Interactive Drama

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Interactive Drama

An “interactive drama” ... is a first-person experience within a fantasy world, in which the User may create, enact, and observe a character whose choices and actions affect the course of events just as they might in a play.

-Brenda Laurel 1986

Interactive Drama

Interactive = ??
• Decisions that influences the outcome.

Drama
• Achieving a goal by overcoming obstacles.

Problems: interactive story = oxymoron
• How can writer control the pace, plot, etc.?
• How can the user feel in control but be “led” through a story.
Different Approaches: Evaluation

- How many choices do you really get?
- How much drama do you really get?
- Any replay?

Most important:
- Find way to align players goals with the goals of the character.
- Player naturally does what plot demands.
- Easy for DOOM, hard for Hamlet

I. Tree from Hell

- Different plot based on each decision.
- This is what people really expect.
- Must create 16 scenes for only 4 decisions ($S = 2^4$).
- Very difficult to create 10 really good scenes in a movie.

II. Death Trap

- Lots of “choices”
  - one takes you forward
  - some lead to death
  - some are side trips
  - some lead you back
- Usually artificially limit choices.
  - Desert Island
  - Boat
  - Spaceship (Warlock)
III. Hour Glass
- Lots of choices, but choices don’t really matter.
- Kinder, gentler death trap.

IV. Open Environment
- Character explores and interacts with world.
- D&D, role playing games.
- Hard to have any plot or drama.
- Hard to have interaction & interesting characters.

V. Peeping Tom
- Many things happening, but can only view one at a time.
- Voyeur, NightTrap
- Can’t change what happens.
- Replay?
- Been done as a live-action play.
VI. Transition Movies
- Game play followed by “reward” transition
- Lots of $$ go into transitions, less go into gameplay
- Transitions are also called “cut scenes”.
- No choices on plot.

VII. Hour Glass/Action Game
- Plot unfolds as user “makes” key decisions or takes specific action.
- Maintains plot and story, but usually limited decisions.
- Intermediate decisions can determine initial conditions for action game
- Action game may have 2-3 endings
- Often multiple endings
- Civilization III

VIII. Linear with Puzzles
- Open world with puzzles that block your way.
- Puzzles should be solvable from story.
- No real choices in outcome (except death).
- Myst, Beyond Time, Zork, Full Throttle, Day of the Tentacle, The Dig, 7th Guest, ...
Design Sins of Linear with Puzzles

- Puzzles should be related to plot.
  - 7th Guest had puzzles that had nothing to do with story.
- Puzzles should be solved by what’s available in the game: “game anthropology”.
  - I.e., puzzle should not require knowledge from outside the game.
- Game shouldn’t take 4 weeks, with 40 minutes of material.
- Online help can avoid some frustration.
  - Go to nearest FAQ or cheat sheet.
  - For World of Warcraft, see thottbot.com, etc.

IX. Online: MUDS, MOOS

- Solves problem of developing interesting characters.
- Lots of choices, but what do they mean?
- Hard to control story and plot.

What’s a MUD/MOO?

- “Multi-user dungeon”, or “Multi-user Object Oriented”
  - Like World of Warcraft pre-graphics
- Text-based interface on top of a database.
- Users interact implicitly via the DB.
- Some MUDs are extensible from within the construct.

See [http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ttc/projects/itap/reports/teaching/chapter5.html](http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ttc/projects/itap/reports/teaching/chapter5.html) for lots more.
Example MUD/MOO

- 4dimensions.com
- Get a MUD client:
  - Cantrip is good for Mac
  - [http://www.4dimensions.com/cm/](http://www.4dimensions.com/cm/)
  - Many for Windows, including
    - AL Client
    - [http://www.ashavar.com/client](http://www.ashavar.com/client)

X. Dynamically Generate Plot

- Generate choices and plot as user makes choices
- Don’t give choices that destroy overall plot

XI. Dynamically Order Plot Elements

- Have many small plot elements
- Dynamically chose from them based on user input
  - Façade
XII. Computational Theater

- Mixture of computer actors and humans.
- Computer/human director controls computer actors so that plot is always followed.
- Online *WestWorld*
- *Star Trek*’s Holodeck
- Beyond the state-of-the-art.
  - Holy Grail of interactive drama

Interactive Drama

Interactive game, populated by human-like AI characters with an AI director that dynamically controls an unfolding story.

Keys to Good Interaction

- Don’t make people hunt for the interaction.
  - Users shouldn’t have to click on every object.
  - Users shouldn’t have to talk to everybody.
- In theater, lighting, sound, position leads the audience to where the action will occur.
- Character to character interaction is most interesting.
  - What are their goals?
  - What do they know?
  - What are they planning to do?
Character to Character

- Toughest interface.
  - Must pass the Turing test.
  - Full natural language isn’t there.
  - Myst avoided issue: no living characters.
- Options:
  - Limited natural language - user guesses.
  - List of specific choices - just try them all.
  - List of abstract choices - in character.
- Deliver the interaction you promise.

Character Reaction

- Character response depends on mood, affect, ...
- Questions that you ask can change mood
  - Return to Zork
- Character response changes as story progresses
  - Good way to move plot along.

Characters: Video/Animation

- Video:
  - Sin of repetition – obvious & unnatural
  - Takes lots of CD/DVD space.
  - Easier for long linear scenes.
  - More realistic.
  - Myst 2 and 3 had a number of video cuts. These were usually blended with computer generated imagery.
Animation

Animation (Interactive Comics):
- More flexible in action and special effects.
- Easier to splice in extra action.
- Can control detail of characters.
- Alyx Vance from *Half-Life 2*

Eric Rabkin’s Main Points:

- Synchronic and Diachronic structures of story
  - *How can we get a rise and fall and return?*
  - A diachronic medium is one, "of historical, cumulative change, in which each step is unlike the last. Myth, by contrast, operates typically and primarily in a synchronic or ‘timeless dimension.’" [Damien Broderick]
- Plot vs. Story
  - Variations in sequence are greatly constrained by interactive game
  - Closure of a sequence
  - Time for break, intermediate resolution
  - Levels, rooms, scenes, ..
- Genre
  - How to use it and break away from it
  - Avoiding aesthetic fatigue
  - Violate expectations without being arbitrary