Characters as Gateways to the Game World

This paper will present characters as a gateway to understanding a game world. It considers game worlds to be *hyperdiegeses*, (see Hills, 2002), of an imaginary world that can be transmedial. Existing theories suggest that information about imaginary worlds is obtained through either story-telling (see Ryan, 2014; Jenkins, 2006; Wolf, 2012) or the concept of infrastructures (see Wolf, 2012). However, as of yet there is no theory that considers characters as a source to provide the player with information about the game world in order to make sense of it. This is relevant because in Japanese role-playing games in particular, the player heavily engages with different characters as a mandatory and non-mandatory part of the game. Through a textual analysis of the *Eiyuu Densetsu: Kiseki* game series (2004 – 2014), this paper will therefore consider characters as a factor of consistency through which the player can obtain knowledge about the game world to make sense of it.

Despite the *Kiseki* games mostly being set in the same world, the (player-) characters, place, circumstances, story, etc. change every other game. There is no apparent connection between the individual games, making it difficult for the player to relate to the new setting the game places her in. However, by considering game characters as the central element that shape the game world in which they move, based on the so-called Japanese *media mix* (see Condry, 2013; Steinberg, 2012)*,* this paper demonstrates that the characters connect different instalments – sometimes even different worlds. The characters' appearances in various instalments indicate continuity between them to which the *implied player* (see Espen Aarseth, 2007) can relate in order to understand the world she is placed in.

When characters share their knowledge, which often shows their point of view of the world, the player gains pieces of knowledge about the world, which she experiences directly and indirectly. In this sense, similar to Eiji Otsuka's *narrative consumption* (2010), characters become the gateway for the *implied player* to the game world. This is a role that is not only reserved for the player-character, but can be applied to non-playable characters as well (Blom, 2017).

Furthermore, when we consider game characters as a gateway to the game world, the *Kiseki* series demonstrates that they are a factor of consistency that connects the game world to other various texts they appear in, such as certain stories in *manga* or *anime*, and affirm the flow of continuity between them. The knowledge that familiar characters produce through their appearances in different game instalments and other media give the *implied player* an understanding about the circumstances of the world as they allow her to connect one situation to another. This way, familiar characters are able to give situations a specific meaning that indicate not only continuity, but also reveal that they make the connection possible at all.

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