



# TweetQuest

MMO Stories 140

Characters at a Time\*

\*including spaces

Cory Herndon

Senior Narrative Designer

Carbine Studios



# Who?





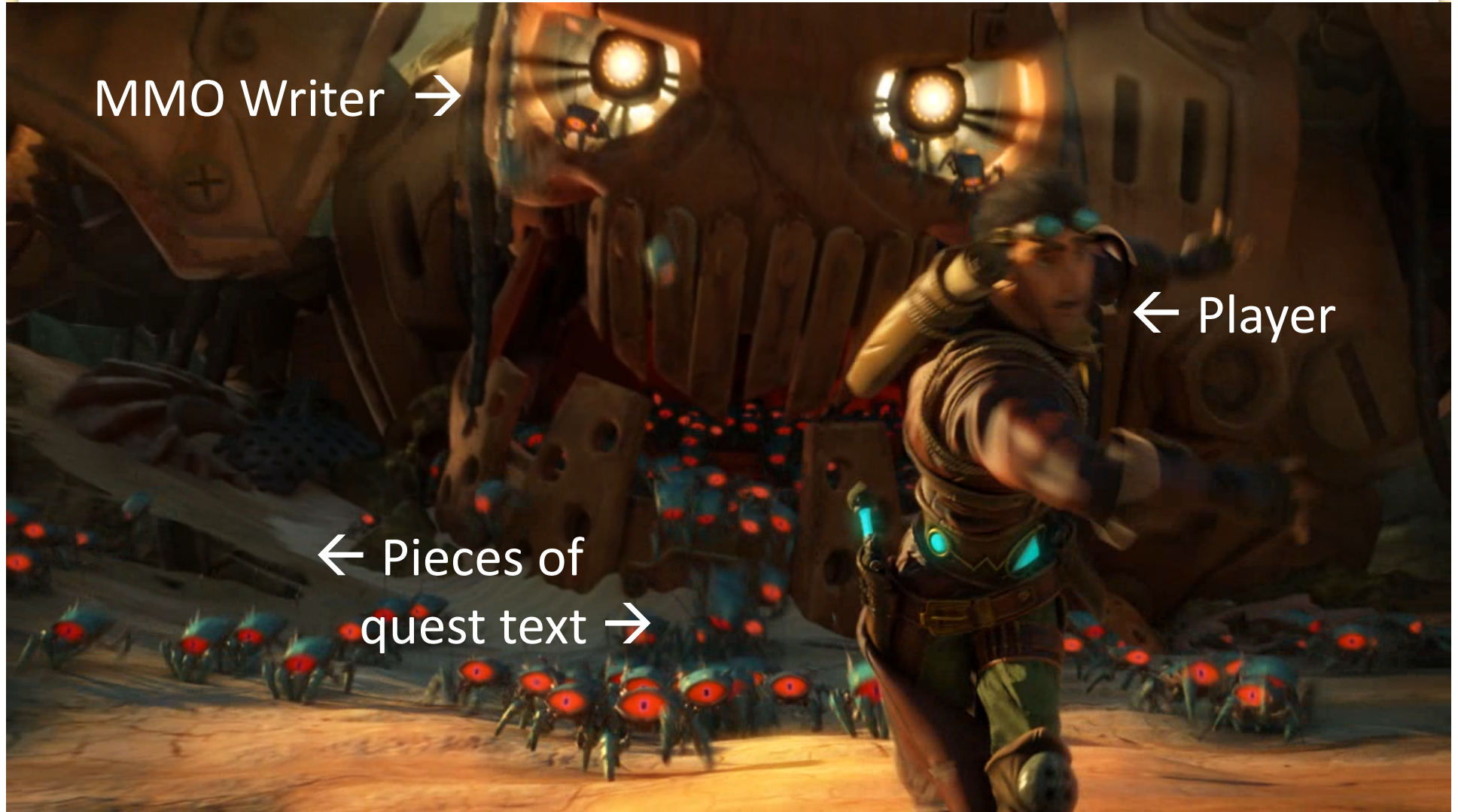
# Carbine

S T U D I O S™





# MMO Quest Text: The Common Perception





# MMO Quest Text: The TweetQuest Way

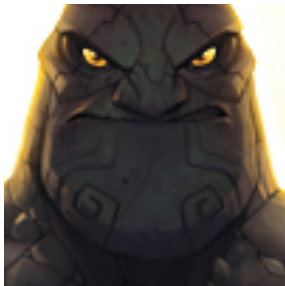
← MMO Writer  
Quest text →

← Player





# The TweetQuest



**xXSargeXx** Cory Herndon

Many players want stories in their MMORPGs, but may not read a huge wall of text. Your job? Write text so short they can't help but read it.

An ever-increasing number of seconds ago

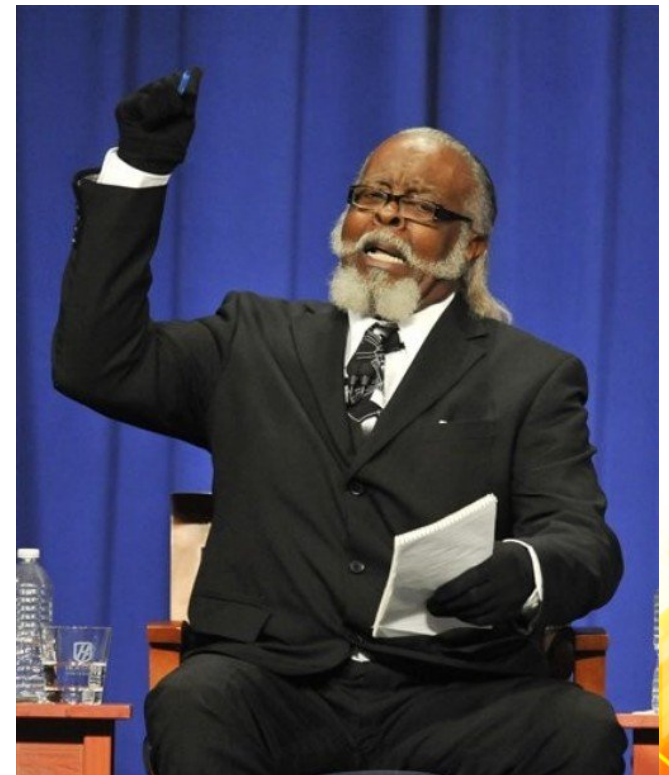
(The above “tweet” is 140 characters with spaces.)



# Key Points



Most MMO quest text  
is too damn long!



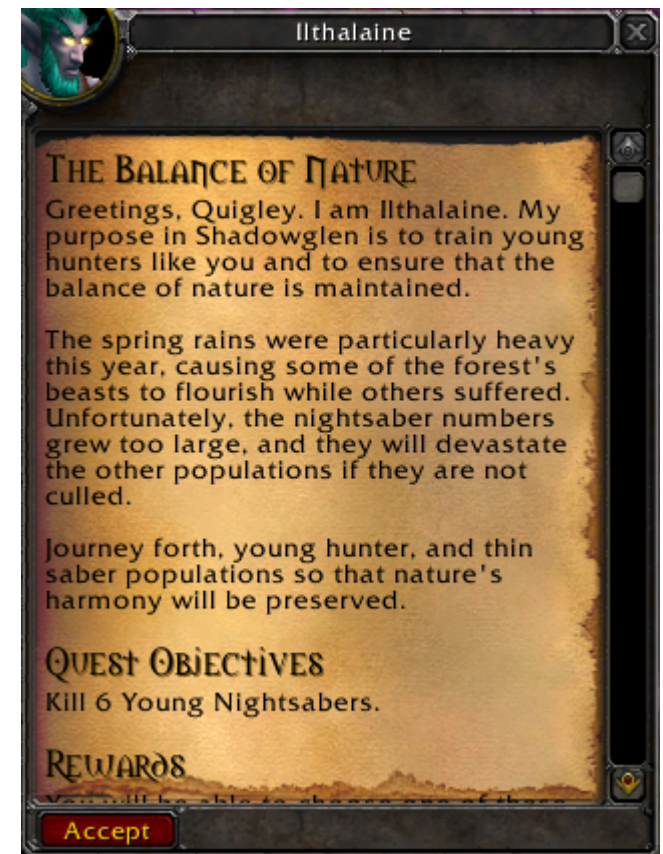


# Less of this.

“Greetings, Quigley. I am Ilthallaine. My purpose in Shadowglen is to train young hunters like you and to ensure that the balance of nature is maintained. The spring rains were particularly heavy this year, causing some of the forest's beasts to flourish while others suffered. Unfortunately, the nightsaber numbers grew too large, and they will devastate the other populations if they are not culled. Journey forth, young hunter, and thin saber populations so that nature's harmony will be preserved.”

--*World of Warcraft* quest “The Balance of Nature”

(497 characters with spaces.)



# And this.

“Ha! You want to know what those mutinous dogs have planned? You couldn't figure it out for yourself? Har!

Well, it shan't be too complicated. Any ship that tries to get past the mutineers and into Port Royal, the pirates aim to sink 'em. Not even your ship is fast enough to elude those treacherous bastards.

I'll tell you what, Captain. I've got a fast ship o' my own, "The Swift." If you're willing to take the risk o' your life to get that letter of marque to Port Royal, I suppose I owe Milford Cox enough to risk my ship. That privateersman saved my neck on more than one occasion. Borrow my ship, Captain, she's not much good for heavy cargo, but she's fast. Fight your way past those pirates and get that letter of marque to Milford's missus.”

--Greeting text from *Pirates of the Burning Sea* mission “Final Justice”  
by Cory J. Herndon ←

(747 characters with spaces.)



# More of this.



(38 characters with spaces.)

(Thank you, Internet.)

# And this.





# Or this.

Path quest offer:  
63 characters →

This planet is ours, and we're gonna fight to keep it that way.

Bosun Redmark

- ! (Yeti Control Point!)
- ! (Protecting the Protectors)
- ! Nevermind

← Simple,  
direct title

18:09 [Dev]: 10USShoes has left [1 - Dev].  
18:09 [Dev]: killyouwithmybrain has left [1 - Dev].  
18:09 [Dev]: fumanchu has left [1 - Dev].  
18:10 [Dev]: Spook has joined [1 - Dev].  
18:10 [NPCChat] Bosun Redmark: Much obliged.  
18:10 [Dev]: TestMan2 has joined [1 - Dev].  
18:11 [NPCChat] Trapped Survivor: Help me! Anyone! Help me!  
18:11 [NPCChat] Trapped Survivor: Can anyone hear me?  
18:11 [Dev]: 10USShoes has joined [1 - Dev].  
/s



Bunni

3 XP: 1/2175

2615 / 2615

1400 / 1400



Zone Objectives

0/0 CALL ON/OFF

NEAREST HOLDOUTS:

0/16

# Key Points



- 💧 140 characters (with spaces) of text is short enough you can't help but read it.



# Non-MMO Examples



# Don't Forget the Flavor

Style and flavor in  
136 characters→

That tower's at the eye of the storm - if I don't miss my guess, it's causin' this somehow. See if you can shut that blasted thing down!

You will receive:



I'll investigate the tower!

Not right now

F Talk to Aron Brightland

## Tasks

- 1 Yeti Control Point!  
Activate the control point and defeat your yeti attackers.
- 2 Protecting the Protectors  
Fight off the Rootbrutes who are currently attacking your fellow Exiles. (0/5)
- 3 From the Wreckage  
Rescue survivors north of the crash site. (0/3)  
Kill yeti on your way to the ancient tower. (0/4)

## Zone Objectives

0/0 CALL ON/OFF

## NEAREST HOLDOUTS:

A. Conquer the Yeti 4x

18:13 (NPC) Trapped survivor: help me! anyone! help me!  
18:13 (NPC) Settler's Reach Protector: You're alive! I can't believe you survived that crash!  
18:14 (Dev): fumanchu has left G1 - Dev!  
18:14 (Dev): 10USShoes has left G1 - Dev!  
18:15 (NPC) Exile Scientist: These readings are off the chart!  
18:15 (Dev): fumanchu has joined G1 - Dev!  
18:15 (Dev): 10USShoes has joined G1 - Dev!  
18:15 (Dev): Stabby has joined G1 - Dev!  
/s



Bunli

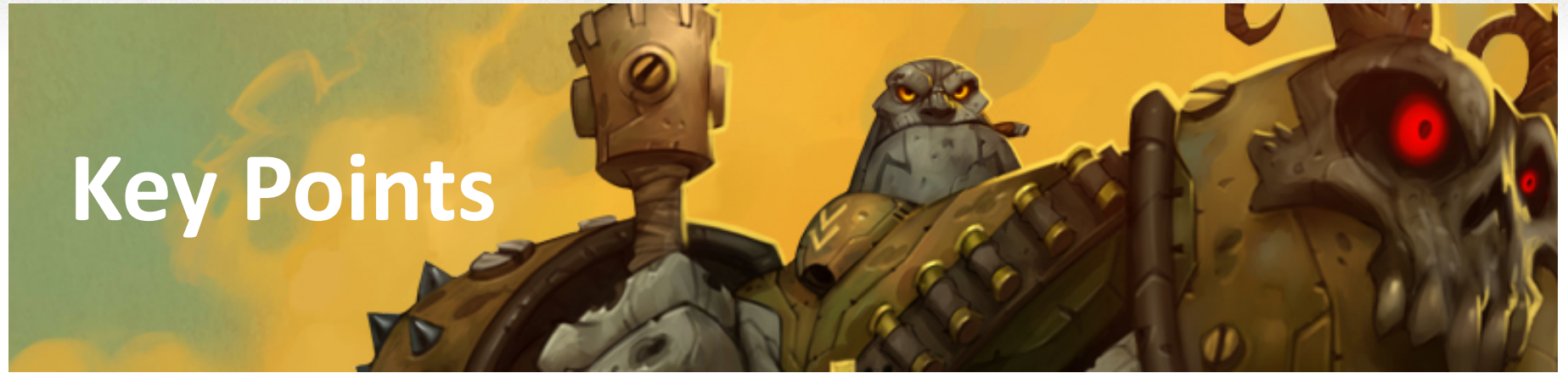
3 XP: 1/2175



0/16



# Key Points



-  A 140-character limit encourages integration of story into the *whole* game.

# Narrative Back-Up

## All-Stars

- 
- Marketing
  - Art
  - Design
  - V.O.
  - Cinematics
  - Lore
  - Transmedia
  - The Player



# Why Do I Need Text at All?







**CENSORED**




# Key Points



The story the player experiences is unique and personal.





-  MMO players build their own stories.
-  Keeping text short and stories modular allows the player to create connections.
-  Social connections make reading text secondary to game play and communication.

# Marketing

- It's the first thing most players see
- Displays style and mood
- Lays foundation for the narrative
- Invites questions, teases answers

Carbine  
STUDIOS™GDC  
Online



5

# A ship approaches.

**Science fiction**

**Retro style →**



**A decal?**



A planet that isn't our own.






# The Soldier's Path





# The Explorer's Path

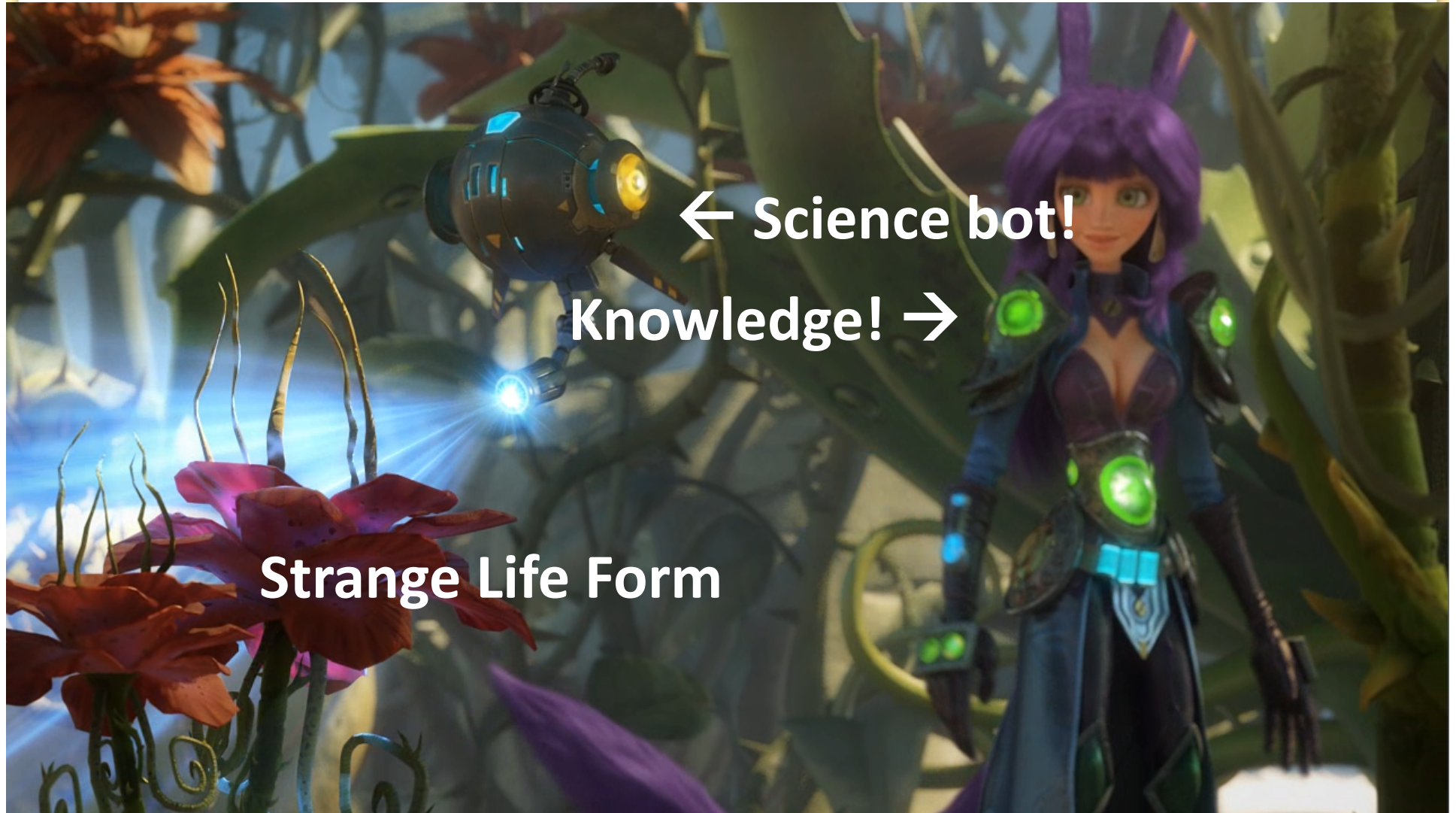


**Goggles and  
maps →**

**Not babysitting  
the ship**

**Packing pistols**

# The Scientist's Path



← Science bot!

Knowledge! →

Strange Life Form



# Class: Warrior



# Class: Esper





# Class: Spellslinger





# Art



Omnipresent  
Powerful narrative tool  
Concept art informs design



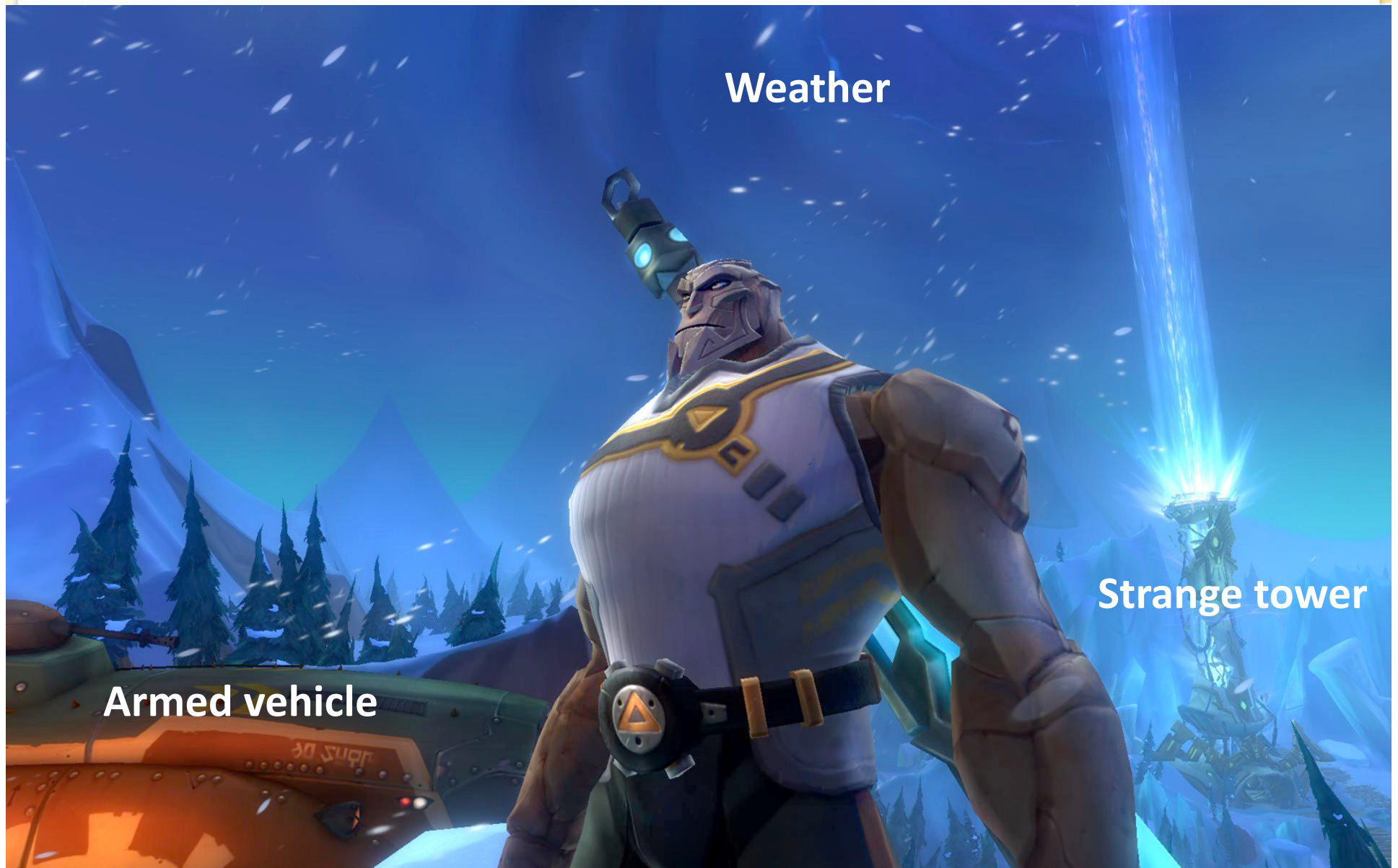


# Concept Art





# In-Game Art





# In-Game Art





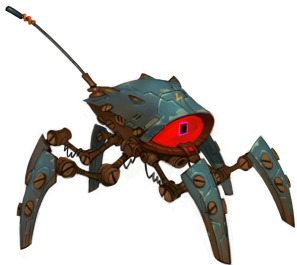
# In-Game Art





# Design Text

- Tutorials
- Help Text
- Story Panels
- Objectives
- Quest Log

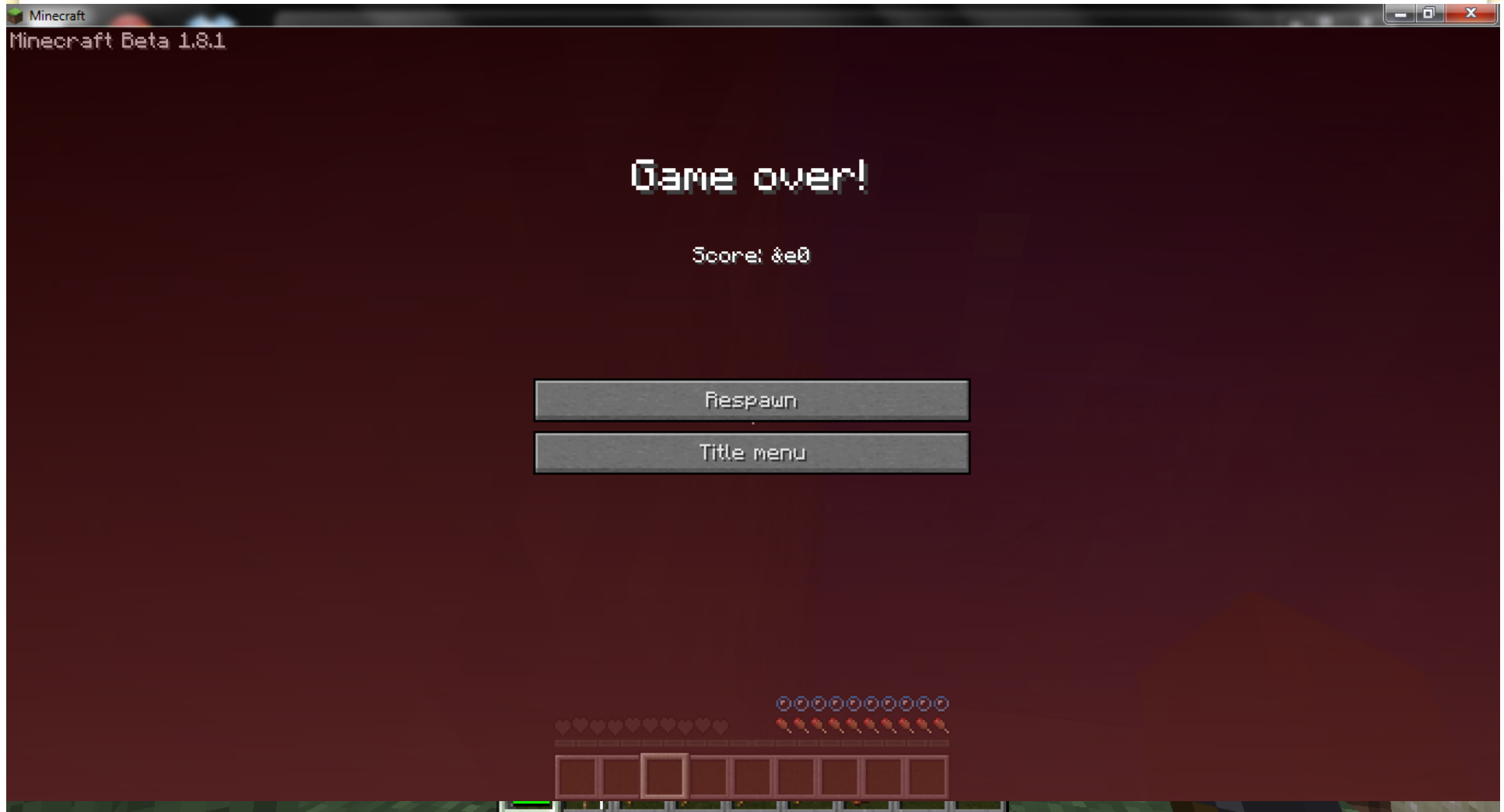


# Without design text...





# Without design text...



# Tutorial Text





# Help Text





# The Quest Log





# Narrative Design

**Narrative Designer →  
(artist's depiction)**

**← Note the Glasses**

- Zone Road Maps
- Lore
- V.O. Dialog
- World Story



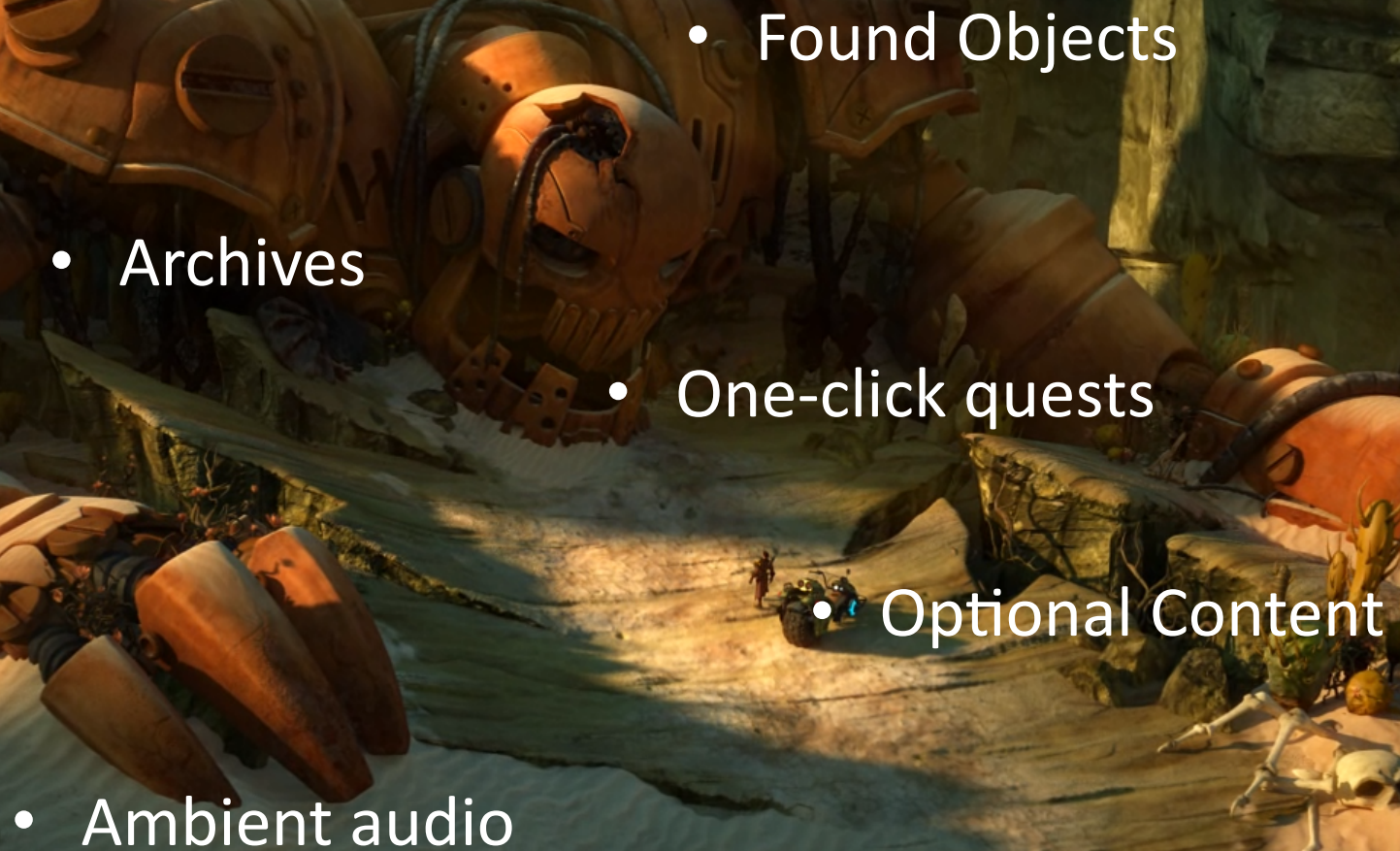
# Voiceover



- Quest VO
- Narration
- Ambient speech



# Lore

- 
- Archives
  - Found Objects
  - One-click quests
  - Optional Content
  - Ambient audio



# Lore via One-Click Quests

13 m

Narrative panel  
quest offer →

Rootbrute Grimsy

The corpse of this soldier is badly battered and almost completely frozen. In his jacket you find a journal where he speaks of his young wife and the hopes he had for their new life as pioneers on Nexus.  
You will receive:

← One-click quest (optional content) can allow slightly longer character count

Rest in peace, Renzo.

Nevermind

Tasks

- 1 Securing the Area  
Kill rootbrutes and yedi south of Settler's Reach (0/6)
- 2 Indigenous Intelligence  
Find Scientist Lusk at the skeech camp east of Settler's Reach
- 3 Scattered Supplies  
Gather lost supplies from the scattered crates (0/5)

Act II: Shipwrecked

Zone Objectives

0/0 CALL ON/OFF

NEAREST HOLDOUTS:

A. Conquer the Coldburrow Skeech 4x

16:51 [NPCChat] Settler's Reach Survivor: How are you holding up? Do you have everything you need?

16:51 [NPCChat] Comm-Tech Vargas: I have everything I need right now. Give the supplies to anyone else that needs it.

16:51 [NPCChat] Aron Brightland: I knew I could count on you.

16:52 [Say] Soldier Hult: We picked up a distress call east of the tower. Some men are trying to escape from the skeech, and I need you to buy them some time at the control point.

3145 / 3145 1975 / 1975

1 2 3 4 5 6 9 1

CHERNON1 4 XP: 2/3045

6 / 16



# Lore via Datacube



# Cinematics

- Juxtapose art, design, lore
- Provide exposition
- Advance the plot
- Break up the rhythm
- Suggested, not required





# Cinematic: The Tower



# Cinematic: The Rescue





# Transmedia

## Outside-the-game material

•Fiction

•Cartoons

•Films

•Comics

•Art books

•Toys

# Reaching 140

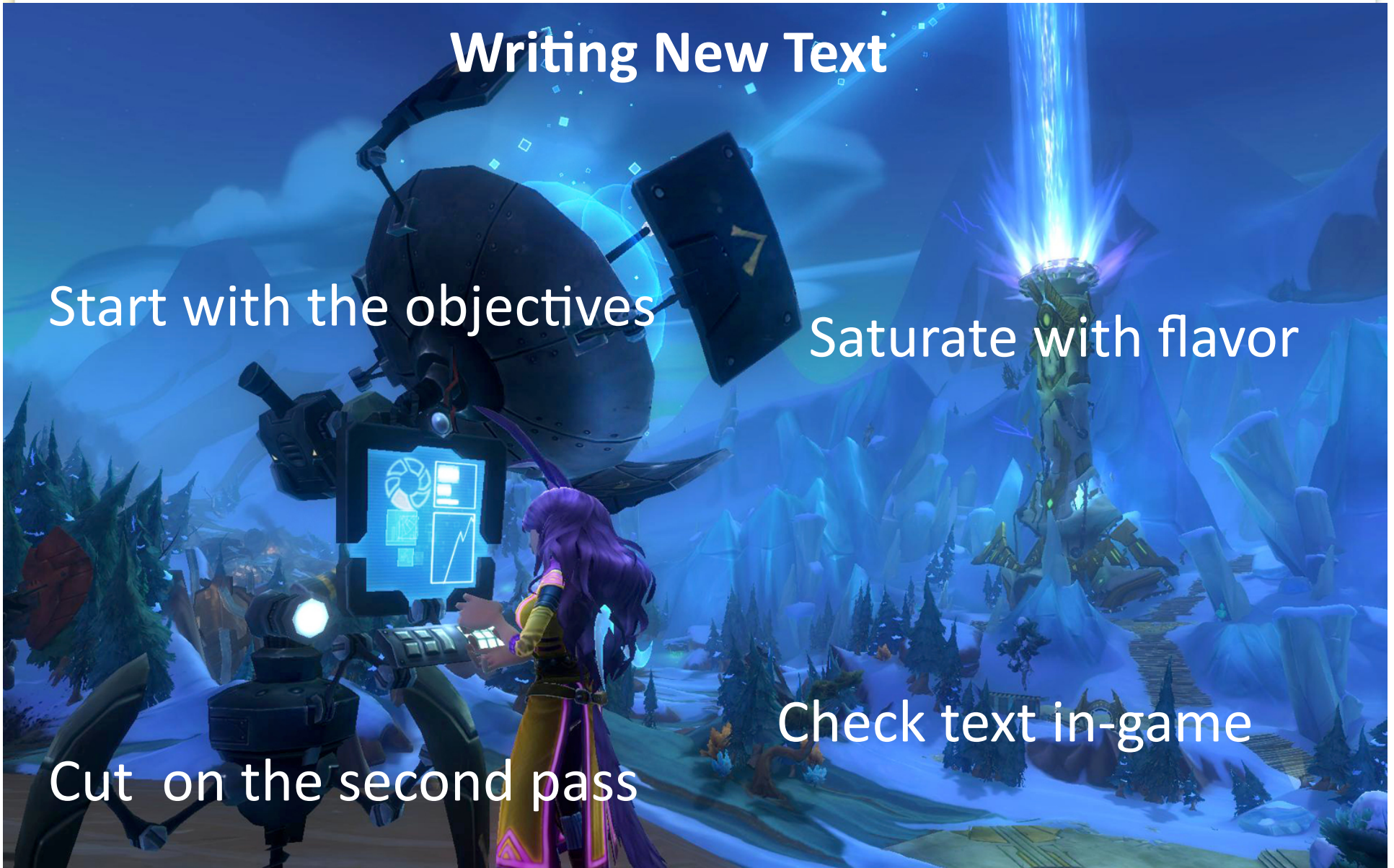
## Writing New Text

Start with the objectives

Saturate with flavor

Check text in-game

Cut on the second pass





# Cutting to 140

## Working with Existing Text

- Start with the objectives
  - Fight redundancy
  - Cut first
  - Revise and add flavor last
- 

# Examples please.





Space: the final frontier.



These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise.

Its five-year mission:

To explore strange new worlds.

To seek out new life and new civilizations.

To boldly go where no man has gone before.

Audio: STAR TREK written and created by Gene Rodenberry  
(Characters with spaces: 220)

Space: the final frontier.



These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise.

Her five-year mission:

To boldly go where no man has gone before.

(Characters with spaces: 139)

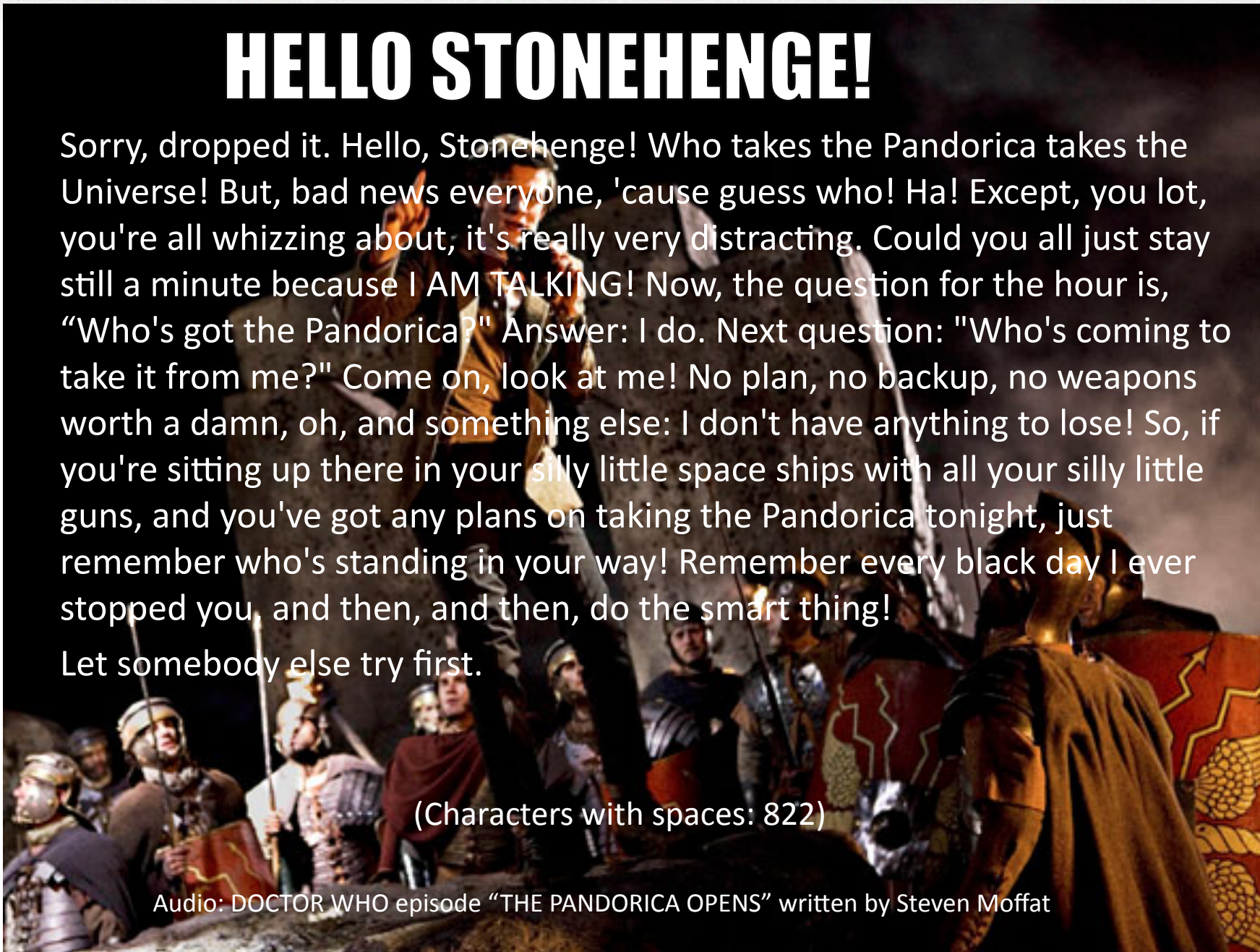


# HELLO STONEHENGE!

Sorry, dropped it. Hello, Stonehenge! Who takes the Pandorica takes the Universe! But, bad news everyone, 'cause guess who! Ha! Except, you lot, you're all whizzing about, it's really very distracting. Could you all just stay still a minute because I AM TALKING! Now, the question for the hour is, "Who's got the Pandorica?" Answer: I do. Next question: "Who's coming to take it from me?" Come on, look at me! No plan, no backup, no weapons worth a damn, oh, and something else: I don't have anything to lose! So, if you're sitting up there in your silly little space ships with all your silly little guns, and you've got any plans on taking the Pandorica tonight, just remember who's standing in your way! Remember every black day I ever stopped you, and then, and then, do the smart thing! Let somebody else try first.

(Characters with spaces: 822)

Audio: DOCTOR WHO episode "THE PANDORICA OPENS" written by Steven Moffat



Hello, Stonehenge!

Who has the Pandorica?  
to take it?

I do.

Plan

Remember who's standing in your way.  
else try first.

Be smart.

Let someone

(Characters with spaces: 138)



# HELLO STONEHENGE!

Who has the Pandorica? I do.

Plan to take it?

Remember who's  
standing in your way.

Be smart.

Let someone else try first.

(Characters with spaces: 138)

Good morning. Good morning. In less than an hour, aircraft from here will join others from around the world, and you will be launching the largest aerial battle in the history of mankind.

Mankind, that word should have new meaning for all of us today. We can't be consumed by our petty differences any more. We will be united in our common interest. Perhaps it's fate that today is the 4th of July, and you will once again be fighting for our freedom. Not from tyranny, oppression, or persecution, but from annihilation. We're fighting for our right to live--to exist.

And should we win the day, the 4th of July will no longer be known as an American holiday, but as the day when the world declared in one voice, "We will not go quietly into the night! We will not vanish without a fight! We're going to live on, we're going to survive." Today, we celebrate our independence day!

(Characters with spaces: 877)

Audio: INDEPENDENCE DAY written by Dean Devlin & Roland Emmerich



# Short...



We're fighting for our right to exist.  
We will not go quietly into the night!  
Today...is our independence day!

(Characters with spaces: 110)

# Stacked.



Good morning. Today we launch the largest aerial battle in the history of mankind. Mankind, a word with new meaning for all of us today.  
(Characters with spaces: 136)



We can't be consumed by our petty differences any more. We will be united in our common interest. We're fighting for our right to exist.  
(Characters with spaces: 136)



Should we win the day, the 4th of July will no longer be just an American holiday, but the day when the world declared in one voice:  
(Characters with spaces: 132)



"We will not go quietly into the night! We will not vanish without a fight! We're going to live on, we're going to survive." Today we celebrate our independence day!  
(Characters with spaces: 165)



# The Secret Rules

- The limit is a tool, not a straitjacket.
- 140-character chunks can stack.
- 180 is close to 140—without spaces.



# That's cheating!



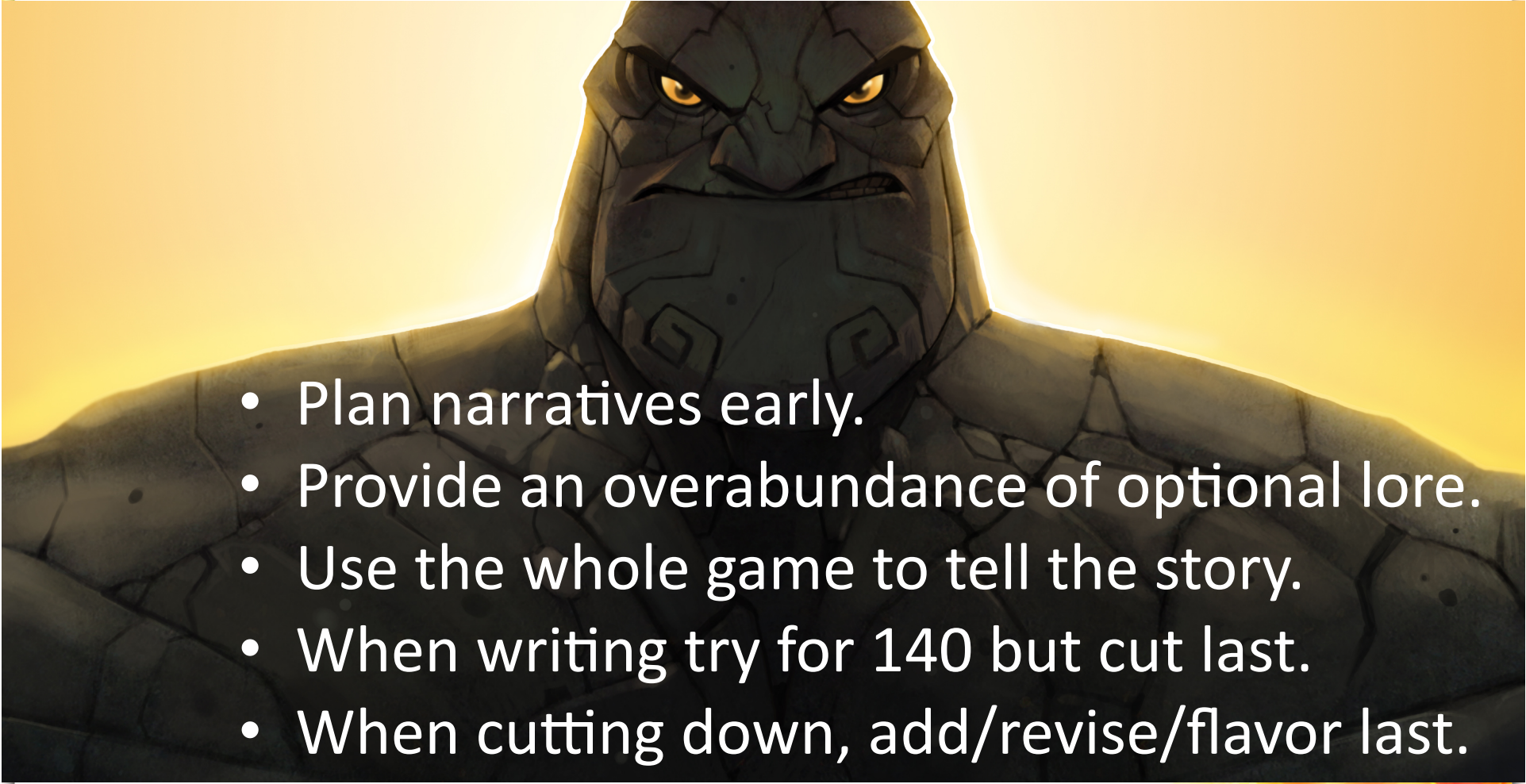


That's why  
they're secret.





# In Closing...

- 
- Plan narratives early.
  - Provide an overabundance of optional lore.
  - Use the whole game to tell the story.
  - When writing try for 140 but cut last.
  - When cutting down, add/revise/flavor last.



# Cinematic: The Epilogue





# Questions?





Thank you!

And visit [wildstar-online.com](http://wildstar-online.com) to learn more about

**WILDSTAR**™

The background of the slide is a piece of promotional art for the game WildStar. It depicts a male character in a blue and gold steampunk-style jacket and a female character with long purple hair and a purple outfit, both holding dual pistols. They are standing in front of a large, mechanical, skull-like structure with glowing red eyes. The background is a dark, starry space with a large red planet and a green planet visible.