Croteam , Tom Jubert , Jonas Kyratzes

The Talos Principle

Online (2014)

TAGS: Aristotle Athena Bacchus Daedalus Hephaestus Heracles Hercules Hesperides Hippocampi Labyrinth Lares Mercury Minos Poseidon Pottery / Vases Roman Art Sphinx Talos (Automaton) Zeus



We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	The Talos Principle
Studio/Production Company	Developed by Croteam and published by Devolver Digital
Country of the First Edition	Online
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2014
First Edition Details	The first version of the game came out on December 11, 2014 for Windows, OS X and Linux.
Platform	Microsoft Windows (Steam), OS X, Linux, Android, Playstation 4, iOS, Virtual Reality (VR)
Official Website	croteam.com (accessed: October 31, 2018)
Available Onllne	Trailer (accessed: October 31, 2018)
Awards	2014 – Game Trailers: “Game of the Year”; 2015 – Independent Games Festival: Finalist in “Excellence in Narrative” and “Seumas McNally Grand Prize”; 2015 – National Academy of Video Game Trade Reviewer: “Game, Special Class”.
Genre	FPP (First-Person Puzzle)*, Puzzle video games*
Target Audience	Crossover (crossover between young adults and adults; PEGI 7)

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children’s and Young Adults’ Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of “Artes Liberales” of the University of Warsaw.

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Creators



Croteam (Company, Production Company)

Croteam is an independent video games developer based in Zagreb, Croatia. It was established in 1993 and is best known for having developed the *Serious Sam* games and *The Talos Principle*. Croteam develops games and 3D engine technologies for PC, Mac, Linux, Xbox360, PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4, iOS, and Android. *The Talos Principle* was developed by Croteam together with Jonas Kyratzes and Tom Jubert as the writers.

Prepared by Nanci Santos, OMC Contributor,
nancisantos@hotmail.co.uk



Tom Jubert , b. 1985
(Author, Screenwriter)

Tom Jubert was born in 1985. He attended the University of Southampton where he initially studied Computer Science, before changing his course to English and Philosophy.

He graduated in 2007 and began his first writing job in the same year, writing the story for the game *Penumbra: Overture* (2007). He has also written the story for the sequel *Penumbra: Black Plague* (2008) and *Penumbra: Requiem* (2008). He has also worked on the game *Driver: San Francisco* (2011) as a narrative designer, as well as being the writer for the games *FTL: Faster than Light* (2012), *The Swapper* (2013), and *Subnautica* (2018).

Bio prepared by Nanci Santos, OMC Contributor,
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Jonas Kyratzes , b. 1984
(Author, Screenwriter)

Jonas Kyratzes was born in Wiesbaden, Germany on 21, 1984. He has worked on a variety of video games including *The Infinite Ocean* (2003, 2010 remake), *The Great Machine: A Fragment* (unknown), *The Sea Will Claim Everything* (2012) and *Serious Sam 4* (TBA). He has also written a book titled *Στη σκιά του Αόρατου Βασιλιά* [In the Shadow of the Invisible King] (2013) and wrote and directed a short documentary in 2009 about the 2008 Greek riots, titled *The Greek Riots: Some Basic Facts*.

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Additional information

Translation	List of languages available on Steam: English (Interface, Full Audio, Subtitles – Unknown years of release) French (Interface, Full Audio, Subtitles – Unknown years of release) Italian (Interface, Full Audio, Subtitles – Unknown years of release) German (Interface, Full Audio, Subtitles – Unknown years of release) Spanish (Interface, Full Audio, Subtitles – Unknown years of release) Russian (Interface, Full Audio, Subtitles – Unknown years of release) Japanese (Interface, Full Audio, Subtitles – Unknown years of release) Korean (Interface, Full Audio, Subtitles – Unknown years of release) Polish (Interface, Full Audio, Subtitles – Unknown years of release) Portuguese-Brazil (Interface, Full Audio, Subtitles – Unknown years of release) Simplified Chinese (Interface, Full Audio, Subtitles – Unknown years of release) Traditional Chinese (Interface, Full Audio, Subtitles – Unknown years of release) Czech (Interface, Subtitles – Unknown years of release)
Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs	*Sigils of Elohim* (Prelude) *The Talos Principle: Road to Gehenna DLC* (23 July 2015) *The Talos Principle 2* (Release date TBA)
Summary	In *The Talos Principle*, the main character wakes up to find a peaceful

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but ruined world. An unknown voice, who later says he is Elohim, speaks to you, the player, and instructs you to complete a series of puzzles he has created for you (consisting of lasers, pressure pads, “Reflectors”, “Hexahedrons”, Enemies, amongst other features) so that you collect “sigils” and therefore ascend to the next realm. However, it also advises you not to climb the tower; later in the game, the player realises that it is a tower situated outside the main areas of the game. You begin to complete the puzzles, and it becomes clear that you are an Artificial Intelligence (AI) robot, created to complete a series of puzzles in a virtual world, so that you can ascend and join Elohim.

As the game progresses, a computer named Milton Library Interface begins speaking to you, questioning you on various subjects such as the reasons for blindly following a voice. He also questions the player on who he believes he is, whether AI can ever be human, what it means to be human, amongst other questions. These computer terminals also contain various pieces of texts, emails, log information, which slowly reveal that due to global warming, a deadly virus, which was hidden in the ice caps, has been unleashed and caused the extinction of humanity. You slowly also begin finding out that these files were uploaded as a last hope to keep humanity alive after the death of all humans, through an Artificial Intelligence robot.

Analysis

The Talos Principle is a first-person puzzle game which focuses its story on the philosophical principles of “What it means to be a human being?”, Transhumanism, and Artificial Intelligence. The game was created by Croteam and written by **Jonas Kyratzes** with the help of **Tom Jubert**. The influence from these writers is clearly visible when comparing *The Talos Principle* with their previous work. It is easy to see how **Kyratzes** brings the atmospheric horror and philosophical principles of existence from the game *The Infinite Ocean* as well as the child-friendly gameplay combined with adult story ideas from the game *The Sea Will Claim Everything*. Meanwhile, **Jubert** brings to the game influences from his previous game *The Swapper*. *The Swapper* is a philosophical platformer, whose plot is highly influenced by the philosophy between the body and soul. The game focuses primarily on the philosophical aspects of humans and machines, hence its setting inside a computer with the player controlling an Artificial Intelligence robot. However, despite this modern concept, the game itself was

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influenced by classical culture due to the origins of the concept, which will be discussed in full detail further below. The game also contains Judeo-Christian and ancient Egyptian elements, including references to the *Book of Revelations* in the Bible, God (or Elohim, in this case), and the *Book of the Dead*.*

The first interesting thing to note in regards to Classical Greco-Roman influence is the name of the game itself. *The Talos Principle* is a reference to the Talos myth linked to the Argonauts, and it is briefly mentioned in-game as a possible name for the AI as whom the player plays.** In ancient Greek myth, the Argonauts encounter Talos in Crete on their way home from their quest. The story of Talos varies between those who mention the story. In general, Talos was created to protect Crete. He was unbeatable, used gigantic stones as weapons and if those did not work, he would use the heat of his body and embrace his victim. He was defeated due to the piercing of a vein. Variations include the following. Simonides describes Talos as an automaton, made from bronze by Hephaestus and gifted to Minos to guard Crete (568 *PMG*). Apollonios, meanwhile, describes him as the last of Hesiod's race of bronze, the men who sprung from an ash tree (*AR* 4.1638-88). A third version, found in Sophocles' lost work *Daidalos*, explains that Talos was always fated to die (*Frr* 160, 161 R). This seems to be the version the game follows as it is possible to learn from an "email" found in a computer terminal in World A, named *talos.eml*.

In these computer terminals, the player comes across various files with documents and pieces of fragmented/corrupted texts, among these, there are a series of fragmented texts named "Athena" and then followed by various numbers. Later in the game, the player finds a "master file" containing a list of all the "Athena Chapters". These "Athena" texts, the player has been coming across, are part of a novel titled *Athena Reborn: A Novel*:

1. *Theogony*
2. *Zeus Speaks*
3. *The Lost Children of Hephaestus*
4. *Dreams of the Labyrinth*
5. *The Songs of Eris at Nightfall*
6. *Athena in the Garden of the Hesperides* **(excerpt found in-game)**
7. *The Buried City*
8. *The Riddles of the Sphinx* **(excerpt found in-game)**

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9. *The Age of Faith* **(excerpt found in-game)**
10. *The Madness of Coeus*
11. *Olympus Revealed in the Clouds*
12. *The Council of Zeus* **(excerpt found in-game)**
13. *Skepsis and Synthesis*
14. *The Judgement of Hephaestus* **(excerpt found in-game)**
15. *Zeus Reflects Upon Creation*
16. *A Second Awakening in the Kingdom of Artemis* **(excerpt found in-game)**
17. *Anthropogony*

Despite the name suggesting a real-world text, the novel is indeed fictional, with some references to ancient works, of the likes of Hesiod's *Theogony* and Homer's *Odyssey*.

The chapters also include references to gods such as Zeus, Hephaestus, Eris, and Artemis, as well as references to ancient stories and myths as with chapter 6. This Chapter, titled *Athena in the Garden of the Hesperides*, discusses the garden of the Hesperides and the golden apple; however, the text has an interesting twist. It describes the garden as being a "garden of gears and cogs" with a tree "made of bright blue steel" where the golden apple grew. The next paragraph also introduces an interesting concept. Despite this text seemingly referring to the Garden of the Hesperides, Heracles' 11th task (according to Sophocles' *Trachiniai*, fr 11 PEG and Euripides' *Herakles* 394-407), it combines Greek mythology with the Judeo-Christian story of the Garden of Eden and the snake who convinced Eve to eat an apple. This reference can be observed in the words of the nymphs in the *Athena Chapter* 6 text who state that the apple "confers the gift of deathlessness and true wisdom". According to Judeo-Christian tradition, Eve is told by God not to eat the apple as she would die, however, the snake convinces her that if she eats the apple, she will be given knowledge of all things, good and bad (*Genesis* 3:3-5).

Chapter 8, titled *The Riddles of the Sphinx* also provides an interesting small text featuring the Sphinx and the famous riddles. The Sphinx asks Athena which riddle did it not reveal to her, to which Athena answers that it was one about why riddles exist in the first place. Athena proceeds to speak about the automatons, mute children of Hephaestus, and why they make Athena answer these riddles. Athena then unplugs the sphinx, effectively, killing her. This short chapter provides a couple of interesting points of discussion. Firstly,

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there is the role of the Sphinx and the involvement of Athena. In Greek mythology, Athena never dealt with the Sphinx. This was always attributed to Oedipus, who defeated the Sphinx in ways that the ancient sources do not discuss, leaving it to open interpretation.*** Another point of interest is the reference to "automatons". In Greek mythology, the "automatons" are animate statues, who act like humans, and were created by Daedalus (according to some, as for example, Philostratus the Elder, *Imagines* 1.16) like in the myth of Talos of Crete, as discussed previously. Also as part of the "Automaton" myths regarding Talos of Crete, one of the stories states that he was a gift from Hephaestus, as per above, hence the use of the "mute children of Hephaestus" in the game.

Finally, in terms of philosophical setting, the game combines a wide range of different philosophical combined. According to a response from the creators in a forum post, the game is influenced by various philosophical ideas, of which, some are linked to the 4th century BCE philosopher, Aristotle (see here, accessed: October 31, 2018).

The art style and game scenarios also contain some interesting classical references. The first "world" (World A) the player is taken to is a classical one. The player wakes up in the middle of ruins from a Roman civilization. The setting features the typical buildings made from the known Roman red brick. At one of the levels, the player can find an amphitheatre, as well as a replica of Trajan's Market. According to an interview conducted by Reinhard with the writers of *The Talos Principle*, the scenery in the games is inspired by Pompeii and other locations (see here, accessed: October 31, 2018). According to Reinhard, the game also features photorealistic settings in Rome and Ostia.

Despite the buildings' aesthetic, perhaps the most interesting details are the use of frescoes and mosaics decorating the buildings and floors, much like in the Roman period. One of the mosaics that can be found throughout the game displays a man standing on a horse-serpent, looking at a woman behind him appearing to be pulling her hair and with what appears to be a bull in front of him. The horse-serpent seems to resemble Poseidon/Neptune's Hippocampus****, a half-horse, half-fish sea creature. If this is so, the man could perhaps represent Poseidon/Neptune and this scene could be a depiction of the famous bull of Crete which was sent to Minos as a sacrifice by Poseidon. However, according to Apollodorus (*Bibliotheca* 3.1.3–4), Minos did not sacrifice the bull and so in revenge, Poseidon made

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Pasiphae, Minos' wife, fall in love and mate with the bull instead, thus creating the well-known "Minotaur". If this mosaic presents indeed this famous episode, then the female figure to the right of the mosaic could be a representation of Pasiphae, however, it could also be Amphitrite, Poseidon's wife, as they are typically depicted together.

The frescoes found within the game also depict at least two different scenes. The first appears to be an execution. A semi-clothed male is being held by what appears to be a guard whilst they watch a second semi-clothed person being executed. This is being watched by four other males, of whom, one is holding a hammer seemingly while also standing as a guard, another has wings and is protecting the "executioner's" back, while the third and fourth are merely observing the scene.

The second fresco is inspired by the "Lararium", a fresco of Greek gods at the Thermopolium of Vetutius Placidus, in Pompeii.***** This fresco, which is found in various places within the game, depicts the Roman god Mercury on the left, two *Lares* holding a rhyton on the centre-right and centre-left of the picture, the head of the *paterfamilias* in the middle, and the Roman god Bacchus to the right.******

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* Due to the nature of this database, this analysis will only be focusing on the Classical Greco-Roman elements.

** This explanation is found in the computer terminal "document" called *Soma.eml*, in the World B, level 3's extra terminal, as well as in *talos.eml*, found in World A, level 8's computer terminal.

*** Please refer to Gantz, T., *Early Greek Myth*, 1993, 494–498 for further information on the topic.

**** *Roman mosaic, Hippocampus of the House of Neptune, the Roman city of Italica, Spain*, 123rf.com (accessed: October 31, 2018).

***** *Fresco of Greek Gods at Thermopolium in Pompeii, Italy*, encirclephotos.com (accessed: October 31, 2018).

****** *The Lararium*, romanpolytheist.wordpress.com (accessed: October 31, 2018).

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Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aristotle Athena Bacchus Daedalus Hephaestus Heracles Hercules Hesperides Hippocampi Labyrinth Lares Mercury Minos Poseidon Pottery / Vases Roman Art Sphinx Talos (Automaton) Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Environment Future Intellect Philosophy Puzzle* Science Utopia and dystopia
Further Reading	Multiple Authors, *Suggested preliminary readings*, in "Steam discussions", available at steamcommunity.com (accessed: October 31, 2018). Reinhard, Andrew, *The Archaeology of The Talos Principle*, available at archaeogaming.com (accessed: October 31, 2018).
Addenda	Average playing time: 20 hours (based on howlongtobeat.com, accessed: October 31, 2018) Genre: Single-player, Puzzle Video Game.

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