GAMING IN ARCHAEOLOGY

July 29, 2011   Katy Meyers   Community Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2011, Digital Archaeology, Education   Academia, advisors,Anthropology, Archaeological sub-disciplines, archaeologist, Archaeology,Community Archaeology, Creative Commons, digital archaeologist/video game designer, head video game designer, indiana jones, Lara Croft, Marta Manso, Sid Meier

Today for me is probably not what you would call a typical archaeologist's day; although it has become quite typical for me. I'm the head video game designer on the project Red Land Black Land. The game we are designing is a modification of Sid Meier's Civilization V and is going to serve as an educational game about the development of Ancient Egypt. The game has an archaeological spin to it, in that we are modifying the advisors to be archaeologists instead of economists, diplomats or scientists.

Today I'm primarily working on the development of dialogue and content to the game. Instead of making witty remarks and pithy banter, the characters will have historically and archaeologically accurate facts to teach the players. Every word that comes from the advisors is based on archaeological, historical, or textual evidence. The work itself is actual quite similar to trying to prepare to do any fieldwork or analysis of Ancient Egypt, except instead of applying this knowledge to create questions for fieldwork I am developing questions that players can explore in the game.

Archaeology has had a bumpy relationship with video games. Characters like Indiana Jones and Lara Croft play on stereotypes that we as archaeologists have worked so hard to dispel. Through mainstream video games, the archaeologist is akin to an imperial looter, stealing from 'primitive' cultures and disregarding any from of academic or scientific process. Its not like Dr. Jones took the time to take careful notes on the provenience of the golden idol before having to make a mad dash out of the tomb. By creating accessible and most importantly fun video games that accurately represent archaeology and the process of interpreting the past we can help to create a better public understanding of what we do.

But the digital archaeologist/video game designer is only a third of who I am. For my mortuary archaeology, check out my site Bones Don't Lie, and for public archaeology check out MSU Campus Archaeology

[Image from Flikr user Marta Manso and used under Creative Commons License]