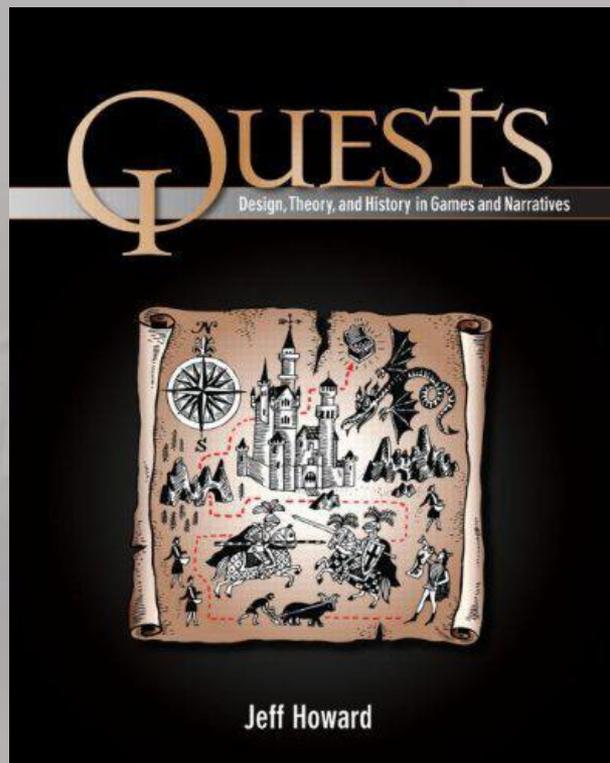


Occult Game Design: An Initiation into Secrets and Mysteries

Jeff Howard

Professor of Game Development and Design
Dakota State University

Assistant Professor of Game Development and Design, DSU



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Game Magic
forthcoming
Winter 2013,
Taylor and Francis/CRC



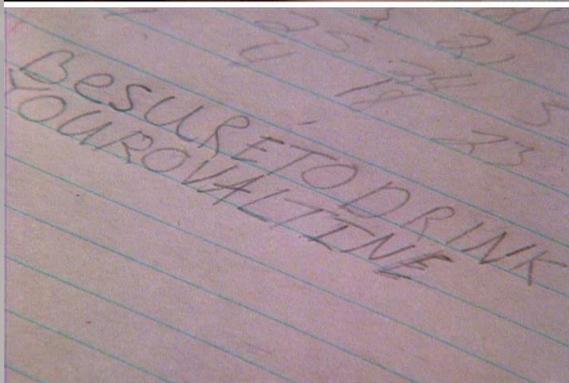
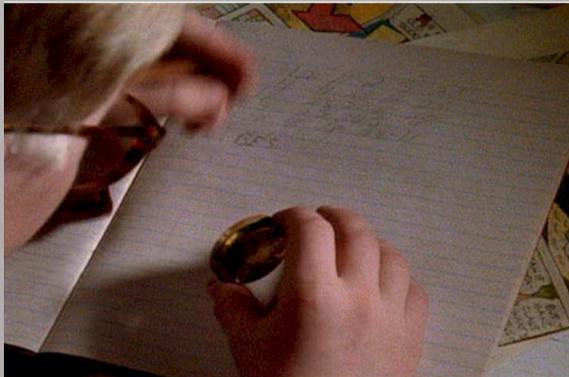
*Arcana: A
Ceremonial
Magick
Simulator*
forthcoming

- **Mystery** = an **overarching effect** of something **hidden** but decipherable about a game **world**
- **Secrets** = individual **hidden elements**
- **Initiation** = the **gradual revelation of mystery**, achieved by players through the **attainment of skill** and **understanding**

Secrets can contribute to **cult following**



But not all secrets are created equal (Ovaltine . . .)



Lists of best Easter eggs



No, they're not.



Cute



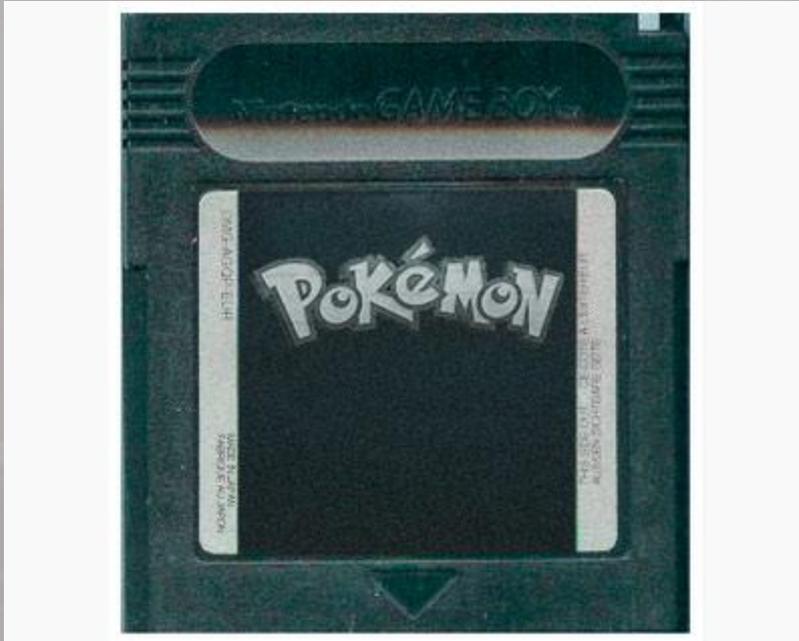
Fourth wall breaking



Meta



The Cursed *Pokemon* cartridge



Haunted *Majora's Mask*



YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE
DONE THAT

BEN will keep hunting you!

The ultimate Easter Egg

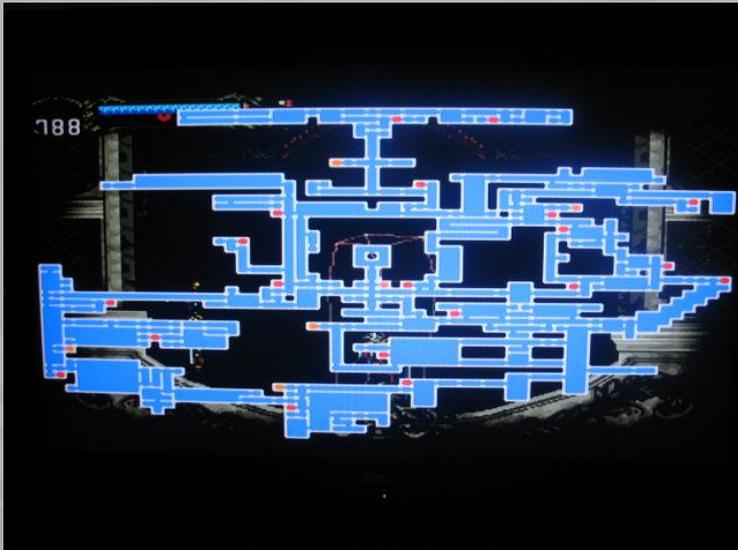


- Seemingly **arbitrary** action
- Apparently **gratuitous** reward
- Outwardly **random** mechanism for delivery

Not arbitrary, gratuitous, or random

By performing some **strange set of actions**
in the **right time**
at the **right place**,
an **absolutely unique play experience**
will be **unveiled**.

Actually unlocks a secret world



ANOTHER QUEST WILL START
FROM HERE.

PRESS THE START BUTTON.

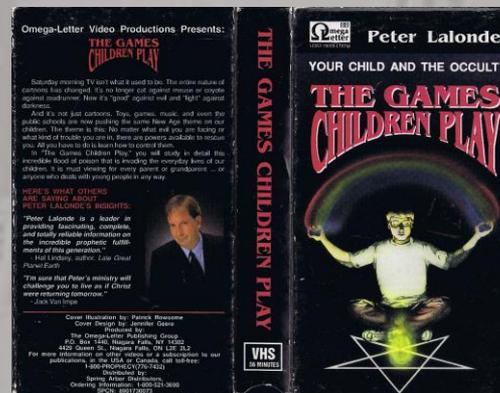


NINTENDO

Unlocking a **secret world** beyond the world



Occult = magic, mystical, esoteric

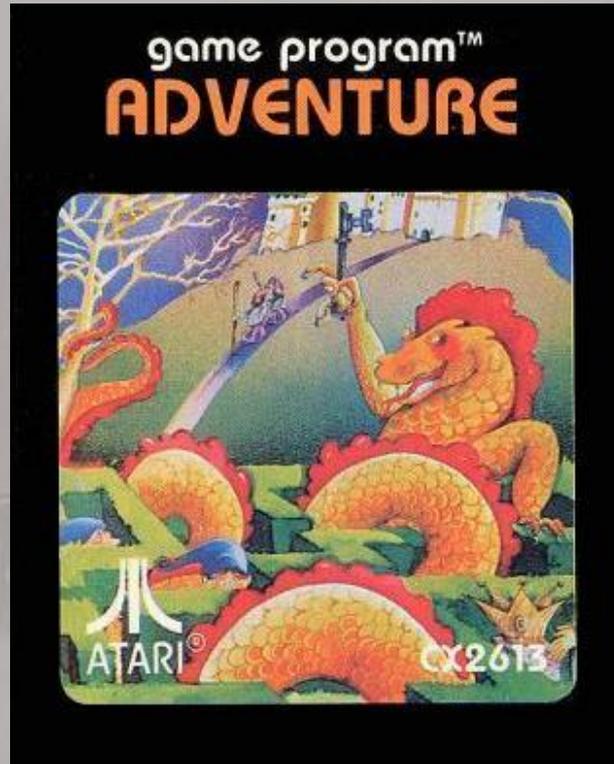


Occult = secret, hidden

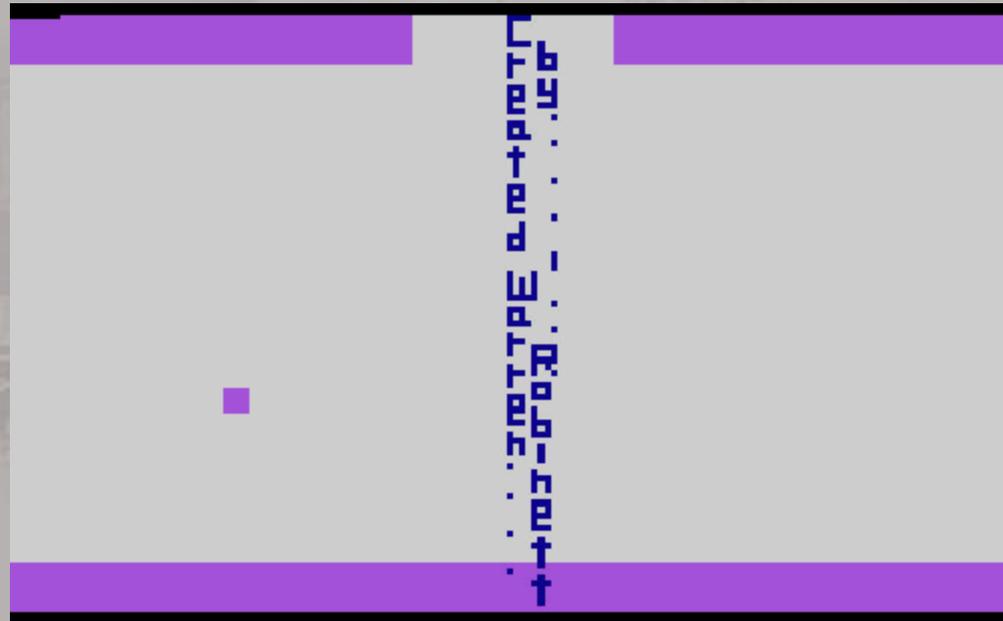




Atari 2600 *Adventure*



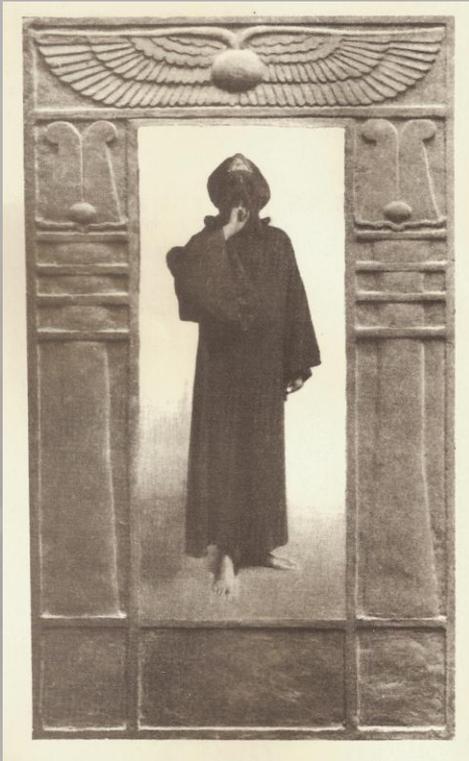
Key **unlocks** door,
reveals **message**



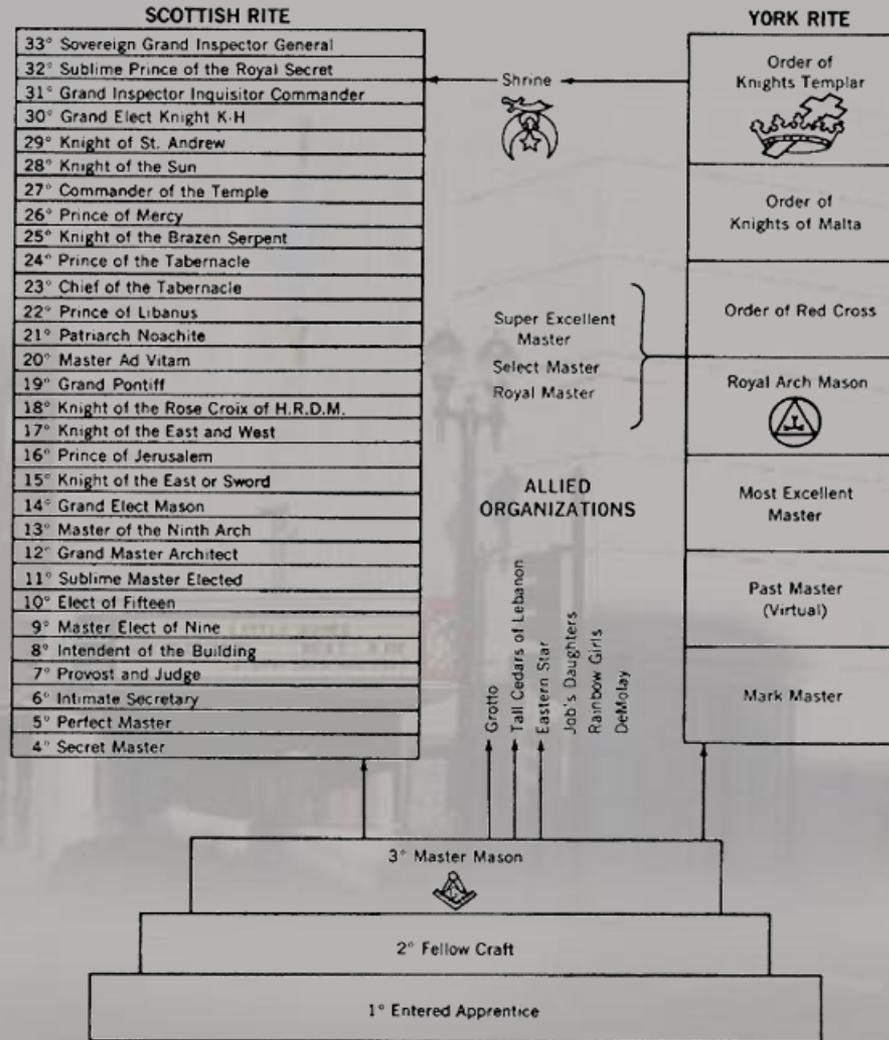
Mystery and initiation

from *mystes* "one who has been initiated"

myein "to close, shut" the lips or the eyes



Initiation



The Masonic structure.

Players discover secrets
by putting the game into **an unusual state**,
controlled by **variables** of the game
(time, space, player action, player status),
resulting in an **illuminating narrative payoff**.

Cryptic mechanics resonate with narrative themes

1. Hidden gameplay systems and subsystems
2. Obscure goals/quests
3. Puzzling control schemes
4. Obscured range of actions

Hidden locations (space)

Hidden events (time)

Obscure mechanics:
player actions with uncertain
effect on **variables** with uncertain
effect on **narrative**



Mysterious **lore resonates** with **obscure mechanics**



Demon's Souls Wiki -- <http://demonssouls.wikidot.com>

Hidden gameplay **sub-systems** (e.g. a **secret school of magic**)

Eternal Darkness
simalcrum@hotmail.com

Rune Chart

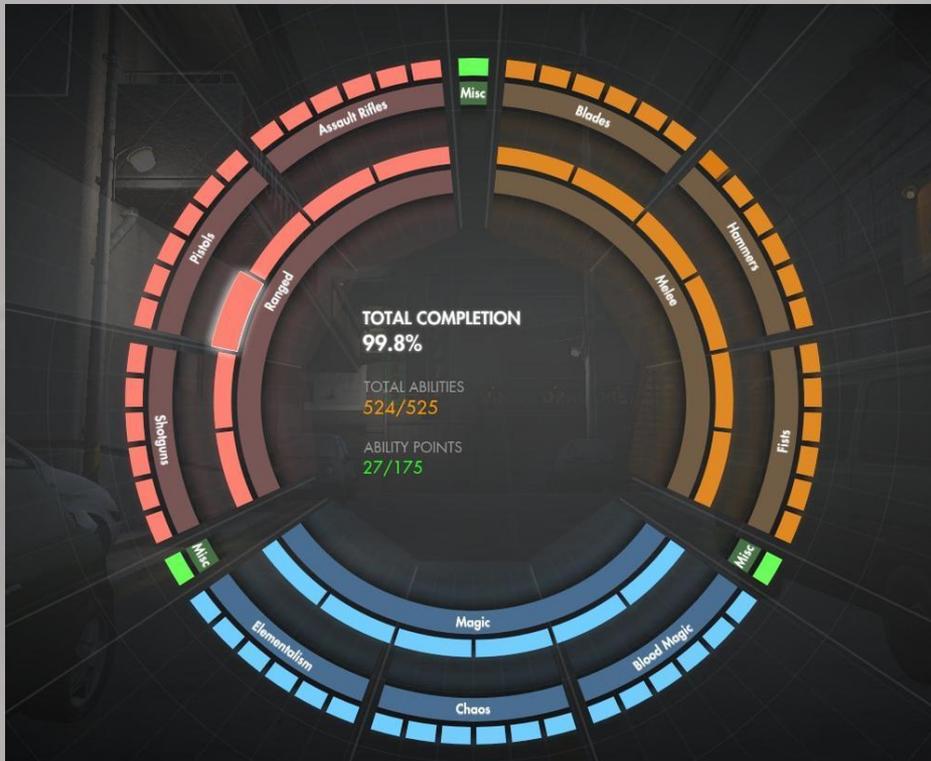
The Rune Chart displays 15 symbols arranged in three rows. Each symbol is accompanied by its name and a brief description of its effect:

- Chattur'gha (Red symbol)
- Ulyaoth (Blue symbol)
- Xella'toth (Green symbol)
- Mantarak (Purple symbol)
- Bankarok (Protect) (Black symbol)
- Tier (Summon) (Black symbol)
- Narokath (Absorb) (Black symbol)
- Nekleth (Dispel) (Black symbol)
- Antorbok (Project) (Black symbol)
- Magormor (Item) (Black symbol)
- Redgemor (Area) (Black symbol)
- Aretak (Creature) (Black symbol)
- Santak (Self) (Black symbol)
- Pargon (Power) (Black symbol)

Spells List

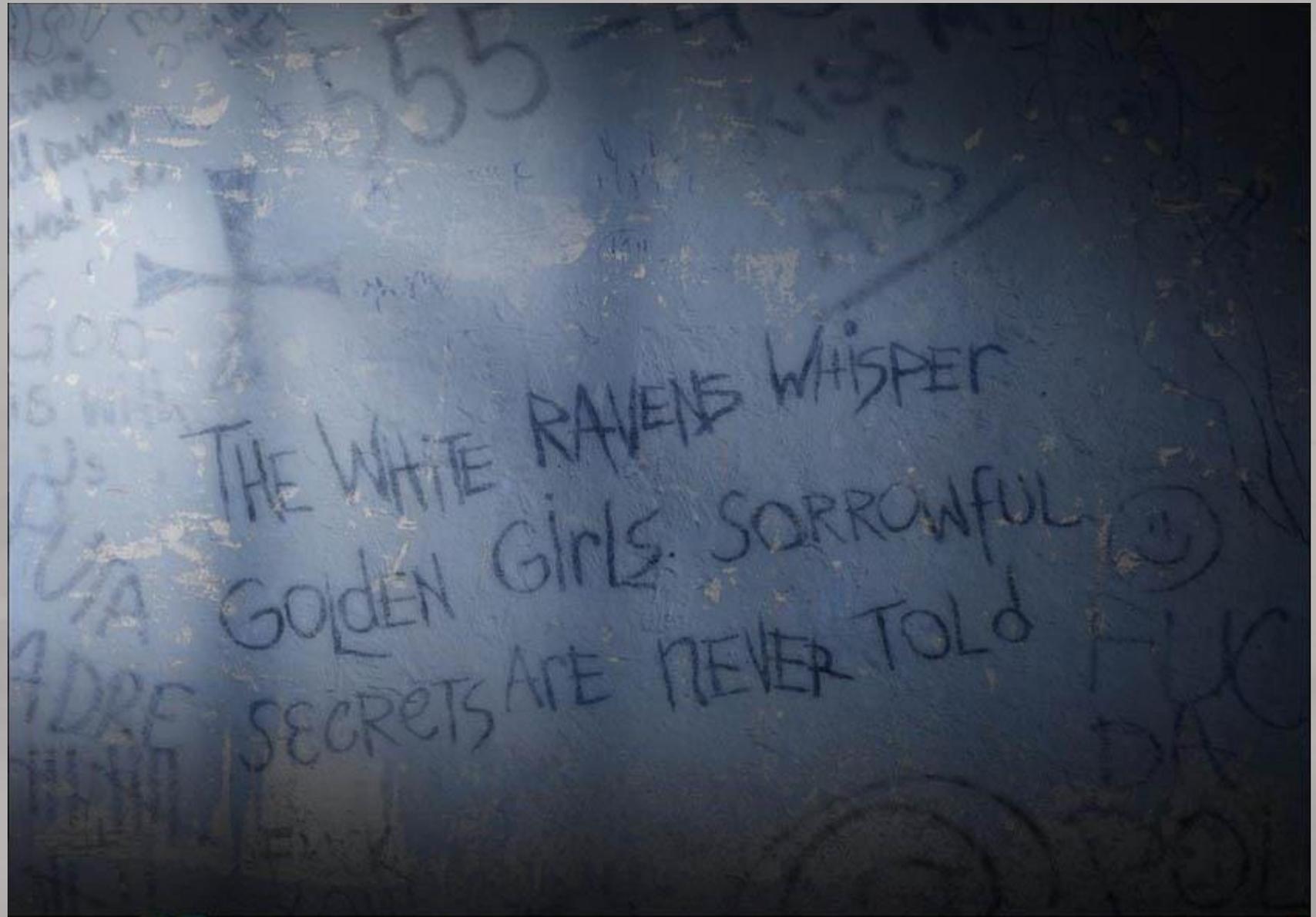
1. Enchant Item = Project + Item
2. Recovery = Absorb + Self
3. Reveal Invisible = Absorb + Area
4. Damage Field = Protect + Area
5. Dispel Magic = Dispel + Area
6. Summon Trapper = Summon + Creature (3)
7. Shield = Protect + Self
8. Summon Zombie = Summon + Creature (5)
9. Magic Attack = Project + Area
10. Summon Horror = Summon + Creature (7)
11. Magic Pool = Summon + Area
12. Bind Creature = Protect + Creature

Recursive unlocking (gameplay and narrative)



Cryptic Objectives





Puzzling control schemes to reach objectives



Uncertain **range of actions**

```
You are standing at the end of a road before a small  
brick building. Around you is a forest. A small stream  
flows out of the building and down a gully.
```

```
>enter building
```

```
That's not something you can enter.
```

```
>east
```

```
Inside Building
```

```
You are inside a building, a well house for a large  
spring.
```

```
There are some keys on the ground here.
```

```
There is tasty food here.
```

```
There is a shiny brass lamp nearby.
```

```
There is an empty bottle here.
```

```
> █
```

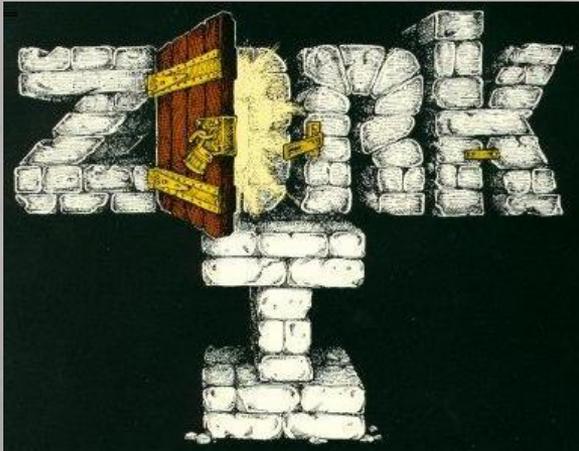
The Pendant



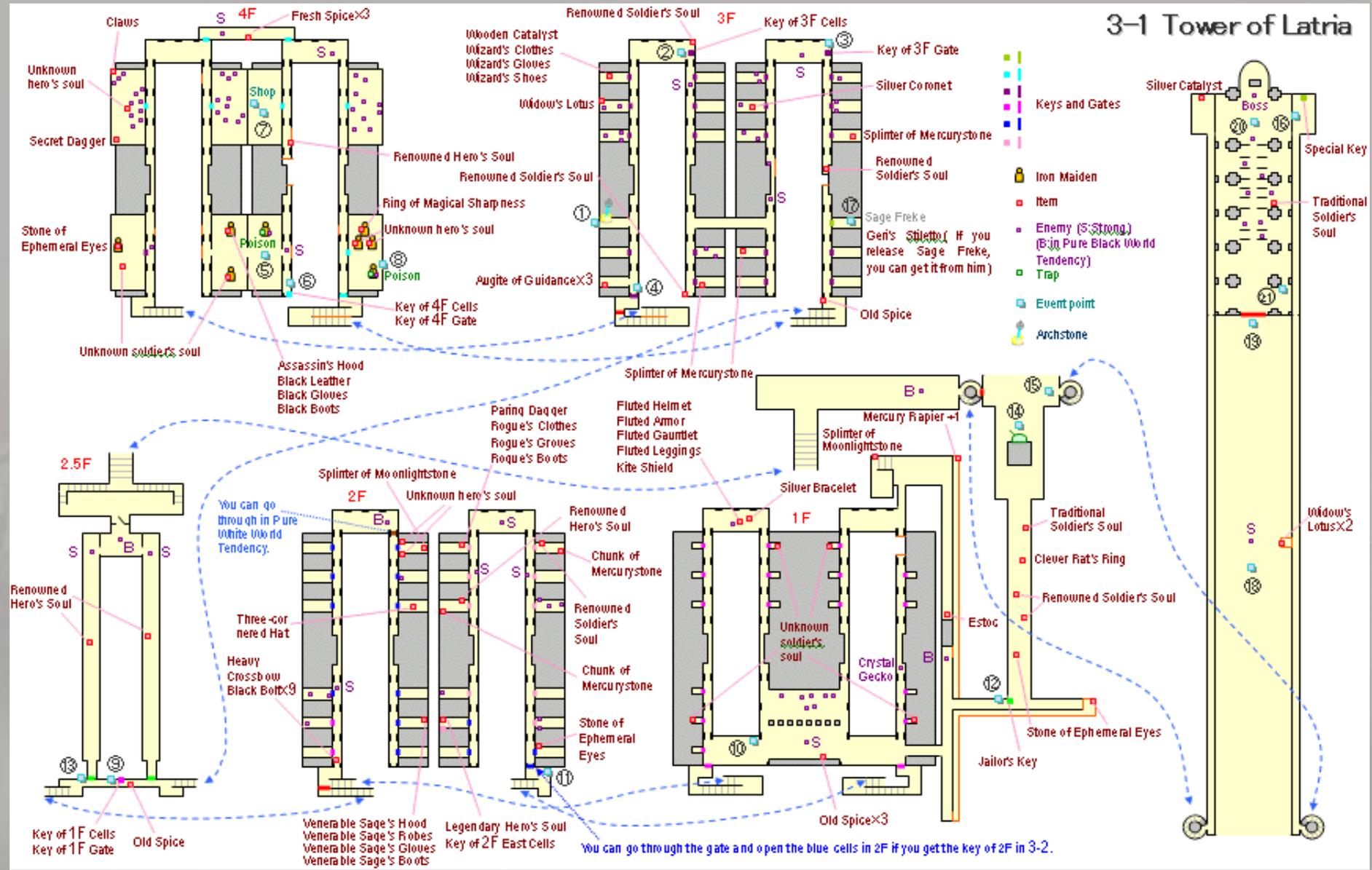
The Pendant

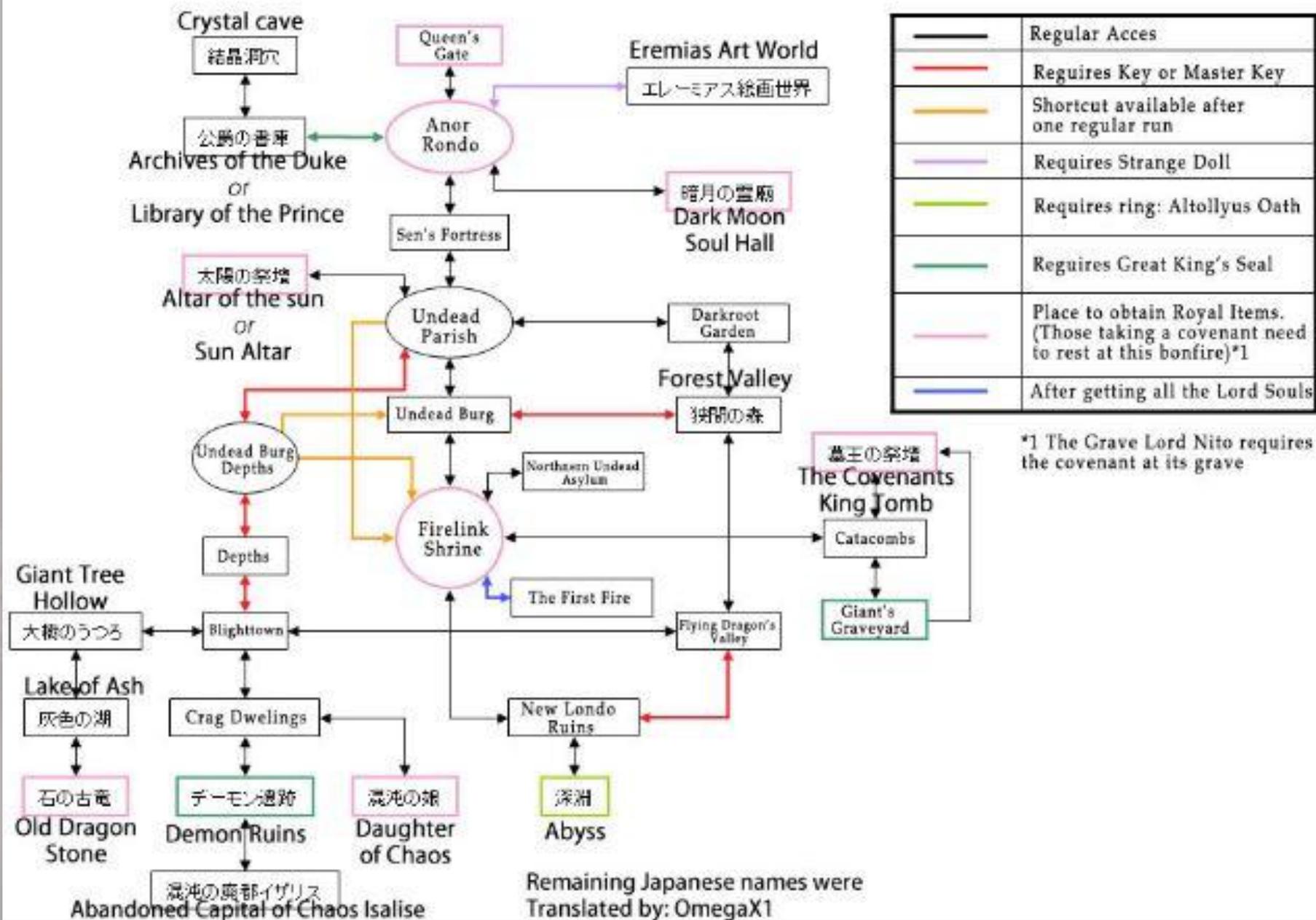


Hidden locations

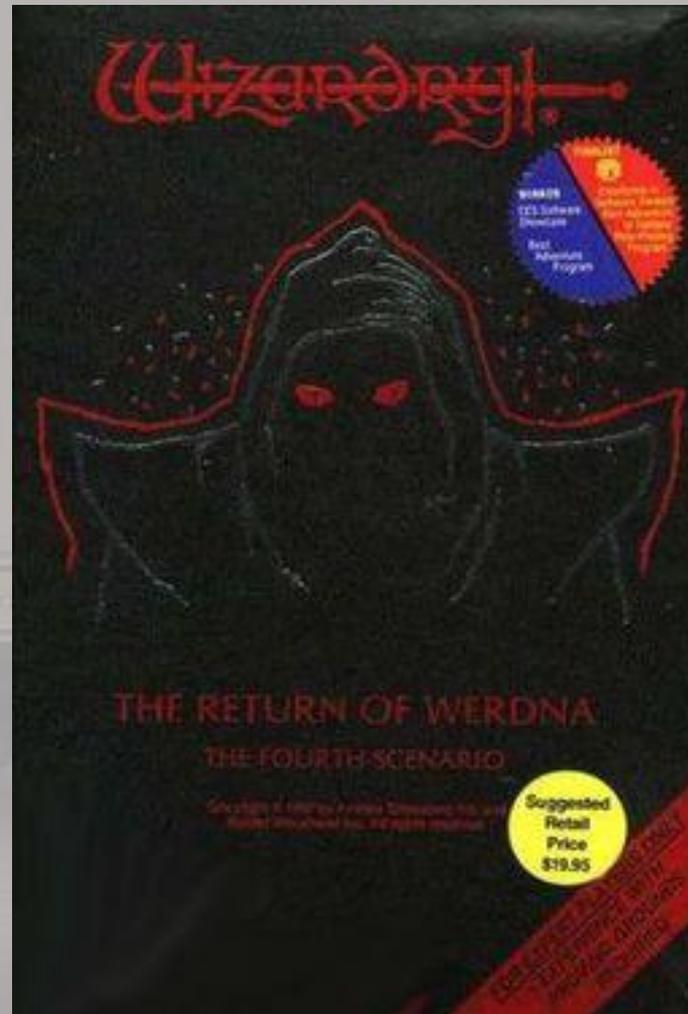


3-1 Tower of Latria





The most
difficult
RPG
of all time



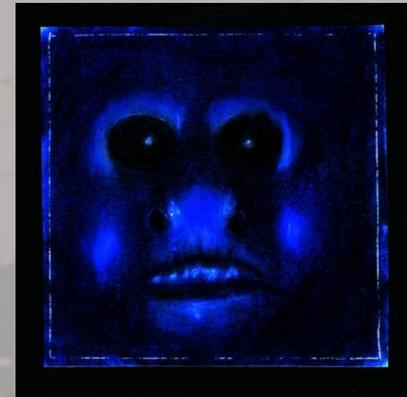
Hidden events (time and place triggered)



An overarching effect: mystery



Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me Red Room and Judy



Cult Classics

Surreal, strange, disorienting



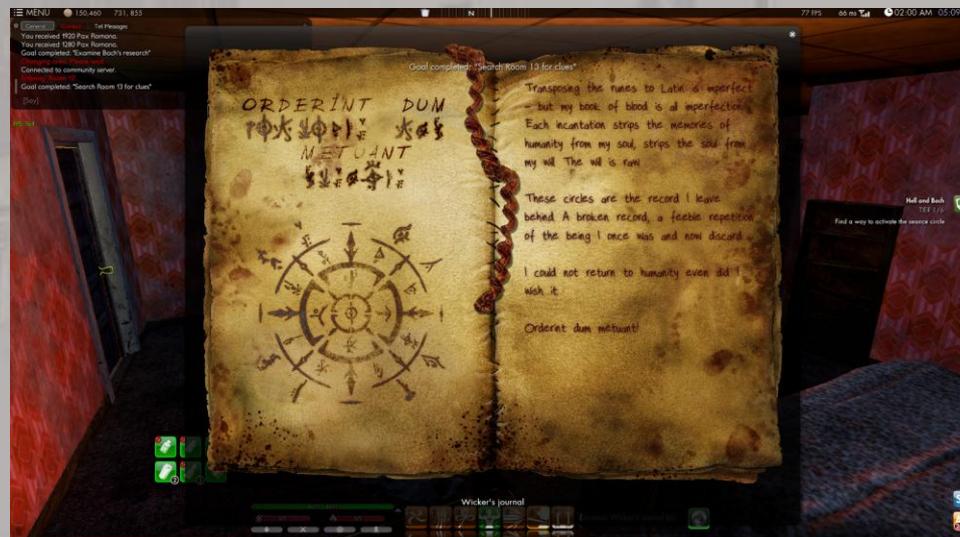
Surreal ≠ Random

This is **not** the same thing
as being **random**

Puzzles **pervasive** and **organic**



Puzzles are often **symbolic**
and
Players gain
understanding of world.



Initiation entails cumulative understanding

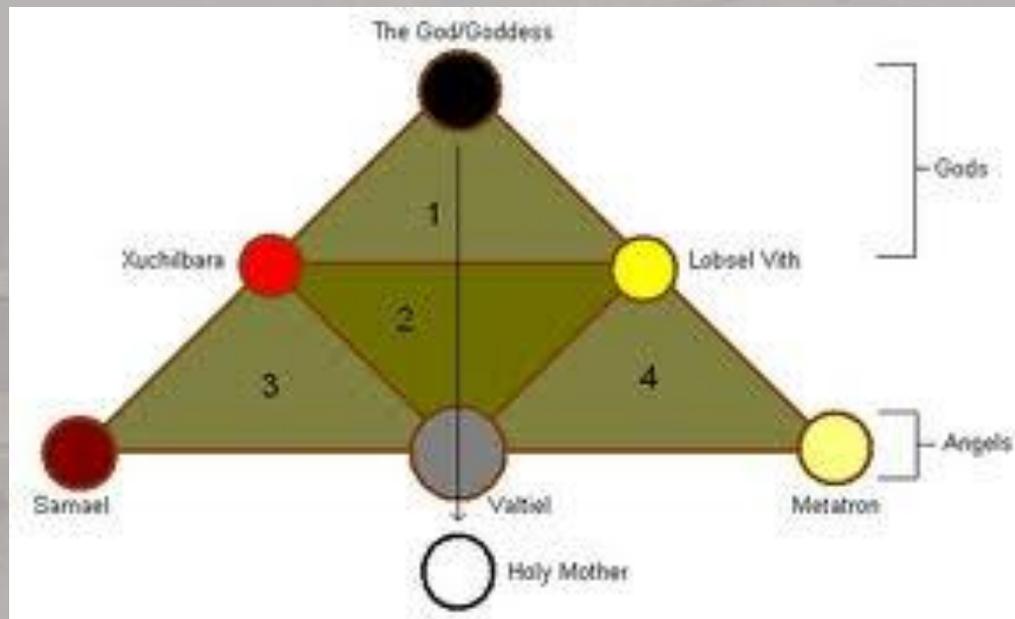


Deadly Premonition: secret dog(s)

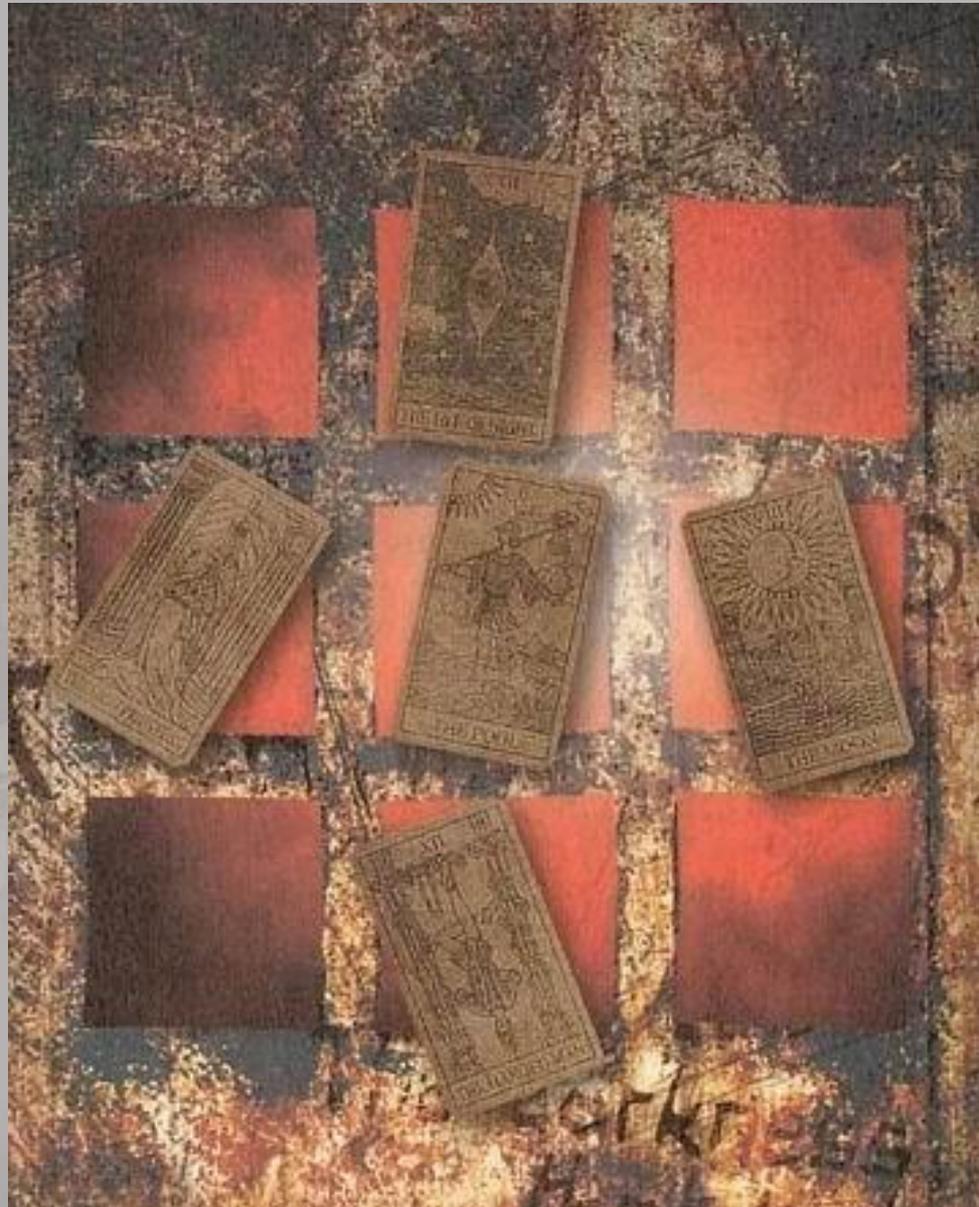


Sometimes, apparent attraction to **horror**
is a **desire for initiation**













XXII: THE EYE OF NIGHT

The God

The being that sleeps inside the holy mother... is this truly God?

At the end of the game, the creature called "God" appears. However, the form that it assumes seems too sinister for it to be the same being that is supposed to bring paradise to this world. One possible explanation for this is that if the town of Silent Hill holds the power to materialize delusions and innermost thoughts from one's subconscious, "God" is the result of someone's delusions just like the other creatures.



And did the seed of The God that was growing inside Heather truly disappear? That is left to the player to interpret.

THE FETUS THAT HEATHER VOMITED UP MAY HAVE BEEN ACTUALIZED BY THE HUMAN SUBCONSCIOUS AS WELL.



Creator's Commentary
In the original tarot, there is no Eye of Night card. The idea is that this card is added corresponding to a Hebrew vowel, even though tarot originates from the Hebrew alphabet which has only letters that are consonants. The card suggests The God.
-Hiroyuki Owaku

6Fz
112

The form of The God that is born to the earth changes depending on those who summon it

The god that sleeps inside Alessa has appeared in various forms throughout the series. The fact is that there is no one form of The God because the form that it takes is projected by the minds of those who summon it.

◆ Incubus



WITH THE INFLUENCE OF THE RED LIQUID, DAHLIA'S DELUSION IS PROJECTED.

◆ the god

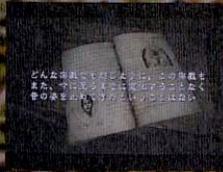


GOD VAGUELY RESEMBLES ALESSA BECAUSE CLAUDIA'S THOUGHTS ARE PROJECTED.

◆ Incubator

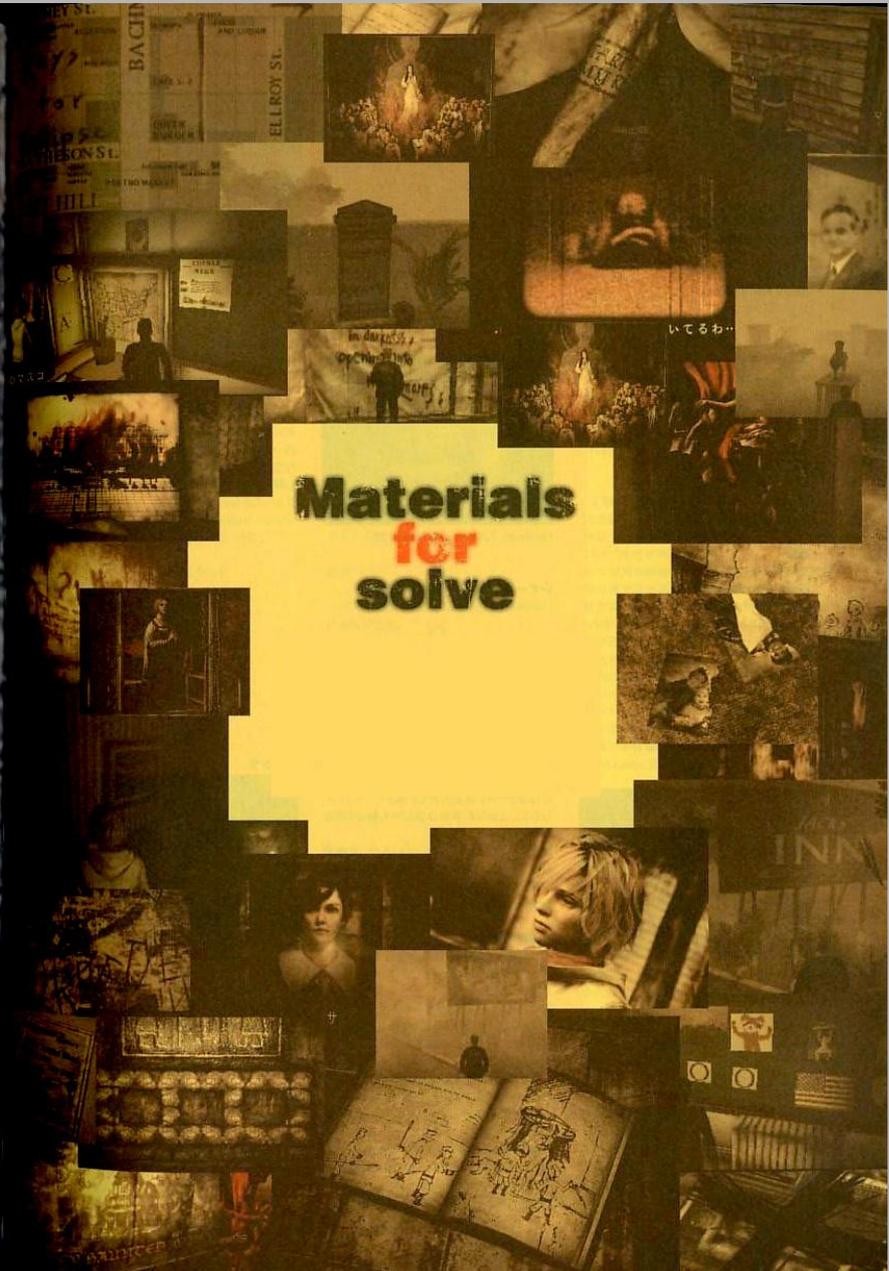


A MANIFESTATION OF THE MENTAL IMAGE OF THE GOD THAT ALESSA HERSELF HAD.



A BOOK IN THE CHURCH REGARDING THE FORM OF THE GOD. IT NOTES THAT THE FORM AND NAME OF GOD HAVE COME TO CHANGE.

Trick or Treat Special! On a poster in the shopping mall, the words "I'm All" are written, which means "fairy world."



**Materials
for
solve**

X: THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE

Loop

The immortal Alessa repeats an infinite loop of birth and death

In addition to "terror," motifs that have to do with life such as "birth" and "reincarnation" also become major themes in Silent Hill 3. It may fairly be said that like rotating objects and the crest which is used as a save point, a "cycle of rebirth" motif is inlaid throughout the game and Silent Hill 3 is thoroughly filled with this "loop."

It is worth contemplating the proposition that this "cycle" is closely linked not only to the work itself, but also to the act of playing the game.

THE POSSIBILITY OF VARIOUS PROFOUNDLY MEANINGFUL INTERPRETATIONS IS HIDDEN IN WHAT HEATHER SAYS AFTER SHE UNDERSTANDS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION'S CREST.

死んでもそれで終わリじゃないってわろいか
それは確かに便利だと思ろ



WHAT COULD THE REASON BE FOR CHOOSING A MERRY-GO-ROUND AS THE SETTING FOR THE FIGHT WITH THE MEMORY OF ALESSA?

Save&Load

save points = the crest of the religious organization which signifies resurrection and the flow of time

According to a book that can be read in the church, the crest of the religious organization is known as the "Halo of the Sun." The three circles drawn in its inner part signify present, past and future. Couldn't it be that there are two meanings in the fact that this crest appears as a save point, namely that "Heather regains her memories as a result of looking at the crest" and "her time is managed by the player?"



EACH TIME THE PLAYER LOADS A GAME IN THE REAL WORLD, HEATHER COMES BACK TO LIFE AGAIN IN THE GAME.

Creator's Commentary

Given that the crest of the religious organization symbolizes "resurrection" and "save and load" are perceived as a "cycle of rebirth," it seems that a link to the real world is created. After she understands the significance of the crest, Heather remarks, "Even if I die, it's not the end. That's certainly convenient, I think. But somehow... I can't help but feel that this is terribly unpleasant." The truth is that this is a message to the player. In short, it means "as far as the player is concerned starting over again and again is convenient, but for Heather herself, this is painful."

-Hiroyuki Owaku

Gameover&Restart

Valtiel, who drags Heather away, is an angel that governs the cycle of rebirth

Upon receiving "game over" in places such as the church and amusement park, a demonstration of Valtiel dragging Heather's body away occurs. Although his purpose is to restore life to Heather, whose body is where The God resides, if one shifts one's attention to the real world it is possible to interpret "game over and restart" as a kind of "death and rebirth." Regardless of Heather's own will, she is brought to life again by the player and the story must continue.

AT THE MOMENT OF "GAME OVER," VALTIEL APPEARS. HE DRAGS HEATHER OFF SOMEWHERE TO RESTORE LIFE TO THE BODY OF THE MOTHER OF THE GOD.

Creator's Commentary

In the religious tradition native to Silent Hill, Valtiel is a being that is close to The God. In other words, he is established as an angel. Simultaneously with acting as an agent of The God, Valtiel takes on the role of watching over the body of the mother until The God's revival. For this reason, he continues to observe Heather without harming her. When a "game over" occurs, he takes Heather away to restore life to the body of the mother of The God. In this case, there are two meanings to Heather's rebirth. One is that she is reborn as Alessa's reincarnation in the game scenario. The other is that she is reborn when the player retries the game another time.

-Hiroyuki Owaku

The hidden meaning of rotating objects

Beginning with the merry-go-round in the opening, and then the handle that Valtiel operates as well as giant electric fans, rotating objects appear everywhere in the game. It can be thought that these objects suggest the circular passage of time.

Even the development of the story is inevitably similar?

The story of the first game begins with a nightmare, passes through an amusement park and concludes in "nowhere." The third game also starts from a nightmare and finally comes to an end in a church. One should reach an understanding if one imagines that even the story development which is similar to a surprising degree is a phenomenon that "loops."

THE REVOLVING MERRY-GO-ROUND SYMBOLIZES THE REPEATED REINCARNATION OF ALESSA HERSELF.



THE FAN IN THE PASSAGEWAY LEADING TO THE UNDERGROUND CHAPEL EVEN THE GIANT VENTILATION FANS THAT APPEAR SINCE THE FIRST GAME CAN BE SEEN AS OVERLAPPING WITH THIS "CYCLE."



EXACTLY LIKE THE FIRST GAME, IN THE BEGINNING OF SILENT HILL 3 THE PROTAGONIST IS JUST ABOUT TO AWAKEN FROM A BAD DREAM.

IN THE FINAL STAGE OF THE GAME, THE PROTAGONIST COMES TO WANDER ABOUT "NOWHERE," A REALM WHICH IS FORMED FROM MEMORIES.



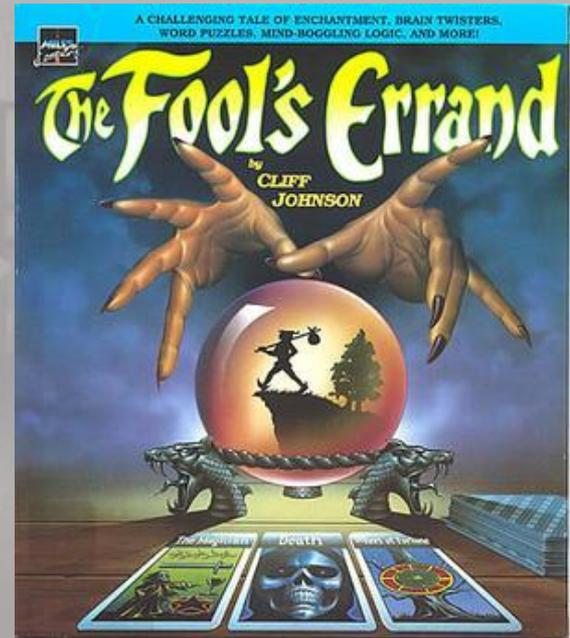
THE HANDLE THAT VALTIEL TURNS SUGGESTS ALL OF THESE "LOOPING" PHENOMENA.

Trick or Treat Special With data from Silent Hill 2, if one investigates the toilet in the bathroom in the otherside shopping mall...

Trick or Treat Special There is a save point in the art gallery in the otherside office building, but if one investigates the painting that is in this spot in the 'right side' art gallery...



Tarot = **simple** surface,
mystical interpretations

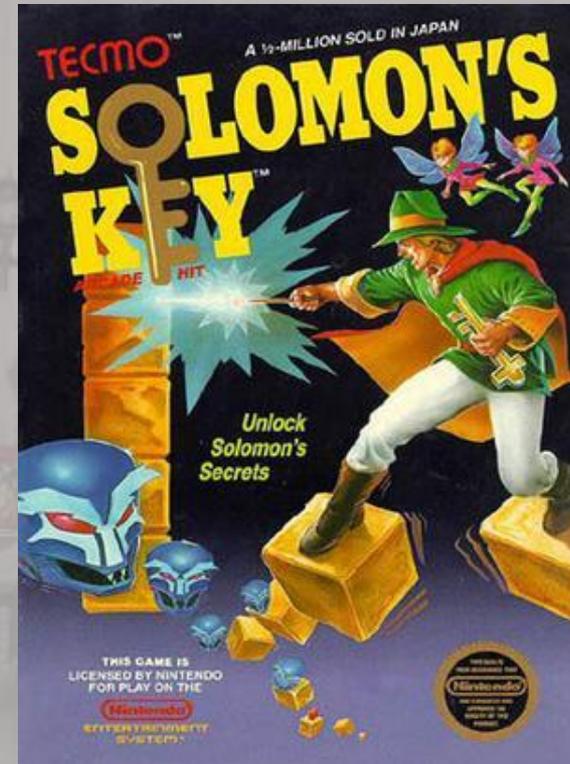
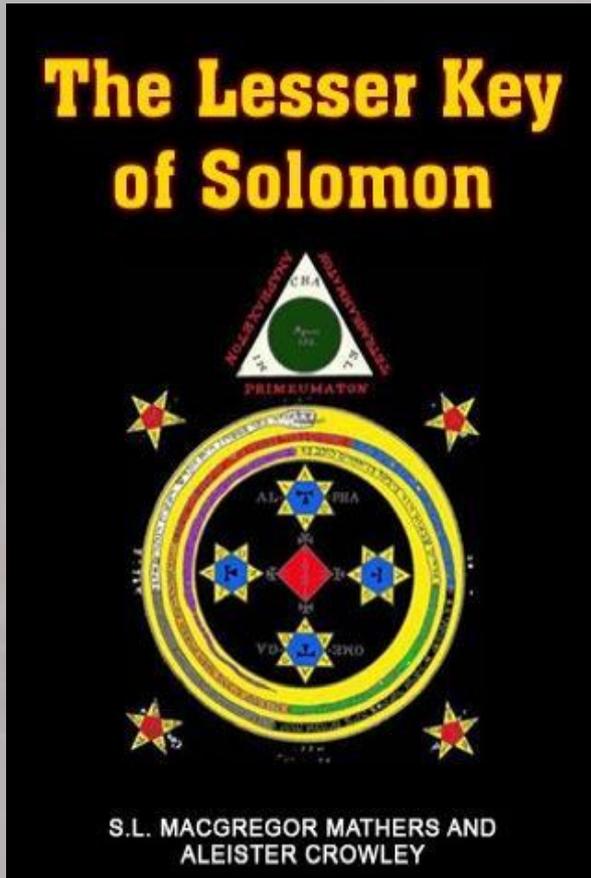


Howard's Law

For secret significance:

power \propto innocence \times simplicity



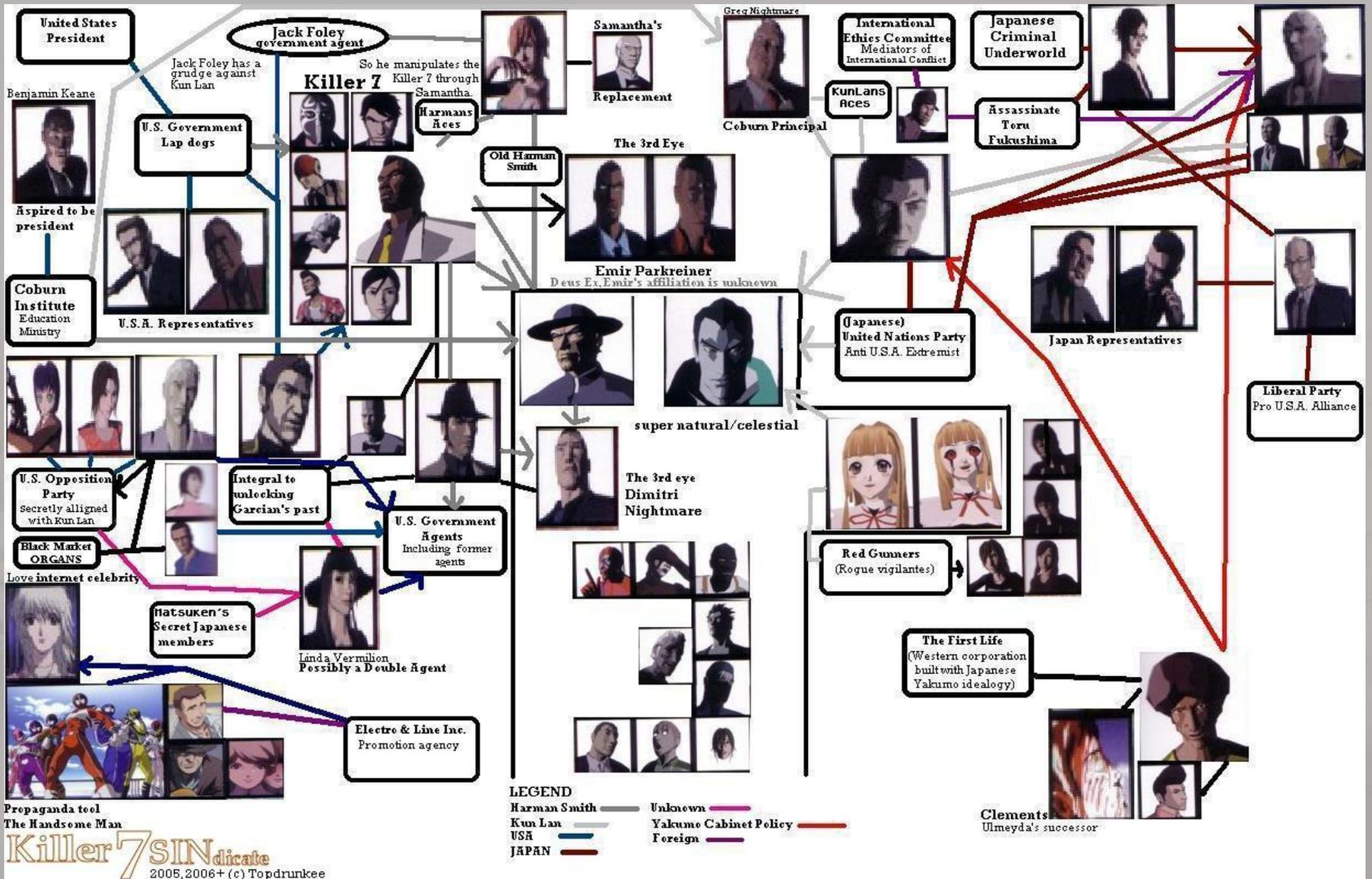


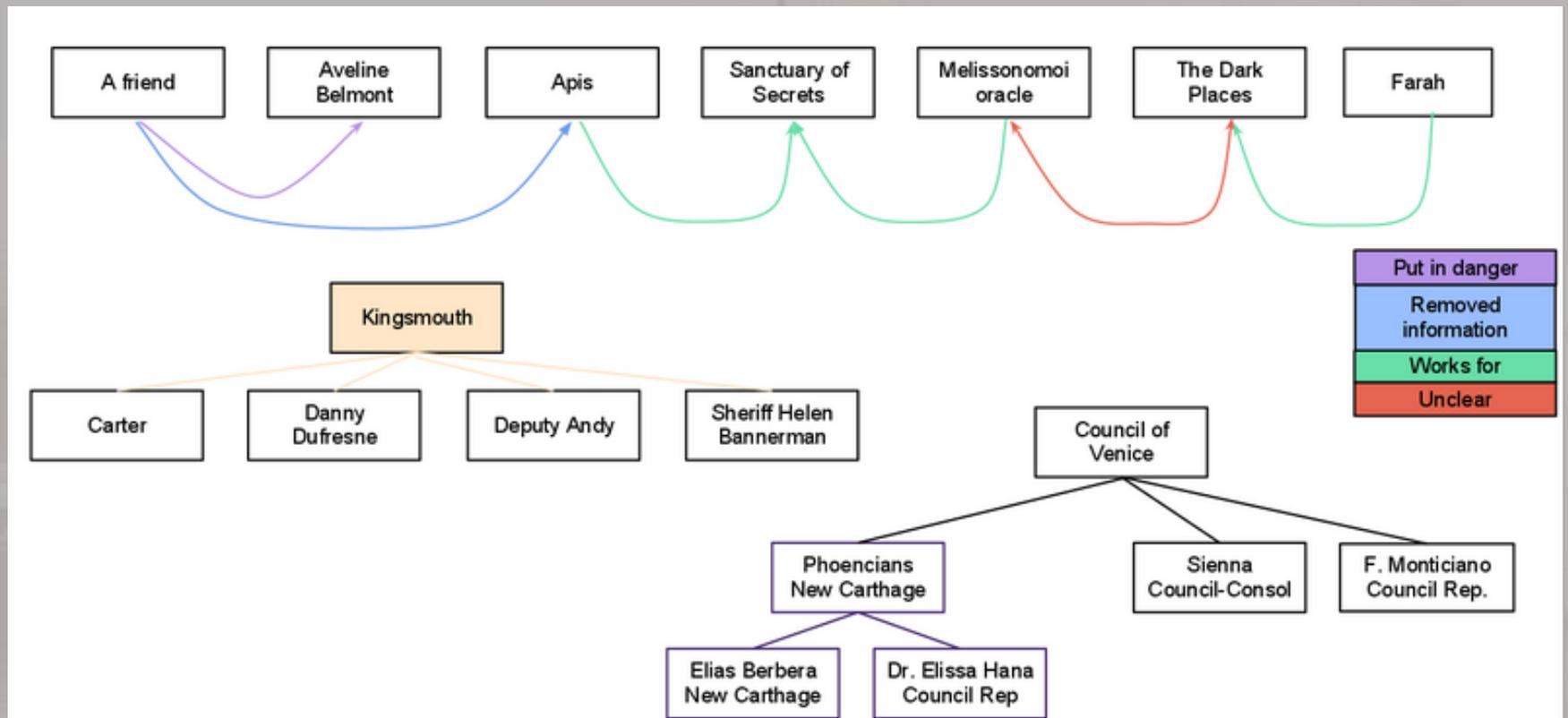
Nanashi No Game (*The Nameless Game*)



Communities that **form naturally**, driven by **interpretation**







Initiatory **self-discipline**: don't spoil for yourself

... once you get into the actual puzzles, solve them for yourself and do not use a walkthrough!

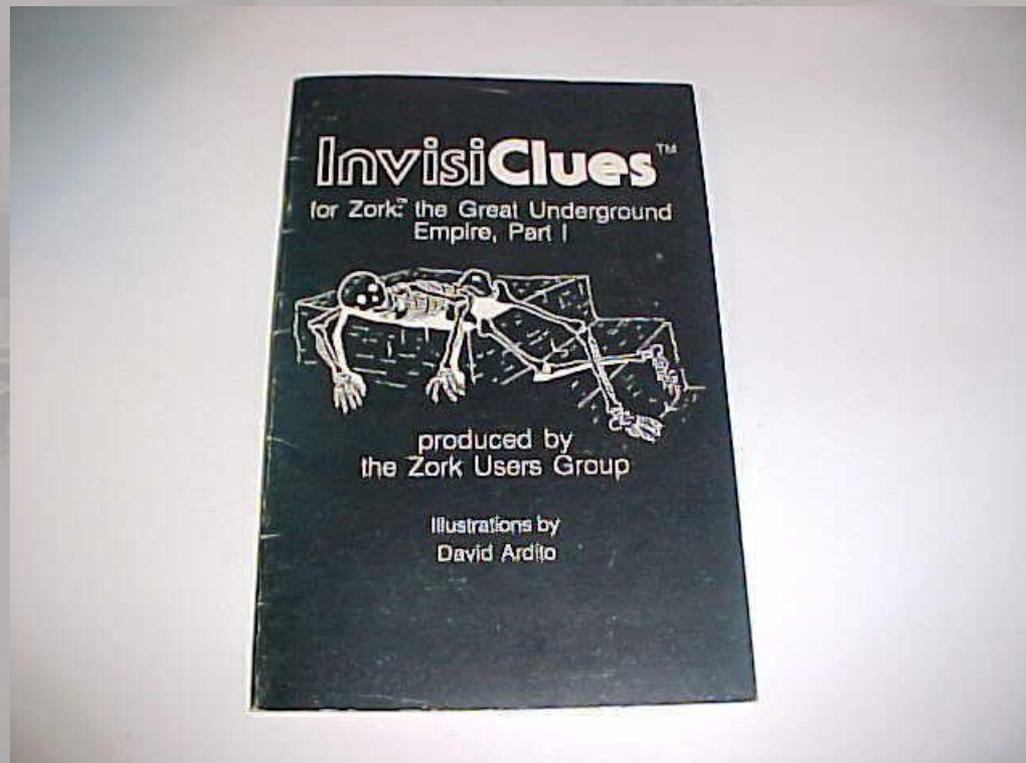
All the puzzles in Braid are reasonable.

They don't require you to do anything random; they don't require guessing. They don't require trial and error. The solutions tend to be simple and natural. They flow directly from the rules of gameplay in each world.

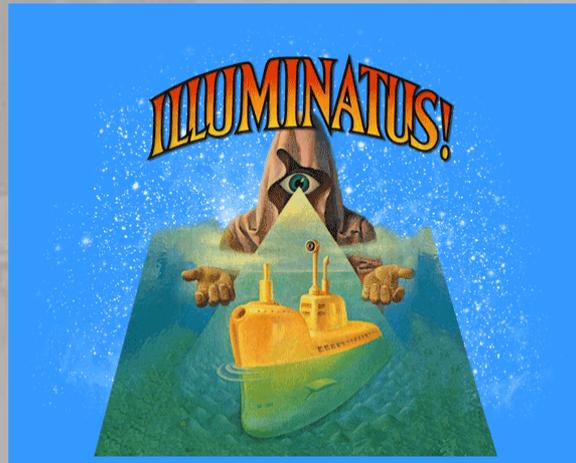
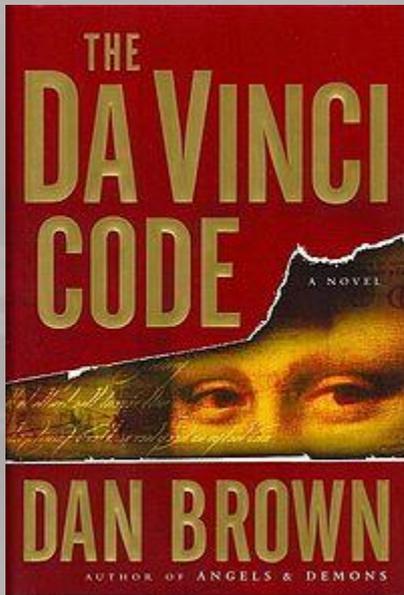
If you are having problems solving a puzzle, don't give up!

Some of the puzzles will be hard. But when you manage to solve those hard puzzles, **you will feel very good about it**. The game will feel very rewarding. Don't rob yourself of that feeling by reading a walkthrough!

Communicate without spoiling for others



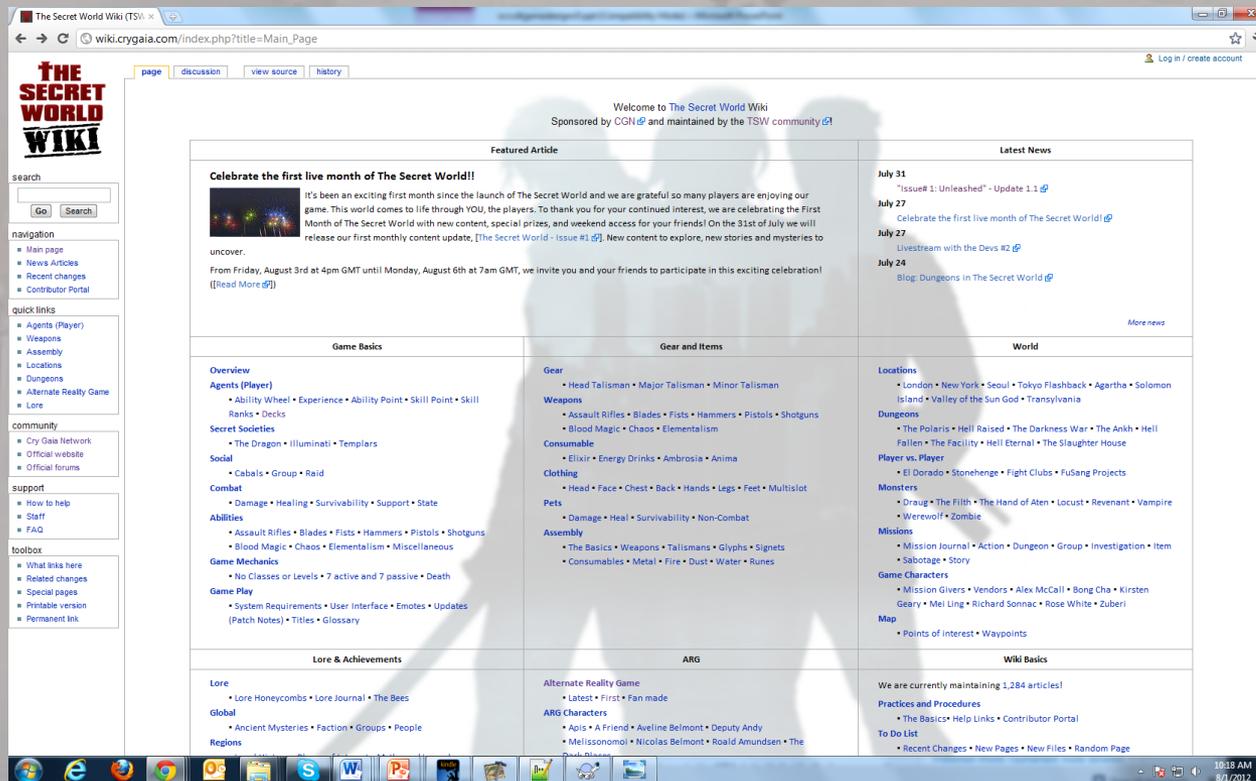
Let's create
secret **knowledge fantasies**,
not power fantasies



The two meanings of occult merge (**hidden** and **magical**)



Initiates protect and communicate the mysteries



Questions?

jeffhoward7@gmail.com