Comparative History of Ideas 498 F – Poetics of Play in Digital Roleplaying Games
Assignment: Mini-Canon Rationale

Introduction
Part of the experiment of game studies is a pedagogical one. We’re not only trying to engage digital games critically for the edification of academic discourse and to invent better models and theories – it is also about educating productive thinking at the point of contact with students (the future interpreters, gamers, theorists, designers, commentators, etc.). One question connected to this aim is centered on what games to select in a course on games, a question especially difficult if we are to expand beyond the general survey, the topical critique, or the theory course. Two of the choices all scholars have to make (consciously or not) is which set of games to focus on—whether it’s in their thinking, their course design, or their writing—and how to frame them for inquiry. Thinking about these questions is one of the best ways to get at your own view of the art form and where your interest lies in it (and even where you think the opportunities for learning are, too). This assignment is an effort to position you in this uneasy (but exciting) space where you have to think about your own views about digital RPGs critically, and imaginatively.

You are not exactly working without a net: you’ve got the readings from this class which give you various ways of imagining what’s significant, the course reserves and the critical précis of your colleagues, your own game experiences, those of your fellow-gamers, and “the series of tubes” we call the Internet. This assignment forces you to pool your resources, to really explore this from multiple angles. You obviously can’t play all the RPGs out there, and you may be forced to include a game in your list you actually dislike or haven’t even played through, depending on your rationale! I expect you might have to do some browsing, conversing with others (in class and out), etc. to get this assignment done.

Description
Make no mistake – this is an exercise in focus, not in coverage. The overall goal of this assignment is produce a written rationale for a small selection of games that you think exemplify and showcase qualities of digital “roleplaying games” in ways you find interesting. The practical (and somewhat arbitrary) constraints of this assignment are (1.) that your mini-canon cannot consist of more than 7 games, or less than 4, and (2.) that you must make use of the course readings in your rationale. The end result will be a 2-3 page, single-spaced document of formal writing that explains your approach and goals of your mini-canon in a general rationale, and provides commentary for each individual game as well. Beyond these constraints, it is pretty much up to you how to approach the task (see the forum thread for discussion on various approaches).

Components
1. Creative Title – your mini-canon should have a title that suggests to us something about your approach and goal
2. General Rationale – your mini-canon list should be preceded by an introductory comment about the organizing principle(s) behind your game choices that follow. This section should identify the “logic” or theme of your choices and what you hope the mini-canon achieves (what it is designed to show us).
3. Game Commentaries – each of your selected games should be followed by a short critical comment about the role that particular game plays in the rationale of your mini-canon. These are not informal comments—they are meant to provide us with some context for the choice you made, which may include description of a key element of the game, a theoretical concept that informs your insight, etc. These sections should describe how each game relates to your general rationale.

Summary
Type these short documents in Word (or equivalent) with the following specifications:
1. Creative title
2. General rationale (1-2 paragraphs)
3. Game specific commentary (1 paragraph each)
4. Length 2-3 pages, single-spaced
5. Due: May 28th