Future Perfect

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A workshop exploring the process of creating an immersive location based game driven by narrative. The game is specifically designed to be portable with minimal effort to tailor a meaningful experience in any city-based location.

location based gaming, GPS mobile gaming, digital narrative, digital storytelling, trajectories

1. INTRODUCTION

Applying theory from comic, film and game writers and cross referencing this with discussions on interaction design and narrative structure provided the platform for the development of Future Perfect. This workshop examines the various applied methods and demonstrates the end result, an engaging hybrid narrative unfolding in the city streets and on a mobile device.

2. TARGET AUDIENCE

Moore (2003) states that exacting a restricting criterion on which to base a hypothetical 'average audience member,' is wrong and unhelpful.

Standard theory in interaction design encourages us to be centred on target users and audiences.

We need to come to terms with the best approach in the design of hybrid narrative events and Future Perfect has deliberately taken Moore's approach.

3. CHARACTERISATION

"The interior life of your character takes place from birth until the moment your film begins. It is a process that *forms* character. The exterior life of your character takes place from the moment your film begins to the conclusion of your story. It is a process that *reveals* character." (Field, 2003)

For a narrative to be effective and believable, it is essential that character development be approached seriously. This project utilised the tool of Character Diamonds developed by Freeman (2003).

Characterisation is essential to the project. Much of the plot is exposed through "talking head" monologues and characterisation enabling both the actors and audience to actively immerse themselves in the story.

4. LINEAR VS NON-LINEAR NARRATIVE

Being able to approach each narrative checkpoint (GPS trigger) in any order could cause coherency problems in the narrative, thus disrupting its flow (Polaine, 2005).

Despite the freedoms of an emergent narrative and the unique experiences players can create for themselves (Adams, 2009), Jeffries (2009) suggests that creating a linear narrative has its own benefits. It is "a valid design decision", as the designer understands the optimum, most exciting way for players to experience the narrative.

Jeffries_(ibid) states "Both games are breaking me out of my play style, but the linear one is just being forceful instead of using a random system."

4. PORTABILITY

The decision to make the project non-location specific was made very early on in development and served to support this idea. An anchored game would drastically reduce the potential audience the game would receive, and its inadaptable nature couldn't serve as a useful template. However this choice did remove some personal elements of the narrative, for example mentioning local landmarks.

4. TECHNOLOGY CONSTRAINTS

The project is delivered on Asus A626 Pocket PCs. These devices are 3 years old and provide specific technical constraints. The device only has 64Mb of RAM and is limited to Flash Player 7.

Added to these constraints is the HP Mediascape platform, a specific GPS development platform that was discontinued shortly before delivery.

As interaction designers, we often spend our time looking forward, waiting for technology to catch up with our imaginations.

The project was specifically driven at producing content for the imagined perfect device.

It is essential that we anchor ourselves in the real world and adapt to genuine constraints of the actual technology and budget available to us at a particular time. Future iterations of this narrative will be developed on other platforms such as Android and iphone.

5. FAMILIARITY EFFECTS DESIGN

Using an interface design that draws from modern smart phone interfaces, provides users with a comfortable frame of reference, reducing the for need familiarisation. There is also consideration of not breaking a person's presence immersion in the narrative by providing unnecessary technical hurdles.

6. USERS ARE PARTICIPANTS

Users become participants when they are fully prepared to suspend their disbelief. This leads to a form of collusion, known in Alternate Reality Gaming as the TING aesthetic. TING stands for "This Is Not A Game" and is a central tenant for this type of work.

The collusion being that as an audience member, I accept that I am experiencing a fiction. I also accept that at no time during the experience will anyone involved admit that the events are fictional.

Benford (2009) argues that the purpose of cultural user experiences is not to reach the destination, solve the problem, or complete the task, but rather "to enjoy an engaging journey," a point that resonated throughout the design of this project.

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