

# My thoughts on Skyrim and the state of TES

I held back for quite a while on my opinion on Skyrim since I'd likely end up ranting. However I finally wanted to compile my thoughts on it both to put down on why I "hate" the game and what I think went wrong with TES as a whole.

It should be noted that everything here is my personal opinion based on my preferences, and that they will clash with what a lot of people actually LIKE about Skyrim, which also was a reason why I didn't really talk about it.

To me Skyrim is a massive tease. I'm completely starved for a game in the same vein as Morrowind as there's simply nothing that comes close to it. Morrowind is still one of my all time favorites but by now has seriously aged, so has Oblivion which I wasn't THAT fond of, so I'd love something new.

So why not get Skyrim then?

The problem is just all the issues overpower all the possible positives.

I sometimes mentioned to friends "In order for me to enjoy Skyrim you'd need to change one thing, make the game not be Skyrim!".

Now that may sound asinine and harsh but let me explain what I mean in detail:

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## **The Plot:**

Biggest issue for me right off the bat. It's a Dragon slayer plot. And don't try to say "they're only dragon like creatures, not real dragons"... they are CALLED dragons in game, you get the DRAGON abilities from them, they stem from a great DRAGON. It is what it is.

To me that is a gigantic turnoff. I like Dragons, be it as characters or just as intelligent animals, but not as them just being there for the slaughter. And in terms of TES it's an even bigger slap to the face.

In the past Bethesda basically held the stance of "instead of putting Dragons into the main games and doing it badly we'd rather not do them at all and keep them a mystery". A pretty noble stance that they sadly broke the worst way possible.

Dragons in Skyrim are nothing like they had set up in the game's lore.

They were supposedly massive city sized beasts, they could easily take on armies and win. Additionally they were smart and intelligent, able to interact with the humanoid population.

Capable of doing great magic, even transformation which is a nearly godly power. And also, they were allies with the empire, there were very few of them left that lived in seclusion in the mountains, both as protectors of the empire and protected by the empire.

You don't see ANYTHING like that in Skyrim. The dragons are tiny compared to their lore description, you could take them on easily, hell a hand full of people could bring one down. They behave as dumb as you can imagine, just mindless attack beasts and there is pretty much zero interaction with them aside slaughtering. Of them wielding great magic, almost nothing. And their alliance with the empire and its people, simply forgotten like so many details of the lore that made TES interesting.

And what makes it even worse for me, not only did they turn Dragons evil and made you kill them, they had to do the whole "enslave their SOULS" part. For me that's just insult to injury. As a little side note, this also hit me quite a bit as the announcement and trailers for skyrim came out just a bit after I had watched "How to train you Dragon" which did dragons wonderfully. Then seeing it all go back to square one of having them just evil beasts to kill was a bit of a gut punch.

Especially because TES is quite a bit of a market dictator believe it or not, to the point where the typical Skyrim helmet, the goofy looking one with the bent down horns, was implemented as a homage in Dark Soul 2.

On side plots, I'll just mention that abysmal Thieves Guild quest. If you want a detailed analysis of it check here: <http://www.shamusyoung.com/twentysidedtale/?p=14422>

### **The Setting:**

The province of Skyrim simply said is dull.

Snow, Ice and Rocks, that's 90% of the overworld. The color pallet is mostly gray and brown.

Now you may say "Well it is set in the mountains and the far north", that doesn't mean it all has to look so boring and dull. Look at pictures of Iceland and Norway. Plus it's a Fantasy setting, they could have done a lot more there.

If this IS the only thing they can do with the location then they should have chosen something that allows more variety than that.

**ADDITION:** After having played "Kholat", which is set in the Ural mountains of Russia, in winter, at NIGHT, during a snowstorm, it uses color and saturation WAY better. The game is much more ice, snow and rocks than Skyrim, and it manages to give you color, brightness and vibrance by using it where it is most effective. Campfires are glowing beacon in the cold wastes, finding yourself in the cave systems that have veins of plants growing through them, all that makes even such a cold and harsh environment appear "warm" at times.

So no, a cold environment does not mean it has to be constantly bleak and desaturated.

### **The Combat:**

One thing that sealed the deal for me that combat would be dull was seeing one of their promotional videos where an enemy was sliced right across the throat... and it did nothing different than a slice in the leg would have been.

Hitpoint only based systems are OK, but they don't allow for a lot of variety.

Plus the different weapon types really don't have much difference aside range and how much damage they do per hit. With arrows you have that annoying "arrow to the knee" joke, sadly it doesn't matter where an arrow hits, it always does the same damage. I still have my anecdote from Oblivion where I pelted a mountain lion with 50 arrows to the skull which barely hurt it, all because my archery skill was too low compared to the level scaling (which itself is a terrible idea).

### **The Argonians:**

This was one of the main points that drew me into TES. A reptilian race that's playable and NOT declared as stupid or evil? In an open world RPG? That was a dream come true back in the day. Sure the walking animation was silly and they had some problems with being implemented right (as I later learned one reason being they weren't meant to be playable at first so more or less a last minute addition) but it was something I loved.

Then there came the changes they did for Oblivion, made their bodies much more humanoid, gave them human feet and stance and generally removed quite a bit of their reptilian looks... hell they didn't even have finger claws anymore.

And sadly those changes persisted into Skyrim. While they did change their faces and they do have finger claws now there is one thing that annoyed me. They had to add face details (the spikes and horns) that are irremovable and the females just look... wrong somehow (mainly the necks I think).

Also... there are almost none. There's only around 20 in the entire vanilla game.

Once again, if you say "we'll it's a cold environment, there wouldn't be that many", well that once again speaks for Skyrim being either a bad choice of location OR they should have been more creative with HOW they do their environment.

### **The Gameplay:**

I long suggested that climbing should make a return.

Looking at games like GTA, when climbing was introduced in San Andreas it made the game world so much more open and accessible, it gave the map designers much more freedom and exploration was much more than "I can maybe clip my way into there". Hell you could have added climbing gear giving you ton of vertical movement.

In addition, crawling and shimmying your way through narrow opening could have added a lot, make dungeons and cave crawling much more interesting both to explore and design.

Dishonored, while it has the advantage of no character model for the player so it could simply raise and lower the camera, was a great example of the character adapting to different heights and squeezing under narrow opening. Also the climbing there was very good, allowing you to pull yourself up nearly everywhere. Same with GTA Online where the climbing on rocks and small *overhangs* is fantastically done.

But as you have in TES now, there is no climbing so all places you can get on top of on either need a staircase if at max jumping height or a conveniently placed ladder. All opening you can fit through have to accommodate you while standing upright and need to be wide enough to fit shoulder width.

This makes the game world very stiff and unnatural and limits interaction with the environment aside pre-programmed locations.

And while this has been an issue in Morrowind already, there you at least had levitation to get around. Something they did away with in Oblivion since they had completely enclosed cities you weren't supposed to levitate over. And of course it was not brought back for Skyrim so all environments have to be tailored to the limitations in movement and interaction.

### **The Inventory:**

Seriously, the inventory in Oblivion was already annoying, but in Skyrim they managed to make it even worse.

No quick info unless you click on it, no preview images, only a full render that takes up half of the screen, a line inventory instead of a grid that allows more objects to be shown.

I remember I did suggest a 3D item viewer some time before Skyrim came out, but I meant that as an addition, not a replacement of the previews.

Sadly this seems to be something they have carried over from Fallout as that had the inventory in such a manner. That was not something I wanted to be used.

### **The broken Immersion:**

This is a big one, something that has already grown from Oblivion onward.

Sit or get up from a chair, forces you in third person to watch it. Mount or dismount your horse, forces you out of first person. Get knocked out, camera leaves your body. In Morrowind the only time you got forced out of first person was when you died.

Now in Skyrim they again went to implement things from Fallout, a frigging Kill Cam. To me that just shows that they don't give a damn about the immersion anymore, it's much more catered to a third person action game than a first person adventure.

I also often advocated for seeing your body in first person, but again this is something that didn't really happen. Though mods for New Vegas have made that possible, and working quite nicely (not even replacing the classic first person but adding an additional view) this just doesn't seem to happen by default.

### **The abandoned Lore:**

This one hurts quite a bit regarding TES as a whole. The universe had awesome lore that really set it apart from a lot of other fantasy. If you read the in game books they have great details about the world, the provinces, their looks and climates and customs. But sadly more and more is getting stripped and replaced with vanilla fantasy material.

Cyrodill was originally a tropical jungle, the empire a mixture of Meso-american and Roman culture (partially still reflected in Morrowinds armor and weapon design), many tribes living along the massive rivers cutting through the land, the imperial city itself being a massive city-state with the main island being roughly the size of the England. That all sounds amazing... but look with what it was replaced with in Oblivion.

Mild middle European climate, no jungles, only small forests, everything looking medieval instead. There just wasn't any creativity in it anymore.

Even more than that, the Dwemer which they had some interesting ideas for in Morrowind got the same treatment. While in Morrowind their clothing and weapon designs were very inspired by Mesopotamian designs, the concept arts practically looking like an impression of it. The Dwemer armor almost looked like the shell of a Robot which it very well could have been, or hell some kind of primitive power armor. They had invented electric lighting and incredible steam powered machine, some remains you could find outside ruins were actually walking ballistas. And regarding their size, they may have been called Dwarfs but from what you can see of Dwemer ghosts they were as tall, if not a bit taller, than Bosmer, so they weren't that small. A lot of that has been lost in Oblivion, they are now short people, their armors and weapons look nothing like they did before (hate to use the term generic fantasy too much but that's what it boils down to). The ruins aren't the mechanical and technological marvels anymore, just more of the old decayed places of stone.

While you could say "they just wanted to take it a different direction", I personally think that direction wasn't a good idea, it took something down to a base level that was interesting and fresh.

### **The Consolization:**

This might seem like an insult but it's not meant as one. It is largely though the simplification so it's playable on consoles, and sadly that has torn quite a chunk of it out.

I mentioned the inventory, and sadly that was one of the reasons for why it was done that way.

Also the Journal, which I really loved in Morrowind once I installed the Expansions which added a lot of new functions, sadly is only a shadow of what it was. Sure the chronological logging system in Morrowind was a bit messy but could have been fixed. What was great though was that it actually logged every person you talked to and every single conversation you had and the discussion topics. THAT is fantastic but sadly never repeated.

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### **Conclusion:**

I think this largely concludes my thoughts on the matter. There are still a few smaller ones like the skill system that I'd need to get more in depth to.

Now, you may think "There are a lot of mods for Skyrim and you don't have to play the main story". That is true but sadly, that doesn't fix a lot of the issues.

Even if I don't play the main story it still is always there and meaning a huge chunk of the game would just be there for nothing and there would be zero progression in the world with a lot of items and content inaccessible.

And as for mods...

### **Combat:**

Yes there are mods that overwork the combat, sadly that doesn't fix the engine being rather unfit for it and the animation being too twitchy and sudden to have good combat.

### **Game world:**

There are many overhauls that make the world less dull, but most dungeons and towns are still all the same looking. In Morrowind you had the styled of 4 different cultures all mixed together and more added with the expansions. You had towns that looked radically different both in Architecture and based on their environment. In Skyrim the differences are meek at best.

### **Argonians:**

The best mod I saw adds a whole 20 new Argonian NPCs, and the designs don't change a lot. Mods that change their legs are experimental at best and as far as I know, cause complications with armors.

### **Gameplay:**

There's only so much that mods can do here. Especially as that would include having to change a ton of the game's environments to be worth it.

### **Inventory:**

Again only so much that can be done or is done.

**Broken Immersion:**

Yes some things can be done here and kill cam is optional.

**Abandoned Lore:**

This sadly is permanent damage. There would simply be far too much to be able to fix this issue and restore it to something unique and fascinating.

Sadly it also seems like this will be the way the series will go in the future as well. Dragons will stay evil, the lore is pretty much gone, there's no sight of better combat or implementing more interactive gameplay and the immersion remains a low tier priority.

It's especially a letdown after "Shivering Isles" was such a gem. The game world looked fantastic, varied and vivid, it has original ideas, some dark humor, it even hinted to the orders of Oblivion (the plane of existence) getting changed. It was such a breath of fresh air in a game that was mediocre for the largest part. Skyrim just tore that last pillar of hope down for good.

To me TES is pretty much lost and would require a serious reboot and retool to spark my interest again. While there are rumors that the next game would be set in Black Marsh, the home of the Argonians, all I can really think of is, "what excuse will they use to justify making the population primarily elves and humans".