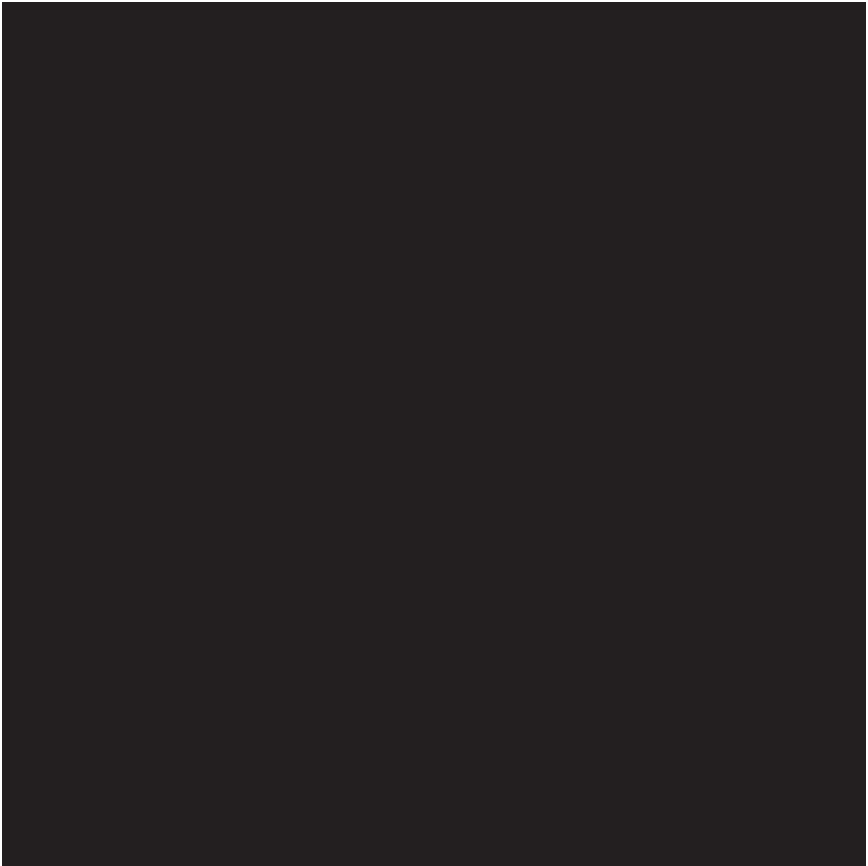


# **New Simulationism**



**a Manifesto**

**In everything you do, ensure that the fictional world is first. If, at any point, any aspect of the game begins to clash with the veracity and truth of the fictional world, change it.**

**In every ruling, every rule, every encounter, every moment—the fictional world reigns. It cannot be overcome.**

**1.  
The fictional  
world is  
supreme.**

**Characters and systems can, obviously, affect the fictional world. As they move through and act upon the world, the world changes to reflect those actions. These changes can occur as a result of both the players' characters and the GM's. Likewise, diegetic systems of the fictional world—law, magic, weather, economics, and so on—can change the world, too. Let these run wild! Embrace the unexpected, the unpredicted, the unknown. Allow your world to shine in its transience!**

**Outside of diegetic in-character actions, players cannot change the world. The world is sacred: it is apart and cannot be altered except by those forces from within the fictional world. At no point should the world change simply because the rules dictate it so.**

**2.**

**Restrict the  
non-diegetic  
means by  
which the  
world can be  
changed.**

**The GM is a player. Accordingly, they are restricted in their non-diegetic ability to change the world, just like every other player.**

**If the GM is also author, designer, and creator of the fictional world, they must adhere to the fictional world created before play begins. Once at the table, the world cannot be changed except by purely diegetic means.**

**When you as GM are struck with the urge to alter the fictional world outside of your diegetic methods, resist the temptation! As you change the fictional world, you deny the other players at the table their chance to play and have genuine impact on the world. Grant them the trust and dignity to make their own decisions.**

**3.**

**The GM is a referee, not an author—they too are subservient to the fictional world.**

**All rules are abstractions of a larger, more complex fictional reality. They exist to ease complicated processes into something that can be more easily played with—and nothing more.**

**Rules are not directions for play. They are not orders. They are not codifications of some external system, such as a narrative arc or erstwhile genre trope. All story is post-hoc.**

**When the dragon reaches 0 HP and dies, it does not die because it reached 0 HP: it dies because it has suffered so much damage it cannot endure further. Your game's abstractions are representative, not authoritative.**



**4.**

**Rules,  
systems, and  
mechanisms  
are  
abstractions  
of the fictional  
world, not  
structures  
or orders for  
players.**

**The fictional world is vast and complex. Each abstraction reduces some part of that vastness to something manageable. At each such turn, ask yourself: “Is this abstraction better for the game than simple play?”**

**In many cases, the answer is yes. Each game has a different focus, and the rules should be crafted to better those foci. The world is huge: don’t be afraid to simplify parts that matter less.**

**If the focus of your game is, say, exploring a new planet, you may find it helpful to abstract government funding from the home planet. It is a relevant part of the fictional world, but is extremely complicated, and—critically—most of those complexities are irrelevant to the explorers on the ground. What matters is the input (what the explorers need to do to get funding) and the output (how much funding they get). The precise details of each wheel of government funding are irrelevant: abstract them.**

**In a game where the focus is exploration, however, exploration should remain unabstract.**

**5.  
All  
abstractions  
must  
justify their  
existence  
against  
unabstracted  
play. Many  
abstractions  
are justified.**

**If at any point the abstractions in your game—the rules—do not match the reality of the fictional world, change them. The fictional world is supreme: abstractions can always be de-abstracted, but the fictional world cannot be changed except from inside the fictional world.**

**Friction between your world and abstractions is normal and expected over the course of any game. No abstraction is more precious or important than the fictional world—change them at your own whim.**

**6.**

**If your  
abstractions  
do not match  
your fictional  
world,  
de-abstract  
until they do.**

**Because the fictional world is supreme, it is the single most important aspect of your game. When you change the world, you change the game.**

**If you decide as a table of players to change your game, step away from play and change the world together. Decide what matters and what doesn't to your play, and change the world based on those desires.**

**The abstractions are all secondary. Inevitably, as your world changes, you will find your abstractions do not match the fictional world. When this occurs, de-abstract until they do match. Then, as you play, re-abstract those parts of the game that are justified in doing so. Don't get caught up in the rules.**

**At no point should the fictional world change as a result of some previous abstraction, some holdover rule that demands its presence be felt. Fear neither the rulebook nor the self-crowned game designer.**

**7.**

**If you want to  
change your  
game, change  
your world  
before your  
abstractions.**

**Abstractions are, by their very nature, mechanistic. Non-playful. Play in RPGs occurs at the fringes and margins of the abstractions: they are relevant and impactful, but not where the primary act of play occurs.**

**Your game should focus on play, not mechanisms.**



**8.**

**Play is the  
focus of  
the game.**

**Play is not  
abstracted.**

**The fictional world is infinitely, fractally complex. It is impossible to truly simulate: no person nor text can imagine the full thing. We are limited in our understanding by myriad factors, unaware of even our own unawareness. We remain wholly ignorant in the face of the vastness of knowledge that comprises the fictional world. It is impossible to truly simulate.**

**You should try anyway.**

**Strive forth boldly towards the platonic ideal of total simulation! Reach for the wonder of a wholly secondary world! Approach those distant spheres!**

**9.**

**The fictional world cannot be perfectly simulated.**

**This does not mean you should not try.**

**In all senses, the people you play with  
are more important than the game.  
Your play community is the foundation  
of play. Nothing matters more.**

**10.  
Players  
come before  
the fictional  
world.**

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**Further reading:**

**Boluk, Stephanie & Lemieux, Patrick // *Metagaming***

**De Koven, Bernie // *The Well-Played Game***

**Gearing, Luke // “Against Incentive”**

**Gearing, Luke // *Volume 2 Monsters &***

**Huizinga, Johan // *Homo Ludens***

**Huntsman, Vi // “Dread and Other Emotions”**

**Juul, Jesper // *Half-Real***

**Milton, Ben & Lumpkin, Stephen // *Principia Apocrypha***

**Peterson, Jon // *Playing at the World***

**Rose, Noora // “The Tyranny of ‘Rule’”**

**Scott, James C. // *Seeing Like a State***

**Sicart, Miguel // “Against Procedurality”**

**Sinclair, Jared // *Anti-Sisyphus Omnibus***

**Sinclair, Jared // “‘Rules Elide’ and Its Consequences”**

**Sinclair, Jared // “The New Transparency”**

**Thriftomancer // *Null***

**Wark, McKenzie // *Gamer Theory***

# Notes

