# COPYRIGHT

# 13.ENCHANTING REALITY –
## A VISION OF BIG EXPERIENCES
## ON SMALL PLATFORMS

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ABSTRACT
Games for mobile platforms (phones and PDA) tend to be simple remakes or clones of gaming hits like Snake and Defender or in the case of high end-devices, Starcraft and Myst. Only a very small number of games use the unique properties of mobile computing. These location-based or mixed reality games represent a game form in its infancy, struggling to find functional gameplay models. Is it possible to create powerful immersive game experiences using the mobile platforms unique properties? How can technical limitations like limited display size, resolution and sound quality be made to work with the game instead of against it? What challenges face designers of games played on handheld devices in a real physical setting?

Using the functional Visby Under prototype as a starting point this paper presents a novel approach to location-based mobile games. The mobile gamers presence in physical space, his ability to move though and interact with it, is seen as the central quality of the game-form. Using experiences from live-action-roleplaying design the paper explores the possibilities of using the real world as the primary user interface for deep mobile games. The device is used as the engine for story-progression and gameplay without breaking the illusion of the fiction, transforming everyday reality into an engaging multi-player game space.

KEYWORDS
Location based, Visby Under, live action roleplaying, diegetic consistency, visions

### INTRODUCTION
The race to create and dominate a global mobile games market has begun in earnest. With the Nokia N-gage, SymbianOS phones and Sony's upcoming Play Station Portable (PSP) the trend is clear. Mobile games are just a niche to be conquered and turned into a highly profitable business by the giants of digital industry. Nintendo's absolute dominance over the market is about to be challenged by a new type of mobile games machine blending the capabilities of media player, communications device, PDA and hi-spec Gameboy variant.

[1] http://www.pspinsider.com/ holds complete specs

The presented hardware specifications[1] for the PSP indicate it will outperform the PSOne by a long shot, being closer to the PS2 in terms of graphical prowess. Add to this a wireless network, mpg4-player, USB-port and extensions to link up the device with GPS and mobile phones and you have an intriguing machine for mobile gaming. The Nokia N-gage is closer to a phone boasting the prowess of a PDA processor and the design of a Gameboy. Its built in GPRS, bluetooth, mediaplayer and sound recording functions make the divice uniquely suited for new styles of mobile games.

From its birth the mobile games market has been dominated by the practice of porting ancient console titles to handheld platforms. 80's classics like Snake, Defender and Pac-Man resurface and find new audiences all over the compulsively cellphone-wielding industrial world. Nintendo have successfully managed to sell a substantial share of their 8 and 16 bit games twice, once on the original console and once as remakes for the Gameboy models. And for every original re-released there are a hundred clones, a thousand variants and even a few whole gameplay genres of vastly varying quality based upon it. Many of these ancient games are beautiful, almost universally regarded as classics of digital art, but we who were active gamers in the 80's have seen them all before and some of us are not convinced that a new packaging changes the essence.

An often repeated reason for interest in handheld games, both from industry and consumers is the practice of filling otherwise meaningless moments of time with gaming enjoyment. A lonely lunch-break, a cross-country car journey and the grind of daily commuting become opportunities for gaming pleasure. Olli Sotama refers to this "first phase of mobile gaming" as the *"entertainment of idle moments"*[1] and

quotes Lasse Seppinen as saying: "This is the core of mobile gamer behaviour: mobile gaming remedies moments of boredom when there's no access to better gaming devices." [2] This is all fine, but we believe the technical configuration and the very mobility of handheld devices makes many other radically different games formats possible, most notably games based on the players physical location and physical presence in her environment. Sadly all indications imply that this first idle phase of mobile gaming may last for quite some time.

The lack of conceptual innovation within the games industry has been pointed out by many critics, designers and researchers over the past few years. Veteran game designer Greg Costikyan sums the situation up nicely in his webblog on games culture and development [3]:

> "And so the walls come closing in. You have to be fuckin' Will Wright to get an innovative title through; no one else can do it. (Okay, Miyamoto can do it. Maybe Sid Meier. But you get the drift.) Fewer and fewer titles are commissioned from independent developers; the publishers gobble up studios, until they themselves fail, because they don't have the publishing spread (or, in many cases, the brains god gave a biscuit) to compete with the largest houses.
> The industry is fucked. It's less imaginative, more risk averse, than the fucking music business. It makes Hollywood look happy to take a flyer on talent."

Looking at the release schedule for any handheld platform confirms the suspicion that the publishers are opting for the "safe" route when it comes to mobile games as well. Expect Tomb Raiders and Tony Hawks rather than new made-for the media games.

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What we are about to see is basically a rerun of the last few years' stationary development with little or no utilization of unique device traits such as location-tracking, mobility, and communications functionality. We find this development disturbing. Simultaneously we see it as an opportunity to make a difference as visionary researchers and independent games designers.

We believe it is high time to explore the rich potential for unique games for this new breed of platform. From the screen to the street, from audiovisual to multi-sensory - the possibilities are limitless. We realize this exploration will not initially be driven by the commercial games industry, but must be pushed by independently funded artists and researchers working in close contact with passionate gamers. Weather there is a mass market for dedicated mobile games or not is more or less irrelevant; innovation and mastery of a new game-form is the goal itself. During the past year the Zero-Game studio has led development of a story-driven location based game called Visby Under. This production, the preliminary report from this summers' testing and my background in Live Action Roleplaying (LARP)[2] forms the basis for our, still raw and half-formed, thinking about digitally facilitated gaming in real world environment.

### CURRENT STATE

During the VU project the current mobile games market has been glanced at more than once. Of special interest to us are naturally those projects falling under the label "Location Based" or "Pervasive". Only a handful games using real-world location as a parameter in gameplay exist to our knowledge.

Perhaps the most famous example is Botfighters, developed by the small Swedish mobile-games studio "It's Alive!"[3]. This simple pervasive location-based shooter has achieved slight commercial success with around 6500 subscribers in Sweden, slightly more in Russia and handfuls in other parts of the world. The game tracks GSM-cell location and allows players within range of each other to score kills and gather resources to by upgrades. Botfighters is a prime example of a pure Location Based game. Of special interest to us is that the simple competitive set-up is enough to get at least some players deeply involved in the action lead them into intense physical situations like the one described by top player Bjorn Idren in an interview for Business Week Online;

> "After getting caught with his radar guard down, Idren quickly revived his handset and used the radar to determine that his opponent was 9,000 feet away and driving off fast. He was out of range for a wireless bullet, so, hoping to exact revenge, Idren and his girlfriend gave chase. They shadowed Idren's opponent for a full hour at high speeds on the highway but couldn't get close enough to pull the trigger."

[2] The Scandinavian LARP scene is a highly developed subcultural network organizing physical role-playing games ranging from deep explorations of immigration policies and political readings of Shakespeare to wild fantasy adventures and humorous sci-fi extravaganza. http://weltschmerz.laiv.org/europa/sourcebook/eurochap_1.RTF describes one style of serious LARP:ing in english. The Norwegian LARP portal http://www.laiv.org is a good place to start looking into the nordic LARP-scene (if you know norwegian).

[3] Official homepage http://www.itsalive.com/page.asp

Botfighters is studied in depth in Olli Sotama's afore-mentioned paper for last years CGDC. Olli, in his study, concludes that "other real world features than location can become significant in the future", echoing our interest in the physical and social world as playing field. Sadly but predictably almost no games concepts of the kind Mr Sotama imagines have been published. It's Alive seem to be one of the very few champions of Location Based and Pervasive games out there. Their most recent game – Supafly, where the goal is to become a virtual superstar, concentrates on social relations and community but does not introduce any new modes of real world interaction. Portugese company Ydreams have recently launched a Botfighter-like anti-terrorist game introducing the concept of physical sanctuary in certain locations, malls and restaurants are given as examples.

At the absolute forefront of experimental location based gaming we find the UK mixed-reality performance group Blast Theory[4]. Their projects Can You See Me Now and the recent Uncle Roy All Around You both use handheld computers, GPS location tracking, and invisible online players to construct games where fast physical movement and device-mediated teamwork are central to gameplay. The games are almost entirely free from fictional context, opting instead to get their point across through pure gameplay and the physicality of the experience.

French Telecom laboratories have experimented with two different location based games in the Marseilles region. GeoQuest is a mystery-story set the 19th, Orbital a Elite-type space trading game.[5] Both of these use the physical city as a gameboard, triggering text-based events when a player enters a certain mobile cell and contacts the game-server. In this basic mechanic these games have a strong similarity to the Visby Under game and GeoQuest sets itself apart from the others by virtue of having a story as driver for gameplay.

## TRAITS

So, that's the rough state of the art. Location Based games today are relatively small (in terms of programming as well as economic turnover and media interest), mostly competitive games with very slim narrative content, with Supafly's potential for emergent stories a possible exception. Clearly these games, varied as they are, do not represent the full spectrum of possible mobile experiences. What are the defining traits of gaming on a hand-held communications platform? Stationary games are slowly finding a form of it's own, some aspiring to artistic quality and attempts to use it's unique opportunities to create powerful games experiences. Warren Spectors words illustrate this striving for excellence within the medium:

> "For me, making the most of it means doing everything in our power, as developers, to ensure that our games exploit to the absolute maximum the medium's unique characteristics (which I see as the power to transport players to

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4 http://www.blasttheory.co.uk
5 http://www.wgamer.com/articles/
francetelecom092801

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fantastic worlds and immerse them as completely as possible in those worlds; the requirement that the experience be driven by player participation and that the game respond actively and appropriately to player choices; the crafting of experiences and stories that are the result of emergence and not simply careful planning on the part of a writer or designer. In other words, I want to see a game industry that strives to share authorship of the gameplay experience with our collaborators – our players …… If we focus on these unique characteristics of our medium, we will find ourselves riding a tidal wave of originality in a medium that continues to grow both aesthically and formally – a medium that does, on occasion, produce something totally and blissfully original…"[4]

What we are attempting to sum up here is not every single possible thing you can do with the device, rather what qualities this form of gaming possess that define its potential in relation to stationary digital games. By pinpointing these areas we hope to identify where current mobile games are lacking and also construct a reference system to evaluate and push our own projects within the area. I am certain some or all of these traits have been previously identified by other researchers and do not claim the categories as our own. The traits themselves are not primarily derived from the technical details of handheld devices but from their , but how they are to be used in a game is for the individual artist to decide. I'll give you my perspective and my five cents worth of how to create engaging digital games set in physical reality. I base most of my opinions on my ten years as writer, organizer, director and designer of LARP-games. Both types of game have the opportunity to use physical reality as stage and carrier of narrative meaning and I believe there are valuable lessons to be learned by uniting the forms. It is worth

noting that these traits were defined at the end of the VU design-process and did not directly inform design of the game. We will find VU lacking in many of these categories and take these omissions as the starting point for future work in the field.

**Mobility and Motion**
The player of a mobile game can move relatively unencumbered through space and perform almost any physical task that does not require constant visual monitoring of the screen. She may walk, run, skate, crawl, sneak, jump, dance, or make love in the back of a car as active parts of the game. With rugged devices she can swim, fight and perform various physical stunts. The players' locomotive speed and her ability to overcome physical obstacles may be used as active gameplay elements.

**Location**
The players' physical location can be tracked with varying accuracy depending on the technology and may be used as a part of game mechanics. Relative location can be used as well as absolute, as can false location information. Location tracking enables non-physical entities, spaces or objects to occupy the same space as the players. This is commonly known as Augmented Reality and may be used as a part of the game. Players may detect enemies or friends in their vicinity, receive constant directions to hidden locations, flee from invisible phantoms whispering in their headphones and listen to the voice of long abandoned industrial sites telling tales of the past.

**Presence**
The player is physically present in her surroundings and is able to interact with all kinds of objects, humans, animals and technological artefacts as a part of the game. All forms of sensory input, including pain and pleasure can be used to convey in-game information to the player. Any action and sensation can be a core part

of gameplay. A player may force locks, avoid security-guards, negotiate with adversaries, eat lobster and get horribly drunk on tequila as active parts of the game experience. Changes in the state of the physical world can be tracked using various camera and sensor-systems or work on the basis of honour-systems.

### Communication

The devices that mobile games are played on are currently primarily communications devices. This means players of a mobile game may communicate with ease and distribute media-files to each other and third parties outside the game. Peripherals such as cameras and sound recording equipment add even more possibilities for communication. In the case of a multi user game this means players can stay in more or less constant contact, organize teams when the going gets tough, call meetings in discreet locations, send pictures of a suspect to be checked against FBI-archives and talk to their characters wife in Los Angeles (played by a gamemaster or support team member). In a single player game a player may access online information on a historical event relevant to the game, record, e-mail and later decode the strange voice emanating from the cellar, download a manual to operate a forklift and call friends for advice on how to get across town quickly.

### PERVASIVE GAMING

It is worth stressing that these traits refer not to what is possible to do "on the side" while playing a game, but tries to identify stimuli and actions that can be used as active parts of the gameplay or as integral parts of the game experience. Pervasive games affect your ordinary life and are played in short bursts when convenient. This is not our focus. Our goal is depth of emotion and immersion - gaming as peak experience, not constant access to digital diversion. To exemplify; a player acting the part of a down and out private investigator is sent an

SMS telling him the address of a suspects hideout. This is a part of the game's structure but is masked as a tip from an informer. He goes to the address, manages to break down the door and finds a run-down room with a single ancient computer. The room is a part of the games setup, rigged for this and similar scenes. In a drawer he finds a bottle of cheap vodka. Our hero sits down, fires up the ABC-80 and proceeds to get drunk while his tech-savvy brother in law (another player in the game) tries to guide his futile hacking attempts over the phone. Compare this to the botfighter-player who fires a shot at an enemy on his way home from the pub, then breaks into a house, steals some booze and plays with an old computer. With careful planning, solid roleplaying and sound games design any real-world activity can be incuded in the games story-world. This brings us to what we believe to be a core element of a roleplaying game set in the physical world; consistency between the story-world (diegesis) and the sensory input of the player.

### DIEGETIC CONSISTENCY

The fundamental game rule of Live Action Roleplaying (at least in the Scandinavian countries) is to consider the game, while it lasts, as if it were real. Players and organizers spend massive resources ensuring that the illusion of the game setting is kept intact and players are expected to disregard all sensory imput that falls outside the stated story world of the game. The goal is to make sure that the diegesis and the physical world are as consistent as possible and make deep immersion into the game easier. In a strict medieval game costumes, props and even buildings are designed or modified to make sure they fit the period and the setting. Budget, creativity, knowledge and reliance on the players' internal suspension of disbelief dictates how authentic the end result is and needs to be. If an aeroplane flies over the heads of a group of players

playing the parts of iterant monks on their way to a monastery they may choose to ignore it simply by not looking up, thus disregarding the diegetic disturbance. Acknowledging the presence of the aircraft breaks or changes the diegesis radically (this is a medieval world, but a strange flying object just appeared above us, what's up with that?). Breaking the diegesis of a roleplaying game of this kind effectively ends play until it can be re-established. I'm talking in general terms here, I've played around with extra-diegetic narration quite a lot in my games but the baseline is that a roleplaying game needs a strong diegesis to be sustained, especially over longer periods of time. The skill to enter into a state of suspension of disbelief seems to be an ability we all possess, but are also able to develop over time. I have the pleasure to know many people highly skilled at entering into story-worlds at the drop of a hat, but most of us require help to leave our everyday mindset. Games designed for this purpose are one of the most effective ways of achieving this shift in perception. Most LARP players I have discussed the subject with agree that consistency between perceived sensory reality (location, props etc.) and diegesis (the game world and backstory) is a powerful tool to make the game engaging and it is often considered aesthetically pleasing in it's own right.

In traditional computer and console games the world and its flavour is established by everything from interface design, engine architecture and gameflow to sound effects and voiceacting. The breach of diegetic consistency is accepted as a part of the computer games genre; lag, reloading, hardware crashes, visible interfaces on screen, the very presence of the screen itself, tells us that this is not for real. Yet we manage to immerse in them, enraptured by the repetitive patterns of problem-solving and skill-based confrontations. This is the magic of successful gameplay design at work. One may argue that computer games are not played with the same goals as LARP's or storytelling-oriented tabletop rpg's and therefore no comparison can be made between them. The narrative language of computer games tend to be more influenced by cinema and television than by a desire to create a seamless illusion of alternate existence. On the other hand games like Deus Ex, Morrowind and Elite present spaces for the player to fill with meaning and subjective narrative without forcing her to follow a set pattern of narrative development and manage to establish a strong sense of internal diegetic consistency by elegant player-involving means. Remember the words of Mr Spector, designer of Deus Ex;

> "...to transport players to fantastic worlds and immerse them as completely as possible in those worlds..."

How is diegetic consistency handled in current location based games? The answer is quite clear from looking at the cases presented above. Very few of the games have any kind of backstory and the ones that do conflict radically with players real world

experiences while playing. In botfighters you control a Manga-style robot with your mobile phone, ordering it to fire and raise shields by SMS messages. When you move the robot moves with you. I can buy that kids suddenly gain access to remote-controlled killing machines. Similar things happen with alarming frequency in Japanese popular fictions. But where are these robots? Why can't I hear the gunfire and see massive shadows outside my window? It is quite impossible to unite the game and reality in cases like this and thus the opportunity to use the physical world as a means to deepen immersion is weakened or lost. It can still be used as a gameplay mechanism and that is how all currently available location based products treat it.

LARP and location based games share one very important trait: they are both played in physical reality. A LARP game is most likely set in a closed environment designed to fit the diegesis. A game using the unique traits identified above is most likely to be played on the streets of a modern city. Consistency must then be achieved through the crafting of the diegesis. Stories essentially have to be set in the modern world, or a place that looks, feels and sounds just like our own. It does not exclude the introduction and simulation of genre-elements like magic, hyper-technology and the occult, but it does force these elements to be hidden from or integrated with normal day-to day existence. This may seem like a severe limiting factor to the kind of stories that can be told with the medium but that may be exactly what the form needs. Computer games have been obsessed with blatant Sci-Fi and Fantasy narratives since it's birth and a little subtlety may be just what gaming needs. The real world setting is perfect for more politically relevant games and by it's very essence encourages some heavy-duty reflection on the nature of reality and games.

### VISBY UNDER - BACKGROUND

In the middle of the Baltic ocean lies an island of myth and a city of legend. Long ago, before the now ruined and ivy-clad cathedrals and grand walls of Visby were built, no men lived here. The island rose and sank with the rhythm of the sun and moon and was inhabited by magical creatures, the Trull. Memories of the Trull still linger in our folktales but we can no longer reach them. Their world and ours have separated, the ties severed by steel and blind faith. But magic is coming back to us. Radical research into radio-séances catching distant voices in the ether has given birth to the mathemagical Doyle-device. A modified Ipac equipped with an experimental GPRS-system can breach the walls between the worlds and reconnect us to the legends of old. But time is short, the world is starving without magic, and a chosen few have been called to heal the breach. Wielding technology and magic alike, they must team up with a crew of fickle Trull, untangle the legends of Visby and take a stand in the struggle for reality.

Thus, briefly, goes the backstory for Visby Under. The game uses the abovementioned technology to track players positions in the beautiful medieval city of Visby,

and triggers events when one of twelve key locations is found. There the player, seeing the world through the eyes of her companion Trull (or rather mouth, since the Trull tells the player what it sees on the other side), must solve riddles and gather the strength to make a difference. The game can be played as a single player experience or as a team-based game with two opposing Trull factions struggling to turn fate their way.

Visby Under attempts to unite the mythical story, the physical setting of Visby and the capabilities of handheld devices to produce an immersive location based gaming experience for the mobile platform. What we have aimed for is to create a game appealing to a wide audience and that can be played with many levels of intensity and immersion. It can be played as a pure game, but nothing in the diegesis stops you from believing that it is true. A troupe of players could easily treat their PDA-mediated contact with the Trull as real and engage in deep roleplaying , contemplating the meaning of their actions and the implications for themselves and the world at large. We took a first step towards enchanting reality, but the tests indicated that the players wanted more. Far more.

### VISBY UNDER - IMPLEMENTATION

The Zero-Game studio drafted the game design and backstory for the Visby Game with three goals in mind.

1. To create a game that enchants a physical location and gives it new meaning in the eyes of the player using mobile technology.
2. To make the legends of Visby and Gotland accessible to tourists and visitors in a playful and engaging manner.
3. To bring mobile gaming and LARP-methods together.

The game was then written, designed and developed by a team led by producer Christopher Sandberg and using the expertise of the Namni Group. With slim budget and timeframe they developed not only the game engine, the story and the audiovisual components, but had to construct a working network and server solution tying all the untested and occasionally volatile parts of the iPAQ and its peripherals together. At the core of the Visby Under game lies the Doyle engine, a story-building system with support for proximity triggers, virtual object-handling, interface by magic runes drawn on the screen, combat between ethereal beings, a bartering system and much more.

### VISBY UNDER - TESTING AND
### LESSIONS LEARNED

VU has so far been tested in small focus groups with greatly varying games experience. The report [4] must be considered preliminary, but there are several noteworthy comments and attitudes from the players that indicate strong directions for future development. In the executive summary of the report Sandberg concludes:

"It is clear from testing that changes to the participant's consumer context radically diversifies the experience. Because the user no longer sits in his or her comfortable computer room, but in fact wanders in any conceivable milieu, the consumer context has become increasingly disparate. With little research done into user situation this becomes an unknown variable when predicting and controlling the experience of a mobile game. To ensure positive outcomes both game mechanics and player attitudes must be handled in the location based game production. For this reason ported computer games to, for example, cellular phones will remain leisure games, or games played when the environment provides a computer room-like situation (home, school, café, bus).

Games that utilises the surroundings and control the player situation/attitude have the potential to become choice activity (with high level of participation and loyalty)."

The mention of player attitude is significant. A LARP-like attitude to a mobile game like Visby Under radically changes the experience, makes the experience more precious than when played as a game of skill and chance. If played with a computer gamer's attitude, the walks between locations become boring. To an immersed roleplayer they take on deeper meaning, with every mundane object interpreted through the diegesis of the game. But how can we change an attitude? Clearly the thin connection between location and game present in the first iteration of Visby Under will not be enough to encourage players to leave their mundane sets of reference. Heavier artillery is needed.

"While walking in the medieval city of Visby is a suggestive experience, it does not automatically present a framework for a digital game or vice versa. In order for walking through local environments to add to the computer game the milieu has to be vital to the game diegesis. In one word (sic) : what you do in reality has to effect virtuality. It is not enough to merely trigger events on sites. Such detailed reality-virtual interaction as moving objects, talking to actors, triggering outdoor FX of sound and light really have to come in to a full-fledged production. In the first proof-of-concept version of Visby Under no such advanced alternate reality gaming functions were implemented."

**FUTURE TRAJECTORY**

Consider that an iPAQ has a 240x320 (3.8" diagonal) 65Kc Reflective TFT screen. In a game it can be used to show the sun in two different ways. The first is to find

an appropriate place in the story of the game to play a beautiful MPG-4 of a brilliant blue sky and the shining life giving star, or a rendered version of the same sight. The second is to relay a series of orders to the player in the shape of simple words on a black screen. Maybe his wife is held hostage or maybe he follows the advice of a dead friend through the computer.

GO TO SKEPPSBRON 24. ENTER THE BUILDING.

The player walks across the block, into a half empty office-building. She reports her location.

GO UP TO THE ROOF. THERE IS A WAY.

The player tries the elevator, but can't get all the way up. She exits and finds a fire escalator leading up. A security guard looks askance but does not stop her. She exits to the roof. The wind blows strong, the city sprawls as far as the eye can see. The player reports her location.

LOOK UP.

What is the resolution of reality? What is the power of the processor that drives the world and our physical bodies? This is the true spec of these devices when combined with ingenious game design and roleplaying expertise. Every taste, every sight, every smell, every sound and every touch. Every place, every object and every living being on the planet. The whole planet is indeed a stage. She is just waiting for the play to begin.

By filtering our impressions of the world through well conceived gameplay patterns we can see the world in new light and go places we never would have dared to enter in our ordinary lives. A player acting out the part of a time-traveller from a apocalyptic future, driven through the city's abandoned

areas by pieced-together recordings from the distant past will feel the trunk of an old oak-tree in a different way than you and I and can find his lost faith in the words carved in the bark. A player forced to leave everything behind and walk the night-time streets in search for shelter will learn a thing or two about the way our world treats its weak.

The unique, extreme traits of mobile devices call for extreme gaming. This is the skydiving, wreck diving, rock climbing, street boarding of the imagination. The player of an extreme enchanted reality game needs to traverse the urban landscape efficiently, confront constant unexpected resistance, face real physical challenges, engage in character-driven social engineering, challenge her perceptions of the world and learn to follow rules very different from those society teaches her. Not quite the activities we associate with computer gaming today.

SEE YOU IN THE STREETS.

**CASE**

Wind and rain tear through the city streets, gradually driving the crowd indoors or under ground. In a plastic waiting booth of a subway station Teenage Male stares intently at the full colour screen of a specialized wireless gaming device. His train is delayed for a quarter of an hour. Electrical failure. Sweat and moisture hangs heavy in the air, Teenager grunts and takes a deep breath as the game loads the next level. He glances at Pretty Techno Chick sitting in the far corner of the plastic booth. She stares into space, looking faintly sad and lost in thought. A sunken incaesque temple, beautifully rendered in PSOne quality 3d, manifests on screen and the first enemies appear. Jump, dodge, shoot, dodge back, push, pull, pick up. The focused activity of the game takes away the some of the insufferable boredom, making the wait at least bearable. Another meaningless moment has been redeemed through the miracle of hi-end mobile gaming. Seppänen would be proud. A soft polytone beep sounds from the corner. Techno Girl across the booth flips her rubber handbag open and tears through the contents in a frenzy, pulling out an identical device with attached headset. Teenage Male misses a vital jump and it's game over. "Anabelle here, you got the pickup point locked down?" She talks as she rises. The device screen is flickering, showing a green on black architectural schematic of the subway station, a blip pulsing rhythmically near the booth location. "I got it, she mutters. Great going Largo. Give me the locker number when you got it." The device beeps again. "Great, just what I need." A raw crackling noise this time, like a short circuit. Anabelle freezes for a second, checks her screen and turns towards teenage boy. "You ain't seen me. Ok?" She smiles briefly and starts running like crazy. Out of the booth, along the platform shooting head over heals towards the escalators, stumbling on her massive neon platform shoes. Light is spilling out of the tunnel. The train is coming in. Breaks scream and doors fly open, the thoroughly soaked after-work crowd spill out. Last of all a man in his forties, college teacher-like in his polo and blazer rises from his seat and steps into the booth, awkwardly fiddling with his gaming phone. Teenage boy stares in disbelief and palms his own device, vainly trying to hide it behind his back. College teacher reads some numbers on the screen and frowns. "She was just here, wasn't she? Pretty girl, a bit on the thin side, pink hair and big shoes, yes? I'm her father you see. She's gone...missing. Where did she go?" Teenage boy fidgets and makes for the train before the doors close. Too late. Teacher puts a hand on his shoulder, smiling thinly. Something is wrong with his eyes. "This way or that? You only have to point. No big deal, eh?" Teenager is downright freaked now. "That way. Just leave me alone will you. Please." Teacher sighs happily and bows ever so slightly. "Oh, the respect for elders, an admirable trait in this age of Gomorrah.

One piece of advice kid – be careful what you do with that machine of yours. Keep playing those pretty killing-games. Keep playing sitting still and you will be safe and live to be a happy man with a happy life and happy wife. Never play on the run. Games and real life do not mix. Be safe. Be real.'' He turns away, touching the handsfree dial-unit as he starts walking slowly towards the escalators. ''Montsalvant here, the subject is at my location. Making contact. Converge at your leisure gentlemen and blessed be.''

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3. Costikyan, Greg, http://www.costik.com/weblog/2003_03_01_blogchive.html#90490621 The recent blog discussion between Greg Costikyan and Warren Specter is perhaps the most brutally honest and matter of fact treatment of this subject to date.

4. Spector, Warren, http://www.costik.com/weblog/2003_03_01_blogchive.html#90490621 from aformentioned web-blog.

5. Sandberg, Christopher, 2003, ''Visby Under Test Report'', Zero-Game Studio, Visby, Sweden.