Lecture 4
CS148/248: Interactive Narrative

RPG evolution

- Abstract wargames to detailed simulations (maps, miniatures)
- With D&D miniatures move from groups to individuals
- Maps move from large battlefields to constrained dungeons
- Complex processes move from the forefront of each player’s mind to the Dungeon Master
- Room to perform character and story
Computer RPGs

- The role-playing game from has migrated to the computer, at least in some ways
- Statistical combat and character development
- Collaborative performance replaced by rich media

Let's look at this in KotOR
Playing KOTOR

- On Dantooine, went south, met the Sandral family
- Their son Casus, missing – and they kidnapped Shen Matale in response
- Their daughter, Rahasia has fallen in love with Shen

The daring rescue

KotOR family feud

- In this version, Shen and Rahasia moved to the Jedi enclave
- The player then travels north to see rest of area
- On visiting Shen’s father, he seems confused…
A strange conversation…

Later, the PC finds the body of Casus Sandral, and returns to his family, only to find their compound permanently closed.

Upon visiting planets in an unexpected order, has conversations with Jolee Bindo.

When using spatial freedom, the narrative structure’s inflexibility is often revealed.

More broadly, the underlying system doesn’t produce the intended audience experience.

KotOR’s problems

How to think about digital media’s “inside”?

- Is binary arithmetic central?
- Is uncompiled source code the key?
- In Expressive Processing Noah analyzes “operational logics” — sometimes identified using source code, and sometimes higher-level descriptions.
- Operational logics are abstract processes, used by authors to communicate to audiences, that can be implemented many ways.
KotOR’s logics

- KotOR uses common operational logics (e.g., collision detection) to represent navigable space
- KotOR uses widespread RPG logics for character and story: quest flags and dialogue trees
- Logics are exposed in dialogue interface and quest journal, but not identical to them

Quest flags

- Story broken into quests and sub-quests, flags at progress points
- Quest state exposed to player in journal (or similar)
- Game scripts update flags and journal

Dialogue trees

- Hierarchically-nested PC and NPC options
- Active section chosen by flags, may set flags
- Important element of gameplay (quests, battles, rewards, allegiances, etc.)
RPG story logics

- Quest flags (milestones) and dialogue trees (directed graphs)
- Easy to implement and cheap at runtime
- Conceptually simple and accessible to non-programmer designers
- Bug-prone when used ambitiously

Vast number of possible positions in

Writers already know this

Choose Your Own Adventure 100,000 Billion Poems

- To create vast literary possibilities, don’t hand-author each option and connection — use rules
- Which is also understood in another tradition...

You are like my father in some ways

WHAT RESEMBLANCE DO YOU SEE

You are not very aggressive but I think you don’t want me to notice that

WHAT MAKES YOU THINK I AM NOT VERY AGGRESSIVE

You don’t argue with me

WHY DO YOU THINK I DON’T ARGUE WITH YOU

You are afraid of me

DOES IT PLEASE YOU TO BELIEVE I AM AFRAID OF YOU

— Eliza/Doctor, Joseph Weizenbaum, mid-1960s
The *Eliza* system

- Audience input: “You don’t argue with me.”
- Substitutions: “I don’t argue with you.”
- Keyword: “you”
- Decomposition: "I ≠ you"
- “Why do you think I don’t argue with you”
- Operational logic: conversation as transformation
- Initially quite successful — the “*Eliza* effect” — leading to various responses...

Weizenbaum’s response

It’s disturbingly powerful

Suchman’s response

Expectation is the power
Murray’s response

Perhaps the premier literary artist...

Should we build Eliza-style systems?

The *Eliza* breakdown

- In *play* the experience falls apart:
  - You are going to repeat what I say in the form of a question
    - WHAT MAKES YOU THINK I AM GOING TO REPEAT WHAT YOU SAY IN THE FORM OF A QUESTION
  - The power of initial expectation is great, but *Eliza*-style illusions break down (in a manner that reflects the underlying system shape) unless interaction is severely restricted
  - Unfortunately, with *Eliza*, the underlying system that’s revealed is boring
The alternative

- Rather than processes for tricking the audience, we can craft processes that express ideas in the work.
- Not a new idea: Dada, Oulipo, Burroughs, Cage, Mac Low, Cayley, et al.
- But rather than shape the work of the author and/or a performance, these shape the experience of the audience.