

“Die Monster! You Don’t Belong in this World”: The Spectre of Genocide in Japanese Digital Games

Priyanka Das

MPhil. Priyanka Das, PhD.

Presidency University
Department of English
College Street 86/1
7000 73 Kolkata
INDIA
priyanka.eng@presiuniv.ac.in



Priyanka Das is an Assistant Professor of English at the Department of English, Presidency University, India. Her M. Phil is on the objectification of the Male Body in Bollywood films and advertisements and her PhD is on *Game of Thrones*. She specializes in Holocaust and Genocide Studies, and Popular Culture, especially television series, memes and video games. She has presented and published on American, Japanese and Korean television dramas in international peer-reviewed journals. She is currently working on the gaming boom in Chinese dramas and her forthcoming publication from Routledge is a co-edited volume on the Holocaust and Popular Culture.

*Castlevania*¹, the Japanese action-adventure digital games series developed by Konami, has enjoyed an exceptional status since its debut in 1986. From early consoles to OTT platforms, the franchise has been widely adapted. The 2017 Netflix adaptation of the third Nintendo version and the sixth instalment in the series, *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse*² teleports us to a medieval world that is threatened by Count Dracula and his minions. The latest Netflix adaptation of *Castlevania*³ marks the global prominence of the digital game, thereby transcending the particular to the universal.

Perhaps the most striking yet under-researched aspect of the digital game series is its obvious allusion to the Holocaust. Although *Castlevania* is set against a medieval backdrop, it is also a product of a post-Holocaust perception of history, which is why its representation and interpretation is informed by the rhetoric of Nazism and Fascism. One can indeed find a series of uncanny thematic and contextual parallels between *Castlevania* and the Holocaust.

Few such parallels are discussed in this essay. Firstly, the very name *Castlevania*, with all its gothic and vampirish elements, alludes to the Nazi-occupied Romanian town of Transylvania which has its own history of Jewish memory. Elie Wiesel, the widely celebrated writer and a Holocaust survivor, locates his 1986 Nobel Peace Prize winning memoir *Night*⁴ in the small town of Sighet in Transylvania, then a part of Hungary, during the Second World War. Secondly, the evil lord, Count Dracula Vlad Țepeș of *Castlevania* shares the attributes of a Nietzschean Übermensch as was clearly embodied and asserted by Adolf Hitler himself. Count Dracula's indomitable desire to annihilate humanity, for personal vengeance and for the sake of upholding the vampiric race, parallels Hitler's antisemitic worldview to purify the Aryan race and make Germany *Judenfrei*, through extermination of the entire Jewish community. Thirdly, Count Dracula's War Council, much like the 'Hitler Cabinet', consists of his henchmen, or the Devil's disciples, who were instrumental in designing and implementing the genocide. The names of Count Dracula's men, Hector and Godbrand evoke an uncanny similarity with Hitler's right-hand men, Heinrich Himmler and Hermann Göring. Also, the bloodthirsty beasts of Hell, the army of the dead, called upon and unleashed by Count Dracula to destroy mankind, find parallel in the notorious Nazi Waffen-SS who were trained to be monsters. Fourthly, the internment camps in *Castlevania* where humans are treated as livestock for feeding the vampires, is an unmistakable allusion to the infamous Nazi concentration camps. Fifthly, the Belmont clan of vampire hunters evoke the Red Army and the entire episode of Liberation where Russians and Americans emerge as the liberators of the camps and the saviours of Jewish victims. Lastly, the language and vocabulary used in *Castlevania* is uncannily informed by the Nazi rhetoric of the Final solution. The repeated references, for instance, the obvious invocation of 'genocide' by Dracula's son, Alucard, cannot be overlooked. The question of theological intervention is also noteworthy since both the timelines exist in a Godless world where there is no hope for humans.

This article, by tracing such parallels between the historical world of the Holocaust and the mythical universe of *Castlevania*, addresses the transnational discourse of the Holocaust that is perhaps disseminated through Digital Games. Such an approach, I hope, would critique and expand the existing scholarship on both the Holocaust and Digital Games.

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1 KONAMI: *Castlevania*. [digital game]. Tokyo : Konami, 1986.

2 KONAMI: *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse*. [digital game]. Tokyo : Konami, 1989.

3 ELLIS, W. (Created by): *Castlevania (series)*. [VOD]. Los Gatos, CA : Netflix, 2017-2021.

4 For more information, see: WIESEL, E.: *Night*. New York : Hill & Wang, 2006.