

REALISTICNESS

WHY THE VIRTUAL TENDS TOWARDS THE REAL

IGDA SWEDEN

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INTRODUCTION

- THIS TALK IS ABOUT WHY **VIRTUAL** WORLDS HAVE SO MUCH IN THEM THAT'S LIKE **REALITY**
 - I'LL CALL VIRTUAL WORLDS **MMOS** TODAY
 - THE IGDA **IS** ABOUT **GAMES**, AFTER ALL
- IF YOU **THINK** ABOUT IT, THEY DON'T **HAVE** TO BE SIMILAR AT ALL
 - GRAVITY COULD WORK BY **COLOUR**, MAGNETS COULD HAVE SIX **POLES**, ALL SOLIDS COULD BE **GELATINOUS**, ...
 - TEXT WORLDS ARE ALREADY **MULTI-DIMENSIONAL**, HAVE COLOURS REALITY **DOESN'T**, CONTAIN NEW STATES OF **MATTER**, UNDEFINED **SHAPES**, ...

GRAPHICS

- THE VERY REASON PLAYERS **PREFER** GRAPHICS TO TEXT **HINTS** AT THE **ANSWER**
- GRAPHICS ARE MORE **REALISTIC** THAN TEXT
- WHEN MILLIONS OF YEARS OF **EVOLUTION** HAVE **TUNED** YOUR VISUAL CORTEX, IMAGES ARE **EASY** TO PROCESS
 - **IF** THEY MATCH THE KIND OF WORLD TO WHICH YOUR ANCESTRAL CREATURES ADAPTED
- THERE'S MORE **TO** IT THAN THIS, THOUGH
- A WORLD CAN HAVE **PHOTO-REALISTIC** GRAPHICS AND **STILL** BE **UNREALISTIC**

MIQO'TE

- HERE ARE SOME **MIQO'TE** I ENCOUNTERED WHILE PLAYING *FINAL FANTASY XIV*



- NOT **EXACTLY** PHOTO-REALISTIC, BUT STILL...

GLASSES

- ALL OF THOSE CHARACTERS HAVE **EARS** ON THE **TOP** OF THEIR HEAD
- HOWEVER, THEY WEAR **GLASSES** AS IF THEY HAD EARS WHERE **HUMANS** HAVE EARS
- SOME POSSIBLE **EXPLANATIONS**:
 - **OOPS!**
 - IT WOULD LOOK **WEIRD** OTHERWISE
 - WE HAVE TO USE THE SAME MODEL FOR **ALL** RACES
 - YOU'LL FIND OUT **WHY** IT'S LIKE THIS **LATER...**
 - IT'S SAYING SOMETHING ABOUT THE **GAME**
 - IT'S SAYING SOMETHING ABOUT **REAL LIFE**



FICTION

- **ALL** FICTIONAL WORLDS CONTAIN WHAT ARE **TRUTHS** TO THEM BUT **NOT** TO US
 - SHERLOCK HOLMES IS A **PERSON**
 - A MOTHER AND DAUGHTER ARE LOOKING FOR **LOVE**
 - **YOU** LEAD A CIVILISATION
- THE **FICTION** OF A NOVEL, MOVIE OR GAME IS THE **PREMISE** YOU MUST ACCEPT TO **INVEST** YOURSELF IN ITS WORLD
- WHAT ABOUT THINGS IN THE WORLD THAT THE FICTION **DOESN'T** COVER, THOUGH?
 - THERE'S NOTHING THERE ABOUT **ICE**, SAY

DEFAULT

- THE **DEFAULT** IS THAT IF THE **FICTION** DOESN'T COVER IT, IT WORKS LIKE **REALITY**
- UNLESS THE FICTION SAYS **OTHERWISE**, WE CAN **ASSUME** THAT:
 - QUEEN VICTORIA WAS A **PERSON**
 - PEOPLE **LIVE** IN THE USA
 - **HORSES** CAN'T SHOOT **ARROWS**
- THE MORE YOU **DIVERGE** FROM "HOW REALITY WOULD DO IT", THE MORE IT'S GOING TO BE A TIRESOME **DISTRACTION**
 - COUNTER-INTUITIVE BEHAVIOURS ADD COGNITIVE **LOAD**

NEITHER

- **CONVERSELY**, THE **MORE** YOU MAKE A FICTIONAL WORLD **LIKE** REALITY, THE MORE NATURAL AND **PERSUASIVE** IT IS
 - **TOLKIEN** WROTE ABOUT THIS – IT'S WHY HE SPENDS PARAGRAPHS DESCRIBING **BRACKEN**
- SO ... WHAT ABOUT THINGS THAT **NEITHER** THE FICTION **NOR** THE DEFAULTS OF REALITY COVER?
 - WATSON LIMPS IN THE **WRONG** LEG
 - **GERMANS** SPEAK **ENGLISH** TO EACH OTHER
 - ARROWS FLY **FURTHER** THAN THEY SHOULD
- OK, SO **NOW** IT GETS INTERESTING

EXPLANATIONS

- WATSON LIMPS IN THE WRONG LEG BECAUSE CONAN-DOYLE **FORGOT** WHICH LEG HE'D USED
- GERMANS SPEAK ENGLISH WHEN THE INTENDED AUDIENCE **DOESN'T** UNDERSTAND GERMAN BUT **DOES** UNDERSTAND ENGLISH
- LONG-RANGE ARROWS MAKE FOR BETTER **GAMEPLAY**



UNSATISFACTORY

- ALTHOUGH WE CAN **UNDERSTAND** THESE ANSWERS, THEY'RE **UNSATISFACTORY**
- THEY POKE **HOLES** IN THE **FABRIC** OF THE FICTIONAL WORLD
 - WE SIMPLY HAVE TO **ACCEPT** THEM AND MOVE **ON**
- THE VERY **REASON** THE GAME DEFERS TO REALITY IS THAT WE **UNDERSTAND** REALITY
- WE CAN'T MAKE RATIONAL **DEDUCTIONS** ABOUT A WORLD IF **UNSPECIFIED** RULES OF CAUSE AND EFFECT MAY NOT **APPLY** IN IT
 - THE "PRINCIPLE OF MINIMUM DEPARTURE"

NGORONGORO CRATER



EXCEPTIONS

- A WORLD'S FICTION EXPLAINS **EXCEPTIONS** TO THE **EXPECTED**
 - THAT IS, TO HOW THE **REAL** WORLD WORKS
 - (BUT SEE **LATER...**)
- **OUT-OF-FICTION** EXPLANATIONS ARE TO BE **AVOIDED**, BECAUSE THEY MEAN THAT PLAYERS CAN'T **TRUST** THE DESIGNER
- PLAYERS WHO HAVE NO **FAITH** THAT ANY STRANGENESS THEY SEE HAS AN **IN-FICTION** EXPLANATION WON'T **LOOK** FOR ONE
 - EVEN IF IT **DOES** HAVE AN IN-FICTION EXPLANATION!

TRUST

- SO, IF PLAYERS SEE SOMETHING WITH **NO** APPARENT **IN**-FICTION EXPLANATION, WILL THEY:
 - **REJECT** IT BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE IT PROBABLY HAS SOME **OUT**-OF-FICTION EXPLANATION?
 - **ACCEPT** IT BECAUSE THEY **TRUST** THAT AN IN-FICTION EXPLANATION IS **FORTHCOMING**?
- THIS IS **IMPORTANT**, BECAUSE IF PLAYERS THINK OF THE GAME **AS** A GAME AND NOT AS A **WORLD**, IMMERSION BECOMES DIFFICULT
- THIS **ISN'T** A PROBLEM IN **STRATEGY** GAMES, BUT IT **IS** A PROBLEM IN **MMOS**

EXAMPLE

- SO AS NOT TO INSULT ANY **GAMES**, HERE'S AN EXAMPLE FROM TV'S *GAME OF THRONES*
- GOT'S MAIN CHARACTERS ALMOST **NEVER** WEAR ANYTHING PRACTICAL ON THEIR **HEAD**
 - THEY'RE BARE-HEADED IN SCORCHING **DESERTS**, FREEZING **WASTELANDS** AND EVEN IN **BATTLE**
 - THE **MOST** YOU GET IS A CROWN, TIARA OR HOOD
- THEIR **OTHER** CLOTHES ARE HIGHLY-DETAILED, BUT NOT THEIR **HEADWEAR**
- FANS **NOTICED** THIS AND COMPLAINED THAT IT WASN'T **REALISTIC**

REALISTIC

- NOW THE THING IS, *GAME OF THRONES* IS **REALLY BIG ON DRAGONS**
- DRAGONS **ALSO** DON'T FEATURE IN REALITY
- WHY DID FANS COMPLAIN ABOUT INADVISABLE **HEADWEAR** BUT **NOT** ABOUT DRAGONS?
- WELL, THE DRAGONS WERE EXPLAINED BY THE **FICTION** BUT THE BAD HAT-CHOICE **WASN'T**
- SUPPOSE THAT THE *GAME OF THRONES* **SHOWRUNNERS** HAD BEEN ASKED TO **EXPLAIN** WHY HEADWEAR WAS A JOKE
- HOW COULD THEY HAVE **ANSWERED?**

OOPS ETC.

- POSSIBLE RESPONSES **INCLUDE**:
 - GOSH, WE HADN'T NOTICED – **THANKS!**
 - YES, THEY **SHOULD** WEAR HATS, BUT THEN YOU'D COMPLAIN YOU COULDN'T TELL THEM **APART**
 - THIS IS THE ACTUAL REASON
 - LEADERS IN WESTEROS **DON'T** WEAR HATS PRECISELY TO SHOW THAT THEY **ARE** LEADERS
- THE FIRST TWO ARE OUT-OF-FICTION AND ARE **NOT** SATISFYING
- THE **THIRD** ONE USES AN IN-FICTION EXPLANATION TO **COVER** THE REAL, OUT-OF-FICTION ANSWER, BUT IT **IS** SATISFYING

WRONG ANSWER

- A FICTIONALLY-COVERED EXPLANATION KEEPS THE PLAYER **WITHIN** THE FICTIONAL WORLD
- THIS IS TO BE **PREFERRED**, BECAUSE TAKING THEM **OUT** OF IT IS UNIMMERSIVE
- EVEN SO, AN **OUT-OF-FICTION** EXPLANATION IS **SUPERIOR** TO "DON'T WORRY YOUR PRETTY HEAD ABOUT IT, JUST ACCEPT IT LIKE YOU DO THE **DRAGONS**"
- IF WE **DID** SO ACCEPT IT, THAT WOULD MAKE THE LACK OF HEADWEAR **IMPORTANT** – BECAUSE THE **DRAGONS** ARE IMPORTANT

ICE

- HAVING FICTIONAL COVER MAKES FOR **TRUST**
- **LATER** IN GOT, JON SNOW FALLS INTO AN **ICE**-COVERED LAKE, BUT **DRAGS** HIMSELF OUT
- THERE'S **NO** FICTIONAL COVER TO EXPLAIN WHY HE DOESN'T HAVE **HYPOTHERMIA**
- WITH **TRUST**, WE CAN **SPECULATE** WHAT HIDDEN FACT HAS YET TO BE **REVEALED**
 - HE'S **COLD**-PROOF LIKE DAENERYS IS **FIRE**-PROOF
 - HIS SWORD IS **PROTECTING** HIM
 - SOMETHING IN THE WATER IS **WARMING** IT
- **WITHOUT** TRUST, WE **CAN'T**

VIVA LA DIRT LEAGUE PLAYS PUBG



EXPECTATIONS

- I HAD A "(BUT SEE **LATER...**)" EARLIER
- IF PLAYERS PLAY **ENOUGH** GAMES THAT ACT THE SAME **WAY**, THEY CAN DEFER TO **THAT** WAY INSTEAD OF TO THE **REAL** WORLD'S WAY
 - EXAMPLE: EXPECTING THAT GETTING **SHOT** IN THE **HEAD** WON'T **KILL** YOU
 - EXAMPLE: NOT NEEDING THE **LAVATORY**
 - EXAMPLE: DROPPING OBJECTS **DESTROYS** THEM
- BREAKING **THESE** EXPECTATIONS CAN **ALSO** BREAK IMMERSION, BUT HAPPILY IT'S ONLY A QUICK, **ONE-OFF** ADJUSTMENT

ARTHUR'S HEADPHONES



CAT SPECTACLES

- WHY WAS IT THAT THOSE **MIQO'TE** I SHOWED EARLIER WERE WEARING **GLASSES**?
- FEW MIQO'TE **DO** WEAR GLASSES, SO THEY'RE NOT **NECESSARY** FOR THE FICTION
 - EVEN IF THEY **WERE**, WHY GLASSES AND NOT A **MONOCLE** OR **PINCE-NEZ**?
- IT'S CLEAR THAT THESE CHARACTERS WERE GIVEN GLASSES TO WEAR **DELIBERATELY**
- IT'S **NOT** AN ACCIDENT OR INCOMPETENCE
 - THERE'S EVEN A **QUEST** TO GET ONE OF THE MIQO'TE CHARACTERS A **NEW** PAIR OF SPECTACLES

SPEAKING

- THE DESIGNER IS **TELLING** US SOMETHING HERE
- *FFXIV* TAKES PLACE IN A WHIMSICAL WORLD THAT AT TIMES IS FRANKLY **BONKERS**
 - CAT PEOPLE RESTING THEIR GLASSES ON EARS WHERE THEY DON'T HAVE EARS IS JUST **ONE** EXAMPLE
- SUCH EXAMPLES INFORM THE PLAYER THAT THEY **CAN'T** TRUST EVERYTHING **ALL** THE TIME
 - IT'S **SAFE** TO GO WITH THE FLOW FOR SMALL, AMUSING *NON SEQUITURS*
- FOR THE BIG, **IMPORTANT** STORYLINES, THOUGH, **THEN** WE **CAN** TRUST THE DESIGNER

LAMPSHADING

- **LAMPSHADING** IS A TRICK **WRITERS** USE WHEN THEY **DO** SOMETHING THEY KNOW WILL AFFECT **SUSPENSION** OF **DISBELIEF**
- IT INVOLVES CALLING ATTENTION TO THE **IMPLAUSIBLE** FEATURE, THEN MOVING **ON**
- THE WRITER IS **CONFESSING** THAT THEY'RE **STRESSING** THE FICTION SOMEWHAT
- THIS **REASSURES** THE AUDIENCE THAT THE FICTIONAL WORLD WORKS LIKE THE **REAL** ONE
 - “THE REAL-WORLD WEIRD THING IS WEIRD HERE, TOO!”
- **FFXIV DOES DO** SOME LAMPSHADING

WHAT WILL YOU SAY?

What will you say?

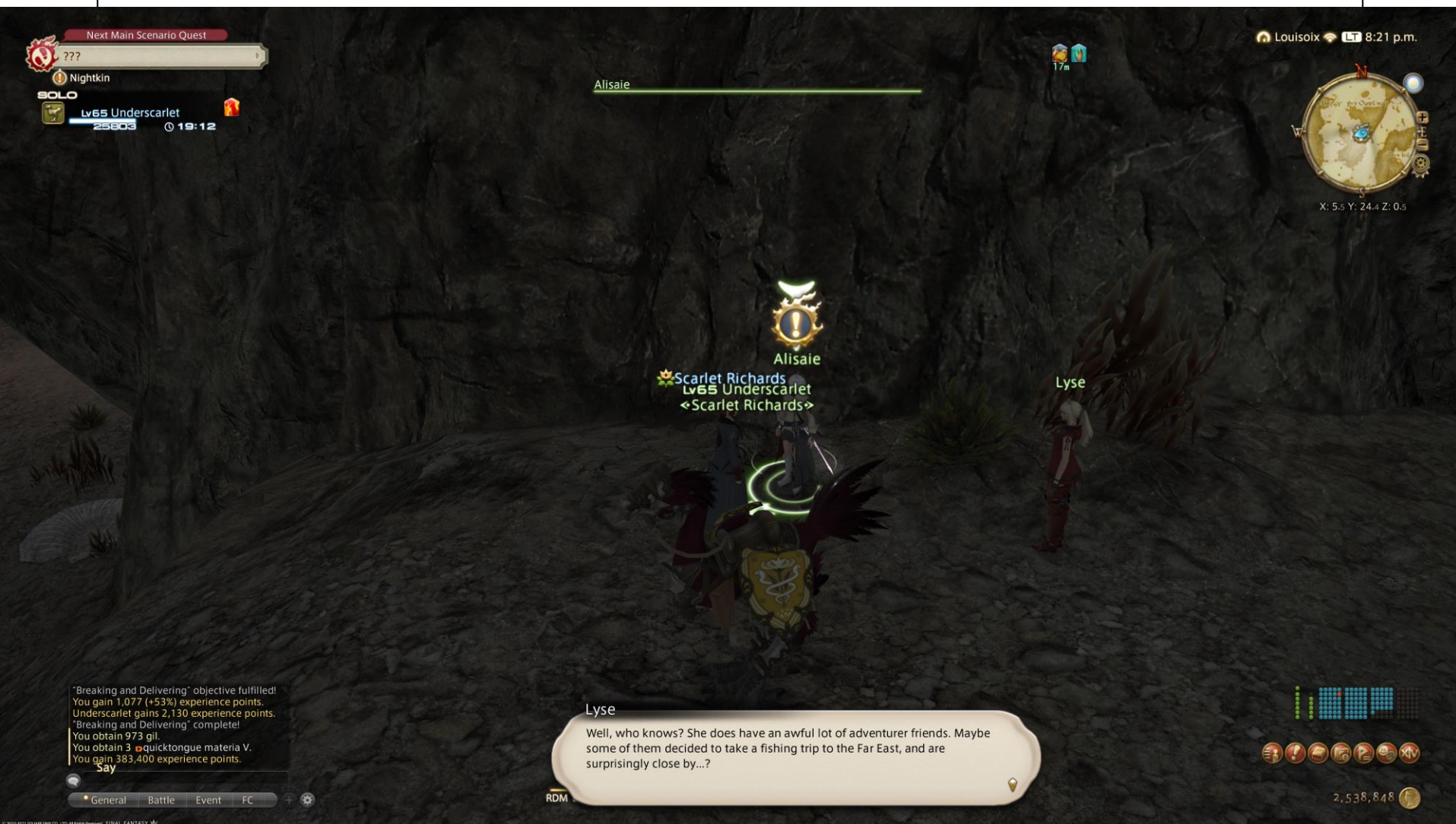
...This is another one of those moments where it really doesn't matter what I have to say, isn't it?
Oh, sod this.

TALKING TURTLE



Soroban
By the kami! A talking turtle!

FISHING TRIP



SHADELESS LAMP

- MIQO'TE GLASSES ARE **NOT** LAMPSHADING, BUT THEY'RE THERE FOR SIMILAR **REASONS**
- THEY'RE **AMONG** THE WAYS THAT PLAYERS **LEARN** WHERE THE **BOUNDARIES** LIE BETWEEN THE IMPORTANT AND THE UNIMPORTANT
- FFXIV IS A WORLD OF **WHIMSY**, SO DETERMINING WHAT'S **SUPERFICIAL** AND WHAT'S **DEEP** IS A NECESSARY SKILL
- BY SHOWING THAT CHARACTER APPEARANCE IS **NOT** IMPORTANT, IT TELLS THE PLAYER IT CAN BE **IGNORED** FOR GAMEPLAY PURPOSES

MESSAGES

- THERE ARE ONLY **TWO** LEGITIMATE REASONS FOR HAVING SOMETHING WITH NO FICTIONAL COVER
- FLASHBACK!
 - ITS SAYING SOMETHING ABOUT THE **GAME**
 - ITS SAYING SOMETHING ABOUT **REAL LIFE**
- THESE ARE ESSENTIALLY TO DO WITH THE **ART** OF GAME DESIGN
- I'VE JUST EXPLAINED HOW FFXIV SHUNS FICTIONAL COVER TO SAY SOMETHING ABOUT THE **GAME**
- HOW CAN DOING SO SAY SOMETHING ABOUT **REAL LIFE?**

EASTER EGGS

- **OVERT** REFERENCES TO REAL LIFE SUCH AS EASTER EGGS ARE **NOT** EXAMPLES OF THIS
- IF YOU NAME YOUR CRATER IN WOW AFTER THE ONE YOU BASED IT ON IN TANZANIA, WHAT ARE YOU **SAYING** TO PLAYERS?
- YOU'RE TELLING THEM THAT THIS IS **NOT** A SELF-CONTAINED REALITY, IT'S **JUST A GAME**
- IF THAT'S WHAT YOU **WANT** TO TELL THEM, THAT'S PERFECTLY **FINE!**
- WHATEVER, IT'S **COST** YOUR WORLD **INTEGRITY** AND **IMMERSIVENESS**

REASON

- THE **REASON** THAT EASTER EGGS AND OTHER REAL-WORLD ELEMENTS (E.G. CASH STORES) DON'T **COUNT** IS THAT THEY'RE NOT **ART**
 - WELL, THEY **CAN BE** ART, BUT IT'S **NOT** THE ART OF **GAME DESIGN**
- THE ART OF GAME DESIGN IS CARRIED BY ITS **GAMEPLAY**
 - IT'S NOT "MAKING THE INTANGIBLE TANGIBLE"
 - IT'S "MAKING THE UNSHOWN SHOWN"
- **BECAUSE** OF THIS INDIRECTION, ALMOST **ALL** STATEMENTS ABOUT REALITY ARE **IN-FICTION**

OUT?

- WHY "ALMOST" THERE?
- TO BE **OUT-OF-FICTION**, THE REFERENCE TO REALITY WOULD HAVE TO BE **OF** REALITY
 - WHETHER PERSONAL, POLITICAL, SOCIAL, ...
- THIS CAN **SORT-OF** BE ACHIEVED IF THE FICTION OF THE GAME IS THAT IT **IS** REALITY
 - ARGS ARE USUALLY THE OTHER WAY ROUND (REALITY IS THE GAME), BUT MAYBE **COULD** WORK
- THE MMO *THE SECRET WORLD* **HAS** SUCH A FICTION, BUT **STILL** ONLY SAYS THINGS ABOUT REALITY THROUGH METAPHOR AND **ANALOGY**

ART

- GAMES **CAN** JUST FLAT-OUT MAKE A STATEMENT ABOUT THE REAL WORLD THROUGH THE **MEDIUM** OF THEIR GAMEPLAY
 - **EDUTAINMENT** GAMES WILL, FOR EXAMPLE
- IF THEY **DO** THAT, THOUGH, THEY BECOME MERE **OFFSHOOTS** OF REALITY
- THEREFORE, IF YOU WANT TO SAY SOMETHING ABOUT THE REAL WORLD IN A VIRTUAL WORLD, **USE** THAT AS THE **BASIS** OF YOUR **FICTION**
- IF YOU **DON'T** WANT TO SAY ANYTHING AT ALL, WHY ARE YOU EVEN **MAKING** THE GAME?

IN SUMMARY

- REALISTICNESS IS WHAT PLAYERS:
 - **EXPECT** TO SEE WHEN THE FICTION **SAYS** THEY SHOULD SEE IT
 - EXPECT TO SEE WHEN THE FICTION SAYS **NOTHING** BUT THE DEFAULT **NON-FICTION** DOES
- NORMALLY THE NON-FICTION IS THE WORLD WE **LIVE** IN, BUT IT CAN BE THE **GAME** GENRE
- IF YOUR GAME **ISN'T** REALISTIC THEN THE PLAYERS WON'T (INDEED CAN'T) **TRUST** YOU
 - ANY STORY IS THEREFORE **SUNK**
 - WORSE, YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO **SAY** MUCH AT ALL

QUEST COMPLETE!

