PROFESSOR: OK, so today, we have a guest lecturer, Clara. Some of you have probably already taken her class.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: [UNINTELLIGIBLE]. My current victims.

PROFESSOR: And past victims.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: [UNINTELLIGIBLE].

PROFESSOR: We'll probably need to do something about the lights. [INAUDIBLE]. I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I'm still operating on Tylenol and caffeine. So today we're going to talk about stories in games. And Clara teaches not just the Intro to Video Game Studies class, but also the Writing for Video Games class in the spring. I wanted her to come in and bring her expertise because she's [UNINTELLIGIBLE] probably a lot more than I have.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Hello, perfect. [INAUDIBLE].

So yeah, Philip asked me to come here and talk about stories in games, and as far as I remember, he said you guys had to read two articles for today. Chapter four in [INAUDIBLE] and Soren Johnson's *Theme is Not Meaning*. Didn't I [INAUDIBLE], too?

PROFESSOR: Yes.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA:	And he's late, OK.
PROFESSOR:	Shh!
CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA:	[LAUGHS] Anyway, so preparing this has been kind of interesting because-- I thought about this quite a bit because there's this focus in my research studying how games and stories can be brought together. What does it mean to have a story in a game? Where do we put the story? But the interesting challenge was thinking, well, the guys are working mostly on non-visual games. And what do stories have to do with non-fictional games. So here what I'm going to need is your input, because you guys have been playing all these board games, card games, and I want a bit of your input of what you think. How you think these concepts apply to non-digital games, because the part of digital games I can do pretty confidently. But I don't know as much about board games or card games. So I need your expertise. This is why you guys are here.
	So the first thing that I wanted to ask you about is that we have two different meetings, and one is sort of about fiction and the other is sort of about theme. But what is the fiction of a game? I turn it to you.
AUDIENCE:	The fiction of a game is, well, whatever you want it to be. It could be the characters in a digital game. It could be a real environment, but you just have fictional characters. It could be an environment that may not exist. It's pretty much up to the designer to figure out what they want to-- like with [INAUDIBLE] be in the game that are real, or if they want it to be fiction.
CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA:	Well, there's something there, but it might be a bit more intuitive than that. I think that you're on the right track, yes.
AUDIENCE:	I'd say it's the setting or the universe in which the user perceives the events of the game to take place in, or the one that the designer intends the user to see the game take place in.
AUDIENCE:	OK, so you can mention environment as the big-- what was the word you used-- the universe, the setting, something like that. Back there.
AUDIENCE:	Oh yeah, I was going to say that the word that is used over and over is world. It's just a world, pretty much.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: And that's the keyword. When [UNINTELLIGIBLE] is talking about fiction, he's really talking all throughout about fictional worlds. In a way, designing games and designing video games specifically, is always thinking about what is the world of this game. And at times there might be games that don't have worlds. You can make *Tetris.* You could make-- There's very few video games without worlds. But there are some. *Tetris--*

AUDIENCE: *Peggle.* So does *Peggle.*

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: *Peggle?* Well, *Peggle* has characters, you know. You were talking about this. Characters are already [UNINTELLIGIBLE] in fiction.

AUDIENCE: You said it has nothing to do with unicorns.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Yes. Who wants to say something? We have two hands here.

AUDIENCE: I'm stealing it. OK, in print or with board games, I think of fiction much more as the specific explicit things they give you, like the pictures, the rules, and all of that stuff versus what it feels like you're doing. So if they don't specifically tell you you're in blah place, then that's not part of the fiction.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: OK, yeah. So you put your finger on it, but when we're talking about non-digital games, there are some non-digital games where thinking about worlds is a bit shaky. Do you want to say something?

AUDIENCE: Yeah, just going to add that in an environment, you have a set of things you can do. So you're basically given rules. Like in a board game, you could be given a character that has to jump for some reason. The board game could say that they could jump some insane distance. Well, in real life, they can't do that. That's just part of the fiction. So it's whatever laws apply within that world, as well.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: This is a very interesting point because when you were talking about-- what's that word that he uses-- incongruous worlds? Incoherent, incoherent. He talks about incoherent worlds, and it's like, well, incoherent according to what? It's obviously not the rules that are also creating part of the fiction. The rules are also creating what are the laws of gravity in a specific world that we are playing in, for example. So when we're talking about fiction, we're mainly talking about fictional world. Now, how does that relate to theme? And you were already kind of hinting at

that. That in fiction and board games, it's kind of like, well, it almost can be about anything. But what is the theme of a g-- when you-- if you remember Soren Johnson's discussion-- what does he refer to as a theme? He is not an academic, so he has a more wobbly, loose definition. What is the theme of a game?

AUDIENCE: The theme of the game is what the designer says to the player, this is what the game is about.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: But when-- Soren Johnson is saying theme is not meaning. So he's making a point that theme might not be what the game is about. Right?

AUDIENCE: This is what the game designer tells you.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Yeah. The example that he gives is *Ticket to Ride,* right? And *Ticket to Ride* is not about riding trains. It's about-- it's about-- well, the description is about going from one end to another, right?

AUDIENCE: Yeah. And travelling across--

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Is building--

AUDIENCE: It's about travelling across the United States.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: But is it really travelling, or is it building the--

AUDIENCE: It's not even a story about-- the story's about travelling.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Yeah, the story's about travelling, that's the theme. But what you actually do is--

AUDIENCE: The official story is that I think it's some number of years after the events that were Around the World in Eighty Days, and to commemorate that, the original people who were involved in that race decided they're going to race across America in trains. And that is the theme of the game, according to--

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA:	Yeah, that's the theme of the game.
AUDIENCE:	Well, that sort of what drives to the point of what Sorenson's talking about, that when theme and meaning are incongruous-- as they are in *Ticket to Ride* to an extreme extent-- it can actually turn people off from the game sometimes.
CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA:	Well, and it's not that it's a bad game--
AUDIENCE:	Or *Halo Wars.*
CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA:	Well, not necessarily.
AUDIENCE:	The thing about *Halo Wars* was that it sounded like you bought it thinking it was going to be an action game, then got disappointed and were like, blah!
AUDIENCE:	In the case with *Ticket to Ride,* it is pretty much just what they were saying there, right? That the theme seems to just be whoever it is that wrote the instruction booklet say that you're doing, which may not necessarily have anything to do with the actual mechanics of the game.
CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA:	Yeah, I have the game. I didn't know if you guys have played it. I made you want to play it. [INAUDIBLE] As of right now, [UNINTELLIGIBLE] is a game called Too Many Cooks, and it seems to be about cooking. Yeah, you have ingredients, and you're making a soup of sorts. But really what you're doing is resource management and exchanging. Just imagine being a cook and having to, like, well, I have to wait until I get the right ingredient or maybe exchange it for another. That's not how you cook really. So there's always the clash of how the fiction of the game relates to the rules. And the interesting distinction between fiction and theme is that theme seems to be like a layer, seems to be like a decoration. At times, it can be part of the title. It can be how the tokens look like, or what the board looks like. That is setting up the fiction of the game. Not the fiction, the theme. But it doesn't really have a fictional world. When when you're playing *Ticket*

to Ride or when you're playing *Settlers,* you have a feeling like you're in a world.

AUDIENCE: At least, more so than *Ticket to Ride.* So, I will argue that maybe the world that you feel is not that they're telling you that you're in, right? One of the problems of *Ticket to Ride* is that you never really feel these characters exist. But the world of the United States is very, very present. Like the positioning of the cities, the fact that these cities exist and can be connected by land is very--

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: You guys have read the levels of abstraction? Talked about levels of abstraction here at all?

PROFESSOR: Not in great detail, but--

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: OK, it's the idea that it's a world, but the way that it works is so abstracted that it doesn't really-- you're not in a world anymore. It's just these little bits and pieces. OK, we have fiction and we have theme, but we also have stories. And what do stories have to do with this? How do we have the story in non-digital games? What principle-- a story-- I'm going to find it for you to save time. A story is a series of connected events that involve characters. So those characters perform actions, or there are happenings, things that happen to them, and those actions happen in time and in a specific setting, in a specific place. And in the case of games, they also involve objects. That's like my telegraphic version of what a story is.

So what we do in games, in games we have changes of state, right? Every step of a non-digital game, particularly. We can think about non-digital games as changes of state, and having a change of state can constitute an event. So that is one way. So how do we generate rules that generate changes of state that can be thought of as an event in the story? But I want to know a bit more. Of the games that you've played so far, how can non-digital games-- and maybe you've played more board than card games than anything, but-- how can we have a story? How can we have those events happen?

AUDIENCE: So one game that I've played that has a really nice story to it is *Battlestar Galactica.* In a way, that places-- it works off of what the player already knows. So it sort of assumes that the player has a knowledge of the *Battlestar Galactica* world, and so it keeps referring to that. Whenever you play a card that has special abilities, [INAUDIBLE], so it relies on previous knowledge.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: That's a very good point. The point of-- in digital games and non-digital games, but is also in digital games-- a lot of storytelling in games happens in the player's head. Is it evoking [INAUDIBLE] , is tapping on the player's knowledge. Is not, as we've got to say, is not so much about storytelling, but like, OK, what do you know? We are making the player fill in the gaps. So that designing a game that involves storytelling is usually giving cues to the player to create the story, if that makes sense. Patrick?

AUDIENCE: I was going to say that a lot of board and card games, a lot of the fiction just comes from the metaphors of the mechanics. So, for example, in *Settlers,* when you want to build a road, if you strip away all the fiction, it's just I have these cards, I put them down, I can put this piece here. But adding the fiction to it, you say now, I'm not just putting cards down, I'm using the resources to build a road. And so that metaphorical action is another event in the story.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Well, it becomes a meaningful action. That's another-- I'm sure that you guys have been talking about that. What is a meaningful action? And at times, meaningful action is it constitutes a story event. Yeah.

AUDIENCE: I think the whole point of Munchkin and and Shiggy and those games are to construct stories. When we played it, there was a moment when someon trashed someone else's shrooms, and then the other person played a Go Dumpster Diving card to go pick up the shrooms and a bong from the dumpster. And this whole sequence of events, the [UNINTELLIGIBLE] text on the cards, what they were, and the actions you were taking, and you string them all together, I did this, and this happened, and this happened with this object, and you've got a perfect story, because you know you're playing the geek, and that--

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Well, there's that. But the other thing that is good about Munchkin is that reading the cards is fun. There are bits of the story you'll get in Munchkin that are like, [INAUDIBLE]. That is kind of like engaging already. Oh, and you wanted to say something?

AUDIENCE: I was just going to say that there are some games which are entirely about telling stories.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Thank you.

AUDIENCE: Role-playing games are the number one, and then another example is something like Once Upon a Time, which I think is [INAUDIBLE]. And then they have, also, The Adventures of Baron Munchausen, if you've ever seen--

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Yes. Oh, I should bring it, yes. I have it in my office. Thought that's kind of difficult to set up in half an hour. But yes.

AUDIENCE: And actually, a friend of mine invented a game which is vaguely based on The Adventures of Baron Munchausen, where each person is telling a story and they have cards in front of them which needs to be flipped over by incorporating the elements of the story into their hand of cards-- Anyway, don't worry about it.

AUDIENCE: Yeah, you're going a bit faster, but that's fine because yeah, there are games that are about storytelling, communal storytelling, and role-playing games are about that. And again, as game designers, what we are given when we have the rule book from D&D is a fictional world that has rules. But then we have, as a designer, as a DM, we are coming up with what is the situation? What is the world? What is the the specific challenges that we're situating in this world? How are we going to do that? But it's about communal storytelling. As we're going to see in a minute, there are also games that are about coming up with stories. We're being thrown in a similar way-- well, in Munchkin, you're kind of constructing the story as you go. But in the games that we're going to play today, or some of you are, like Gloom or Once Upon a Time, the game is being able to produce a narrative. Being able to make sense given the specific cues. You've had your hand up?

AUDIENCE: I was going to do the opposite extreme of a game with a very basic story, and you kind of make a story up as you go along, but it's not really that crazy. This card game, Falling, where pretty much the pretense is you are [UNINTELLIGIBLE], and you're falling to your demise. And so while you guys are falling, you guys decide we'll make a contest of who hits the ground last. And so it's a real-time game, and you're dealt cards in order, and it keeps going until you reach the ground card. And so you can attack other people. OK, this is going to happen to you and different effects happen. And so when you're actually playing it, it's kind of like the intensity when you're falling. Like, oh, I'm going to die, I have to do this fast because, before you know it, the ground is already at you.

AUDIENCE: It's interesting because it creates a longer event of something that's supposed is supposed to be, pop! Gone. Scratch, right? But it's kind of zooming in on how long that would feel if you were actually falling, making a mini-story of that. It's interesting because I don't know how strongly-- this is one of the questions we'll be talking about in stories in games is what kind of an event constitutes an event in the story? Is opening a door an event in the story? Well, in

some games, it can be because it might give you access to new areas, there might be someone showing up that changes things. But in other cases, like Monopoly, going around and getting the-- how many, $100?-- $200, is that an event?

AUDIENCE: Maybe it's not. It doesn't seem like a story event because it's such a mundane thing that happens all the time, although clearly, it has [INAUDIBLE].

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Yeah, it does have an effect, but as a storytelling art, is kind of questionable. The other thing I wanted to ask you, seeing as you guys have been playing particular board games, there are board games that have similar mechanics. So, I played Race to the Galaxy, which I really like. And I've been told that [? Potomac Coast ?] is very similar, yes? So does changing the theme-- those two games have different themes-- but does changing the theme affect the rules in any ways? For those of you who might have played both?

AUDIENCE: Not really. Not for-- San Juan, I think is closer. San Juan is with the cards. But it doesn't really change the game, because the mechanics are almost identical. It's just covered in a different shell, or whatever it is, whatever the mechanic they're trying to mimic.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: So it's like maybe you don't like colonial or whatever--

AUDIENCE: Yeah, if you don't like the--

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: The science fiction part--

AUDIENCE: The science fiction theme, you could go for this more Earth town building theme. But if you don't like playing the game itself, switching to the other game is probably not going to be all that different.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Yes, yeah, which I think is kind of interesting, and it's like, so [INAUDIBLE]. Yes?

AUDIENCE: The interesting thing is that in neither of those cases, unlike, say, *Ticket to Ride,* do these things feel like they're tacked onto the theme? And in each case, the actual mechanics of the

card faithfully represent what they're supposed to be in the game fiction, right? So I feel that the fact that the themes are essentially interchangeable, or that the same mechanics underlie both games, despite the fact that they have different themes, doesn't necessarily mean that there's something wrong with the theme. It's just that--

AUDIENCE: But the meaning is similar--

AUDIENCE: It's just that the mechanics are flexible, or something like that.

AUDIENCE: But what I mean, the meaning of what you actually do in the games is similar. Resource management, planning ahead, knowing when you can deploy a certain-- they are about the same thing, even if they have different settings. So that's probably the connection. It's not about oh, if you like science fiction games, you can play the *Battlestar Galactica* game, Race to the Galaxy, whereas I'm guessing that for most people, it's, well, if I like Puerto Rico, or I'm thinking of San Juan, sorry, [UNINTELLIGIBLE] wrong place.

AUDIENCE: Their themes are close enough.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: But you would play something that is similar. Does that make sense?

AUDIENCE: If the meaning of both games is really empire building in some sense, right? In San Juan, it's got historic themes, and Race to the Galaxy it's futuristic. But they're both empire building. The theme is very well defined in both of these games. That will make sense because both themes are about empire building, only one's in the future and one's in the past.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: OK, so we have-- this has taken a bit of the time, but these are the foundations of the concepts that I wanted to get across today and discuss today. When we talk about video games, there's an extra layer, which is video games that are story driven versus just games with a story. An example I have here. So this is Soul Calibur 2, as far as I remember--

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE] *Soul Calibur II*-- [INAUDIBLE] I think so.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: I don't know. [INAUDIBLE] *Soul Calibur* hoping that it was familiar to [INAUDIBLE] designing. Anyway, so in *Soul Calibur,* what's the game about?

AUDIENCE: Fighting.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: It's about fighting hand-to-hand.

AUDIENCE: It has some weird story.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: And it does have a weird story that's like, well, does anybody know the story? I know that there's something, and there's some reason why Sandra or Sophitia-- Sophitia, right? I don't know. I think her sister is Sandra.

AUDIENCE: They're related somehow, they're mother and daughter or brothers or sisters or something.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Oh, OK. Maybe that's what she's asking for. I didn't know. I still like these games. But do I know their stories? No. But does it? Eh, not really. Enough of these. For some people, I'm sure that they do care about the stories of these, or the stories of the characters in *Street Fighter,* for example. Yes?

AUDIENCE: Well I was going to say for games like this, I actually kind of like the story because it adds-- the game is not the story. There are two separate entities. But one kind of adds to the other. Like *Diablo,* for example. There's lots of people that have played *Diablo II* without really caring about the actual story--

AUDIENCE: Those cinematics were so cool back in the day.

AUDIENCE: But even though you can pretty much separate the story from *Diablo II* and people would probably still play it, the story definitely adds a layer of, I am attached to this game.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: But *Diablo,* in *Diablo,* the difference is that *Diablo's* closer to being a story-driven game. It's closer to being an art-boutique game, where the quests, you have to know who you're going to talk to, what are you going to do. I had a friend, we were working in this game service, and we had to test all these role-playing games. And one of my coworkers was like, oh, I have to play-- it was *Baldur's Gate II.* One of the cool ones. And he was like, OK, I have to test this, and I just have to see that it works. And he was not paying attention to any other text. He was just doing the technical testing. But then he got stuck, and we were supposed to finish the games, and he was stuck, and he was going slower because he didn't know what to do. I said, well, if you had read what you actually had to do. Well, for

him, it was like, it was just a story! Well, you're playing an RPG. You can't leave the story out.

Somebody's telling you that you have to squash I don't know how many arts, be happy to know that you have to support the arts. You have to know where to go. So in story-driven games, what happens is that the story's really so tied to the rules and the goals of the game that you have, as you advance in the game, you're also advancing in the story. That something that, here, when you beat up somebody in Soul Calibur or *Street Fighter,* whatever fighting game you can think of, there might be a little cut scene that tells us who they are. One thing that I like about-- is it *Soul Calibur?* Yeah. There's a bit of taunting, like, oh, he beat me, or something like that. But that is building character a bit, and that means writing. But really, it's not really story-driven. The fact that we're getting bits of the story as we complete challenges, doesn't mean that if we ignore the game, we can still complete the game without knowing the story. Does it make sense?

So this is something that video games are doing that, to a certain extent, some of the board games that you might have been playing don't quite do. Does it make sense? We can still think of-- and there might be some people who play these board games still at the mathematical level without paying any attention to what the event that's representing of. But that's one potential of video games, that idea of having a story-driven game where you're playing a game, you are interacting with the world with a strong-- in the cases of story-driven games, you also have the struggle of a fictional world that you are interacting with, that you are exploring, that you're poking around.

So one thing I wanted to make clear here is that when we talk about storytelling-- and let's try to use the term. We're talking about the stories, but is it really storytelling? And the thing is that technically games don't tell stories. Who's telling the story? Who's the narrator? There might be games that have a kind of gimmick of having the narrator, like *Prince of Persia: Sands of Time.* When you make a mistake, and he's supposed to be telling what's happened to him, and he's like, no, no, no, wait, when are you guys going to learn, no, that's not how it happened.

But really, most games, again like *Baldur's Gate* or *Diablo,* or more recently like *Mass Effect,* who is the storyteller? And the thing is that there are also different types of stories. When we are interacting with a game, what we are doing is performing, and as we perform, we are creating a story. There's a story that has been maybe prepared for us. Going back to the Munchkin thing, in every card, we have a bit of the story, and we are kind of putting it together,

laying it out. So the game designers have designed each game, each chunk of the story, what are the cues that we're giving the player? But then there's also what else this player is bringing to the game.

As I was saying before, there's part that is the game itself telling its story, and the other is what we are evoking, what we are having the player bring to the game. Is the story happening in that player's head? So what I'd like to say is that it's not really storytelling, it's about story building, and as game designers, we are designing those little chunks. We are creating stories that are meant to be reconstructed, that are meant to be together. So the difference between storytelling and story building basically, when we have storytelling, we have somebody who's narrating, or maybe there's someone who's re-enacting what's happened, so a thing like theater, for example. But this continuous, it's something that just happens and is not fragmented, which is what story building means. We have something that has not already happened. It's communicated one way, and what those events are and what order they're told, that's determined by the author. If we think about stories and how stories apply to games in terms of story building, we're talking about fragmented stories. Stories in pieces. Stories that we have to put together like a puzzle. And we're game designers. We make puzzles. That's one of the many things that we can do. What those fragments are, how are we giving cues to the player to put together those fragments, or to come up with their own ways of coming up with the story.

In a way, it's a kind of collaboration between the designer and the player, because we rely on the player to put this story together, to come up with their own ways of filling the gaps, to really have a proactive role in figuring out what the story is, and what the order of events is. But there are-- you guys have seen the games of progression and the games of emergence? Yes? You discussed that?

AUDIENCE: Could you [INAUDIBLE] I'm trying to remember where this--

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: It's like the [INAUDIBLE] in the first chapter, second chapter?

AUDIENCE: Well it's a seperate-- I think we had actually looked at the individual paper.

AUDIENCE: Yeah, we have the individual, not the book.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-   Not the chapter?

VARA:

AUDIENCE: But it's basically the same thing.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: OK, yeah, because he talked about the same thing in a couple of different places. So what happens is that at times, there are games that have a specific order of events, and there are some adventure games, like *Syberia* for example, where you have to go through a very specific sequence of events, and when you get to a scene it's like, you have to do this. Things like *Dragon's Lair,* the laser disc DVD. When you go to a place and you have to figure out what is the action that you have to do, and if you don't do it, you die in horrible ways. So those are games that set the order of events very specifically.

But most of the games tend to have some more flexibility, and let the players explore the world. Things that happen in the world are generated by how the player is interacting with the world. So in RPGs, for example, depending on the RPG, there might be the main quest and the side quests, and there might be flexibility in what order that happens. Even how a player might solve a specific quest. In terms of table top, who here has been dungeon master? OK, a bunch of you.

AUDIENCE: [LAUGHTER]

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: OK, so we have a corner of dungeon masters. So you probably know that when you design a quest, and then you set it up, and you have your players, and then your players come up with a couple of different ways of tackling your quest, whatever they can come up with. And you have to improvise and try to-- you're building the rails of their living. It's like they're trying to anticipate what they're going to do. So we're trying to get that into video games, too, but we don't have the improvisational capacity built into computers yet. But as you see, it's like the dungeon masters, as dungeon masters, we're responding to the actions of the player. Does it make sense?

When we're talking about story building, there are games, as I was saying, that are about story building, where the challenge is constructing a story, improvising as you go. You're given chunks, and you have to be able to be a storyteller. But you'll play these later.

We've actually talked about this before. So when we're talking about building the fictional world of the game-- I'm going to [UNINTELLIGIBLE] through this a bit fast. We have until 4:30, right?

PROFESSOR: Yes.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: OK. So there are also very minimal ways in which we can construct our fiction, and these are lessons that I've taken from digital games. But if you think about it, many of these also apply to non-digital games. So for example, we have the title of a game can tell us something about the fictional world, right? What about board games or card games? How do the titles build the fictional world?

AUDIENCE: The board game Mafia Wars is pretty clear about what you're doing.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: So that's a way. It's evoking some things, like the type or kind of world on itself. And also setting the situation. So here, Mafia Wars is about

AUDIENCE: Mafia having--

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: There's different factions.

AUDIENCE: Getting in trouble--

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: There's going-- yeah. There's going to be betrayal probably, shooting down people in horrible ways.

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE].

AUDIENCE: Any licensed game?

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Any licensed game? Yes. Thought at times, things like versions of Monopoly or Trivial Pursuit where it's kind of like--

AUDIENCE: Star Wars--

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Star Wars everything.

AUDIENCE: Risk gets kind of broad.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: And there are also skimmings of Risk, right?

AUDIENCE: Yeah, lots.

AUDIENCE: Lord of the Rings.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Lord of the Rings everything, too. Kind of like Barbie.

AUDIENCE: I just feel like there are so many Risks.

AUDIENCE: I know there's [? God's ?] which takes place back in like mythological, [INAUDIBLE]?

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Yeah, apart from franchises, what other titles are--

AUDIENCE: The Settlers of Catan.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Settlers of Catan, which is evoking--?

AUDIENCE: Settling.

[LAUGHTER]

AUDIENCE: Building cities.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Building, sure.

AUDIENCE: San Juan.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Yeah, San Juan's going to-- that's what you told me, too.

AUDIENCE:	Chinatown.
CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA:	Chinatown?
AUDIENCE:	It's set in Chinatown.
CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA:	And what do you do?
AUDIENCE:	You build businesses that are stereotypically associated with being in Chinatown. [LAUGHTER]
CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA:	So with one title, it's not only we're evoking the world, but we can also evoke rules. What do you have to do to here? So like Mafia Wars, you kill people. But then, Settlers of Catan.
AUDIENCE:	[UNINTELLIGIBLE].
CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA:	But you are maybe playing what some of the rules are, what the game is about, which is what is important here. And again, Soren Johnson calls attention to the fact that if you're announcing that your game is about something in the description booklet, the people might not always read, or at least a part of people don't read. You should follow up with that, because it's helping, it's giving cues to the player about how is the story of the game going to build up. What is the key? I like talking about giving keys to the player a lot because I come from theater. It's a very intuitive way of understanding. It's not about us selling the story, it's about helping the player construct the story.
	So I have two examples from video games I really like about how to build a fictional world with a title. One obvious one in video games is *Space Invaders,* right? Space Invaders means we're on Earth and--
AUDIENCE:	Invaders, aliens.
CLARA	Invaders from space, and we'll probably have a fight.

FERNANDEZ-VARA:

AUDIENCE: Invading from space.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Another good one, *Zombies Ate My Neighbors.* There's a whole story right there. So what's the story of this game?

AUDIENCE: Zombies ate the neighbors?

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: The zombies ate the neighbors? So what do I do in this game?

AUDIENCE: Probably kill zombies.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: So probably killing zombies.

AUDIENCE: Are zombies eating my neighbors? Or the zombies ate my neighbors and then just left.

AUDIENCE: Maybe the zombies are your neighbors.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Yeah, maybe you have to kill your neighbors, too, now. If there's anything left, because they ate them. But this is a whole situation. What do I have to do? OK, zombies. Whacking zombies, I'm sure, or running away from them.

AUDIENCE: The fact that you have neighbors in the neighborhood, right? It's not like a military zombie shooter.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Yes, it's not *Resident Evil.*

AUDIENCE: They looked vaguely like '50s.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Yeah, I'm not sure about that. This is like a Genesis game.

AUDIENCE: I just played a game with an old, like-- [UNINTELLIGIBLE]

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Yeah, yeah, right.

AUDIENCE: Harkening back to the zombie movies of the day.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Yeah. Another great title that I found not too long ago, *Earth Dies Screaming.*

[LAUGHTER]

AUDIENCE: Wow.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Which is actually about the '70s--

AUDIENCE: Whoa.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: The title is from a '70s British movie that I think has nothing to do with the game. This is like Space Invaders in a way. You are defending the earth, it kind of looks like that. You have your space ship, and you have invaders, and you have to destroy it before it lands on earth. But again, it's very evocative. It's more memorable than Space Invaders in a way, because it's got-- there's people attacking earth, whoever it is. And this is going to end badly. That's another thing, but Space Invaders and things like [UNINTELLIGIBLE] and all those arcade games that do have an ending, you know the ending. You cannot really save earth. It's really ominous in a way. But again, we have a whole. We have a whole situation is about-- in the title. It's also very memorable. I really like this title.

Another way in which we can give cues to players to build worlds-- and I had more of this, but this applies more to video games than to board games, card games, and even role-playing games, is character design. Because when we are making-- and tell me from your own experience-- but when you're making non-digital games, and even when you're preparing your Dungeons & Dragons campaign, you don't really come up with the characters. The characters is something that the player brings. For card games, if you have any examples that are counter examples for this, please let me know. But character design is not something that you do so much in non-digital games. Do you have any examples of that?

AUDIENCE:	Well, [UNINTELLIGIBLE] can be.
CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA:	Yeah, in a way, yes.
AUDIENCE:	I was thinking [? Acompora ?] and other games where you have a character which is assigned to you and often they have back story. In [? Acompora ?] there's [UNINTELLIGIBLE], Byron, or what have you.
AUDIENCE:	I was going to say the game where you're trying to-- Clue, Clue. Where you choose a character and they all have their [INAUDIBLE] and whatnot.
CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA:	The things that I-- As a player, are you really involved with those characters?
AUDIENCE:	I think I can think of one game which is an example where you are, and it's called Android. This game was released, I think, two years ago now, and part of the-- actually, you should probably play it-- part of the point is that it was trying to include developments of-- resolving characters' personal stories through mechanics in the game.
CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA:	Oh, yeah.
AUDIENCE:	So you're actually playing through this choose your own adventure-ish type scenario. And the choices that you make throughout the game influence what directions your character's personal story arc. It's a very good game. But it's interesting, right?
CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA:	Yeah, what I'm trying to get at here is that at times, the characters are-- and again, evoking actions, evoking certain emotions, too. I think that that detachment with non-digital games-- with role-playing games, it's different. But again, when you're building your own characters in role-playing, you have an investment when you're making it yourself. I'm talking more of the point of view of the designer. Here?
AUDIENCE:	So another [UNINTELLIGIBLE] game again, *Battlestar Galactica.* You are assigned a character, and if you know *Battlestar Galactica,* you're probably going to go for certain

characters, because like, oh, that character's hilarious, I want to be him, or, I'm going to be Starbuck, Starbuck's awesome. And then each player actually also has certain traits, which are characteristic of their-- for the player in the [UNINTELLIGIBLE], like [? tie ?], except he's now taller, so there's a certain negative attribute to him if you're in a certain situation.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: OK. All right, we have-- near the back.

AUDIENCE: I was going to say in live-action role-playing games, like expansion, Assassin's Guild, and stuff, the characters are entirely designed by the game designers. But you still get the players who take up this character and become involved with it, because all of their actions are based on what the designer chose to make that character.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Yep, yep, that's true, that's true. And one?

AUDIENCE: Two other games. Cosmic Encounter is where probably a lot closer to the thousand island kind of situation you've got. You pick a race at the beginning of the game. So it's not a single character. But that's effectively the same thing in that, if you pick something like the Cubans, you have different goals, and you have different powers that you can use in the game. Whereas if you play a game like Illuminati, instead of playing an individual you're playing a corporation, or actually a [UNINTELLIGIBLE] for society, for the most part, and your actual game winning goals are different, depending on who you pick. And part of the game is also figuring out what certain characters are trying-- how certain characters are trying to win the game, because not everybody has the same game winning goal.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: OK. Patrick, last one.

AUDIENCE: In the card game Saboteur, if your role is the saboteur, then it is in the player's best interest to act in that role.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-   To perform like what?

VARA:

AUDIENCE: Yes, to be some person to the other players without letting them catch on.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Well, awesome. You see, and this is why, I think, [UNINTELLIGIBLE] I was asking. Yeah, I think the LARPing one is the obvious case, yeah. In video games, what we do, we can build character in cinematic ways and cut scenes and whatever, but really, it's very difficult to build a character that is at the same time you, and not you are the player and not the player. And what we can do is give them cues about the personality of that character. And one of the examples I wanted to give was Sonic, because Sonic is not really you. This is always the-- a bit of this trouble in a lot of the examples that you were doing, except for LARPing, where LARPing is a bit more involved, is that it's kind of like you but not you. Who am I? I'm the saboteur, because I'm doing this. In games, we have Sonic, for example. We are Sonic. What are we? We are a blue hedgehog. And what do we do?

AUDIENCE: Collect rings.

AUDIENCE: Run.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: So, run and collect coins, and liberating cute animals.

AUDIENCE: [UNINTELLIGIBLE]

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Yes, that too. And one of the things, one of the goals of designing a character, particularly in video games, is making it seem alive. Making it go beyond the functional part. Like, oh, we are the saboteur, we are whatever character in Clue, for example. Having that emotional involvement, that is something that we are trying to achieve in video games. And Sonic does it in a very subtle, very cool way. Does anybody know what this picture is of? What he's doing?

AUDIENCE: When you don't do anything, he starts tapping his foot and looking at you.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: So it's kind of like, you're not controlling me. Come on. I wanna go. I really have to go. I have to run, because what I do is running. So, let's go.

AUDIENCE: Mario goes to sleep.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA:	Yeah, Mario goes to sleep, that's right.
AUDIENCE:	Starts-- [INAUDIBLE]
CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA:	And do you remember any of the Earthworm Jim games? He does crazy stuff. He starts-- he flips his head, and he dresses up, like he is thinking, why don't I-- Yeah. Or he gets an afro wig at some point. What are you doing? But it's pulling attention to, who am I? When you're not controlling me, I'm gonna do it myself. And is the case of Sonic, it's like, OK, I'm a running guy, but I need you to run, so come on. And it's very subtle, something that is very minimal, but is building character, but is also telling the player who this character is.

The last thing-- and this is something that, again, video games can do very well-- is something that role-playing games can do very well, or LARPing, but I'm not sure that card games or board games can do this, is environmental storytelling. It's telling the story in the space as you go around, as you're examining the space and what's going on. Video games, what they do very well, is construction of a virtual world that we can navigate, that we can explore, that we can interact with.

And one of-- those of you who've been in my classes before, you know that I love the beginning of *Bioshock* as an example of environmental story telling, because you know what is this world, what has happened before, and they don't tell it with a word. It's just going to the space and figuring out what has happened. Another example that I really love is *Portal* where a lot of the story is told, or you figure it out, as you explore the world. So what is this in *Portal?* So, first of all, what is the premise of *Portal,* the story? |
AUDIENCE:	You're a test subject testing a new device at Aperture Labs.
CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA:	Yes, so you're a test subject. But very soon, you realize that there's something kind of wrong. This voice that keeps talking to, kind of warps around, and she goes and comes back. But there's something broken, and you just go on because you don't know what else to do. But here, what is this? Once you start realizing, OK, there's something really wrong, what is this?
AUDIENCE:	This is when you're trying to escape.
AUDIENCE:	The hole in the wall.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: There's a hole--

AUDIENCE: One of the things is stuck forward, and you can sneak under it or something?

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Yeah, you go behind the scenes and you realize, OK, so there's something really wrong here, I kind of guessed it, but here we have what looks like somebody's refuge, like where somebody was hiding, and they were writing all these messages. And, of course, it's very funny, because the famous "The cake is a lie," is not something that everybody has to go through. You have to find it. You have to find it in the game. It's part of exploring the game. So the reason why I like-- I like *Portal* for many, many reasons-- but one is because the storytelling is very brilliant--and is not something that we're told, this is what happened. We figure it out. by listening to the voice, by listening to GlaDOS, by going behind the scenes. We are piecing the story together. Yes?

AUDIENCE: If you ever pay attention to what's written on the wall in the safe houses in Left for Dead, there's a lot of funny stuff, as well. And I initially hadn't realized *Left for Dead* had a story, really. And then, when you actually pause and read what's written on the walls in the safe houses, there's almost flame wars between different people who run to the same houses and are writing facts about the zombie apocalypse, and saying, oh, that's not true, that town is completely overrun, no, you're totally stupid, I was there last week, and it had these things going on and various two bits of trivia and facts about the world. And it's very, very clever, and often quite hilarious.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Because what environment storytelling is doing, after all, we're telling the story of the fictional world. That can be part of the goal of solving games, figuring out what is the story of the fictional world? Yes, Andrew?

AUDIENCE: Was there a conscious decision to use environmental storytelling as opposed to story building? Well, you mentioned the difference between storytelling and story building earlier, and you mentioned that that was environmental story telling as opposed to story building.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Yeah, and probably is really story building. So the thing is that environmental storytelling is what people call it. I'm using a phrase. But yeah, this is a type of story building. We're building a [UNINTELLIGIBLE], build it for the player. But yeah, this is story building.

PROFESSOR: More precisely, you will see talks on environmental storytelling when you go to a conference. But what they're really talking about, so you know, is just that [INAUDIBLE] involved in research.

AUDIENCE: So maybe the closest to this kind of thing is in flavor text in CCG's and other such stuff. So if you think, for instance, of Magic the Gathering, then there is a back story behind each of these expansions which comes out. And that's told through actual fiction, where you can buy a really trashy novel. [LAUGHTER] But it's also told through little quotes between-- by significant the characters in the fiction, also the images which are presented on the cards. So, maybe that's the closest thing to environmental story telling in--

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Yes, yeah. Magic the Gathering has this world, and it seems to be very easy expand it. I don't know if there's a bible of the Magic the Gathering world.

AUDIENCE: Yeah, yeah, there's an entire creative department at Wizards of the Coast that's responsible for maintaining the story and making sure it's all consistent and stuff.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: So it's not really something-- it's almost 4:00, so I have still something, but we can go through it very fast if that works?

PROFESSOR: If we run out of time, we can play these games on Friday or something.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: OK.

PROFESSOR: If that sounds like a good idea. All right.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: So, we've been talking so far about designing the story of world, designing the story of the fictional world. What we also have, as I was saying before, the players also construction a story as we go. Things that happen to the player, things that happen in the world, because they happen to the player. And again, one of the reasons why I was talking about games of progressions versus games of emergence is that in stories, we have a similar parallel of stories that have been designed for the player, things that they have to do in role-playing games, and I'm talking about pen and pencil-- pen and paper role-playing games, we have the story that as the end we have designed, and then there's what the players are trying to do.

In video games, because computers don't have the capacity for improvisation, what the player has to do is a lot more constrained in a way. So what are the bosses that they have to-- how do they solve a specific problem, or how do we get over a specific problem. So I like giving the example of Legend of Zelda games, where we do have a story that we're completing almost in a specific order, because if you don't have certain objects, you can't go to the next stage until you have certain properties. So even though we have a really nice, relatively open world, a world that we can navigate, we do have a specific order of events that we have to follow.

Adventure games, it might be something like point and click adventure games, again, things like *Syberia,* things like *Myst,* where there is a pre-established sequence of events that we have to go settle. And then, the other extreme, we have games that are closer to these games like Once Upon a Time, or Gloom where the system itself is producing stories of sorts, like in *The Sims.* And in *The Sims,* the fact that we have a way to record our own stories and share them is proof that that's a kind of system closer to things like Once Upon a Time. That is, the system can generate narratives, and that playing with the system will generate some narratives.

So we have ways in which, as designers, we can provide cues or ways to design the story of the player. And the first one is the game premise, what is the goal of the game? Game events, I don't know if I'll let that one, because that was too long. And we have [UNINTELLIGIBLE] a narrative. The game premise is who are you in the game, what do you do in it. It's kind of similar to the title, but in this case, is very tied to who is the player, what is the role of the player in the game?

So things like *Cooking Mama,* for example. You're Cooking Mama, so who are you, Cooking Mama? You're not mama. Mama's complaining about you. You are the person who's cooking for Mama. That's the title they should have, Cooking for Mama. And then now they're getting pissed off at you because you didn't do it right. But it tells you basically so you're a cook. Or what is it that you do. You're trying to please Mama by cooking something nice and yummy. Usually, also kind of weird. A really good example of creating the story of the player by the premise of who you are in the game is this.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: I love this example.

AUDIENCE:	[UNINTELLIGIBLE]
CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA:	Because it's like, who are you? You're a hacker. And it gives you-- the cool thing about this trailer is it gives you a list of what you do. This is your story. You are framing people, you are framing innocent people, of course. Maintaining people's academic records, building their devices, and all those are activities in the game, but it's also who you are. That is your story. Those are the kinds of things that you're going to be doing in the game. So again, we were talking about *Saboteur* before. Well, as saboteur, you already have a series of actions that you associated with the your character. That is way that we can design the story of the player, at least at the higher level, and give it that cue.
	I'm skipping game events because it's kind of long and it's very, very strong. Two basic video games, and mostly [UNINTELLIGIBLE]. The other example that I want to make here is micronarratives. And again, all these are more video game things, but micronarratives are little events, they're not even cut scenes, they're just little events that happen as reactions to the player's actions. In a way, Sonic tapping his foot is a kind micronarrative. You're not doing anything, come on, I want to go. Or Mario falling asleep is kind of like a micronarrative of sorts. This is one of my favorite micronarratives in these video games. This is the game *Jet Set Willy,* which is from 1985, maybe, something, middle '80s. It was for Commodore 64. Well, it was originally for the--
AUDIENCE:	Spectrum.
	CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Yes, thank you. He's prepared a presentation on the Spectrum, yes. Commodore 64 and surrounding this world is Z80 platforms in the '80s, and this was a sequel to *Manic Miner.* So *Manic Miner,* you were Miner Willy, yes? Miner Willy. And you go down into the earth, and you find a treasure, and you become immensely rich. So with the money that you get from the first game, you throw a party, and you throw such a big party that your house becomes invaded by the weirdest creatures ever. There are flying toilet seats, mutant pigs, I don't know.
AUDIENCE:	Sounds like a good party.
CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA:	Yeah, such a good party that you get people from other worlds to come to your party. But the thing was that it was such a good party, you wanted to go to bed. This is Willy. This is you in the game. So in *Jet Set Willy,* this is the day after, and Willy is is hungover probably after the

super party. And he was in a bed. In the game, to the left, you have the picture of the bed, and that's your goal, go to bed. But this is your landlady, who's seen how you trashed the place, and she doesn't want you to go to bed until you've cleaned it up. So the cool thing, they really want to get-- and then, the animation here-- is that she has her arms like this. She's holding her arms like this, and whenever you get near her-- which arm is it?-- her left arm, she goes like, ha! Go. And it's a reaction to what you do.

With this, it's a few pixels. It's probably four or five pixels. And in four or five pixels, this game is telling you this is what you have to do. Go that way. This is your goal, you asked me. You've gotta come here, go that way, and clean it up. And this is eight bit pixels! And she's telling you all that with just a few pixels. You don't really need that much. But with that kind of reaction, we always want to, again, gives cues. What is it that the player has to do? We don't need a cut scene. With a few pixels, we know what we have to do, right? And it's a very difficult game, too, for today's standards.

Anyway, so the conclusion here is that why do we need stories? Why do we need fictions? What do fictional worlds do for us? What do themes do for us? As we were saying, humans have a tendency the story-icize everything. We are natural storytellers. Some of what these games like Once Upon a Time or [? Bloom ?] are playing with is because we tell other people what has happened to us. If you complain about something, you're complaining in the form of a story if something might have happened to you.

We understand our experiences as stories, and there are different disciplines that have dealt with this from computer science to psychology. How we are making stories about ourselves, how we are making stories about our worlds. So having a story, having a game that has a fictional world in which a story can take place is a way of understanding the underlying system. As I was saying, if we have a game that is called Mafia Wars, we already have a goal, we have sets of rules, who we are, what is it that we have to do. We don't need a lot of-- two words have been enough to evoke a lot of that information.

So the last thing, and this applies a bit more to video games, is that by having a story, we're also providing consistency to the world. When Jesper Juul is talking about incoherent worlds, he's really talking about worlds where there's not really a story, and there are video games that have awful stories, that's true. But when you're forced, or when you're thinking about your world not only as a fictional world as a simulation, but also as a world that has to produce a story that makes sense, that is going to provide more coherence to the world hopefully. We

have to [UNINTELLIGIBLE]. But that means that you can take the [UNINTELLIGIBLE] for games, [UNINTELLIGIBLE].

And there are things that yes there are complains about, like why does Mario have to realize? Well, because it's Mario, right? Is that part of the story? That's one of those no-man's land issues. Does that undermine the consistency of the world? Maybe the anthological level, the level of the world itself. But really, it's more about making sense about the rules. What is it-- being able to look at the world in a critical way. I'm trying to think of an example of-- apart from the three lives of Mario--

AUDIENCE: He was a plumber.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: What?

AUDIENCE: I thought you said he was a plumber. Oh no, that was in the theme.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: No, but for example, Kirby. He eats other creatures and spits them. Where does it come from? Why does it do that? What is the story of Kirby? He's kind of cute, but hey, I would watch out with him, because he can eat almost anything, and then he just dumps it?

AUDIENCE: Kirby's a weirdly disturbing character.

[LAUGHTER]

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Yes, if you think about it in terms of stories. But this is kind of wow.

AUDIENCE: Yoshi, too, right?

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Yes. And I love Yoshi.

AUDIENCE: Yeah, and that's another video game character-- it seems like one of the reasons why these arguments have been raised is because there have been these huge piles of inconsistencies.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: But the inconsistency has become-- I think that when you try to write the story, if that makes sense. So Yoshi eats creatures and--

AUDIENCE: Then he spits them out. Each one. Depends on which Mario you're talking about, because if it's *Super Mario World*--

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: I'm thinking of *Yoshi's Island.*

AUDIENCE: Okay, yeah, in *Yoshi's Island,* yeah, he poops eggs.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Yeah, and is like, hm, and then he throws it, and they're like bombs?

AUDIENCE: Yeah, he throws his eggs at-- he uses his eggs as weapons.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Yeah, but all of those things become evident the moment that we start his story [UNINTELLIGIBLE]. So who is this person, what do they do, why do they do this? Wow, it's kind of falling apart. So the incoherence-- and I'm just thinking that I don't know if you guys will really like this or not-- but the incoherence comes from the impossibility-- or not impossibility, but the problems of trying to make this into a story and realizing, well, this has not been-- this has been thought out as a cool game, and I love Yoshi's Island, but as a story, it kind of falls apart. Yes?

AUDIENCE: I think one of the really glaring inconsistencies in a lot of RPGs in particular is that in most of these worlds, there's some kind of resurrection card, and there are a lot of plots which revolve around character dying and that being a bad thing, but then you're like, why don't you just use your Phoenix Down or-- why do we care if the human is being assassinated, I've got this thing in my inventory which will bring him back.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Yes, I wished that about Aeris like a thousand times, and no, because this guy kills her? Then what kind of--

AUDIENCE: The actual conceit there is you're not dead, you're just knocked out. So it's like smelling salts

or something.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: But there are games like *Planescape: Torment* where that is incorporated in the-- you're immortal, and that's the thing, figuring out why you're immortal. They make fun of you waking up, and you go like, oh my goodness, this really hurts, I feel terrible! And then making that problem into an essential part of the game. Yes?

AUDIENCE: So, with the RPG thing, the incoherency is how so many times when you're in these battles, you're doing these incredible things. Like you're summoning asteroids or jumping in the [UNINTELLIGIBLE]. But then in the game world, you get to a ledge, and they're like, oh, it's a ledge. I have to go around. Or it's a gap like this wide. I can't step over it because of a bush, oh no! What am I going to do? There's a bush in the way.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: But you're thinking diagonals, too. What? No, I cannot do diagonals.

AUDIENCE: I think another egregious inconsistency that comes up a lot is the-- and I think it's explicitly mentioned in the reading-- that you're the world savior usually, and on the way, you're going to pillage, steal, kill innocent people, and it's not going to be a big deal. And even in games where they make the endpoint variable, so all right, you can either save the world to or be a total jerk, and that fixes one problem, they still have the problem that during the game, you can alternate back and forth between being really good and really bad, and all it does is it kind of swings you one way or the other. It's one dimensional. So you're sort of just in a spectrum, and if you do five really bad things and then five really good things, you're back to where you started. And that's not necessarily consistent in terms storytelling.

AUDIENCE: Well, there's also the classic inconsistency of if I don't save the world, everything will be destroyed, but you're still going to charge me 100 gil for this phoenix?

[LAUGHTER]

AUDIENCE: It's still inconsistent.

AUDIENCE: Or, I have to save the world now because bad things are happening. Let me go do these 20 side quests first.

CLARA The whole world is that--

**FERNANDEZ-
VARA:**

AUDIENCE: This cat's stuck in a tree!

                  [LAUGHTER]

AUDIENCE: There're rats in the cellar, man, rats in the cellar.

**CLARA
FERNANDEZ-
VARA:**   Yes, but the end of the world is nigh. Like in *Final Fantasy,* the end of the world is nigh, but let me go around--

AUDIENCE: Blitzball!

**CLARA
FERNANDEZ-
VARA:**   --and get more random encounters so that I can bump up my stats.

AUDIENCE: So that actually reminds me of-- I think it was a web-comic-- that I read around a month ago, and it was based around, oh my god, you're our savior! You know how to solve it! Yes, I am, and so the whole time, he's just going on, like, what are you doing? They're raping and pillaging everything, they're destroying everything, what are you doing? Oh, I'll do that in a second, I just have to get this really, really cool shield. And then at one point it's like, why, what are you doing? It's like, I'm fishing, so I can get this lure, so I can catch another fish. Why would you ever be doing this right now when the world's about to end, and evil is spreading across everything? He's like, don't worry about it, I'm on it.

**CLARA
FERNANDEZ-
VARA:**   Well, it's very interesting. And this is my last slide, so if you want to-- we can go on discussing.

PROFESSOR: Sure.

**CLARA
FERNANDEZ-
VARA:**   So at times, the little cues that are building world or building character can also backfire. So I've been playing one of the DS Zelda games, and one of the nicest touches is that whenever you meet a character, Link is going to look at them in the eye. Hi! You're walking, and it's like, hi. And at times it's super weird, because the characters look at each other. They

acknowledge that they're there, so they feel kind of alive with a very simple algorithm, where there's another character, they look at each other. It's like, wow, they're alive, cool, and they react.

But then, you go into somebody's house, and they're looking at you and you're like, hi! [BREAKING SOUND] You know? You break their pots to get rupees. And they're looking at you, and you're breaking everything. And it's just like, this is kind of weird. They should react, because they're looking at you while you're breaking their house. And that's, again, is giving a touch that is making those characters alive, but it's also like breaking it, like, I'm still breaking your pots. I don't know what's better.

AUDIENCE: I think that was subverted in-- no, in another Zelda game, *Link's Awakening?* You go into the shop, and the shop owner is always looking at you, so if you take something off the shelf and try to exit, he says, no, you can't do that, you can't steal it. But if you run around him, he's not fast enough to keep his eye on you, so you run around him until he's looking away, and you can leave. But if you come back in, he says, you're the guy who stole something, and he shoots you with a laser.

[LAUGHTER]

AUDIENCE: And then every character in the game calls you "thief" for the rest of the game.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Ah, that's really funny.

AUDIENCE: Yeah, it's awesome.

AUDIENCE: I was going to say, *Oblivion* and *Fallout* do the same, where everyone watches you if they're within-- if they're acknowledging you, and then you try to take something, they're run up and be like, why the hell are you taking my stuff, or start beating you up or whatever.

AUDIENCE: Or shooting you.

AUDIENCE: Or calling the town guard. But it's problematic when you're powerful enough and you can take the town guard. Then it's really annoying because everywhere you go, there's guys you can kill that are kind of there, and you're like, all right, come on, get out of my way.

AUDIENCE: So there was a *Mega Man Legends* which I don't know if anybody ever played. I don't think anyone ever played that game. But essentially it was like *Mega Man,* but the RPG style of game. But it was actually slightly different from most RPGs. Most RPGs, you just walk around, walking into people's houses, looking for loot. But you actually couldn't just walk into people's houses. Their doors would be locked. And you could knock and see if anybody was there, but it was kind of interesting, because it was actually consistent, in the sense that you couldn't just randomly walk into somebody's house and steal their crap.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: So one thing that I wanted to ask-- because all these things in video games, after a while, they result in [UNINTELLIGIBLE], right? Because we have the possibility of having a fleshed out world that we can interact with, that is simulated, and the times where those cracks are showing, where the system is is showing, when it's showing that this is limited, that we've chosen a specific level of abstraction to simulate the world. But do those incongruencies bother people in board games or card games so much?

AUDIENCE: I would argue that sometimes it's a little bit of a speed bump to learning what's going on. Assuming some [UNINTELLIGIBLE], assuming that is incoherent. It seems like because it's almost impossible to play a card game or a board game without first understanding the rules, unlike in video games where you can just jump right in, that is usually something that can be surmounted if people say, oh, the rules say this, but the theme says that, OK, I understand how to play by the rules, and be able to step over that.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Yeah, and I think that that's an excellent point, and when we start playing a board game, probably what you guys do in this class, is you get a new board game. What do you do? You pick up the instructions and you're figuring out the rules first, and not the world. In a lot of video games, we figure out the world first, and then by exploring the world, we're figuring out the rules. And even if there are games that are giving us tutorials or manuals, who-- I don't know, not many people read the manuals, if at all.

AUDIENCE: While the game is installing.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Yes, [INAUDIBLE]. But manuals is not something that-- even though it's going to be the first thing to look at in a board game and a card game. And even, well, as a player, you also look at the rule book at least to built your own character most times.

AUDIENCE: You mean on PC and computer games?

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: On role-playing games.

AUDIENCE: Oh, are you talking about table top role-play games?

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Yes, table top.

AUDIENCE: Oh yeah, even table top role-playing games you try to start. People start by looking at their handbooks.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: LARPing might be a good example of how-- LARPing, you're just given your

AUDIENCE: Your character sheet. You have to read it.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Your character sheet, which is very interesting.

AUDIENCE: For role-playing, I know a lot of people who can't really be bothered to learn the rules that thoroughly and prefer just to experience the story and have somebody tell them how to resolve the mechanics and that kind of thing.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: But it's funny, because when you're building your character in a table top role-playing game, you still have to have a look at what is the race that you want, what is your religion, what is your powers that you want to choose? Even if you're only playing for kicks, and you don't care so much about the rule. And I'm the type of table top role-player that prefers the story, and I don't care so much about combat. But you still have to know the rules even before you start playing, if that makes sense.

AUDIENCE: There are situations [UNINTELLIGIBLE] described where people don't look at the rules, but then they're usually relying on the GM to tell them what's allowed and what's not allowed, which means someone read the rules. It's no different from someone explaining to you a card game, as opposed to having the rules--

AUDIENCE: It actually makes the experience a bit like playing a computer game, that the GM does the [UNINTELLIGIBLE].

AUDIENCE: Yeah, the GM is your computer, and in fact it's more powerful than a computer, because a GM can figure out what you're actually asking.

[LAUGHTER]

[INAUDIBLE]

AUDIENCE: I had a question about the [UNINTELLIGIBLE], actually. So one thing about card games and board games is that almost everything that gets revealed or that happens in the middle of the game is usually a player mechanics. Sometimes there's some loose flexibility, like games where they allow open negotiation between specific players. But most of it's actually in the play of a card, the move of a piece, something like that. And especially when you're playing cards, you have to play flavor text, especially for cards where you can just play them at any time. And I've seen micronarratives done-- at least what I think a micronarrative seems to be-- done pretty well in those instances. In fact, in the example of cards, right, someone tries to do something that might win them the game, but you play this card, and that denies them the win, but it is tied up with some sort of flavor text, some sort of thematic element to that card.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Well, it could be like-- in Monopoly, what is the type of card? Those two types of cards.

AUDIENCE: Go to jail?

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: No.

AUDIENCE: Community Chest and Chance?

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Yeah, like the Chance. There's Chance when there's something that happens to you, but there's also--

AUDIENCE: Community Chest.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: --the Community Chest, thank you, which is something that you play. The differences in micronarratives here, what it means is something, it's a reaction to player's events. It's not something that the player chooses to do. Those reaction cards, those are also part of the player's narrative, and in a way, the player is choosing, this is going to happen now. This is what Gloom is about, and these are what these two games are about most of the time. It's like you're trying to construct a story, and you're trying to tamper into somebody else's story, so it's that kind of reaction. Yeah, we would have to find a name for it. But yeah, the micronarrative is referring to something that happens as reaction. It's not something that the player does.

AUDIENCE: It's often in reaction to what another player is doing. So it depends on whose point of view you are taking. So, I've got a Community Chest card, and I'm holding it until somebody else is about to take advantage of a position, and then I deny them that. So it's still a reaction to what the other player is doing.

AUDIENCE: Well, I just wanted to mention, in terms of micronarrative, I don't know, would this be a possible example? In the board game that we're designing, there's a computer in the center that you want to hack, and every time someone tries to hack it, it gets weaker. So it's sort of a response to someone doing an action on it. Would that count as a micronarrative, or is that more of a mechanic?

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: It seems as an event it's an important event. It's a change of state. But I don't know how much of a story it is. And there's no science to what constitutes an event or not. It's something that's part of my research, it's something that I'm going to figure out. How can we identify what's an event that is a rule and is also an event in the story? Because things like disconnecting the computer, or hacking the computer, yeah, that seems to be clearly an event. What if we had each time that it becomes weaker, there is something else that you can do.

So by hacking the computer, there is a new action. You get access to new areas of the game, or you get a new power up. Or it's easier-- for example, if-- I'm totally hypothesizing about what your game is about-- but if you will have a computer that is controlling the security of a place, whenever you hack a certain part of the system, it's letting you move faster through the board. In a way, that might be closer to a micronarrative, because it's a reaction, but it's also a consequence.

AUDIENCE: In that case, in Careers for Girls, when you choose to go down a path, is that a micronarrative? Because the player chooses and then sort of changes the state, [INAUDIBLE].

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: I don't know the choices, but the events that happen, like what happens when you land on something, might be closer. And again, it's kind of like, it's a micronarrative?

AUDIENCE: Careers and Careers for Girls, which I both see as really, really appalling--

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: I agree.

AUDIENCE: Seems to be built on micronarratives, the whole idea that everywhere you land, something's happening-- you're granted something.

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: But the choice-- what I'm saying is that the choice itself is not the micronarrative, it's the landing and what happens when you land. Oh wow. It's almost time. Anything else?

AUDIENCE: I actually wanted to make one last comment about emergent stories, particularly the example of *The Sims.* Is anybody familiar with Alice and Kev?

AUDIENCE: Yeah.

AUDIENCE: Yeah, so Alice and Kev was this really interesting experiment that this guy did where he created two homeless Sims, a father and--

CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA: Ah, yes!

AUDIENCE: --a daughter.

AUDIENCE: I think we talked about this--

AUDIENCE: And just did a sort of a web-comic style display of the lives of these two homeless Sims as she grew up and he got older. And it almost seemed like it became a role-playing game, where the guy playing *The Sims* became the dungeon master, who had created these characters, and then the AIs were playing these characters for him. In particular, there was this one moment where he gets to a part of the story where the daughter has just gotten her first paycheck, and

she decides to donate it to charity. And he keeps trying to keep her from donating it to charity, but she keeps saying I want to donate it to charity. So eventually he lets her donate it to charity. And it was almost like it was the character's choice to donate it. At the end of this blog that he did about this specific event, he's talking about what does it mean when a video game character that you created makes you question your own life choices?

[LAUGHTER]

AUDIENCE:	This is a really interesting thing. If you haven't read it, you should check it out.
CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA:	Yeah, on what blog?
CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA:	I think it's aliceandkev.com, something like that.
CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA:	It's a story of *the Sims 3.*
AUDIENCE:	Yeah.
CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA:	Any more?
AUDIENCE:	Talking about non-digital games being very involved in your character, and I felt like one game I've played where I've been very involved with a character is Mafia, where there's not a lot of actual information given to you. People are yelling at you, like, you're the Mafia, the way you smiled at him! Clearly you guys-- I don't know.
CLARA FERNANDEZ-VARA:	So you become the character more by how people see you than how you play it?
AUDIENCE:	I guess you're also assigning character to other people, reading into their actions and things.

PROFESSOR: That's a game where the roles are designed by the designer, right?

AUDIENCE: Yeah, but there's only two roles. It's not like--

AUDIENCE: Well no, there can be a lot of roles.

AUDIENCE: There's a few roles.

AUDIENCE: I've seen websites with a whole list of roles, and some of them are hilarious.

AUDIENCE: Seems good. In digital games, I feel like there are the games where you have a very defined character, unlike this. If you have a very defined character in a video game, you tend to get into it more, whereas *Fable,* your character isn't defined, and changes based on the actions you use. If you're evil, he becomes ugly and he gets [UNINTELLIGIBLE] things. But I never felt like I identified with the character at all versus games that already give me a very strong character, and I play a certain way.

PROFESSOR: That's odd because that's completely-- that runs against what you would be trying to do, at least, that's why they're marketing games that are trying to do it, to make you feel closer to the character because it's the reflection of who you are.

AUDIENCE: I think that *Bioshock* does a better job of that, where you never see the guy. So you're always just looking through his eyes, and he has essentially no personality, at least, no personality is displayed in the game. So it's almost as if you are directly interacting with the world.

PROFESSOR: You're given a space to to be--

AUDIENCE: To actually project yourself into the game, which I think is sort of what *Fable* was trying to do, but doesn't really do a good job of it. Because you see him right there, and he's clearly not you.

AUDIENCE: I feel like Torment is a really-- *Planescape: Torment* has a really interesting take on this, where the character is essentially who it is that you play in that, but there's more to it than that, because there's also back story to the character, which you, the character, have forgotten, and it's revealed to you over time. But you know more of that character, who your character was back then, than you know about your character now. So your nature changes over time, and you've gone through several iterations of this. And none of them is the truer or more correct you.

AUDIENCE: The funny thing about *Planescape: Torment,* it's kind of like a personality test. I've been playing it again, and the first time I played through, I was chaotic good? And I was trying to play different. I'm still chaotic good. So I'm kind of freaking out. OK, I'm really trying to do something different, but I'm still in the same alignment. Because a lot of your definition of-- and actually, your alignment can also decide items that you can get or things that you can do-- but it's based on your choices and how you tackle a quest. If you lie, for example, or if you do crazy things. It's not something-- once you realize what the effect of your choices is, you can kind of control it. But there's-- playing *Planescape* is-- it's going to be about you and how your game playing style is [UNINTELLIGIBLE] humanity.

AUDIENCE: Yeah, there's interesting effects in *Knights of the Old Republic* if anybody's played that. You can explicitly make decisions to go to the dark side. I remember when I played it, every time it came up with a decision where I could-- the dark side has all the awesome powers, right? So I kept thinking, I'm gonna be on the dark side, I'm gonna have all the awesome powers, it's gonna be grand. Then you get to the decisions, and I was almost uncomfortable with choosing the evil options, such that I couldn't actually bring myself to go to the dark side.

PROFESSOR: We are actually out of time. But I wouldn't say that-- the options are thankfully all-- or, actually, let's save discussion of *Knights of the Old Republic* for another class [UNINTELLIGIBLE].

PROFESSOR: Yeah. OK, all right, well, thank you.