



Telling Story Through Sound: Building an Interactive "Radio Play"

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Michael Lee





The Baker Street Experience

- Released by Schell Games on September 8th, 2016
- An interactive audio adventure (that uses voice!)
- Available on all Alexa-enabled devices





A Quick 'Alexa' Primer



*"Alexa, play
Baker Street Experience"*



Echo



Echo Dot

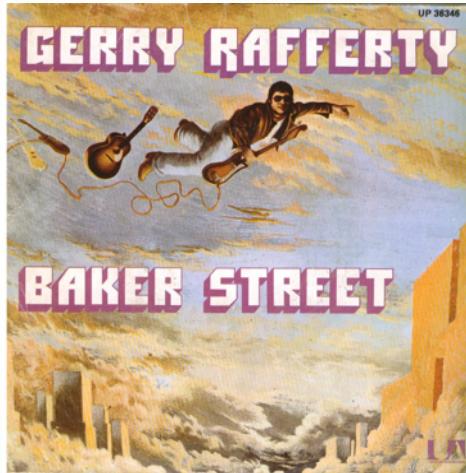


Kindle Fire





The Baker Street Experience



Not This





A demonstration, Holmes...





Takeaways

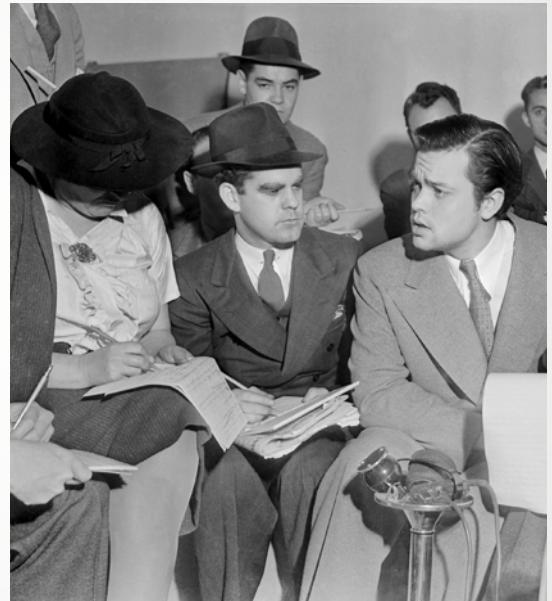
- Audio games are a new market for classic techniques
- Lessons learned from developing Baker Street
- Advantages of building for Alexa and “smart speakers”





What is a “Radio Play?”

- Classic and enhanced storytelling
- Incorporates
 - Strong writing
 - Exciting foley work and sound design
 - Dynamic and varied cast
 - Fun and charm from live performance





Still Popular Today!

- Recorded episodic adventures
 - Doctor Who
 - Hitchhiker's Guide
 - Welcome to Nightvale
- Live radio play performances
 - Midnight Radio program
 - Hear Now Festival
 - And Nightvale again





Advantages of Audio “Plays”

- Wider accessibility for groups
- Narrative iteration and freedom
 - Environments (sound design and music)
 - Characters (dramatic storytelling)
 - Players have guides to picture the scene, but the rest is up to imagination



A painting of a classroom interior. Students are seated at their desks, facing a chalkboard where a teacher is writing. The room is filled with natural light coming from large windows on the right side. The ceiling has exposed wooden beams and several small, round pendant lights. The overall atmosphere is warm and focused.

Designing the Play



Setting the Scene

- Two weeks... in two years



week

- Focus on characters and scenarios, not new settings

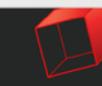
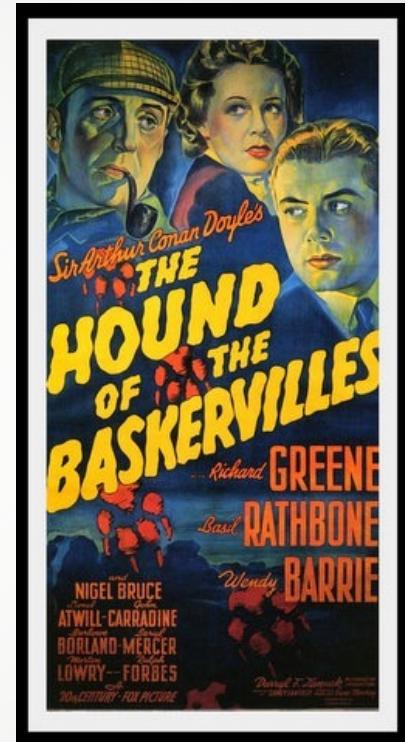
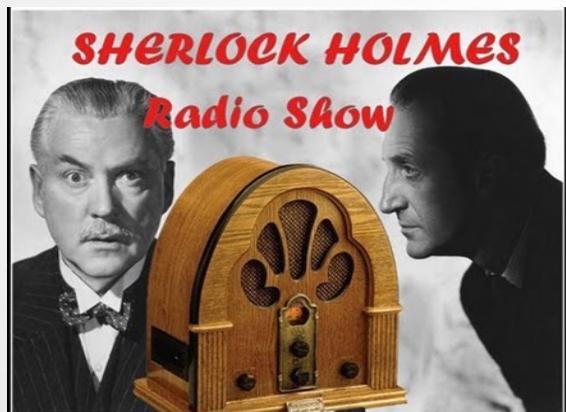
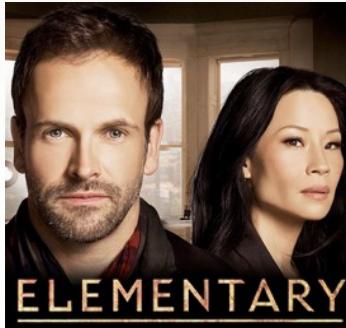


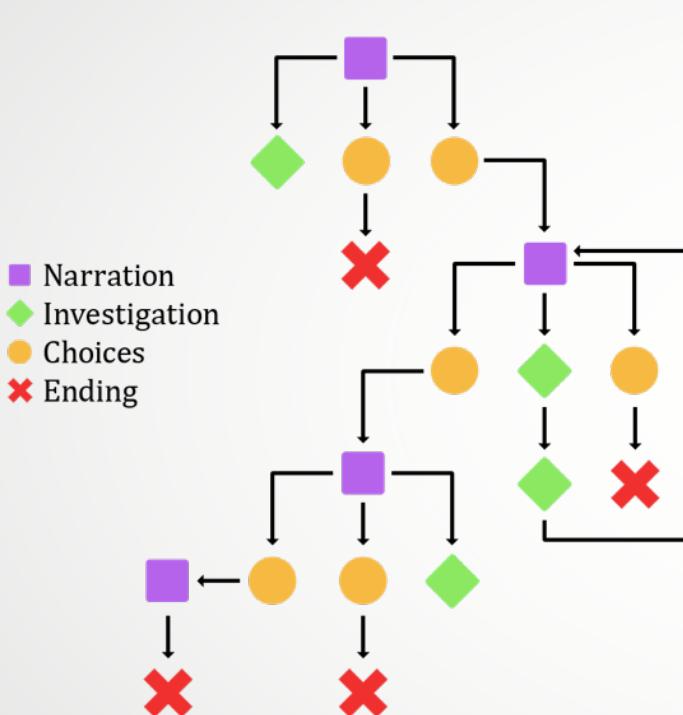


Elementary, My Dear Watson (never said)

- Why not Sherlock Holmes?
 - Focus on creating a good game instead of inventing new setting
 - Freedom to explore and expand on existing characters, plots, and settings
 - The Sherlock-verse is very popular!
 - Fans are open to new interpretations







Connecting the Pieces

- Finalized narrative with paths and branches
- Actors had a chance to shine
- Sound designers had a blast
- Playable 15-25 minutes experience

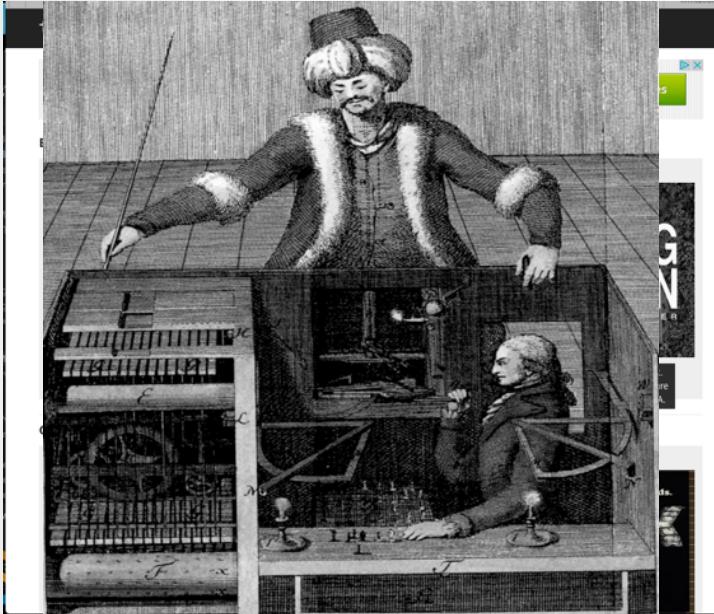


A black and white photograph capturing a dynamic moment of two people leaping into the air. They are holding hands, and their bodies are angled towards each other. The person on the left is wearing a light-colored, short-sleeved shirt and dark pants. The person on the right has curly hair and is wearing a dark top. The background is a bright, overexposed sky, creating a sense of motion and freedom.

Jumping to Alexa



Before Alexa



- Simple prototype
 - Mechanical Turk-esque
- Thinking ahead to voice
 - Examined different options
 - But really just waiting for Alexa



A black and white photograph of a man with dark hair and a beard, wearing a light-colored, vertically striped shirt. He is looking down at a large, framed painting of a landscape with trees and a path. The painting is leaning against a wall, and the man appears to be examining it closely. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and shadows.

Just One Week Later



Hearing the Echo... echo... echo...

- Revisiting Baker Street
 - Amazon released Alexa Skill Kit right after our 1st jam week!
 - Increased support and documentation for new developers
 - And games started to show up!



Alexa Skills Kit (ASK)





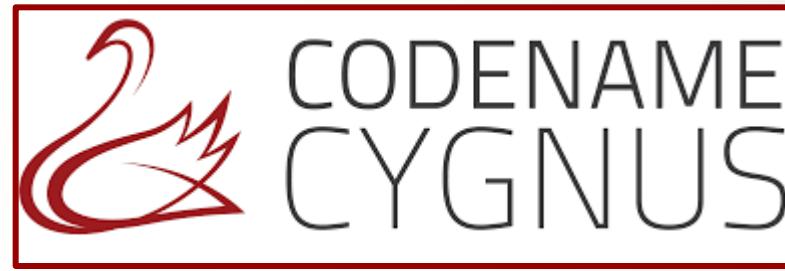
The Alexa Adventure Ecosystem



Magic Door



Wayne
Investigations



Codename Cygnus





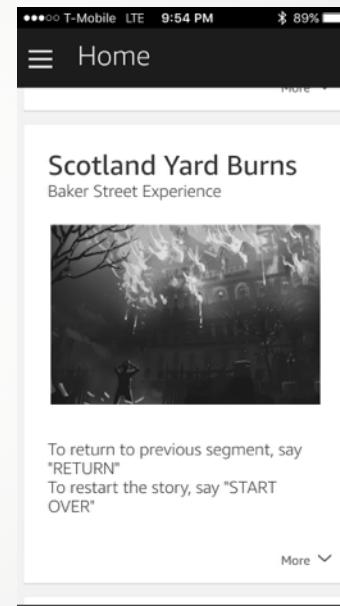
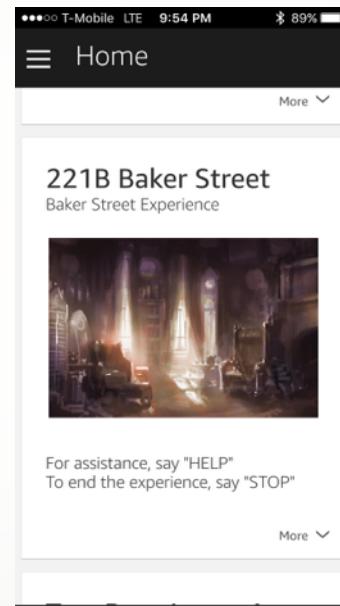
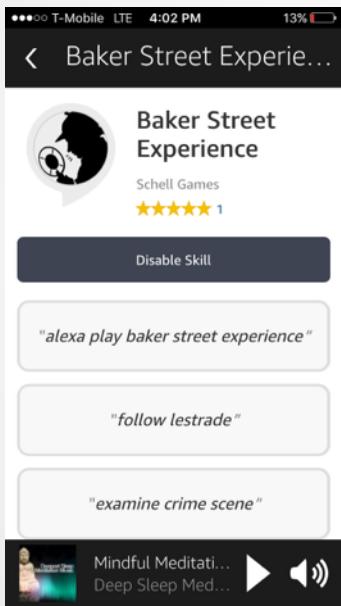
Taking Advantage of Alexa

- Avoid robotic Alexa speak by incorporating audio
- Build voice prompts to feel like natural conversation
- Utilize new features like Home Cards





Using the new Home Card system





Porting Complications



Voicing Some Constraints

- Not (originally) designed for long-form Skills
- Only supports 90 seconds of audio per “prompt”
- Misinterpreted input causes repeats and errors
- Skills automatically timeout after 15 seconds





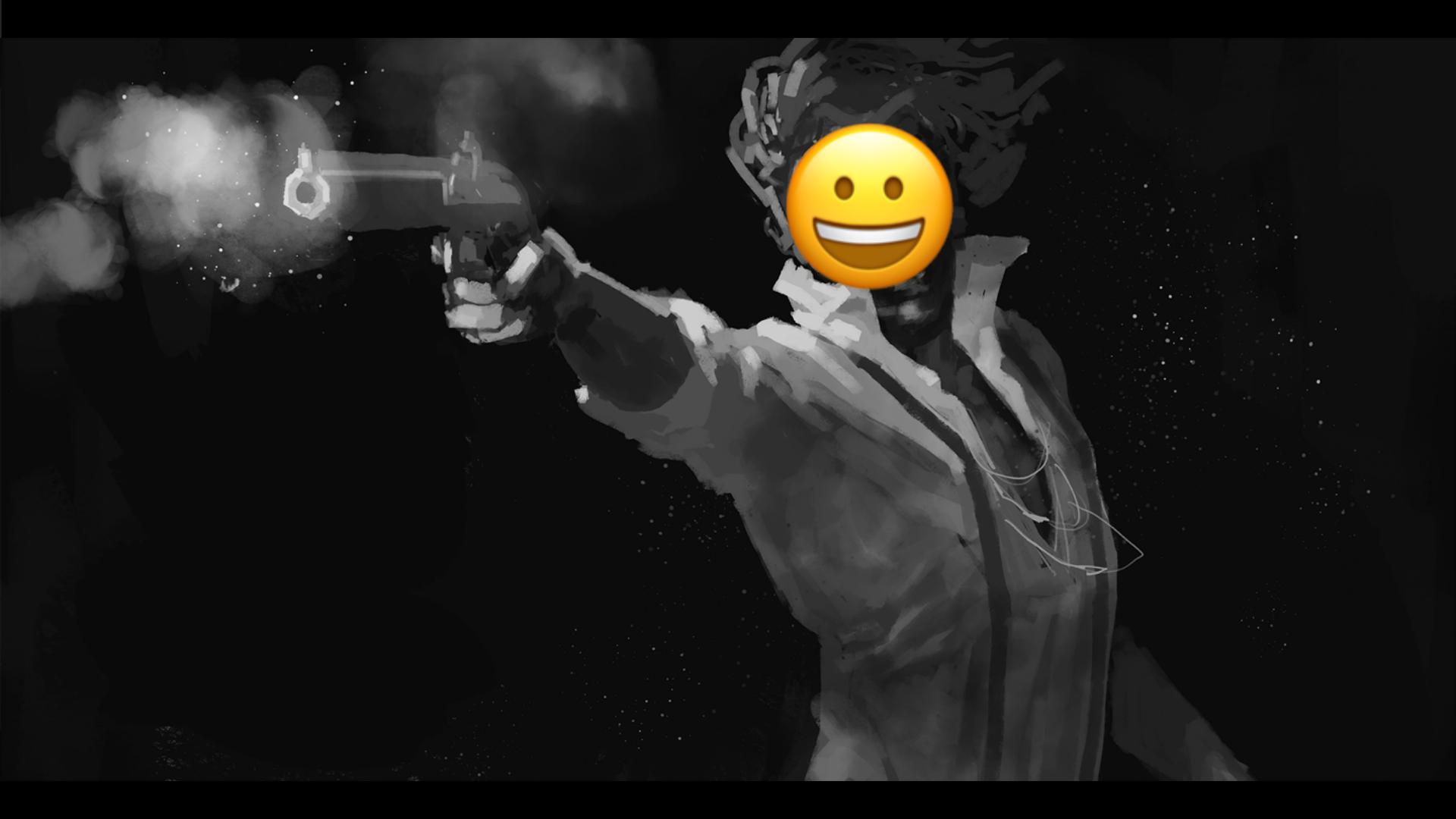
Working Within Limitations

- The 90 second limit
 - Rework prompts to add more interaction points
 - The time limit helped keep prompts focused
- Adding Watson witty responses
 - Misinterpreted feedback
 - Timeout issues





And Released!



A dark, atmospheric illustration of a cozy interior. In the foreground, a large, ornate grandfather clock stands prominently. Behind it, a fireplace is visible, with a small fire burning. To the left, a bookshelf filled with books is illuminated from within, casting a warm glow. Another shelf further back also has a light source, creating a series of bright highlights against the dark background. The overall mood is mysterious and cozy.

Alexa, Care For More Adventures?



The Growth of the Smart Speakers

- Greater hardware adoption
 - Echo/Dot/Kindle (Alexa)
 - Google Home (Google Now)
- Enthusiastic support
 - Audience is responding
 - Skills are being highlighted

The collage consists of three images: 1) A screenshot of a mobile app interface showing a play button and a waveform, with the text "Earplay Codename Cygnus - Feel the Suspense" and "SOUND CLOUD". 2) A screenshot of a news article titled "Amazon Echo: 20 Best Skills in the Alexa App" by Krzysztof Willman, updated on November 12, 2016. The article includes a photo of the author and a snippet about him being a lifelong future tech junkie. 3) A screenshot of a digital interface featuring a camera icon and binary code.

Amazon Echo: 20 Best Skills in the Alexa App

Updated on November 12, 2016

Krzysztof Willman [more](#)
Krzysztof is a lifelong future tech junkie investigating the latest stories from companies like Apple, Samsung, Google, and Amazon.
[Contact Author](#)



Barriers are Low

- Requires little ramp-up
 - Amazon provides basic framework
 - Focus on writing and sound
 - Visuals are secondary

* Monetization still a work-in-progress

Announcing a New Tool for Building Interactive Adventure Games on Alexa



August 02, 2016

Robert Jamison

Alexa Announcements How To

Today, we're pleased to make a tool with source code available to allow you to graphically design interactive adventure games for Alexa. Interactive adventure games represent a new category of skill that allows customers to engage with stories using their voice. With these skills, you can showcase original content or build compelling companion experiences to existing books, movies and games. For example, in [The Wayne Investigation skill](#) (4.7 stars, 48 reviews), you're transported to Gotham City a few days after the murder of Bruce Wayne's parents. You play the part of a detective, investigating the crime and interrogating interesting characters, with Alexa





New Market for Classic Techniques

- Most Skills utilize basic text-to-speech systems
- Design your stories with traditional radio play concepts to create a better story
 - Voice actors, foley, and background ambience
- Growing landscape with desire for content
 - Lots of opportunities for partnered experiences
 - If you're stuck, remember the public domain!





Thanks and Credits

Thanks to Jon and Eddy from Earplay and Susan O'Connor

CAST

James Moriarty — CHRISTOPHER ARNOLD
Irene Adler — BONNIE BOGOVICH

Sherlock Holmes — RYAN HALL
John H. Watson — BOB JONES

Inspector G. Lestrade — TOM QUITONI
The Narrator — TIM ROSKO

PROJECT ROLES

PROJECT DIRECTOR
TOM QUITONI

ENGINEERING
MANOJ ANAND
MICHAEL LEE

WRITERS
CHRISTOPHER ARNOLD
BONNIE BOGOVICH
BOB JONES
JOSH LIPPERT
TOM QUITONI

ORIGINAL CONCEPT
BONNIE BOGOVICH
MATT MAHON

DESIGN
CHRISTOPHER ARNOLD
BONNIE BOGOVICH
BOB JONES
JOSH LIPPERT
TOM QUITONI

AUDIO ENGINEER
BONNIE BOGOVICH

HOME CARD ART
BEN GREENE

SPECIAL THANKS
REAGAN HELLER
ANA BALLIACHE

PRESENTED BY
SCHELL GAMES





Thank You!

Bonnie Bogovich
@BlackCatBonfeed

Michael Lee
@drinkycode

*Alexa, play
“Baker Street Experience”*

More examples at: tinyurl.com/bakerstreetvids
Please remember to fill out your surveys!