10 Things I Hate about Your Game AI

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# 1 Colony building games with suicidal colonists

In a colony building game it would make sense for the colonists to have some semblance of autonomy so you don’t have to babysit their every move. Rimworld pawns do not do that, the number of times my pawns have killed themselves because they deconstruct the walls of a building before the roof and then it collapses on them is baffling. This isn’t the only example either, Oxygen Not Included’s dupes are so dumb they’ll walk into a room full of poisonous gas, which they then can’t get out of, just to pick up some dirt to put in storage. If a colony building game has to have “essential” mods that just fix the bad AI then it’s probably worth taking another look at your AI to fix the stupidity. I want to play a colony building game, not a babysitting one.

# 2 Stop making your NPCs so slow

If I’m playing an RPG and a quest requires me to follow/lead an NPC somewhere, then for the love of god make them match my speed. There’s nothing worse than an NPC that moves at a snail’s pace or gets hung on terrain constantly, especially if the game is requiring me to stay near them. Probably even more infuriating is in games like Skyrim where NPCs move faster than your walking speed but slower than your run, meaning you’re constantly having to change pace to stay near them. It’s so easy to make it so this doesn’t happen, literally one variable tweak on the NPC would mostly fix the issue, I don’t understand how it makes it into final products.

# 3 The AI in your FPS run around like chickens with their head cut off

It feels like the only thing the difficulty slider for FPS AI does is just give them aimbot. Even playing against the hardest bots most FPS games have their movement still feels completely random. I’ve seen bots in many CoD games that will run in a random direction, and then just stop and turn around for seemingly no reason. This isn’t just a CoD issue either, almost any FPS game you play is going to have this problem. Halo Infinite does, Overwatch does, Titanfall 2 does. It seems like the devs just can’t figure out how to make AI that **moves** in an intelligent way.

# 4 Give me a chance to attack back for christ’s sake

This doesn’t happen often but it feels like in every RPG there are a couple of enemies that have attack patterns that don’t allow for counterattacking. Recently I’ve been replaying Elden Ring and there are certain enemies that have super long attack combos with almost no break. This means that I have no opportunity to get any hits in and so the fight is unnecessarily difficult. I understand using it as a way to make enemies harder, but it just makes it feel unfair and frustrating because it isn’t actually a lack of skill that’s causing me to lose.

# 5 I’m pretty sure your AI hates me specifically

This refers specifically to when an AI will ignore other AI in favor of going after the player. The main game that comes to mind when I say this is Mario Kart. It feels like no matter how I’m doing in a race the AI target me over anyone else, saving red shells and other items until I’m in range. To some extent I understand targeting the player if they’re winning, because that’s what a real person would do. But targeting someone who isn’t winning over people who are ahead just doesn’t make sense, and it gets really annoying.

# 6 So your way of making the game harder is just making everyone hate me?

Strategy games are very guilty of this. It seems that one of the most popular things to do to make game AI more difficult on higher settings is to give the player a relationship penalty. This means that even if you don’t do anything to upset them, and in fact do everything you can to make them your friend, you’ll still end up at war with them. Civ is very guilty of this. On higher difficulties in Civ it is almost guaranteed that you will end up at war with everyone in the world just because that’s what high difficulty AI means. I won’t argue that it makes the game harder, but it also hurts the fun factor because you’re forced into a specific way of playing.

# 7 “Must have been the wind”

You know exactly what I’m talking about with this. I know it serves a purpose in game design because you don’t want guards relentlessly chasing the stealthed player, but come on. Stealth games have been doing this for years and it just feels corny. If you’re a guard in Far Cry in charge of guarding an extremely important area in a base and a rock is enough to make you walk away from your post, then you need to be fired. It’s a cool mechanic but it feels so lame for these supposedly highly trained fighters to die because they heard a noise in a bush, walked over to it, and then get easily stealth killed without anyone noticing. And if a guard does hear or see something, they shouldn’t just give up on it within a few seconds.

# 8 There is a wall there you know

This mostly applies to older games, but when an enemy will just beeline straight towards you, obstacles be damned, it is a little annoying as a game dev. Legend of Zelda did this in a few games, Wind Waker comes to mind first. It’s not that hard to make your AI path around walls and obstacles, yet the AI is set to just head straight towards the player. It’s lazy and easily exploitable.

# 9 Your companion isn’t companioning

Yep, Skyrim. It isn’t just Bethesda games but they are by far the most famous example. If a game is going to give you an AI companion then that companion has to be helpful and not just get in the way all the time. Lydia will just stand in doorways that you’re trying to get through, hit you instead of the enemy, alert enemies when you’re trying to stealth. Just all kinds of things that completely counteract any benefit of having a companion. Basically, if the only reason to have a companion is to use them as a pack mule, then you have a problem.

# 10 I got your final boss to walk off a cliff

If I’m playing a game and there’s a super hard enemy that’s supposed to be extremely difficult, then its AI should reflect that. If you put in obvious vulnerabilities that lead to cheesing then that’s just sad. Elden Ring has a few enemies like this, all you do is run towards a cliff in a certain way and the enemy will just happily walk off and hand you its wallet of 80,000 runes on the way down. It feels like if you’re going to make a difficult enemy then you should put more effort into making it so the enemy can’t be killed through stupid methods.

Yes, this was actually the first thing it gave me

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Description automatically generated

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