The *Character-World* Relationship

Understanding Game Worlds through a Character Framework

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Abstract

Current frameworks, called in this thesis the *narrative-world* relationship and the *infrastructure-world* relationship, exclude characters as an element for locating information in imaginary worlds. This thesis introduces the *character-world* relationship as an additional framework for perceiving how the player makes sense of a game world as a *hyperdiegesis* of an imaginary world. Therefore, I ask the research question, "how do characters facilitate knowledge about game worlds and to what degree could they influence the player's perception of that world?". The *implied player* is constructed as a theoretical model to assist with the textual analysis conducted on the *Kiseki* series, a Japanese series of digital role-playing games. In the *character-world* relationship, characters are placed as the central element of games that, through their appearances, can create continuity between the various game instalments. They facilitate knowledge by acting as a gateway to the game world when they share information with the player, though it is mainly deep characters that can become these gateways as they are vital to the progression of the game's plot. The multiple frames of knowledge that the player obtains from different characters when they act as gateways provide the player with a double awareness that offers her a form of *additive comprehension* that changes the meaning of events occurring in the *Kiseki* games. Regardless, since the *character-world* relationship is established through an analysis of a game world, the player-character is specifically influential to the player's perception of that world. The player-character determines whether the player can obtain information from other characters depending on its personal position in the game world. Moreover, the player-character provides the player with a set of affordances that she can choose to act upon that enables her to attain *additive comprehension*, thereby partially influencing her perception of the game world herself as well.

Keywords: character-world relationship, implied player, additive comprehension, characters, continuity, narrative, infrastructure.

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Introduction

There are countless times I have found myself enjoying the quirks and habits of the characters that I encountered in the *Kiseki* video game series. What stood out to me were the rich personal backgrounds that corresponded perfectly to the environment of the game world. Characters encountered during the many quests of the series would tell stories about the places that the player-characters were travelling to, or they would provide an account about the history of other countries in the *Kiseki* game world, about specific inventions, or just talk about themselves. The information they gave to the player-character of the games would be received by me, the player, as well. This information is useful, because the game world of the *Kiseki* series is large. The games all take place on the Zemuria continent, but the player is introduced to a new country with new characters every other game. The player has to learn about each new location, because no location in the *Kiseki* world is similar. The living standards, class systems (if there is one), form of government, institutions, and characters as well, all differ in each country. This raises the question about how the player makes sense of the *Kiseki* as a game world every time she is thrown into a new and unfamiliar part of it.

According to Mark J.P. Wolf, secondary worlds – imaginary worlds that differ from our world, comprise structures which provide a framework through which one can locate information about that specific world (2012, 154). He distinguishes two main structures: narrative and infrastructure. When we consider narrative a framework for locating information about a fictional world, one would commonly make sense of this world through stories about it. The *Kiseki* game series tells stories as a progression game (see Juul, 2005, 5). In progression games, the sequence of events is strongly controlled by the designers and is found in most games with story-telling aspirations (Ibid., 5). In every *Kiseki* game instalment, certain pre-defined events happen in which the player must participate in order to complete the game. By performing mandatory quests or tasks (figure 1), the player triggers other events to advance the game and eventually reach its conclusion. Therefore, from a narrative framework, the player locates information in the *Kiseki* world through its main story and learns from it as the game advances.
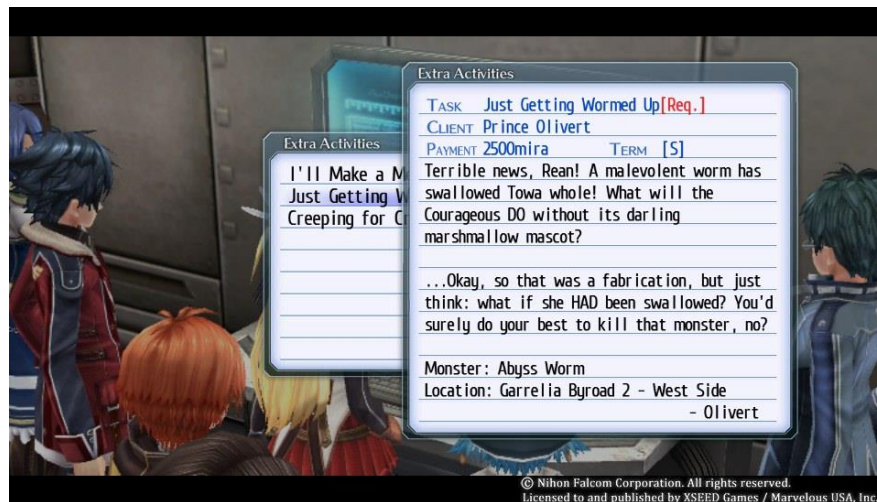
Figure 1:One of the many requests for a mandatory quest that will make the game advance.

Wolf also discusses so-called "infrastructures" as a framework for locating information about an imaginary world (2012, 154). Part of this infrastructure are world elements such as maps, timelines, nature, culture, philosophy and more. In the *Kiseki* world the player can also engage with many aspects that are not mandatory for the game's story to advance, but share specific details about that world's infrastructure. For instance, optional quests such as testing a pair of newly imported shoes reveal bits and pieces about the import regulations of the Erebonian Empire, but the player can also try to gather as many recipes as possible and learn in the process about the local cuisine. Books can be read in the libraries that the player comes across or are sold in various bookshops. They often disclose information about Zemuria's history, sports, myths, companies, or contain fictional stories written by famous writers (figure 2). Simply put, there is a lot that the player can learn about the world through infrastructures without it being part of the main story.
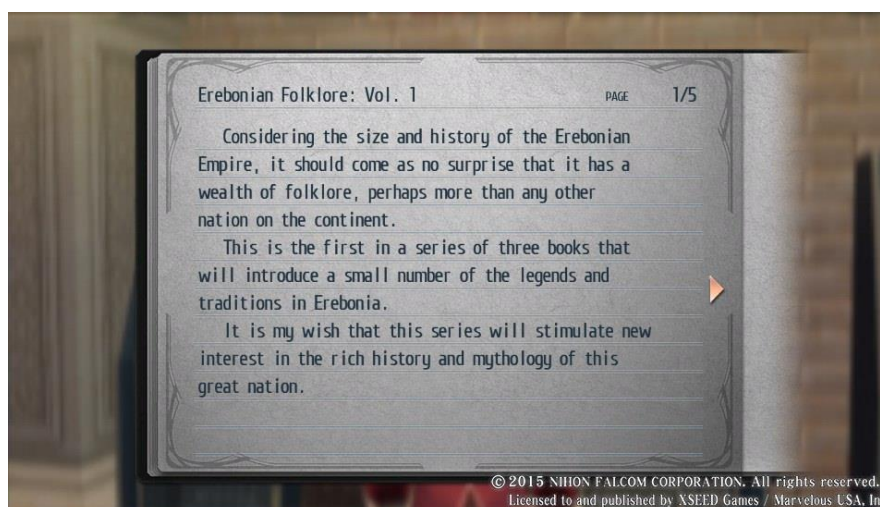

Figure 2: One of the pages of a book on Erebonian folklore.

Both narrative and infrastructure provide a framework that demonstrates how a player can learn about a fictional world. Yet, no framework exists that allows for characters as a source to provide the player with information about the game world. However, in the *Kiseki* games, the player generally acquires information about the world through interaction with characters, and it contains an abundance of moments where interaction with characters is not even required to advance the game. When interaction with characters are part of the main story, characters tend to be a source that conveys information about the situation that the player-character will be in, but even non-mandatory actions with characters can express the circumstances of the world that they move in when characters reveal information about their interests, reasons of acting, families, regrets and more. Characters also enable the player-character to partake in non-mandatory quests that show more about the *Kiseki* world, but these characters can also lie and hold back information, making the information that the player receives not necessarily represent the *Kiseki* game world as it actually is, which can lead to shifting perceptions as the player discovers their deceptions. In other words, characters seem to be a possible means through which a player can make sense of a game world as well and influence the player's perception of it, but the frameworks regarding narrative and infrastructure do not involve characters as a main element. To address this deficiency, I will therefore aim in this thesis to establish a framework, additional to that of narrative and infrastructure, that demonstrates how a player locates information in a game world and understand it through its characters. I will do this through the following research question:

> *"How do characters facilitate the acquirement of knowledge about game worlds and to what degree could they influence the player's perception of that world?"*

Establishing this framework, which I call the *character-world* relationship, will allow me to discuss how characters are related to knowledge acquisition about game worlds. Since the *Kiseki* series are originally Japanese role-playing games through which I will create the framework, characters will be placed as the central element through which the player is able to understand the world. The reason behind this is, because in the so-called Japanese *media mix*, a form of transmedia storytelling in Japan through which contents is dispersed across different media (see Ito, 2001, 2; Jenkins. 200, 110), characters play a central role as

they are considered to be the elements of consistency that connect stories together (see Steinberg, 2012, 180). Even if these stories are contradictory, the appearance of the same character(s) can unite the stories and let them become part of the same world. They thereby take the form of, as Marc Steinberg states, "Leibniz's God" in which characters organise the world they appear in (2012, 186). This means that every character has his or her own view of the world, and therefore one single view might not be enough to understand the whole imaginary world. As anthropologist Ôtsuka Eiji explains through his notion on 'narrative consumption', characters present small narratives, often from their own point of view, that when brought together, reveal a 'grand narrative' or 'world view', enabling the audience to understand the imaginary world as a whole through its characters (2010, 107). This is significant, because it shows that for the audience to make sense of the imaginary world, they first have to engage with that world's characters.

In the *Kiseki* game world, that is partially transmedial as well, characters are the main element that connect the various game instalments. The multiple appearances of familiar characters offer an indication about the circumstances of a situation in the games, as each character has his or her own background and reason for being at a specific event (which they may or may not reveal). This is especially true when they appear in multiple games, since their appearances over multiple instalments allow the player to make sense of each new instalment by connecting it to the events of other instalments. Hence, in the framework, the *character-world* relationship, that I will develop in this thesis, characters will not only be perceived as sources of information for the player to learn about the world, since that way they could also be a part of a narrative or infrastructure framework. Instead, they are also perceived to be fundamental entities through which the player can make sense of the *Kiseki* series as a game world by bringing the different instalments together so that it becomes one imaginary world, similar to the role of characters in the Japanese *media mix* as the central element.

To provide an answer as to what degree characters can influence the player's perception of the game world, I will address certain complications that occur when the player tries to locate information through characters about the game world when we perceive it from the *character-world* relationship. The first complication is that the player-character's position in the world constrains knowledge that the player can obtain. The player might not receive any information from some characters or the information received

could be incomplete or inaccurate. The second complication is that, since I am establishing a framework based on a game world, the agency that the player has in the game world influences the information she receives.

In the *Kiseki* series, the player has a certain amount of agency that allows her to choose to interact with characters or not. Characters could for instance tell the player about specific historical facts about the world, but if the player does not trigger the interaction to occur, then the player might not come to know this information at all. Information otherwise gained will not be acquired, resulting that the player will have a different amount of knowledge and therefore a different perception of that world than when she had triggered some events.

The first chapter is a state of the field in which my theoretical framework will be a discussion about narrative and infrastructure as two frameworks through which one can gain knowledge about an imaginary world, the *narrative-world* relationship and the *infrastructure-world* relationship. Since I establish the *character-world* relationship through an intense analysis of a game world, I will also explain how I perceive a "game world" in regard to an imaginary world. Additionally, I will introduce the textual analysis as a method that I use to form the *character-world* relationship. A textual analysis illustrates how a video game can be understood and interpreted as a text, but a player cannot be ignored, since players are needed for a video game to be interpreted at all. This means that I will define the role of the player in this chapter as well by creating a model of a player, which I call the *implied player.* I will use this model for my research to explain the implications that the *character-world* relationship contains. Lastly, I will give a short account of the *Kiseki* video game series to introduce the reader to its basic components.

In the second chapter, I will establish the *character-world* relationship by discussing how characters are perceived in this framework as a factor of consistency different from narrative between various worlds. An analysis of the *Kiseki* series allows me to expand this notion by presenting characters in the *Kiseki* world as a factor that creates continuity between the different instalments of the series. I will establish the characters as the central element of the framework that clarifies how the player understands the imaginary world through the information that they provide. This enables us to perceive them as a gateway into the game world. Through a categorization of the kinds of characters that appear in the

Kiseki world, I will discuss how player-characters, deep characters and, shallow characters can each separately be considered as a gateway.

The third and final chapter will focus on the two complications I mentioned previously that the *character-world* relationship brings forth when applied to a game world. I will point out that since the framework is subjective, the information that the player receives might not necessarily be accurate. As the player accumulates information through various characters, she develops a double awareness. However, since I argue that her agency is restricted to the player-character's knowledge and personal position in the game world through whom the world becomes phenomenologically available to the player, the player cannot act in line with the double awareness that she develops. Hence, I will discuss how, in the *character-world* relationship, the player's own agency influences the accumulation of knowledge and therefore the player's perception of the game world.

CHAPTER ONE: A Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I will provide a broader academic discussion about game worlds and imaginary worlds as a theoretical frame on which I will base the establishment of the *character-world* relationship. The theoretical discussion is divided by storytelling and infrastructures that I present as two approaches through which the player can locate information in an imaginary world by their connection with narratives and infrastructures. I call them respectively the *narrative-world* relationship and the *infrastructure-world* relationship. The framework that I will add to the theory in this thesis, the *character-world* relationship, has a similar approach that demonstrates how the reader might acquire knowledge about an imaginary world through the inhabitants of the imaginary world itself.

Furthermore, in this chapter I will address several components other than the *narrative-world* relationship and the *infrastructure-world* relationship that will be important for the formulation of the *character-world* relationship. Firstly, as stated in the introduction, I am interested in how characters facilitate the player to obtain knowledge and influence her perception of a game world. Therefore, the *character-world* relationship will be established through a textual analysis of the *Kiseki* video game series that presents a game world. Secondly, I consider a game world to be a *hyperdiegesis* of an imaginary world; it only shows a fragment of the total imaginary world, but according to its own logic and laws. This means that after the discussion about the *narrative-world* relationship and the *infrastructure-world* relationship, I will clarify how a game world fits in the concept of an imaginary world and I will also describe the method, namely a textual analysis, that I use to create the framework. Since the textual analysis is performed on a digital game, I will explain as well how we can perceive digital games to be texts. Thirdly, even though the method is a textual analysis, the position of the reader cannot be fully excluded, since she is an important factor in how knowledge about the imaginary world is received and will interpret the imaginary world based on that knowledge. I will therefore also conceptualize how the reader ought to be considered within the limits of a textual analysis. Lastly, I will conduct a small formal description of the *Kiseki* series so that the readers has a certain understanding of the games that I will analyse to establish the *character-world* relationship.

The Narrative-World Relationship

In the *narrative-world* relationship, I consider stories to be the basis of an imaginary world. Transmedial storytelling is a significant concept in this relationship. The term 'transmedial storytelling' was first coined by Henry Jenkins as a phenomenon part of media convergence or the amalgamation of various media. It refers to the occurrence of narratives dispatched across different kinds of media. According to Jenkins, "transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole" (2006, 97-98). On the other hand, Lisbeth Klastrup and Susana Tosca coined the term '*transmedial worlds*', considering it "abstract content systems from which a repertoire of fictional stories and characters can be actualized or derived across a variety of media forms" (2004). While both definitions seem to differ, they could actually be regarded as complimentary concepts in the field of media-narratology. Both are engaged in matters of how stories are generated and extracted from a bigger unity through various media. Conforming to Klastrup and Tosca, we could call this unity a 'world'. For Jenkins, a world is created through stories, or storytelling. A single story might already create a world, but through the input of multiple stories a more exhaustive world can be created. These stories are not limited to one medium, becoming transmedial when each medium, such as television, film or literature, contributes new stories to the generated world.

> More and more, storytelling has become the art of world-building, as artists create compelling environments that cannot be fully explored or exhausted within a single work or even a single medium. The world is bigger than the film, bigger even than the franchise – since fan speculations and elaborations also expand the world in a variety of directions. (Jenkins, 2006, 116).

The expansion of a world in Jenkins' definition is undoubtedly connected to storytelling. With every new story added, new information expands the world. At the same time, storytelling also functions as the passage through which readers gain information about this world. It is important to point out that storytelling is but one way of creating a fictional world and not a necessary factor. Lubomír Dolezel describes possible worlds of fiction as "artifacts produced by aesthetic activities – poetry and music composition, mythology and storytelling, painting and sculpting, theatre and dance, cinema and

television, and so on." (1998, 14). Thus, the act of storytelling is one of many activities that could be used to bring forth an imaginary world, something also mentioned by Mark Wolf as the most common means for world-building to occur (2012, 199), but nonetheless not explicitly necessary. Narrative is loosely described by Wolf and Dolezel as a sequence of events which are causally connected, to which Wolf adds that it consists of an actor or agent that takes part in an action[1] (Dolezel, 1998, 31; Wolf, 2012, 199).

To clarify the relationship between world-building and narrative, Marie-Laure Ryan considers narrative a spatio-temporal construct that "reports actions hat take place in a world, and the evocation of the spatial layour of this world requires descriptive sentences." (2004, 8). She states that the first condition is that a narrative text must create a world populated with characters and objects: "Logically speaking, this condition means that the narrative text is based on propositions asserting the existence of individuals and on propositions ascribing properties to these existents." (2004, 8). The second proposition is similar to Dolezel and Wolf's description of narrative as such that the world referred to must undergo changes caused by a sequence of events to place it in a flux of history (Ibid., 8 – 9). Lastly, to create a coherence between the events and make it into a plot, the third proposition is that the text must reconstruct "an interpretive network of goals, plans, causal relations, and physical motivations around the narrated events." (Ibid., 9). The world of a text is in a constant flux as a non-static entity that changes with every event that occurs to which the entities respond (Ibid., 8). Yet, that does not exclude the idea that world-building cannot occur without a narrative component or stories that get added to expand the fictional world, which I will explain in detail in the paragraphs about the *infrastructure-world* relationship. In the interest of clarity, I will therefore treat narrative in the *narrative-world* relationship based on Dolezel and Ryan's descriptions.[2] In this thesis, storytelling and narrative are considered to be an aesthetic activity by which worlds of fiction are produced that are in a constant flux by undergoing changes caused by a coherent sequence of events (Dolezel, 1998, 14; Ryan, 2004, 8).

For Klastrup and Tosca, storytelling is the way through which properties of the transmedial world are communicated to the reader(2004). Each world usually shares one

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[1] Narrative thread - Wolf
[2] As readers might have noticed, I use the terms 'story(telling)' and 'narrative' freely to refer to the same concept, but I am aware that there is a difference between them.

foundational story that exposes one acceptable version of that specific world's features. In their framework, transmedial worlds are characterised by certain features that define the 'worldness' of the world. Klastrup and Tosca identified three core features which every world seems to share: *mythos*, *topos* and *ethos* (2004). Respectively, *mythos* is considered to be the history of the world, ' the backstory of all backstories', knowledge one needs to have in order to be able to interact in the world; *topos* refers to the historical and geographical setting of the world; and *ethos* indicates how one should behave in the world according to the explicit and implicit behaviour rules (Klastrup and Tosca, 2004).

As an additive to her definition about narrative, Marie-Laure Ryan coined the term *'storyworlds'*. This narratological concept is predicated on the idea that every story has its own storyworld with its own narrative content, except for transmedial texts (2014, 32). It is however too soon to say that storyworlds are only created by one single text; as Ryan argues, one single storyworld can also extend multiple texts. It could thereby be placed under Jenkins' phenomenon transmedial storytelling (Ibid., 41). According to her (2013, 363), transmedial storytelling is central to storyworlds, because as an entity it holds those transmedial texts together. However, transmedial storytelling might be central to storyworlds, but the idea that multiple texts create one single storyworld also suggests that these texts can stay within one single medium, though in that case those multiple texts cannot be considered transmedial. Yet, the idea of multiple texts also imply that we can differentiate between original texts, that stay within one single medium, that first create the imaginary world, and additional texts, through other media, that address and fill in the gaps of the original texts. The latter is the case with the *Kiseki* series, since the video games are the media that initially establish the *Kiseki* world, though I will address this more clearly in the section of this chapter about the *Kiseki* games. Furthermore, in contrast to the term *fictional worlds* which is also often used by narratologists, Ryan's storyworlds encompass both fictional and factual stories. In this case, the storyworld of a factual story refers to our own world, while fictional stories refer to an imaginary storyworld (Ryan, 2014, 33).

Turning our gaze to the actual definition of storyworlds, the idea of a world and narratology are inherently woven together. Ryan declares the following:

World suggests a space, but story is a sequence of events that develops in time. If we conceive of storyworlds as mental representation built during the reading (viewing,

playing among others) of a narrative text, they are not static containers for the objects mentioned in a story, but rather dynamic models of evolving situations (2013, 364).

In Ryan's definition, each storyworld[3] unifies certain narrative content. This narrative content sustains a few components. Ryan distinguishes these components of a storyworld as static and dynamic. *Static* refers to components of the storyworld that already exist before the story in the storyworld takes place, while a *dynamic* component "captures the unfolding of events" (Ibidem.). The static components consist of:

- *Existents*, characters and objects that are of special significance to the plot;
- a *setting*, the space in which the existents are placed;
- *Physical laws*, 'principles that determine what kind of events can and cannot happen in a given story';
- *Social rules and values*, though only optional for the plot, these are the 'principles that determine the obligations of a character' (2014, 35).

These components however do not make the storyworld evolve; changing it into a more compelling entity than just a container. The dynamic components therefore consist of:

- *(Physical) events,* changes of states that happen over time and bring changes to the existent in the span of the narrative;
- *Mental events*, these events give significance to the *physical events* and are the characters' reactions to the state of affairs (2013, 364-365; 2014, 36).

At this point, I consider it necessary to define what I regard as the narrative-world relationship. As stated above, stories are the fundamental elements of an imaginary world in this relationship. It is not the imaginary world itself, nor the content of the stories, but the connection *between* both concepts that this relationship addresses. The main questions this relationship concentrates on are: "How does the (imaginary) world get created and

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[3] In Klastrup and Tosca's framework, the features that make up a world's 'worldness' are transmitted to the reader through storytelling, while in Ryan's storyworld, a world and storytelling are considered one entity. It seems to be that for Klastrup and Tosca, storytelling is more of a necessary act in order to convey readers about the world, while for Ryan, a world and storytelling cannot be taken apart.

expanded?" and "What is the main structure through which readers (spectators, players etc.) gain information about this world?" As Mark Wolf points out, narrative is the most common form for expanding a world, since stories that become connected can also become seeds for new stories set in the same world (2012, 198). When readers primarily gain such knowledge about an imaginary world through the assemblage of various narratives set in the same world, or when an imaginary world is expanded primarily through weaving various stories together, a vast relationship between narrative and the imaginary world comes into being, what we could call a *narrative-world* relationship. The relationship is an approach that covers various definitions of an imaginary world (such as storyworlds or transmedial worlds) in order to identify if and how narrative is related to said imaginary world.

According to Jenkins' transmedia storytelling, we see that an imaginary world gets created through the contributions of various stories, whether these are transmedial or not. In the phenomenon of transmedial storytelling, the relationship between storytelling and the imaginary world is strong, since the imaginary world expands through the addition of stories.[4] For Ryan's concept of *storyworld*, the relationship between narrative and stories might be considered extraordinarily strong because the definition of the world itself already relies on (dynamic) components that are inherently related to narratology. Without narrative, Ryan's storyworld cannot exist. Lastly, narrative for Klastrup and Tosca's *transmedial worlds* is only one way of many to communicate a world's worldness to the readers which raises the question if we should actually approach their concept through the *narrative-world* relationship since the ' worldness' of an transmedial world is first and foremost perceived through the properties of *mythos, topos* and *ethos*. However, *mythos* is presented as "the backstory of all backstories – the central knowledge one needs to have in order to *interact with or interpret events in the world successfully*" (2003). Hence, we can still regard *transmedial worlds* as related in a certain way to narrative, albeit less firmly than Jenkins' and Ryan's concepts of worlds.

What I call the *narrative-world* relationship is an 'umbrella' framework that covers various definitions of imaginary worlds and identifies the relationship *between* narrative and said world. Stories are a fundamental phenomenon within this relationship as they define

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[4] In this relationship, I consider the number of contributors and whether they are fans or intellectual property owners to be irrelevant, since a discussion about intellectual property is outside of the boundaries of how strong a connection is between a world and narrative.

how the imaginary world is created, and how readers gain knowledge about this world. The more essential the connection between a story and an imaginary world is, the stronger the relationship. A world that expands mainly through stories will have a strong relationship between narrative and world. If, for instance, a world is created through stories and can only be accessed through them, like Ryan's *story worlds*, the relationship is extremely firm and we can assume that the most advantageous way to gain knowledge about the world in question is by reading the stories. A fictional world with a weaker connection to narrative, like Klastrup and Tosca's *transmedial worlds*, might still have stories incorporated that could inform the reader about the world, but they are not the primary means by which one can get to know the specific world. Other sources, like maps or guidebooks, are then a lot more influential in the creation of and access to the fictional world.

The relationship does not, however, exclude other frameworks about how an imaginary world can be perceived since a world's properties can also be conveyed through non-narratives. Though narrative is a prevalent method for world-building, it is only one way of many through which an imaginary world can be approached since imaginary worlds can also be created without narratives. A framework that approaches worlds from a non-narrative perspective is the *infrastructure-world* relationship which I shall discuss in the following paragraph.

The Infrastructure-World Relationship

Narrative is not the only framework through which readers can gather knowledge about an imaginary world. As discussed in Klastrup and Tosca's concept of transmedial worlds, narrative is only one of the frameworks through which the properties of the world might be transmitted to the reader. Their concept can be communicated to any possible media form (2004). In other words, even if this medium excludes the possibility of narrative, the properties of the world could still be passed onto the reader. In this case, the questions would be: "Through what framework, aside from narrative, could an imaginary world be expanded?" or "Through what non-narrative form could a reader gather knowledge about an imaginary world?" These questions give readers the possibility to consider how a world would function without any narrative engraved within it. It emphasizes the experience one could have in the imaginary world (Wolf, 2012, 11).

A framework that allows for locating information about a world is the concept of

infrastructures. According to Wolf, infrastructures are a point of reference through which readers can perceive similarities between our world and the imaginary world, and thereby make sense of these imaginary worlds (2012, 154). To explain this in further detail, however, an explanation on the concept of the Primary World and secondary worlds is necessary.

Wolf's idea about infrastructures is based on the English writer J.R.R. Tolkien's *subcreation*. Subcreation refers to the ability of creating a world within an already created world (Lars Konzack, 2006, 2). As a devout Roman catholic, Tolkien believed God to be the creator of our world. This belief influenced the concept of subcreation. In *On Fairystories,* he makes a distinction between the ' Primary World' and ' Secondary Worlds' (1997, 12). The Primary World is our world as a creation created by God (Konzack, 2006, 2). He does however consider storymakers, living in the Primary World, to be subcreaters with the ability to make a world as well (1997, 12). To these worlds, Tolkien refers to as ' Secondary Worlds' and considers them worlds which our minds can enter (Ibidem.). Though the subcreator is able to create something new and exciting him- or herself, as game researcher Lars Konzack argues, the subcreator is also subject to the Primary World (2006, 2). This means that the subcreator, situated in our world, can only create a Secondary World with the Primary World as a reference point. Each secondary world is therefore based upon our Primary World.

Employing the concept of subcreation, we can understand how Wolf uses the idea of infrastructures in Primary and secondary worlds. Because secondary worlds are based upon the Primary World, secondary worlds will often have conventions that also exist in the Primary World. For instance, the existence of gravity is often a default assumption in a secondary world. Besides these conventions, similarities are also shared between the Primary and secondary worlds. These similarities can be found in infrastructures. According to Wolf, these infrastructures are the way we make sense of a story or a world, but for world *gestalten*, a composition of details that implies the existence of a world, to occur we need these structures to be complete and consistent (2012, 154).

Besides being the means of how we make sense of an imaginary world, how should we define these structures? We know that through the assemblage of these structures, world *gestalten* may occur, provided that they are consistent and complete. The occurrence of world *gestalten* seems similar to Klastrup and Tosca's definition of ' worldness' whose abstract properties can be transmitted through various media, but for the reader to

understand these abstract properties they should be conveyed in an organized, concrete and coherent format. How these abstract properties are arranged is what enables us to understand the organization of the imaginary world, thus, the arrangement of the world is what we call a world's 'infrastructure'. The infrastructure of an imaginary world is a concrete arrangement of these properties which implies the existence of a comprehensible world. In his book *Building Imaginary Worlds* (2012), Wolf provides us with a number of manifestations of these arrangements: maps, timelines, genealogies, nature, culture, language, mythology and philosophy. Like stories, an assemblage of infrastructures can create an imaginary world as well as provide readers with knowledge about the world. Each of Wolf's infrastructures enables the reader to learn how the world is organised. He considers maps, timelines and genealogy are considered to be the structures that "arise from be the basic elements that a world needs to exist" (2012, 154)[5]. He perceives the other structures as "various systems which build upon each other and comprise the world itself, from the physical to the philosophical" (Ibid., 155)[6]. Various media can be used for concrete manifestations of these structures. In the Primary World, for instance, we can look at old family photos to get a sense of our genealogy, or at history books that divide the human history in historical periods such as the Middle Ages, Renaissance or Modern Age (which also depends on the culture and age it is written in). These structures are all connected one way or another to each other, but as an arrangement with the emphasis on a limited topic (language, cultures, nature and more), we are able to connect the dots to the other arrangements and perceive how they fit in the world context. The manifestation of these structures can also be applied to imaginary worlds. As a child, I owned the unofficial guide-book *The Sorcerer's Companion: A Guide to the Magical World of Harry Potter* (2001) that

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[5] Maps are related to a world's topos, and indicate how the locations relate to each other on a spatial and topographical level (2012, 156). Timelines can clarify a world's mythos: they connect events together temporally and might assist readers to fill in gaps in the chronological history of the world (Ibid., 165 – 166). Genealogies demonstrate how inhabitants of an imaginary world are related to each other, such as kinship or friendship, which provides them with context on a familial, ancestral, social, institutional and historical level (Ibid., 170 – 171).

[6] *Nature* "deals with the materiality of a world, its physical, chemical, geological and biological structures and the ecosystems connecting them." (Wolf, 2012, 172). *Culture* is a structure that connects nature to history and often serves as a unique background to historical conflicts (Ibid., 179). *Language* is the structure that directly expresses the *culture*'s worldview (Ibidem.). *Mythology*, as a historical setting, provides the reader with knowledge on how to interpret these events and therefore deprive meaning from them (Wolf, 2012, 189). P*hilosophy* is a structure that expresses a character's point of view or behaviour; the way characters are punished for a crime, or what is considered a crime.

informed the reader about mythical phenomena and legendary creatures such as arithmancy, hellhounds, mermaids or hippogryphs existent in the magical world of the *Harry Potter* franchise (Kronzek and Kronzek 2001). The book refers to where the creatures and phenomena are mentioned in the book as well as providing information on their history and why they are relevant in the world of *Harry Potter*. The reader is (usually) able to tell the difference between structures of the Primary Worlds and secondary worlds, because of fictional signals that give us hints whether to interpret an event or phenomena as something of the Primary World or as something fictional, like the *paratext* – external material or messages surrounding the main text[7]. The *Harry Potter* guide book explicitly states that it is a guide book about the magical world of *Harry Potter*, thereby implying that it is about world other than our non-magical Primary World. It serves the same purpose as a history book about our Primary World. Such a book gives the reader more knowledge about the world in order to let him or her interpret events and create meaning.

Each of these structures are an arrangement, or a window, through which the reader can look to understand how the world is constructed. Like the *narrative-world* relationship, the *infrastructure-world* is an approach that covers various definitions of imaginary worlds, however in the case of the *infrastructure-world* relationship it emphasizes the connection between infrastructures and the imaginary world. If we were to read a map of an imaginary world, we would be informed about that world's geographical spaces, but depending on the map this information might be limited or could be so rich in detail that we would even be informed about the existence of mountains, towns or even the density of a population in an area. By its very nature, an imaginary world can be designed without any need for narrative, only to be expressed in concrete manifestations such as maps, images, or even dictionaries of the language spoken in that specific world. However, the *infrastructure-world* relationship does not exclude the existence of narratives. Both relationships can peacefully coexist, since they are merely approaches to informing the reader about what worlds are comprised of. How does the reader know about an imaginary world's power structure, for instance? Is it by having read a certain story about a princess who needs to be rescued, that implies the existence of a monarchy? Or did the reader see a genealogy that implied the existence of a monarchy? If the reader can be informed about an imaginary world mainly

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[7] see Umberto Eco 1993, 119 – 120

through the manifestations of infrastructures, then we could say that there is a strong connection between the infrastructures and the world. Yet, this relationship is difficult to concretely define, because structures such as philosophy or a world's history are hard to understand without a narrative. Narrative is able to convey the reason behind the existence of certain aspects in the world quite well, since it explains through a sequence of events how a world has come to be as it is. Perceiving a world merely from the *infrastructure-world* relationship could give the impression that an imaginary world is not fluid, but a static concept that lacks reasons to exist in the first place, making it seem less coherent than it actually is. I have to remark, though, that I am not arguing that an imaginary world created without a narrative is by definition a static entity but rather that perceiving an imaginary world solely from the *infrastructure-world* relationship could limit a reader's understanding of a world's dynamics.

Just as narrative is not the only method through which we could understand a world, the *infrastructure-world* relationship is not the sole approach to consider. Rather than stating that the relationships preclude each other, I argue that these relationships are dynamic: each framework specifies where the knowledge comes from and how the world is set up, but they also complement each other by demonstrating how they are dynamically interwoven. For instance, if the reader saw a historical timeline of an imaginary world, it would be difficult to understand and create meaning without any other context. Narratives provide these contexts since they can on one hand, describe the events that have taken place in the world. On the other hand, narratives are limited to what they can tell about a world's cultures, nature or languages amongst others, since it is not necessary, even impossible, for the development of a narrative's plot to speak about everything that exists in the imaginary world. As such, the *narrative-world relationship* and the *infrastructure-world* relationship together offer a larger picture about the construction of a world, but the *infrastructure-world* relationship specifies how much of the world is constructed through the establishments of infrastructures without narrative, and therefore also how much knowledge the reader gains from a focus on infrastructures.

In short, the *infrastructure-world* relationship is a framework that identifies the connection between an imaginary world and the infrastructure in that world. Infrastructures are in this relationship perceived to be arrangements of an imaginary world through which the reader can make sense of the world. Objects such as maps, guide books and timelines

amongst others are considered manifestations of the arrangements that inform the reader about these arrangements. Though difficult to define, the relationship approaches how the reader gains knowledge about an imaginary world without the necessity of narrative but not excluding it.

Game Worlds and Imaginary Worlds

To develop my argumentation for *character-world* relationship, I will first express how I interpret a game world in relation to an imaginary world. Espen Aarseth proposed the following definition of a game:

Gameworlds are physical or pseudo-physical (virtual) structures that are clearly delimited and which can be described by geometry and topology. They are different from so-called fictional worlds in that they, unlike fictional worlds, have a measurable, concrete extension that can be explored directly by an independent agent. Fictional worlds depend on the imagination, whereas game worlds have objective existence, even if they only exist via computing machinery (2012, 131).

Aarseth perceives a game world as a separate entity from fictional worlds by having set concrete boundaries that are to be explored by an independent player. By taking this stance, Aarseth seems to imply that fictional worlds are passive entities with readers who are not able to independently engage with that world yet depend on their own imagination for the world to come into existence. In contrast, a game world is presented in a concrete form so that the player does not have to depend on her own imagination, therefore fictional worlds are infinite entities depending only on one's the imagination, but game worlds are restricted to the medium's capacity of displaying the fictional worlds (Ibid., 131) While Aarseth considers game worlds different from fictional worlds, I argue that it is a form of an imaginary world subjected to the limitations of the medium. Wolf's definition of an imaginary world is as follows:

All surroundings and places experienced by a fictional character (or which could be experienced by one) that together constitute a unified sense of place which is ontologically different from the actual, material and so-called "real" world. As

"world" in this sense refers to an experiential realm, an imaginary world could be as large as a universe, or as small as an isolated town in which a character resides (2012, 377).

As Aarseth puts it, an independent agent often manifests in video games as an avatar, a character of the video game that the player can control. While he does not focus on whether a game world is fictional or not like Wolf does, both definitions correspond to the idea that a character (or avatar or agent) experiences the world geographically and topographically. The definitions also seem to agree on the idea that the worlds are ontologically different from our Primary World, since Aarseth's explanation of how they differ from fictional world implies that they are different from the "real" world, like Wolf's imaginary world is, by default. Rather than suggesting that a game world is a different entity from an imaginary world, I argue that a game world is a manifestation of an imaginary world. An imaginary world can take all forms and shapes without any limitations but needs to be transmitted through a medium in order for a reader to become aware of the world's existence at all. According to Tosca and Klastrup(2004), a digital world has to conform to the software and the medium through which it is implemented. The boundaries of a digital world, whether a video game or otherwise, are constricted because the ability of computing machine is limited. In other words, the medium through which the imaginary world manifests is limited and one can only see the parts of an imaginary world that the medium can show. The term for this phenomenon comes from Matt Hills who calls it a *hyperdiegesis*: "the creation of a vast and detailed narrative space, only a fraction of which is ever directly seen or encountered within the text, but which nevertheless appears to operate according to principles or internal logic and extension." (2002, 104). The medium can only show a fraction of the imaginary world, but what it shows is so coherent according to the logic and principles that are shown that the reader can imagine the rest of the world. A game world in this sense is an imaginary world that can be perceived through a game, but the game medium can only present a limited fraction of the entire imaginary world. The faction that is displayed however, is coherent with the imaginary world. For this reason, I approach a game world as a manifestation of an imaginary world in which a player has a certain degree of agency but is nevertheless bound to the rules, objectives, dynamics and mechanics of the video game (besides the computational limitations of the machinery).

Method

The method that I use to develop the *character-world* relationship is a textual analysis. Textual analysis is deeply grounded within humanities, especially in relation to reading and writing. However, the textual analysis in this thesis is performed on a video games series, a medium that is not necessarily associated with the written word. Game designer and scholar Clara Fernández-Vara, basing her argument on the French theorist Roland Barthes' book *Mythologies,* points out (2015, 5) that the term *text* can be extended to other artefacts as objects of study. The meaning of the text can change depending on by whom it is written or read, or in what historical period it is read and more. A text does not exist in its own vacuum of texts but is a cultural production that can be interpreted differently depending on the context. Games are a cultural production whose significance is derived from the context of play (see Fernandez-Vara 2014, 6). This means that we can approach them as texts that can be read and interpreted in various ways, making them suitable for textual analysis.

To interpret video games as texts also means that we have to acknowledge the medium's specific affordances and limitations, since video games are interpreted within the context of that medium. As argued, a game world is a form of *hyperdiegesis:* the video game medium only shows a limited fraction of the total imaginary world. A formal approach to digital games is that they are a combination of mechanics and semiotics that together make up the game object[8]. According to Aarseth, the semiotic layer informs the player about the status of the game world on a visual, auditory and even textual level. The semiotic layer provides the possibility of meaning-making by transferring the manifestation of the imaginary world in a game world with its own structures and events while the mechanic level lets the player engage with those structures and events (Ibidem).

Jesper Juul takes another approach and considers video games a *half-real* medium: "a video game is a set of rules as well as a fictional world" with the interaction between the game rules and the fictional world as one of the most important features of video games (2005, 1). His concept coincides with *hyperdiegesis* in such a way that video games project a fictional world, and the game – that which is bound to the rules of the game, is placed inside

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[8] See Aarseth, 2014, 488.

the fictional world (2005, 165). In other words, the game is part of the fictional world (Ibid., 164). According to Juul, a video game's rules can be divided into two basic game structures: *emergence*[9] and *progression*. Progression is mostly related to games with storytelling ambitions, such as adventure and role-playing games. In progression games, "the player has to perform a predefined set of actions in order to complete the game" (Juul, 2005, 5). To merely perceive a game as a set of actions that the player has to perform would deny that a player's experience is shaped by both the fictional world and the rules (Ibid., 177). A game on its own does not need fiction, but it influences the player's experience (Ibid., 189). As Juul argues, part of a game designer's challenge is therefore to incorporate aspects of the fictional world in the rules of the game, since what he calls 'complex' themes, like love, ambition and social conflict are too difficult to implement, and are therefore only presented in the fictional world (Ibidem.).

What should be realised is that concepts such as 'narrative' and 'infrastructures' in a game world are also in one way or another embedded in the rules of the video game, even if the rules are hidden (see Juul, 2005, 176). If the player wants to advance a digital game's narrative for instance, she has to perform certain actions according to the games' rules. In regard to infrastructures, a player might have a map to see where he or she is in-game, but the rules ultimately decide where the player can and cannot go in the game's space. As Juul states: "Focusing exclusively on coherent worlds and well formed storytelling is a misunderstanding of what games are about." (2005, 190). Perceiving video games as a text appropriate for textual analysis therefore also means that the medium's specific limitations and affordances should be taken into account. In this case, I propose that that the amount of agency that a player has is both an affordance and a limitation of the rules of the game and the game world. Thus, the analysis that I administer in this thesis will also considerate the *Kiseki* series as a game world embedded into the game's rules.

The Player
The reader cannot be ignored in a textual analysis, because interpretation and understanding of a text emerge through being read. The same goes for video games, since

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[9] Emergence as a game structure is considered by Juul to be "the primordial game structure, where a game is specified as a small numer of rules that combine and yield large numers of game variations for which the players must design strategies to handle." (2005, 5). This is found most in sport games, card and board games, and most action and all strategy games (Ibidem.).

they need players to engage with the game object so that they can interpret the game. According to Fernández-Vara (2015, 7): "The player is a necessary part of the text; it is difficult to find games where there is no player input, as the game is not really a complete text without a player that interprets its rules and interacts with it". In games, players have a degree of agency that enables them to act in a certain way that in turn affects their interpretation of the game object. However, there exist many types of players who engage with video game differently; their game play varies. In Multi-User Dungeon games for instance, Richard Bartle (1996) identified four types of players who all engage with the game in a different way, like killers, socialisers, explorers and achievers. Since each type has a different main goal, the behaviour of these types in the game and their engagement with it is ultimately carried by these goals. Accordingly, each type of player will interpret the imaginary world of the game in a different way, since they position themselves differently in it. Thus their understanding of the game world is also dependent on their own gameplay.

Imaginary worlds have a special status in regard to the real world. On one hand, they are conceptually separate entities to which one can escape. On the other hand, they are intrinsically connected to one's daily life (see Micheal Saler 2012, 6). They need the reader's imagination in order for the world's existence to be implied (see Wolf 2012, 52). For Samuel Taylor Coleridge, an English poet and philosopher in the eighteenth century, the "*willing suspension of disbelief*" was a vital state of mind through which the reader would momentarily set aside his or her disbelief in the imaginary world in order to be able to face that world (see Wolf 2012, 24). Additionally, Micheal Saler describes the phenomenon of alternating one's mind between different worlds in the late-nineteen century as the "*ironic imagination*", a form of double-consciousness that became culturally central in the twentieth century (2012, 14). Without experiencing cognitive dissonance, it "enabled individuals to embrace alternative worlds and to experience alternative truths" (Ibid., 13 – 14). He goes on to argue (Ibid., 28) that imaginary worlds do not rely on their existence through the *willing suspension of disbelief*, but on the willing activation of pretense by the reader. Likewise, Tolkien considers the *suspension of disbelief* a substitute for what actually happens.

That state of mind has been called "willing suspension of disbelief." But this does not seem to me a good description of what happens. What really happens is that the

story-maker proves a successful "sub-creator." He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is "true": it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. … But this suspension of disbelief is a substitute for the genuine thing, a subterfuge we use when condescending to games or make-believe, or when trying (more or less willingly) to find what virtue we can in the work of an art that has for us failed. (Tolkien 1997, 12).

He urges a different kind of belief, *Secondary Belief*, that the reader needs in order to enter a secondary world. *Secondary Belief* is the act of imagining an imaginary world as if it really existed, ignoring the fact that it might only be a story from a book or even film (see Wolf 2012, 25). The *willing suspension of disbelief* counts everything that happens within the imaginary world as not true by default, while it ignores the idea that what happens in the imaginary world could be true within the mythos, topos and ethos of that world. What the reader does instead is form a double consciousness: he or she can enter the secondary world while being in the Primary World at the same time. The reader is then able to interpret events or phenomena in the imaginary world to perceive what counts as true or false within the known mythos, topos or ethos of that world.

What should also be taken into account is the control the author(s) of the imaginary world through which the reader is led to a certain interpretation of the imaginary world. Chiel Kattenbelt argues that the position of the author is at the root of how a spectator is bent into observation and experiential construction of the possible world and is therefore able to control the interpretation of the reader (1991, 99). He distinguishes, in the field of possible worlds in theatre, three positions for the author to convey the world from. The *dramatic position* assumes that the author hides himself behind the world as if the world is not constructed by him or her (Ibidem.). The world is considered to be absolute; a stand-alone independent entity without any apparent need for realisation of its maker that has decided its inner construction. The *epic position* regards the author as an observer outside or next to the world. Here, the world can only be understood through the author's observations (Ibidem.). Consequently, interpretations of the world by the reader are influenced by the author's personal interpretation of the world he or she presents. Last, in the *lyrical position* the author assumes the identity of a subject who experiences the world

from within. Through 'affective perception' of the author's experiences, the reader is forced to understand the world from the author (Ibidem.). The reader's interpretation is therefore influenced by the author who has a certain amount of control of what and how knowledge about an imaginary world is received by the reader up to such an extent that it constructs its own reader.

Semiotics is considered by Carlos Alberto Scolari to be necessary and beneficial approach when dealing with how texts can construct their own readers (2009, 591). Following Umberto Eco, Scolari suggests that every text constructs its own reader, since a text "talks to" a reader with particular interpretation skills in the topic of that text (Idem., 592). According to Dan Hassler-Forest, the reader often has to use every detail of a story to construct a certain model in order to perceive how the Primary World differs from the story world (2013, 119, own translation). These details are however coloured by the previously discussed position of the author of the text, resulting in a text that can control what details the reader is supposed to pick up to create a realisation of the imaginary world. In other words, the author already assumes a certain reader for his or her text who is able to identify the signs that the author has spread out and interpret them in a meaningful way as to construct an image of that world. Following Eco, Scolari defines the reader "inside" the text, as a strategy or virtual figure, to be a *model* or *implicit reader* (2009, 592). Scolari goes on to suggest that when the *implicit reader* is proposed by the text and the actual reader accepts the proposal to take the role forced upon him or her by the text, a *reading contract* is established (Ibidem.).

Digital games assume the existence of an *implicit reader* as well, or rather, the existence of an *implicit player*. Aarseth also considers the game world to consist out of two divergent spaces: the ludic and the extra-ludic space; the arena of gameplay, and the surrounding non-playable space" (2012, 131). According to Aarseth, while in some games the ludic space takes up the entire game world, in other games, the "ludic space consists of narrow trajectories or corridors surrounded by static scenery" (Ibidem.). The presence of these dual spaces in a digital game demonstrate that while a player has a certain agency, this is limited to the ludic space. The extra-ludic space is a space that the player cannot engage with. This is similar to Juul's idea that a game is only played inside a specific part of a fictional world (2005, 165). To play in that part of the world, the only option that exists for the player is to submit to the rules of the game. Aarseth demonstrates that games facilitate

player behaviour; they construct the way for a player to behave in a game (2007, 130). "By accepting to play, the player subjects herself to the rules and structures of the game and this defines the player: a person subjected to a rule-based system; no longer a complete, free subject with the power to decide what to do next" (Ibidem.). Having to subject him- or herself to the rules and structures of the game, the game clearly constructs a model player. That is, the *implicit player* of the game forces the actual player to accept the contract and adapt to this model, or the actual player should quit playing the game at all.

Aarseth considers Eco's concept of the *implicit reader* a view that on one hand tilts too much to the side of the humanists for whom the player is but a theoretical concept while forgetting the real player in social sciences, but argues on the other hand that the social sciences are barely engaged with humanistic textual interpretation (2007, 131 – 132). To solve this dilemma of textual meaning, Aarseth follows literary theorist Wolfgang Iser's model of the *implied reader*. For Iser, each literary text addresses an ideal reader who "embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect – predispositions laid down, not by an empirical outside reality, but by the text itself. Consequently, the implied reader as a concept has his roots firmly planted in the structure of the text; he is a construct and in no way to be identified with any real reader"(see Aarseth 2007, 132). Based on this concept, Aarseth constructs the *implied player* as a concept that "can be seen as a role made for the player by the game, a set of expectations that the player must fulfil for the game to 'exercise its effect'" (Ibidem.). By no means is the *implied player* a real player; a historical player that needs a game to play (Aarseth 2007, 130). Rather, Aarseth's *implied player* follows philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer's notion of the unfree player-subject, and is a "boundary imposed on the player-subject by the game, a limitation to the playing person's freedom of movement and choice" (Ibid., 132). When playing a digital game, the player has but a little amount of agency to such a degree that during game play, "we as players are only half-ourselves…the rest of us is temporarily possessed by the implied player" (Ibid., 133). The *implied reader* is thus a model on which a set of expectations and limits is implanted for a digital game to exercise full effect on the player.

I will use the concept of the *implied reader* to construct a model of the player of how she is to be considered in a *character-world* relationship for the rest of this thesis. The player that I will address from here on is a theoretical combination of Aarseth's *implied*

player and the double consciousness necessary for a reader to enter an imaginary world, since I construct the *character-world* relationship through the textual analysis of a game world as a form of an imaginary world. I do not consider the *implied player* to be only a limit according to which the real player has to behave but regard it as a model that establishes the possibility for the player to enter a game world. As stated previously, when a reader forms a double consciousness, she is able to identify what is true or false according to the laws of that world. The game world is an imaginary world that is subject to the boundaries and limits of the medium, such as the rules of the game, hence the inhabitant of that world are subjected to the same boundaries. The player is still a reader, as she has to read the events in-game according to the game world's rules and boundaries on both a semiotic and mechanical level. By adapting a double consciousness, the player accepts these rules and limits as part of the laws of the imaginary world that she then can enter as long as everything that happens is according to the game world's rules. The game world's rules are part of the imaginary world's laws. If we link it to Aarseth's *implied player*, the *implied player* contains the double consciousness that the player needs to have for entering the game world. Accepting the laws of the world means abiding a game world's boundaries in order for the imaginary world to exercise its effect so that the player can enter that world and interpret its events accordingly. In short, the player that I will address from here on is a model of a player with a double consciousness who reads events in a game world according to the world's boundaries and rules in order for the game to exercise its full effect, namely motivating the player to enter the game world and accept its laws as if it were a real world.

The *Kiseki* series

In this section, I will explain why I have chosen the *Kiseki* series for the establishment of the *character-world* relationship through the textual analysis. What I discuss in this paragraph will be broadly expanded with examples in the following chapters, therefore, I will only introduce the video game series here and how it will fit in the method of textual analysis.

What I call the *Kiseki* series is in fact a set of seven game instalments part of a larger video game series, the *Eiyuu Densetsu (英雄伝説, "Legend of Heroes")* series, developed by the Japanese video game company Nihon Falcom Corporation. While the *Eiyuu Densetsu* series consist of thirteen games in total, the *Kiseki* series that I address are the games from the sixth entry on, as those games spawn a new trilogy that seems to have no connection

(yet) to the previous entries, while each new entry after the sixth entry explicitly takes place in the same world. The *Kiseki* series consists of: *Eiyuu Densetsu: Sora no Kiseki First Chapter* (2004,) *Eiyuu Densetsu: Sora no Kiseki Second Chapter* (2006), *Eiyuu Densetsu: Sora no Kiseki The Third* (2007) as a trilogy. It also includes: *Eiyuu Densetsu: Zero no Kiseki*(2010) and *Eiyuu Densetsu: Ao no Kiseki* (2012) as a duology. And lastly it contains: *Eiyuu Densetsu: Sen no Kiseki* (2013) and *Eiyuu Densetsu: Sen no Kiseki II* (2014)[10]. Since only half of these games have been translated to the English language or are currently being translated, I use the Japanese titles to avoid confusion and address them from here on without "*Eiyuu Densetsu*" written before the titles[11]. Where possible, I included images of the series of the English editions of the games so that it would fit better with the English language used in this thesis, but I since that is not possible for all the images and texts that I discuss, I have translated the ones that were only available in Japanese.

The *Kiseki* series is of the role-playing genre in which the player controls the actions of the main character(s) with several additional party members, participating in a series of quests to reach the conclusion of the game. The games are heavily text-based, so while the games do each have a combat system that the player engages with when coming across monsters during a quest, they rely mainly on the story for the player to progress in the game. Broadly speaking, certain events have to arise in order for the story to develop. These events range from the player having to travel to certain areas, defeating an enemy or having to speak to specific characters, amongst others. As such, the *Kiseki* series are what Juul considers "progression" games (see Juul, 2005, 5).

In the previous section about the *narrative-world* relationship, I argued that transmedia storytelling is a significant concept in the construction of an imaginary world, and since I consider game worlds to be a *hyperdiegesis* of imaginary worlds, it implies that game worlds are also transmedial. This raises the question about how I regard the *Kiseki* series in relation to transmedia, since I stay within the single medium of video games for this thesis. As stated in the discussion about Ryan's storyworlds, the games of the *Kiseki* series are what I consider to be the original texts that initially create the *Kiseki* game world. The imaginary world of *Kiseki* consists however not solely of games. Other additional texts also exist, such as *manga* (Japanese comics) and *light novels* texts, that contribute to *Kiseki*'s

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[10] *Eiyuu Densetsu: Sen no Kiseki III* is in development at the moment of writing.
[11] For the same reason, I only refer to the years in which the game instalments first have been released.

imaginary world. For instance, the *manga* story "*Eiyuu Densetsu: Zero no Kiseki: Puresutoorii: Ichiban Han no Yubiwa*" (2010)[12] is specifically stated to be a pre-story ("*puresutoorii*") of the *Zero no Kiseki* instalment and explains the presence in that game of the player-characters of the previous game instalments. It therefore fills in a small gap of the *Zero no Kiseki* game, but does not address nor is a direct connection to the main events of *Zero no Kiseki*, but as a story set after the *Sora no Kiseki* trilogy, *Ichiban Han no Yubiwa* only refers to the events that occurred in those previous instalments. The reader is dependent on her knowledge of these previous games to make sense of the story. On the other hand, the reader can understand the story regardless of knowing the *Zero no Kiseki* game instalment even though the *manga* title refers to it. In other words, the story is dependent on the games to sustain it, but the games do not need the *manga* story.

The additional texts can however contribute new aspects to the world. The same *manga* story for example, introduces the character of Toval, who only makes his first game debut in the *Sen no Kiseki* instalment, which was released three years after the release of this *manga* story. *Ichiban Han no Yubiwa* does not refer to Toval in *Sen no Kiseki*, since the events in *Sen no Kiseki* have not happened yet by then. On the other hand, when *Sen no Kiseki* introduces Toval, he is first shown as an unfamiliar character, presumably because he has not made an appearance in any game instalment previously. His actions in *Ichiban Han no Yubiwa* are not fundamental to *Sen no Kiseki*'s plot and are not explicitly mentioned.[13] This shows that the imaginary world of *Kiseki* is transmedial. Yet, the *Kiseki* games can exist without the additional texts, but the additional texts cannot exist without the games, because the world is created and sustained by the game instalments. Therefore, I regard it to be a game world most of all, but with additional non-game texts that make it transmedial, that are dependent on the games to make sense. Thus, we could call the imaginary world of the *Kiseki* games a transmedial game world.

At first sight, the series seem to be story-based, fitting well in the previously discussed *narrative-world* relationship, since the progress of the game is tied to the progress of a story plot. This implies that gaining knowledge on the series' imaginary world is also

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[12] Originally called 「英雄伝説　ゼロの軌跡　プレストーリー　一番半の指環」, which translates to: "Eiyuu Densetsu: Zero no Kiseki: Pre-story: The Ring of Judgement". It is drawn by Shinki Kitsutsuki.
[13] Though an observant player might notice Toval implicitly hinting to the events in *Ichiban Han no Yubiwa* if she decides to interact with him, but this is not part of the main plot of the game.

tied to the story, yet even though certain events have to arise in order to progress the game's plot, (most of) the video games in the *Kiseki* series offer the player extra quests which are not essential to the plot. Since the player can opt for these quests, she has an amount of agency greater than the game initially suggests. They give the player the opportunity to get to know the game's world perhaps even better than only by following the game's plot. Moreover, the amount of text that the player reads is primarily speech of characters that the player comes across. Characters provoke the player into undertaking (sub)quests, and are often the only gateway through which a player gets to know of certain in-game events and the existence of phenomena, or even through which the player can access certain areas within the world. Playing the game without communicating with in-game characters is impossible, and even for side-quests, interacting with characters is often necessary for the player to progress.

As I will demonstrate in in the following chapters, in the case of *Kiseki*, characters are more than just objects in a game world. They alternate between being a mandatory part of the game and an optional element that the player can choose to engage with. Hence a player's interpretation of the imaginary world of the game is also dependent on engagement with the characters. This suggests that we should look beyond the idea that the player in *Kiseki*'s game world is subjected to the story's plot to become familiar with the imaginary world's construction. The idea that they can provide the player with knowledge about the game world is the main approach behind the character-world relationship. The textual analysis will therefore focus on examples of the games in which characters are involved with the different kinds of accumulation of information by the player about the *Kiseki* world. The examples will support me in establishing the development of the *character-world* relationship framework in the following chapters.

CHAPTER TWO: Characters as a Gateway to the World

In this chapter I will argue that characters are the gateway to understanding a game world from the perspective of the *character-world* relationship. Independent from narrative, I present characters are the factor of consistency that connect the seemingly incoherent game worlds that the *Kiseki* series presents at first glance. When characters share the information about their world with the player-character, the player gains knowledge as well. Since the *Kiseki* series deploys different kinds of characters within its game world, a formation that distinguishes these roles serves as a means to identify to what degree certain character roles affect the player's knowledge and understanding of the game world.

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section I will establish the character as a concept separate from narrative. Using the character *Link* from *The Legend of Zelda* (1986 – 2016) game series as an example, I will put forth the idea that characters offer a form of consistency as they connect various imaginary worlds to each other.

In the second section, the character as a factor of consistency will be extended. Firstly, through an analysis on the *Kiseki* series, I will present how the character preserves continuity when looking the *character-world* relationship as a framework. Secondly, developing the idea that characters can create continuity, the character will also be established as a central element in the *character-world* relationship that is able to tie together seemingly incompatible worlds. Thirdly, departing from the character as the central element, it will be clarified through various analyses that the character enables the player to understand the imaginary world by sharing the information that it has.

In the third section, I will call attention to how the character is a gateway in the *character-world* relationship in a game world. In game worlds, the avatar is perceived as the gateway that makes the game world phenomenologically available to the player. However, since that idea does not take the avatar's position in the game world into consideration or how other characters can technically be seen as gateways, I will categorize the kinds of characters that appear in these series by their roles in the game story progression. Through this categorization, we can perceive how their roles affect the kind of information they provide the player with, that can allow them to become gateways to the *Kiseki* world.

A Character-Centred Approach

In order to understand the gateway-character function, it is necessary to first discuss the relation between narrative and character. In Ryan's conception of storyworlds, characters are considered a static yet mandatory story component. Yet, they are not perceived as components that help the story world evolve; they are not the dynamic components, the physical and mental events that bring changes to the existents of the story world (2013, 364-365; 2014, 36). Nevertheless, Ryan mentions that story worlds "cannot acquire a distinctive identity without characters who inhabit it, and characters cannot acquire an identity without some kind of personal history that follows them around." (2013, 283). Therefore, a world needs a narrative to evolve as a dynamic entity, and the narrative needs characters in order to develop. Yet, are (story)worlds and characters actually so inherently linked to each other that narrative and characters cannot be considered two distinct concepts?

One view that offers a solution regarding narrative and character is the *transmedial character* coined by Bertetti (2014, 2344). Moving beyond the idea of the character as an entity bound to a single text, Bertetti defines a transmedial character as a "fictional hero whose adventures are told in different platforms, each one giving more details on the life of that character" (Ibid., 2345). He proposes a character-centered approach to transmedial storytelling as a common concept to world-building. A transmedial character can appear in multiple texts, but these texts do not necessarily refer to the same world (Ibid., 2346). In each particular text, the same character may have a different background, a (slightly) divergent appearance, and perform actions inconsistent with previous instances of the character since consistency is not a priority for texts that refer to multiple worlds.

The appearance of a transmedial character connects two divergent worlds to each other. The consistency of the identity of the character becomes a priority, rather than the consistency of continuity within a specific imaginary world. In regard to world-building, continuity and consistency are two emphasized concepts, as they raise the believability of the world in order for the reader to immerse him- or herself into the world (see Wolf 2012, 25; Klastrup and Tosca, 2004). For instance, if a character performs an action which conflicts with the same character in a different fictional world, the consistency of the world does not suffer. However, if the character were to perform an action that conflicts with his or her actions in texts that are all set in the same world, inconsistency occurs and it

becomes difficult to distinguish what actions do or do not count. As a result, world immersion becomes more difficult.

Focusing on continuity and consistency, Bertetti distinguishes two different kind of characters: characters based on a single course of events, and characters based on multiple courses of events (2014, 2350). Characters based on a single course of events usually have a strong bond with their specific imaginary worlds, and the course of events are chronological and consistent. In contrast, characters based on multiple courses of events can differ greatly in each text: "we deal with characters that, in different episodes of a series or in different transmedia renewals, don't refer to a single course of events. Each occurrence tells a different story, with no relations or references to the others" (Bertetti 2014, 2353). Bertetti seems to think that discontinuity can only be avoided when each text refers to a different imaginary world. He regards continuity as a series of successions through which a story develops with each new chapter (Ibid., 2351). This suggests that, though character and story cannot be fully perceived as two distinct concepts unrelated to each other, they are not always strongly linked if stories with the same character occur in a different world.

The dilemma with Bertetti's transmedial characters, who are based on multiple events, is that it suggests that continuity can only occur when each of these stories that the same character appears in are set in different worlds. It does not account for different worlds that become connected through the appearance of the same characters, even if they perform contradicting actions, since that would create discontinuity. Yet, if we look at *The Legend of Zelda* series (1986 – 2016), we can see how characters are capable of connecting and creating continuity between distinct narratives and imaginary worlds. The first *Legend of Zelda (LoZ)* game was released in 1986, and was followed by many other instalments, most of which initially did not seem to have sequential connections to each other. In *LoZ: Skyward Sword* (2011), the game initially takes place in the sky, while the vast land underneath has been destroyed in the past. *LoZ: Wind Waker* (2003) on the other hand has people live on islands on the Great Sea, and *LoZ: Twilight Princess* (2006) takes place between the Light and the Twilight Realm. Several elements return in each instalment: the *Hyrule Kingdom* for instance serves usually as the main setting for this series, and the *triforce* is also an element that returns as a source for power divided into courage, wisdom and power. Another element that always returns are the characters such as the games' protagonist hero Link.

While characters such as Ganondorf and Princess Zelda are present in most of the game instalments, Link is the character that always returns as the main protagonist, but he is not the same person in every game. Instead, he usually appears as an incarnation of the previous heroes. In each and every instalment, at some point he is recognizable as a young man with a green tunic, blond hair, bearing the *Triforce of Courage* and wielding a sword. Each game in *The Legend of Zelda* series has a story and a goal of its own in which Link usually has to save the world from its downfall. For example, in LoZ: *Oracle of Seasons* (2001), Link has to defeat general Onox by using the Rod of Seasons. And, in *LoZ: Ocarina of Time* (1998), Link embarks on a quest to save Princess Zelda and becomes the Hero of Time. By his continuing re-appearance in different instalments, he perfectly fits Bertetti's description of the transmedial character.

While recurring elements do not suggest that the games take place in a completely different world, every instalment is so divergent from the other that it is initially difficult to relate them all to each other without causing some form of discontinuity. However, in 2011 Nintendo finally released the book *Hyrule Historia* that established once and for all the chronological time line of these series[14]. As it turns out, each event in *The Legend of Zelda* series takes place in the same world, but the world is divided into three separate dimensions according to the hero's actions at the end of *LoZ: Ocarina of Time*. Some games are set in the dimension where he has succeeded in defeating evil. As the timeline shows, this dimension depends on if he continued to be an adult at the end of *LoZ: Ocarina of Time,* or if he returned to being a child, separating the dimension in two different dimension which are called the Child Era and the Adult Era. Additionally, other games are set in a dimension where he has failed in his quest. Thus, there exist three different dimensions in total in which *Legend of Zelda* games can take place. The games that are set in one specific dimension are all chronologically and sequentially related, but there is no such continuity between the game instalments that take place in different dimensions. Yet, does that suggest that there exists no form of continuity between those games?

For Bertetti continuity exists only when there is a sequential order of events. If there is no sequential order, the events must take place in a different world, and reoccurring characters then become characters based on multiple events. Though that is exactly what

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[14] See the official website: http://www.hyrulehistoria.com/complete-history/p069/ for the time line.

has happened in *The Legend of Zelda* series, I would like to point out that in the case of these series, continuity rests not only on the chronological order of events. After the establishment of the time line, Link became the character whose actions divided the different dimensions instead of a continuity based on sequential events. The player can make sense of the relationship between games by looking if Link is considered to be (the incarnation of) the hero who succeeded to defeat evil in *LoZ: Ocarina of Time* or not. For instance, in *LoZ: Oracle of Ages*, it is mentioned that a previous incarnation of Link did not defeat the evil Ganondorf, thereby the player knows that she is playing a game set in the dimension where Link failed to defeat evil in *LoZ: Ocarina of Time.* Since the *LoZ: Oracle of Ages* instalment indicates that the hero was defeated, it also implies game instalments in the dimension where the hero succeeded. In other words, Link is the factor that allows the dimension to refer to each other's existence, thereby connecting them even if the narratives of these dimensions are contradictory.

The above account demonstrates that although stories and character are inevitably connected to one another, one cannot speak of a one-to-one relationship in which story defines the chronological order of events in one world to which the character is subjected. It shows that the character can be a consistent factor in ordering a world where stories do not have a convergent continuity. In contrast to Bertetti's concept of the transmedial character, the *Legend of Zelda* series avoided incoherence between the different instalments by establishing Link as the element that, as his name suggests, 'links' the games together, enabling the events of those games to all take place in the same world.

Characters as a Gateway to an Imaginary World

The previous analysis of *The Legend of Zelda* series demonstrated that the *LoZ* instalments are connected to each other if we perceive the protagonist Link as the consistent factor. However, that world still had to be ordered into three different dimensions based on the character's actions in order to make sense. When looking at the character as a consistent factor from a theoretical perspective, we have Bertetti's transmedial character as I have extensively described above, and Will Brooker's models of continuity. Brooker proposes three different frameworks of continuity in which Batman, the fictional superhero character in the DC Universe, operates. According to Brooker, Batman as a character is an amalgam of all his different forms, histories and stories; a character whose individual iterations can each

be wiped, rebooted or re-written when it no longer suits the interests of the producers or audience; and a character whose texts exist within a matrix and interact with each other through transmedia channels (see Brooker, 2012, 151).

The complication with these theories and the example of *The Legend of Zelda* is that they all focus on resolving the discontinuity characters based on multiple events can cause. The *Kiseki* series however take place in a single world. Whereas *The Legend of Zelda* instalments have the same (reincarnated) protagonist and mainly take place in the kingdom of Hyrule, but in different dimensions, the *Kiseki* instalments switch protagonists and setting every two games, yet the world always stays the same. The main protagonists are not implied to be reincarnations of each other, since the instalments all take place on the same continent and occur two years apart at most. The *Kiseki* series does not have the kinds of re-appearances in which the presence of a character conflicts with its appearance somewhere else. Therefore, if discontinuity is not the underlying reason to establish the character as a consistent factor, then from what standpoint should we perceive the character as a consistent factor? And additionally, can we still speak of the character as a consistent factor when the protagonists regularly change?

In the first instalment, *Sora no Kiseki: FC,* the protagonists Estelle and Joshua are making their way to become full-fledged bracers[15]. At the end, Joshua leaves and Estelle is left on her own to be the main protagonist in the second instalment: *Sora no Kiseki: SC.* Having one fewer protagonist, the setting of the second instalment does not change. The whole game still mainly takes place in the Liberl Kingdom. Only in the third instalment does a big change: the protagonist suddenly switches from Estelle to Kevin Graham, a young priest of the Septian Church, and the setting is changed to an unknown dimension. Nonetheless, the title of the third instalment indicates that the player is still playing a sequence as the game is called *Sora no Kiseki: The Third* (2007). Furthermore, Kevin is not a stranger to the implied player, as he has made several appearances in the second instalment. And while the setting is completely different from the Liberl Kingdom, or even the Zemuria continent, well-known characters from the previous instalments are brought into the otherworldly dimension during the whole game, including Joshua and Estelle. As a

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[15] A combat group that protects civilians and tries to maintain stability in the regions where they operate.

matter of fact, hardly any new faces are introduced in *The Third*, and all the characters acknowledge the events from the previous instalments.

Elizabeth Evans, whose research focuses on transmedia television, considers characters the central point of engagement for a television audience. She argues that a series' narrative changes with each episode, resulting in episodes merging together as they become indistinguishable from each other. Over the course of a series, the characters remain a consistent element, since they are easily recognizable and familiar, therefore becoming the factor through which the audience orient themselves in each episode (2007, 13). We find a similar situation in the composition of *manga*, Japanese comics. *Manga* historian Miyamoto Hirohito refers to the *yonkoma*, a special gag comic strip whose story concludes within four panels[16]. The only indication that shows that each new *yonkoma* is part of the same series is the re-appearance of the same characters within the comic. "For the reader, such a work brings primarily characters to the mind, rather than individual episodes" (Hirohito, 2011, 85). Like Evans' television character, Hirohito's emphasis on the characters indicates that in both cases the characters are of greater influence in the understanding of the fictional world where the characters reside than the narrative of the series. According to Hirohito, for a character to stand out, or rather to manage becoming the thread that binds each individual episode together, the character has to have at least some degree of autonomy: "The character is not tied to one narrative world. In the background of the individual narratives presented to the reader, there is the evocation of a larger narrative world in which the character dwells" (2011, 86). Appropriately, this means that each episode implies the existence of a larger world that the individual episodes themselves cannot entirely convey but can only show small pieces of (Ibid., 87).

The occurrence of the characters in *Sora no Kiseki: The Third* connects that instalment to its predecessors, even though the setting seems unrelated to *Kiseki'*s world at first. No character seems to know why they are brought into that dimension in the first place and can only rely on the fact that once someone familiar is brought into the dimension, another pathway opens up that brings them closer to getting out. The re-appearances of these characters take on a big role in this game. Only through their appearance is the implied player able to orient herself in the unfamiliar setting. Like the

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[16] The term "yonkoma" (四コマ) literally translates to "four panels/frames".

yonkama, the appearance of these characters indicates that the third instalment is a direct sequel of the previous two games. By recognizing these characters, the implied player can connect the otherworldly dimension to the game world of the *Kiseki* series. As such, through their re-appearance these characters have become a factor of consistency, demonstrating that there is a form of continuity going on between all three instalments.

Nevertheless, it becomes a lot harder to perceive the characters in the *Kiseki* series as a factor of consistency in the fourth instalment. The third instalment announces itself as "The Third", suggesting that it is part of a *Sora no Kiseki* trilogy, but the fourth instalment has a different name: *Zero no Kiseki*[17]*.* The setting of this game, Crossbell City, differs from its predecessors. At first glance, the only similarity between this game and its three predecessors is that all take place on the Zemuria continent and are chronologically proximate[18]; the characters that the implied player first comes across are completely different. The main protagonist is that of Lloyd Bannings, who works as a newcomer at the Crossbell Police Station together with a newly formed team called the Special Support Section (S. S. S.) consisting of Randy Orlando, Elie Macdowel and Tio Plato. The events that play out do not seem to elaborate on the events that occurred in the previous trilogy. Amongst others, Lloyd and his companions are challenged by two rival gangs, have to prevent the execution of Crossbell City's mayor, and they become involved with the IBC, Crossbell's national bank that runs a field trial to develop the Orbal Network[19]. There seems to be no obvious connection to past instalments, unlike the *Sora no Kiseki: The Third* where all the characters were known to the implied player, that can function as a factor of continuity, until the player runs into Joshua and Estelle.

Joshua and Estelle are introduced as the "girl with the pigtails" and the "black-haired boy" who have come to support the bracer guild located in Crossbell City (figure 3 and figure 4). Simultaneously with Joshua and Estelle's appearance, another familiar face makes her entrance: Renne, a girl affiliated with the mysterious organization Ouroboros, that has been

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[17] While I am aware that every game has "*Kiseki*" written in the title, this does not indicate a direct connection. Considering that each game starts with "*Eiyuu Densetsu*"("The Legend of Heroes"), a title that is also used for other games by the Nihon Falcom Corporation such as *Eiyuu Densetsu III* (1994), *Eiyuu Densetsu IV (*1996), and *Eiyuu Densetsu V (*1999) that do not seem to have a direct connection to the *Sora no Kiseki* trilogy, the title cannot be the sole indicator that shows that every instalment is connected (though there is some fan speculation).

[18] The *Sora no Kiseki* trilogy takes place around the year 1202 on the Septian Calender and *Zero no Kiseki* around year 1204.

[19] A data network similar to our global internet system, but runs on orbal technology.

the cause of many events in the previous games. The young bracers announce their identity and reason for being in Crossbell immediately after they are first introduced, but Renne on the other hand never mentions her identity when the S.S.S. first meets her (figure 3). Instead, she is identified by a different bracer, who does not notify Lloyd and his team about her identity (figure 6 and 7).

Figure 3: "Nice to meet you. I'm Estelle Bright, a full-fledged bracer". Screenshot from Zero no Kiseki.

Figure 4: "And I'm Joshua Bright". Screenshot from Zero no Kiseki.

While the meaning of Renne's appearance is something that can be speculated about throughout the game, the question to ask is: "How do those familiar characters indicate that *Zero no Kiseki* is a chronological sequel to the *Sora no Kiseki* trilogy?" Their appearance might demonstrate after all that there is a connection to the trilogy, but how can the player know for sure that they imply a form of continuity? There are a few indications based on the characters Estelle, Joshua and Renne alone that confirm that the events in *Zero no Kiseki* sequentially take place after the *Sora no Kiseki* trilogy. To name three clues:

1) Joshua and Estelle identify themselves as full-fledged bracers (figure 3). Only at the end of the first instalment do both of them get promoted from junior bracers to full-fledged ones, so the implied player definitely knows that *Zero no Kiseki* takes place after the first instalment.

2) Joshua and Estelle have become a couple. In the first instalment, they are acting as adopted brother and sister, and Joshua disappears at the end. Only after he returns at the end of the second instalment, do they officially become a couple. Consequently, their romantic behaviour towards another in *Zero no Kiseki* suggests that that game takes place after the second game as well.

3) Thirdly, after the second instalment, Joshua and Estelle travel to search for Renne, who had disappeared after the second game. Although Estelle and Renne do meet in *Sora no Kiseki: The Third*, each character returns to the place that they were pulled away from after the events in the otherworldly dimension, allowing Renne to hide once again. The dimension is never mentioned in *Zero no Kiseki*. Nevertheless, Joshua and Estelle are still looking for her, and because Estelle is genuinely relieved that Lloyd and his team encountered Renne and are assured that she was doing well, we can safely assume that *Zero no Kiseki* is a continuation of the *Sora no Kiseki* trilogy.

While the emergence of familiar characters is less transparent in *Zero no Kiseki* than in the *Sora no Kiseki* trilogy, the appearances of characters such as Estelle, Joshua and Renne and their behaviour indicate that all four games are chronologically a continuation. Though I have not yet discussed the appearance of characters in other instalments, familiar characters appear in games such as *Sen no Kiseki* in a similar fashion as in *Zero no Kiseki*, so the implied player recognizes them from previous encounters and can confirm their actions

and behaviour as a continuation on the events of the previous instalments. These characters are not an element in the series to avoid discontinuity comparable to the *Legend of Zelda* series, but they are rather an element that emphasizes continuity between the different instalments.

Figure 5:"Ehe. Please call me Renne". Screenshot from Zero no Kiseki.

Figure 6:"Enforcer of the Ouroboros organisation. No. - ". Screenshot from Zero no Kiseki.

Figure 7:"XV – 'The Angel of Extermination' Renne". Screenshot from Zero no Kiseki.

Characters as the Central Element

In the previous analysis, familiar characters acted as an element that maintained continuity between the instalments. The re-appearance of characters that allows them to become a factor of consistency is an important aspect to the *character-world* relationship, but not the only one. That is because an approach like that might become too one-dimensional as it would allow *any* character that simply reappears to become a factor of consistency. It suggests that only temporal order is the sole form of consistency that a character can offer.

Considering that the *Kiseki* series are originally Japanese role-playing games and that only about half of the games in this series have been translated to the English language and released in the West, it is of interest what kind of role the character plays in the Japanese contemporary environment. The state of affairs in which the character is the main significance is pointed out by *manga* historian Miyamoto Hirohito of being of utmost importance regarding *manga, anime* (Japanese animation) and games in contemporary Japanese society (Ibid., 85). By shifting our gaze beyond our own Western society to the spheres of *manga, anime* and games in Japanese society, we might come to understand the position of the characters within those forms of storytelling, and perceive what kind of influence that position has in the realization of the *character-world* relationship.

In Japanese society, the so-called *Media Mix* is a strategy to disperse content across different kinds of media, from arcade and video games, television and film, to cell phones and collectables (Ito, 2001, 2; Jenkins, 2006, 110). According to Marc Steinberg, *anime* occupies a central place within this circulation of content, though any form of consumption of the media mix's products are considered fine (2012, 141). The media mix parallels transmedia storytelling, but transmedia storytelling has its roots in narrative that, according to Jenkins, is a "process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience" (2009). On the other hand, the media mix's dominant factor is the appearance of the characters in their dispersion across various media. Cultural anthropologist Ian Condry states that the centrality of characters provides an alternate perspective to transmedia storytelling, as the characters are perceived in terms of their relationships with others, and the way they create and shape the world in which they move (2013, 75). Steinberg takes a similar perspective and considers them not only the 'architects' of the imaginary worlds that they move in but the point of connection between the various media in which they emerge as well (2012, 188).

The characters are the element of consistency in the complex worlds in the media mix, scattered across different media sources, and often have with their own version of the fictional world (Steinberg, 2012, 180). The difference with the approach that I discussed previously, in which the character is the factor of consistency through the emphasis of continuity between instalments, is that in the media mix the character takes the place of the philosopher Gottfried Leibniz's God as an entity that enables the convergence of incompossible worlds (Ibid., 186) – that is, the co-existence of two (or more) contradictory worlds (Ibidem., 186). What is added to the idea of creating consistency by appearing in multiple works, is that as the so-called "Leibniz's God", characters organize the imaginary world that they appear in. As I will show in the next analysis, this organization is significant for the player to understand the diegetic structure of the imaginary world as it also affects the kind of information the implied player is able to retrieve from the characters.

In the *Kiseki* series, there is one instalment specifically whose setting is of a completely different nature than the others: *Sora no Kiseki: The Third.* The setting of this instalment is the otherworldly dimension, Phantasma, whose existence is incomprehensible at first. At the beginning of the game, Kevin and his childhood friend Riese Argent are

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transported to the dimension by the mysterious powers of the Arca of Recluse, a powerful ancient relic. Phantasma is divided into ten different areas. Each area is only unlocked when a previous area has been cleared and the cube(s) from that area have been discovered and opened. Through the cubes, characters that had been of importance to the two previous instalments are brought into the dimension. Their significance in terms of the game is that they enable certain areas to open so that the path to escape the dimension can be made. Additionally, some of them are the only characters who can enter specific areas that are important for the game to advance. At one point in the game, trials have to be overcome. The only way to enter the trial area is with the associated character. As a result, those trials inevitably include specific characters, regardless of the player's preference. For instance, at one point Kloe Rinz is needed for a trial "The Colorless School" that takes place at a duplicated version of the Jenis Royal Academy, the school Kloe attends as a student. However, while the reappearance of these characters confirms their importance to the game progress and establishes a connection to past instalments, they do not explain the organization of the dimension nor its reason of existence. Phantasma is shrouded in mystery and the reason behind the presence of monsters or trials remains unclear. The dimension simply does not make sense, and escaping seems to be the goal of the game when one does not take the protagonist into account.

Kevin is an enigmatic character who does not reveal much about himself, which is striking as he is the main protagonist of the game. In previous instalments, Joshua and Estelle were the main protagonists that took the player along on their journey. Specifically, Estelle's background, offered through open conversations with other characters, reveals much about the game world. She shares plenty of information with others and in return obtains information as well. Everything that she and Joshua learns, the player learns. Kevin, on the other hand, does not share anything. While he and Riese can be considered the third instalment's Joshua and Estelle, Kevin is not eager to share his personal story with anyone, leaving the player and any other character in the dark as to Kevin's past.

However, regardless of Kevin's non-transparent personality, the player does learn a few details about Kevin's past. Cut-scenes at the beginning of each game chapter reveal pieces of Kevin's troubled history, but naturally these cut-scenes are co-ordinated accordingly so that the player does not get to know too much. While Kevin is becoming more neurotic by the minute in the dimension during gameplay, the cut-scenes only reveal

parts of Kevin's past. They do not explain the connection between his anxiety and the dimension itself. Even when the Lord of Phantasma appears, who is in control of the dimension, and points out that Kevin is ridden with guilt does the world cease to make sense, since it still does not explain the connection between Kevin's paranoia and the state of the dimension. It is only during the trials later in the game that the dimension starts to make sense. Then it is revealed that the ultimate goal of the game is for Kevin to liberate himself of that guilt so that he and the other characters can escape and return to the Zemuria continent.

The artefact's power used Kevin's guilt as a basis to design and create the otherworldly dimension, making Kevin the character around which that dimension evolves. In that light, we can consider him to be "Leibniz's God" who organizes the world in which he appears. Only when Kevin opens up and starts to share information regarding his past, does the dimension start to become understandable. Not only the other characters to whom he tells his story, but also the implied player herself gains understanding about that dimension.

While Kevin's case is more extreme than others in the *Kiseki* series, it exemplifies how characters enable the understanding of the world from their position as Leibniz's God just by sharing specific information. The *Kiseki* series is no stranger to having characters tell other characters about the structures of *Kiseki*'s imaginary world, simultaneously sharing this information with the player as well. Instead of a god however, characters in the *Kiseki* series are an anchor, a grip that the player can hold on to for understanding the world as they explain it. From that view, they are not only a form of consistency that emphasize a chronological order between instalments but also provide a way for the player to see how the world is organized and therefore perceive the bigger picture.

Narrative Consumption and the Character-World Relationship

Information shared by characters is the key to how an imaginary world is organized in the *character-world* relationship. As information is shared, a meta-view of the world and its organization is revealed to the player. Characters sharing pieces of information to perceive a greater picture is a concept that is called 'narrative consumption' by anthropologist Ôtsuka Eiji. In his ethnographic essay *World and Variation: The Reproduction and Consumption of*

Narrative (2010, [1989])[20], Ôtsuka presents 'narrative consumption' as the consumption of a single fragment of a bigger worldview in the form of a thing (2010, 109). The theory is based on the popularity among Japanese children of the Bikkuriman Chocolates sold in 1987 and 1988.[21] Although they were sold as chocolates, the main commodity of the product was actually the supplementary stickers for children to collect (Ôtsuka, 2010, 105). The reason for the craze behind the Bikkuriman stickers is explained by Ôtsuka as follows:

> 1. Every sticker contained the drawing of one character. On the reverse side of the sticker there was a short bit of information called "Rumors of the Devil World", describing the character drawn on the front of the sticker.
> 2. With one sticker alone this information amounted little more than noise. But once the child had collected a number of them and put them together, the child began to vaguely see a "small narrative" emerging – the rivalry between characters A and B, the betrayal of D by C, and so on.
> 3. This unexpected appearance of narrative functioned as a trigger to accelerate children's collection.
> 4. Moreover, with the accumulation of these small narratives, a "grand narrative" reminiscent of a mythological epic appeared.
> 5. Child consumers were attracted by this grand narrative, and tried to gain further access to it through the continued purchase of chocolates (2010, 106).

Ôtsuka points out that we can see that first and foremost a "grand narrative" is consumed through this device rather than the stickers themselves (Ibid., 107). Each individual sticker presents a "small narrative" – little pieces of information revealing a larger narrative behind them. This "grand narrative" is known in the field of *anime* as "world view". In each animation episode, a singular narrative is presented to the audience from the main character(s)'s point of view, known as the "official narrative" (Ibidem.). To make the episodes consistent with each other, countless detailed settings are indirectly presented per

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[20] Article was originally published as '*Sekai to Shukô: Monogatari no Fukusei to Shôhi*' ('*世界と趣向：物語の複製と消費*') in 1989 in Ôtsuka's urban ethnography *Monogatari Shôhiron* ('*物語消費論*', 'A Theory of Narrative Consumption').
[21] 'Bikkuriman Chocolates' can be loosely translated as 'Surprise Man Chocolates'.

episode of the same series. These settings include the place where the main characters live, their interpersonal relationships, manners of living, relations between countries, and so on.

As seen in the Bikkuriman example, for the consumption of the grand narrative to occur readers first have to consume its characters. Douglas Schules notes that at the core of Ôtsuka's consumption of the grand narrative lies a character-world relationship that motivates readers to consume the grand narrative through the consumption of smaller narratives provided by the characters (2015, 57). The 'consumption of narratives' is quite a drastic expression as it recalls a passive activity in which nothing is left of characters and imaginary world after consumption. Marc Steinberg's notion of the character, based on Ôtsuka's "grand narrative," sustains a better metaphor that explains how the characters in the *Kiseki* series who share information provide the player with insight into their world so that she can access it.

Steinberg considers the character as the maintainer of consistency and compossibility of fictional worlds to have two essential sides: a material one and an immaterial one (2012, 188). "The material embodiment of the character is the gateway to its world. Consumers purchase character goods not only to possess the character in its material form, but also to access the world in which the character exists" (2012, 188). The immaterial side on the other hand is considered by Steinberg to be an abstract entity. It is the essential element of consistency in an imaginary world; it connects seemingly incompossible worlds and makes them belong to one realm of experience (Ibidem). Steinberg's idea about the material side of the character is especially striking as it perceives the character as a *gateway* to the world. It shows that by possessing the material embodiment of these characters, the player is able to access the world and experience it.

However, the concept of character that I speak of is not materially embodied. If we carry Steinberg's idea of the character as a gateway to Ôtsuka's concept of consumption, then consuming the small narratives to gain access to a grand narrative becomes an active activity that allows one to experience the grand narrative. The temporary edge to "narrative consumption" fades away if we regard the act of consuming the small narratives to get to the "grand narrative" more as a method in which one a) absorbs information to b) immerse oneself into the world in order to c) actually experience it. In this sense, the characters providing the player with pieces of information ("small narratives") are a gateway to the imaginary world ("grand narrative").

The *Kiseki* series is full of situations in which several characters provide an explanation of the world's structure (figure 8), but these situations lack a form of immediate experience for the player that shows directly how much of a gateway characters can be. Although the player can usually experience what is told soon after (for instance when a character tells about a city that the player is travelling to), I believe that a more literal study of the characters as a gateway to the world might better demonstrate the experience they can provide the player with.

Figure 8: An explanation about the village of Celdric. Screenshot from Sen no Kiseki.

My analysis will be focused on the Star and Moon doors in *Sora no Kiseki: The Third*. During gameplay, the player encounters several doors that she can only open and enter if the player has brought with her the characters that the doors call for[22]. The doors will not open unless the correct characters are present, making them the exclusive means through whom the player can get access to what is on the other side. While some doors show the seemingly irrelevant daily lives of some characters, others declare the whole reason for certain events or appearance of some specific characters in other instalments. When the Erebonian prince Olivier enters his door for instance, we see him and his retainer Mueller in a cut-scene in which Olivier declares his independence from chancellor Osborne that

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[22] The doors 'speak' in the Classical Japanese language in the form of riddles, hence the player has to speculate which characters are called for.

eventually leads to the power struggle between the aristocracy and the working class reformists in the Erebonia Empire happening in *Sen no Kiseki* (figure 9).

Figure 9: Olivier declares his independence. Screenshot from Sora no Kiseki: The Third.

The event in Olivier's door is spoken of several times in *Sen no Kiseki*, so any kind of player will be informed about it, whether she entered the door in *Sora no Kiseki: The Third* or not. However, for the implied player this event is not only something she is already aware of, but has actually experienced. The doors bring the player into events that let her directly experience the situation at hand, in contrast to the previous example where the character just tells about a specificity of the world. As the doors are coupled with specific characters, the characters come to function as the gateway to these events rather than the doors themselves. The doors are materialized symbols that manifest the characters' roles as a gateway by allowing the player to experience the information that they provide the player with directly. Nevertheless, while the doors give the player a direct experience, a character that simply gives indirect background information, can still be a significant factor in understanding the world. For instance, in *Sen no Kiseki*, an instructor at the military academy teaches his students about the "orbal" communication technology and its role in modern warfare (figure 10). Though the player never experiences the invention of that technology directly, she does see the influence an antenna has on the ongoing war that shuts out all communication devices in *Sen no Kiseki II* (2015). At that point, the player indirectly experiences the influence of the events that the instructor previously described. Therefore, in both situations, one in which a character tells something about the world and one in which the player directly experiences the information that is given (through the

experience of the events in the doors that provide the player with background information in later events), the characters are the ones that acts as a gateway, because they present the player with pieces of the imaginary world that she can experience, even if that experience only happens later on.
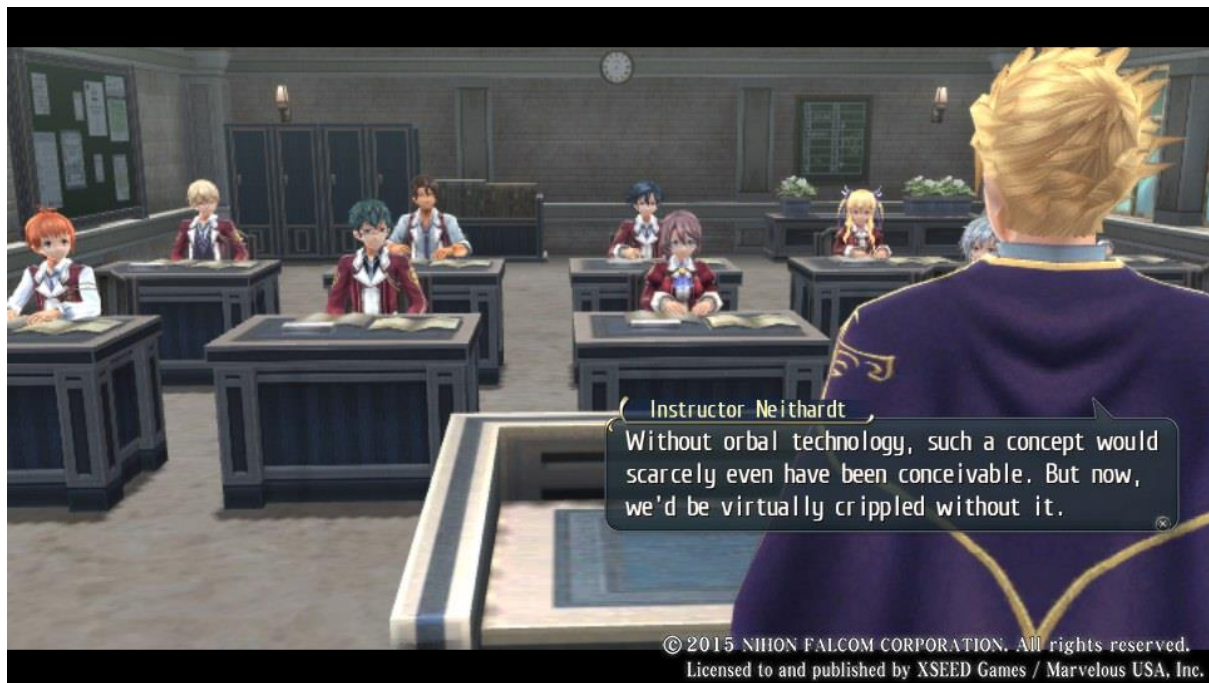

Figure 10: The instructor explains how much impact "orbal technologies" have on modern day warfare. Screenshot from Sen no Kiseki.

Characters as Gateway to the Game World

While I argued that through sharing pieces of information characters are a gateway to the imaginary world in the *character-world* relationship, it is not a distinct characterization to the *Kiseki* series as a game world, because it can be adopted by many media forms that portray an imaginary world. It is therefore of interest to perceive how the *character-world* relationship functions when we acknowledge that as a *hyperdiegesis* (see Hills, 2002, 104), the game world is bound to the rules, objectives, dynamics and mechanics of the game. In that case, the most significant element in the *character-world* relationship is naturally the characters, and specifically the player's avatar.

In game worlds, the avatar is usually perceived as the element that pulls the player into the world. As game philosopher Daniel Vella notes: "it is precisely through the virtual embodiment of the player within the gameworld that the world becomes available to her phenomenologically - that is to say, as an object of consciousness - *as* a world" (2013). The

player can experience the game world spatially through these characters, especially the avatar which then can also be seen as a gateway for the player to the world.

However, considering the *Kiseki* game world, there are a few indications that point out the "avatar-as-embodiment-of-the-player" approach as a dilemma. First, in every *Kiseki* game, the player can choose to walk around with any character in the player's party (though the main protagonist is the one that has to be used most often[23]). The player can switch to another character to act as her vessel of transportation with just one click of the button when party members are present. So then it is questionable to perceive every character that the player can walk around with as the virtual embodiment of the player. Second, each character in the *Kiseki* series has their own personality, including the avatars. Kevin, Estelle and Joshua, Lloyd, and Rean are all main protagonists and avatars simultaneously through whom the player experiences the world, but each with their own individuality. Therefore, we could consider them 'player-characters', a concept by Vella. A player-character makes the game world phenomenologically available to the player, while also taking into account the character's separate identity (Vella, 2013).

A player-character can inform the player about the game world by making it phenomenologically available. For example, at the beginning of *Sen no Kiseki*, Rean is put in a class at Thors Military Academy together with students from different social classes, a rarity in the Erebonia Empire where nobles hold a higher rank than commoners. During the introduction between the students, a discussion arises on this matter. A hot-headed commoner accuses a student of noble standing to be a misplaced snob due to his arrogant behaviour as a noble. The player is initially not familiar with the situation regarding the social system and the importance of certain members of nobility, but during the discussion, Rean informs a foreign student who is also not familiar with the Erebonian class system about the tensions between the nobles and the commoners (figure 11 and 12). Simultaneously, the player is also informed of the tension between the different classes,

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[23] For events that initially only involve the main protagonist.

which is of importance, since both *Sen no Kiseki* and *Sen no Kiseki II* (2015) revolve about the conflict between these classes.

Figure 11: As a foreign student, Gaius is not familiar with the class differences. Screenshot from Sen no Kiseki.
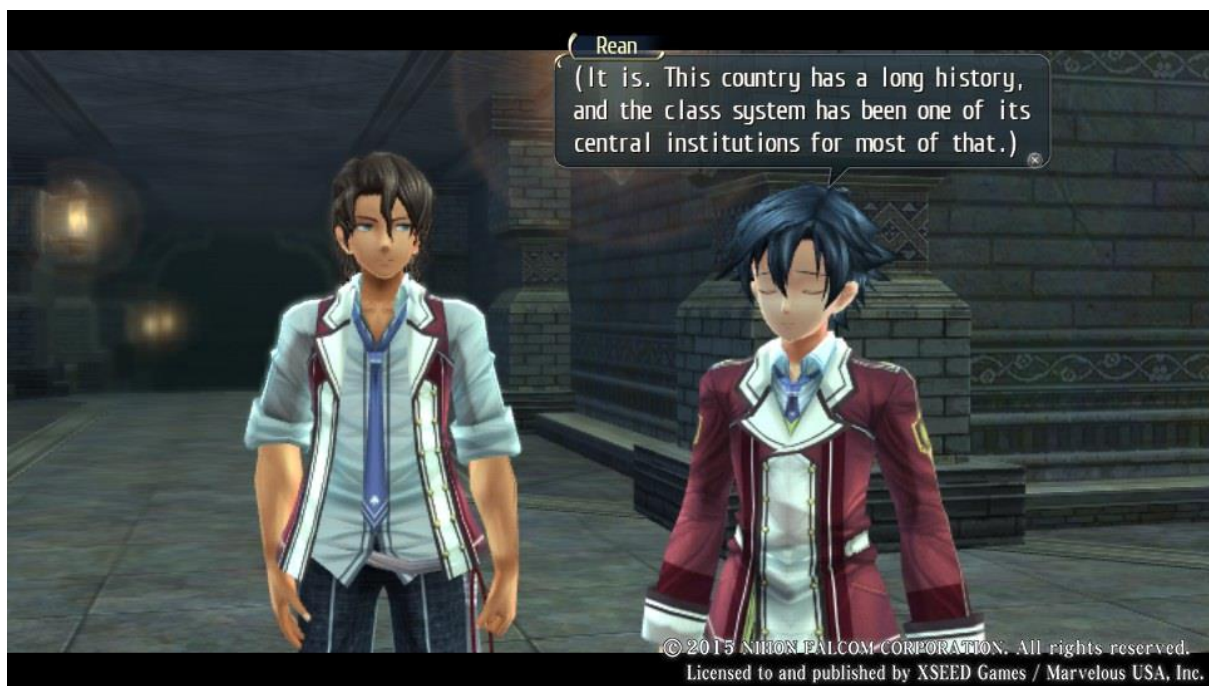

Figure 12: Rean explains the class system in Erebonia. Screenshot from Sen no Kiseki.

The player-character is not the only character that shares information with the player. I have argued previously that in the *character-world* relationship, characters who share information are considered a gateway to the world, because by sharing information, the player can immerse herself in the imaginary world. During the discussion about the

nobility in the Erebonian Empire, Rean might have been the one who informed a different character about the commoners and the nobility, but he was not the only one in that situation to share this kind of information. Other characters also revealed their knowledge of this situation. There are also other situations in which the player-character is neither involved nor even present when information is given to the player. For example, at one point in *Zero no Kiseki*, the player is forced into a cut-scene in which Lloyd and his colleagues have lunch. Randy mentions the unusual surroundings of the place. In response, Elie points out that on the exact location where they are eating, a battle had occurred in the past between the Erebonia Empire and the Calvard Republic (figure 13).

Figure 13: Yes, well. In the past a battle occurred on this spot". Screenshot from Zero no Kiseki.

 Lloyd is present, but he is only involved in the explanation so far that he listens to it. Furthermore, in *Sen no Kiseki* for example, after the dramatic revelation of the main antagonist's identity, two Ouroboros members discuss the plans that have finally been set in motion (figure 14 and 15). Though the names of these plans are the only things to be revealed, the player is made aware of them nonetheless. By contrast, Rean, through whom the player supposedly immerses herself into the world, is not even present and therefore not aware of the existence of these plans.

      Though we can state that the player-character is one way of having a game world phenomenologically available to the player, it is not a distinct concept necessary for the *character-world* relationship to occur in a game world. Instead, the above explanation

shows that we have returned to the idea that any character, as long as they provide information to the player, can be perceived as a gateway to the imaginary world. That is the core idea of the *character-world* relationship. The fact that so many characters exist in *Kiseki*'s game world with whom the player-character interacts, leads me to believe that we should look beyond the idea that there is only one player-character who matters in that game world. We should acknowledge the idea that there are many other characters who act out their specific role as a component of the game. When the specificity of their roles in *Kiseki*'s game world is addressed, we perceive how that role affects the kind of information that allows them to transform into gateways to the game world.

Figure 14: Where the members of Ouroboros operate. Screenshot from Sen no Kiseki.

Figure 15: Rean is not told about the Phantasmal Blaze, yet the player is. Screenshot from Sen no Kiseki.

A Distinction between Character Roles

Any character that appears in a game world is bound to its rules, dynamics and more, since the game world is a hyperdiegesis. The game world is therefore what Jesper Juul calls "an incoherent world", which refers to the idea that some things in that game world cannot be explained "without discussing the game rules" (2005, 130). One of these so-called rules that we have to refer to when discussing *Kiseki*'s game world is the fact that each character is designed according to the role they have in the game. In role-playing games like the *Kiseki* series, the player encounters many kinds of characters, including ones that might not be of great significance to the game's narrative progress. As a matter of fact, there are more non-playable characters (NPCs) unimportant for game progress than characters who are. On the other hand, those who are significant do not necessarily have to be player-characters. There are non-playable characters with whom the player can opt to speak who might not be relevant to the game's progress, but who can support the player in the game performance by giving additional items or an extra quest. There are also non-playable characters who are of importance to the main storyline. In other words, as the *Kiseki* series belongs to the role-playing genre, there exist various types of characters in the game that may or may not be involved in the narrative progress of the game. Therefore, we need to distinguish the kinds of characters one might come across in the *Kiseki* series.

Aarseth classifies game characters into three different categories: bots with no individual identity, shallow characters, and deep characters (2012, 132). The latter two categories are a parallel to the distinction English novelist Edward Morgan Forster makes between flat characters who do not change during narrative development, and round characters, those who change and develop as the story progresses (Aarseth 2012, 132). As Aarseth points out: "it can be claimed that the richness of character is an important authorial tool that characterizes the positive potential of authorship in games, where malleability and user control limit authorial affordances" (Ibidem.). The *Kiseki* series has a large variety of round characters, but that does not mean that they can be directly controlled by the player. Nor do I wish to imply that characters who can be wielded by the player are the only kinds of characters that can give the player information about the game world. Simply speaking, I classify the characters in the *Kiseki* series in three different categories:

1) The player-character who is the main protagonist whom the player controls (for most of the time) in the game;

2) Party members, whom I consider the other main protagonists of the game, but who are not always present;

3) Non-playable characters (NPCs), among those:
   - Deep characters who are important for the series' narrative progression;
   - Shallow characters who are semi-important for the game's narrative progression in a single situation;
   - Shallow characters who are of no importance to the game's narrative progression.

An indication of what the games recognize to be deep characters are specific introductions of certain characters and the presence of their portrait image. When Wazy Hemisphere, the head of the gang called 'Testament' is introduced in *Zero no Kiseki*, the player immediately knows that this is a deep character, who is probably important to the game's plot progression (figure 16). Wazy's gang members, on the other hand, are only shown in their pixelated appearance, even when the player interacts with them. This is similar in all the games. For instance, in *Sen no Kiseki*, each character might have their own portrait image when they speak, but one can recognize the difference between shallow and deep characters by the fact that deep characters are specifically introduced and the designs of the shallow characters are limited and re-used often (see figure 17 and 18). Most deep characters are important to the progression of the games' plot, and the player is usually forced to interact with them. Interaction with shallow characters, on the other hand, is

often optional. Yet, since they are more often than not of no significance to the plot, the

things that they say are limited (see figure 18 and 19).

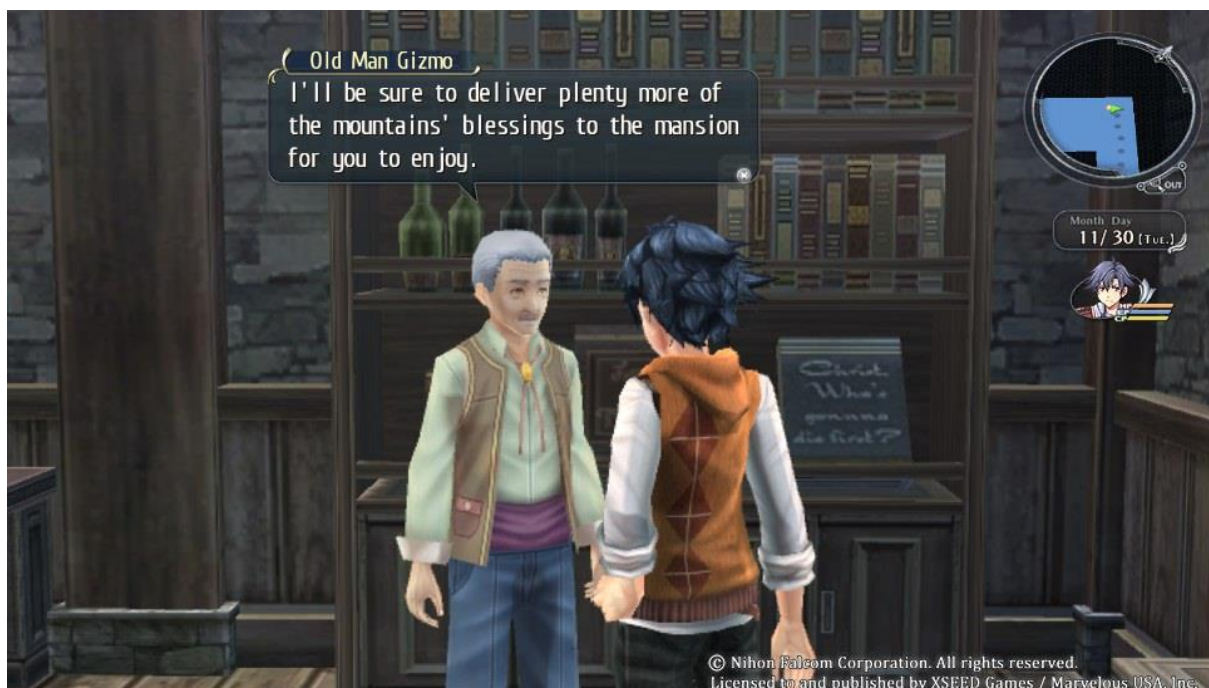*Figure 16: He has a portrait; therefore, he must be important.*

Figure 17: Old Man Gizmo is an old friend of Rean's father in Sen no Kiseki II. Screenshot from Sen no Kiseki II.

Figure 18: But as his design has been used before in Sen no Kiseki, we can safely assume that he is a shallow character. Screenshot from Sen no Kiseki.

Figure 19:Non-playable characters usually do not keep up big conversations. Screenshot from Sen no Kiseki.

Yet, there are situations where shallow characters can be of relative importance to the progress of the game's narrative. The mayor of Weinz town in *Zero no Kiseki*, is a shallow character, but Lloyd is frequently forced to interact with him, as the mayor calls for help whenever his town is in havoc. The game requires to help the mayor with missions

such as to find a person, or to save the town from thieves, at least three times without Lloyd being able to refuse. In *Sen no Kiseki,* Rean had to interact with a shallow character in order to fulfil a mandatory quest. These mandatory actions make them an essential element for the games' narrative progress, but even though the player has to interact with some of them, they are not of incredible importance aside from one or two situations. This is contrasted with some of the deeper characters with whom the interaction might also be limited. The noble Rufus Albarea, for instance, is a deep character whom the player only meets twice in *Sen no Kiseki*. Interaction with him is limited, but he is of great importance in *Sen no Kiseki II,* since his actions in *Sen no Kiseki* resulted in him becoming the main tactician of the Noble Alliance in the war between the nobles and the Erebonian military army. In this regard, shallow characters with whom the player must interact are still similar to the other many shallow characters with whom the player can choose to interact, as the importance of that forced interaction is limited to the situation at hand. By the same token, interactions with a deep character might also be limited, but that character can be of great importance later.

Deep characters are more involved in the plot's progress and therefore inevitably have more substance to share. They are the ones who usually explain specific situations or matters regarding *Kiseki*'s world, which is also one of the reasons why the player-character has to interact with them. During these interactions however, these characters also have the tendency to share a lot of personal details. In *Sen no Kiseki,* party members are specifically a good way to obtain information about the world, since they accompany the player-character through many of her quests. Before each field mission, characters associated with the area that they travel to explain the cities' rich histories and culture. Besides going on field studies, the player-character can also form "bonds" with his classmates.[24] During one of these events, the student Gaius mentions to Rean that he is from a different country called 'The Northern Highlands'. This surprises Rean, as that country is a special place where the historical figure emperor Dreichels of the Erebonia Empire raised his army several hundred years ago. Through this event, the player not only finds out who Gaius is, but also learns about the close ties between the Erebonia Empire and the Northern Highlands (figure 20 and 21). As a result, the player-character can

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[24] This is a new addition only available from *Sen no Kiseki* on.

simultaneously receive information regarding the classmate in question and learn about aspects of the world that that classmate is referring to.

Figure 20: A bonding-event between Gaius and Rean. Screenshot from Sen no Kiseki.

Figure 21: And the player learns where the historical Emperor Dreichels raised his army. Screenshot from Sen no Kiseki.

The roles these deep characters have make them a relevant element in the *character-world* relationship, since they carry more substantial information justified by their role in the game's plot. Their role can be of such significance that it goes beyond the scope of one single instalment, turning them into gateways for understanding *Kiseki*'s world in

other instalments as well. A character whose role is of such significance that he repeatedly returns in other instalments is Olivier Lenheim, a flamboyant travelling merchant. In *Sora no Kiseki: FC*, protagonists Estelle and Joshua first meet Olivier. Olivier is immediately recognized as a citizen of Erebonia and is met with some suspicion and animosity as to why a citizen of Erebonia would travel into the Liberl kingdom. Olivier in his turn acknowledges that Liberl and Erebonia have a conflicted past, because of the Hundred Days War that happened between the countries ten years ago. Olivier gives the player insight into the internal constructions of another country that the player cannot enter, which is something many deep characters do, as they provide the player which substantial information regarding *Kiseki*'s world. At the end of *Sora no Kiseki: SC*, however, Olivier's significance as a deep character changes. He is revealed to be a royal prince of Erebonia. After this revelation, the locations of the later games are not set in Liberl anymore, and the player cannot re-enter Liberl anymore either. The whereabouts of later games are either set in Crossbell or the Erebonia Empire, and Olivier as the royal prince appears in all of them.

The implied player can deduce that Olivier will be of a major influence in *Sen no Kiseki*, for example, from Olivier's significance in the previous instalments. While other characters in *Sen no Kiseki* are completely new for any player, Olivier's appearance allows the player to use the knowledge she has attained in the previous instalments as a sort of foundation (figure 22). This means that alongside the significance of Olivier's role in the games, his re-appearances confirm that the information that he has shared is not just limited to one game, but affects the whole series. This way, Olivier can be regarded as a gateway through which the implied player can immerse herself in various instalments of *Kiseki*'s world.

Figure 22: The implied player will immediately recognize this man as Olivier from the previous instalments. Screenshot from Sen no Kiseki.

We have now seen that in *Kiseki* game world, the player has many opportunities to interact with various characters, but shallow characters usually do not add substantial narrative information, nor are they of major influence to the games' progress. Party members and other deep characters inevitably have more substance to share with the player. They are the most accessible way of gaining knowledge about *Kiseki*'s game world, although the player receives information from them anyway as interaction with them is often forced, because of their importance to the game's plot progression. These deep characters play a major part in the progress of the games to such an extent that they re-appear in other instalments as well, allowing the implied player to better understand the game world. From that perspective, these deep characters are the gateway to the game world.

Up until this point, I have argued that deep characters can become an entry into *Kiseki*'s world in the *character-world* relationship. Yet, the same question I have asked previously returns: is the idea of deep characters as gateways to the game world, a specific original element to a game world? I am aware that the difference between deep and shallow characters is not something that is entirely a distinct element to a game world. Even though deep characters have more substantial information to share, the player will attain the most

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information anyway, since it is of importance to the game's plot. In this sense, their significance does not differ from the significance of deep characters in a regular story plot. Shallow characters, on the other hand, might not be of great significance to the game's plot, but the player has the agency to choose to interact with them. However, this simple distinction between shallow and deep characters is not entirely accurate. That is why there are two observations that I would like to point out which I will continue to discuss in the following chapter.

Firstly, interaction with deep characters is often mandatory and they might have more substantial information to share, but only if they are willing to (figure 23).

Figure 23: You cannot just make them share information. Screenshot from Sen no Kiseki.

The *Kiseki* series has its fair share of characters who hide their identity: Joshua, Kevin, Wazy, Rixia Mao, Thomas, Olivier, Crow, Misty, Rufus, Lechter, Sharon are all names of deep characters who have been involved in the *Kiseki* games' plots one way or another, but have hidden their identity. In these cases, the player might receive information that is not necessarily accurate. This means that the player-character's own personal position from which the player perceives the world also influences what kind of information the player receives.

Secondly, similar to the optional doors in *Sora no Kiseki: The Third*, the player has the possibility of interacting with deep characters in ways not required for the game's narrative progress. Most of the time, deep characters might only quickly mention something

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regarding the situation that they are in. This kind of interaction is related to the interaction with shallow characters. However, besides the bonding-events in *Sen no Kiseki*, which I will discuss in more detail in the following chapter, optionally interacting with a deep character might also prompt a "secret event" to occur.

Figure 24:Instructor Neithardt decides to give the boys a tough swimming lesson. Screenshot from Sen no Kiseki.

Figure 25: Instructor Sara responds to the on-going rivalry with a swimming lesson of her own. Screenshot from Sen no Kiseki.

At one point for instance in *Sen no Kiseki*, Rean is called by one of the instructors asking him to gather his male classmates and come to see him, but he mentions that it is not obligatory. If the player chooses to go to the instructor, a special event will occur in which the students will have a swimming lesson given by said instructor (figure 24). This event prompts another event later in the game during which a female instructor forces Rean's female classmates also to participate in a swimming lesson in order to beat the boys (figure 25). Though not of big relevance to the game's main plot, both events are fun to watch and emphasize the on-going rivalry between the two instructors, adding more depth to the overall life at the academy.

Even though a distinction between the different kinds of roles that characters play in the games' plot progressions shows from what kinds of characters the player receives the most relevant information, it is not enough to simply proclaim that deep characters are the overall element that will make the player understand *Kiseki's* world as it is. The last two examples show that there are at least two aspects that also affects the player's understanding of the game world – that is, a) the player-character's own personal position so that the game world is not objectively shown, and b) the player's agency that gives the player the possibility to choose to obtain information through specific events. Therefore, I will discuss the influence of the player's agency and of the player-character's own personal position in the final chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: Affordances and Additive Comprehension

In the previous chapter I pointed out that even though deep characters can be perceived as a gateway to the game world because they have the most substantial information to share, they are not always willing to share the information they have. In some cases, the information that they do share is not even accurate. The player cannot force these characters to give information since the player is constrained to the position of the player-character. Furthermore, I mentioned that the *Kiseki* series provides the player with quests and events that are not mandatory for the overall games' progression. It is up to the player to participate in these events or not. In other words, gaining information through deep characters in these events is also a matter of agency. In this chapter, I will continue to discuss these complications through various detailed analyses of several events in the *Kiseki* series.

The first section of this chapter will demonstrate that the relationship between the player-character and game world is subjective, as the player is dependent on the frames of knowledge each character contains. Through an analysis of *Sora no Kiseki The Third,* I indicate two circumstances that appear in the *character-world* relationship: first, the player develops a form of double awareness, because the focalization in the game switches regularly, but the player's double awareness is restricted in the sense that the player can hardly act on it. Second, the frames of knowledge are subjective, since the imaginary world only makes sense when the subjectivity of the situation (in-game) is revealed.

The second section will address the issue of agency in the *Kiseki* game world. By analysing two situations in which the player is restricted in her control over the player-character, I will establish that it is the player-character's own subjective position on which the player's agency depends. However, rather than considering the agency constrained by the player-character's position, I argue that we should view the agency that the player has over the player-characters as a matter of affordances: what the player-character can do and what it cannot do.

Using this as a point of departure, the final section offers a broad analysis consisting of multiple situations in the *Kiseki* instalments. The first part will focus on the question of how much of an influence the agency is that the player is afforded. It will demonstrate that while the agency has little influence on game progress, it influences the content of single

events. The second part concentrates on how the player's decisions affect knowledge acquired about the game world. While I conclude that the agency is limited to the affordances of the player-character, the examples in the analysis demonstrate that the different options that the game affords can also lead to additive comprehension, a form of insight. By choosing to engage, the player is able to connect situations from separate instalments, which enables her to understand the significance of the circumstances in the game world, even those that do not seem to hold any direct connection to the progress of the game.

Switching between Frames of Knowledge

After posing for two games as an eccentric traveling troubadour, Olivier Lenheim finally reveals his actual identity as Olivert Reise Arnor, the first prince of the Erebonia Empire near the end of *Sora no Kiseki: SC*. The revelation about Olivert came as a big surprise for Joshua and Estelle, the player-characters of that instalment. It is not until he decides to reveal his identity in a striking fashion to them that his identity is also revealed to the player. The revelation about Olivier's actual identity to the player that is simultaneous with the player-characters also specifically demonstrates that the game world is perceived from Estelle and Joshua's point of view.

In narratology, the process by which a world becomes available to the reader from a specific character's point of view is called *recentering*. As Vella and Ryan point out, this is a mode of reading where a consciousness relocates itself in another consciousness and perceives what is actual in that world from that standpoint (Vella, 2013; Ryan, 2015, 73). *Recentering* is of large influence on Vella's concept of the player-character. In the case of game worlds, the player sees through the 'eyes' of that character how the player phenomenologically experiences the world (see Vella, 2013). This is exactly what happens in the case of Joshua and Estelle. Since they are the player-characters, the player naturally perceives the *Kiseki* world from their perspective. This also influences the knowledge that the player receives. As teenagers of the Liberl Kingdom, Joshua and Estelle have limited knowledge about the Erebonia Empire. As an inhabitant of the empire, Olivert was the perfect source of information. For the player, this is convenient as well: as player-characters, any information they receive, the player receives. The revelation about Olivert's actual identity thus comes as just as much of a surprise to the player as to Joshua and

Estelle. As the player obtains the information that Joshua and Estelle obtain, this also means that technically anything that they are being kept in the dark about, the player is also not aware of. As Steinberg notes: "The world is not only an abstract setting but a way of seeing, a particular […] relation between the character and the narrative space. Much as a character-monad is a point of view onto a particular world, the narrative world is indissociable from the position occupied by the character" (2012, 199).

Recentering assures that even though the game world might become phenomenologically available to the player, she is simultaneously constrained to the position of the player-character in said world. This implies that even though the player-character might receive specific information from various characters that enables her to understand the world, the player cannot assume that information to be accurate. After all, Olivert pretended to be an Erebonian troubadour for a long period of time in the eyes of Joshua and Estelle, while he in fact was the prince of the empire. That said, the player-character is not constantly present in the Kiseki series. Sometimes, the player sees scenes which the player-character is unaware of, making the player conscious of aspects of the game world that the player-character is not. Hence, the argument that the player perceives the world solely from the perspective of the player-character is perhaps problematic to make.

It is certainly true that characters do not always wish to share information. Kevin is perhaps the most obvious case, as he is secretive about the raison d'être of the otherworldly dimension for most of Sora no Kiseki: The Third, despite being knowing the answer. The implied player first comes to know Kevin through the perspective of Estelle in the role of the player-character in Sora no Kiseki: SC. However, as a result of change in focalization, the position of the character on which the game concentrates (see Gérard Genette, 1980, 189)[25], the implied player learns a few things about Kevin in the second instalment, which are relevant for the third instalment. At the end of Sora no Kiseki: SC, the mode of focalization switches from Estelle and Joshua to Kevin. As the game turns away

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[25] Gérard Genette makes a difference between internal focalization in which the reader perceives the narrative from the perspective of the characters focused on, and external focalization in which a narrative follows a character, but the reader does not receive that character's thoughts or point of view. I consider 'focalization' as 'internal focalization' in this thesis to exemplify that the game regularly deviates from the player-character's perspective, though I do mention specifically when the focalization appears not to be from the character's point of view.

from Joshua and Estelle to focalise on Kevin, the player becomes aware of Kevin's actual identity and true intentions, that he accompanied the main protagonists mainly for their connection to the antagonist. The change of focalization causes the player to become aware of more state of affairs than the player-characters do. Even when the focalization returns to Joshua and Estelle, they have no idea about Kevin's real identity. For them, the actual world is the world in which Kevin is a wandering priest, but for the player, the *Kiseki* world turned into a world in which Kevin is a knight of the Septian church posing as a wandering priest. In short, while it seems at first that in the *character-world* relationship the knowledge that the player can acquire is constrained to the personal position of the player-character, the change of mode in focalization causes a rift between the knowledge that the player-characters have and the player has. Instead, the player develops a double awareness that the player-characters do not have.

The double awareness that the player develops is closely associated with the double consciousness the implied player already has that I discussed in chapter one, in order to be able to enter the imaginary world. Gary Fine considers double awareness a usual phenomenon in role-playing games. He notes that in analogue role-playing games, players work under the constraints of what he calls a *closed awareness* (1983, 188). Since Fine's player is aware of both the primary world and the fictional world of the character when he is in his so-called 'frame' of the player, the player naturally has more knowledge than the character he plays as (Ibid., 188). Fine's player switches back and forth between these different frames of knowledge of player and character. When the player is inside the frame of his character, the character cannot draw upon the knowledge the player has, but is instead limited to the knowledge the character can have within his own subjective frame as an inhabitant of the game world without any awareness of a primary world (Ibid., 188). In contrast to Fine, Vella considers the character a psychological frame in which a character's point of view in the game world is formalized "beyond the simple geometry of a position in space" (2013). Comparable to the matter of *recentering*, the psychological frame is "the non-(or pre-)ludic representation of a player-character that first begins to shape the frame through which the player perceives the gameworld" (Ibidem.). Nevertheless, Vella relates this frame only to the player-character, but he does not address the phenomenon that we can see in the *Kiseki* series in which modes of focalization regularly switch.

The extent of the double awareness that the player develops through the switch of focalization in the *Kiseki* series can be addressed through a combination of Fine and Vella's theories. Since Joshua and Estelle's knowledge about Olivert was limited to him being a wandering troubadour, their view on the world was constructed accordingly. When the game focalises on Kevin, who reveals himself to be a knight of the church, a rift occurs between the frames of knowledge of the player and of the player-characters. First, the psychological frame through which the player perceives the world is placed from Joshua and Estelle onto Kevin. The *Kiseki* world becomes available to the player from Kevin's point of view as a knight of the Septian Church. Second, simultaneously, the frame of knowledge is suddenly divided into three different frames: Joshua and Estelle's frame of knowledge, Kevin's frame of knowledge, and the player's frame of knowledge. When the psychological frame switches to Kevin due to the internal focalization that switches, the frame of knowledge also switches to him. Third, consequently the player's own frame of knowledge expands with the new information that Kevin provides, thereby merging Kevin, Estelle and Joshua's frames of knowledge into her own developing double awareness.

The player moves in a constant flux between different frames but cannot necessarily act on the frame of knowledge that she has in her own double awareness. That is, she cannot act according to what she knows, but is limited to what her player-character knows. While the player is aware of Kevin's real identity near the end of *Sora no Kiseki: SC*, Joshua and Estelle are not. As soon as focalization returns to them, the player can no longer use the knowledge she has gained to influence the game, because the game quickly ends after this revelation[26]. Even when the player regains control over Joshua and Estelle as party members in *Sora no Kiseki: The Third*, Kevin has become the player-character through whom the world supposedly becomes available to the player and he guards his true identity. Until both Joshua and Estelle become aware of Kevin's identity in *Sora no Kiseki: The Third*, the player can only act according to frames of knowledge limited to the presentation of the otherworldly dimension as a dangerous place to escape from, instead of its actual purpose as a place where Kevin is supposed to undergo trials to attain forgiveness. This means that in the *character-world* relationship, a player develops a double awareness as she gains information regarding the game world from different perspectives. Yet, simultaneously she

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[26] After the revelation about Kevin's identity, the game only shows cut-scenes, refraining the player from doing anything inside the *Kiseki* world except for watching the events unfold.

is constrained to the frames of knowledge every character has and is forced to take into account the regular shift between these modes of focalization, regardless of her own double awareness.

Constrained Affordance: The Subjective Position of the Player-Character

During gameplay in *Sen no Kiseki*¸ the mode of focalization frequently changes to a group of terrorists who are acting out a plan to attack a certain building in Crossbell City. Though the player is made aware of their plans, she cannot intervene, since the that event is only shown to the player through cut-scenes. The mode of focalization returns to Rean after each cut-scene, but Rean is not aware this event occurred. Instead, as a student of the military academy, he has to go on a field trip and undertake several quests for the game to advance. Even if the player decides to deviate from the quests to intervene with the attack on Crossbell, the game would stop her. For instance, when the player strays too far away from the city of Roer, one of his party members will speak up by saying that they would eventually arrive in the country's capital if they continue down that road (figure 26 and 27). The game will continuously place Rean back in the area that he is supposed to be in, making it impossible for the player to act according to her double awareness. The agency that she has cannot be used to deviate from the rules of the game.
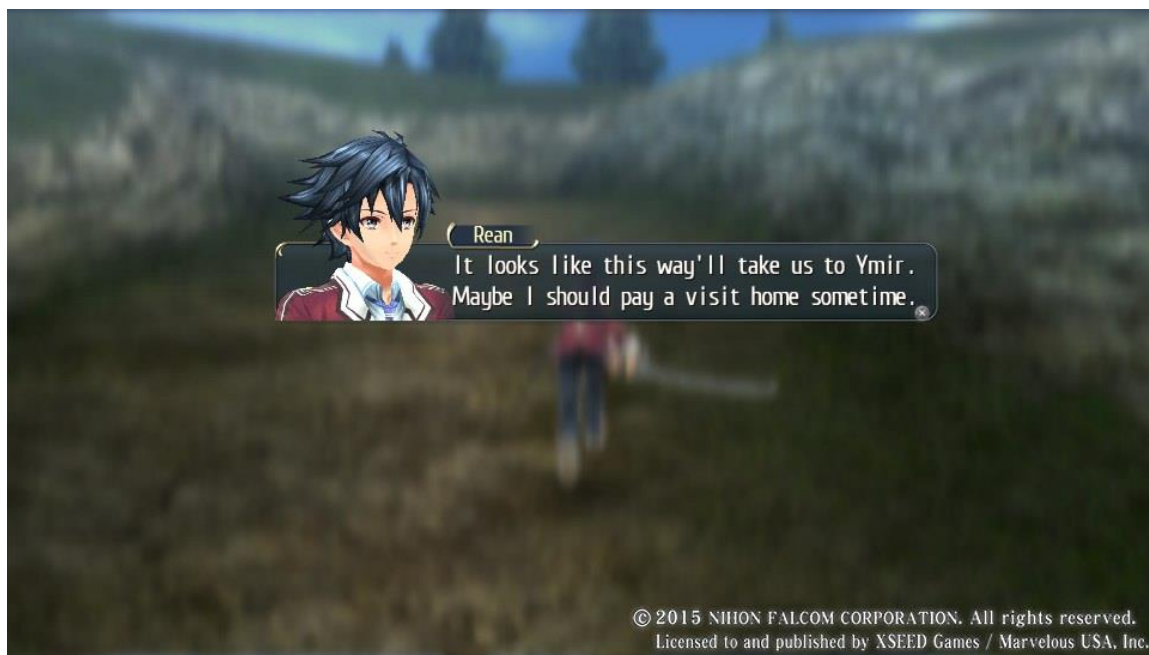
Figure 26: The player can try going somewhere else then where Rean is supposed to be. Screenshot from Sen no Kiseki.
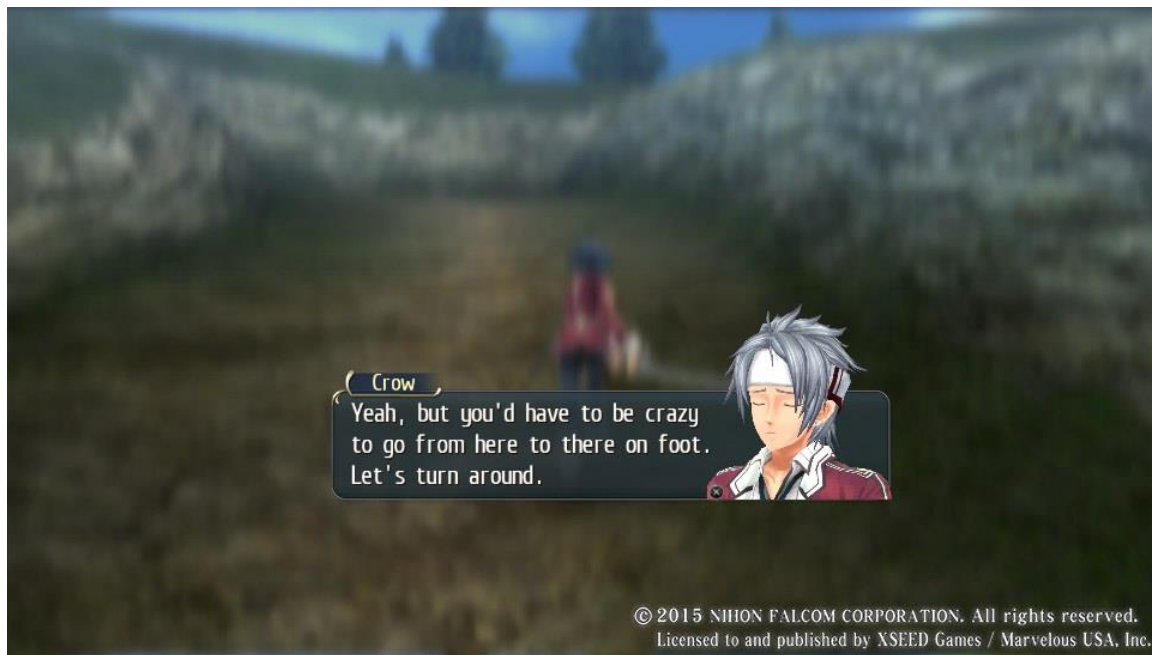
Figure 27: But the game simply does not allow deviating from the path. Screenshot from Sen no Kiseki.

Simply speaking, when a player has a certain amount of agency over a game, she could technically influence actions, events and even the outcome of the game, but this is not true in practice. In the *Kiseki* series, the player has agency over the player-characters and their party members in terms of moving through the space of the game world, adjusting their *orbal arts* and equipment, and choosing what to do during battle. In *Sora no Kiseki: SC,* the mode of focalization temporarily shifts to Joshua. Unlike other focalization changes that occur in cut-scenes when the game departs from the player-character, Joshua can actually be controlled by the player during this event. Yet, all the agency is constrained to the task that Joshua is about to undertake: the infiltration of the military base. The player is not able to make Joshua go elsewhere.

Generally, the rule for the *Kiseki* series is that the player must win the battles that the player-characters are in for the game to advance[27] though there are a few exceptions (figure 28)[28]. The game never specifies when the player does not have to win, but usually the player may notice that the opponent is tremendously overpowered. Returning to the infiltration event, Joshua ends up fighting a previous ally, Major Vander who is trying to stop Joshua from stealing the airship. Major Vander is strong and hard to defeat, but even if the

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[27] If the player does not win, the game will simply stop with the message: "Your party was wiped out. Game Over".

[28] Some battles the player does not have to win or the player will be stopped half-way through the battle. And, some battles simply just cannot be won

player loses the battle, the game will continue, making the battle a case of 'not having to win'. The battle is in the hands of the player, but the outcome of the event will stay the same.

Figure 28:Their opponent Rufus is so immensely overpowered that the play can anticipate beforehand that she cannot win this battle. Screenshot from Sen no Kiseki II.

As it later turns out, the reason for stealing the airship is that it will be of importance during the rest of the game's plot. The restrictions of agency as a rule in the cases of Joshua and Rean make sense, because the games' development relies on its plot progression. If the game world allowed Rean or Joshua to deviate from their quests, the game's internal logic as a *hyperdiegesis* would be destroyed. Too much agency would kill the *Kiseki* game world. The player's agency is in this sense constricted to the *hyperdiegesis'* internal logic, but would it be correct to consider a constriction of agency as a limitation when it allows the game world to act according to its own internal logic?

Instead of calling the constriction of agency in the *Kiseki* game world a limitation, I perceive the agency in the game world in terms of affordances, since that allows us to discuss the extent of the player's influence on the plot while also bound to the subjective position of the player-character. Drawing parallels to Erkki Huhtamo's encapsulated bodies, we have seen that the player is able to immerse herself in the diegetic game world through the body of the player-character, such as Estelle, Kevin or Rean, which we can consider as apparatuses that produce "certain cognitive and emotional states of mind (and, arguably, of

the body)" (Huhtamo, 1995, 165). Though the player is able to enter the world, she has to do so without her own body and is instead encapsulated by the body of the player-character, who has a mind of his own. What the player can do and cannot do depends on the player-character. For instance, in *Sen no Kiseki II*, one of Rean's party members, Laura, asks their opponent in battle if she can disclose any information regarding her master, the Steel Maiden. Having a tremendous grudge for some reason against both Rean and Laura, the opponent bluntly refuses to do so, leaving Rean, Laura and the player in the dark about the dubious origin of the Steel Maiden (figure 29, 30, and 31). Rean cannot get any information from his opponent, so arguably the player is not able to do so either. The world might have become observable to the player through Rean, but as an embodied being of that world, Rean is also subject to his own position. Hence, the player perceives her agency through which information can be obtained about the world in terms of the player-character's capabilities: 'what Rean can do and cannot do'. These capabilities we can call 'affordances'. How affordances work in regard to the player-character is clarified by Vella:

> This range of capabilities – or, to return to Merleau-Ponty's term, 'I can's – open to the player through the avatar therefore determines the player's mode of being-in-the-gameworld. As we have established, to some extent the avatar is the player - both as an instrument to use, and as an embodiment that allows the player to speak of being-in-the-gameworld in the first place. However, it is already becoming clear that this is an embodiment that happens necessarily on the avatar's own terms – though there might be some degree of choice both in terms of specifying the attributes and affordances of the avatar (this is especially true of role-playing games as a genre) and in terms of putting the avatar's range of 'I can's to use, this is necessarily only within rigid, strictly delimited boundaries (2013).

This means the player might have agency over the player-character as she is encapsulated in the body of that character, but the agency is bound to the affordances that are given to that character by the game.

Figure 29: Laura asks her opponent politely to distribute information about the Stahlritter. Screenshot from Sen no Kiseki II.

Figure 30: The opponent refuses to give any information to Laura and Rean. Screenshot from Sen no Kiseki II

Figure 31: Due to Rean's personal position as a player-character, there is nothing that the player can do against the refusal. Screenshot from Sen no Kiseki II

If we then return to Rean, who the game does not permit by the game to intervene, and consider the attack on Crossbell City in terms of affordances, we can perceive what kind of agency the game affords Rean in regard to his own personal position. The player might have a double awareness of the situation, but Rean's own frame of knowledge does not extend to the plans of the terrorists. Rean is only afforded to act according to what he knows, and since he is not aware of the plans, he is unable to intervene with the attack. What Rean does know is that he has to go on a field study, conduct several tasks to help the people in that area and through that learn about the affairs of the Erebonia Empire. Thus, the affordance that Rean has is to act within the boundaries of the tasks laid out for him. As a result, the accomplishment of the tasks advance the game, Rean learns about the upcoming assault, and is abruptly allowed to intervene with the attack on Crossbell City, saving Prince Olivert, Major Mueller, and the chancellor of Erebonia in the process (figure 32 and 33).

Figure 32: Rean and his classmates learn about the attack on Crossbell City. Screenshot from Sen no Kiseki.

Figure 33: They are encouraged to intervene at the attempt to blow up the trade conference. Screenshot from Sen no Kiseki.

Party members also have certain affordances. In the *Kiseki* series¸ party members can be used at times instead of the player-character, and their *orbal quartz*[29] and equipment can be regulated too. It is mainly the player who has the agency to decide the equipment of the player-character and the party members[30], hence the player has a certain amount of agency over their affordances. Nevertheless, the game has its own ways of making sure that not every character can be identically equipped. There will always be characters who are afforded to use more *orbal arts* than others. For instance, Prince Olivert has a large affinity for arts and his equipment for *orbal quartz* is designed in such a way that he has the capability to use a wide range of *orbal arts*, while his retainer Major Vander on the other hand, has a large affinity for strength, and his *orbal quartz* equipment is designed so that he is limited in the amount of arts that he can use, but welcoming to *orbal quartz* that enhance his strength.

The affordance that might be the most striking is the capability of party members to be present or absent at an event. During the civil war in *Sen no Kiseki II*, Rean comes into possession of Prince Olivert's airship. The airship allows him to undertake quests in multiple

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[29] By setting specific quartz, the player can influence the amount of arts that a character can use, and/or enhance certain battle features.
[30] Some irregular party-members have their equipment decided for them which the player cannot undo, but this is an exception.

parts of the Erebonia Empire together with his classmates who are Rean's usual party members. However, the game has limited the amount of party members that can be taken along to six persons, including Rean. As such, Rean is allowed to take only five classmates with him, even though he has at least ten. Every party member can accompany Rean, though in some cases the game will partially decide for the player. For instance, during the kidnapping of the older sister of Rean's classmate Elliot, Elliot insists on being part of the rescue team. As the kidnapping event is mandatory for the game to progress, the player simply cannot choose to exclude Elliot. Yet, this still leaves four open places to fill with party members that the player has to choose by herself. The choice can be done according to the player's own personal preferences, the characters' abilities, or the potential narrative addition they might bring to the event.

As deep characters, every party member has their own position in the world, their own personal battle abilities, and their own frames of knowledge that they might share with the player-character. Each character might have different kinds of affordances that the player is bound to, but the player still has a certain amount of agency over these affordances. Having the agency to choose which characters accompany Rean would therefore hypothetically signify that the combination of characters the player chooses affects the game on a certain narratological and performative level, and also influences the variety of knowledge that the player possibly could acquire. This leads to two questions, that will be answered in the final section of this thesis: "To what degree does the agency the player has affect the game itself?", and: "To what extent does the agency influence the knowledge the player acquires?".

The Influence of Agency in the Acquisition of Knowledge

At the end of *Sora no Kiseki: The Third,* Cassius Bright appears as the final boss that Kevin and his party have to defeat. Not only is Cassius the birthfather of Estelle and the adoptive father of Joshua, he is also known for being an elite bracer, a (former) colonel of the military army in the Liberl Kingdom with supreme swordsmanship skills, and the one who stopped the war between Liberl and the Erebonian Empire ten years prior to the game. All in all, with Cassius Bright as the final opponent, the player is in for a terrific fight. Luckily enough, the player can choose with whom Kevin will battle Cassius. Personally, I preferred to enter that upcoming dreadful battle with characters that I was most comfortable with, but I got

scolded at by other fans for not putting Estelle and Joshua in the party. Apparently, if Joshua and Estelle are both present there, they have a deep conversation with Cassius complimenting them on their achievements. The characters that I had chosen also had a conversation with him before the start of the battle, but it was a short one with no deep meaning behind it. Yet, thanks to the fact that I chose party members I was comfortable with, I performed better during the battle and could actually win, which might not have been the case if I had chosen Estelle and Joshua instead. As such, my choice as a player influenced the game to such a degree that I lost specific story content but managed to direct the battle to my favour. Nonetheless, the events that happen directly after the battle would be the same regardless of my choice of characters.

The above example is insufficient to answer the question as to what degree the player's agency affects the game itself, since it would simply let me respond that the player's agency might affect the game content wise a little and it influences the battle performance. Yet, the outcome of the event will stay the same: the player has to win the fight, so that the game's plot can advance. While that statement is certainly not incorrect, since many battles and events have only one single outcome, the above statement is not applicable to enough events in the *Kiseki* series. Though the series is bound to a fixed set of events which influence the affordances the (player-)characters have, the player still has some agency over story and battle performance that influences events later in an instalment. The series consists of over 700 hours of gameplay if one wishes to invest that much time, making it impossible for me to discuss every event that the player can influence story- or battle wise. Nevertheless, I attempt to point out some events that provide a general view on the extent of the player's agency. For my analysis, I will stay in this section with the events happening in *Sen no Kiseki* and *Sen no Kiseki II*. As the series' latest instalments, they include events in which the player's agency is similar to that of the previous games as well as new kinds of events in which the player's actions impact in a way different from previous instalments.

First I will discuss the events in *Sen no Kiseki* and *Sen no Kiseki II* that are similar to events in the other game instalments. The battle with Cassius in *Sora no Kiseki: The Third*, and Rean who is suddenly in possession of an airship with all his classmates are two events quite similar to each other. In both instances, the player's choice on which character to add to her party influences story and battle performance aspects, but the outcome of the events

always stays the same. Cassius will have to be beaten by Kevin for the game to advance, and in the case of the kidnapping of Elliot's older sister, the sister will always be saved by Rean and his party. Yet, regardless of the outcome, the events themselves are slightly different depending on the characters the player chooses to take along with. Battle performance for instance can differ greatly if the player has party members that she is comfortable with. Better battle performance in turn can result in a better overall performance, as the amount of experience and the kind of rewards characters obtain depend on multiple battle performances[31]. Furthermore, the events might also slightly differ storywise. After the kidnapping in *Sen no Kiseki II*, Rean's classmates Fie and Millium mention that their instructor who turned up in the end to rescue the whole gang, is interested in Elliot's sister (figure 34 and 35). While their comments are certainly amusing, the instructor's interest in the sister might not have been discussed if the player had chosen characters other than Fie and Millium to accompany Rean.

Figure 34: Millium points out the chemistry between their instructor and Elliot's sister. Screenshot from Sen no Kiseki II.

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[31] The *Kiseki* series, especially *Sen no Kiseki* and *Sen no Kiseki II*, have a battle system that takes the player's strategies during battle into account. For instance, if the player is able to defeat three enemies at once, the system rewards the player by multiplying the amount of experiences the characters receive with 1.3 percent.

Figure 35: The player only knows this interest because Fie and Millium were taken along. Screenshot from Sen no Kiseki II.

A different kind of events available in all the games are the "secret events". In the previous chapter I mentioned a secret event where Rean was asked to take part in several swimming classes with two rivalling instructors. Though a secret event, it was announced to allow the player to choose whether it would happen or not. For most secret events however, the player will not receive notice beforehand and is unaware that she has the option to take part in them. For instance, at one point in *Sen no Kiseki*, Rean's classmates Emma and Fie declare that they are going to study together that day. However, as soon as the implied player walks around campus with Rean, she notices that Emma is sitting in the library on her own. If the player decides to speak with her, a secret event will occur in which Emma asks Rean to find Fie for her as she did not show up. After the player has found Fie, she will join Emma in her study session and the event ends. The game did not point out in advance that this non-mandatory event would occur, so the game will advance regardless of the player discovering this event. Yet, by using her agency and discovering the secret event, the game rewards the player by becoming better friends with Emma, which can be beneficial in the battle performance when Rean fights alongside her.

While Emma is a deep character who is important for the game's plot, interaction with shallow characters can also be beneficial to the player. They are often not of large influence on the game's story progression, but the affordance that the player-character has to speak with them can indirectly be helpful in battle performance. They can prompt non-

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mandatory quests or secret events to occur. For example, finding an elderly lady's kitten

when the player decides to interact with her will naturally be rewarded with a sum of mira

that in turn, can be used to buy equipment or other items with. In addition, Rean also

receives several 'academy points'(AP[32]) that are given to him with every request that he

manages to fulfil. The sum of it ranks Rean's performance at the end of every game chapter.

More APs give Rean a higher ranking which is rewarded with various elite items. The

difficulty is that the player has to speak with almost every shallow character she comes

across with to discover the secret events. They are easy to miss, and though they do not

have a big impact on the game's story plot, missing too many secret events can result in

having difficulty to win battles that are necessary for the game to advance.

Sen no Kiseki and Sen no Kiseki II also have a new mechanic that affects the games'

plot as well: the ARCUS links. In battle, two or more characters can connect to each other,

granting them insights into each other's actions[33]. It enhances the battle system's efficiency,

but for the efficiency to improve during battle, Rean has to improve his bond with the linked

characters. Every so often Rean can trigger 'bonding events' with several party members

(most of whom are his classmates). Though the effects of the bonding events are at first

mostly experienced in battles, they are not the only aspect for which the Arcus links are

used. As an affordance granted to Rean, the bonding events could be considered a way of

influencing the game world, since the player has the choice of whom Rean will get close to.

The choice is however limited to the occurrences of the events themselves, not on how they

play out[34]. While a single bonding event might give the player some insight into the world, it

does not affect other events of the game much overall, unless the player manages to

improve Rean's bond with a party member to its maximum. Assuming that the implied

player succeeds in maximizing some of the bonds[35], Sen no Kiseki rewards the player with

the option to choose a partner with a maximized for the dance party near the end of the

game. Depending on the partner, that specific event will turn out differently, though each

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[32] In Sen no Kiseki and Sen no Kiseki II, the points that the player-character receives are called 'academy points', but in Sora no Kiseki: FC, Sora no Kiseki:SC, they are called 'bracer points' (since the player-characters are bracers).

[33] The game makes use of turn-based battles. If a party member for example hits an opponent critically, another party member is enabled to finish that foe off, or when a party member is hurt, another character can partially heal him or her, without losing a turn when two characters are linked.

[34] The player cannot always trigger a bonding event with every party member, and the amount of times is also limited.

[35] In one gameplay, the player is usually able to maximize only three or four bonds.

version emphasizes the bond between Rean and the chosen character (figure 36). In turn, this choice also affects the ending of the game, yet only slightly as it only alters which character encourages Rean to escape, not whether or not he will flee, how, or why. Having a character with whom Rean has the closest bond to appear as the last one Rean sees is more of an addition to enhance the dramatic impact of the ending. Yet, it is an addition that the player can influence.
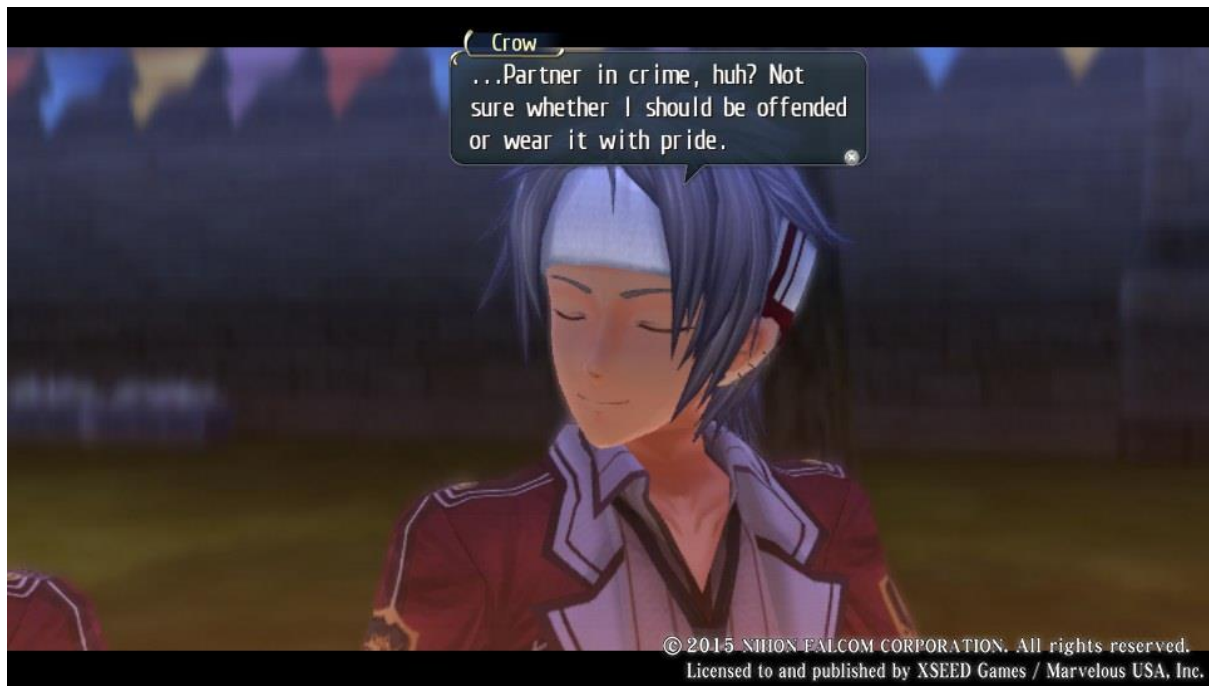
Figure 36: At the party, Rean's best friend will mention how well their friendship has developed. Screenshot from Sen no Kiseki.

We can deduct from the analysis that through the affordances of the player-characters, the player has a large influence on the battle performances in-game, but not necessarily on the game's plot. The player might have several options that are of influence on how some events play out, but as a game series focused on progression (see Juul, 2005, 5), the agency in the *Kiseki* series only extends to the player affecting details of single events. The player cannot affect the outcome nor what happens elsewhere in the game. Yet, as little as the agency to affect the game might be, it can still determine what kind of knowledge the player acquires about the *Kiseki* game world, especially in the case of the ARCUS links. In the previous chapter, I explained how each bonding event allows the player to learn about the world through the personal experiences of the character that Rean is speaking with. Since these events are restricted affordances that the player can opt to take, what the player does learn about the world and through whom differs per bonding event.

For instance, the player can opt not to trigger any of these bonding events at all, which would naturally result in a player missing more information about the *Kiseki* world than one who manages to trigger all possible bonding events. We should therefore ask the following question for the final section: from the perspective of the *character-world relationship,* to what extent does the agency influence the knowledge the player can gain?

Affordances and Additive Comprehension

If we take the idea of the deep characters acting as a gateway to the game world when perceived from the *character-world* relationship, then almost any deep character that shares information could be considered a gateway to the *Kiseki* world. In this and the previous chapter, we have also seen that the player can choose to utilize given affordances by speaking with these characters. Thereby, the player triggers multiple kinds of events through which she could learn about specific aspects of the world, but the agency is limited in the sense that the player cannot acquire whatever information that is out there, but instead has to choose what she wishes to learn. For instance, if the player decides to prompt a bonding event in *Sen no Kiseki* between Rean and his classmate Jusis instead of his other classmate Machias, the player will learn more about the nobility in the Erebonia Empire than the life of the commoners since Jusis is a noble and Machias a commoner (figure 37). This is explainable through Aarseth's notion of games as a cybertext:

when you read from a cybertext, you are constantly reminded of inaccessible strategies and paths not taken, voices not heard. Each decision will make some parts of the text more, and others less, accessible, and you may never know the exact results of your choices; that is, exactly what you missed (1997, 3).

In a second game play, the implied player might learn about Machias' life nonetheless, but for one round of game play, the player is simply not afforded access to all the information that the deep characters can give, and is constantly reminded that the choice for one character will close the possibility to bond with another. Additionally, it is also rather simple to state that an actual player can find any secret event. An actual player will likely miss an event or a quest. It is therefore quite difficult to determine the degree the player's agency can influence the understanding of the *Kiseki* series without accounting for

how many times she has played the game or how the implied player would play the game compared to how an actual player could play the game.

Figure 37: Bonding with Jusis means that the player will primarily learn about Erebonia's nobility. Screenshot from Sen no Kiseki.

However, there is an affordance in *Sora no Kiseki: The Third* that can offer insight into how agency influences the knowledge the player gains without the complications described above: the Star Doors. I have three reasons for this: firstly, unlike the other instalments, *Sora no Kiseki: The Third* does not have any secret events incorporated, making it possible to use the theoretical model of the implied player, since it will not clash with an actual player's experience. Secondly, all the Star Doors are available in a single playthrough, unlike the ARCUS events where the player is limited in with whom she can bond with. Thirdly, the Star Doors also reveal information about other instalments. This allows me to analyse two events that occur each in a different instalment, but are connected to each other depending on whether the player has experienced the doors' events in *Sora no Kiseki: The Third*.

One of the saddest, and probably most disturbing stories depicted in the Star Doors is the background of the young Renne. Renne's Star Door addresses a time in her life that clarifies her reasons for joining the society Ouroboros as an enforcer. Renne lives in an

ambiguous place called 'Paradise[36]', and is forced to take on painful jobs from customers that slowly destroy her body. The game does not explicitly state what exactly happened to Renne, but it can be deducted from the scenes that Renne was physically abused and experimented on. After she is rescued, Renne is shown looking envious at a happy couple with a new-born baby from a distance. Though the game does not state specifically how the couple is related to Renne, her behaviour towards them reveal that they are probably her birth parents, though she reveals a desire to kill them. Her thoughts about being tainted, while the baby is not, and her desire to murder the couple indicate that she has been scarred deeply by her experience in 'Paradise'. The only reason she does kill them is because it is implied by Renne's colleague that they might not have anything to do with the abuse that Renne was put through.

In *Zero no Kiseki*, Lloyd and his team are asked to find a child, Colin, gone missing in the chaos of a celebration all across Crossbell City. Renne suddenly shows up and insists on joining Lloyd in his search. She never reveals the reason behind her help, but mysteriously seems to know several spots where the boy might have been. Upon discovery, they find him surrounded by hungry wolves. Renne immediately saves his life (figure 38). When the boy is brought to the police station, Renne is apprehensive to meet his parents, and therefore hides in a closet. As Lloyd returns the missing child to his parents, the parents reveal that two years prior to the game, they lost their daughter to a fire in their friends' house. When Colin and his parents leave, Renne is completely in tears, though she refuses to meet the couple since her "number one reason for going to Crossbell City is gone".[37] This statement is rather confusing for one of Lloyd's teammates who remarks: "However you look at it, you are …"[38], which implies that the couple might have been that couple's lost daughter.

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[36]Originally the name is: " 楽園" (rakuen), a word used to refer to the concept of "Eden" or paradise in heaven.
[37] Translated from: "レンがこの町に来た理由。。。その一つが無くなかったから." ("Ren ga kono machi ni kita riyuu… sono hitotsu ga nakunakatta kara").
[38] Translated from:"レンちゃん、どう考えてもあなたは。。。！" (Ren-chan, dou kangaetemo anata ha …!").

Figure 38:"Leave immediately!"

If we assume the position of a player who had not chosen the option of opening Renne's door in *Sora no Kiseki*, then the event of the missing child would be an event that stands on its own. Renne would then be simply an Ouroboros enforcer (without Lloyd being aware of it), who for unknown reasons wants to participate in the search for the missing child. However, several remarks and actions of Renne during the event would be rather confusing. For instance, after the defeat of the wolves, Renne cries out: "Even though I decided to only watch…! Even though I decided that I would not take part in it…!" (figure 39).[39] The sentence shows that Ren had made a decision that she would only be passively present in regard to the child's situation before the event actually happened, but felt inclined to actively interfere with the situation in front of her. The reason behind her interference though, is not revealed.

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[39] Translated from: "見てるだけって決めったのに。。。！絶対に関わらないって決めたのに。。。！" ("Mitterudakette kimetanoni…! Zettaini …kakawaranaitte kimetanoni…!")

Figure 39: Renne screaming that she initially did not want to interfere with Colin's life.

A similar situation occurs with the missing child's parents. Renne, for unknown reason, does not want them to see her. When the parents explain the disappearance of their first-born child, the player might deduce from their story and Renne's anxiety that they are referring to her. Simultaneously though, their story reveals that they are unaware that she's alive. Contradictorily, Renne seems to be well aware of the existence and whereabouts of her parents but refuses to meet them for which the reason, once again, is not revealed. Regardless, the event shows enough details to suggest that the couple with the missing child are Renne's parents and little brother, which explains why she was that worried about the child being attacked. There is no support necessary from other instalments to guarantee that the meaning of the plot of that particular event comes across. Nevertheless, the lack of clarification as to why Renne does not wish to meet her parents nor why she decided beforehand not to interfere with the life of her little brother is a case that cannot be answered by that single event in *Zero no Kiseki* alone.

Assuming the position of the implied player who has acted on the affordances in *Sora no Kiseki: The Third* to open Renne's Star Door, we can see how that enacting on an affordance can transform the situation in *Zero no Kiseki*. The knowledge that the implied player gains by opening Renne's Star Door enables the player to be aware of all three frames of knowledge in the event of *Zero no Kiseki*. The first frame is that of Lloyd and his team who are aware of Renne's existence, but not of her status as an Ouroboros enforcer

nor of her reason for hiding from her parents. The second frame is of Renne's parents, who are neither conscious of their daughter's existence nor aware of Renne's help in rescuing their son[40]. And the last frame is naturally Renne's, whose frame of knowledge can only be known by having opened Renne's Star Door.

As the implied player is conscious of Renne's frame of knowledge, the event in *Zero no Kiseki* transforms into a different situation than the description I gave before, allowing the player to gain an 'additive comprehension' of the situation (Jenkins, 2006, 127). Taking the concept from film producer Neil Young, Henry Jenkins describes 'additive comprehension' as a concept in which one piece of information that is given, changes the whole perception of the situation that the reader, spectator or, film viewer among others, perceives in front of him or her in transmedia stories (Ibid, 127). The frame of knowledge that the player acquires by seeing the scenes in Renne's Star Door is such an impactful piece of information that it sparks additive comprehension to occur in the double awareness of the implied player. It enables the implied player to read subtle remarks in the event in *Zero no Kiseki* that she could not have noticed otherwise.

With the implied player having experienced Renne's Star Door, Renne introduces herself not only as an Ouroboros enforcer willing to help out with the search of a lost child, but also as the older sister of the lost child. When the child is lost, the implied player already knows that we are dealing with Renne's parents [41] [42], which clarifies why they are referring to the past in which something similar happened, namely the disappearance of their first-born child Renne (figure 40). Knowing that Colin is her little brother also explains beforehand why she would go to such great lengths to protect him from the wolves, instead of the player discovering it afterwards. Most of all however, having seen the scene in Renne's Door clarifies her reasons for wanting to be a passive bystander, her hesitance in meeting her parents, and her remark about the loss of her number one reason to go to Crossbell City. The additive comprehension reveals a (possible) situation that Renne might

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[40] Colin mentions a girl with similar purple hair like his father's, which arouses his parent's suspicion, but do not seem to conclude that this might have been Renne, as they believe that she is dead.

[41] In her panic, Renne's mother remarks: "でも。。。でも。。。！あの時みたいなことがあたっ

ら。。。！" ("Demo… demo…! Ano toki mitainakoto ga atarra…!"), when she is asked by her husband to calm down. It translates as:" But… but…! If it's the same as that time…!", which is a hint for the implied player to Renne's disappearance.

[42] Additionally, vague images of Renne's parents are also shown during the scenes in Renne's Star Door, making it possible for the implied player to recognize them through that as well.

not want to meet her parents and her brother, because she considers herself to be tainted due to the abuse she went through in Paradise and instead just wants to observe them as a passive bystander. Furthermore, in her Star Door it is implied that Renne has a compulsion to kill her parents due to the abuse. However, having heard the story that her parents told Lloyd and his team about how they lost their daughter, Renne becomes aware that her parents never knew about the abuse she was put through nor intended her to be in such a situation. It is after that specific explanation that a tearful Renne mentions that her number one reason for coming to Crossbell disappeared, enabling the implied player to understand that she no longer feels the urge to take revenge on her parents, because they are not the persons who caused her that harm (figure 41). Instead, they still care for her as loving parents would.

Figure 40: Colin's mother is upset about her child disappearing: "But...but...! If it's like that time...!". Screenshot from Zero no Kiseki.

The new perception of the missing child event in *Zero no Kiseki* demonstrates the extent of the agency the player has in acquiring knowledge in the *Kiseki* game world. Agency in the *Kiseki* series might not affect the games content wise to such an extent that the player can completely influence the events that occur. However, the affordances that the player has been given influence the knowledge the player can gain as it affects the player's own understanding of meaningful scenes. If the player had not chosen to see the scene in Renne's Star Door, she would not have been aware of the subtle implications that change the meaning of the entire scene. The scene in *Zero no Kiseki* would merely introduce the existence of Renne's parents. In contrast however, with the additive comprehension, the scene focuses on the dramatic personal change Renne undergoes by deciding to let go of the grudge against her parents.

Though I have only analysed a single major example, scenes in which additive comprehension can change the meaning of the scene occur regularly in the *Kiseki* series. For instance, I have mentioned the scene in which Prince Olivert declares his independence from the chancellor in one of the Star Doors in *Zero no Kiseki* several times. Olivert's first appearance in *Sen no Kiseki* then allows for a meaningful indication that hints that the freshly established Class VII that consists of nobles and commoners together is more than

just an experiment[43]. Another example is the sudden appearance of Lloyd near the end of *Sen no Kiseki II* who unexpectedly becomes the player-character for a single event instead of the original player-character Rean (figure 42). While *Sen no Kiseki II* was released in September 2016 in the West as *Trails of Cold Steel II*, *Zero no Kiseki* and *Ao no Kiseki* (2011) are not. For the non-Japanese speaking player, Lloyd's short appearance as a player-character in *Sen no Kiseki* is confusing as that kind of player is not familiar with Lloyd's existence nor with the names of the characters Lloyd mentions. A potential meaning about the event with Lloyd is lost on this player, but for the implied player this situation is quite a dramatic meaningful event. Near the end, the Erebonia army infiltrates Crossbell and annexes it to their empire. As Lloyd in *Sen no Kiseki II,* the player is on a mission to erase all the existing data on Crossbell's citizens to protect them from the Erebonian forces, but is interrupted by Rean who has become a loyal Erebonian army soldier (figure 43).

Figure 42: The player-character is suddenly switched from Rean to Lloyd at the end of Sen no Kiseki II. Screenshot from Sen no Kiseki II.

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[43] At the beginning of *Sen no Kiseki,* Class VII is explained to consist out of nobles and commoners together as part of an experiment to test the new ARCUS battle devices made by the Reinford Company. Rean and his classmates are chosen to be part of that experiment, because they are deemed to be most compatible with the devices.

Figure 43: Rixia and Lloyd are supposed to prevent the data about Crossbell's citizens from falling into the hands of the Erebonian Imperial Army. Screenshot from Sen no Kiseki II.

This event is meaningful because earlier meetings between previous player-characters, such as the meeting between Lloyd Joshua and Estelle, or Estelle and Kevin, are displayed in a positive light (figure 44 and 45). In all previous instalments, previous player-characters acted as helpers of the current player-character. Never before has a player-character been placed in a negative light like Rean suddenly is. For the implied player, the situation changes from "player-character versus wrong-doer" or "good versus evil" to "player-character versus player-character". The division between the so-called "us" and the "other" suddenly disappears. The additive comprehension of the implied player also extends beyond this division as it enables her to consider the battle as foreshadowing of events in future instalments[44]. As two opposing forces, will Lloyd and Rean have to battle each other? Will Crossbell's side overcome the annexation or will the Erebonia Empire conquer all? At the very least, the implied player understands that Lloyd's, Rean's, and perhaps Estelle and Joshua's stories as player-characters are far from over.

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[44] The sequel *Sen no Kiseki III* was announced on September 25th 2015, and is currently in development.

Figure 44: The meeting between Joshua, Estelle, and Lloyd was very positive. Screenshot from Zero no Kiseki.
Joshua: "Which means that the place where the Orbal Network advances the fastest is perhaps Crossbell."

Figure 45: When Lloyd and Rean met, they immediately started off as enemies. Screenshot from Sen no Kiseki II.

I have argued that the agency of the player in the *Kiseki* series revolves around the understanding of the player within the *Kiseki* world, rather than around the player's agency to affect game world's progression. Making use of the affordances given, the player can control the knowledge that is acquired. From the *character-world* perspective, this is done through affordances applied to the player-character that enable the player to gather

information from various characters that develops into knowledge accumulated into a double awareness. The implied player gains additive comprehension that can transform her perception of certain events in the *Kiseki* series. In turn, the implied player can use the additive comprehension to acquire new insights, and therefore new knowledge, about the events that occur in the *Kiseki* world. Hence, agency in the *Kiseki* world might seem at first glance to be constricted to its rules as a progression game series, but it also affords the player with the possibility of developing her own understanding of the game world.

CONCLUSION

It can be said that trying to gain an understanding of a game world is almost the same as trying to understand our own Primary World from the many perspectives of the persons who inhabit it. The number of viewpoints is countless and many perceptions diverge. Yet, in this thesis I aimed to establish a framework, the *character-world* relationship, that would demonstrate how one locates information in a game world and might understand it through its characters.

Literature suggests that there are only two frameworks through which one can make sense of an imaginary world: narrative and infrastructure. In this thesis, I referred to those frameworks as the *narrative-world* relationship and the *infrastructure-world* relationship. The *narrative-world* relationship was based on academic texts mainly from Marie-Laure Ryan and Lubomír Dolezel about concepts such as narrative and story world in which each narrative text constructs a story world that undergoes changes through a sequence of connected events. Readers make sense of imaginary worlds through sets of stories woven together, when we perceive it from the *narrative-world* relationship. The *infrastructure-world* relationship on the other hand is a framework that I primarily based on Mark J.P. Wolf's ideas of infrastructures - a set of arrangements of properties that implies an imaginary world. Manifestations of these arrangements were perceived to be a world's culture, nature, mythology and philosophy among others. This framework allows one to understand an imaginary world through these structures. However, neither framework involved characters as a possible resource for understanding an imaginary world, specifically a game world in which a player has agency over a character within it.

By discussing the following research question, I established a third, additional framework, that allowed us to perceive how a player makes sense of a game world:

> *"How do characters facilitate the acquirement of knowledge about game worlds and to what degree could they influence the player's perception about that world?"*

I considered a game world to be a *hyperdiegesis* of an imaginary world; it only shows a fraction of the entire imaginary world, but that fraction makes sense according to its own internal logic. The *character-world* relationship is supposed to be applicable to an imaginary world, but since I conceived it based on a game world, I expect it to be naturally more suited

for a game world than all kinds of imaginary worlds in general. It is not supposed to be an all-encompassing framework that announces one single method to gain knowledge from a world, but instead formulates how one could locate information through characters to understand an imaginary (game) world.

In the textual analysis of the *Kiseki* series that I performed, the *character-world* relationship was established as a framework in which characters facilitate the acquirement of knowledge by being the central element of the world that affirm continuity; familiar characters can connect different instalments – sometimes even different worlds, to each other through their appearances in different instalments that indicate a sequence between individual games. Characters facilitate knowledge by sharing the information that they have, making them a gateway to the world. Yet, the knowledge that they have corresponds to how they themselves make sense of the world when we perceive them as the factor that organizes the imaginary world. As a gateway to the world, they allow the player to perceive the world from their point of view.

In the *Kiseki* series, the player receives multiple frames of knowledge that allows her to make sense of the world, though I had to point out these frames of knowledge were mainly limited to what the games regard as deep characters, since they have more substance. The frames of knowledge that the player obtains in the *character-world* relationship also influence the player's perception of the world. The player's double awareness in which these frames of knowledge reside allows her to comprehend situations not only from different points of view but can change the meaning of certain events entirely. Characters can thus assist the player in gaining *additive comprehension* by attaching another meaning to a situation in the game world. In this sense, characters can transform the player's perception of the game world completely by offering another point of view.

Since the character is the central element in this framework, I had to consider the player-character through whom the agency is conducted. In the *character-world* relationship, I described the player's agency as a form of affordances constrained to the player-character through whom the game world becomes phenomenologically available. The kind of information that the player receives is bound to the player-character's position in the world, though through the concept of focalization the player can still attain a double

awareness sustaining multiple frames of knowledge independent from the player-character's point of view as long it is part of the game's plot.

Regardless, the affordances that the player-character has, when perceived from the *character-world* relationship, are most influential to the player's perception of the game world. As it grants the player a set of choices, it enables the player to select the information that she receives. As we have seen in the analysis, gaining information from characters was one of these affordances, though the player-character's position was of relevance to it, as it could determine whether the player could gain information or not. For instance, characters could hold back information or plainly lie. When the player was offered information, it was her own choice to enact upon this affordance or not. This meant that the player could not only influence whether she would receive certain information or not, but also what kind of knowledge she would receive. As such, the *character-world* relationship specifies that characters facilitate knowledge by being a gateway to the world, but also that as a gateway they can only influence the player's perception of the world by depending on the player to act on the choices available. In this sense, it is the player herself, from the point of view in the *character-world* relationship, who shapes the acquisition of knowledge within the boundaries the characters provide her with. Hence, the player herself is partially of influence to attain a form of *additive comprehension* in her perception of the game world through the information that she receives.

We should take into account that the *character-world* relationship is established through a textual analysis of a Japanese role-playing game series. In this thesis, I consider the *Kiseki* series to be a part of the Japanese *media mix*, in which characters are the central element that brings imaginary worlds together, as opposed to the Western variant of *transmedia storytelling*, in which stories create imaginary worlds. As I hardly addressed the cultural differences between Japanese and Western video games, this might raise the question of how applicable the framework is to Western games. Though that is a plausible question, rather than seeing it in terms of constraining its applicability on Western games, I would instead argue that the framework shows potential in uncovering the media-cultural difference between Western and Japanese games. If we were to analyse multiple games, both Japanese and Western, by applying the *character-world* relationship to them, we could perhaps unveil the differences of not only the roles of characters between Japanese and Western games, but perhaps also the differences in game narratology. Though I can only

contemplate about it here shortly, but since the Japanese *media mix* emphasizes characters to create an imaginary world, and the Western transmedia storytelling accentuates story, the *character-world* relationship allows us to explore how characters and story are intertwined in both Japanese and Western games. Should we perceive characters in Japanese games as agents generating stories, and in Western games as dependent on stories? Does this mean that when characters seem to create the game world, that we could consider those games to have a certain Japanese uniqueness? These are but an example of the kinds of questions that could be raised by applying the *character-world* relationship to both Western and Japanese games, so that it creates a possibility to rethink and re-appropriate our understanding of (the differences of) narratology in both Japanese and Western games.

There are however several limitations in my research that I have to acknowledge. First off, I discussed in the first chapter how we could perceive the relevance of the frameworks by looking at the strength between the world and the infrastructure, narrative, or characters. However, I have not determined how to gauge the connection between character and world besides regarding the link as strong when the player is able to acquire an abundance of information about the imaginary world from characters, but even that remains vague.

A second restraint is the presence of narrative woven into the *character-world* relationship that determines if and what kind of information the player receives, specifically from deep characters. The player only seemed to receive a massive amount of information from them when it was relevant to the games' plots, but would get this information regardless of her own affordances as it was necessary for the progression of the games. While I never tried to establish the *character-world* relationship as a framework that excludes the other frameworks, the above deduction also implies that the *character-world* relationship is not a framework independent from the *narrative-world* relationship, nor from the *infrastructure-world* relationship for that matter.

Lastly, I initially declared that a textual analysis of a digital game cannot exclude the player as a vital component for games to be interpreted. Yet, to construct the *character-world* relationship through my analysis, I had to use a model of a player, the *implied player,* instead of actual players. If we wish to measure the exact extent to which characters facilitate knowledge and influence players' perception of the game world, a certain amount

of 'real-life' players would be necessary. In this thesis, I exclusively established a theoretical framework that indicates how a player locates information, but further research could use this theoretical basis to investigate how players make sense of imaginary worlds.

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