

Chapter 10. Character Development

It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.

—J. K. ROWLING, *HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS*

Characters play a key role in entertaining us in many video games. The character that we play and those we interact with help make the game world believable to us. Not all games need characters, but they add life and warmth to a game, and they're essential to any game that includes a story.

This chapter looks at how to design compelling and believable characters. We'll start by examining the characteristics of the avatar character, both player-designed and built-in. Next we'll look at the issues inherent in gender-specific character design, paying attention to the common game stereotypes you should avoid. We'll also look at the attributes associated with characters—visual, behavioral, and audible—and how you can use them to design your own characters. We'll also talk about the difference between art-driven character design and story-driven character design, and why you might prefer one over the other. A section on

the importance of good audio design for your characters concludes the chapter.

The Goals of Character Design

In many genres, games structure gameplay around characters. Action games (especially the fighting and platform subgenres), adventure games, action-adventure hybrids, and role-playing games all use characters extensively to entertain. Players need well-designed characters to identify with and care about—heroes to cheer and villains to boo. The best games also include complex characters who aren't heroes or villains but fall somewhere in between, characters designed to intrigue the player or make the player think. If characters aren't interesting or appealing, the game is less enjoyable.

Many factors combine to determine the degree to which a character appeals to people. A character need not be attractive in the conventional sense of being pleasant to look at, but he must be competently constructed—well drawn or well described. His various attributes should work together harmoniously; his body, clothing, voice, animations, facial expressions, and other characteristics should all join to express him and his role clearly to the player. (However, disharmonious elements can be introduced for humor's sake, as with the cute but foul-mouthed squirrel in the *Conker* se-

ries.) Characters should be distinctive rather than derivative. Even a stereotypical character should have something that sets him apart from others of the same type.

A good character should also be credible. Players come to know a character through her appearance and actions, and if that character then does something at odds with her apparent persona, players won't believe it. An evil demon from the underworld can't be seen worrying about orphans. For that matter, neither can James Bond. Simple characters must be consistent. Richer characters, with more human frailties, may be more inconsistent, but even so, players must feel that the character holds certain core values that she will not violate.

Avatar characters have an extra burden: The player must want to step into their shoes, to identify with them, and to play as them. The next section discusses avatars in more detail.



TIP

A good character is the most financially valuable part of any video game's intellectual property.

Important business considerations enter into character design as well. Customers identify many games by

their key characters; that's why so many games take their name directly from their characters, from *Pac-Man* to the latest in the *Ratchet & Clank* series. Good characters occupy what the marketing people call *mindshare*, consumer awareness of a product or brand. You can use the character in a book, movie, or TV series; you can sell clothes and toys based on a character; you can use a character to advertise other products. It's more difficult to license a game's world or its gameplay than its characters.

The goal of character design, then, is to create characters that people *find appealing* (even if the character is a villain, like Darth Vader), that people can *believe in*, and that the player can *identify with* (particularly in the case of avatar characters). If possible, the character should do these things well enough, and be distinctive enough, to be highly memorable to the players.

The Relationship Between Player and Avatar

Lara Croft is attractive because of, not despite of, her glossy blankness—that hyper-perfect, shiny, computer look. She is an abstraction, an animated conglomeration of sexual and attitudinal signs—breasts, hotpants, shades, thigh holsters—whose very blankness encourages the viewer’s psychological projection. Beyond the bare facts of her biography, her perfect vacuity means we can make Lara Croft into whoever we want her to be.

—STEVEN POOLE, “LARA’S STORY”

The game industry uses the term **avatar** to refer to a character in a game who serves as a protagonist under the player’s control. Most action and action-adventure games provide exactly one avatar. Many role-playing games allow the player to manage a party of characters and switch control from one to another, but if winning a role-playing game is contingent upon the survival of a particular member of the party, then that character is often the player’s avatar (though some games require that more than one character survive). The player usually sees the avatar onscreen more than any other character (except in first-person games). Displaying the avatar requires the largest number of animations, which must also be the smoothest animations, or you risk distracting the player. People are very sensitive to the movement of human beings, and flaws in the animation will break their immersion. The avatar’s movements must be attractive, not clumsy, unless clumsiness is part of the avatar’s character.

The nature of the player’s relationship with the avatar varies considerably from game to game. Whether the player designed the avatar himself, whether the game displays the avatar as a visible and audible presence, how the player controls the avatar’s movements, and many other factors influence that relationship.

Player-Designed Avatar Characters

Whereas most games have an established character as the player's avatar, role-playing games, especially multiplayer online ones, almost always give players considerable freedom to design an avatar to their own specifications. They can choose the avatar's race, sex, body type, hair, clothing, and other physical attributes, as well as a large number of other details, such as strength and dexterity, that have a direct effect on the way the avatar performs in challenging situations.

Figure 10.1 shows an example character creation screen from *The Lord of the Rings Online*. In such games, the avatar is a sort of mask the player wears, a persona she adopts for the purposes of the game. Because the player herself designs the avatar, the avatar has no personality other than what the player chooses to create. In such games, then, your task as a game designer is not to create avatars for the players but to provide the necessary tools to allow players to create avatars for themselves. This feature is especially useful (and most commonly found) in multiplayer online games in which players interact socially with one another through their avatars. The more opportunities for personal expression you can offer, the more the players will enjoy exercising their creativity. This is particularly true for children and younger people, who

are at an age at which playing with identity is a part of their own development.



Figure 10.1 *The Lord of the Rings Online* gives the player many options for designing her own avatar.

Specific and Nonspecific Avatars

In games in which the player does *not* get to design or choose an avatar but must use one supplied by the game, the relationship between the player and the avatar varies depending on how completely you, the designer, specified the avatar's appearance and other qualities.

The earliest adventure games, which were text-based, were written as if the player *himself* inhabited the game world. However, because the game didn't know

anything about the player, it couldn't depict him or say much about him. Such avatars were *nonspecific*—that is, the designer didn't specify anything about them.

The nonspecific avatar does not belong entirely to the past, however. Gordon Freeman, the hero of *Half-Life*, does not speak and is never even seen in the game (although he does appear on the box). The designers did this deliberately; *Half-Life*, a first-person shooter in a world with no mirrors, offers Gordon as an empty shell for the player to inhabit.

However, many game designers find this model too limiting. They want to develop games in which the avatar has a personality of his own and is someone who belongs in the game world rather than just being a visitor there. It's awkward to write a story around a character whose personality the designer knows nothing about. Besides, designers often want to show the avatar on the screen. As soon as you depict a person visually, he begins to exhibit some individuality.

Modern games with strong storylines use detailed characters who have histories and personalities of their own. Max Payne, the lead character in the series of the same name, comes equipped with a past and a number of personal relationships that affect his life.

Nancy Drew from the many *Nancy Drew* games (and of course all the books that preceded them) is another

good example. These are specific avatars, and the

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player's relationship with them is more complex than it is with a nonspecific avatar. With a specific avatar, the player's relationship to her is more like that of the reader's relationship to the protagonist of a novel. The reader is not the protagonist, but the reader does identify with her. The difference is that in a game, the player can help and guide the protagonist rather than just read about her. But—at least in some games—the specific avatar is also free to reject the player's guidance. If the player asks April Ryan (from *The Longest Journey*) to do something dangerous, she refuses with comments such as, "That doesn't seem like a good idea." Specific avatars sometimes have minds of their own.

Between the two extremes of nonspecific and specific avatars lies a middle ground in which the avatar is only partially characterized—specified to a certain degree but not fully detailed. For many games, especially those *without* strong stories, it's better to create the avatar as a sort of cartoonish figure (even if he's depicted realistically). Many avatars in action games fit this description. Mario isn't a real plumber; he's a cartoon plumber in the same way that Bugs Bunny is a cartoon rabbit rather than a real one. Lara Croft, too, has more looks than personality; she's a stand-in for the player, not a three-dimensional human being. Generally speaking, the more perfectly photorealistic

characters are, the more the players will tend to regard them as being someone other than themselves, independent human beings, and expect them to behave as such. This isn't always a good thing, as it causes players to exercise more critical judgment than we might want them to. Nobody objects to a cartoon plumber jumping on cartoon turtles, but they probably would if both Mario and the turtles were photorealistic.

The Effects of Different Control Mechanisms

The way a player feels about an avatar depends somewhat on how the player controls the avatar in the game. In the case of Nancy Drew and the avatars in all other point-and-click adventure and computer role-playing games, the player's control is *indirect*; he doesn't steer the avatar around but points to where he wants the avatar to go, and the avatar walks there of her own accord. The player feels more like a disembodied guide and friend than a personal inhabitant of the game world. This is also how units move in strategy games: The player doesn't steer them; the player gives them orders.

Lara Croft and Mario, in contrast, are under *direct* control: The player steers their bodies through the game world, running, swimming, jumping, and fighting as necessary. The player becomes them and revels in the abilities that they have that she does not. But she

doesn't worry too much about their feelings. That's

partly because Lara and Mario are only partially specified, but it's also because exercising so much control makes them more like puppets than people.

Designing Your Avatar Character

As you design the avatar for your game, think about how you want the player to relate to him. Do you want an entirely nonspecific avatar, really no more than a control mechanism for the player; a partially-specified avatar, which the player sees and knows a little about, but who doesn't have an inner life; or a fully specified avatar, separate from the player, an individual with a personality of his own? The more detail you supply, the more independent your avatar will be. Consider psychological and social detail as well as visual detail.

How much will he talk? The more he talks, the more we know about him; the more we know, the more he becomes differentiated from us. Gordon Freeman never talks; Mario and Lara Croft don't talk much; April Ryan talks a lot. Gordon *is* the player; Mario and Lara are representatives of the player; April is a person in her own right.



NOTE

If you are making a game based on a licensed character such as a Marvel hero or a Disney princess, you won't make these decisions.

The player will already have a relationship with the avatar through her relationship with the character in other media.

Also think about how the player will control your avatar: directly or indirectly? Your decision will have a profound effect on the player's identification with the avatar. With indirect control, the avatar is distinctly *someone else*, with a mind of his own; with direct control, the avatar is to some degree an extension of the player himself. Your job is to find the right balance for each particular game, to create an avatar whose characteristics serve your goals for the player-avatar relationship. The player will see the avatar all the time; it must be a character the player can identify with and must possess qualities he is likely to appreciate, such as bravery, intelligence, decency, and a sense of humor.

The worst decision you can make is to create an avatar with qualities that players actively dislike. Squall Leonhart, the protagonist of *Final Fantasy VIII*, seemed at first to be self-absorbed and obnoxious, and those players who weren't willing to put up with his attitude stopped playing the game. This is one reason designers make games with only semispecific characters. Link, from the *Zelda* series, is a semispecific character (though perhaps a little more detailed than Mario). We don't know enough about Link to form much of an

opinion of his character, either positive or negative.

Visual Appearances

In modern video games, almost all the characters have a visible manifestation in the game. The exceptions are nonspecific avatars who view the world only in the first-person perspective (like Gordon Freeman) and disembodied characters who sometimes speak to the character (via headphones, telepathy, or other means) but are never seen. In all other cases, you will need to display your characters, and the way those characters look will have an enormous effect on the way players feel about them.

Many designers, especially those who are visually inclined, start to create a character by thinking about her visual appearance first. If the character doesn't exhibit a complex personality and she doesn't change much during the course of the game—either behaviorally or visually—then this is often the best way to do it. Such an approach is called *art-driven character design*. It works well for games with fairly simple, cartoonlike characters. Art-driven design also makes a lot of sense if you hope to exploit the character in a number of other media besides video games, such as comic books and toys.

Story-driven character design, an alternative to art-driven, is defined in the following section. You will use

both visual and behavioral design techniques when creating your character, but you will probably find that you prefer either the art-driven or the story-driven approach. This may depend on the genre of game that you are making.

Character Physical Types

We'll begin with the basic body types of game characters and some of the ways that they may be depicted.

Humanoids, Nonhumanoids, and Hybrids

Characters in video games fall into three general categories: human or humanoid; nonhumanoid; and hybrids. (A small number of characters appear as disembodied voices or animate objects, but they aren't included here because this section is specifically about visual design.) Humanoid characters have two arms, two legs, and one head, and their bodies and faces are organized like a human's. The more you deviate from this arrangement, the less human a character seems. Truly human characters can have either realistic human proportions or exaggerated ones in a cartoon style, but if you use cartoon proportions, you should use a cartoon drawing style as well. A photorealistic human with exaggerated proportions will read as disturbingly deformed.

Nonhumanoid characters include those shaped like ve-

ehicles or machines (often indicated by the presence of metal and wheels), animals, or monsters. In the *Star Wars* universe, R2-D2 is clearly a machine, albeit one with endearing qualities. R2 has three legs with wheels on the bottom, a variety of mechanical appendages, and a head, but no real face. The Daleks of *Doctor Who* are also machines, at least as seen from the outside, for similar reasons. Animals, even imaginary ones, look organic; the presence of wings or more than two legs distinguishes them from humanoids. Skin covered with fur, scales, or feathers further sets them apart. Many video game characters, such as Crash Bandicoot, have animal-like heads but humanoid bodies; they're still classified as humanoids rather than animals. Designers often modify the faces of animal-like humanoids, shortening the muzzle and bringing the eyes to the front, to make them more like humans as well.

Monsters are distinguished by such characteristics as significantly asymmetric bodies, a different facial arrangement (eyes below the nose or jaws that move sideways, for example), and extreme proportions.

Many of their qualities are borrowed from orders of animals that humans in some societies find frightening or repulsive: reptiles, insects, and the more bizarre sea creatures. Claws, fangs, oozing slime, and an armor-like exoskeleton all add to a monster's appearance of alienness and danger. The creature from the *Alien*

movies exhibited all of these distinguishing features.

Hybrids include beings such as mermaids or human/machine combinations. Davros, the creator of the Daleks, has a humanoid torso and head but a mechanical bottom half. The Borg from *Star Trek* and C-3PO from *Star Wars* read as humanoids rather than true hybrids, however, because they still follow the rules for humans: two arms, two legs, and one head in the appropriate configuration. Cylons, from the popular *Battlestar Galactica* series, are hybrid machines/humans. In the latest incarnation of this show, they push the boundaries of how visuals can deceive the viewer as to what is human and what is not.

Cartoonlike Qualities

Relatively few art-driven characters are drawn with ordinary proportions or with photorealistic features. Rather, they are exaggerated in various ways that should be familiar to you from comic books and cartoons. These exaggerations serve as convenient symbols to indicate a character stereotype. Four of the most common are *cool*, *tough*, *cute*, and *goofy*. A character isn't always limited to one of these qualities, however; he can sometimes shift from one to another as circumstances require.

■ **Cool** characters never get too upset about anything.

The essence of cool is detachment. If something irri-

tates them, it's only for a moment. A rebellious attitude toward authority often accompanies cool. Cool characters often wear sunglasses and their body language is languid; when not doing anything else, they slouch. Frequently clever or wisecracking, cool characters may, depending on the situation, use their wits rather than brute force to overcome an obstacle. Ratchet, from the *Ratchet & Clank* series, exemplifies the cool character. Though cool characters are often drawn as insouciant when standing still, their game actions (jumping, running) are usually fast and focused.

■ **Tough** characters exemplify physical aggression.

Often male—although Lara Croft would be classed as a tough character—they are frequently drawn with exaggerated height and bulk. They use large, expansive gestures and tend to talk with their fists. Tough characters are frequently **hypersexualized** as well (see the next section). Ryu, from the *Street Fighter* series, is a tough character. Yosemite Sam is a tough character whose small stature leavens his toughness with a comic quality. The birds in *Angry Birds* are also tough but funny—they're just birds, after all. Animations for tough characters are usually big and abrupt, fast moving, and aggressive. Postures that lean forward, implying motion and action even where there is none, are common.

■ **Cute** characters are drawn with the proportions of

Human babies or baby animals: large eyes and over-

sized heads. They have rounded rather than angular bodies, dress in light colors, and have a general demeanor of cheerfulness, although they may exhibit moments of irritation or determination. Mario is the ultimate cute video game character. Animations of cute characters usually allow characters to achieve things that they physically could not accomplish in the real world: jumping wide gaps, climbing long ropes, firing weapons larger than themselves. They usually look innocent and detached.

■ **Goofy** characters have slightly odd proportions and funny looking, inefficient walks and other movements. Their behavior is largely comedic. Like cool characters, they are seldom upset by anything for long, but their physical awkwardness means that they are definitely not cool. The Disney character named Goofy is a perfect example; among video games, Crash Bandicoot is a goofy character. Animations for a goofy character in a game sometimes include the goofiness, as long as it doesn't affect the player's experience of the play. Tripping while running can be humorous, but if the character dies because of the visual joke, the player won't appreciate it. Instead, save the humor for cut-scenes or idle moments where there is no game impact.

These are, of course, far from all the cartoonlike char-

acter types possible; consider the mock-heroism of Dudley Do-Right and George of the Jungle, the twisted evil of the witch in *Snow White*, and so on. **Figure 10.2** shows a variety of cartoon-like characters.



Figure 10.2 Several cartoon characters from video games and other media

Note that for the most part, these are Western classifications. Art styles vary wildly among different cultures, particularly for characters. Japanese animation often uses large eyes and tiny mouths for characters, but the mouths sometimes swell to huge sizes when they shout, which looks grotesque to Americans. The animé style also sometimes gives cute childlike faces to sexually provocative women, producing somewhat disturbing results—to Western eyes, at least. European cartoon characters often seem slightly grotesque to Americans too. Asterix and Tintin are two exceptions, en-

joy huge worldwide success. If you want your game to sell in a number of different countries, study those countries' native cartoon and comic styles closely to make sure you don't violate local expectations. For example, in the West, cartoon characters often have only four fingers and nobody really notices it, but Crash Bandicoot's four fingers seem like a mutation to the Japanese. When the game is localized for Japan, Crash's artwork has to be changed to give him five fingers.

The design of art-driven characters depends considerably on the target audience. For example, the adjectives *cute* and *scary* mean different things to a five-year-old and a 25-year-old. *Doom*-style monsters certainly won't go down well in a Mario-esque adventure.

Conker's Bad Fur Day presented an interesting twist on this rule. Rare, the game's developer, transplanted their cute children's characters into a game for adults (or rather, adolescent boys), full of bad language and vulgar jokes. But it's a one-way transformation; you wouldn't want to insert the jokes into a game genuinely intended for children.

COOL WITHOUT ATTITUDE

Kids hate goody-two-shoes characters just as much as parents dislike characters with foul attitudes—but just because a character doesn't cop an attitude with au-

uthority figures doesn't make him a goody-two-shoes.

The *Scooby Doo* kids provide a pretty good example of characters who retain their appeal with kids despite not being rebellious. Kids like to identify with the characters' intelligence, bravery, and resourcefulness.

Scooby is funny, too, because despite his large size, he is a coward. But because he's a dog and not a child, Scooby doesn't get picked on or treated with contempt for being scared. This is a very clever piece of character design: Children know that no matter how scary the situation is, Scooby is even more scared than they are, so they can feel virtuous for being braver than he is.



NOTE

In 1954, American psychiatrist Frederic Wertham published a book titled *Seduction of the Innocent* in which he alleged the bulging muscles and tight clothing of comic-book superheroes promoted homosexuality, and that Wonder Woman's strength and independence meant that she must be a lesbian. Following Congressional investigations, the American comics industry self-censored its products for many years.

Hypersexualized Characters

Hypersexualization refers to the practice of exaggerating the sexual attributes of men and women in order to make them more sexually appealing, at least to teenagers. Male characters get extra-broad chests and shoulders, huge muscles, prominent jaws, and oversized hands and feet. Female characters get enormous breasts, extremely narrow waists, and wide hips. Skimpy clothing lets them display their physical attributes as much as possible, and sexually suggestive poses further drive the point home (as if there were any doubt). Both sexes boast unrealistic height, with heads that seem disproportionately small and with extra-long legs. High heels often further exaggerate women's height.

Kratos, from the *God of War* games, typifies the hypersexualized male character, as do most of the male characters in fighting games. Lara Croft is the best-known example of a hypersexualized female character among the hundreds populating any number of video games. Comic book superheroes (male and female) are also traditionally hypersexualized, a quality that got comic books into trouble with the U.S. Congress in the 1950s.

Such characters obviously sell well to young men and teenage boys, but by now these images are clichéd. So many stereotypical he-men and babes have been created over the years that it's difficult to tell them apart,

and any new game that relies on such images runs the risk of being lumped in with all the others. Using such characters may actually obscure any technological or game design advances you have made. Finally, hypersexualized characters really appeal only to a puerile audience. They actively discourage older players, who've seen it all before, and female players. Strip clubs are male preserves; a character that looks as if she just stepped out of one sends clear signals that female players are not wanted or welcome. (To give her her due, Lara Croft's hiking boots, backpack, and khaki clothing do set her apart from the common run of women clad in chain-mail bikinis or skintight leather.)

In short, avoid hypersexualizing characters just for their titillation value. It limits your market and seldom adds much. You might get away with it if it's intentionally done for laughs; putting Cate Archer into a 1960s retro catsuit worked out well for the designers of *No One Lives Forever* because of the game's humorous context. But *No One Lives Forever* was also an excellent game in its own right. Big breasts won't sell a poor game, as the developers of *Space Bunnies Must Die!* discovered.

Clothing, Weapons, Symbolic Objects, and Names

When designing ordinary human beings, body shape is only the beginning. In the real world, we have only a

limited ability to change our bodies, so instead we ex-

press our personal style through things that we hang on the outside of our bodies: clothing and accessories.

In a video game, the player can more easily see who is whom—especially important in situations requiring snap decisions, like a shooter game—if characters' clothing and props uniquely identify them. Indiana Jones wears a certain hat and khaki clothes, and he carries a bullwhip. Darth Vader's flowing black cape, forbidding helmet, and even the sound of his breathing instantly set him apart from everyone else in the *Star Wars* universe. Crucial for avatars, this rule applies to a lesser extent to minor characters.

A character's choice of weapons tells a lot about him, too. On the one hand, a meat cleaver or an axe is a tool repurposed for use as a weapon, so it suggests crude and bloody violence. On the other hand, a rapier's thin elegance suggests a dueling aristocrat. Indiana Jones can use his bullwhip to get himself out of all kinds of scrapes; it's a symbol of his resourcefulness. That he generally prefers the nonlethal bull-whip and carries a pistol only as a backup (in the movies, anyway) sends the message that he'd rather not kill if he doesn't have to.

Hairstyles and jewelry tend to remain the same in games with specific avatars even when the avatar's clothing changes. Both function as good identifiers if

you make them visible and distinctive enough. Jewelry, in particular, has a long history of magic, meaning, or mysticism: Consider the significance of wedding rings, military medals, the crucifixes of Christianity, and the steel bracelets of the Sikhs. If you want a magical power or status transferred to another character, you can easily do it by transferring a crown, ring or chain of gold, or gems. You don't necessarily have to give jewelry a meaning; as long as it's visually distinctive, it will help to identify the character and define her style.

DESIGN RULE DON'T ADD TOO MUCH DETAIL

Don't overwork a character by adding too many distinctive visual features. Two or three is usually enough—more than that and she will start to look ridiculous.

You can also give your characters distinctive names and ethnicities if appropriate. Consider how the men of Sergeant Rock's Easy Company in the old DC Comics World War II series reflected the ethnic diversity of America with names such as Dino Manelli, Izzy Cohen, and "Reb" Farmer—not to mention the square-jawed American hero, Sgt. Frank Rock.

There is a flip side to using such obvious names. Naming your characters in such a fashion lends them a cartoonlike style. This may be exactly what you need for some games, but for others, it is not necessarily

such a good fit. If realism is your aim, for instance, then such an unrealistic collection of names, each obviously chosen to represent an ethnicity or a stereotypical group, cheapens the final result.

Names do not have to spell out explicitly the character's persona. The name of Sylvester Boots, the hero of *Anachronox*, says little or nothing about his personality, though his nickname, Sly, is altogether more revealing. Lara Croft's name, although it does not immediately seem to indicate anything about the character, does (to English sensibilities, at least) imply a degree of upper-class Englishness.

CONCEPT ART AND MODEL SHEETS

Concept art consists of drawings made early in the design process to give people an idea of what something in the game will look like—most often, a character.

Many people involved in the game design, development, and production process will need such pictures.

This includes everyone from the programmers (who might need to see a vehicle before they can correctly model its performance characteristics in software) to the marketing department (who will want to know what images they can use to help sell the game). By creating a number of different versions of a character, you can compare their different qualities and choose the one you like the best to be implemented by the

game's modeling and animation teams.

Concept art shouldn't take too long to draw—minutes, not hours. The object isn't to produce final artwork; the concept drawings shouldn't end up in the final product at all. Rather, its purpose is to explain and inspire.

Figure 10.3 shows a character drawn by artist Björn Hurri. Told only to draw an imaginary Mongol horse-woman as the hero of an action-adventure game, and without any reference materials, he made a number of key decisions about her age, features, clothing, and weapons, all of which are visible in the picture. Her emotional temperament comes through in the image as well—this is not a woman to be trifled with. Good concept art like this definitely bears out the old adage that a picture is worth a thousand words.



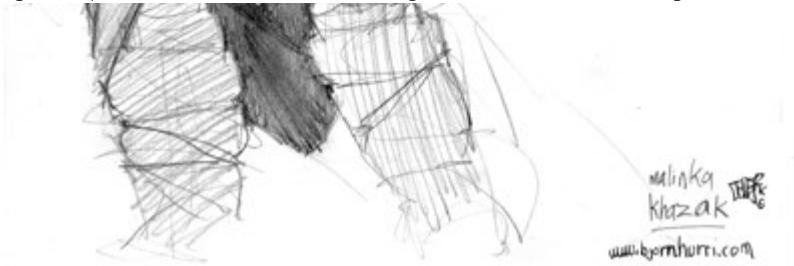


Figure 10.3 Concept art of a fantasy Mongol horse-woman. Courtesy of Björn Hurri.

Another visualization tool that you should consider using is the **model sheet**, a traditional animator's device. A model sheet shows a number of different poses for a single character all on one page, representing different emotions and attitudes through his or her facial expression and body language. This lets you compare one with another and gives you more of an overall feel for the character than a single image can do. **Figure 10.4** is a model sheet from *The Act*, a coin-op game by Cecropia, Inc. that uses hand-drawn animation.

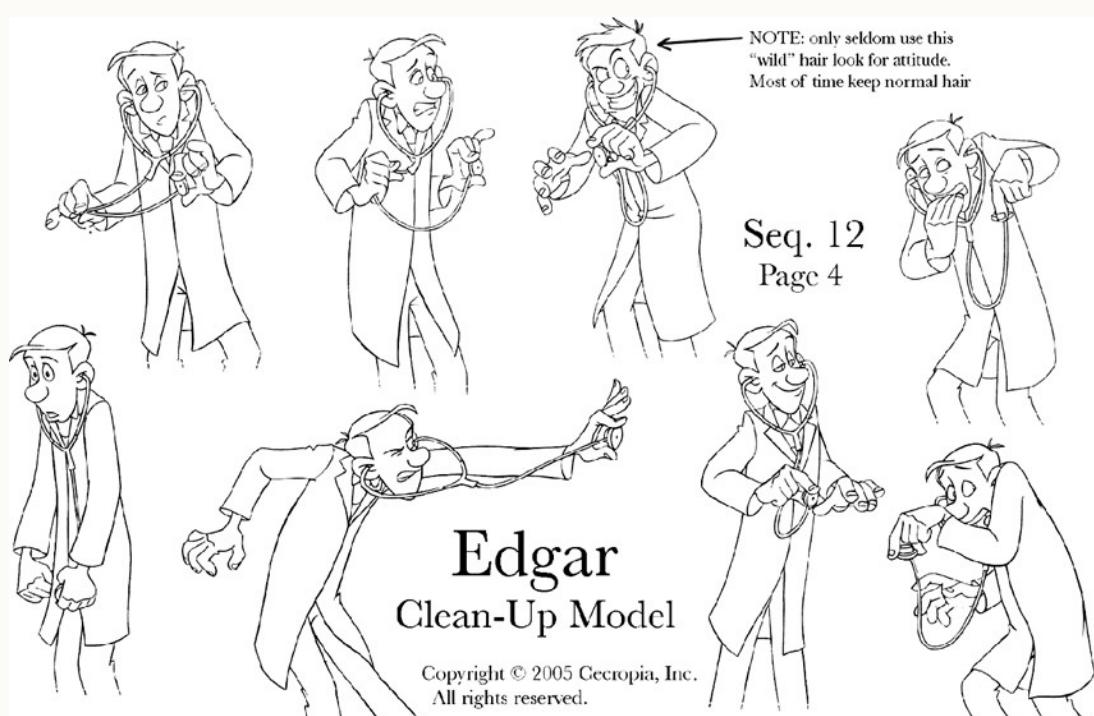


Figure 10.4 A model sheet of the Edgar character from *The Act*. Copyright © 2005 by Cecropia, Inc. All rights reserved.

Color Palette

As you work on your character's appearance, also think about creating a color palette for her—specifically, for her clothing. People in games seldom change clothes, which saves money on art development and helps to keep them visually distinctive. In the early *Tomb Raider* games, Lara Croft wore a teal-colored shirt unique to her; no other object or character used that color. If you spotted teal, you'd found Lara. Comic-book superheroes furnish another particularly strong example. Superman wears a lot of red in his cape, boots, and shorts; blue in his suit; and a small amount of yellow in his belt and S logo. Batman wears dark blue, black, and again a small amount of yellow as the background to his logo. Characters can share a palette

if the proportions of the colors vary from individual to individual.

Choose your color palette to reflect your character's attitudes and emotional temperament. As upholder of "truth, justice, and the American way," Superman's colors are bright and cheery; the red and blue of his uniform recall the American flag. Batman, the Dark Knight of Gotham City—a much grittier, more rundown place than Superman's Metropolis—dresses in more somber colors.

Sidekicks

Hero characters are sometimes accompanied by sidekicks. A tough hero may travel with a cute sidekick (or vice versa) to provide some variety and comic relief. The cheerful look of Miles "Tails" Prower, the two-tailed fox who accompanies Sonic the Hedgehog, complements Sonic's expression of determination and mischief. Sidekicks appear in many action games: *Jak and Daxter*, *Ratchet & Clank*, and so on. Link from the *Zelda* series has had various sidekicks. Banjo and Kazooie were, in *Banjo-Kazooie*, really only one avatar; they could only work together (Kazooie rode around inside Banjo's backpack). Later in the series, they began to operate independently some of the time.

Sidekicks offer several benefits. They allow you to give the player additional moves and other actions that

would not be believable in a single character; they extend the emotional range of the game by showing the player a character with a different personality from the hero; and they can give the player information she wouldn't necessarily get any other way. Link's fairy in *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, for example, doesn't do very much, but she offers valuable advice at key points in the game.

Additional Visual Design Resources

This is not a book about drawing or modeling, so it can't address the actual techniques of creating character artwork. However, these crafts are an essential part of the process of character design, especially if you prefer the art-driven approach. If you would like to know more, consult *Digital Modeling*, by William Vaughan (Vaughan, 2012), and *Digital Character Animation 3*, by George Maestri ([**Maestri, 2006**](#)).

You don't have to purchase expensive software to learn to draw and model characters. There are many free tools available. Among the best are GIMP, the GNU Image Manipulation Program, for editing bitmap pictures; Inkscape, for editing vector graphics (line drawings); and Blender, a 3D modeling tool that approaches the quality of some packages costing thousands of dollars. Sculptris is useful for sculpture. You can also download student editions of the industry-standard

Maya and 3ds Max applications from Autodesk.

Although the student versions of these commercial tools may be restricted in some ways, it will be useful to learn how to use them if you want to get a job doing 3D modeling.

Character Depth

The visual appearance of a character makes the most immediate impact on the player, and you can convey a lot of information about the character through his appearance, but you can't convey everything. Nor does his appearance necessarily determine what role he will play in a story, how he will behave in different situations, or how he will interact with the game's core mechanics. To address those issues, you have to give your attention to deeper questions about who the character is and how he behaves.

If you begin your character design with the character's role, personality, and behavior rather than his appearance, you are doing *story-driven character design*. In story-driven design, you decide these things first, and only then let the artists begin to develop a physical appearance for the character. Artists often like to work from a detailed description; it helps them to understand and visualize the character.

Even games that you would not expect to have fully developed characters can gain much by including them.

Konami's game *Powerful Golf* for the Nintendo DS, shown in [**Figure 10.5**](#), has customizable characters, a story, and a variety of mini-games. The addition of these elements makes it more than a simple sports game. The player chooses a character and begins to identify with her even though the artwork is very abstract. This creates a greater sense of immersion in the game. The player chooses her own friends—or enemies—from the other characters at will, and her choices do affect the gameplay. Interaction between characters is one of the most interesting aspects of stories—sometimes more so than the actual plot. Although a plot details the path of a story (which is covered in the next chapter), the characters' interactions add the flavor and subtlety that differentiate a well-crafted story from a fifth-grade English composition assignment.



Figure 10.5 *Powerful Golf* is a sports game that includes real character development.

Role, Attitudes, and Values

Every character in a story plays a role, just as every character in a movie plays a role, even if only as an extra. The moment a character appears for any reason, the audience needs to know something about him. For minor characters, appearance and voice may convey all the information the audience needs—we don't need a detailed biography of the coffee-shop waitress who appears for only 30 seconds.

Major characters need richer personalities, however, and to design them, you will have to envision the character in your head and then answer a large number of questions about them. In his 2001 article “Building Character: An Analysis of Character Creation,” designer Steve Meretzky recommends that you create a character background paper, or **backgrounder**, for each one. You don't necessarily have to write it in narrative form; lists of qualities will do. The main thing is to get the information down on paper so that it's documented somewhere. Meretzky suggests that you consider the following:

Where was the character born?

What was his family life like as a kid?

What was his education?

Where does he live now?

Describe his job.

Describe his finances.

Describe his taste in clothes, books, movies, etc.

What are his favorite foods?

What are his favorite activities?

What are his hobbies?

Describe any particular personality traits and how they manifest.

Is he shy or outgoing? Greedy or giving?

Does he have quirks?

Does he have superstitions?

Does he have phobias?

What were the traumatic moments in his life?

What were his biggest triumphs?

Describe his important past romances.

Describe his current romantic involvement or involvements.

How does he treat friends? Lovers? Bosses? Servants?

Describe his political beliefs, past and present.

Describe his religious beliefs, past and present.

What are his interesting or important possessions?

Does he have any pets?

Does he have unusual talents?

What's the best thing that could happen to him?

The worst thing?

Does he drink tea or coffee?

Obviously, this list is intended primarily for documenting ordinary humans, not sentient robo-camels or creatures of the underworld; if you set your game in the realm of fantasy, you'll have to adjust the list of considerations as necessary. But in all cases, your goal is to become the world expert on this character, to know everything worth knowing about him. Try to imagine how he will behave in a variety of situations.

Once you know the answers to these questions, you can begin to think about how they will manifest themselves in your game's story. If your character is slightly dishonest, say—a small-time crook but not a villain—
how will you make this clear to the player? One of the

cardinal rules of fiction writing is that you should show—rather than tell—things about the characters to the reader. This goes double for video games, in which players expect to be interacting most of the time and show little tolerance for expository material. How, then, will you show your characters' personalities?

Appearance and language quickly and directly establish character but may produce stereotypes if you're not careful. The third factor, behavior, is the most subtle way of conveying character to the audience.

Appearances can be deceiving, and deeds matter more than words. But establishing character through behavior takes longer; you must give the player the opportunity to observe a character's actions. What will your character do, what events might he get caught up in that will cause him to display his true nature?

Attributes

Chapter 9, “Creative and Expressive Play,” first introduced attributes, and this section discusses attributes of characters. Attributes are the data values

form part of the game's core mechanics, but deciding on appropriate values is also a part of character design.

As we saw in [Chapter 9](#), status attributes change frequently and by large amounts, and characterization attributes change infrequently and by only small amounts or not at all. Characterization attributes define the bedrock details of a character's personality, which—unless the character is mentally ill—shouldn't change much. In the *Dungeons & Dragons* universe, hit points (or health) is a status attribute; it changes moment by moment during a fight. Constitution is a characterization attribute referring to the character's overall degree of hardiness and resistance to injury or poison; it changes rarely or not at all.

In the past, most video games limited characters' attributes to physical details such as their health and inventory. In recent years, more games have made an effort to model social relationships and emotional states. The standout example of the latter is *The Sims*, a game simulating the behavior of people living in a suburban neighborhood. A set of characterization attributes for each character (called a *sim*) determines, in part, its affinity for other sims; those with conflicting qualities won't get along well if forced to interact. The original version of the game called those attributes neat, outgoing,

ing, active, playful, and nice. Status attributes named hunger, comfort, hygiene, bladder, energy, fun, social, and room represented sims' personal needs, which could be met by directing them to perform appropriate activities (such as visiting a neighbor or taking a shower) or by improving their surroundings. An overall happiness value went up or down depending on whether the sim's needs were being met. Few games had ever bothered to measure their characters' happiness before, but this mechanic is now commonplace in games about pets and other kinds of nurturing games.

**NOTE**

Books and movies about small groups of people sometimes manage to achieve a thorough realization of the entire cast of characters; see the movie *The Big Chill* or read Gabriel García Márquez's novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* for examples.

The Sims' model was simple but more sophisticated than anything that had yet been tried. As games get more complex and their stories get richer, undoubtedly there will be much more detailed models of human emotional states and relationships. Defining your characters' attributes is part of character design, but the attributes that a character needs depend entirely upon the genre and the nature of the game-play. The

Fundamentals e-books that are companion volumes to this book discuss the character attributes appropriate in each genre.

Character Dimensionality

In everyday language, people often speak disparagingly of characters in books and movies as being two-dimensional. By this they mean that the character isn't very interesting, doesn't grow or change, doesn't feel fully human, or adheres to a stereotype without any nuances. This criticism usually applies to heroes and villains; it's not realistic to expect everyone who appears in a story to be a fully rounded character with his own quirks and foibles.

This book proposes a slightly more formal use of the idea of character dimensionality, which may help you define characters for computer games. Characters may be classified into four groups: zero-, one-, two-, and three-dimensional. A character's degree of emotional sophistication and the ways in which her behavior changes in response to emotional changes determine her degree of dimensionality. Here we'll examine each group in terms of the kinds of characters found in *The Lord of the Rings*, simply because that story is so well known.

- **Zero-dimensional** characters exhibit only discrete

EMOTIONAL STATES. A ZERO-DIMENSIONAL CHARACTER MAY

exhibit any number of such states, but there is no continuum of states; that is, the character's emotional state never moves smoothly from one state into another or shows evidence of being in two states at the same time; there is no such thing as "mixed feelings." The nameless orcs in *The Lord of the Rings* feel only two emotions: hate and fear. The orcs hate the heroes and attack whenever they feel they outnumber their enemies, and they fear the heroes and run away whenever they feel vulnerable or outnumbered. This minimal level of emotional variability is typical of the enemies in a simple shooter or action game (see [Figure 10.6](#)).



Figure 10.6 Zero-dimensional characters have binary emotional states with no mixed feelings. They may have more than two. HATE FEAR

The emotional simplicity of zero-dimensional characters can make them comic. The characters in classic Warner Brothers cartoons—Bugs Bunny, Sylvester, and so on—change almost instantaneously from one extreme emotion to another.

- **One-dimensional** characters have only a single variable to characterize a changing feeling or attitude; in other respects their character is largely fixed. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the dwarf Gimli is hostile and suspicious toward elves at first, but over time his respect for

CIOUS TOWARD ELVES AT FIRST, BUT OVER TIME HIS RESPECT FOR

the elf Legolas grows until they are boon companions.

His other attitudes don't change much. The movies make him a more one-dimensional character than the book does (see [Figure 10.7](#)).

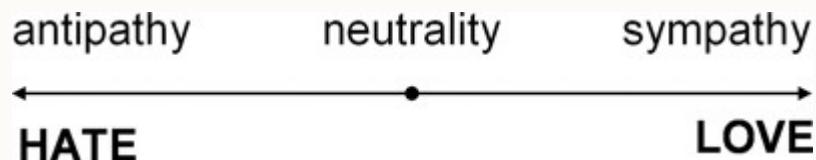


Figure 10.7 One-dimensional characters have a single variable that describes an emotion that changes over time.

- **Two-dimensional** characters are described by multiple variables that express their impulses, but those impulses don't conflict. Such variables are called orthogonal; that is, they describe completely different domains, which permits no emotional ambiguity. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Denethor is a two-dimensional character. He has a variety of strong emotions—pride, contempt, despair—but he never faces a moral dilemma. His senses of duty and tradition trump all other considerations, even when they are wildly inappropriate (see [Figure 10.8](#)).

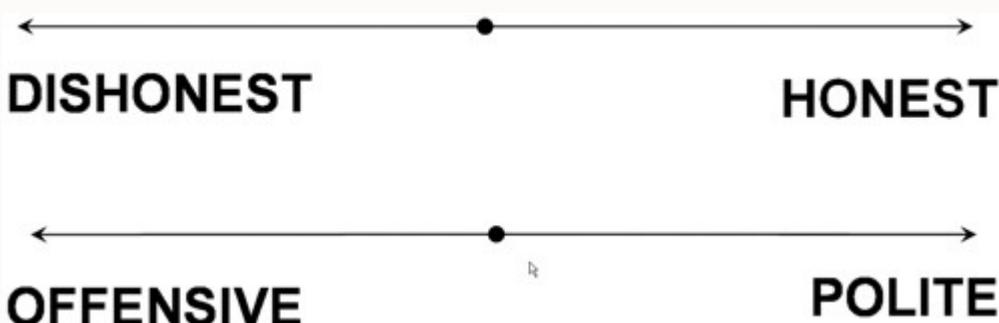


Figure 10.8 Two-dimensional characters have multi-

ple, nonconflicting impulses.

■ **Three-dimensional** characters have multiple emotional states that can produce conflicting impulses. This state of affairs distresses and confuses them, sometimes causing them to behave in inconsistent ways. Most of the major characters in *The Lord of the Rings* are three-dimensional, especially those who are tempted by the Ring. Frodo and, above all, Gollum are three-dimensional; Gollum's conflicting desires have driven him mad (see [**Figure 10.9**](#)).

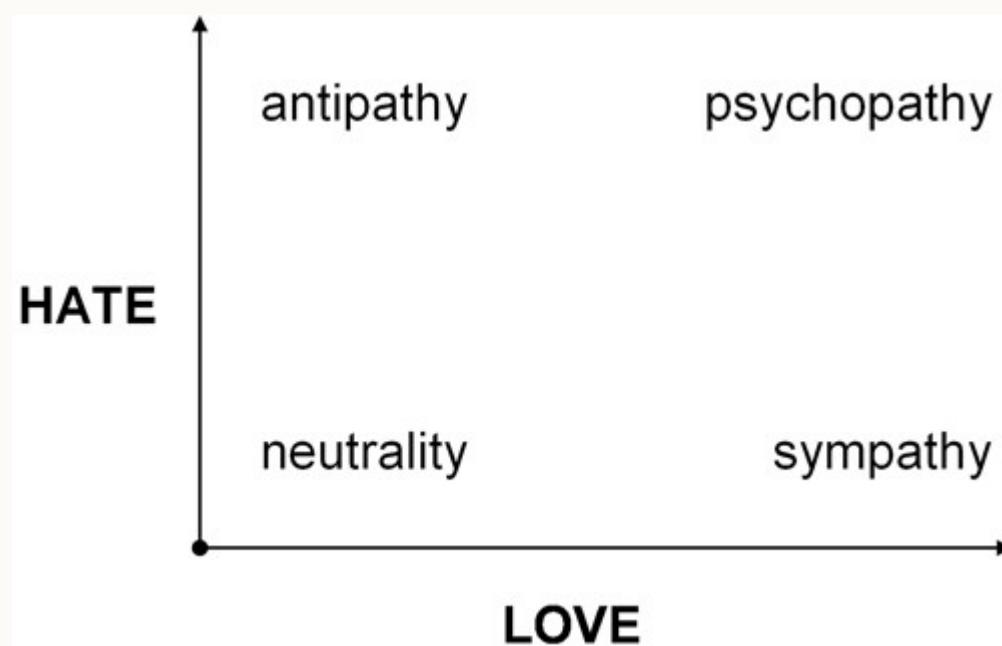


Figure 10.9 Three-dimensional characters can have conflicting impulses that produce inconsistent behavior.

If you plan to allow conflicting emotional states to exist in a character, then you must decide how this conflict manifests itself so that the player perceives it. At any given time, one state will dominate, but if the character really is of two minds about something, his behavior may become erratic as one emotion dominates and then another. For example, a person doing something he really doesn't want to do may be visibly reluctant, change his mind in the middle, or even subconsciously take some action that sabotages his own efforts. There isn't space to discuss this issue in depth here, but you will have to think long and hard about how to portray your characters' mixed feelings, and you should also discuss the problem with both your programmers (who will have to implement the necessary algorithms) and your artists (who will have to create animations showing, for example, reluctance or uncertainty).

Both the game industry and the playing public would benefit from more games with three-dimensional characters. April Ryan in *The Longest Journey* and The Nameless One in *Planescape: Torment* both face a number of moral dilemmas and questions about what it means to be who they are. This kind of writing helps to improve the public perception of our medium as an art

form worthy of serious consideration.

Character Growth

If a game aspires to be more than a simple adventure, and if it seeks to have a meaningful story and not just a series of exciting episodes, then it must include character growth of some kind.

The way in which character growth takes place varies by genre. Action games typically restrict growth to new moves and new powerups; the character's mental state does not change. Adventure games, which depend on strong characters and plots, allow for a more literary type of change: personal and emotional growth, unrelated to gameplay. Role-playing games focus on character growth as one of the game's top-level challenges.

Role-playing games offer several dimensions for growth: personal, if the story is rich enough; skills, such as the ability to use magic or weapons; and strength, intelligence, or any number of such character attributes.

To build character growth into your game, you'll have to decide *which* characters will grow (most often the hero, if there is one) and *how* they will grow.

Physically? Intellectually? Morally? Emotionally?

Games use physical growth, in abilities and powers, more than any other kind of growth because it is easy to implement and show to the player.

Then ask yourself how you will implement this growth within the game—through changes in numeric or symbolic attributes, or through changes in the plot of the story, or some other means? How will growth affect the gameplay, if at all? Finally, how will it be represented to the player? Some of your options include displaying numbers on the screen to show the growth (the crudest method), changing the character’s appearance, changing the actions available to the player if the character is an avatar, and showing that the character has matured by changing her language and behavior (a more subtle method).



NOTE

The psychologist Carl Jung originated the concept of character archetypes, and although his work is increasingly out of fashion in psychological circles, students of the humanities and literature still find it useful.

Character Archetypes

In his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* ([Campbell, 1972](#)), folklore scholar Joseph Campbell identified a pattern that many stories follow, which he called the *Hero’s Journey*. Stories that follow this pattern frequently include archetypal characters—that is,

characters of types that have been fundamental to storytelling since the days of myth, that are found in the stories of virtually all cultures, and that may even be fundamental to the human psyche. These characters assist or impede the hero in various ways on his journey. In *Banjo-Kazooie*, for example, Bottles the mole teaches the protagonists (and thereby the player) a number of things they need to know to fulfill their quest, so he fits neatly into the archetype of the *mentor* character.



TIP

Using character archetypes, like working within a well-known game genre, can shorten the design process and take advantage of the fact that the player already understands what they mean. However, character archetypes may not translate well across cultures.

There isn't room to discuss each of Campbell's character archetypes here, but Christopher Vogler's book *The Writer's Journey* ([Vogler, 1998](#)) gives a condensed treatment of Joseph Campbell's work for screenwriters and discusses archetypes in depth. For how to make the best use of characters who represent these archetypes in your own games, refer to *The Writer's Journey*.

You should not implement character archetypes slavishly, nor must a game have all or even any of them. Video games do not necessarily have to be heroic journeys, and good characters don't have to fit into neat little boxes.

Audio Design

Audio design, both sound effects and language, is also a part of character design. You will need to work with your team's audio director—and sometimes defer to her experience—to find the right effects and voice for your character.

Sound Effects and Music

The sounds a character makes tell us something about his personality, even if he doesn't speak. Sounds—anything from a gunshot, to a shouted “Hi-yah!” accompanying a karate chop, to a verbal “Aye, aye, sir”—confirm acceptance of the player's command. Sounds also signal injury, damage, or death. The sound of a punch that we're all familiar with from the movies is in fact quite unrealistic, but we're used to it and we know what that *THWAP!* means when we hear it. Likewise, drowning people don't really go “glug glug glug,” but that's what games have taught us to expect. Much of sound design involves meeting psychological expectations. Deep sounds suggest slow and strong characters.

high sounds suggest light and fast ones. The tone of the sound a thing makes should confirm and harmonize with its visual texture: Metallic objects make metallic sounds. As usual, however, incongruity can be funny, so you can mismatch sounds and visuals on purpose for comedic effect. As you define your character's movements and behaviors, think about what sounds should be associated with him.

As the audio gear in computers and home consoles has improved, game developers have begun to create musical themes associated with specific characters, just as the movies have for decades. John Williams is a master at creating themes for film characters and situations. Everyone remembers the themes from *Star Wars*: the Imperial March that accompanies Darth Vader, with its harsh, discordant trumpets; Princess Leia's love theme; the main title theme that represents the Rebel Alliance generally. Even Jabba the Hutt has a theme. This book can't teach you music composition, but you should be aware of certain common techniques. Evil or bizarre characters often get themes in a minor key; good or heroic ones get themes in a major key. Instruments playing in unison, especially to a monotonous rhythm, suggest enforced conformity, another characteristic of the Imperial March. These are, of course, traditional Western notions; music for an Indian audience would be different. However, Western dominance of the

video game industry has meant that even games made in Japan follow similar rules. The music from the *Final Fantasy* series has become particularly popular.



TIP

In addition to separate volume controls, an overall mute button is useful too, especially on mobile devices. Many people playing video games in public prefer to keep the sound off entirely so as not to annoy those around them.

If you're involved in designing the game sounds and their technical implementation, be sure that you keep music, sound effects, and dialogue or spoken narration in separate sound files that the game mixes together during playback. This is important for two reasons. First, if the game is ever localized into another language, it will be necessary to replace the spoken audio. If the dialogue is already mixed into the music, the sound files in the new language will have to be remixed with the music before they can be added to the game. It's much easier just to drop in a new file of spoken audio and let the game mix it.

Second, the music and sound effects should have separate volume controls in the game for the benefit of the hearing-impaired. Players with a condition called tin-

nitus find that music prevents them from hearing the sound effects properly, which makes it more difficult to play the game. Keep the two separate so the players can turn off the music if they need to. For more on music and sound effects in video games, read *Game Sound: An Introduction to the History, Theory, and Practice of Video Game Music and Sound Design*, by Karen Collins ([Collins, 2008](#)).

Voice and Language

The way a character speaks conveys an enormous amount of information. This breaks down into various elements:

- **Vocabulary** indicates the age, social class, and level of education of the character. People who don't read much seldom employ big vocabularies. Teenagers always use a slang vocabulary of their own in order to exclude adults. Beware, however: If you use too much current slang, your game will sound dated six months after publication. Conversely, period slang can help set a game in a different time—calling a gun a roscoe promptly suggests the hardboiled detective fiction of the 1930s and 1940s. In all cases, a light touch is best unless you're deliberately trying to be funny.
- **Grammar and sentence construction** also convey information about education and class; bad grammar

reveals bad schooling. Although it's not really valid, we

associate articulateness and long, complex sentences with intelligence.

■ **Accent** initially tells us something about a person's place of origin and social class. City people and country people speak differently the world over. Accent is also, unfortunately, thought of as an indicator of intelligence. (This can backfire; smart lawyers from the American South occasionally play up their southern accents to fool their northern opponents into thinking they're not as bright as they really are.) Avoid the "dumb redneck" stereotype; it is offensive.

■ **Delivery** refers to the speed and tone of the person's speech. Slow speech is—again, mistakenly—often associated with a lack of intelligence, unless the speaker is an Eastern mystic, in which case slow speech can be mistaken for wisdom. Try to steer clear of stereotypes. Speed and tone can still work for you, indicating your characters' excitement, boredom, anxiety, or suspicion. The speaker's tone conveys an attitude or emotional state: friendly, hostile, cynical, guarded, and so on.

■ **Vocal quirks** include things like a stutter (Porky Pig), lisp (Sylvester the cat), and catchphrases that identify a character ("Eh... what's up, doc?" from Bugs Bunny).

Consider how *The Simpsons* defines its characters' education, intelligence, and interests through language.

Homer's limited vocabulary and simple sentences show that he's not well educated; the kinds of things he says indicate that his interests are chiefly food and beer. Marge's middle-sized vocabulary goes with her middle-class outlook on life; from her statements we see that she's concerned with work, friends, and her children. Lisa is the scholar of the family, interested in reading, writing, and music; she has an unusually rich vocabulary for her age and speaks in long, complex sentences. Bart's use of language varies considerably based on his situation, from moronically crude when he's playing a practical joke to quite sophisticated when he's making an ironic observation. Bart is a care-free hedonist but self-aware enough to know it and even comment on it. He's a postmodern sort of character.



NOTE

To make games accessible to the hearing-impaired, dialogue should be available in both audible and text form (subtitles). However, subtitles can't convey accents, so you may need to use carefully chosen slang or dialect terms to help indicate characters' origins. Use a light touch with this, however! Reading a lot of slang or dialect quickly becomes irritating.

StarCraft, which draws on a variety of American accents to create several different types of characters, exhibits some of the most interesting uses of language in games in recent years. Although designers did include the regrettable redneck Southerner stereotype, they also included the southern aristocrat and western sheriff speech patterns for Arcturus Mengsk and Jim Raynor, respectively; the laconic, monosyllabic diction of airline pilots for the Wraith pilots; a cheerful, competent midwestern waitress's voice for the pilots of the troop transports; and a sort of anarchic, gonzo biker lingo for the Vulture riders. This gave the game a great deal of character and flavor that it would have otherwise lacked if it had used bland, undifferentiated voices.

Summary

Character creation is an important part of computer game design. Games have come far since the rudimentary characters of their early days, and character design continues to become increasingly sophisticated. For many games, simple, iconic characters will do. However, as our medium continues to mature, more games need rich and deep characters as well. Whether a player defines the avatar she uses in the game or a designer creates a complete character for her to use, the designer has to make characters belong in the

game world they inhabit, making them complete, compelling, and believable.

Design Practice Exercises

1. Design a human, two-dimensional character for a computer game in three different versions: child, teenager, and adult. The design must include several distinct attributes (visual or personal) that signify the character's age and level of maturity at each stage.

Make the character's emotional temperament different at each stage and suggest some events that might have happened to the character that would account for the change. Your instructor will give you the scope of the assignment; we recommend two to five pages.

2. Choose a game that you've never played whose box displays a cartoonlike avatar character. What does the character's general appearance tell you? What attributes does the character possess that make players want to play? What kind of player is the character designed to appeal to? Is there anything you'd like to add, and if so, why? Is there anything you want to remove?

Why?

3. Think of someone you know: a friend, family member, or even yourself. Think about the qualities that are the most dominant characteristics of this person's personality—his key attributes, if he were a game character—and write those down. Then imagine the person

in one of the following scenarios:

- The person is wrongfully accused of a serious crime—murder or armed robbery, for example.
- Earth is invaded by an enormous alien armada whose objective is to blast everyone to bits.
- The person wakes up from sleep to find himself in another body in another place, but with the same personality.

Write a short essay addressing the following questions. What would your chosen person do in these situations? Situations like these are extremely unusual, but what if they happened? Would an ordinary person like the one you've chosen be a compelling and appealing character?

4. Try designing two characters whose strengths and weaknesses complement each other, so that while they seem very unlike, they actually work together quite well. (Consider the characters Banjo and Kazooie or Ratchet and Clank as examples.) Choose a game genre and design characters and attributes suitable for that genre. Show how their qualities complement each other when the characters are together but leave each character vulnerable to the game's dangers when they are apart.

Design Practice Questions

As you begin the task of developing characters for a game, consider the following questions:

1. Are the game's characters primarily art-based or story-based?
2. What style is your art-based character drawn in: cartoon, comic-book superhero, realistic, gothic? Will your character be exaggerated in some way: cute, tough, or otherwise?
3. Do your art-based characters depend upon visual stereotypes for instant identification, or are they more subtle than that? If they are more subtle, how does their appearance support their role in the game?
4. Can the player tell by looking at a character how that character is likely to act? Are there reasons in the story or gameplay for wanting a character's behavior to be predictable from her appearance, or is there a reason to make the character ambiguous?
5. If the game offers an avatar, does the avatar come with a sidekick? What does the sidekick offer the player—information, advice, physical assistance? How will the sidekick complement the avatar? How will the player be able to visually distinguish between the two of them at a glance?

6. With a story-based character, how will you convey the character's personality and attitudes to the player —through narration, dialogue, gameplay, backstory, or other means?

7. What about the avatar will intrigue and interest the player?

8. What about the avatar will encourage the player to like him?

9. How will the avatar change and grow throughout the game? Physically, emotionally, intellectually? or will she remain essentially static?

10. Do the characters correspond to any of Campbell's mythic archetypes? or do they have less archetypal, more complex roles to play, and if so, what are they?

11. What sorts of sounds will each character in your game make? What sorts of music are appropriate for them? How will your choices of sounds and music support the way you want the player to feel about each character?

12. How do the character's grammar, vocabulary, tone of voice, and speech patterns contribute to the player's understanding of the character?

