Dystopia

AND
THE PLAYER

Stepping into Estranged Worlds

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Dystopia and the Player: Stepping into Estranged Worlds

Talk inspired and is based on:

Playing Dystopia
Nightmarish Worlds in Video Games and the Player's Aesthetic Response

https://www.transcript-verlag.de/detail/index/sArticle/4330

https://books.google.de/books/about/Playing_Dystopia.html?id=mRM0vAEACAAJ&redir_esc=y

https://www.amazon.de/Playing-Dystopia-Nightmarish-Aesthetic-Medienkultur/dp/3837645975/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1541699007&sr=8-2&keywords=playing+Dystopia

https://www.amazon.co.uk/Playing-Dystopia-Nightmarish-Aesthetic-Response/dp/3837645975/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1541699026&sr=8-1&keywords=playing+dystopia+farca

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# Stepping into Estranged Worlds

Stepping into Estranged Worlds

- **To go where others will not**, might not, dare not (Moylan 4).

- The … **pleasure in discovering and thinking through** the logic and consequences of an imagined world (Moylan xvi).

- **Estranged genres:** science fiction, utopia / dystopia, cyberpunk, posthuman, post-apocalypse, …

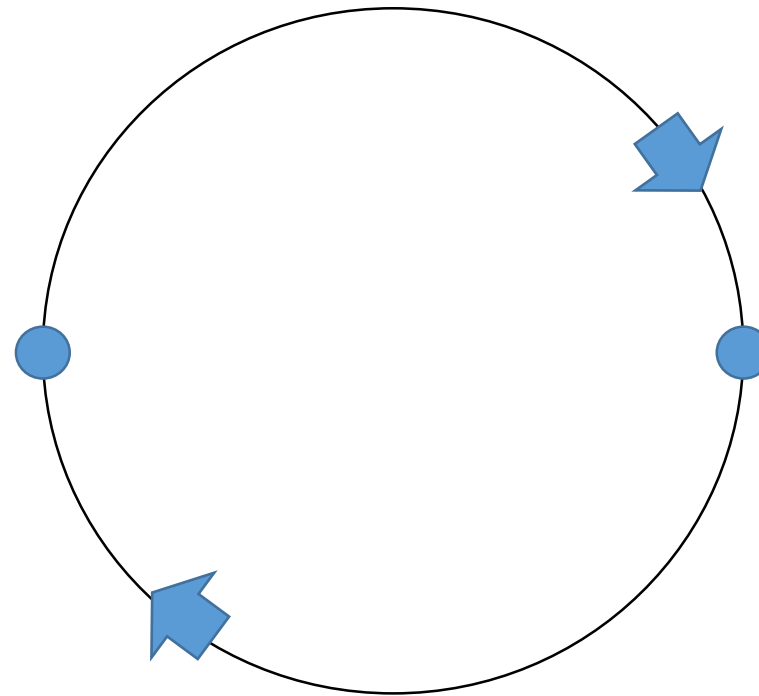# A Sense of Wonder

Empirical World and Fictional Alternate World

Empirical World in dialogue with **Fictional Alternate World**
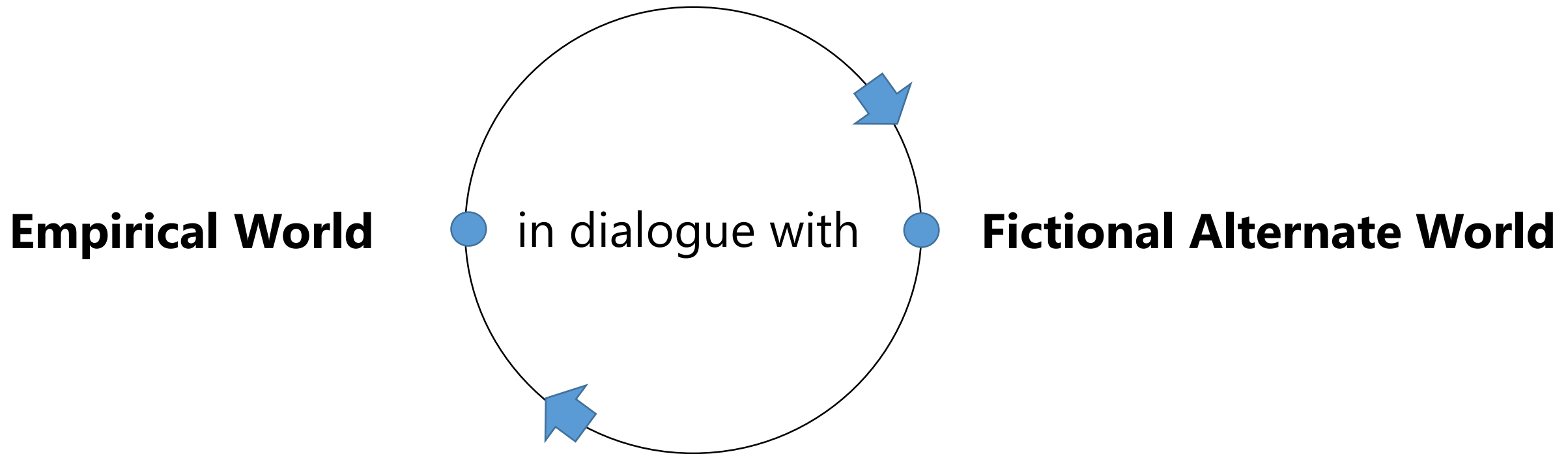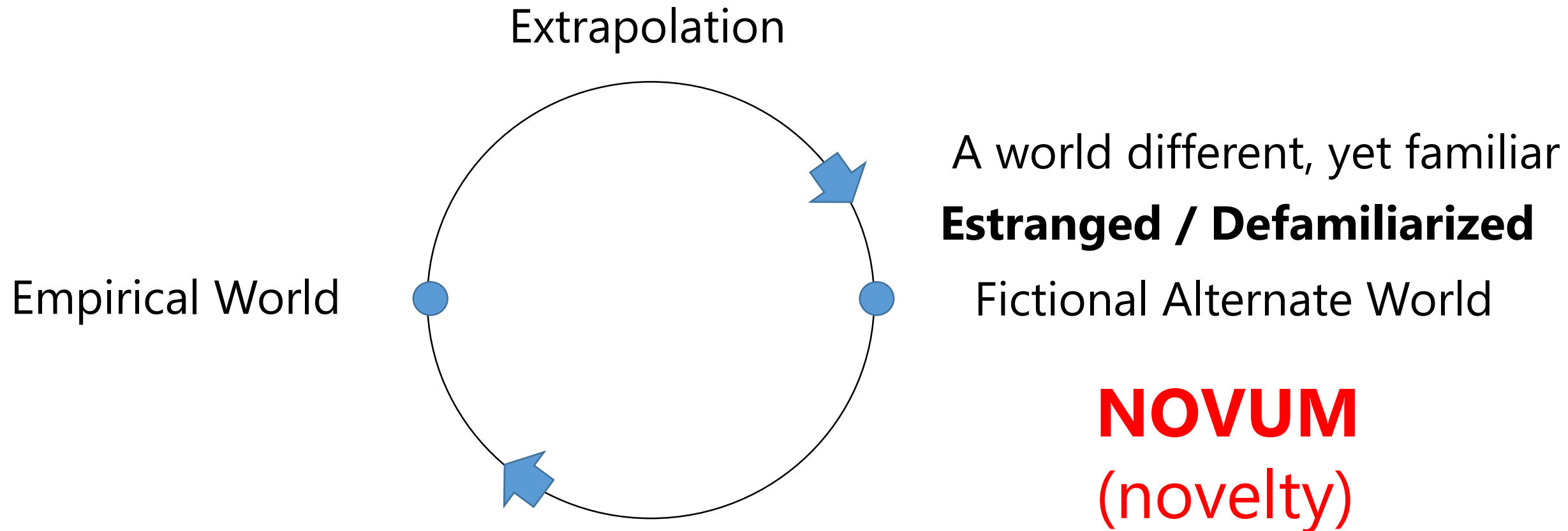
Extrapolation

Single Tendencies

Extrapolation

Potential Results of these Tendencies

Empirical World

Fictional Alternate World

Cognitive Estrangement

Extrapolation

Empirical World

A world different, yet familiar

Estranged / Defamiliarized

Fictional Alternate World

NOVUM
(novelty)

Feedback Oscillation

Estranged / Defamiliarized

Fictional Alternate World

Empirical World

Reader, Player

NOVUM

A New Perspective on the Empirical World
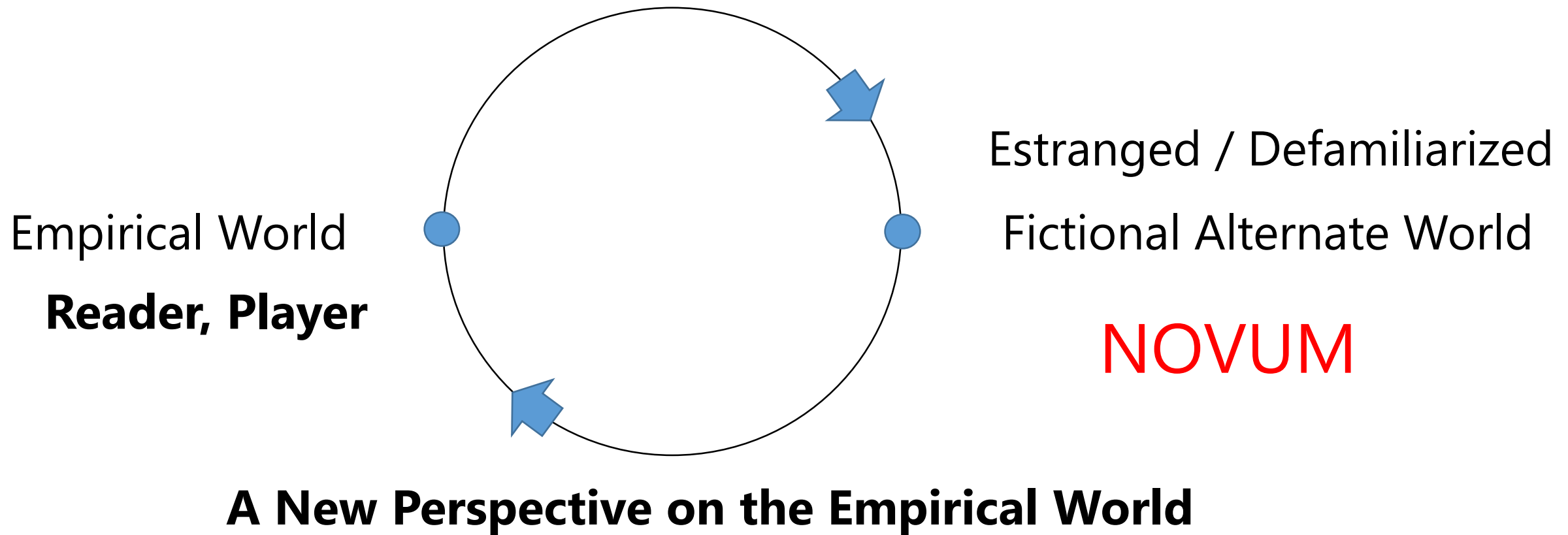
The Player as Traveler / Detective

- **A traveler in a foreign culture** or **a detective** seeking clues to unravel the mystery at hand (Moylan 7).

- **Stepping away from a known world** and yet always **in creative connection with it** (Moylan 24).

- **Decoding** the fictional alternate world.

  ➢ **Reorganization** of Assumptions and Knowledge.

Literary Utopia

(E)Utopia = the good non-place, 'not yet'.

– a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as **considerably better than the society in which that reader lived** (Sargent 9).

Literary Dystopia

Dystopia = the bad non-place, 'not yet'.

– a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as **considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived** (Sargent 9).

Dystopian WARNING

WARNING

Dystopian WARNING

- Alternative worlds to **foreground current** *social, political,* and *cultural* **issues**.

- **We Have To Act, Before It Is Too Late**

Typical Dystopian Plot (Despair)

<u>Narrative of the Hegemonic Order:</u>

Depiction of some sort of **oppressive regime or state**:

totalitarian state, multinational corporation, Artificial Intelligence, etc.

- **Oppression of the individual**.

- **Other targets:** socialism, overpopulation and environmental collapse, consumer capitalism, bureaucracy, surveillance, etc.

Typical Dystopian Plot (Hope)

Counter-Narrative (of Resistance):

Dissident / Deviate: process of gradual

realization of the dystopian circumstances.

- **Educational plot:** from apparent **contentment** into an **experience of**

  alienation.

- Individual or collective **RESISTANCE**. => **utopian horizon**

A WORLD DRAINED OF AGENCY

Jacobs 92

"The Stanley Parable"

Agency

Agency: the satisfying power **to take meaningful action** and to see the results of our decisions and choices (Murray 126).

The Capacity to **choose for oneself** and the capacity to **act upon one's choices** (Jacobs 92).

Lack of Agency in Dystopia

- **Agency** is compromised in the dystopia.

- The **otherwise thinking** individual **will be crushed**.

A Bureaucratic Consumer Capitalism

- **Cogs** in a bureaucratic mechanism the individual cannot grasp in its totality.

Faceless workers:

- **Lacking democratic agency** in a world oppressed by corporate power, alienating capitalism, and meaningless, servile daily routines.

- **Lack of identity:** oppressed subjectivity and free will.

Narrative of the Hegemonic Order

- **Stanley pushing buttons** in a meaningless servile routine (for 4 hours !!!)

- **Walking in loops** the entire game.

- **The "Matrix" ending:** the worst possible ending! => living in the simulation!

The Counter-Narrative

Stanley? Hello? Are you… is everything okay?

- **Estrangement** to see our world afresh.

- The attempt to **regain agency (breaking the rules)**.

- **Driving the narrator mad** and ruining his meticulously planned story.

- **Hope** lies with the player, not with Stanley => a classical dystopia.

- **WARNING**: **Do not become Stanley! Do something about it!**

Dystopia and the Player

- **Game world** as _fictional trial action_ for the player.

- **The player** as active participant in the counter-narrative.

- **The process of gradual realization** is experience by the player.

- **Player agency**: choice between resistance and compliance.

- **Personal responsibility !!! !!! !!!**

Thank you very much!

Any Questions?

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