

## King Solomon's Mines (cleared). Cartography in digital games and imperial imagination.

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*Notwithstanding the progress of discovery on the coasts and borders of that base continent the map of its interior is still but a wide extended blank... Sensible of this stigma, and desirous of rescuing the age from a charge of ignorance, which, on other respects, belongs so little to its character, a few individuals, strongly impressed with a conviction of the practicability and utility of thus enlarging the fund of human knowledge, have formed the plan of an Association for Promoting the discovery of the interior parts of Africa. (extract from the African Association manifesto)*

### Travels in the Interior of Skyrim Province

I found myself standing at the grotto entrance, trembling with fear and blinded by the sun - a prisoner miraculously saved from the executioner's axe. After my daring escape, I navigated the narrow and poorly-lit corridors of an underground complex, and have reached a den of spiders of enormous size. The bronze-colored female laid four to six eggs from which younglings hatched after several days of incubation. In the same cavern, I encountered an enormous brown bear, hibernating for winter - the spiders, although carnivorous, left him alone.

Bypassing the bear, I turned left and reached the surface. In a blink of an eye, my fear and worry was gone: at my feet, the beautiful valley opened, rich with dark fir trees, colourful flowers and meek, lush grass. In the background, mighty, snow-covered peaks were rising above clouds, gleaming in the sun. Such was the beauty of this wild, untamed place that I shook of all my previous tribulations and merrily followed my native guide into the inviting mouth of the valley. Within minutes, I made at least three important discoveries and marked them on my map.

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The short piece above is a summary of my memories of the first few minutes with *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (Bethesda Game Studios, 2011). It provides quite an accurate account of the experience offered by the game. I have tried to maintain the conventions of the '19<sup>th</sup>-century explorer's diary' literary genre; accounting journeys, discoveries and observations of naturalists travelling around African and South-American interiors, or trying to penetrate North-Western Passage. Despite the obvious shortcomings of my prose, there are several similarities between John Barrow's 'Mungo Park's', or Richard Lander's journals, and the way the first experience with the world of *Skyrim* is framed: there is a solitary explorer, high on a hill, gazing at the landscape opening before him and describing it in a picturesque style. The landscape is used to paint convention as an aesthetic base for his narrative and although the topic is living nature, the account is more of an *ekphrasis* than plain description. If there is any sign of a native population present, it either becomes part of a picture and dissolves in the natural world or is mentioned only when it directly serves the explorer (Pratt, 1992). In the case of my journey through *TESV: Skyrim* tutorial, there was a mandatory non-player character (NPC) companion - yet, in my narrative he appears only once, when he guides me toward the first place of 'discovery'.

The only role of such a native guide, a person who obviously knows the area the explorer is going to traverse, is to lead the European toward an important land-formation and to allow its discovery. This is precisely what the guide in *TESV: Skyrim* does - he explains the world to the Dragonborn, the protagonist, and leads him or her towards important places and landmarks. Soon, discoveries are made: the player is informed (by sound and text appearing onscreen) that he has just discovered Spirit Stones, the Village of Riverwood, the Ruins of Bleakfalls Barrow and so on - even the cave Dragonborn emerges from after the tutorial sequence and is marked as 'discovered'.

It is obvious that the guide knew all those places before, as he explains all important details. The village is populated. Yet, the knowledge of the indigenous population means nothing: only the protagonist (and the player) has the ability to make discoveries, as the act is directly related to marking newly-located places on the map that only the player can access. Again, the similarity is striking: discoveries made by European explorers were directly

correlated with the process of adding a place (or a plant, or an animal, or a natural phenomenon) to a supposedly positive, objective scientific knowledge - geography and natural history. As this kind of reasoning was unavailable to the natives, they were unable to discover anything; despite their apparent knowledge of freshly discovered phenomena. This was no coincidence as Mary Louis Pratt claims the apparently benignant anti-conquest of naturalists was sprung by Carl Linnaeus' work on universal systematics, which in turn initiated a new kind of distinctly-European science-rooted awareness (Pratt, 1992).

My aim in this paper is to analyse 'in-game' maps as used in open-world games; conceiving these maps as tools of anti-conquest and framing player-activities in such games as similar to the 19<sup>th</sup> century exploration of African or South American interior. Therefore, I will analyse the relations between the gamescape and the map to explore how both of these elements are constructed in open-world single player games. I shall argue that such a setup is a derivative of an imperial worldview and is rooted in imperial fantasies of controlling and exploiting the world. To do so, I will employ two important contexts: 19<sup>th</sup> century maps and travelogues, analysed by Mary Louis Pratt in *Imperial Eyes* (Pratt, 1992), and the use of maps in Victorian adventure prose, especially in Henry Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (Haggard, 1907). My objective is to present a connection between in-game cartography and imperial imagination, although I am less interested in colonial issues of dividing and settling the land or moving borders. For this reason, I am focusing on protagonist-driven single-player 'open-world' games and I omit strategy games about ruling and dividing the land. I understand 'imperialism', after Edward Said, as ideology justifying the superiority of stronger culture over weaker; more connected to the series of images than to practice of settling and ruling over foreign land (Said, 1993).

The connection between video games (in a much more general approach) and travelogues is far from new. In dialogue between Mary Fuller and Henry Jenkins, both authors claim there are several similarities between the way gamescapes and recollections of exploratory journeys are experienced (Fuller and Jenkins, 1995). Fuller compares the eagerness to find new digital land to the urge driving 16<sup>th</sup> century sailors, and Jenkins uses the comparison to

paint video games as an American form of narrative (ironically, he is interpreting Super Mario Bros). I wholeheartedly agree with the main argument of this very insightful text: the drive to travel, discover and experience yet another brave, new world seems to be one of main reasons behind video-gaming. It therefore can be identified as one of the potential motives behind the high prestige of open-world games and 'Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games' (MMO RPGs) within games culture. Yet, there are two crucial differences I wish to point out. First, Fuller and Jenkins address 'platformer' games; a fascinating, high-speed genre that does not allow to move back. In an open-world, the player can revisit already discovered areas (and sometimes is forced to do so). He or she has more time to appreciate the surroundings and can potentially even take some screenshots. Therefore, the player interacts with the gamescape in a quite different, more reflexive, manner. Moreover, the urge to press forward is not motivated by the game engine alone: occasionally, the player needs to decide where they will go next, into which cavern she will descend, which mountain to will climb. The second difference between genre analysed by Fuller and Jenkins and open-world games is even more crucial: in contrast to platformer games, open-worlds have a map already in place. It usually presents major landmarks and - most importantly - borders of the area which the player can explore. Distance is not measured only in the number of levels finished, it is documented on the map by the appearance of more and more markings; denoting various places already visited (and discovered). The protagonist in the genre I am discussing is not only a relentless explorer, pressing forward - he is also a cartographer, documenting his journeys on the map.

### **Involuntary Cartographer**

Existing analyses of video game cartography, undertaken from the post-colonial perspective that I am interested in, focus mainly on historical strategy games. This choice seems to be motivated by two interwoven reasons. The first reason is somewhat obvious: there is a rather straightforward relation between the concept of warring nations claiming more and more land, until the saturation of available territory, and the inevitable conflict that results between imperial and colonial ideologies. As Souvik Mukherjee observes, some strategy games address 'Empire directly in...title and content' (Mukherjee, 2015: 306). But there is another fascinating aspect to those

games in relation to cartography: as Sybille Lammes and Shoshanna Magnet point out, the gamescape is simultaneously the map (Magnet, 2006; Lammes, 2010).

Both those aspects of strategy games go hand-in-hand with the imperial metaphor of dividing the real land by map only - as was the case with the Great Survey in India or division of former Ottoman Empire into Arabic states after The Great War (Mukherjee, 2015). In case of real empires, this practice can serve as a grim memento to Baudrillard's famous observation on maps predating and shaping the territory (Baudrillard, 1994). In case of strategy games, the distinction between map and territory is nonexistent as the gamescape constantly re-shapes to reflect player's will, imprinted upon the game world. As there is no territory behind the map, each aspect of the real, historical land that the gamescape is modeled upon lacks any details unknown or unaddressed by the designers: they simply do not exist within the game. This is why areas further from the mainstream 'Western' historical narrative are usually portrayed with less care for historical accuracy and primarily serve as places to act out fantasies of exoticism (Mukherjee, 2016). Such is the case with the *Tropico* series of games employing stereotypical Latinidad fantasies, complete with military coups and cigar factories; a player's playground (Magnet, 2006).

The relation between map and territory in character-driven games receives significantly less critical attention. Existing analyses lean toward de Certeau's division between the map and the route (de Certeau, 1984). Stephan Günzel mentions the auto-filling map of *Doom* in such a context, claiming that it tells more about the player's movement than about the world itself (Günzel, 2007). Sybille Lammes observes that 'right through this explorative journey [...] the player both develops a spatial story with her- or himself as the main character, as well as being an imaginary (military) cartographer who interacts with maps and changes them according to the spatial advancements that are made' (Lammes, 2010: 2-3). However, as Lammes (2010: 3) stipulates just a few sentences later, 'this is rather different from how maps have figured in colonial ideologies', as such maps were ideologically constructed as transfixed and eternal depictions of the 'true' state of the world (Lammes, 2010: 2-3). According to Lammes, the mutable nature of the map in strategy games is

at odds with the way the colonial powers wished to present themselves [Lammes, 2010].

The correlation between an individual player's choices and the way the map fills with symbols is undeniable. Perhaps this aspect of playing with a map in avatar-based open-world games can thus be interpreted as the 'tour', in the de Certeauian sense. Yet, there are several important factors that I would like to take into account. In said games, the map itself usually predates the act of playing. In *TESV: Skyrim*, *The Witcher III* [CD Projekt RED, 2015], *Assassin's Creed* series [Ubisoft Montreal, 2007 and subsequent] and even *Grand Theft Auto* (GTA) [DMA Design 2001, and subsequent], the map is available immediately after the tutorial section, showing most of the game landmass and its borders. It is usually free of any markings, but shows major landmarks, rivers and other prominent geological features, according to the game setting. In more recent *Assassin's Creed* games, there are no mountains, but most prominent monuments of city architecture are depicted right away. Similarly, in *GTA*, the player can see highways as well as natural phenomena. The land is partially discovered; its 'coastal line' is established, so the player knows, more or less, what to expect. Their task is to find the fine details and fill the map with exacts: reshaping it from vague to precise. The situation echoes the mission of African Association that I quoted as the motto at the start of this paper: at the dawn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the shape of the world was more-or-less known and it was time to pay attention to details.

The map can be seen as a tool that the player requires in order to fill the outline of the game world, to plot the desired route toward whatever goal they desire. In an open-world, the map is the only way to coordinate traveling. But there is also an obligation toward the map: during their travels, the player fills it with various markings, denoting important places within the game world. The player can stumble upon them by pure chance, but many games subtly point the player toward important, 'map-worthy' spots. In *TESV: Skyrim* there are contours of such places appearing on the compass at the center of the screen, inviting player to detour and add it to the collection of places mapped. The *Assassin's Creed* series lets player add several such places at once, on condition that the protagonist climbs a vantage point [I will come back to this motif later]. But there are more perverse examples: Geralt the Witcher can

approach a notice board in any human settlement to add several question marks to the map - they mark places worth visiting, clearly stating that the discovery is just systematisation of local folk's knowledge. In *Rise of the Tomb Raider* (Crystal Dynamics, 2015), Lara Croft follows the footsteps of her predecessors; explorers of bygone era. To gain access to cartographic knowledge, she has to locate murals, lost journals and even abandoned maps to absorb findings of explorers who tried to map the area before her.

No matter how the discoverable place is found, the process itself is almost always the same: the protagonist needs to approach it and, when within range, a sound and text are displayed onscreen to announce the discovery. At the same moment, a marker is added onto the map at this location. In this brief and seemingly natural moment, the complex issue of imperial imagination underlying the relation between the game-map and territory, unfolds. The process itself is purely spectacular: to make the discovery, the player needs to navigate the protagonist into the proximity of an object and establish a visual contact. Then, everything happens automatically, usually without any intervention, although in some cases (i.e. in *Assassin's Creed* or in the *Tomb Raider* series) a 'special gaze' must be activated. This echoes the process of making discoveries within African or American interior, dubbed by Pratt (1992: 201) the 'monarch-of-all-I-survey scene', after opening line of the poem *The Solitude of Alexander Selkirk*, by William Cowper. The only necessary condition for the explorer was to see the phenomenon: 'In the end, the act of discovery itself, for which all the untold lives were sacrificed and miseries endured, consisted of what in European culture counts as a purely passive experience—that of seeing'. (Pratt, 1992: 203-204). The act of discovery can be deliberately staged, if the explorer is actively pushed towards the discovery, or it can be coincidental, when the player simply stumbles upon an interesting or important landmark previously unknown. However, in both cases, it is unavoidable and there is no way to unsee what was once seen. Games discussed follow this pattern quite literally and there is nothing to block the marking of the object on the map. In both cases, the player/explorer seems to be only an extension of some higher entity, the one who decides what constitutes discovery.

The spectacular aspect of 'monarch-of-all-I-survey' scene is particularly intense in *Assassin's Creed*. In most of the series, the map is initially clouded and needs to be revealed - only the general outline of the area is known. Later, in the last two games, the map evolves into a 3D model of a city, but it is still deprived of useful information. To access it, the player needs to climb a high point in the city or countryside, marked by the presence of a large eagle (it is hard to imagine a more heavy-handed metaphor for seeing) and activate so-called 'synchronisation'. The perspective shifts: the camera slowly recedes, encircling the assassin. In this way, several effects are produced. Firstly, the landscape is presented to the player - thus, it can be mapped. Second, the moment of discovery is framed in a heroic, almost god-like aesthetic: the only constant point onscreen is the protagonist, a solitary figure standing high above the ground. The act of looking at the city from above, as Michel de Certeau observes:

'transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was "possessed" into a text that lies before one's eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god. The exaltation of a scopic and gnostic drive: the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more'.  
[de Certeau, 1984: 92].

But there is even more in said scene: if the assassin is given god-like qualities to transform the world into a text (or, to be precise, a text of a map), what of the player's gaze, transfixed in watching the protagonist who watches the city? From the player's perspective, it is more important to observe the act of seeing, than to see for themselves. Thus, the synchronisation in *Assassin's Creed* serves not only as the apotheosis of the assassin, but also as the commentary on the power of imperial gaze; transforming a chaotic, incomprehensible gamescape into cartographic order.

*Assassin's Creed* (and the franchise as a collective) is one of very few games to employ such a subtle and subversive metaphor to problematise the spectacular trope of discovery. Most games tie the act of mapping the gamescape to the eyes of the player: she is the one who needs to see certain areas or objects. However, it is worth noting that despite being free to roam the open-world, the player has nothing to say regarding the discovery. Not only are objects put onto the map, regardless of the player's actions and will, but



also the player usually has no say about which objects are map-worthy. Usually, the player can put only one temporary marker on the map, denoting the place she wishes to go. Ironically, when a goal is reached, the marker disappears - it renders the marker as a direct opposite to permanent icons for various categories, denoting important places already discovered. The importance of a map-marker in the game itself is pre-determined: even if the player pays no attention to a cartographic category (for example the user never sharpens Gerlat's swords in *The Witcher III*), it is always marked on the map and the best the player can do is to temporarily filter it off.

### **Player as Naturalist**

When discussing the beginning of modern travel narratives, Mary Louis Pratt stresses two important events: (1) the launching of the first international scientific expedition, and (2) the publication of Carl von Linné's *Systema Naturae* in 1735 (Pratt, 1992). The first affirmed the conviction that scientific expeditions are independent from the political interests of particular empires. The second, provided what Pratt (1992: 4) calls 'global or "planetary" consciousness': a distinctly modern ability to perceive whole world as single entity governed by systemic rules of nature. Moreover, despite being 'global', it resulted in the interpretation of Northern Europe as the center of the natural system, against which all other phenomena are measured. The basis of such a belief was rooted in Linné's universal classification, as it allowed the inclusion of any plant (and later - any beast), no matter how strange, into the rational and scientific taxonomy. To prove its usefulness, Linnaeus' disciples travelled all around the globe, collecting specimens from unknown species and relentlessly indexing them into their master system.

The Player's position as an in-game involuntary cartographer, seems to be similar. Their task, regarding cartographic taxonomy, is to find phenomena belonging to a certain category, usually sharing visual qualities, and to mark them onto a map using said category. For example, in *The Witcher III*, among various markings shown on the map there is the 'monster's den' category: this is where monsters are born. It is universal, regardless of the monster type. Therefore, dens of puny nekkers and mighty griffons are marked with the same icon, showing the general category and foregoing any specifics. Categories are completely universal, arbitrary, unambiguous and external.

The player cannot determine the classification of certain places or objects; it is done automatically. Moreover, one phenomena can belong to only one category and can be marked on map as such. Finally, not all specimens are included in the category: sometimes, especially during longer quests, objects normally marked on the map are discarded without effect. There is also the possibility to encounter an object possessing all visual qualities of a certain category, yet still not belonging to it as it lacks certain functionality – after all, usefulness is the most important cartographic criterion. The only agent capable of dividing objects into categories and putting them on the map is the player: NPCs lack access to the whole area of cartographic knowledge. The issue is sometimes commented on within the game narrative - Geralt of Rivia or Lara Croft are agents of rational, scientific reason, constantly battling folklore superstition. But even without such commentary, the distinction between player's and NPC's capabilities are in place: simple denizens of Skyrim Province probably cannot distinguish between a Dwemer ruin, a Nordic barrow, a mine and a simple natural cave; an act the player does without even looking inside the place. The whole mechanism exemplifies the naturalist's dream fulfilled: everything can be divided by categories so precise and objective, that there is no room for human initiative and interpretation. When a specimen is observed, it is immediately classified.

Yet, not every phenomenon is map-worthy and the game makes a distinction between those places and objects that should be marked and everything else. The line of division is clearly visible in *The Rise of the Tomb Rider*: the only geographic features marked on the in-game map are cave and tomb entrances. Overwhelmingly, the majority of objects with special icons are collectibles: byzantine coins, hidden survival packs, artifacts, documents and similar items Lara should find and excavate. When they first appear on the map, they are pure white. When found, they become slightly greyish and transparent, but they do not disappear. This way, two ends are met: firstly, the duty towards the archeological theme of the game is satisfied. Secondly, useful resources are separated from everything else: landmarks, ruins, places of human activity, or of great natural beauty, are all distinguished, although because the aforementioned categories cannot be exploited, they are of no consequence. In this way, the main connection between scientific naturalism and imperial interest is exposed. Although the cartographic

endeavor is seemingly morally pure and knowledge-oriented, it is a vanguard of violent exploitation of a described region. Even Alexander von Humboldt, with all his selflessness, described various American natural phenomena with utilitarian categories:

'the cannas, the heliconias with fine purple flowers, the costuses, and other plants of the family of the amomyms...form a striking contrast with the brown colour of the arborescent ferns, the foliage of which is so delicately shaped. The Indians made incisions with their large knives in the trunks of the trees, and fixed our attention on those beautiful red and golden yellow woods, which will one day be sought for by our turners and cabinet makers'. (Pratt, 1992: 130)

This strange mixture of scientific and utilitarian approach found its way into maps of the imperial period. When discussing imperial and colonial cartography, Jeffrey C. Stone points out their main difference - maps of the imperial period 'were based on instrumental observation which added a scientific dimension to the travellers' records, an important "civilising" element in legitimising the European penetration, presence and even interference in Africa' (Stone, 1988: 58). Stone further states that such imperial-period maps simultaneously served to promote private, commercial or missionary enterprises on the continent: therefore, they depict not only natural landmarks, but - for example - 'the farming and ranching potential of various parts of the country' (Stone, 1988: 58). They are directly opposed to colonial maps, preoccupied mostly with political divisions of the land - provincial and national borders - and forfeiting scientific observations almost completely. Regarding video games, such a distinction can be made between maps in character-driven open-world games, slowly filling with icons denoting various useful places (and their current state, if they can be depleted), and mutable maps in strategy games, preoccupied with shifting borders and areas of influence.

Uncovering all markings on the map - turning the 'white spot' into a fully mapped area by discovering all its secrets - is usually promoted by the game itself. Some games that do not emphasise exploratory effort, like the *GTA* series, simply correlate the game ending with a complete reveal of their maps: when the plot reaches an end, there is nothing more to discover. But in most

cases, there is no direct relation between the plot of the game, tasks given to the protagonist, and mapping the game terrain: Lara Croft is probably the only character with any real interest in cartography - although even in the case of *Tomb Raider* it is possible to finish the great adventure without completing the map. The encouragement for discovery is purely player-oriented. In the case of *Tomb Raider* or the *Assassin's Creed* series, there is percentile meter of game completion - it cannot reach 100% without cartographic obligation being met. Different titles, like *TESV: Skyrim*, reward the diligent naturalist with an achievement visible on their player profiles on 'Steam' or the 'Playstation® Network' (PSN). All those rewards are inaccessible to the protagonist and means nothing for the game narrative. Moreover, in-game cartographic tasks are usually directly at odds with the game story: to make discoveries, the player needs to steer the protagonist away from the plot objective, ignore the supposed urgency of a task at hand and wander the land in search of makeable places and objects. The cartographic duty is the player's and the player's alone: the protagonist is just a medium for making discoveries; the focal point for player's gaze. In no other part of an open-world game is the difference between the player's and protagonist's objectives so apparent. But there is a third layer to this relation, as the player is also a servant of the system. Play entails a universal and infallible cataloguing, a relentless division of the game world into things that are useful or useless, worthy or unworthy, waiting to be marked onto the map.

But the heroic narrative of the game is crucial for the imperial ideology to hold. Contrary to open colonial imaginaries of strategy games, most open-world single-protagonist titles (*GTA* aside) depict a lonely hero, usually a newcomer to the explored land, who travels around the country and faces many dangers just to selflessly help native population. This help comes in various forms, be it: freeing defenseless peasants from terrors lurking in the countryside - bandits and monsters, as is the case of *TESV* or *The Witcher III* - or defeating an external evil invading the land in *Dragon Age: Inquisition* (BioWare, 2014) or *Rise of the Tomb Raider*. Each time, the protagonist goes to great extent to justify his presence in the area as useful and benevolent. Without this kind of external help, the native population would be doomed. Sometimes, the protagonist is victimised: Lara Croft takes a great deal of discomfort, from nasty puncturing wounds to hunger and cold, just to reach

the goal. *The Witcher III* serves as an even more colorful example: Geralt is a true naturalist, recognising monster species from their tracks, and the markings left on victims, lonely feathers and such like. In his battles against monsters, he constantly reflects about proper taxonomy, differences between subspecies, and the idiocy of folk wisdom. In return, he is shunned by the very people he is saving, his benevolence and selflessness is rewarded with harsh words of rejection.

This kind of narrative constitutes what Mary Louis Pratt (1992: 8) called 'anti-conquest': the ideology of a morally pure and benignant imperial agent, motivated by curiosity and willing to sacrifice himself at the altar of science. When confronted with the ignorant stupidity of natives, he is always ready to help, especially with his Western medical knowledge. Despite being constantly harassed by hostile warlords, shamans and greedy native women, he remains paternalistically clement towards ungrateful natives, pointing out their several virtues in his journals. This kind of narrative is very characteristic for both travelogues and adventure novels set in Africa. Even though John Barrow, Hugh Clapperton and their ilk express usually sincere opinions,, their ideological background serves as justification for taking symbolic possession of explored land (Pratt, 1992). Geralt of Rivia and David Livingstone each believes they know the land better than people living on it for hundreds of years, and hence can make things easier for native populations - if only they can return home with the knowledge necessary to improve the land they traverse.

Once discovered and put on the map, marked places can be exploited: sometimes, as is the case in *Rise of the Tomb Raider* or *The Witcher III*, they are even divided between still useful and depleted, as already discussed. But there is also another important aspect of game cartography: it makes the world smaller. Discovering certain places allows the player to fast-travel between them - the protagonist is teleported to the other part of the world, without any risk or effort. This is for the good cause, as areas already known are deprived of their alluring power and there is nothing interesting in crossing them back and forth. From lands of danger, they are transformed into the mundane subject of imperial control, interconnected by means of quick and efficient journey. The opposition between hazardous and heroic

exploratory travel, and fast, efficient trips to different part of the empire is, as Edward Said claims, essential for exporting imperial ideology (Said, 1993) - and through its connections to imperial views on cartography in general, seem to effortlessly influence open-world games poetics.

### **Toward King Solomon's Mines**

There is one kind of icon on an in-game map that defies the logic of rational discovery sketched before: it is a gleaming circle showing the place protagonist should visit to move the plot forward or resolve a side-quest of some kind. In modern games, which always mark the goal region on the map, it is probably one of the first cartographic symbols the player will see after the game starts, luring him or her into the wild. This icon seems to defy all rules established above: it appears on the map without the moment of spectacular discovery. It is temporary and disappears as soon as the requirements of the quest are met, or player turns her attention elsewhere. Instead of the fixed certainty of a cartographic system, it denotes the unknown and the player usually learns that their initial impressions about the place they need to go through are wrong. Therefore, it does not quite meet the criteria of a rational world the rest of the in-game map denotes. Yet, despite the difference, this kind of relation between the map and the territory occupies an equally important position in an imperial code, as related to two very influential adventure novels: R. L. Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (Stevenson, 1883) and H. R. Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (Haggard, 1907).

Both books, extremely influential and well-researched, share similar narratives: an English gentleman is in possession of a map leading toward untold riches and embark upon a dangerous journey for reasons other than greed. According to W. Z Katz, this kind of narrative provides space to show virtues of English gentlemen: ingenuity, courage and purity in a testing setting (Katz, 1987). It can be also perceived as an open invitation to private investments in colonies, as it offers great opportunities for courageous businessmen (Daly, 2007). If read as a didactic children's novel, the narrative turns into a lecture on capitalism, virtues of prudence and diligence, and English claim to the world's treasures based on the character's merit - only in hand of capable British people can the riches be put to good use (Mathison, 2008). There is also a prominent reading of the map and terrain from *King*

*Solomon's Mines* as a depiction of the female body, violated by male Europeans (McClintock, 1995), already employed in the reading of strategy video games by Souvik Mukherjee (Mukherjee, 2015).

Regardless of the reading, some tropes remain constant: maps are 'blueprints leading to treasure, fame and fortune' (Mathison, 2008: 179) and represent a rightful entitlement to the riches for whoever finds the map. Maps are also ambiguous and imprecise. For instance, although Captain Flint's map precisely locates the island, the route to the treasure itself is incorrect; the pirate's gold was relocated and the map itself became useless. Similarly, in *King Solomon's Mines*, the map was painted with blood by a dying Portuguese explorer of old, who used native, non-scientific names of geographical features and does not show the exact route to the land of Kukuanaaland, nor the precise location of ancient diamonds. In both cases, the protagonists need to form an alliance with local people to uncover the secret. The procedure is quite similar to the usual structure of an open-world game quest: the player starts in a well-known area, ventures into unexplored wilds guided by the map that shows general directions, but lack details. The protagonist then fights off countless dangers and, upon arriving, learns that things are not as simple as it seemed. To receive the prize - in a form of treasures and experience points - the protagonist needs to appease the local population by presenting herself or himself as a savior and protector.

In the process, both heroes of adventure novels and players of video games verify the map. Although Captain Flint certainly knew his way around the map, he was not a naturalist: his map is a curious mixture of precise, scientific information and practical advice formulated like riddles:

'the doctor opened the seals with great care, and there fell out the map of an island, with latitude and longitude, soundings, names of hills, and bays, and inlets, and every particular that would be needed to bring a ship to a safe anchorage upon its shores. (...) Over on the back the same hand had written this further information: "Tall tree, Spyglass shoulder, bearing a point to the N. of N.N.E..."' (Stevenson, 1883: 20).

The map Allan Quatermain possesses is even more suspicious - the great white hunter even wonders if the drawing can be called a map. The process

of treasure-hunting is also a test of maps. In both novels, the maps pass it only partially: they contain relevant geographical information but they are wrong about the place the treasure is buried at - or they turn out to be irrelevant in the search for riches. Cartography and exploitation are suddenly distinguished from one another: geographic reason remains pure, unassociated with greed, as it turns out a native guide must replace the rationality of the map in order to capture treasure.

Complex interaction between cartography and treasure-hunting translates more or less directly into an interaction between exploration and resolving the plot in a typical open-world game. During the perilous trip toward the goal, new discoveries are made and marked, and then, during quest resolution, the map becomes useless, with the freedom of travel suspended until a plot point is resolved. Then, the problem disappears, as was the case in the cited novels: after removal of the treasure, mystic aura is removed from the place and it can be included in the order of cartographical knowledge. Open-world games treat their gleaming quest marker in a very similar fashion. After the task is resolved, the marker is removed - but all discoveries made during the quest remain. The lesson is that adventure and treasures fade away, but rational taxonomy of geographical knowledge is eternal.

The process of finishing single-player open-world games is similar to the final period of an adventure novel genre. With each player-move and each quest resolved, there is less and less exciting 'new space', full of new challenges. The player and the protagonist both serve as involuntary cartographers, exploring, mapping and usually exploiting new land to the point where no stone is left unturned. In the process, the narrative justifies the procedure with the story of a savior, who destroys those who threaten the indigenous population, and a naturalist, collecting and cataloguing various phenomena for greater good. The in-game map serves as journal of those endeavors, filling with icons as the game progresses. At the end, there is nothing more to do: explored and exploited land offers only the mechanical order of simulated NPC life, repeating meaningless actions without any obstruction. There are no more enemies: all creatures opposing the player are slain. There are no more desires: the player has fulfilled all personal NPC quests. There are no more treasures: each chest was searched, each vein of precious metal dug out,



each rare herb harvested. The naturalists task is finished, as anti-conquest turned the land into a self-regulating machine.

In the analysis of in-game cartography, I have attempted to show an issue central to video games. As the popularity and prestige of open-world games grow, the ubiquity of imperial imagination stays strong. The main model for building the relation between the human and the world is domination, masked as rational, paternalistic benevolence. With each world designed to be simultaneously saved and mapped, the specter of Allan Quatermain continues to haunt the media and, it seems, there is a long time before this will be finally put to rest.

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