
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

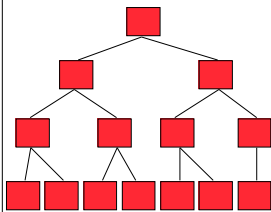
Interactive Drama

- v Interactive = ??
 - Decisions that influences the outcome.
- v Drama
 - Achieving a goal by overcoming obstacles.
- v 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

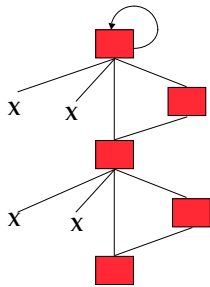
- v How many choices do you really get?
- v How much drama do you really get?
- v Any replay?
- v Most important:
 - Find way to align players goals with the goals of the character.
 - Player naturally does what plot demands.
 - Easy for DOOM, hard for Hamlet

I. Tree from Hell



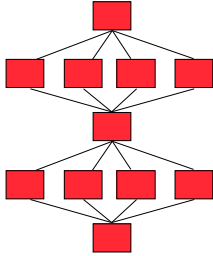
- v Different plot based on each decision.
- v This is what people really expect.
- v Must create 16 scenes for only 4 decisions ($S = 2^d$).
- v Very difficult to create 10 really good scenes in a movie.

II. Death Trap



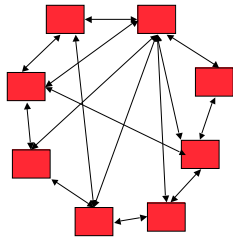
- v Lots of "choices"
 - one takes you forward
 - some lead to death
 - some are side trips
 - some lead you back
- v Usually artificially limit choices.
 - Desert Island
 - Boat
 - Spaceship (Warlock)

III. Hour Glass



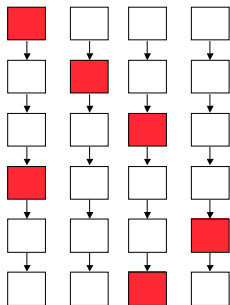
- ∨ Lots of choices, but choices don't really matter.
- ∨ Kinder, gentler death trap.

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

TRANSITION

ACTION
GAME

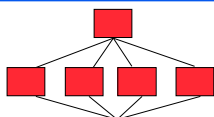
TRANSITION

ACTION
GAME:
Next Level

TRANSITION

- u Game play followed by "reward" transition
- u Lots of \$\$ go into transitions, less go into gameplay
- u Transitions are also called "cut scenes".
- u No choices on plot.

VII. Hour Glass/Action Game



ACTION GAME



ACTION GAME



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

VIII. Linear with Puzzles

Puzzle

Exploration

Puzzle

Exploration

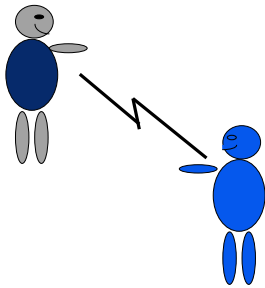
Puzzle

- u Open world with puzzles that block your way.
- u Puzzles should be solvable from story.
- u No real choices in outcome (except death).
- u Myst, Beyond Time, Zork, Full Throttle, Day of the Tenacle, 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 ?

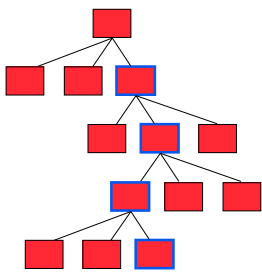
- ∨ "Multi-user dungeon", or "Multi-user Object Oriented"
 - Like *World of Warcraft* pre-graphics
- ∨ Text-based interface on top of a database.
- ∨ Users interact implicitly via the DB.
- ∨ Some MUDs are extensible from within the construct.
- ∨ See <http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ltg/projects/jtap/reports/teaching/chapter5.html> for lots more.

Example MUD/MOO



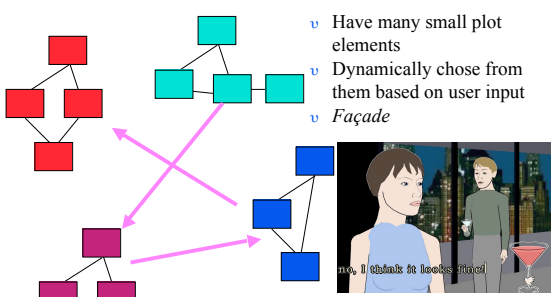
- u 4dimensions.com
- u Get a MUD client:
 - Cantrip is good for Mac
 - <http://www.solidsun.com/cm/>
 - Many for Windows, including AL Client
 - <http://www.ashavar.com/client>

X. Dynamically Generate Plot



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

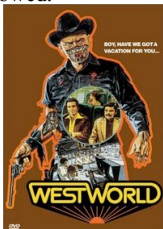
XI. Dynamically Order Plot Elements



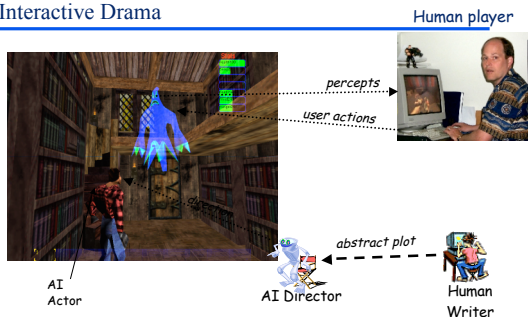
- u Have many small plot elements
- u Dynamically chose from them based on user input
- u Façade

XII. Computational Theater

- v Mixture of computer actors and humans.
- v Computer/human director controls computer actors so that plot is always followed.
- v Online *WestWorld*
- v *Star Trek*'s Holodeck
- v 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

- v 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.
- v In theater, lighting, sound, position leads the audience to where the action will occur.
- v Character to character interaction is most interesting.
 - What are their goals?
 - What do they know?
 - What are they planning to do?

Character to Character

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

Character Reaction

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

Characters: Video/Animation

- v 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
