

A GAMER'S DESIGN
PHILOSOPHY AND IMPROVEMENTS
FOR

PANTHEON

RISE OF THE FALLEN



by Tom Hart

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION - What is this document?

This document is to express my own personal design preferences for *Pantheon Rise of the Fallen*, to formulate the design philosophy and improvements I want to experience.

In no way is this document part of the official development of Pantheon. I have not played Pantheon and have only followed it's development minimally. My only intent is to discover what can improve the game.

1.2 INTRODUCTION - Brief Overview of the game

Pantheon Rise of the Fallen is a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG). Set in the world of Terminus. Focused on challenging gameplay and social interaction, with a emphasis on group involvement. It's design is focused on a return to how mmorpgs used to be.

1.3 INTRODUCTION - What are the major Aspirations I want developed in Pantheon?

- ❑ Innovate how players experience a secondary world.
- ❑ Simulate a believable world.
- ❑ Reimagine the basics of role playing game standards.
- ❑ Make the core game loop of magic and melee combat original and enjoyable to play.
- ❑ Heavily depend gameplay on social interaction.
- ❑ Design zone layout, antagonizers and abilities for the best adventures possible.
- ❑ Discover the journey.

2 DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

2.1 DESIGN - What Features do I care about?

- ☐ Visual Style
- ☐ Audio Style
- ☐ Large explorable world
- ☐ Zone design
- ☐ Interesting Lore: NPCs, Places, Fictional History,
- ☐ Progression
- ☐ Rich Character Classes
- ☐ Variety of Races and monsters
- ☐ Marching troops, NPC Hierarchies, living NPCs

2.2 DESIGN - What Features do I least care about?

- ☐ Combat
- ☐ Mechanics
- ☐ Platforming
- ☐ Invasive Gameloops

2.3 DESIGN - How could Pantheon be poorly designed?

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ No over the top animations | ☐ Limited world building |
| ☐ Not for lowest common denominator | ☐ Too focused on the technical |
| ☐ No hand Holding | ☐ Too much extrinsic Risk & Reward |
| ☐ Player not the chosen one | ☐ Simplistic visual and audio |
| ☐ No current trendy Features | ☐ Clunky movement and control |
| ☐ No rails | |

2.4 DESIGN - My Concerns of Pantheon's game design?

Limited world building

There's plenty of world building in Pantheon but none of the current lore I've read is solid enough to get excited for the world. Maybe Pantheon needs famous characters that give the world a believable sense of purpose. It could also do with some solid grounding in the conflicts between factions and a sense that certain lore has an effect of eagerly awaiting player's future experience.

Wow has Orcs vs humans war. +huge amounts of iconic world building.

EQ2 has Antonia and Lucan and cataclysm

Eve has The 4 races and the lore behind them

I need a stronger sense of what is happening in Terminus, simple enough it can be expressed in an image or in other forms of art.

Too Technically minded

Technically plenty of thought is placed on classes, races and gear etc but I would like to see more in relation to the character of the environment and of the world. Something I thought EQ did well. EQ had *character* with its items, places, npcs etc. I want to see more magical creation in Pantheon.

Extrinsic Risk and reward

This might just be me but rewarding me in a game-loop to keep me playing doesn't interest me longer than 15 min. Maybe I can play a game for a couple of days before the hook wears off. Modern games have made me dislike it, immensely.

I want intrinsic risk and reward. Make the game about me and my adventure and what I experience. Which involves challenge and limitations that can be overcome with a great deal of effort.

Visuals

I like how Pantheon has improved visually but I feel it's still a long way from looking great. I think spr and pbr would go far to improve Pantheon. Terrain and structures look flat.

Audio

I'm not sure I like the Combat Audio. The Clunk sounds and slash sounds sometimes sound fun and other time i find them annoying. I prefer when sounds match what I watching, otherwise the sound seems arbitrary.

Movement

Movement needs a smoothstep Maybe it removed but in newer videos movement is really abrupt.

2.5 DESIGN - What is the most important aspect of a mmorpg?

Content is the number one priority for a mmorpg. This involves plenty of NPCs to defeat, the way the zones are structured, a fun game loop and limitations to force players to progress to visit further lands. I want content to connect to other content in creative ways so it creates a sense of a living world and not looking at stuff.

2.6 DESIGN - What should be the basic foundation of Pantheon's Game Design?

Drip-Drop progression through group play to further experience the secondary world.

2.7 DESIGN - How should players experience the core game?

Epic Journeys, Fun Encounters.

What is fun?

Fun is the experience of feedback created by the player's control of an action or change, limited by game mechanics solved through skill that the player is actively engaged with.

What is Epic?

We are curious by nature, to learn of new possibilities and what we might become. When we have a new experience, one that is inline with our own personality, it draws us in and tells us where we are going. Interests have a story to tell and tell in detail what they are for and what they are.

What are game Mechanics?

At play are rules designed to create an experience out of physical representations. A working game mechanic is when the right rules are properly combined to incentives and stimulate the player to achieve.

The experience = Fun + Epic + Game Mechanics.

2.8 DESIGN - How should players learn to play?

It should not be in their interest to teach players how to play. Though it should be intuitive enough to discover how to play and not lose that knowledge. The world should be explored. Straight from the start the game should be a adventure into the unknown.

2.9 DESIGN - How should Game Flow be incorporated into challenges?

The most vital role of game design is balancing skill and difficulty to create game flow. Primarily do this with structured level design and structured npc encounters. The purpose of this structure is to commit players to the game.

Give players plenty of routes of advancement while causing many types of tough challenges as alternatives to the regular forms of play. That can be done with controlling the obstacles at play that have varied difficulty.

2.10 DESIGN - How can the early stages of the game be enjoyable?

The aim should be to bring players into a new experience. This experience should be fun and social. Involving many aspects of a simulated world whereby players can *game-the-system* to feel empowered.

2.11 DESIGN - How should the world of Terminus feel believable?

Aim for a simulation of a high fantasy world with locations, characters and story that form a feeling of being in a secondary world. Environments and locations should be primarily designed for lore, character, story and believability instead of hooking players through ease of play.

NPCs should exist in hierarchies, with alignments and goals fitting to their need, wants and persuasion. Players should be immersed into the mythology of the region they in, using voice overs, quests(perception) and npc needs.

How can complex systems be abstracted?

By using data from the real world the essence of interactions can be abstracted using **disparity** (odds of it happening), **alignment** (comparison to a neighbour), **cohesion** (algorithms, seeds and rules), and **separation** (it's distinctiveness in a hierarchy).

2.12 DESIGN - What would cause players to return time and time again?

Terminus should be a world filled with story and adventure. Players should be excited to return and discover how events continue to unfold at a global scale and also for the personal stories players experience with npcs and other players.

2.13 DESIGN - How does Risk vs Reward effect Gameplay?

Mechanics should be in place to create Intrinsic reward from content.

Intrinsic reward is how the player thinks and feels about their own game experience and extrinsic reward is how the game rewards with developing your avatar or your position the game places you in.

Gameplay should be defined by ability. Either a player succeeds or fails. I have a disdain for percentage chances, Random Number generators, loot boxes or other forms of gambling.

How do we get feedback from intrinsic rewards?

Players receive feedback from intrinsic rewards by challenging ingame rules so positive change can provide a sense of accomplishment. Feedback is given to players through positive change by involving players in dynamic systemic gameplay.

What is Dynamic Systemic Gameplay?

Dynamic systemic gameplay could also be called a dynamic system of interactive fundamentals. The purpose of such a system is to create intrinsic reward from choice. By interacting with a range of actors, that form vertically and horizontally, and can move between authorities, the player gains a synergy with the game world because the weight of choice is lifted when the system is mastered, which improves immersion.

2.14 GAMEPLAY - What's my perspective on role playing games?

The basics of a RPG is to take upon a role in a living breathing world and to enact change upon the world. I do not want a mmorpg based just on simple results or only on changes to my character but instead allow me to alter the simulated world. I want choice to be a major part of the game, in every encounter, to have a butterfly effect on the stories taking place.

My view of how encounters should be done in a rpg is based on making decision for myself and my party that result in a change to the narrative of my journey.

3 GAMEPLAY

3.1 GAMEPLAY - Features I like inspired from other games.

- 01.Repetition with Exploration of Final Fantasy for Progression
 - **Rhythm**: a hypnotic use of responsive clean ui, brought about by exploring. That incentivises players to continue.
- 02.Environmental-Storytelling of Bioshock Infinite's for archetypal Level Design.
 - **Framework**: Environments tell a story connecting story to gameplay.
- 03.Immersion of Arma for challenging conflict.
 - **Vigilance**: Strong NPCs challenge the player. Making the player vigilant to predators and hunters.
- 04.Innovation of The Elder Scrolls Oblivion through World Building
 - **Brilliance**: The world feels alive through the use of simulated trickery.
- 05.Uniqueness of Warcraft 3 to build character
 - **Respective**: The choices players make form a player's bearings in relation to the lore. This is done by coalescing unique npc / faction lore with game mechanics and features.
- 06.Character Traits of League of Legends to deepen conflict
 - **Variant**: a rich variety of NPCs change the course of the experience with a multitude of possibilities.
- 07.Nemesis System of Shadows of Mordor for Global Narrative
 - **In/famous**: Players remove or install characters into position of power to effect global narratives.
- 08.Graded Game Loops of XCOM for Interlocking Goals
 - **Purpose**: Quest system to produce change to the world through different types of gameplay at multiple levels of interaction.

3.2 GAMEPLAY - What should be the Core Game Loop?

The core loop is to risk death by mastering the environments harsh game mechanics. Such as Trains, darkness of night, corpse run, de-leveling, unlucky pulls and hidden traps. Master the environment and move to a new one and master the environment again.

3.3 GAMEPLAY - What will improve combat?

Mechanically I have no idea how combat can be improved. Single player games are years ahead of mmos. Any attempt to improve mmo combat feels 15 years outdated.

The best way to improve combat is to improve it indirectly by improving Zone design. Combat is improved by creating a better metagame.

3.4 GAMEPLAY - What will improve zone design?

A lot can improve zone design. Such as well designed paths, troughs, corridors, NPC pathing, NPC spawn placement, guildmaster placement, merchant placement, trap placement and adding a need for unique class skills. A zone can be more than open space and linear corridors.

3.5 GAMEPLAY - What will improve the rpg in mmorpgs?

To me rpgs are all about distinctive sets of attributes. Skin colour, language, profession, height, a physical body, a non physical body, an affinity for a type of magic, skills, etc. The more a mmorpg can distinguish between characters the stronger their role entails a place in the world. Along with this distinctiveness come positives and negatives. To a certain degree the game should be built around these positives and negatives so they are not too overbearing but on the whole bring players into a world that is as harsh and challenging as it needs to be.

3.6 GAMEPLAY - How should players quest?

Players should be able to give themselves a purpose, that drives the story of Terminus. Thousands of interactive triggers help players find a purpose. This can be part of the perception system at a meta scale. That uses local perception triggers as part of grander quests. Players should gain snippets of knowledge to work out what they want to do, without having to follow rails.

A abstract "quest" could have a set of attributes that emergently interacts with NPCs and other triggers that form a story of sorts.

3.7 GAMEPLAY - How should threat and risk be handled?

Players who step out into the world should meet many creatures and beings of various alignment and affinity. If someones rubbed the wrong way they could become enemies or maybe they don't like others for their race or faction. We should experience plenty of antagonists, some more dangerous than others. Some regions should be populated only by murderous npcs while other regions should be highly safe. You should have to keep an eye of your surroundings. Sometimes you should have to flee a fair distance.

Zone layouts shouldn't be created for a easy experience. There should be dangers and obstacles. Player should expect to learn to lose and to help others through the dangerous journey.

3.8 GAMEPLAY - How should death penalties work?

I believe the challenge a rpg should have must be based upon the challenges your role involves. The further you progress in your role, the harder the challenge and the worse the punishment should be-for failure.

- A. I want the player to have goals, to fail at a goal is not to go backwards but to lose out on that goal. There should not be artificial penalties but you should be able to fail, that failure will have an effect on the world.
- or
- B. Players should be beaten, items taken and lose xp. These changes to your character will be short term and easily re-earned. The more you learn the game, the faster and further you should rise back up.

3.9 GAMEPLAY - How should players advance their Character?

1. I would like to see short term progression at building up attributes that fall over time. This should be a simple 10-20 min game that puts you in peak fitness so players can feel they are advancing in a single game session. The

system could be mastered by learning how to boom your fitness in a short amount of time.

2. The second form of advancement is affinity skills, affinity points that go towards disciplines. Affinity calculates the power-effect of skills. Using abilities based on choices you make throughout the game have a effect on your affinity, which allows what skills you are a master of.
3. The main form of advancement should be xp and levels. Gaining new abilities that are trained or brought from a trainer.

3.10 GAMEPLAY - What is the role of gear?

Gear in rpgs has come to feel mostly useless. A minor dopamin fix, a little reward for your efforts. I would like gear to play a more integral role in the game.

The easiest way to give gear a purpose is to allow gear to have a higher life span. This means less level dependent gear. Gear could also be used through it's lore to triggers spawns, loot drops and perception notifications.

3.11 GAMEPLAY - How should classes be balanced?

They shouldn't be balanced. Apart from looking at the statistics and measurements classes power shouldn't be based on whimsical opinion.

Players should believe their class is overpowered without it actually being so. This can be done by having advantages to a class that others don't have.

3.12 GAMEPLAY - What types of Classes could Pantheon have?

Five possible types of class.

- Heal: Primary action is to heal other players, weak mitigation, with low damage (Priest, Diviner)
- Damage Dealers: Primary to cause huge amounts of damage, weak mitigation (Diabolist, Berserker)
- Crowd Control: Primarily to control the state of NPCs, weak mitigation, low damage (Illusionist, Banshee)
- Tank: Primarily soak up damage and mitigate damage, low damage (Battlemage, Dreadknight)
- Sustain: A balanced class that can do everything okay. (beastmaster, Spiritualist, Necromancer)

4 EXPLORATION

4.1 EXPLORATION - Destination or journey?

I want a mmorpg to have a world so large it's not all explorable and is not easily traversed. Exploration and travelling should be a major role of a mmorpg. It could take days to get to a location but it should be enjoyable along the way with plenty of people to travel with and plentiful challenges to tackle.

4.2 EXPLORATION - What could be done while traveling?

There should be routes of various Levels and group sizes so traveling across terrain is like traveling through a dungeon.

Survival mechanic such as setting up camp every 4-8 hours to rest to re-acclimate gear.

4.3 EXPLORATION - How should zone layout effect play?

Zones should be designed to produce fun through exploration and interaction. By following a path players should be sent onto a journey filled with wonder and excitement. A great deal of scenery should catch the eye with plenty of key locations to give the world a rich ingame history, along with focal points to create an artistic serenity.

It shouldn't take long for explorers to find new locations along the journey. Every twenty to forty seconds something new should be found throughout the open world that the player can use or engage with.

The open world should liberate players giving them plenty to do, with no guidance telling them what to do. Allow players to become lost in the world, never feeling their efforts are wasted.

4.4 EXPLORATION - What will improve the sense of existing in a virtual world?

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5 LORE & STORY

5.1 LORE - What playable races would I like to see?

Human - With several variants. Including halflings, Giants, barbarians, non magic capable races, highly magic capable races and various complexions.



Gnomes - Maybe this is how gnomes looked before they lost their physical form or these could be Halflings



Elfs - More Elves: Snow Elf, High Elf, Wood Elf, Blood Elf, Night Elf, Dark Elf.



New races

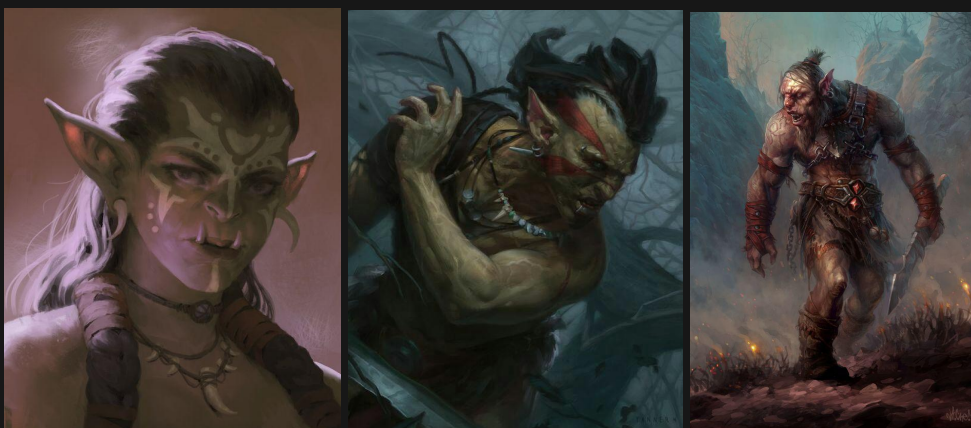
Eidolon - A black skinned neanderthal race with shamanic powers.



Saran. Pink skin psycho orc race. Die to become spirits to be reborn. Older Sarin turn into goblins known as the sullied.



Tarin. Green skin Orc race like the Na'vi in Avatar.



Bloodsire - DA:Os Darkspawn race. A plague. Skar?



Lizardmen - Archai?



Nymphs - Dark Myr?



5.2 LORE - What prominent locations could exist?

The Kingdoms, the Imperium, the hinterlands, the great wilderness, the old forest, the free cities, the wastelands, the enchanted forest, the underhalls, and nightfall. Elven Lands, netheriel (Snow Elves) and dark moira (Dark Elves).

The Empire, orc lands, the desert of the damned, Kiado rainforest, Nepherket (witches land), Majuna (Dunes), Titan Steppes, Yetahnu desert, Erambis savanna and Neath (town of mythical races).

Also the Crimson Isle and Livatica (the moon). The eight dimensional worlds exist alongside the natural world.

5.3 LORE - How should players experience story and lore in Pantheon?

Aim to use story to push forward players desire to achieve.

Use the perception system further to attach lore to a npc characters backstory for players to interacted with. In the form of conversations, books and art. That match the character of a NPC. In this sense the lore can be a history of the simulation, and form a mythology.

5.4 LORE - How can the backstory of Terminus be improved?

Fragmented civilization from various realms and time has a fun dnd vibe but does seem overly chaotic and disjointed. More should be known about the fiction, about these multiple realms pieced together. What forces are at play? How do these forces affect the player? What effects are seen across the divides? What magical properties do the realms have. What prominent characters are effected by or effect the cataclysm. Do these various realms have a history of conflict with each other?

5.5 STORY - Who could be the powerful characters of Terminus?

I suggest:

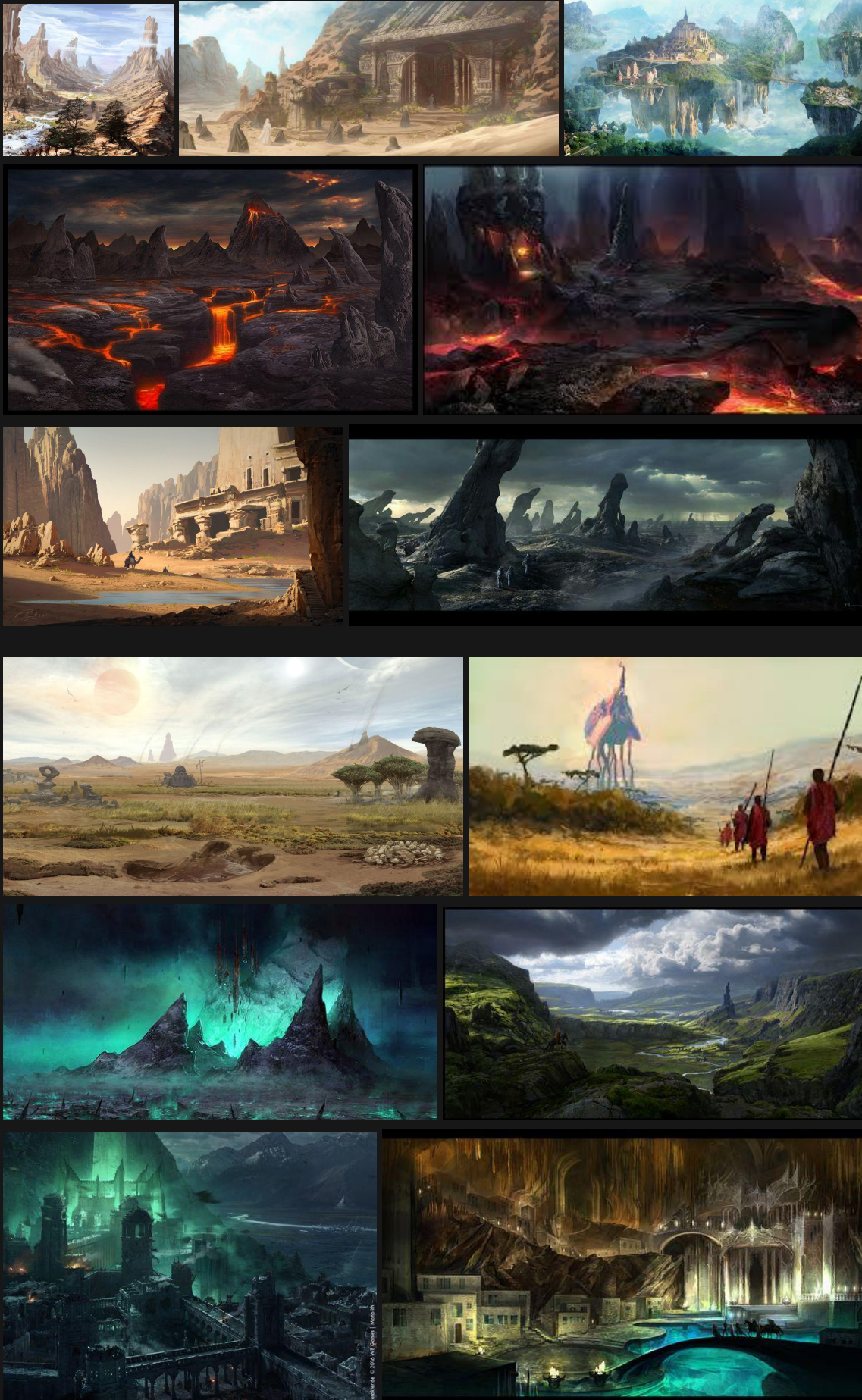
A Dark Lord	A Nemesis	A necromancer
		
A grand wizard	A rightful King	A Elven Queen
		

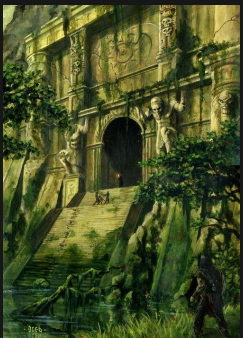
5.6 STORY - How should individual players bring together the wider narratives to have an effect on other players?

Pantheon should have a hierarchy of NPC groups and individuals, who make up factions, that compete for what they depend upon; calculated by rules, involving resources, tax, resolve and knowledge, that player action has an effect on.

6 VISUALS

6.1 VISUALS - Environment concept art





6.2 VISUALS - Zone layouts

