



Field Guide



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Vast and threaten Elysium

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Curator's Note

Disco Elysium (2019) allows the player to explore a small yet considerably dense game world. The district of Martinaise, the container, and limit of *Disco Elysium*'s playable world, is described by lead designer Robert Kurvitz as a “matchbox” [1] in comparison to the larger world of Elysium, a “paracosm” he and his team began building at “the turn of the millennium” [2]. Beyond the game's many geopolitical subplots and the encyclopedic fashion in which off-screen locations, political ideologies, and concepts are revealed to the player (Graad, Mavoizianism, ‘plasm,’ etc.), there are two key determiners of the vastness of *Disco Elysium*'s off-screen space.

The first is ‘Shivers,’ one of twenty-four skills representing protagonist Harry du Bois' inner mind. Shivers informs Harry (and the player) almost entirely of off-screen events, such as the biographies of kings or feral children living in a subterranean network. In one memorable example, Shivers informs Harry of an atomic bomb that will be dropped on Revachol years after the end of the game's narrative. The player is thus ‘witness’ to events that they cannot see nor change.

The second is the ‘pale,’ an in-game “existential, cosmological threat” [3] that is spreading and will eventually swallow up the world of Elysium. Though its parallels with climate change are many, the pale’s exact nature is never confirmed. Some in-game characters refer to it as an “antipode” to the “world of matter;” others claim it suspends the laws of physics and “contains past information... it’s rarefied past.”

There are references to the pale being a man-made phenomenon (says one creature: “The pale came with you”). Some theories attest that the Shivers’ skill is not intrinsic to Harry’s mind but was installed in him through exposure to the pale, granting him supernatural levels of awareness.

The pale is, therefore, an antithesis to everything the player *can* see. The vastness of Elysium (and its Shivers-told pasts and futures) hints at an unseen space that is as threatening as it is under threat. If the existential threats in *Disco Elysium* are man-made (and its atomic bomb prophecy is telling), these threats speak not only to the world of Elysium but to the world of the player.

References

[1] Kurvitz, R. (2021) 'Outro.' In: Tamsalu, K. (ed.) *Disco Elysium*. Los Angeles CA 90065: iam8bit, Inc., pp. 187.

[2] Kurvitz, R. (2021) 'Outro.' In: Tamsalu, K. (ed.) *Disco Elysium*. Los Angeles CA 90065: iam8bit, Inc., pp. 181.

[3] Vervoort, J. 2021. *Beyond the Pale: Disco Elysium and the three spheres of transformation*. Medium, 5 May. Available from:

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