

Levels of Reality and Artifice in *The Talos Principle*

The Talos Principle is a 3D puzzle-solving game built on philosophical and religious tones in which the character Elohim has created a number of subworlds and levels like the Garden of Eden. As the player – an android, presumably alone after an apocalypse – explores these environments, the musical design of the game enriches the player’s experience, and also provides clues and questions to what is real and what is not. The music is just as key to gameplay as the visuals in unfolding the story. While the desolate, snowy overworld is convincingly real in its sonic and graphic depiction, the subworlds are somewhat more digital and glitchy. There is an intentional exoticism to the music of these subworlds, which uses an unorthodox blend of non-Western instruments to suggest a fantastical environment rather than one based on reality. Other clues subtly suggest that the world’s existence is unstable, furthering the artificiality. Voice is a factor in shifting the player’s frame of relative reality based on which characters they may trust. The player uncovers evidence in gameplay that the overworld is just another layer of artificiality, most effectively found in the sound design. I analyze and compare instrumentation and sound cues, voice as it applies in theory and in practice, and the sound designer’s use of sonic glitches to reveal how attention to the sonic environment reveals crucial aspects of the game and reflects the information revealed in plot development.