DG8010 - Game Development - W2023
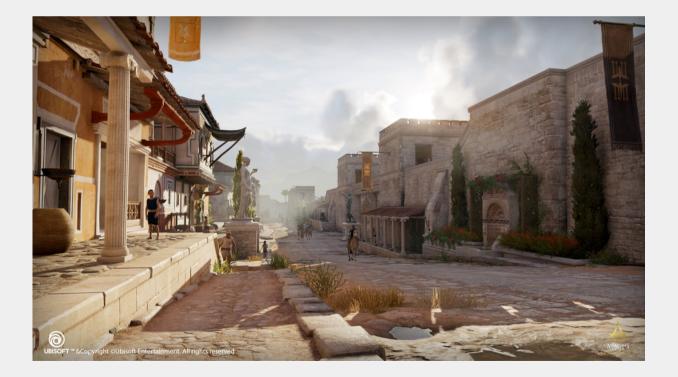
VIRTUAL WORLDBUILDING

Research on the role and process of worldbuilding in game design

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DEFINITION

- To construct an imaginary universe for the purpose of **cohesive storytelling**
- Establishes a set of rules for the world
- Necessary for immersing the audience and **evoking emotions**
- Similar techniques are used for worldbuilding in films and games
- More important for entirely fictional storylines and settings

Image 1: Fictional city in *The Matrix Awakens* video game

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

- **Goal**: to create a world that the audience wants to experience instead of just perceive
- Not only how things appear visually, but **how the world operates** as a whole
- Successful worldbuilding might appear so natural and easily-accepted that it goes unnoticed

HISTORY
- Current state of this fictional world
- Main historical events that shaped how the world currently is
- How the current world order was formed

GEOGRAPHY
- Physical traits of the location in which the story develops
- Climate, key landmarks, natural resources and how they shape inhabitants' lifestyles

POLITICS
- Government and law systems
- Who is in power
- Power distribution

STORYTELLING ELEMENTS FOR WORLDBUILDING IN GAMES

CULTURE
- Language(s) used
- Family structures & hierarchies
- Valued creations (artworks, literature, inventions, etc.)
- Unique traits of inhabitants

SOCIETY
- Social classes and conflicts
- Common knowledge & values
- Behaviors, beliefs, trends

ECONOMY
- Overall "wealthiness" of the collective
- How products & services are traded
- Leading industries
- Supply and demand levels

WORLDBUILDING WORKFLOW

- Requires work by different parts of the development team across various stages
- Begins at pre-production and continues through production process
- Could be approached through different perspectives

PRE-PRODUCTION **PRODUCTION** **POST-PRODUCTION**

PRE-PRODUCTION	PRODUCTION	POST-PRODUCTION
• Core concept: what's the story • Determine values the game is based upon • Discuss visual style (storyboarding) • Prototyping of elements	• Visual details of characters, environments & events • Physics simulations • Realistic audio effects • Refining each possible storyline	• Adjusting game details based on market feedback • New levels/series built upon existing game world

CASE STUDY #1

Assassin's Creed: Unity (2014)

- Open-world game developed by Ubisoft
- Set in Paris during the French Revolution
- **A balance of accuracy and creativity**: maintaining historical details while supporting a fictional storyline
- Addressing "**postcard effect**" -- players having an existing impression of what the place (Paris) should look like -- is crucial in worldbuilding
- Strategic design to convey game information in visually engaging ways

CASE STUDY #2

The Sims 4 (2014)

- Life simulation series developed by Maxis
- Realistic replicas of real-life scenarios; worldbuilding focuses on **unpredictability**
- Less programmed control over in-game events creates richer possibilities for players to explore
- **Introduction of AI** gives players additional flexibility in creating personalized storylines
- Took around 4 years to create diverse characters and complex environments

INDUSTRY TRENDS & SIGNIFICANCE

Being ethical matters because people engage in imaginary worlds with the same passion and emotion that they do their own real lives.

ANNE REID, Narrative Director

- As boundaries between film and games are increasingly blurred, **standards for game worldbuilding are getting higher**
- Games are getting more immersive, especially with new technologies (AR/VR)
- Less about mechanic completion of tasks; heavier focus on narratives and emotional connections

Ethical Worldbuilding

- Understand the consequences of game designs that are **"authentic reflections of humanity"**
- Address real-life issues through diverse representation and objective portrayals
- Examples: use gender-neutral player descriptions, no violence and assault for entertainment

SOURCES

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