Lecture 14

Storytelling & Progression
Players Need Discrete Progression

- **Analogy**: hiking to a mountain peak
  - Constantly making progress to top of mountain
  - Psychologically hard to recognize this progress
  - **Result**: take pride in reaching concrete landmarks

- Players need this discrete progress as well
  - Individual levels
  - Game worlds
  - Narrative or *storytelling*

Games without story
Players Need Discrete Progression

- **Analogy**: hiking to a mountain peak
  - Constantly making progress up mountain
  - Psychologically hard to recognize this progress
  - **Result**: take pride in reaching concrete landmarks

- Problem with endless games

- Players need this discrete progress as well
  - Individual levels
  - Game worlds
  - Narrative or *storytelling*

*Level Design*
Game as a Travelogue

Level Design
Travelogues are a Kind of Story

- Focus is on **journey**, not the characters

- Many examples in **literature**
  - *Gulliver’s Travels*
  - Classic heroic myths (e.g. Odyssey)
  - Epic fantasy (e.g. Tolkien)

- Problem is the **emotional impact**
  - One landmark is as good as any other
  - Can we achieve this without having narrative?
Emotional Progression: Apsis

1. Free Space
2. Short Winds
3. Obstacles
4. Wind
5. Obstacles
6. Free Space
7. HAWK
8. Long Wind
9. Free Space

Graph showing tension over time:
- Free Space increases tension
- Short Winds increases tension
- Obstacles decreases tension
- Wind increases tension
- Obstacles decreases tension
- HAWK decreases tension
- Long Wind decreases tension
- Free Space increases tension

Level Design
Emotional Progression: *Apsis*

1. **Beginning**: Open and enjoyable
2. **Action**: Wind currents
3. **Harder**: Obstacles introduced
4. **Increasing**: Faster wind
5. **Increasing**: More obstacles
Emotional Progression: *Apsis*

6. **Relaxing**: Open up again
7. **Harder**: Hawk appears
8. **Joy**: Wind escapes hawk
9. **Rest**: Journey reaches end
Gameplay vs. Narrative

- **Narrative**: non-interactive
  - Designer created narrative
  - Player experiences it
  - Even if there are choices

- **Gameplay**: interactive
  - Very definition of a game
  - Entirely player driven

- How do you combine these?
The **dynamic structure**

- How is story revealed?
- Relation to gameplay?
- Can story be “missed”?

**Examples:**

- Cut-scenes
- Character dialog
- In-game lore
- Game manual
Elements of Game Narrative

- **Characters**
  - Protagonist: player controlled character
  - Supporting characters: NPCs

- **Storyline**
  - How does the story progress?

- **Dialogue**
  - Story vehicle in games and fiction
  - Easy way to allow player choice
Elements of Game Narrative

• **Characters**
  • Protagonist: player controlled character
  • Supporting characters: NPCs

• **Storyline**
  • How does the story progress?

• **Dialogue**
  • Story vehicle
  • Easy way to allow player choice
  • Very niche in mobile games
Characters: Agency vs. Empathy

- Like gameplay vs. narrative dichotomy

- **Agency**: Character represents the player
  - Can be utilitarian (allowing player choice)
  - Can support role playing, creativity

- **Empathy**: Develop emotional bond
  - Hard if complete player control
  - Requires some predefined personality
Characters vs. Avatars

Character vs. Avatar

Interactive Storytelling
Computer vs. Player Control

Computer Control

Player Control

Interactive Storytelling
Characters and Monetization

Classic Equipped

Bomber Jacket

Area 51

Antarctica

Wetsuit

Catsuit

Midas Lara
Elements of Game Narrative

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**Interactive Storytelling**

*Very niche in mobile games*
**Storyline**

- **Linear Storytelling**: Designer directed
  - Success is adherence to story
  - Very easy to design (cutscenes!)
Example: *Fracture 2*
Example: *Fracture 2*
Example: *I Saw Her Standing There*

i loved her but she was a zombie.
so i put her safe in a cage.
Example: *I Saw Her Standing There*

i loved her but she was a zombie.  

so i put her safe in a cage.

Storyline acts as a tutorial, guiding us through the mechanics.
Going Meta: *Pretentious Game*

(R)ESET

I will break rules

Interactive Storytelling
Going Meta: *Pretentious Game*

**Deadly spike**

**Hint**
Introducing a Dramatic Arc

Interactive Storytelling

Exposition

Rising Action

Climax

Falling Action

Resolution

Narrative Time

Narrative Tension
Example: *Donkey Kong*

**Exposition, Act I**  
**Rising Action, Act II**
Example: *Donkey Kong*

Climax, Act III

Denouement
Example: Unravel
Example: Unravel
**Storyline**

- **Branching Storytelling**: Player directed
  - *Choose Your Own Adventure*
  - Content becomes very expensive!
Example: Storyteller

Can move characters in each timeline

Affects state in other timelines
Example: Today I Die

Can replace words in the poem

Affects state of the world

Used to be on App store. No longer available
Example: Year Walk
Aside: Year Walk and Story Vehicle

Årsgång
Year Walk

Year walking was at its core a vision quest with the purpose being to foresee the future. There were very rigid rules concerning the year walk and not adhering to them could prove very dangerous, even fatal.

How the practice of year walking came to be is shrouded in mystery, but it seems to have been a widespread practice in Sweden until the beginning of 19th century and in some rural

Bäckahästen
The Brook Horse

Need both Apps for good ending
What Category is *Device 6*?
**Component Design**: Dialogue heavy games
- Game has “components” each with different story
- Simple branching story per component
- Player’s story is a mix-and-match of components
Component Design: Quests

I'm ready to continue research on the last chapter.
Have you thought about disarming the bomb?
I've been thinking about your experiments. Can I ask you something personal?

Side Mission
Symbolic Effects and Component Based Storylines

Interactive Storytelling
Symbolic Effects and Component Based Storylines

Interactive Storytelling
Interactive Storytelling
Resources and Storylines

Story A
Add Resource

Story B
Add Resource

Story C
Add Resource

Story D
Common in quest systems

Needs Resource > x
Player Directed Story

- Player story is outcome of player’s actions
  - Very little narrative or designer voice
  - Think Kotaku’s Highlight Reel

- Limited to certain types of games
  - Open (ludic) world games
  - Multiplayer games

- Or else very achievement driven
Example: Sword & Sworcery
Example: Sword & Sworcery

Interactive Storytelling
Summary

• Story is integrating **narrative** with gameplay
  • **Character design**: agency vs. empathy
  • **Storyline**: controlling game progression
  • **Dialogue**: often a vehicle for storyline

• Storyline is the most interesting challenge
  • Linear story is simple, but often shallow
  • Branching story leads to expensive content
  • Component design makes story **core mechanic**