An individual's experience of the uncanny would depend on the subject's own selective trauma and context, with the homely representing the positive aspects one sees in the self. That same person can experience the uncanny on a societal scale, seeing dangers in the structuring or current events of their community. Finally, they can experience the uncanny on a cosmic scale, something that they feel threatens the very fabric of their understanding of the universe. The uncanny is the feeling that threatens any of these anchoring positions in one's life – their comfort with their selves, their communities, and their world at large – that has somehow integrated itself

[110] Timothy K. Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 4.
[111] For more on the *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, see Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, translated by David McLintock, introduction by Hugh Haughton (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 123-162.

into the experience of these categories. Monsters symbolically and narratively represent that unease, as they are the things that lurk within each of these supposed places of safety. [112] By analyzing what makes a monster frightening, we can determine the insecurities that plague individual, societal, and existential well-being.

Monsters have an inherent relationship with religion, as hinted by the very construction of the word. Beal notes that it arrives from the Latin *monstrum*, which is related to the verbs *monstrare* (to "show" or "reveal") and *monere* ("warn" or "portend"). "Monster" not only describes the "horrifically *unnatural*" but also the "horrifically *supernatural,*" those creatures which *reveal* a grim *warning* of God's coming judgement. This has connections to the "experience" of horror, often characterized similarly to religious experiences, where one encounters something both *awesome* and *awful*.[113] Beal draws on Rudolf Otto, who sees religious experiences as an encounter with the numinous, "something inherently "wholly other," whose kind and character are incommensurable with our own, and before which we therefore recoil in a wonder that strikes us chill and numb."[114] The numinous is an abstract force that is characterized by the feeling it reflects, which Otto calls *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* – mysterious and fascinating, while existentially terrifying.[115]

Otto discusses the monstrous in a way that is akin to Freud's *unheimlich*, viewing "the uncanny" as an expression of the numinous "in its aspects of mystery, awfulness, majesty, augustness and 'energy.'"[116] An example of this would be the feeling conveyed in the passages on Behemoth and Leviathan in the Book of Job (Job 40:15-32), the lengthy descriptions of the reality-bending physique of imagination-defying beasts being representative of the awesome power under God's command. Otto, however, sees the numinous and the uncanny as "wholly-other," whereas Freud sees the experience of uncanniness as the return of the repressed, inner-other. Though Otto's examination of this somehow attractive yet repulsive fearsome experience provides us useful descriptive monikers in *mysterium*, *tremendum* and *fascinans*, he puts too much emphasis on an

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[112] Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters,* 4-5.
[113] Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters*, 6-7.
[114] Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry Into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, translated by John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 28.
[115] Otto utilizes the term 'numinous' to replace 'holy,' as he believes the latter term has taken on a moral characteristic that loses its original *feeling*-oriented meaning. *The Idea of the Holy,* 5-11, on *mysterium tremendum*, 12-30.
[116] Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 40.

irreducible abstract religious experience.[117] So instead of the monstrous personifying the numinous, as Otto would suggest, Beal follows Freud's lead and sees the monstrous uncanny as standing for the repressed otherness within the "house" of the self, culture, and cosmos. The repressed fears that are "banished from consciousness" are represented by the monsters proliferated both by individual authors and cultures at large. Through this understanding of the uncanny in combination with Otto's definition of the monstrous, Beal finds his project of exploring religion through its monsters, seeking theological discourse not only from the monsters of biblical literature but also from "the ostensibly non-religious popular culture of horror," where he finds an abundant venue for theological discourse.[118] This leads to numerous conclusions about monsters and their religious significance from many regions of the world across multiple eras, such as acknowledging that ancient Babylonian rites were premised on keeping the monstrous Tiamat in check, to seeing how presentations of Dracula became increasingly "de-ritualized" over time, thus showing shifting concerns over the practice of sacraments.[119] As Nephilim belong to both biblical literature and popular horror categories, Beal's method of seeking religious significance in monsters themselves becomes an invaluable resource in determining the role Nephilim play in current religious sensibilities.

Sympathetic Monsters: Vampires and Nephilim

Understanding what authors use to distinguish Nephilim as non-human helps us understand what people consider to be outside of a normative, orderly human experience. Yet, even though characters that exist in the worlds of Nephilim typically fear them, they are often intentionally depicted as *non-monstrous*, shown to effectively be humans born of unfortunate circumstances beyond their control. While the earliest pieces of media to include Nephilim always utilized them as villains or creatures that obstructed the paths of protagonists, they eventually became

[117] Several theorists have critiqued Otto's primacy of the "feeling" of the numinous in religious experience as being avoidant of the material realities that shape what we call religion. Otto assumes that due to a supposedly universal yet personal experience with the numinous, all people are effectively religious at a basic level. Things such as ritual are simply an outlet for what he considers a fundamental human truth. The term is only used here in accordance with Beal's interest in determining when a monster is symbolizing religious experience. On criticism of the concept of religious experience being *sui generis* championed by Otto, see Russell T. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on* Sui Generis *Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), particularly 11-15, 101-126.
[118] Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters*, 7-9.
[119] Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters,* 14-19, 149-151.

increasingly sympathetic. Over time, Nephilim went from representing the most ancient of evils to being lost children and anti-heroes. Their inhuman nature made them frightful on a surface level, but many overcame their terrible origins and chose to use their powers for good. Where once Nephilim were monsters, many texts now include them instead as monster hunters or as guardian lovers of central protagonists. In the process of this shift Nephilim received a facelift, typically looking more and more human as the 21st century began. Gone were the scales, the serpentine features, the disfigured bodies, etc. and in came the normative, conventionally attractive, youthful Nephilim that became pervasive. These changes will be discussed in detail in the coming chapters, but there is little scholarly work on Nephilim specifically in popular culture.

There is, however, one monstrous cousin of the Nephilim that went through a similar sympathetic change, who has in turn received considerable attention from media scholars over the years. Vampires went from dastardly Victorian companions to vicious lords of forlorn castles, to hunters of their own kind, to the hyper-sexualized figures on the covers of young adult romance novels. While the sheer number of depictions of vampires ensures that there is no monolithic understanding of their nature, there are similar patterns that can be seen in the reception history of both creatures. Indeed, one text to be examined in a coming chapter even equates vampires and Nephilim, depicting them as historically being the same creatures appearing under different names. In general, there are many key differences between the two beyond their simple physical differences – vampires are typically created or "turned" while Nephilim are born, for example – yet seeing how other scholars have investigated the shifting depictions of near-human creatures can be fruitful to understanding the role of the Nephilim in contemporary fiction. In brief, this section will act as a case study for how this method of analysis has been utilized.

Though monsters have most typically been viewed as a window into repressed fears, Nina Auerbach suggests that some monsters, particularly vampires, are also useful in determining repressed *desires*. In her work *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, Auerbach investigates the shifting image of vampires in English and American media from the 19th century onward, finding evidence that while many other monsters – ghosts, werewolves, or what she calls "manufactured monsters" – remain relatively unchanged, vampires blend seamlessly into shifting cultural landscapes.[120] Her investigation is inspired by the compelling nature of vampires, one that makes the creatures seem

[120] Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 3-8.

incredibly alluring. They *are* us, sometimes in the most horrid way possible, representing the fear of what we truly desire being abhorrent. We crave the immortality, seductiveness, and power of vampires despite knowing that they are monsters and exist outside of an acceptable experience. It is perhaps that desire to be like them that makes vampires most frightening.

There are many types of vampires that can be found in the folklore of nearly any region in the world. Evidence of concern over demons or spirits that consume flesh or drink blood were particularly present in ancient Greece, Rome, Egypt, and Eastern Europe. The actual nature of each version of the creature could vary greatly but a core pattern emerged of humans returning from the grave to consume the flesh or blood of those in their unsuspecting community.[121] It is not until the nineteenth century that vampires in their typical contemporary form, who appear as sophisticated and gentlemanly while remaining pale and sinister, were first introduced in the works of Lord Byron (1788 – 1824) and his contemporaries, though John Pollidori's *The Vampyre* (1819) could perhaps be considered the truest progenitor.[122] In *The Vampyre*, Pollidori's antagonist Lord Ruthven becomes the earliest blueprint for a suave, enchanting figure who enthralls those around him. By the end of the text, Ruthven marries the protagonist's sister and drains her of her blood on their wedding night, disappearing afterwards and never being seen again. Over time this figure inspired many other famous vampiric depictions, such as James Malcolm Rymer and Thomas Peckett Prest's *Varney the Vampire* (1845-1847) and Sheridan le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872), but none became nearly as famous as Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897).[123] As any historian of vampires would tell you, this new archetype generated by Ruthven of a bloodsucker in gentlemanly clothing was a far-cry from nearly any previous folkloric beliefs about vampires. He nonetheless became the blueprint for how vampires are understood globally, especially when *Dracula* expanded on the formula and became a worldwide sensation.

Many of the tropes established by Polidori continue in Stoker's work. At its core, the tale revolves around a sophisticated nearly-human monster that seeks the blood of a woman whom he aims to take as a bride – but the sort of things that make Ruthven and Dracula *monstrous* set them apart. Though Ruthven's final act is a despicable one of betrayal and murder, he is still a friend to

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[121] Matthew Beresford, *From Demons to Dracula: The Creation of the Modern Vampire Myth* (London: Reakton Books, 2008), 19-30.
[122] For discussion on the complicated development and relationship between Byron and Polidori's work, see Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, 14-27.
[123] Beresford, *From Demons to Dracula*, 115-139.

the orphaned young gentleman, Aubrey, who narrates the text. Aubrey cannot help but be drawn to his otherworldly demeanor that sets him apart from his peers and even wishes to grasp a piece of his unique identity for himself. They travel together and Ruthven treats Aubrey, a commoner (though a wealthy one), as an equal, transcending class contempt.[124] Over time, however, Aubrey comes to regret and fear his oath to not reveal Ruthven's true nature – an oath he nonetheless never breaks – culminating in the death of his sister. Ruthven's monstrosity comes in part from his gore-seeking nature, and of course from his ability to rise from death, but it is primarily his ability to secure loyalty from an unsuspecting accomplice that is to be most feared.

Dracula, on the other hand, is fearsome from start to finish. Stoker's protagonist Johnathon Harker is initially intrigued by Dracula, a Hungarian Count whom he assists in purchasing a house in England, but he is nearly killed by Dracula's vampiric wives. It is evident from that point forward that the Count is a monster, and his association with night creatures throughout the tale never lets the reader forget it. From the beginning, Dracula's foreign, unfamiliar, and antiquated demeanor set him apart from the English cultural norm represented by Johnathon.[125] Where Ruthven was the epitome of English standards of class, Dracula became a monstrous archetype of the foreign Other, especially after Bela Lugosi's iconic 1931 performance as the titular villain.[126] Ruthven represented the fear of betrayal by one's own community and heroes; Dracula represented the fear of outsiders wreaking havoc on the normative experience as they seduce, murder, and "convert" the people (particularly women) of proper society. Indeed, Dracula himself arrives in England after a violent voyage at sea, killing those who provided him passage, as he enters the country seeking new prey to become his wives, which can be interpreted as the worst possible outcome of foreign immigration. The transformation of these women from upstanding citizen to monster by this foreign figure, often taking place inside churches, could be seen as fear of non-normative modes of Christianity (at least in an English context) replacing Anglican dominance, amongst other similar cultural shifts. Beal sees the titular villain of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) as the ultimate *unheimlich* found *within* Western Christianity, representing both the repressed "primitive" form of Christianity practiced by foreigners that threatens to pollute the rational faith

[124] Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, 15.
[125] Beresford, *From Demons to Dracula*, 134-139.
[126] For analysis of the specific changes that Lugosi brought to the character and thus set as a standard for vampiric portrayals, see Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves,* 112-117.

that has found its place in Western modernity, as well as Dracula's representation as a personification of anti-Semitic caricatures of European Jewish identity.[127]

Dracula proliferated a trope that became nearly as important to the horror genre as the vampire itself – the monster hunter. While *The Vampyre* ends with the grisly fate of Aubrey's sister, *Dracula* ends with the vampire vanquished and Johnathon's wife, Mina, rescued. This is due in no small part to the expertise of Professor Abraham Van Helsing, a medical doctor who not only knows more than any other characters about vampires, but also has a pure and noble heart. He chooses to battle Dracula, despite the potential danger to himself, representing the most desirable form of masculinity in Victorian England.[128] He can be described at a character level as intelligent, kind, and brave, but he is also notably the normative ideal of a white, educated, upper-class male. He is everything a man *should be* where Dracula is everything a man *should not,* at least in the eyes of the normative experience. Interestingly, Van Helsing is also an outsider to England – he hails from Amsterdam – but he has internalized the ideals of his new home and assimilated himself into its culture.[129] Indeed, Auerbach finds this to be integral to Van Helsing's ability to defeat Dracula, as it was only with the wisdom and understanding of a similar "ponderous foreigner" that the vampire was defeated.[130] Heather L. Duda continues this line of thought by noting that the monster hunter is always an outsider of some kind, and an integral trait of these characters is their ability to weaponize their Other-ness against their evil adversaries on behalf of the society they are not quite integrated within.[131] It is the pure-hearted model minority who uses their extended outsider's knowledge that allows the monster hunter recruits (Johnathon and his friends) to finally defeat the aggressive foreign invader.

This type of character was seen in many texts and films within the horror genre until the 1970s, when the slasher genre seemingly took over. Upon the defeat of the U.S. military in Vietnam, it became evident to the American public that the "good guys" do not always win – and indeed, it was revealed that these "good guys" had committed atrocities against many innocent Vietnamese citizens. So, too, had things like the Watergate scandal eroded trust in the leadership

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[127] Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters.* 124-127.
[128] Heather L. Duda, *The Monster Hunter in Popular Culture* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company Inc., 2008), 8-9.
[129] Duda, *The Monster Hunter in Popular Culture*, 13.
[130] Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves,* 116.
[131] Duda, *The Monster Hunter in Popular Culture,* 13.

of those at home.[132] Where it once seemed clear cut who the monsters were, it was now muddled: perhaps it was human nature to be monstrous, and society simply acted as a mask to that truth. Media about vampires and other monstrous Others who were clearly set apart from the normative human experience largely disappeared amongst this uncertainty for a time, in favor of immortal, unstoppable humans who could no longer supress their urge to kill. When vampires finally re-emerged at the turn of the decade beginning with Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* (1976), they were no longer simply beings to be feared, but indeed sorrowful representations of a tenderness and emotional complexity that humanity has since lost.[133]

Not only are these new vampires emotionally complex and sympathetic, but they contain the knowledge required to defeat their fellows that have gone too far. Many aid humans in defeating or evading the vampiric threats they face, sometimes due to guilt and sometimes for their own gain. Over time this becomes further protracted as the monster becomes the monster hunter, using their powers to protect the innocent (though often with selfish ulterior motives) from those that share their existential experience. Vampires put themselves on the frontline of defeating the *unheimlich*, such as in the 1989 Canadian television series *Forever Knight* and the popular American series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003).[134] In both these shows, vampires with souls attempt to reclaim their lost humanity by protecting those around them from monstrous threats. Duda suggests that the most important part of this reclamation is in community connection, as it is the tie to community that prevents the vampires from losing to the repressed monstrous side that awaits them if they reside in isolation.[135] In aiding humans in protecting the *unheimlich* that threatens the *well-being of the culture*, they protect themselves against the *unheimlich* that threatens the *well-being of the self.* It is no accident when a vampire is utilized in this role of monster hunter, as it breaks the traditional good/evil dichotomy that it implies.[136] It challenges our concept of what "human" truly means, and Duda notes that this shift to sympathetic monsters shows that posthumanism has seeped into horror as sources question what it is that makes these creatures inherently monstrous or any worse than their human counterparts.[137]

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[132] Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves,* 152; Duda, *The Monster Hunter in Popular Culture,* 21.
[133] Duda, *The Monster Hunter in Popular Culture,* 23-24.
[134] Duda, *The Monster Hunter in Popular Culture,* 44-45.
[135] Duda, *The Monster Hunter in Popular Culture,* 52-53.
[136] Duda, *The Monster Hunter in Popular Culture,* 9.
[137] Duda, *The Monster Hunter in Popular Culture,* 27-28.

In the case of *Blade* (1998), a relevant archetype is established: the half-breed monster hunter, who is caught in the middle of his monstrous and mundane experiences.[138] These characters may have horrific, murderous pasts, but through some form of human intervention they repress their violent natures and turn that aggression against evils greater than themselves. Blade could choose to be as evil as his vampiric father, but it his choice to instead defend the values of humans like his mother that establishes him as a heroic (or at least, anti-heroic) figure by the end of his tale. Once again, the mostly-Other chooses the normative society with which he does not quite belong. In doing so, the authors lessen the sense of *unheimlich* associated with the monster as a whole: while these creatures do not truly belong, they can be persuaded to coexist.

Nephilim, with their uncertain origins and monstrous mythos, leave ample space for authors to explore these same sorts of posthumanist questions. These sometimes-children-of-angels use their divine power to protect their earthly counterparts where their heavenly associates cannot personally intervene. Sometimes, Nephilim must in fact protect humanity from these very heavenly associates. When they are not used to define monstrosity, they are used to ask their audiences to define it for themselves. So too do they sometimes act as a secular rallying-cry, asking us to decide if their heavenly parents and the goodness they are associated with are as worthy of our praise as we commonly assume.

Nephilim as Monsters in Western Popular Culture: Three Categories

While the various forms of Nephilim in popular culture do not fit particularly cleanly into specific categories, the next three chapters will nonetheless approach their forms from three different titles to describe them: fallen angels, primordials, and angel-hybrids. The simplest to engage is the fallen angels: this refers to beings that are in some way in the employ of God or heaven but go against their intended purpose and are thus given the name Nephilim. This is the category with the least number of entries, but the first fictional use of the term fits this in Madeleine L'Engle's 1986 *Many Waters.* Following are the primordials, the loosest of each category that is admittedly treated as something of a catch-all for the examples that are not explicitly implied to be "angelic," but nonetheless show shared ideology in their representation. This refers to the term

[138] Duda, *The Monster Hunter in Popular Culture,* 29-30.

Nephilim being applied to creatures who somehow "came before," either predating history or man itself. They are depicted, either through visual cues such as "primitive" dress or through explicit description, as being from a time forgotten by humankind, perhaps before a flood eradicated what existed of their history and culture. The shape can vary greatly here, from vampires to deformed monstrosities that truly challenge the meaning of *unheimlich*. Finally, there are the angel-hybrids, the largest of the three categories where most examples of Nephilim are to be found, especially in the 21st century. Here Nephilim are described as in some way having the essence or DNA of an angel, be it through parentage or other means. The most popular examples of Nephilim are found here, in examples such as Cassandra Clare's young adult fantasy series *The Mortal Instruments,* Blizzard Entertainment's *Diablo* video game series and the recently completed *Supernatural* television series.

By categorizing Nephilim as such and being as exhaustive as possible in the inclusion of examples of each, I provide an avenue for analysis more particular to the claims made by each category itself, versus an in-depth exploration of each individual appearance of the word. The primary concern of this work is how to approach *Nephilim* as its own amorphous category of monster, as one might approach vampires or werewolves and the deviations between their representations. Nephilim have a unique, growing role in Western folklore, and regardless of a piece of media's view on "chaos" as a concept, when Nephilim appear they are always its champions. Like the primordial waters of creation so often seen in ancient cosmologies, Nephilim have proven to be the primordial monsters that can be molded into whatever shape an author requires.

Chapter 3: Fallen Angels – Rejecting Order

"A Nephilim… an angel."

"Not an angel from heaven, an angel cast from heaven! An angel at war with God!"

- Dr. Elissa Cardell and Father Fulton, *The Devil's Tomb* (2009).

The first category of Nephilim is fallen angels, servants of God who "fall from grace" and decide to rebel against the rigid order of their master. It is important to distinguish what is meant by the term "fallen angel," as it is a loaded and theologically significant term. In Judeo-Christian traditions, an angel is a being that is in the employ of God who often resides in heaven (a realm that is separate from Earth). The term angel comes from the Greek ἄγγελος, *angelos,* literally meaning "messenger," a translation of a Hebrew word with the same meaning (מַלְאָךְ, *mal'ākh*). They may resemble a human in many ways (e.g., Gen 18), or they can be strange creatures made of wheels and covered in eyes (e.g., Ezek 1). Typically, they have been imagined in Western culture to be humanoid in appearance with the important addition of feathered wings. Angels often have the power to heal wounds or to smite evil. In the Bible, they frequently perform the role of heralds, presenting knowledge and prophecies on behalf of God to his chosen human agents. In most cases, both in ancient contexts and in popular culture, angels are undyingly loyal to their Lord. Angels that break their sacred charge in pursuit of their own desires are often called fallen angels, either in reference to the (primarily) Christian concept of falling out of salvation, or more literally referring to falling out of heaven and down to Earth.[139]

Fallen angels as narrative characters have seen something of a resurgence in popular culture over the last few decades. They are often just as evil as Judeo-Christian traditions would have us believe, but Milton-esque portrayals of complex, flawed angelic figures became more popular around the same time that vampires were becoming rehabilitated. As counter-cultural activities grew in the wake of continued war efforts and corruption scandals, especially in the United States, so too did the sense that perhaps some of the most reviled figures in Western mythic traditions had a valid perspective against their respective social orders. On the opposing end of that spectrum were those that saw these rebellious figures as simply adding to the problem, making an already complicated situation worse. It is within this context that we find authors using the term Nephilim

[139] For a summary on the history of angels both as narrative figures and objects of religious practice, see David Albert Jones, *Angels: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

to name their fallen angels; a name used to signify that these angels have an ancient past long forgotten by humanity, where they took up a self-righteous cause and brought chaos and ruin to a world already plagued by uncertainty.

When counted among the Nephilim, what changes about an errant servant of God? There are many popular texts that utilize fallen angels as villains or anti-heroes, but only four texts or franchises out of the two-dozen analyzed for this project use the term Nephilim to represent their wayward messengers, making this the rarest of the three categories. Indeed, between these four there seems to be very little that links them, at least physically. Unless, of course, you count their physical *actions*.

The first narrative example of Nephilim in popular culture belongs to this category, found in Madeleine L'Engle's *Many Waters*. Here the premise is set for authors concerned with Judeo-Christian mythology to insert Nephilim however they feel is appropriate, even if it is only tangentially related to traditional biblical readings. As was discussed, no ancient source considered the Nephilim and the sons of God to be one and the same – even the ancient-astronaut theorists took these "fallen ones" only to be the children of rebellious extra-terrestrial "fallen angels." So, it is here with L'Engle that we see this interpretation first take form. The three texts that followed each operate within considerably different genres, but they all make use of biblical horror to add weight to their respective narratives. So, too, do their fallen Nephilim all make use of similar powers and motifs.

Enochic Motifs in Many Waters

Many Waters, published in 1986, is the fourth novel in L'Engle's *Time Quintet* young adult fiction series. These books follow the exploits of the brilliant teenage Murry siblings as they travel through time and space to defeat the efforts of one evil being or another. The series has distinctly Christian themes and influences, with angelic beings making frequent appearances to aid the children in their adventures. Monika Hilder finds the *Time Quintet* to be a challenge against the primacy of rationalism that had engulfed post-Enlightenment culture, intentionally invoking a

sense of "the mystery of the supernatural cosmos" in her work.[140] The Murry siblings are the children of two quantum physicists who explore the material fabric of time, but a recurring theme is that magic, science, and religion are all in constant conversation with one-another. Rationality and scientific examination do not shake the Murry's belief in the Christian God, but instead reaffirm it. In many ways, the *Time Quintet* is a deliberate champion of the "re-enchantment" discussed by Christopher H. Partridge,[141] encouraging readers to seek God and the spiritual world in their explorations of the material world.[142]

Many Waters is the only text in the series with Nephilim, and these beings are used to represent the antithesis of the above synergy between the material and the spiritual. The plot of the book sees the Murry twins, Sandy and Dennys, accidentally sent back in time to the days of Noah. After their arrival they are split up from each other, and each boy finds himself in two separate camps in "the Oasis," one belonging to Lamech and the other belonging to his estranged son Noah. The plot of the text primarily revolves around Sandy and Dennys aiding the two men in repairing their relationship and helping Noah build his ark, all while they both fall in love with Noah's daughter Yalith.[143] Conflict in the narrative arises from the schemes of the twelve Nephilim, strange denizens of the Oasis who fear that the twins have been sent by "El" to destroy them. [144]

L'Engle's Nephilim are characterized by pride, lust, consumption, and paranoia. This is accomplished by drawing on both biblical Enochic motifs, calling them the "sons of El" and depicting them as lustful teachers with a tinge of associated cannibalism.[145] Even the Enochian Watchers' concern over their giant offspring is reflected in *Many Waters*, and it is implied that the Nephilim will watch the death of their children just as the angels of 1 Enoch did. Though L'Engle uses the term for Enoch's half-breeds in association with the angels themselves, she brings the Enochic precedents for what themes should be associated with Nephilim into the 20th century.

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[140] "Mythic Re-enchantment: The Imaginative Geography of Madeleine L'Engle's Time Quintet," in *Children's Literature and Imaginative Geography,* edited by Aïda Hudson, 243-260 (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2018), 243-244.
[141] As discussed in Chapter 2.
[142] Hilder, "Mythic Re-Enchantment," 251-252.
[143] Though no female characters are named in Genesis 6-9, L'Engle creates names and personalities for Noah's wife (Matred), the wives of his sons (for Shem, Elisheba, for Ham, Anah, and for Japheth, Oholibamah) and his forgotten daughters, Mahlah and Yalith.
[144] "El" is a transliteration of a word for god or deity in several semitic languages, including Biblical Hebrew. In the Hebrew Bible, the word is sometimes used as a proper name for God.
[145] L'Engle, *Many Waters*, 94.

Most authors will abandon her use of Nephilim as fallen angels, instead using the term to describe angelic hybrids, but many of the motifs of lust and pride will carry over into the texts examined below. Yet, perhaps more importantly, L'Engle showed that Nephilim could be amorphous and shapeshift into whatever form an author needed to carry out their thematic vision. She turned an ancient, nigh-forgotten creature into the perfect symbolic antagonist in a story about free will, faith, and love. She showed a generation of authors that the Nephilim were a monster that could be used to represent the tensions of a world losing touch with its religious past. The *unheimlich* they induce comes from their unnatural beauty and the forbidden knowledge that they share; though they look beautiful on the surface, they are nonetheless unnerving for both the characters in the text and the audience themselves. Physical beauty hides dark intentions, and L'Engle uses them to show us the emptiness that a godless future holds, but they are not just to be feared – the women in the text willingly pair themselves with this danger. Like the vampires Auerbach observes (discussed in Chapter 2), these Nephilim are what we desire: beauty, knowledge, and perhaps most importantly, control.

When asked about the Nephilim, Noah describes them as such:

> they are tall, and they have wings, though we seldom see them fly. They tell us that they come from El, and that they wish us well. We do not know. There is a rumor that they are like falling stars, that they may be falling stars, flung out of heaven.[146]

The Nephilim's wings are vibrant colours such as red, green, or purple, and their matching eyes give off a soft light. They can create illusions, shapeshift into various desert creatures such as lizards and insects, and have the power to control the minds of those that they have seduced, resembling the powers of Stoker's Dracula.[147] Each Nephil has a unique name, associated colour, and preferred animal form.[148] Some of these names are found in the Book of Enoch (Rumjal, Ertrael, and Rumael) while the remainder of their names have ties to the broader folklore of Judeo-Christian demonology.[149] One of the Nephilim, Eblis the lizard, attempts to seduce Yalith throughout the text. He is flirtatious and offers her jewelry, and when she initially refuses his

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[146] Madeleine L'Engle, *Many Waters* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1986), 96.
[147] L'Engle, *Many Waters,* 204.
[148] Though the word is not found in Hebrew, L'Engle uses the word "nephil" to denote a singular member of their race. This term will eventually be used by several other authors.
[149] For example, Eblis (one of L'Engle's Nephilim) seems to be a play on the term *Iblis*, the term used for the Devil in Islam.

advances Eblis envelops her in his wings and offers to teach her about "men's ways." [150] The Nephilim evoke the sexuality of the biblical sons of God as well as the motifs of gifts and angelic instruction of tied to the Enochian Azazel.

Also residing on Earth at that time are the twelve Seraphim, brothers of the Nephilim who are still loyal to El. Like the Nephilim they have individual personalities, names, forms, and associated colours, but they have a distinctly more "noble" quality in their physical presence. Their colours are various shades of gold, silver, white, and blue, while their animal forms could be considered prouder, such as a lion, camel, or pelican. The Seraphim are an important foil to the Nephilim, informing us as to what their fallen brothers *could* be but *chose* not to be. This theme of choice is important to the text and the Nephilim symbolize the choice of material pleasures over spiritual fulfilment. At a meeting between the twelve, a Nephil that "we chose to be silent with El. We chose to never hear the Voice again, never to speak with the Presence."[151] The twins are nearly seduced by a woman under the Nephilim's control, but they resist temptation and *choose* to remain pure.[152] This leads to the Nephilim attempting to dominate the minds of the twins through a dark ritual, which finally sparks the intervention of God's loyal Seraphim.[153] They only act against the Nephilim when someone's choice is being infringed upon or their ability to choose is being taken away – if someone decides to take up the offer of material avarice, then they will simply watch in grief.

Nephilim covet their chosen women, their chosen forms are carrion feeders that will eat anything they find in the dessert, and they distrust their Seraphim siblings and the twins to the point of scheming against them without any active cause. Yet there is one characterizing element utilized to make them sympathetic: fatherhood. One of the most important plot points of the story is the relationship between Noah's daughter Mahlah and a Nephil named Ugiel. The pair eventually marry after Mahlah conceives a child. The baby is large (nearly killing Mahlah during childbirth) and drinks greedily from his mother, alluding to the giant and consumptive nature of the Enochian Nephilim.[154] Though Ugiel can be dismissive of his partner, he seems to genuinely

[150] L'Engle, *Many Waters*, 46-48.
[151] L'Engle, *Many Waters*, 258.
[152] Their only hope for returning home is time-travelling unicorns, but for whatever reason can only be approached by virgins.
[153] L'Engle, *Many Waters*, 292-294.
[154] L'Engle, *Many Waters*, 302-303.

care for his son. Omniscient narration confirms that Mahlah is deeply in love with Ugiel, and she claims to her sister that the Nephil has been kind and good to his family.[155] So, while these Nephilim are antagonistic and consumed by their material desires, we see that at their core they do still have the capability to love and to cherish – making their choice to reject the love of El even more tragic. For the next few decades, authors would follow L'Engle's lead and utilize their Nephilim as similarly tragic figures.

Illusion, Lust, and Secrecy

Lust and desire are the primary characteristic of the remaining depictions of fallen angel Nephilim. Following *Many Waters*, it was not until a television series named *Hex* released to British audiences in 2004 that we saw fallen angel Nephilim again. This series emphasized the horror of the Nephilim, both in their physical form and in their ability to use sexuality to destroy people. Each subsequent version of fallen angel Nephilim would do the same, and each would make varying use of 1 Enoch in their monstrous details.

Hex (2004-2005) is a supernatural drama series with elements of horror and comedy, and here the correlation between Nephilim and sexual immorality continues. *Hex* depicts the Nephilim as somewhat tragic figures who define themselves as victims of a wrathful God. According to their leader, Azazeal (Michael Fassbender), they were forced to align themselves with Hell when they were rejected by Heaven.[156] It seems evident that the authors intended for this to be ambiguous, as Azazeal often lies and schemes to accomplish his goals. Despite his penchant for devious plots, Azazeal seems to genuinely care for the protagonist, Cassie Hughes (Christina Cole) and especially for their eventual child, even risking conflict with Hell to ensure their safety. Like in *Many Waters,* Nephilim are depicted here as lustful and greedy, but their paternal instincts seem to outweigh their selfish desires. Azazeal is devious and manipulative, hiding his monstrous form behind an attractive façade, but like L'Engle's Nephilim he is a knowledgeable, handsome, dedicated father

[155] L'Engle, *Many Waters*, 303.
[156] In many fictional depictions of Heaven and Hell, the terms are often capitalized as they are real, physical places within the context of the narrative. Thus, I will also capitalize the term when referring to these operative places referenced by these texts.

with power over his own destiny. He is a monster, but one that Cassie (and by extension, audience members) is drawn to.

The first season follows the story of Cassie, a talented young painter who is attending a private college in the English countryside. Cassie is a descendent of witches, making her the target of a mysterious and handsome man who stalks her at night. This man approaches Cassie, professes his love for her, and tells her that his name is Azazeal.[157] Justifiably disturbed, an incredulous Cassie approaches the school headmaster, David Tyrel (Colin Salmon), and asks if he knows anything about the name "Azazeal." David is initially caught off guard but responds that "he was the leader of the Nephilim." He continues, stating that Nephilim is "Hebrew for 'the fallen ones.'" He then retrieves what he calls "the ancient text" and quotes details directly from 1 Enoch, including the two hundred angels who fell and their history of teaching women witchcraft. The passage detailing Azazel's punishment is read aloud verbatim.[158]

Despite David's warnings, Azazeal eventually seduces Cassie and conceives a child with her, once again evoking the sexual immorality that is central to Genesis 6:1-4. The baby comes to term in a matter of weeks and grows at an accelerated pace, reaching adulthood within months. *Unheimlich* is attached to the unforeseen consequences of pregnancy, especially when conception takes place with a stranger. There is a specific moral boundary that has been crossed when Cassie gives in to the fraternization of a mysterious stranger. There is horror induced by the accelerated birth of Cassie's baby as her body behaves in a way that should be impossible – informing us that this child is not truly human. Azazeal and his spawn act to warn us about sexual immorality as any good monster should. The child, named Malachi (Joseph Beattie), is at the center of a prophecy that will finally begin the "End of Days." Malachi is registered at Medenham for the following year, setting the drama for the second season.

Enochic details pervade season two. A hideous gargoyle-like creature with a disfigured face, stunted wings, and slimy elongated limbs stalks Cassie until it is killed by Ella Dee (Laura Pyper), an immortal descendant of the occultist John Dee.[159] This creature is revealed to be

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[157] Though the pronunciation and spelling of this name seems to be unique to *Hex,* "Azazeal" is clearly a reference to the Azazel figure found in texts such as 1 Enoch.

[158] *Hex*, season 1, episode 1, "The Story Begins Part 1," directed by Brian Grant, aired October 17, 2004, on Sky One, 44:31-47:31, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6W0JjPcf5Oc.

[159] For more on John Dee and his ties with modern Occultism, see Egil Asprem, *Arguing with Angels: Enochian Magic and Modern Occulture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), particularly chapters 1 and 2.

Baraquel (Alan Ruscoe), one of the Watchers listed in 1 Enoch. Several more Enochic Watchers join Azazeals efforts, appearing in both monstrous and humanoid forms.[160] *Hex's* Raphael, one of the loyal archangels that punishes the Watchers in 1 Enoch, acts as a liaison between Heaven and their human agents until he himself falls from grace.

The Devil's Tomb, a direct-to-video military horror film with a markedly different plot and setting from *Hex,* also gives considerable focus to lust and desire in its depiction of Nephilim. Once again, we find fallen Nephilim in the role of villains in a story that follows Captain Mack (Cuba Gooding Jr.) and his special forces squad as they embark on a doomed mission in an unnamed desert in the Middle East. A CIA operative named Dr. Elissa Cardell (Valerie Cruz) leads their mission to an archaeological site, referred to as "the Temple," where a group of scientists were searching for suspected weapons of mass destruction. The team is told that their mission is to recover a man named Dr. Lee Wesley (Ron Perlman), Cardell's father, and that nothing else is to be brought above ground – including other people. They are thwarted along the way by a Nephilim (used as a singular term in the film) who can control peoples' minds through the spreading of a viral infection. Unlike in *Many Waters* and *Hex,* the film deliberately utilizes an esoteric figure from Western folklore to comment on the misinformation presented by mainstream religious doctrine, implying that we are only given *some* of the truth at best. The "re-enchantment" taking place in other Nephilim media is rejected.

Inside the Temple, Mack's team finds several strange, boil-covered people that spew black slime from their mouths as a form of attack. One is a Vatican priest who chants in Latin before seemingly expiring, and another is a man who speaks ominously in an unnaturally deep voice as he cites Hebrews 9:22 and rants about religious truth.[161] These men are possessed by the (singular) Nephilim, who is intentionally sowing seeds of doubt in both the team and the audience about trusted authority figures and religious leaders. The team continues and finds a non-possessed priest named Father Fulton (Henry Rollins), who reluctantly leads them into the bowels of the Temple where they find several religious texts, referred to as "ancient fire-and-brimstone shit," conflating

[160] This includes Araquiel, Sariel, and Ramiel.
[161] "Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins."

their messages to all be about the same thing: an ancient war between good and evil.[162] An alien-looking figure is found encased in ice, and when pressed on the origin of the creature, Cardell and Fulton reveal that it is a fallen angel, called a Nephilim, who was entombed here by God after a revolt in Heaven. The angels have been trying to escape ever since through possession and illusory magic. Each of Mack's team members die in a symbolic manner tied to their inherent desires before the final confrontation with a possessed Wesley, who has taken the spirit of the Nephilim into his own body. Mack escapes alone to enlist as "a new soldier in a very old war,"[163] ending the film with a note on the truly ancient origins of the Nephilim and the strife they have caused.

The Nephilim's possession is spread when the black slime is ingested by victims. To ensure that these people ingest the slime, the Nephilim somehow reads the minds of the team members and creates illusions to lure them into letting their guard down around other possessed people. This includes a character's sister, another's unborn child, and a beautiful naked woman. Lust and love are the primary motivators used in these illusory attempts at possession, once again harkening to Genesis 6:1-4. This is an explicit use of desire *as unheimlich*, making temptation itself the truest antagonist in this tale.

When describing these powers, Father Fulton avoids using the term "illusion" and instead calls them "hallucinations," exposing a notable preference in the film for scientific language instead of terms like "magic" or "powers." Indeed, the protagonists use military lingo and slang when describing any "religious" phenomena, while those possessed by the Nephilim make frequent references to scripture and theological concepts, particularly free will and the choice to believe in God. In the final confrontation, the angel claims to have been "bred to do the dirty work" of God but rejects this calling and refuses to do as he is told.[164] Despite showing contempt for following the directions of a superior without understanding the reasons, the power of the Nephilim revolves around wresting control from the people they possess. They not only represent those that overstep their place and control those that they were meant to protect (be it government bodies or religious organizations), but they also represent the hypocrisy that exists in their rationalizations.

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[162] These traditions are referred to as "Hebrew, Christianity, [and] Buddhism," which many readers will note are words that would not typically be used within the same denominative category. The framing of religious experience being inherently about conflict is notable. *The Devil's Tomb,* directed by Jason Connery (Ice Cold Productions, 2009), 50:13-51:00, https://www.netflix.com/watch/70115820?.
[163] *The Devil's Tomb,* 1:24:55-1:25:07.
[164] *The Devil's Tomb*, 1:15:07-1:15:22.

Regarding the influences on this depiction of Nephilim, it seems the director and/or writers took more from Trench's *Sky People* than they did from 1 Enoch or similar early religious texts. The Nephilim's appearance closely resembles a standard "Gray alien" extra-terrestrial found in other popular culture sources,[165] even being mistaken as "some form of spaceman" by a soldier in the film.[166] While scripture is cited often and sacrilegious religious imagery is used frequently (such as crosses carved into the chests of victims), there is a distinct attempt to make the fallen angel resemble a creature from a science-fiction film instead of a magical being from, say, a children's book about the times of Noah.

The final example of fallen angel Nephilim comes in the *Age of Eve* supernatural erotic romance series, first published in 2013 with *Return of the Nephilim* and followed by the 2015 sequel *The Tempting: Seducing the Nephilim*. The series follows the romance of Eve Dowling and Beauregard Gregoire Le Masters (Beau), the long-lost heir to a wealthy New Orleans family and secretly a demonic incubus.[167] Several bizarre events follow, such as encounters with voodoo practitioners and extra-dimensional travel, all of which lead to the revelation that Eve is in fact *the* Eve who was at the garden of Eden. The Nephilim, ancient beings that were banished from the earthly realm long ago, are attempting to return but they can only do so with the help of Eve's feminine sexual energy. Sex, both consensual and non-consensual, is central to nearly every facet of this text. Eve can create portals to other worlds when someone is making passionate love to her – hence the Nephilim's desire to control her. Both the figurative and literal "true form" of people is revealed during their sexual encounters. The primary antagonist, Kirakin, has many powers centered around the ability to control – but without an equal female power, he is unable to *create*. This emphasis on female power is central to the narrative. Kirakin provides himself the illusion of control when he sexually assaults female characters, an event that is frequent in both books. In the abstract, Pratt's Nephilim represent patriarchal power that seeks to assert its control over the lives of women and their children – thus Eve, "the Messiah of the feminine," is a reminder that no man can create a familial legacy without the aid of a woman, and that a woman has power when she

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[165] On the fairy origin of Grays and their place in Western mythology, see Eden Lee Lackner, "Grays," in *Aliens in Popular Culture,* edited by Michael M. Levy and Farah Mendelsohn, 135-137 (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2019).
[166] *The Devil's Tomb,* 54:44-54:50.
[167] D.M. Pratt, *Return of the Nephilim* (Sherman Oaks: BroadLit, 2013). 50. An incubus is the male version of a succubus. According to Jewish and medieval Christian folklore, incubi/succubae are demons that appear to people in dreams and use lust and sexual pleasure to drain their victims of life force.

withholds that aid.[168] Motherhood is the ultimate form of the "divine feminine," that which brings true control to the chaotic ambitions of men and their most ancient progenitors.

Kirakin is a devil-like red skinned figure with batlike wings, cloven hooves, and a tentacled tail in place of his male genitalia.[169] He possesses Beau and sexually assaults Eve on several occasions with the intention of controlling her mind, a power the Nephilim can use on those that have surrendered to them.[170] The *unheimlich* of Kirakin comes in part from his ability to hide his form, and thus, his intentions, though the monstrosity of his assaults are also self-evident. His blue skinned twin Gathian, a fallen angel seeking redemption, also attempts to seduce Eve in a bid to enact his own misguided utopian vision of the future. Gathian explains that the Nephilim "were too close to the purity of the first intelligent, energetic force you call God," which led to a battle between this force and its "sons," seemingly referring to the biblical sons of God. Now they have returned and seek to replace God as architects of the future. The climax of *The Tempting* involves a ritual in which twenty priestesses chant while Eve has sex with a regular human man named Macklin Blanchard (Mac), allowing her to transcend to a higher plane referred to as "the alpha and the omega" inhabited by a being made of pure energy.[171] The Nephilim are banished, and the epilogue shows Eve gathering an army (including the Archangels Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Metatron) to aid in her final battle against Kirakin.[172]

In both novels, after first learning the word "Nephilim" Eve performs an internet search to gather information on what the term means. The scene is much more extensive in *The Tempting*, as Eve discovers two prominent interpretations of the Nephilim: one religious and one scientific.[173] The religious interpretation (based on "multiple passages in the Torah, Bible, and Koran")[174] effectively combines the biblical giants with the angelic sons of God, stating that they were

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[168] Pratt, *The Tempting*, 300.
[169] "Burgundy red glowed beneath his flesh skin, yellow eyes, leathery bat-like wings hung from his back like a cape, a snake's tongue, cloven hooves and a huge tail on the wrong side of his body," *Return of the Nephilim*, 78.
[170] *Return of the Nephilim*, 173.
[171] D.M. Pratt, *The Tempting: Seducing the Nephilim* (Sherman Oaks: BroadLit, 2015), 324. Revelation 22:13: I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning of the end."
[172] Pratt, *The Tempting*, 343-345.
[173] In *Return of the Nephilim* all she finds is "a picture of the Bible and the Torah" amongst several religious links and then the (fictional) Wikipedia entry that defined Nephilim as "the offspring of the 'sons of God' and the 'daughters of men.' The fallen." Pratt, *Return of the Nephilim,* 74.
[174] There is no explicit mention of the Nephilim in the Koran/Quran. Pratt may be referring to other tales of giants, but the word itself (or an Arabic analog) is never used.

"uncontrollably sexually aroused by the long, beautiful hair of human women." [175] Their children became a "distinct and separate species" that was later hunted down.[176] The "scientific" interpretation is effectively in line with the views of Trench and von Däniken: long ago, "Advanced Beings" came to Earth and genetically engineered the Nephilim to breed with humans to create a more advanced race. Pratt's scientists base their theories on massive skeletal remains found in the Fertile Crest – a practice done by real world pseudo-archaeologists to this day. The scientists believe that when the Nephilim revolted against the Beings, they were nearly wiped out by a "Great Flood."[177] The final website she finds, later proven to be "true," claims that Mother Earth was in balance until the "Immortals" created the Nephilim. One of these beings convinced Eve in the Garden of Eden to share the metaphorical "forbidden apple," which was the knowledge that "the feminine body… could be utilized as a portal through a state of bliss into other dimensions."[178] This reinterpretation of the Biblical Garden of Eden narrative not only emphasizes the importance of the feminine in relation to knowledge, but also centers the actions of the Nephilim as integral to humanity's loss of innocence.

Overall, the Nephilim prove to be the perfect, amorphous villain for an erotica novel steeped in New Age religious syncretism. Due to their mysterious origins and the very nature of the debate that surrounds them, they can be made to fit into a world in which several religious traditions are all effectively speaking on the same subject. At one point Eve finds herself searching through a spell book that includes "whole sections from writings of Enoch" alongside passages from the Dead Sea Scrolls, European alchemical texts, Egyptian rituals, and the Kabbala.[179] It is only by utilizing the cultural relics of *all of humanity* that she can defeat the Nephilim once and for all. In *Age of Eve* Nephilim are the very profane chaos that every religious tradition around the world has sought to control through sacred ritual. More generally, they contribute to the pervasive idea that the Nephilim are relics of a time when we had not yet established the rules and regulations of sexual immorality – a time where, supposedly, chaos reigned, and religion had not yet civilized humanity.

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[175] Possibly connected to 1 Corinthians 11:10.
[176] Pratt, *The Tempting*, 132-133.
[177] Pratt, *The Tempting*, 133-134.
[178] Pratt, *The Tempting,* 135-136.
[179] *The Tempting*, 290.

Chapter 4: Primordials - Monsters as Old as Time

A pub door banged open farther down the street and two skinny, sick-looking men came hobbling out towards him, each of them waving a bloody handkerchief; they were both jabbering at once, but Crawford caught the word "stone" and another worth that seemed to be "neffy-limb." [180]

- *The Stress of Her Regard* (1989).

It was not long after *Many Waters* that authors started to recognize the potential of a word like "Nephilim." Tim Powers, author of *The Stress of Her Regard*, understood that most readers would not know the word if they read it, let alone heard it. If a reader did not know the word, then it was a mystery to be solved; in the off chance they *did* know the word, then it was a word to be feared. The only certainty was that he would cause either intrigue or frightfulness with its use. Beyond those two emotions, he could make the word mean nearly anything he liked. Like the vampires investigated by Auerbach (Chapter 2), Nephilim can easily represent shifting cultural landscapes and an author's response to those changes.

My second category for Nephilim is admittedly a catch-all for the most abstract depictions of the creatures. Sometimes they are hideous behemoths, and sometimes they are ancient spirits. Other than their name, there is only one thing that connects the non-angelic Nephilim: they seem to be as old as time itself, or at the very least represent a time long passed. This is akin to the temporally situating effect the term has when it is applied to fallen angels, but these creatures and the settings they exist within sometimes operate totally outside of a Judeo-Christian mythos (such as fictional universes apart from our own). I have chosen the term "primordials" to encapsulate the bygone ages that they symbolize.

If one were to trace the typical origins of this category, they might tie it to the giants-interpretation of the biblical Nephilim. Due to the ambiguity of the biblical text, all that we can confirm about Israelite interpretation is that they believed there were fearsome and large beings, called Nephilim, that existed in antediluvian times. Authors that use primordial Nephilim take this ambiguity and use it to its fullest potential, creating (or reconfiguring existing) monsters that would not normally be associated with the Bible. It is an intentional decision to use a hotly debated term to represent these monsters, one that ensures their texts are inevitably considered within the

[180] *The Stress of Her Regard* (New York: Ace Books, 1989), 70.

Nephilim-associated cultic milieu. It is not simply a decision to tie your creatures to a biblical text, but a decision to tie them to an ancient mystery that is baked into Western folklore. The Nephilim are a subject already characterized by confusion, intrigue, and inadvertent dread, but the following depictions delight in exacerbating the issue and broadening the boundaries on what the term could possibly mean. Like a metaphor for the Bible itself, these are the mysterious giants of the past that have irrevocably determined the future of Western culture.

The Beating Heart of our Stories

Chronologically, *The Stress of Her Regard* is the second entry in the corpus of popular tales about the Nephilim, representing a significant shift from the angelic beings in *Many Waters*. The "Nephelim"[181] in this text are the first intelligent race to walk the Earth and as such they are an amalgamation of several monster traditions from various cultures around the world. They have been interfering with humans for as long we have been telling stories; whether it is the biblical deluge or the Greek flood narrative of Deucalion and Pyrrha, the ancient creatures show their influence.[182] *The Stress of Her Regard* is the first text to provide a culturally syncretic understanding of the Nephilim – one that sees them as not only a Judeo-Christian monster, but a global one. Much like their fallen angel cousins discussed in Chapter 3, these Nephilim are used to discuss sexual immorality, but their role goes beyond that. They dynamically represent many other social issues such as suicide, drug addiction, and gender roles, allowing Powers to explore each of these in a way akin to contemporary vampire fiction.

The plot of the novel is set in the early 19th century and follows the unfortunate misadventures of an obstetrician named Michael Crawford. He inadvertently "marries" one of the Nephilim by placing a wedding band on the finger of a statue. After being falsely accused of murdering his human fiancée, Julia, Crawford escapes to mainland Europe, pursued by Julia's sister Josephine.[183] He is thrust into a grand narrative involving several giants of Romantic literature, such as Lord Byron (1788-1824), Percy and Mary Shelley (1792-1822 and 1797-1851),

[181] Powers chose to use an alternative spelling to the more common "Nephilim."
[182] *The Stress of Her Regard,* 113-114.
[183] *The Stress of Her Regard*, 20-24, 38-39.

and John Keats (1795-1821). He befriends Byron and his compatriots along the way as each are also part of the extended Nephilim "family."

These Nephilim are called many other things over the course of the tale, such as lamiae, Muses, and "pre-Adamite vampires."[184] They are silicon-based lifeform, cold and hard to the touch despite their elegant snake-like forms. Though they are themselves genderless, they can shapeshift into a form that is attractive to prospective partners. They can reanimate the corpses of those that they kill, which they sometimes do to long-lost loved ones of characters in the novel.[185] When the Nephilim "wed" someone, their spouses act as a sort of host; Nephilim take on an immaterial form and travel *inside* their spouse, feeding on their energy. These hosts become effectively immortal, experiencing prolonged lifespans and the protection of vicious supernatural beings. Even when a host tries to commit suicide, their spouse will take great efforts to ensure it cannot be done. Much like Victorian vampires, Nephilim are weak to sunlight – when exposed to heavy doses they crystallize and turn into "a sort of dirty quartz."[186] Byron claims that Lot's wife was in fact a lamia, and the "pillar of salt" was simply a misremembered detail of a historical event.[187] Other ways to defeat the Nephilim are tied to gothic vampire traditions, such as the use of garlic and silver bullets.

The Nephilim appear to their hosts in lurid, sexual dreams, providing untold pleasure that waking sexual encounters apparently cannot compare to, evoking a similar tradition of sexual promiscuity attributed to the Nephilim discussed in Chapter 3. The host often becomes addicted to these encounters and obsessed with their lamia spouse; addiction and its dangers are a recurring theme associated with the Nephilim and their hold over the protagonists of the text. Hosts are also pursued by "neffers," humans who know of the existence of Nephilim and seek to become hosts (or even prey) themselves. When a lamia bites a human and drinks their blood, it releases a toxin

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[184] *The Stress of Her Regard*, 306. They are primarily based on Keats' classic poem *Lamia*, which tells of the wedding between a youth named Lycius and a serpentine creature, granted the form of a beautiful woman, named Lamia. Lamia is described as icy and stone-like, pale when there should be rose-colouring in her cheeks or veins visible on her forehead. When a sophist named Apollonius unveils Lamia's identity she disappears. Lycius dies of grief despite being spared a potentially gruesome fate. John Keats, "Lamia, Part II" in *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems* (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1820). 41-45. https://go-gale-com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/ps/i.do?p.

[185] These victims are typically referred to as vampires. Powers uses this to explain some bizarre Italian burial rituals, such as cutting off a corpse's head before burial.

[186] *The Stress of Her Regard*, 114.

[187] Genesis 19:26, "And his wife looked back and she became a pillar of salt."

that provides a kind of chemical bliss analogous to the effects of psychedelic drugs. Thus, there is an entire sub-culture dedicated to seeking these encounters, with neffer dens and pubs existing where people would go to get their fix.[188]

Crawford is at one point able to escape his bride, but he eventually relapses and allows the Nephilim to take control once again. Other hosts experience similar relapses at various points, allowing the creatures back into their lives. The Nephilim have a Muse-like ability to inspire artistic brilliance in their hosts, which is the oft-cited reason that the famous poets eventually return to their vampiric spouses. Byron is not so much addicted to the sexual facets of the Nephilim – he barely seems to care for them – but he admits that he was often unable to feel the necessary inspiration to write without their aid.[189] In this way, Nephilim parallel the contemporary myth that artists require mind altering drugs to create their works. Powers would encourage his readers to reject the allure, because underneath the pleasure there is a greater danger that eats away at you. Though these Nephilim provide the answer to many desires – lust, success, immortality – it is always evident that the control they have over their hosts makes them more monster than muse.

The Nephilim operate as the primary antagonists, but they utilize several human agents to do their bidding. In the text, the Habsburg royalty and the kingdom of Austria have been controlled for hundreds of years by an ancient Nephilim host named Werner von Aargau[190] – and he is only defeated when Crawford is able to "deliver" (via caesarian section) a stone Nephilim baby that resides within the ancient husk-like body of the nobleman.[191] Though biologically male, von Aargau is, for all intents and purposes, "pregnant" with this supernatural child. This child was placed in von Aargau when he awoke the once-defeated Nephilim in a bid for immortality. The transgender implications of this are meant to be a sort of cosmic *unheimlich* – a pregnant man is demonized as antithetical to the cosmic order, and he must be eliminated.

Even in the delivery itself there is complicated gender dynamic at play, as it is in part Crawford's ability to transcend 19th century gender roles that allowed his victory. Josephine,

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[188] During a particularly low point in Crawford's life, he accepts employment in one of these dens where he is drained of blood to be drank by paying customers. *The Stress of Her Regard*, 338-339.
[189] It is implied that Lord Byron took his wife back to complete his epic, *Don Juan. The Stress of Her Regard*, 180-181.
[190] Von Aargau is seemingly based on Werner the Pious (1025-1096), an early Patriarch of the House of Habsburg. Martyn Rady, *The Habsburgs: To Rule the World* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2020). https://web-p-ebscohost-com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid. 10.
[191] *The Stress of Her Regard*, 458-463.

formerly a revenge-driven would-be assassin and now Crawford's lover, assists in this process by acting as a subservient nurse. The tension Crawford experiences as a male obstetrician (a medical role that was traditionally occupied by female midwives) is vindicated when he saves humanity with this blossoming medical science.[192] The ancient chaos of ill-defined sexual morality and an absent gender hierarchy, represented by the genderless Nephilim and their male-mother avatar, are finally ousted when a man, supported by a woman, put their medical training to work. Though it is difficult to fully label Crawford and Josephine as "normative" due to numerous experiences with mental health issues throughout the novel, they never deviate from their heteronormative identities. When they accept their roles as doctor and nurse, man and woman, they are able to let go of the fear that has otherwise gripped them up to this point in the story. Existential chaos is vanquished, and social order is restored when each gendered character acts in a way deemed to be proper. Though figures like Byron and Percy Shelley are characterized to a degree by the outrage they stoke in circles of social propriety due to sexual immorality, the normative hero that Crawford and his learned (yet subservient) partner play is the most pivotal role in humanity's salvation. Overall, the text sees "modern" (to the depicted period, at least) men defeat an archaic evil by dedicating themselves to a rational and learned understanding of their mythic past. Much like in L'Engle's *Time Quintet*, Powers privileges an outlook that appreciates both scientific knowledge and mythic traditions.

Nephilim as an Occult Totem

In some texts, the Nephilim become counter-cultural angst made manifest, representing a rejection of mainstream historical narratives. They are gatekeepers of knowledge, conquerors, covert controllers of human development – much like the fears about a global cabal of satanic elite controlling our own lives, propagated amongst real-world cynical conspiracy theorists and fringe political groups. These texts seem to suggest that in seeking the *real* truth of these matters, one can find power in that knowledge. Whether or not that power is used to overthrow these oppressive structures is left totally to the individual.

[192] *The Stress of Her Regard*, 461.

The first of these is the rulebook for a tabletop roleplaying game called *Nephilim: Occult Roleplaying (NOR)*.[193] First published in France by Multisim in 1992, it was translated into English and distributed to American audiences by Chaosium Inc. in 1994. Like Powers, Multism depicts their Nephilim as primordial creatures, but their forms, motives, and abilities are vastly different. Of note, this is the first text to remove any sexual element to the Nephilim – there is nothing about lust or seduction explicitly discussed in the rulebook. Though these beings are conceivably able to have sex, it is no longer a defining characteristic.

In *NOR* each player creates a Nephilim character: an immortal, magical spirit that lost their physical body during the Deluge.[194] These spirits are composed of five elemental forces, referred to more generally as "Ka:" fire, air, water, earth, and moon.[195] By possessing human bodies referred to as Simulacrum they can interact with the world, develop their skills, and influence the direction of humankind. They may have "participated in the sack of Troy, contributed to the fall of Rome, spied upon the crowning of Charlemagne, initiated Napoleon to the mysteries of the Carbonari or encouraged the crimes of Jack the Ripper" in one of their various returns to the mortal world.[196] The rulebook depicts Jesus as the first Nephilim that was able to possess a human fetus, who was subsequently killed when he attempted to instruct humanity on the truth of the world. This was followed by Paul, a Nephilim from an opposing faction, intentionally preaching a "garbled version of part of Jesus' message" to obscure his Nephilim nature.[197] All of these

[193] Analysing a source like *NOR* provides its own challenges versus the narrative sources that have been discussed thus far. Tabletop roleplaying games (TTRPGs) are a unique kind of game that incorporate elements of shared storytelling and dramatic improvisation. Rulebooks are provided for each TTRPG 'system' that determine the options a player has when creating a character, as well as the actions they can take in a game state. Despite the rules that are laid out, TTRPG settings and rulebooks are intentionally designed to give agency to players when they are determining the origins of their characters. There is no distinct story; the role of the book is primarily to provide inspiration and guidance through various improvised encounters. While some books were published under the same *NOR* ruleset that gave a loose narrative structure for players to follow, the primary engagement from readers and/or players would have been through the rules and guidelines.
[194] Frédéric Weil, Fabrice Lamidey, Sam Shirley, and Greg Stafford, *Nephilim: Occult Roleplaying* (Oakland: Chaosium Inc., 1994), 7.
[195] Weil et al., *Occult Roleplaying*, 21, 24-27. Ka is an ancient Egyptian concept that refers to a part of the soul that seemed to survive the death of one's body. Laura Etheredge, "ka – Egyptian religion," *Encyclopedia Britannica,* July 26, 2010, https://www.britannica.com/topic/ka-Egyptian-religion.
[196] Weil et al., *Occult Roleplaying*, 7.
[197] Weil et al., *Occult Roleplaying*, 65-66. This aligns with Gnostic traditions typically showing disdain for Paul's works.

manipulations and repeated lives are done in pursuit of a status of spiritual enlightenment called "Agartha," one which allows Nephilim to travel between existential planes at will.[198]

Each human body they possess experiences a "Metamorphosis," in which the individual Nephilim's dominant Ka-elements transform their body into one of the "Old Races."[199] These races include (but are not limited to) djinn, satyrs, elves, sylphs, and angels. In the fictional world of the *NOR* rulebook, all these folkloric creatures were initially Nephilim that had experienced this process of Metamorphosis. Once again, we see a syncretic understanding of Nephilim, having them fill in for many culturally significant monsters and creatures. In the rulebooks introduction there is a quote of what can only be called a fictional translation of Genesis 6:4: "In those times, when men grew and multiplied after Adam left Eden, the Nephilim roamed the Earth."[200] This translation has no basis in the Hebrew found in authoritative Bibles, but there is an interesting dynamic at play as it centers the loss of Eden – a perfect, lost world akin to Agartha – and removes the theological mire that is the sons of God.[201] The emphasis is on the Nephilim who were present from the very beginning of human history.

As promised by the game's title, the rulebook includes many references to various elements of the cultic milieu, such as Kabbalistic lore, astrology, Atlantis, and Egyptian sorcery. Occultism permeates every element of the rulebook, from the fictional history to the game systems used by players, and the authors achieve this by channeling the occult through the narrative totems that are the Nephilim. *NOR* is perhaps the best example of how Nephilim have come to represent all that is ancient and enigmatic. Every monster ever encountered, every hero that ever lived, every false god that has been worshipped: it all comes back to the Nephilim.

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[198] Weil et al., *Occult Roleplaying*, 121-122. According to various occult sources from the 19th century, Agartha is a secret underground city. See John Michael Greer, *The New Encyclopedia of the Occult* (St. Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 2003), 7-8.
[199] Weil et al., *Occult Roleplaying*, 28-39.
[200] Weil et al., *Occult Roleplaying*, 7.
[201] There is a similar alternative translation from the Book of Enoch found in a later part of the rulebook: "The Nephilim will slaughter and conquer, unpunished, until the day of Great Judgement. Then the age will arrive and the Nephilim, alongside the godless, will be wholly consumed." Weil et al., *Occult Roleplaying, 42.* This is likely a shortened version of 1 Enoch 16:1: "From the day of the slaughter and destruction and death of the giants, from the soul of whose flesh the spirits are proceeding, they are making desolate without (incurring) judgement. Thus, they will make desolate until the day of the consummation of the great judgement, when the great age will be consummated. It will be consummated all at once."

Mick Farren's *Renquist Quartet* novels (1996-2002) follows in the tradition of ancient Nephilim influencing the direction of human development. In this series, the Nephilim were an alien race that ruled over the Earth "some fifteen thousand years in the past."[202] Though they do not play the same kind of antagonistic role we have seen most Nephilim represent thus far, they carry on an important pseudo-archaeological tradition. Much like Trench and von Däniken posited, Farren depicts the Nephilim as being behind each major human religious tradition throughout time. In Farren's telling, the ziggurats of the ancient near East act as spaceports where primitive humans would gather to worship their conquerors.[203] The Nephilim are led by "the God King Marduk Ra," an entity that is announced by engineered thunderstorms.[204] They also employed the squid-headed Cthulhu, described as a demon in the text, as an enforcer of their colonial will.[205] The "courtiers," hybrid children of Nephilim and humans, seem to be an analogue for the sons of God, who the series protagonist notes were accurately recorded in the Book of Enoch.[206] While they ruled the planet, the Nephilim bioengineered a giant, vampiric warrior race called Original Beings, mimicking the monster-creation found in the *Book of Giants* (discussed in Chapter 1). All religious teachings – and in the case of Cthulhu, stories thought to be pure fiction – that followed throughout human history were bastardizations of the original worship of these beings and their children. At some point in the past, the Nephilim abruptly left Earth to pursue some other goal, leaving the Original Beings and their hybrid descendants to wreak occasional havoc upon humanity.

There are many parallel cultic details between *NOR* and the *Renquist Quartet,* including but not limited to the use of Ka, hollow Earth theories, ancient aliens, alchemy, and disillusionment towards the "truth" of major organized religions. Both examples utilize the Nephilim as a mysterious starting point for all these things, archaic beings that left their mark in the darkest corners of the world. They perform a certain function in a literary sense, as they operate as a bridge between some of humanity's oldest tales and some of our newest religious innovations. Once again, the varied interpretations of the Nephilim and their amorphous nature allow these authors

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[202] Mick Farren, *Darklost* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2000), 207.
[203] Farren, *Darklost,* 209.
[204] Farren, *Darklost,* 212. God King Marduk Ra seems to be an amalgamation of the chief deity of both Babylonian and Egyptian pantheons.
[205] Cthulhu is one of the most popular "Old Gods" created by the early 20th century horror author H. P. Lovecraft. Some aspects of his mythopoeia, particularly the fictional grimoire called the *Necronomicon,* are important parts of the cultic milieu.
[206] Farren, *Darklost,* 210, 216.

to tie several disparate traditions back to one mysterious Hebrew concept, hinting at a kernel of truth hiding a dark secret amongst our most significant mythic traditions. They provided the perfect outlet for a team of game designers and an underground author that were interested in exploring as many occult and esoteric subjects as possible.

A Symbol of the Past in Faraway Worlds

A year prior to the publication of the first *Renquist* novel, the Nephilim made their videogame debut in Spiderweb Software's roleplaying game *Exile I: Escape from the Pit* (1995), re-released with graphical updates as *Avernum* in 2000 and once again as *Avernum: Escape from the Pit* in 2011. The player controls a band of adventurers that are exiled from the human-ruled "Empire" to the fledgling subterranean kingdom of Avernum. One of the earliest enemies the player encounters are Nephilim, aggressive feline humanoids that attack humans on sight. The player is told that "Nephilim are a proud, tribal race, that once filled the wild plains of the surface."[207] They were nearly wiped out by the Empire and have fostered a hatred for humanity ever since, many resorting to demon-worship for power and revenge. Townsfolk in the game complain of raids by neighbouring Nephilim, with one character stating that "they won't rest until every human is on their dinner plates," perhaps referencing Enochic cannibalism.[208] In the first game, the Nephilim are characterized in this way: savage cannibalistic warriors that harass fledgeling human communities in search of food, plunder, and revenge. They wear little-to-no clothing and attack with crude weaponry, making them a caricature of indigenous peoples. They are stuck in the past, knowing only violence. Their saving grace, at least in relation to most other Nephilim by this point, is that they seem disconnected from concepts of lust or sexual immorality.

Nephilim get some development in the second game as the narrative sees the sentient races of Avernum unifying against the Empire. Whereas the first game only allowed the player to create human characters, *Exile II* allows any mix of humans, Nephilim, or the serpentine Slithzerikai that

[207] Spiderweb Software, *Avernum: Escape from the Pit*, 2011, PC. This is explained in a narrative sequence during the tutorial section at the start of the game.
[208] Spiderweb Software, *Avernum: Escape from the Pit.* This is stated by Acacia, a woman guarding Fort Avernum.

the player chooses.[209] The racial hatred the Nephilim experience in the first game is severely diminished, though most characters still consider them to be a primitive nuisance.

Other than the name they carry, there is seemingly very little that pairs these creatures to the ones discussed so far. They have no ties to angels, no mysterious control over world events, no divine power turned to evil. Spiderweb Software's Nephilim are more akin to goblins than demigods, and it is unclear why the creators would choose to use that name. Yet, despite their unique form and protracted distance from the biblical text, the Nephilim of Avernum still *represent* the same thing their winged cousins often do - the chaos of pre-society and the dangers of a people who give in to irrational violence. The tribal Nephilim are stuck in a Frazerian stage of magic, a barbarous people who choose superstition and revenge over the supposedly civilized order of Avernum. Only by adapting the customs and laws of the more "advanced" human kingdom are they able to progress as a species. This feline Other represents the alleged societal progress we have made – and to hint at what we could return to if we do not follow a particular social stratum.

If Spiderweb's Nephilim represent a *reminder* about a particular theoretical moment in human history, then the depiction in *Magic: The Gathering* (*MTG)* represents a primal *fear* of it. *MTG,* the world's first trading card game, introduced Nephilim to their expansive fantasy mythos with the 2006 release of the *Guildpact* set.[210] *Guildpact* is set in Ravnica, a magical and wondrous world-spanning city controlled by an uneasy alliance of ten competing guilds, each representing a different kind of magic or approach to life. They can be anything from corpse-worshipping elves and drill-sergeant angels to self-mutating scientists. The setting is largely characterized by the principal that just about any kind of creature can be found here, with the caveat that they have experienced ten thousand years of relative prosperity and technological development. Monsters that would normally be depicted dwelling in caves might be inventors or diplomats. Though danger still lurks in many places, it is a world where social order has erased the sense of *unheimlich* from the most frightening of creatures. Even the demons and goblins that display extreme violence in

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[209] Like the Nephilim, the Slithzerikai are treated as semi-intelligent foes that are originally dedicated to destroying the humans of Avernum.

[210] *Magic: The Gathering* operates by releasing a new set of cards several times a year, each introducing new rules, artwork, and characters. These sets often come with supplementary materials, such as books, comics, or blog posts, that help flesh out the narrative these cards are meant to represent. For a study on how consumers approach this grand narrative, see Brett A. S. Martin, "Using the Imagination: Consumer Evoking and Thematizing of the Fantastic Imaginary" in *Journal of Consumer Research* 31, no. 1 (2004): 136-149. https://doi.org/10.1086/383430.

their own parts of the city are otherwise held in check by the titular "Guildpact," a powerful enchantment that allows enforcers total control over anyone who breaks the laws of the land.

One of the few monsters immune to this power are the "nephilim,"[211] ancient monstrosities long forgotten by most denizens of Ravnica, though they are venerated by a religious group called the "Cult of Yore."[212] They are relics of a primeval age predating the Guildpact and the prosperity associated with it. Each one has a unique, grotesque, and gargantuan form that evokes the *unheimlich* through elements of both body and cosmic horror. Cory J. Herndon's *Dissension*, a novel tied to the *Guildpact* set, describes the Nephilim as having a "freakish resemblance to at least part of a human being" and depicts them as endlessly hungry, semi-intelligent creatures that devour anything in sight, growing larger and larger as a result.[213] Their anatomy is nearly inconceivable; where a vampire can be understood due to their proximity to humans, there is nothing in nature truly comparable to the strange entities that are Ravnica's Nephilim.[214] At some point in the past the Nephilim were forced to slumber but for reasons unknown they awoke at the turn of the "Decamillennial," an event celebrating ten thousand years of the Guildpact.[215] Now they bring terror and destruction to a city unprepared to meet the most primal forces that exist on their world. They rampage across Ravnica feasting on people, monsters, and buildings alike. When their defeat finally comes, it is only through great sacrifice and the immense power of the remaining guild leaders.

This is the story that a curious fan may find if they explore the various resources that exist online, or if they read a tie-in novel such as *Dissension.* Most players, however, would only ever meet the Nephilim through the cards that represent them – game pieces with very little information on who the creatures are from a narrative perspective. Each *MTG* card has a title, visual artistic depiction, a description of the card's gameplay mechanics.[216] There are five Nephilim in total:

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[211] *MTG* does not capitalize the word 'nephilim' unless it is used in the title of a card.
[212] Matt Cavotta, "Wake Up Call," magicthegathering.com, Wizards of the Coast, February 22, 2006. https://magic.wizards.com/en/articles/archive/feature/wake-call-2006-02-22.
[213] Cory J. Herndon, *Ravnica Cycle, Book III: Dissension* (Renton: Wizards of the Coast, 2006), 14-21.
[214] For example, a character describes one of the creatures by stating it has "an organ that had no known analog on the plane of Ravnica, a combination stomach and brain," something so impossible that it is hard for us to comprehend its function. Herndon, *Dissension,* 19.
[215] The Decamillennial is a primary part of the setting for Herndon's *Ravnica Cycle, Book I: Ravnica* (Renton: Wizards of the Coast, 2005).
[216] There is sometimes a short sentence included to provide extra context or to direct player imagination, as is the case with each of the nephilim cards. Each follows a pattern of describing the horrific event that took place after the

Glint-Eye Nephilim, Dune-Brood Nephilim, Yore-Tiller Nephilim, Witch-Maw Nephilim, and Ink-Treader Nephilim.[217]

Each of these monsters have an impossible anatomical form, one that evokes the *mysterium tremendum et fascinas* that Otto attributed to religious experience (as discussed in Chapter 2). Fear and mystery work together to force us to confront a cosmic *unheimlich*. Unlike the primarily near-human monstrous forms seen with other Nephilim, these creatures are truly grotesque, looking more like the disfigured corpses of animals than people. Glint-Eye looks akin to a slug, except there is a hoof at one end of its body and a humanoid torso on the other. The appendages of Dune-Brood are indecipherable, and dozens of humanoid figures spew from its mouth. The remaining three each have their own strange shapes that intrigue as much as they disturb. *Unheimlich* is induced as the player attempts to comprehend the incomprehensible, asking them to contend with the structures of knowledge that are considered rigid and infallible. Like the giants of the medieval ages, they are symbols of God's authority and creativity – the depths of his power are impenetrable, and the world can always become more fearsome. We know just by looking at them that they should not be able to exist as they do – but there is enough human or animal similarity that we are forced to reckon with their structure. Between the mysterious texts, the impossible shapes of the creatures, and the unfamiliar name of "nephilim," these cards were meant to be "examples of the world's vastness, diversity, unpredictability, danger, wonder, horror, and complexity beyond our comprehension."[218] Though this quote is meant to be about the implications of the Nephilim for the world of Ravnica, it profoundly describes the general role of primordial Nephilim in many of the sources in which they appear. They are an amalgamation of the tensions we feel when we are forced to confront our chaotic and ultimately unknowable ancient past.

Nephilim and UFOs

As discussed in Chapter 1, Nephilim were eventually associated with the ancient-alien hypothesis and various conspiracy theories about government cover-ups, but these fringe beliefs

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specific nephilim awoke. For example, *Ink-Treader Nephilim* states "when it awoke, the mirrors of the world reflected only darkness."

[217] Due to their intentionally abstract forms, these creatures are very difficult to describe. To see the art that represents them, visit the official Magic: The Gathering card viewer site, Gatherer, at https://gatherer.wizards.com/Pages/Search/Default.aspx?subtype=+[nephilim].

[218] Cavotta, "Wake Up Call."

were typically far from the public eye even in their heyday during the 1960s and 1970s. This changed in the 21st century when conspiracy theories again gained considerable traction, particularly in an American context.[219] Several documentaries and books exist on the supposed hidden truth about technologically advanced Nephilim giants that either roamed or continue to roam the Earth, sometimes implying that they initially arrived here on spacecraft.[220] Mick Farren first made use of this idea in a fictional context, but a few other authors would soon adapt it as conspiracy concerns grew. The inclusion of the Nephilim, even in passing, creates a sense of cosmic *unheimlich* in the audience, implying that no matter how much someone *thinks* they know, there is always more to the truth, always some monster that feeds on our uncertainty.

Independent British film director Neil Johnson has dedicated much of his career to exploring his own depiction of extra-terrestrial Nephilim. His first feature-length film, *Demons in My Head* (1996, re-released as *Nephilim* in 2007), introduced the creatures to his audience. He has since released several films which delve into the Nephilim, including *To Become One* (2002, re-released as *Bipolar Armageddon* in 2009), *Humanity's End* (2008), and *Alien Armageddon* (2011).[221] The latter film spends the most time with the Nephilim themselves. Johnson's Nephilim are human-alien hybrids, created when a slug-like parasite crawls into a human and takes control of their body. They are ruled by the "Shemyazas," Nephilim that have evolved to be immortal, who are in turn served by the "watchers" that acted as scouts and soldiers, some of which have been on the Earth for millennia.[222] They invade Earth in the early 21st century in search of a food source – for whatever reason, the Overlords can only consume meat with Overlord DNA, evoking Enochian motifs of cannibalism. They force some of Earth's conquered people to eat lumps of

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[219] On the increase in support for conspiracy theories in the 21st century, see Joseph E. Uscinski and Joseph M. Parent, *American Conspiracy Theories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Thomas M. Nichols, *The Death of Expertise: The Campaign Against Established Knowledge and Why it Matter* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Anna Merlan, *Republic of Lies: American Conspiracy Theorists and Their Surprising Rise to Power* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2019).

[220] Such as *The Nephilim,* directed by Allen Austin (Merkabah Productions, 2012), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6j2K9tOBXQ; Patrick Heron, *The Nephilim and the Pyramid of the Apocalypse* (New York: Citadel Press, 2004).

[221] "Neil Johnson," IMDbPro, accessed June 3, 2022, https://pro.imdb.com/name/nm1484928/. *Alien Armageddon* should not be confused with the 2019 documentary of the same name, which posits that ancient aliens called watchers have controlled humanity with advanced technology since the First Agricultural Revolution – a familiar story.

[222] *Alien Armageddon,* directed by Neil Johnson (Morphius Film, 2011). The term is evidently a play on the Enochic figure of Samyaza, who lead the Watchers to Earth.

strange green meat which slowly kills them by infecting their natural DNA. These tainted humans are then fed to the Overlords in a complicated cycle of consumption.[223]

Like the ancient-astronaut theorists discussed in Chapter 1, Johnson makes use of out-of-context religious quotes and concepts to develop his depiction. Though his Nephilim are not related to fallen angels, Johnson clearly takes direction from 1 Enoch in his use of terminology and key narrative concepts; Nephilim are human-monster hybrid warriors that resort to violence and subsequent cannibalism to survive. 1 Enoch itself is quoted in both the opening and closing shots of *Alien Armageddon*.[224] One character goes as far as suggesting that Jesus was aware of the Nephilim, and likely was one himself, but no scripture is ever cited.[225] A very modern cosmic *unheimlich* permeates this reading. Like Farren and the documentary creators mentioned above, Johnson plays on the fear that we are not only sharing the universe with other species, but that those species have a considerable lead on our technological and sociological advancement. Yet this is not only the fear that we live amongst extra-terrestrials – it also encapsulates the feeling of dread one experiences when they realize they were warned about a danger just as it overtakes them.

Two more videogames make use of primordial Nephilim, though they are only mentioned in passing. Ubisoft's *Assassin Creed* series, one of the bestselling videogame franchises of all time, has made cryptic allusions to the Nephilim in multiple cases.[226] The games take place during various historical moments and settings, such as Italy during the Renaissance or the United States during the American Revolution. In each of these epochs, there is significant interaction with the "Isu," advanced extra-terrestrials that were worshipped as various gods at different points of time.[227] In *Assassin's Creed III* (2012), it is hinted that Moses' scouts met the Isu in Canaan and called them Nephilim; Numbers 13:33 is quoted to describe the difficulties in advanced intelligences trying to communicate with "primitive" human minds.[228] The Nephilim are again mentioned in a cryptic moment in *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* (2020), where the player finds notes

[223] This is the plot of *Humanity's End*, directed by Neil Johnson (Morphius Film, 2009).
[224] 1 Enoch 16:1 is the quoted passage, the same used by *NOR*.
[225] *Alien Armageddon,* 43:17-43:23.
[226] As of 2020, the *Assassin's Creed* series has sold over one hundred and fifty-five million copies. Ubisoft, "Ubisoft's Assassin's Creed Valhalla is the Biggest Assassin's Creed Game Launch in History," November 17, 2020, https://web.archive.org/web/20201229235850/.
[227] Such as the Norse Pantheon (Odin, Thor, etc.) in Ubisoft, *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla*, 2020, PC.
[228] *Assassin's Creed* implies that Numbers 13:33 was a comparison of intelligence as opposed to physical size. Human understanding, when compared to the Nephilim, was only as developed as a grasshopper.

left behind by a 6th century monk named Brendan of Clonfert (484-577 BCE) at the prehistoric monument known as Seahenge. In the game, Brendan posits that the wooden structures there were erected by the Nephilim and acted as a barrier against invasions from other worlds.

Overkill Software's *Payday 2* sees players take part in elaborate heists, from simple bank robberies to a mission into the secret underground of the White House. There are many cryptic riddles placed throughout the game that act as a sort of side-project for particularly attentive players to find. A grand conspiracy is described, in which "the Watchers," members of an organization dating back to ancient Sumer, have been influencing history with advanced technology left behind by giant, extra-terrestrial Nephilim. Many of these details are only found by examining the artifacts on display in various locations or by reading and deciphering encrypted in-game emails – all of which takes extra effort and research outside of the game itself, turning enthusiastic players into virtual conspiracy theorists.[229] Like in the *Assassin's Creed* games, Nephilim are a signpost to players that there is mystery and ancient intrigue afoot, encouraging the curiosities of those who have heard the word but are unfamiliar with its meaning. Both games engage with the fear that we are controlled by a cosmic Other that orchestrates both contemporary political events and the accepted historical record.

[229] The developers invented a language/font that players worked together to decipher, and then in turn had to use the translated font to read various in-game tablets and artifacts for clues. This kind of transmedia interactive narrative is referred to as an "alternate reality game."

Chapter 5: Angelic Hybrids – Where the Sacred Meets the Profane

"Nephilim. Half-angel, half-man. Old testament's chock full of 'em. They're very nasty guys, and very, very hard to kill."

- Joseph in *The Prophecy 3: The Ascent (2000).*

The third and final category of Nephilim is by far the most represented in popular culture. Though 1 Enoch has largely lost its influence over mainstream religious thought, its presence in occult fantasy and supernatural horror is made evident by the popularity of half-angel creatures. Many separate franchises make use of this interpretation, some of which span multiple mediums. A few are still seeing continued releases.

The angelic hybrid category covers any Nephilim that is depicted as a part angel being, regardless of how they came to exist. This primarily refers to the half-human children of a human parent (typically a mother) who had sexual relations with an angel, and the resulting child is imbued with some element of the divine. In most cases, these Nephilim look more-or-less like regular people, but some key thing sets them apart from mundane humans. Where texts often differ is whether this is a blessing or a curse. These hybrid Nephilim can be victims, heroes, or villains – sometimes a combination of the three. They are almost always at the center of a prophecy or the final hope of a fictional desperate Heaven. Yet not everyone in their worlds agree about their potential for good. Much like in 1 Enoch, these hybrids or "half-breeds" often experience revulsion from their peers, especially from the angels with whom they supposedly share heritage. They represent the fear of mixing the sacred and the profane, sometimes explicitly in the story itself or implicitly as a metaphor for our own social organization. The narrative role of the Nephilim, despite or because of their nature, may allow us some insight on attitudes towards things such as religion's role in public life, race-mixing, a polarized political landscape, and the degree to which someone's parentage defines them.

While many of the texts discussed up to this point have had relatively small and/or niche audiences, a few examples within this angelic-hybrid category are some of the most popular examples of a given genre in their respective medium. Even though they are the latest addition to Nephilim fiction (the first appearing in 1998, twelve years after *Many Waters*), the word "Nephilim" has largely become synonymous with an angelic hybrid of some kind. Debate exists

in online fan discussions and forums about whether certain characters in other texts should be considered Nephilim based on their half-angel legacy. This discussion exists because of popular culture, as the angelic hybrid understanding of Genesis 6/Numbers 19 has been outside of mainstream religious thought for centuries. Even fringe religious beliefs about biblical giants are unlikely to consider them to be hybrid creatures. These texts have altered the common conception of a millennia-old religious concept, inadvertently rekindling an interpretation that has not been seriously considered for centuries.

Unfortunately, there is not enough space here to discuss each of the angelic hybrid sources in detail. The following chapter will be divided into genre or medium-specific groups to discuss the common themes and motifs that have developed over time, with some of the most significant, popular, and/or influential examples of each group seeing closer analysis. This chapter will display how the term "Nephilim" has begun to take on a singular meaning in popular culture, one that primarily understands them as half-angel, half-human beings with supernatural powers. Though many of these texts are tonally different from one another, Nephilim are homogenizing and turning to heroism in much the same way that vampires did in the early 20th century. Where vampires were once shambling corpses or snakelike women to be avoided at all costs, in some cases they eventually became dark protectors of humanity that used their Otherness to defend the fragile social order they orbit. As Duda observes, the monster best knows how to be a monster hunter, and this motif of using one's monstrosity for good becomes integral to angelic hybrid Nephilim. While hybrid Nephilim begin their tenure as victims, they soon become hunter-heroes. Like vampires, Nephilim become like us but slightly *better* – stronger, more powerful, more beautiful, maybe even immortal – but they must choose to resist the urge to use their powers selfishly if they are to shed the moniker of "monster." They can become the *unheimlich*, or they can vanquish it.

Nephilim on the Big Screen and Prime Time Television

1998 was a confusing year for the Nephilim. A new interpretation would be presented to the public at large in one of the most successful science fiction television shows of all time, followed just months later by a similar yet conflicting vision in a Hollywood film. The supernatural investigation series *The X-Files* depicted them as sympathetic yet dangerous abominations, beings whose death comes as a divine mercy. The Hollywood *The Prophecy* film series centred Nephilim

in the titular prophecy that drives the narrative of the film, promising salvation to humanity through the actions of a half-angel child. Though they are based on the same interpretation, the Nephilim in these texts could hardly be more different in their symbolic meanings: one warns against the crossing of the profane into the sacred at all costs, the other tells us we should embrace that intersection. The details of what makes someone a Nephilim from a theological standpoint is also muddled; where *The X-Files* depicts the Nephilim as human bodies (material) containing angel souls, *The Prophecy 3* sees them as those "with the heart of an angel and the soul of a man."[230] In one instance, divinity is trapped within profane material; in the other, the essence of a human is elevated by sacred material. Yet, despite these differences, these two texts worked together to establish to a new, wider audience that the Nephilim are not inherently monsters. They are victims of ancestry who are thrust into a world that is fundamentally unprepared for them. Despite centuries of theological insistence that angels were immaterial, they also posit that angels can have sex with humans and procreate with them, challenging mainstream religious answers to a largely post-secular audience.

Angelic-hybrid Nephilim made their first popular culture appearance in April of 1998, during the fifth season of *The X-Files* (1993-2002, 2016-2018). The seventeenth episode, "All Souls," sees FBI special agent Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson) investigate the mysterious death of a paraplegic teenage girl named Dara Kernof (Emily Perkins) on behalf of a Catholic priest, Father McCue (Arnie Walters).[231] Dara is one of four identical quadruplets that share a unique condition: each was born with six fingers and toes, a congenital spinal disorder, and strange protrusions on their clavicles that appear to be "winglike."[232] They are later revealed to be Nephilim, lost daughters of an angelic Seraph. Throughout the episode, the girls act as a narrative representation of the crossing between the sacred and the profane within one's own struggle with mortality: there is the comfort provided by religious faith challenged by the coldness of reality.

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[230] *The Prophecy 3: The Ascent,* 33:53-33:58. The use of heart is literal here, as much like the angels in these films, the only way to kill Danyael is to tear out his heart.

[231] Of note, 13.44 million people saw this episode at the time of airing, exposing millions to a term that had thus far only been seen in very niche texts. Andy Meisler, *The Official Guide to The X-Files*, Vol. 4, *Resist or Serve* (New York: Harper Entertainment, 1999), https://archive.org/details/resistorserve00meis/mode/2up. 284.

[232] "All Souls," Coulter. 23:36-24:02, 26:11. Some pseudoarchaeologists attribute six-digit hands and feet to biblical giants.

On the night of her baptism, Dara is miraculously able to walk outside to meet a lone figure standing in the rain on the street. She falls to her knees, and after a flash the figure disappears. Dara is left dead, her eyes burnt out and smoldering while her hands are raised as if in prayer.[233] The event leaves the faith of Dara's father (Eric Keenleyside) shaken, a theme that is explored extensively throughout the episode as Scully herself recently lost her own daughter. Throughout the rest of the series, Scully is characterized as a skeptic who doubts the existence of the paranormal, but she finds both her skepticism and her faith challenged by the events of this episode.

The quadruplets are systematically murdered in the same fashion as Dara, causing Scully to investigate with her partner, Fox Mulder (David Duchovny). Their investigation leads to Father Gregory, a man who was trying to adopt one of Dara's sisters and is thus now the lead suspect of the case. He leads an independent church that has its own canon, including the Gnostic Gospels and 1 Enoch.[234] He claims that the "secular prejudices" of the agents will not allow them to understand the truth of the murders, and claims that "the messengers" are in danger.[235]

While Gregory believed it was the Devil himself that was killing these girls, they were instead killed by their father, a four-faced Seraph who had impregnated a human woman seventeen years ago.[236] Father McCue describes a story to Scully that depicts one of the Seraphim having four children with a mortal woman, leading to the birth of "the Nephilim, the fallen ones. They have the souls of angels, but they weren't meant to be."[237] In this story, God sent the Seraph to Earth to kill the children and retrieve the souls of the Nephilim to stop the Devil from claiming them.[238] Though he tells this story to Scully, he himself believes Scully's experience with the Seraph to be a figment of her imagination.

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[233] *The X Files,* season five, episode seventeen, "All Souls," directed by Allen Coulter, aired April 26, 1998, on Fox, https://www.disneyplus.com/video/4f26e230-10b0-40b5-ac6c-0c2eaed1b3ed. 1:54-3:18.
[234] Mulder reads some of the titles found in the "Book of St. Peter the Sinner." He mistakenly reads the term "apocrypha" as if it is the title of a single text. "All Souls," Coulter. 18:42-19:04.
[235] The use of messengers refers to the literal translation of angel. It is atypical to use it in reference to the offspring of an angel. "All Souls," Coulter. 19:08-21:01.
[236] The term "Seraphim" is used several times in the Hebrew Bible. Debate about the term and its root is complicated, but it is used in at least one instance (Isaiah 6:2) to specifically denote a winged, angelic being. In Jewish, Christian, and Islamic angelology, the term refers to a specific category of angel, influenced in large part by 1 Enoch and the later Book of Revelation.
[237] "All Souls," Coulter. 38:13-38:40.
[238] This story was made up for the purpose of this episode and has no specific real-world analog.

In the climax of the episode, Scully must choose between allowing the fourth child to go with her father "into the light" or keeping the child alive on Earth, locked in a life of disability which is depicted as a form of suffering. After the girl appears as Scully's own dead daughter, she chooses to let go, physically and metaphorically, and the fourth sister is found dead in a kneeling position after there is another flash of light. Scully is left to contend with the tension between her belief that the girl's soul was released to Heaven, and the physical fact of her death. The episode closes with Scully noting that maybe faith is the acceptance of loss.

Physically, the girls are dead; their corpses are material matter that no longer houses a soul. Yet the show makes it clear that the souls have been set apart and made sacred by their ascendance to heaven. The physical disabilities of the Nephilim, symbols of the restrictiveness of material existence, are removed when they relinquish themselves to a symbol of divinity, in this case their angelic father. As McCue states, the Nephilim were not meant to be – the sacred was never meant to be profaned in this way. When one gets caught between them, they are spiritually crippled. The show uses disability to represent this tension and establishes the idea that mixed race Nephilim are to be pitied, even if they are understood to be anathema and in need of removal, whether it is with mercy or disdain.

Just months after the airing of "All Souls," the Nephilim made their debut film appearance in *The Prophecy II* (1998). In this series, various residents of Los Angeles are dragged into an on-going war between two factions of angels vying for control of Heaven. Dissenters led by the Archangel Gabriel (Christopher Walken) are vexed by the position of the angels in relation to humanity; Gabriel considers the angels to be closer to perfection and thus more deserving of God's love, mimicking the common story of Lucifer's initial fall from grace as it is told in Christian and Muslim traditions. Gabriel believes he and his brethren are owed control of the Earth, so he fights to take control of heaven and eradicate humanity in the process. The *unheimlich* of these films is represented by these evil angels, those that should represent God's love but instead champion cosmic scorn.

It is not until the second film that the Nephilim are introduced. The opening credit sequence of *The Prophecy II* is a montage of various religious passages, images of angels in textbooks, and

the hand of an unknown writer scribbling notes. The words "A Nephalim" [239] appears briefly onscreen amongst these images, followed shortly after by a shot of the opening verses of Genesis 6 being torn from a Bible.[240] Though this credit sequence is not part of the plot, it introduces some of the significant texts used to synthesize the film's depiction of angelic figures as well as establishing the religious weight of the story being told.

The film follows the outfall of an angel named Danyael (Russell Wong) impregnating a human woman named Valerie (Jennifer Beals) at the behest of the Archangel Michael (Eric Roberts), due to a prophecy that claims a Nephilim child will end the war in Heaven.[241] Valerie is a nurse from a Catholic family, but she herself has lost her faith. Less than a week after a sexual encounter with Danyael, she discovers that she is not only pregnant, but already in her second trimester.[242] As she investigates this miraculous occurrence with the help of Joseph the coroner, she meets William (J. G. Hertzler), the lead monk of a nearby monastery. He tells her that a recently murdered monk had a vision of "the union of Heaven and Earth, the coming of a Nephilim… a child born of an angel and a human woman."[243] The next scene shows Valerie studying angels in a textbook while Genesis 6:1-4 is read aloud. The remainder of the film sees Valerie pursued by Gabriel until she defeats him with a literal "leap of faith," grabbing the fallen angel and jumping from a building when she hears the voice of God. Gabriel is turned into a human as punishment for turning away from God, and Valerie departs to raise her child alone. Her son Danyael, a seemingly normal human boy named for his late angelic father,[244] is shown alive and well some years later.

The Prophecy 3: The Ascent (2000) continues this story with Danyael (Dave Buzzotta) as a young adult. Valerie was killed during Danyael's childhood, leading him to preach on the street about how God has abandoned humanity. During one of his sermons a man shoots Danyael several times and he dies while lying cruciform in the arms of his lover, Magdalena (Kayren Butler), likely

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[239] This spelling of "Nephalim" is used any time the word appears onscreen throughout the series.
[240] *The Prophecy II*, directed by Greg Spence (Dimension Films, 1998). "A Nephalim" appears at 1:20, Genesis 6 appears at 1:56.
[241] An angel named Daniel is listed amongst the fallen Watchers in 1 Enoch. The alternative spelling is commented on by characters in the film.
[242] *The Prophecy II,* 25:23-25:55. This accelerated process parallels the short pregnancies of the wives of Nephilim in *Many Waters*, discussed in Chapter 3.
[243] *The Prophecy II,* 36:18-36:38
[244] Though Michael insisted that his subordinates stay out of the conflict, the angel Danyael was killed while protecting Valerie and his child from Gabriel.

named after Jesus Christ's companion Mary Magdalene.[245] This is the first of many direct associations with Christ, informing us that this boy is meant to be both saviour and redeemer. His corpse is brought to Joseph the coroner, now also an amateur scholar of angelology. When Danyael spontaneously resurrects from the dead and escapes from the morgue locker that acts as his tomb, Joseph is unshaken while Magdalena is dumbfounded, leading him to explain that he believes Danyael is a Nephilim: "half-angel, half-man."[246] Until this point, Danyael had no knowledge of his divine nature.

The rest of the film shows Danyael coming to terms with his heritage, learning to control his powers (including superhuman strength, the ability to fly, and prophetic visions), and choosing to fight on behalf of humanity. To save humankind he must defeat the angels Zophael, the "spy of God," and his master Pyriel, "the Whited Sepulcher," who aspires to take over heaven.[247] With the help of God's intervention, both are defeated.[248] Having finally accepted his place in the world, the angelic sigil of Danyael's father appears on his neck.[249] Like Christ he is now both the son and the father, with his faith in God restored and the future looking hopeful.

Young Adult Fiction and Teenage Nephilim

Though *The X-Files* had a much larger viewership, *The Prophecy'*s version of the Nephilim proved to be more influential. While "All Souls" presented a thought-provoking question on the nature of divinity and its confluence with humanity, it ignored one of the most intriguing clauses about the Nephilim in Genesis 6:4: "they are the heroes of yore, the men of renown." As one might imagine this potential for action proved to be gripping when authors would further explore the concept in the future. This was especially the case in the realm of young adult fiction, where young Nephilim heroes began to emerge *en masse*. In these texts they lead lives of excitement, danger, and romance. They are caught between the perilous world of the supernatural and the regular,

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[245] *The Prophecy 3: The Ascent*, directed by Patrick Lussier (Dimension Films, 2000) 4:20-5:30. This is the first of many visual cues that connect Danyael to Jesus Christ.
[246] *The Prophecy 3: The Ascent,* 33:59-34:17.
[247] *The Prophecy 3: The Ascent,* 25:40," 45:49-46:05. In the film, scholarship on Zophael does not agree on his allegiance between Heaven or Hell. This has roots in the various ways he has been represented in both theological and poetic literature. Pyriel may be a play on Puruel, a pitiless angel in found in the *Testament of Abraham*. Davidson, *A Dictionary of Angels,* 230, 330.
[248] *The Prophecy 3: The Ascent,* 1:15:49-1:16:27.
[249] *The Prophecy 3: The Ascent,* 1:17:48.

mundane lives they always thought they would lead. None of them chose to be Nephilim – but they all choose to accept it and make the most of the nature they were born with. In doing so they regularly unite the sacred and the profane, providing balance to a world that has lost itself to one side or the other. They challenge dogmatism while also challenging a worldview that leaves no room for the mysterious, spiritual, or paranormal. The *unheimlich* of these series is a cultural one, concerned with when figures we are supposed to trust – angels, or the political and religious authorities they represent – go too far. A new generation must lead the way.

Thomas E. Sniegoski made use of angelic-hybrid Nephilim in the debut novel of his *The Fallen* young adult fantasy series (2003-2013). Sniegoski's series played its part in establishing the common motifs and tropes associated with angelic hybrids in young adult fiction. The Nephilim in these books are the children of a Grigori father (making use of the term for Watchers in Greek translations of 1 Enoch) and a human mother. Much like Danyael in *The Prophecy 3,* Sniegoski's Nephilim are depicted as having the material forms of angels (i.e., they have magic powers and sprout wings from their backs) but the souls of humans. The protagonist, an orphan named Aaron Corbet, is also depicted as something of a Christ-figure – he is called "the One" and "the Redeemer" because of his unique ability to forgive the sins of Grigori, allowing them to return to Heaven after millennia of penance.[250] Aaron is at the center of a prophecy that claims he will "bring about peace between Heaven and Earth the likes of which had not been seen since Genesis."[251] A group of zealous angels called "the Powers," led by Verchiel, pursue Aaron as they have made it their mission to kill all the Grigori and Nephilim that they can find.[252] This all eventually leads to an encounter with a repentant Lucifer, Aaron's true father.[253] The central concept of half-angel teenagers doing battle with malevolent forces proved to be appealing and worthy of investment, evidenced in part by ABC Family adapting the novels into a limited series called *Fallen* (2006-2007).[254]

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[250] Thomas E. Sniegoski, *The Fallen* (New York: Simon Pulse, 2003), 248-249.
[251] Sniegoski, *The Fallen*, 208.
[252] Verchiel is traditionally understood as the angel of the month of July and as one of the rulers of the angelic order of Powers. Davidson, *A Dictionary of Angels*, 305.
[253] Aaron finally meets his father in the fourth book of the series, *Reckoning* (New York: Simon Pulse, 2004), 170-171.
[254] The *Fallen* television program changed much of the story and notably included more details from the Angelic descent myth. Azazel, one of the main characters in this version, is released from the pit he was imprisoned in deep below the surface of the Earth. *Fallen,* season 1, episode 1, "The Time of the Redeemer," directed by Kevin Kerslake, aired Aug 4, 2007, on ABC Family. 11:53-14:26.

Further evidence of the popularity of angelic hybrid Nephilim arrived in 2007 with the *New York Times* bestselling novel *City of Bones*, the first in Cassandra Clare's *The Mortal Instruments* series. These novels went on to be adapted to the big screen in *The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones* (2013) and a rebooted television program called *Shadowhunters* (2016-2019). This multimedia franchise would have acted as an introduction to Nephilim for many people, especially young Americans, and it heavily emphasized the *desire* side of creatures that had previously been seen as monsters. *City of Bones* is an urban fantasy novel set in 21st century New York, where supernatural denizens of the "Shadow World" lead a secret existence alongside unwitting humans. Werewolves, vampires, fairies, and warlocks, collectively referred to as "Downworlders" due to the demonic origins of their respective conditions, all live in an increasingly unstable state of peace. This peace is upheld by an organization of Shadowhunters, also called Nephilim, who use angelic sigils to give themselves superhuman abilities like increased strength or invisibility. Together with the help of the Downworlders they protect the mundanes (humans who have no supernatural ancestry and thus cannot see the Shadow World) from interdimensional demons.

The Shadowhunters/Nephilim are humans with the blood of angels. When the primary protagonist, Clary Fairchild, is learning about the Shadow World from a Shadowhunter named Hodge, he explains that:

> In the Bible [the Nephilim] were the offspring of humans and angels. The legend of the origin of Shadowhunters is that they were created more than a thousand years ago, when humans were being overrun by demon invasions from other worlds. A warlock summoned the Angel Raziel, who mixed some of his own blood with the blood of men in a cup, and gave it to those men to drink. Those who drank the Angel's blood became Shadowhunters, as did their children and their children's children.[255]

A periphery tie-in book called *The Shadowhunter's Codex* details Raziel's encounter with Johnathan Shadowhunter, the first of his kind. Raziel quotes Genesis 6:4 to Johnathan, telling him that his band of warriors will be called Nephilim because they have the essence of both humans

[255] Cassandra Clare, *City of* Bones (London: Walker Books), 77. Raziel has a complicated place in Judeo-Christian mythology, though he is perhaps best known for his role as a prominent angel of wisdom in Kabbalistic lore. Davidson, *A Dictionary of Angels, 242.*

and angels.[256] In essence, Raziel is corroborating the Enochian reading of Genesis, confirming the existence of half-angels in Clare's mythology.

Clare's Nephilim have their own complex society and traditions.[257] They have unique coming-of-age events, weddings, worship, and more. Instead of focusing their religious devotion to any specific version of the greater Judeo-Christian tradition, they venerate the angels (particularly Raziel) above all else. Though the Bible is quoted at times, Clare avoids opaque theological discussion. The Nephilim mythos is used as a starting block to create a world of mystery and magic in our own figurative backyards without making substantial comments on the nature of religious life. Though they are steeped in biblical context, the Nephilim are meant to be more akin to a secular body such as the United Nations than representatives of ancient religion. This secularization of the Nephilim is telling in itself – these figures are meant to be accessible to all, regardless of their backgrounds. Though they are connected to biblical lore and many of the traditions that were spawned from it, they are a diverse, global, and modern organization – a post-secular group of heroes that accept their past while shaping their future.

The grand narrative centers around the politics of supernatural factions, but the plotlines in the series follow more typical thematic lines for young adult drama in a post-*Twilight* literary environment: sex and relationships, reconciling familial ties, diversity, discovering independence and responsibility, etc. Both thematically and aesthetically (particularly in the film and television adaptation), the series is, in a word, sexy. The Nephilim are physically fit warriors covered in tattoos that tend to wear black leather clothing. Their angelic blood makes them beautiful, which some characters use to their advantage as they seduce various targets for information or leverage. Previously, most Nephilim from other texts were characterized by sex to display their depravity. Clare flips the script, introducing sex-positivity to her interpretation of Nephilim and questioning what is truly so bad about being sexually active – even if you are, perhaps, a son of God who has fallen for a daughter of man. Clare also challenges the inherent warning against race-mixing presented in Genesis 6:1-4, as her Shadowhunter protagonists often have sexual encounters (and even sometimes marry) across racial lines with other Downworlders.

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[256] Cassandra Clare and Joshua Lewis, *The Shadowhunter's Codex* (New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2013), 236-237.

[257] Introduced in Cassandra Clare, *City of Fallen Angels* (New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2011), accessed June 14, 2022, ProQuest Ebook Central, 193.

While Clare led the way in sexualizing the Nephilim in a positive manner, she certainly was not the last. Further teen fantasy series would make use of Nephilim in a similar fashion, such as Becca Fitzpatrick's *Hush, Hush* (2009-2012) and Lauren Kate's *Fallen* (2009-2015, adapted to film in 2016). Each series has its own specific details about Nephilim but they each essentially stick to the formula developed in *The Prophecy*; Nephilim are young, attractive, super powered angel-human hybrids. Their worlds are shrouded in mystery and deciphering the obscurity of their nature makes them all-the-more alluring.

Half-Angels, Half-Demons: Anti-Politics in Videogames

Distrust of power structures – both those we know to be bad, and those that are meant to be good – comes to a head in multiple fantasy videogames released between 2010-2013. There was a sudden surge in games using the Nephilim, marking a distinct interest amongst gamers and game developers at the time. On top of all releasing within a short time frame, these games all shared an interpretation that was new to the conversation: Nephilim were half angel, but they were also specifically half *demon* as well. They sit at the centre of that which is supposed to be wholly good, and that which is supposed to be wholly evil. From this middle position, they operate as the only people able to contend with both sides. Of the eight videogame franchises that include Nephilim characters, five of them interpret these beings as angelic hybrids, and four of those see them more specifically as crosses between angels and demons. This angel-demon depiction is entirely unique to the gaming industry; no single commentator over the extensive reception history of Genesis 6:1-4/Numbers 13:31-33 had ever interpreted the Nephilim in this way, but suddenly a whole subset of media consumers was repeatedly told that this obscure Hebrew term had this angel-demon meaning. This should be seen as an example of how global, digitized subcultures can quickly proliferate a new understanding of an old idea.

This all begins with a tie-in book. In 2006 Richard A. Knaak published *Diablo: The Sin War: Birthright,* the first novel in a collaborative prequel trilogy to Blizzard Entertainment's popular *Diablo* role-playing games (RPGs).[258] In these games the mythology is centered around

[258] *Diablo II,* released June 29, 2000, sold over four million copies within its first year on the market, a feat that was quite impressive for a PC-only videogame at the time. Sales continued to grow over the next decade as it became established as a classic roleplaying game. Business Wire, "Diablo II: Lord of Destruction Goes Gold," June 21, 2001, archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20010801205053/http://biz.yahoo.com/bw/010621/2122.html.

the Eternal Conflict, a war between the angels of the High Heavens and the demons of the Burning Hells.[259] Players take on the role of heroes who primarily fight to protect the fictional world of Sanctuary, the realm of humanity, from the demonic forces of Hell. Knaak's novels expand upon the mythology of the series, set during a time when humans were unaware of angels and demons.

As one might imagine, the "Eternal Conflict" took place over an extended period of time. An angel named Inarius eventually grew tired of the constant cosmic battles, and with the help of a like-minded demon named Lilith he created the world of Sanctuary.[260] Here, soldiers from both sides could hide from the war. Eventually Inarius and Lilith fell in love, as did many of the other angelic and demonic refugees, and from their coupling came the first "nephalem."[261] When the High Heavens finally learned of Sanctuary, they considered these beings to be abominations and many angels called for their eradication. Even Inarius, their own progenitor, thought that their creation was a mistake.[262] These nephalem had the immense power of both of their parents, but Inarius magically diluted their abilities early in their existence in a bid to control them. The nephalem's descendants went on to become the mundane humans that inhabit Sanctuary.

Before there were any sequels to *Diablo II,* three games with Nephilim were released: Cryptic Studios' *Champions Online: Revelation* (2010), Vigil Games' *Darksiders* (2010), and Ignition Tokyo's *El Shaddai: Ascension of the Metatron* (2011).[263] *Revelation* is notable, as it is technically the first videogame to include angel-demon Nephilim. *Champions Online* is a massively multiplayer online roleplaying game (MMORPG) that sees players create their own superheroes, and the final encounter of *Revelation* is with a fallen angel named Therakiel, who leads an army of angel-demon Nephilim in a bid to conquer both Heaven and Hell.

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[259] These realms are obviously inspired by Judeo-Christian traditions about heaven and hell, but they have their own fantasy elements dissociated from any real-world religious beliefs. For example, God is not present in this mythos.
[260] Though Inarius has no known analogue, Lilith is a central figure in Jewish demonology. Traditions about her go back to the Epic of Gilgamesh. She has been depicted in several ways, including as a malevolent spirit who uses seduction to prey on men, as well as the rejected first wife of Adam. See *Encyclopedia Judaica,* s.v. "Lilith."
[261] Richard A. Knaak, *Diablo: The Sin War: Birthright* (New York: Pocket Star Books, 2006), 254-258, 412-413. The "nephalem" spelling is used both in Knaak's book series and in the videogames that followed, making them one step further removed from real world biblical legends.
[262] Knaak, *Birthright,* 257.
[263] In the world of videogames, the term expansion refers to content that is added to a live-service game after its initial release, normally with an associated cost. This can include new storylines, player abilities, game systems, and more.

Darksiders is a fantasy action-adventure game that is loosely based on the biblical Book of Revelation. After the seventh seal is broken early, Earth is destroyed by the forces of both Heaven and Hell as they fight over the planet.[264] Hell eventually triumphs, and Heaven shuts its gates to the remaining angels left behind. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse are sent to mediate the violence and to investigate the start of the war, leading to various adventures and battles with forces from above and below. The Horsemen are the four remaining Nephilim, a race of conquerors created by a demon named Lilith when she combined the remains of angels and demons. They now act as enforcers of "the Balance," a theoretical state of peace between good and evil. Only the Nephilim, those with the essence of both the most righteous and the most wicked creatures in existence, can truly maintain equilibrium.

El Shaddai is an adventure game that is heavily influenced by extra-biblical texts such as 1 Enoch. The protagonist is a warrior-scribe named Enoch who seeks to defeat seven fallen angels called Grigori due to their tampering with human evolution.[265] One of the results of their tampering is the creation of the Nephilim, strange blob-like creatures that are hybrids of angels and humans with an insatiable hunger. The Council of Heaven elects to flood the Earth in response unless Enoch can defeat them. With the help of four Archangels, Enoch battles the fallen angels and their Nephilim children and saves humanity.[266]

While each of these games were generally well received and continue to have dedicated fanbases to this day, they could not compare to the popularity of Blizzard's third sequel, *Diablo III*. Twelve years in the making, this was one of the most anticipated games of all time. On its release (May 15, 2012) it was the fastest-selling computer game ever by that point and by May of 2022 there had been over 65 million copies sold, making it one of the most financially successful videogames ever launched.[267] Through this game, millions of people were introduced to the

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[264] "Then I saw the Lamb break one of seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures call out, as with a voice of thunder, "Come!" Rev. 6:1. "When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them." Rev. 8:1-2.

[265] All but one of these Grigori have their names taken directly from 1 Enoch, including Semyaza, Azazel, Armaros, Sariel, Arakiel and Baraqel. The exception is Ezekiel.

[266] These Archangels are the same who mete out justice in 1 Enoch: Gabriel, Michael, Raphael, and Uriel.

[267] Blizzard Entertainment, "Diablo III Celebrates 10 Years," Blizzard.com, May 12, 2022. https://news.blizzard.com/en-us/diablo3/23788296/diablo-iii-celebrates-10-years; Jeff Cork, "Diablo III Breaks PC Sales Records," Game Informer, May 23, 2012. https://www.gameinformer.com/b/news/archive/2012/05/23/diablo-iii-crushes-pc-sales-records.aspx

Nephilim. Player characters discover their Nephilim heritage early in the game (regardless of the cultural background selected by the player) as they awaken the powers of their cosmic ancestors. From then on, the players are often referred to as "The Nephalem" not only by characters in game, but also in press releases and communications from Blizzard that address fans directly.[268] The player and their companions are the only ones able to defeat the main villain, Diablo the "Prime Evil," as he assaults Heaven itself and breeches its gates for the first time in history. Where the arrogance of the angels causes them to fail, the Nephilim heroes defeat Diablo and save Heaven. Some years later they defeat Malthiel, a former Archangel, when he tries to wipe out all traces of demons from Sanctuary – the human descendants of Lilith and her brood included. Only these superpowered humans, who make use of the abilities of both sides of the cosmic conflict, can defend their home from both forces and protect the balance of the universe in the meantime.

One final game followed *Diablo III*, which was Ninja Theory's *DmC: Devil May Cry* (2013), a reboot of an older (though still ongoing) series called *Devil May Cry*. The original games primarily follow a supernatural investigator named Dante, son of a human mother and a demon father. The reboot uses Dante as a protagonist once again, but this time makes him the rebellious, delinquent, anti-hero son of an angel and a demon. When Dante learns of his heritage from his long-lost twin Vergil, he is told that "the only beings that can slay a demon king are Nephilim, a hybrid of angel and demon."[269] As one might expect, the Nephilim protagonists utilize both their angelic and demonic powers to defeat the villain and save the day.[270] The pattern continues.

The true reasons for this pervasive change are unlikely to ever be properly quantified, but the answer may lie within the subtext of a being who balances both *good* and *evil* within themselves. Especially in a US context, political events had generated a discouraged apathy in the early 21st century.[271] For example, when President Barack Obama ran his historic 2008 campaign, he had done so on the simple slogan of "Hope." When American lives remained largely the same,

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[268] For example, when Blizzard celebrated the 10-year anniversary of *Diablo III*, one sentence read thusly: "remember, this 10-year milestone for Diablo III was made possible by YOU, Nephalem, many of whom…." Blizzard Entertainment, "Diablo III Celebrates 10 Years."
[269] Ninja Theory, *DmC: Devil May Cry*, Capcom, PC.
[270] Of note, the hardest difficulty mode of the game is also called "Nephilim," implying to players that only the most elite warriors (digital or otherwise) belong to this category.
[271] On the disparity between high political interest but low political engagement in the United States, see Kate Krontiris, John Webb, Charlotte Krontiris and Chris Chapman, "Understanding America's 'Interested Bystander;' A Complicated Relationship with Civic Duty," June 2015, http://s3.amazonaws.com/arena-attachments/2545570/.

some came to believe that the two-party system they existed within – a perceived half of the country finding one party to be inherently good, the other to be inherently evil, while the other half of the population saw things in reverse – was not an effective vessel for change. As political polarity began to grow, a frustrated younger generation found their heroes in those that were more "morally grey" – characters that were willing to work with a lesser evil if it meant protecting their home. When even the most trusted of institutions (be it the angels of Heaven or the US government) were understood to be arrogant and unable to address the concerns of the people, counter-cultural figures that utilized both the best and the worst possible methods became significant. The angel and the demon on one's shoulder now work together because they cannot rely on anyone else.

Theologians Frank G. Bosman and Marcel Poorthius find this emphasis on cosmological dualism and humanity's place within it to be a response to a shifting philosophical context. In a study on *Darksiders, Diablo,* and *DmC* specifically, they note that angels had a specific cognitive function in medieval philosophy – angels are *almost* like humans, and it is the small difference between the perfect angel and the sinful human that allowed these philosophers to define what it *truly* meant to be human. Yet angels in these games are too righteous for postmodern humankind; "we are more comfortable with the anthropologically mixed Nephilim, who incorporate – as we do – both good and evil traits."[272] Modern narratives in Western culture make significant use of the anthropologically holistic idea that everyone has the capability for both good and evil, where the protagonist must first take victory over the self before they can take victory over the enemy.[273] Nephilim are the deliberate champions of this tension, informing us that our proximity to all that is evil and profane does not need to barricade us from all that is good and sacred.

The Infinite Potential of the Nephilim

Despite the explicit influence of biblical traditions in these texts, many of them either change God's name to something like "The Creator" (such as in Sniegoski's *Fallen* and in *Darksiders*) or refuse to engage with the deity altogether (such as *Diablo* and *DmC*). Those that

[272] Frank G. Bosman and Marcel Poorthuis, "Nephilim: The Children of Lilith: The Place of Man in the Ontological and Cosmological Dualism of the *Diablo,* Darksiders and *Devil May Cry* Game Series," *Online: Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 7 (2015): 36-37. https://heiup.uni-heidelberg.de/journals/.
[273] Bosman and Poorthius, "The Children of Lilith," 34-36.

do mention a God/Creator do so without expanding their respective mythos to the throne of Heaven itself – God's existence is never confirmed by any of these characters as he is in L'Engle's *Many Waters* or *The Prophecy*. In each of these books, shows, or games, the angels that fathered or created the Nephilim operate in the cosmos on their own. This is reversed quite drastically in the final text to be examined, The WB/The CW's long-running paranormal drama program *Supernatural* (2005-2021).

As of the writing of this thesis, *Supernatural* holds the title of "longest running sci-fi/genre series in the history of American broadcast television,"[274] one that consistently garnered millions of viewers over its sixteen-year lifespan. *Supernatural* was created by Eric Kripke, the showrunner for the first season that aired on The WB. The show follows two brothers named Sam (Jared Padalecki) and Dean Winchester (Jensen Ackles) as they hunt various mythological creatures from a wide span of cultural traditions across the United States, including (but not limited to) vampires, werewolves, ghosts, demons, and even angels. The mythology of *Supernatural* is immense and often complicated due to the dozens of showrunners, directors, producers, and writers that have collaborated on the program. Though the Winchesters do battle with all manners of creatures, the main narrative arcs normally involve Judeo-Christian mythological figures and concepts. Main characters and antagonists include the demons Azazel (Fredric Lehne) and Lilith (Sierra McCormick), the archangels Michael (Matt Cohen) and Lucifer (Mark Pellegrino), and the eventual angelic ally of the brothers, Castiel (Misha Collins). Both demons and angels share a general contempt for humanity and put their own power ahead of the safety of Earth. Sam, Dean, and Castiel must battle various threats tied to the machinations of both Heaven and Hell across each season. The ontological dichotomy of good versus evil is challenged once again as both sides fight towards roughly the same end, and only the fundamentally flawed but nonetheless selfless Winchesters stand in their way.

Nephilim are not introduced until the eighth season. They are the children of an angel and a human, but the writers cleverly get around the issue of immaterial angels creating material babies. Due to their forms of pure light, these angels can only operate on Earth by possessing the body of a willing host. This possession functionally changes the host, charging their blood with holy power.

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[274] Nellie Andreeva and Denise Petski, "'Supernatural' to End After Season 15 on The CW," Deadline Hollywood, March 22, 2019. https://deadline.com/2019/03/supernatural-to-end-after-season-15-on-the-cw-1202581010/.

Castiel is told by Metatron (Curtis Armstrong), the elusive Scribe of God, that he must kill an innocent woman named Jane (Linda Tomasssone), the only living Nephilim on Earth, as part of a ritual to lock the doors of Heaven and stop the angelic tampering of human affairs. Though she puts up a decent fight due to her angel heritage, Castiel murders Jane and we hear nothing about the Nephilim again until season twelve (aired in 2016-2017). [275]

While possessing the fictional President of the United States (David Chisum), Lucifer conceives a child with a woman named Kelly Kline (Courtney Ford).[276] Like in many texts discussed above, Kline is pregnant for a short period (five months) before dying in childbirth. Her son, Jack (Alexander Calvert), grows to the size of a teenager within minutes of his birth.[277] Jack is effectively adopted by the Winchesters and becomes a main-cast character as he wrestles with his Nephilim nature. Jack displays nearly omnipotent powers, allowing him to create portals, heal wounds, battle dangerous foes, and even convert willing human souls into angels.[278] Despite his best intentions he sometimes loses control of his powers, leading to the accidental injury and death of several people and leaving him frequently pondering if he is human or one of the very monsters the Winchesters have sworn to hunt. Indeed, the audience is asked the same question – even if Jack has only the best intentions, should the prodigal monster hunters not end his life if he causes harm to humans? In the end the Winchesters decide that it is his efforts to help his fellow humans that define him, even if he makes mistakes. For *Supernatural*, the Other is given a choice to suppress their *unheimlich* – they only become a monster when they lose control.

Jack is only defeated when God (Rob Benedict), thought by nearly everyone to have abandoned the Earth long ago, reveals himself and the fact that he has been orchestrating events behind the scenes for his entertainment. When Sam and Dean refuse to play his game, he smites Jack and decides to destroy the Earth in a dramatic finale to his story.[279] Eventually Jack is

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[275] *Supernatural,* season eight, episode twenty-two, "Clip Show," directed by Thomas J. Wright, aired May 8, 2013, on the CW, https://www.primevideo.com/detail/0RQXF3CD7BVE71V74U3MOGPN3G/.
[276] *Supernatural,* season twelve, episode eight, "LOTUS," directed by Robert Singer, aired December 8, 2016, on the CW, https://www.primevideo.com/detail/0R5MBGG9445BJFZDD3YJSMMI06/.
[277] *Supernatural,* season twelve, episode twenty-three, "All Along the Watchtower," directed by Robert Singer, aired May 18. 2017, on The CW, https://www.primevideo.com/detail/0R5MBGG9445BJFZDD3YJSMMI06/, 41:17-41:29.
[278] This is the only text reviewed by this thesis that depicts the possibility of humans *becoming* angels. Typically, the natures are so distinct from one another that they cause conflict instead of existential harmony.
[279] *Supernatural,* season fourteen, episode twenty, "Moriah," directed by Phil Sgriccia, aired April 25, 2019, on The CW, https://www.primevideo.com/detail/0PUREYD8YQDDIE47QY1B3V4G2Q/, 34:57-35:22.

resurrected, and he joins up with the Winchesters once again as he increases his powers in a bid to finally defeat God.[280] During a fight in the series' penultimate episode, Jack grasps God by the head and absorbs what remains of his divine energy. God is turned into a mortal human, and Jack becomes a new, omnipotent God that is committed to non-interference and justice.[281] The final moments of the finale show Dean experiencing Heaven, once barely more than a prison in which people lived out their own individual simulations, now repaired to be a genuine paradise.[282]

To summarize, *Supernatural* tells the story of a Nephilim – once an obscure reference in the Bible – defeating God, becoming God, and fixing a broken Heaven. Millennia of eschatological scholarship concerned with measuring the supposed perfection of heaven is discarded; from a theological perspective, *Supernatural* implies that our understanding of the afterlife and the promises of religion are completely mistaken. A malevolent God and a broken heaven suggest that society has lost sight of what *should* be sacred, and that new direction and dynamic action are required to redefine it. The angelic hybrid not only balances the sacred and the profane but fully rewrites what the sacred can and should be. Guided by the lessons of regular humans and his experience as both man and angel, Jack defeats an existential threat and makes the universe better than it ever was before. *Supernatural* tells us that the Nephilim – representatives of both the ancient past and a promising future, both adamant faith and mundane wisdom – have the potential to be anything. We are led to believe that if we follow in Jack's kind, understanding, and just footsteps, perhaps we can also reform the world into a better place. We are more than the sum of our parts, and our flaws – inherited or developed – do not define us. Jack the Nephilim, like many other Nephilim before him, shows us instead that it is our actions and deeds that measure us in the end.

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[280] Notably, Jack begins to regain his strength when he hunts down and consumes the hearts of the Grigori, fallen angels who have lived in secret on the Earth for millennia. Their names (Tamiel, Sariel, and Kabaiel) are drawn from 1 Enoch. *Supernatural,* season fifteen, episode eleven, "The Gamblers," directed by Charles Beeson, aired January 20, 2020, on The CW, https://www.primevideo.com/detail/0NHJ70GJVMIXBA6A2DTG35S5X2/.

[281] *Supernatural,* season fifteen, episode nineteen, "Inherit the Earth," directed by John F. Showalter, aired November 12, 2020, https://www.primevideo.com/detail/0NHJ70GJVMIXBA6A2DTG35S5X2/.

[282] *Supernatural,* season fifteen, episode twenty, "Carry On," directed by Robert Singer, aired November 19, 2020, https://www.primevideo.com/detail/0NHJ70GJVMIXBA6A2DTG35S5X2/.

Conclusion

Like the chaos they often represent, the history of discourse surrounding the Nephilim has always been tumultuous. There has never been a time in our record where every interested party seemed to agree on who or what the Nephilim were (or are). Exegesis from the Second Temple Period saw them as the giant offspring of angels, but Rabbinic and early Christian thinkers soon saw them instead as the corrupted children of sacrilegious parents. As time went on and mainstream Christianity saw significant shifts following the Protestant Reformation, further iterations on the supernatural nature of the Nephilim appeared. Regardless of their true parentage they were legendary either for their status as rulers or as warriors, influencing the myriad ways that both ancient and contemporary authors decided to depict them. Despite the debate that existed through the millennia, the Nephilim remained largely outside the public eye until the late 20th century.

As the Western world began to secularize, friction came in the form of distrust for old institutions, especially those tied to the Church and Christianity at large. The forms of knowledge that had previously been suppressed saw increased interest during this time, especially as a sort of post-secular fatigue set in amongst both artists and audiences. Under the umbrella term of "the occult," these alternative worldviews enjoyed unprecedented popularity. One thing that these occultists (and those that study them) understood was that, despite our supposed secularization, our monsters seemed to follow us into this new, non-religious age. Now many scholars take tales about monsters seriously, tracing the ways that they are characterized in both religious texts and in popular culture. While our monsters followed us into this age, they changed in many of the same ways that humanity did; for example, the goals of vampires became more lofty, no longer about simple survival but now instead about domination and immortality. Even then, as time went on, these monsters became sympathetic – as Westerners began to confront their role in colonialism and other projects of international domineering, some vampires began to confront their own kind or to reject their sanguine thirsts. As human anxieties changed form, so did monsters.

Many timeless monsters saw repeated use throughout the duration of secular projects, but Nephilim themselves did not appear in Western popular culture until the 1980s. Though they had humble beginnings during this time (appearing in the works of one gothic rock band and as monsters in two novels), their presence in these scant few texts inspired enough curiosity to lead

to a veritable explosion of interest over the next three decades. Nonetheless, nearly every text dedicates time to explaining who – or what – the Nephilim are in the context of their own fictional history. While the popularity of Nephilim has skyrocketed, they still live in relative obscurity, enough so that authors understand they cannot simply use the name and expect their audiences to understand. Ghosts, werewolves, or vampires are rarely explained at a base level anymore, but the Nephilim always come with an elaborate introduction. Each use of Nephilim provides a sort of cultural cachet for those interested in occult subjects and bizarre beings. They turn a text that may have otherwise been understood as totally secular into a work of religious fiction – even if the author is not themselves religious. An ancient and lively debate is inherently introduced alongside the inclusion of the Nephilim, bringing with them questions about the origin of evil, the role of chaos in our society, and religious mysteries.

Alas, as with all things esoteric, many avenues for interpretation exist. Part of an author's trouble with introducing or re-introducing these beings to their audience is that the last Nephilim text the reader engaged with may have represented them in a vastly different way. Simply including Nephilim in a text does not tell us what an author fears about themselves, their neighbours, or their world; their context and their form invariably alters their meaning. To aid us in determining what each use of the Nephilim means, I have divided them into three major categories. These categories not only allow us to track the differences in form and influence between each subsequent depiction, but they allow us to glimpse a text's claims about the role of religion in a supposedly secular future.

Nephilim as Fallen Angels

Whereas many cosmogonies depict a deity wrestling against chaos to create the first semblances of order, Judeo-Christian traditions typically report that God has always existed in a state of omnipotence. The Nephilim act as a conduit for that primordial chaos to enter the Judeo-Christian cosmos, if not before Order, then very shortly afterwards. Before even the devil himself was causing trouble, the Nephilim were introducing war and discord to humanity. These creatures represent a fear of those who refuse to adhere to the cultural zeitgeist, those who rebel against rules that define what acceptable social interaction looks like. They are deviancy made manifest. For one, fallen angel Nephilim are almost always associated with lust and sexual misconduct. Whether they use lust as a weapon or have an uncontrollable attraction to human women, there is always

an element of hyper-sexuality at play. Though not all these texts are necessarily anti-sex, sex is associated with control. Fallen Nephilim warn of the potential violence of sex, and how it can be used to persuade people into acting against their own interests. Of note, by depicting Nephilim as physical, sexed beings, these sources challenge post-Nicene angelology on the spiritual nature of angels.

As "the Nephilim were on the earth in those days" (Gen 6:4) it is not much of a stretch for an author to decide that this mysterious title may as well belong to an angelic version of the sons of God – Nephilim supposedly means "fallen ones," after all. Of these marriages come children, a theme that becomes integral in all the above texts. Children take center stage in the schemes of the Nephilim, sometimes for the simple desire to be a father (*Many Waters*), sometimes for evil plans of domination (*Age of Eve*), and sometimes an ambiguous mix of both (*Hex*). These depictions all include an element of illusion and shapeshifting. Fallen angel Nephilim are tricksters that use magic (or hallucinations) to convince people of their better intentions, or to fool them into believing they are someone else. This reveals a baseline self-awareness from the Nephilim that they are not likely to be trusted by the humans they are attempting to control – there is something about their physical appearance or nature that is unsettling when encountered. They embody the *unheimlich* and thus do everything in their power to hide it, which in turn increases the unhomely feeling for the audience. We watch in horror as these beings hide their alien likeness from the hapless protagonists and share in the heroes' revulsion when their adversaries' true forms are revealed. In general, this may point at a fear of misinformation, or to the fear of discovering someone's "true self," especially in connection to a sexual partner.

In these cases, the term Nephilim not only implies a being that can physically alter their surroundings to appear as something or someone else, but it also refers to beings that have been hidden away or intentionally kept separate from humanity. It is no coincidence that in each of these texts, the protagonist must have the word explained to them at some point or another. In part, it is due to a recognition that the audience is unlikely to know what the word means without assistance, but it is also meant to inform us that the Nephilim are steeped in mystery. It is an old term describing one of the oldest things in the universe, lost to history when they were banished, destroyed, or imprisoned in a time long since passed.

Nephilim are so old, in fact, that they may have been the first hint of chaos in any of these worlds. Fallen angels in any text are always old, often predating humanity – some Christian and Muslim traditions depict the "fall" taking place when Lucifer/Iblis refused to bow before Adam and the first of humankind. Yet there is something about the term Nephilim that truly hints at the ancient nature of these beings. Whereas a regular fallen angel could possibly be assumed to be contemporary, one who is aware of the current state of the world or even present in it, "Nephilim" implies that these angels are from a bygone epoch. They not only revolted against God – they were the first things in creation to defy the 'Order' he represents.

Though each of these monsters are called fallen angels in their respective texts, and various religious traditions are alluded to or referenced to justify that correlation in each, the term 'Nephilim' allows for a significant amount of creative license for the authors. In truth, no one can quite tell them that they are wrong, even if their depiction belongs to the most underrepresented interpretation of Genesis 6. Due to the mysteriousness of the term and the ancient era it seems to harken to, authors can justify alternative depictions of what a fallen angel is. None of these beings are simply humanoids with black wings – fallen angel Nephilim are totally alien, whether they are crippled slimy monsters, extra-terrestrials, or interdimensional demons.

Nephilim as Primordials

Not much connects the physical forms of the primordials – few would look at the cat people of *Exile*, the behemoths of *MTG,* or the slugs of *Alien Armageddon* and consider them to be mythological cousins. Yet, there are recurring themes and influences that are found across the texts that depict Nephilim in this way that point at the intentionality of utilizing such a term. Patterns include pessimism towards authority, warnings against historical forgetfulness, and the familiar cosmic fear of chaos. In short, Nephilim as primordials speak to a fear of the past. It can come back to haunt us in strange and violent ways. When we forget it, or we let others dictate our knowledge on it, we put ourselves at risk.

The primordials text examined here typically depict a major government power as either useless, tyrannical, controlled by a shadowy cabal that is unknown to the public, or some mixture of the three. The protagonists in these stories must work towards reforming government by first exorcizing the influence of the Nephilim, or simply avoid entanglement with authorities altogether,

allowing the cabals their control. Exceptions to this rebellious narrative exist in *Exile* and *MTG,* but even in these fantasy worlds there are governments that vastly overstep the boundaries of their power, which in turn exacerbates the problems with violent Nephilim even further. They are the vanguard of the cultural *unheimlich*, informing us that there is something very wrong about how we organize our society.

Nearly all conflict regarding Nephilim in these narratives could have been avoided if humanity had been better stewards of their history. In many cases they were once dominant over what existed of the human populace; were we better able to understand and document what we had seen, later generations could have been prepared. Of course, it is hard to blame these ancient peoples who first met with the Nephilim for their ignorance, but these authors suggest that we too are ignorant when we ignore the warnings left in our folkloric tales, cultural traditions, and religious texts. These authors draw connecting lines between several literary sources, seeing common threads that imply a shared human experience of religious truth. If taken literally, this shared experience points at a singular group of entities who influenced the earliest written accounts of gods and supernatural beings (as posited by later pseudoarchaeologists such as Erich von Däniken). Primordials do not quite symbolize religious syncretism – it is not that every religion gets something right about the nature of the universe, but instead that each religion is *wrong* about the *same thing*. These texts tell us that our ancestors were foolish to be duped, but we are even more foolish to ignore what little warning they provided. When Nephilim exist in other universes, they inform us of what a lack of social order could look like. When the Nephilim are aliens or ancient monsters from our own universe, they represent a time that we are too distracted to remember, and a bleak future we do not even realize we are being pushed towards. Even though most people would generally dismiss the idea, it is easy to feel like some unseen force is working against us – these sources provide an answer as to *who* that might be by drawing on centuries of interpretation combined with postmodern paranoia.

Of all the Nephilim categories, primordials are the most likely to challenge one's understanding of the cosmos, creating a sense of *unheimlich* at the grandest scale. They question our thoughts on how our universe works – not only are we not alone, but we have *never been* alone. Something sinister has always been just outside of view. If God was ever present, he left us to contend with these most archaic of monsters long ago. It is us against the Nephilim, and we will

only prevail once we accept that we have been wrong since the beginning. Victory against the powers that be would require a restructuring on a scale never seen before – and these authors are unsure that we will ever be bold enough to grasp it.

Nephilim as Angelic Hybrids

Compared to the bleakness of primordial Nephilim, angelic hybrids represent the most hope for the future of the three studied categories. They combine the traditions of the past with the flexibility of the future. They also combine the sacred and the profane in a way that challenges strict ideas about social strata and religious intolerance. Angelic hybrids find the synthesis in what we hold most dear, and what we consider unworthy. They revolt against the rules that exist with the intent to create a better world. This change is dangerous – and not all angelic hybrids are up to the task – but they show us that stagnation is even worse than the risk.

Thirteen different franchises were studied for this chapter, but more examples of angelic hybrids exist. They are, without a doubt, the most popular depiction of Nephilim in the realm of popular culture. Not only are they the most numerous, but they are involved in the books, television programs, and videogames with the largest audiences. Clare's *Mortal Instruments* and Blizzard's *Diablo* are of particular note, being medium-leading texts of extraordinary popularity that focus fully on Nephilim protagonists. It should be seen as no coincidence that the most commercially successful texts utilize the angelic-hybrid interpretation. There are several possible reasons for this, but when compared to other depictions of Nephilim it is likely due to their tendency to leave our understandings of the ancient past unchallenged. They do not claim that we have been lied to about our pasts – instead, they promise a more synergistic future. They are not only ideologically safe, but hopeful.

Despite their initial appearance as disabled children in *The X-Files,* from *The Prophecy's* Danyael to *Supernatural's* Jack these angelic hybrids became homogenized into heroic young people with a penchant for righteous violence. Some exceptions exist, but by-and-large the Nephilim became counter-cultural symbols of resistance to both the usual evils that plague humanity and a social order that causes friction. In balancing the powers of those who are meant to be the best of us with the simple lessons of a normal human life, a balance of justice and peace

is achieved. In these texts the mixing of the sacred and the profane is no longer abomination; it is salvation. In an increasingly globalized and diversified world, perhaps it should come as no surprise that we see heroes in those who are able to synthesize and bring peace to different peoples. It is also possible that angelic hybrid Nephilim act as a sort of catharsis for those who experience guilt over things such as slavery, or any other kind of tension with racial legacy – they tell us that it is not one's heritage that defines them, but instead what they are able to accomplish with the privileges they are given. Even when a person born of two peoples is feared by both, it is possible to prove that it is the *individual* who decides their legacy.

Within this category is a peculiar subcategory, one that I have only been able to identify in video games: the angel-demon depiction of Nephilim. In essence angel-demons take the angelic-hybrid personification of the sacred-profane dichotomy to new heights, though it remains attached to the *Prophecy*-esque idea that a Nephilim is a prophesized, superhuman warrior that is at the center of humanity's salvation. Yet it is not only their angelic power that is required – specifically, they must also make use of their supposedly evil demonic nature as well. An agent that represents both sides of the cosmic battle – possibly extrapolated to represent two ends of a political spectrum, or any other number of ideological dichotomies – is the only one who can protect their community from the doom to come. Typically, this agent is mistrusted until they prove themselves, but eventually in each text a Christ-like redemption of the world comes at the hands of a biblical monster who becomes a cultural hero.

The fact that many millions of people seem to identify with angelic hybrids should tell us that there is a communal *unheimlich* being addressed by these heroic figures. Perhaps these authors and audience members feel we have collectively shifted too much towards total profanity, and while it should not be our goal to return to a total reliance on sacredness and the institutions that keep it (namely, the Church) we must still re-inject faith back into our communities. As stories about Nephilim continue to be told, and these stories continually lean towards an angelic hybrid understanding, we as scholars would be wise to measure the ways in which these beings are contextualized and how these texts discuss topics of religion, community, and legacy.

Nephilim in Popular Culture

No matter which category they belong to, Nephilim in popular culture represent a desire to understand the most mysterious parts of a collective human past. There is no coincidence that they are a biblical figure being re-introduced into the cultural imagination. Their biblical ties allow those in a Judeo-Christian context to tie the usual escapism of fantasy to traditions that hold real-world significance. They allow secular Westerners to reconnect with some of the folkloric mysteries that provided cultural identity to their forbears. Yet, there is also something of note in that the Bible does not seem to be enough for this mission of reconnection – while the Nephilim are indeed biblical, so much of the influence seen in their depictions come from texts like 1 Enoch. Authors constantly connect and re-connect various details of their own work and the work of these religious scholars from so many centuries ago. It begs familiar questions about why humans often feel the need to tie their traditions to their oldest possible point – even if they are secularists writing fiction for the future. Where the infallibility of the Bible once defined Western thought, we are witnessing a new method of religious wisdom-seeking take place as people look to other ancient texts to answer modern questions. Those anxious about a cabal controlling the human future simply do not find those answers in the Bible, but instead of creating new answers they rely on the ancient and esoteric. Though looking into the past is chaotic, perhaps it is still less frightening than looking into the future.

I attempted to cover a lot of ground with this thesis, and if the reader is anything like myself then this influx of information created more questions than answers. There are several directions that this research could go in the future. Experts on all the discussed popular texts could challenge my own interpretations and readings. Each source deserves more time than it was given. My initial interest was the rise in popularity surrounding the Nephilim, so I sought to find patterns in the broadest strokes – these patterns could be broken down and specified to a much more distinct degree within each category. One could cross analyze data surrounding things like political apathy, self-reported religiosity, or other metrics alongside the number of Nephilim texts produced in a particular block of time.

If, most generally, I have convinced the reader that the increase in Nephilim media helps reveal the changing ways in which religion is experienced and consumed in a post secular twenty first century context, then this thesis has accomplished its goal. In a society that waits for the next

streaming event or blockbuster film and allows those things to frame their discourse of topics such as politics and religion, therefore altering the futures of those topics, we cannot afford to ignore the trends in dialogue that take place within the arena of popular culture. Anxieties about the uncertain future are laid bare in the imaginative fiction that is produced every day. It should be a priority for scholars of religion to track how the concepts we hold dear – both in the academy and in places of worship – find their way into these stories.

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