

# The Early Game Development Process

From Concept to Proposal

# The First Idea

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- Most games begin with a single idea.

This idea can revolve around:

- A character
- A setting
- A story
- A style of gameplay
- A philosophy
- A new technology
- And so on

# The First Idea

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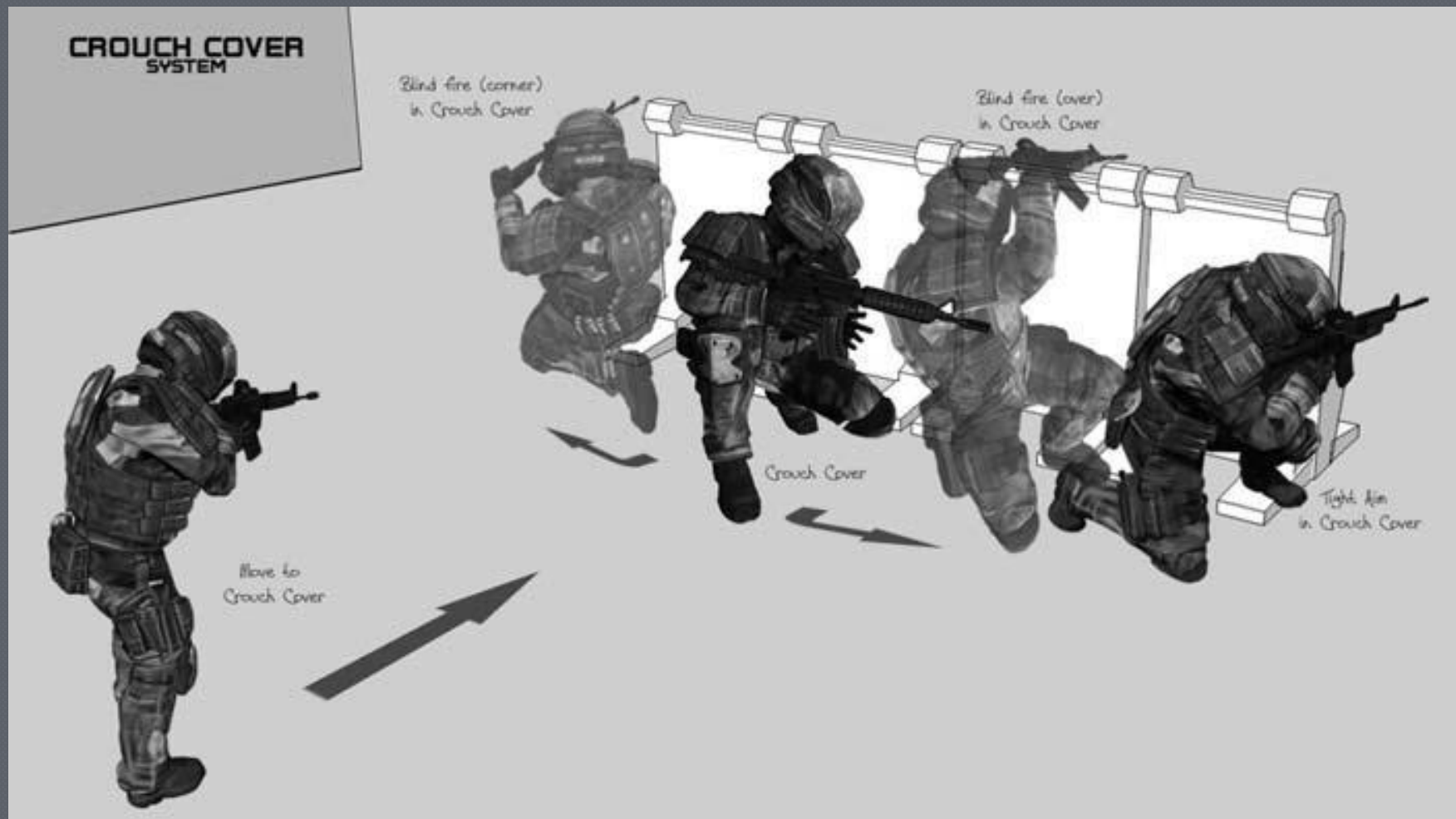
- ◉ Sometimes the idea is completely original, but more often it builds on existing work.
  - Totally new ideas can be good, but they are also unproven, and consequently untested.
  - New variations on something already established is safer, and often more easily accepted by game publishers.
- ◉ So, while you do need something new, innovative or interesting, don't despair over similarities to existing games.
- ◉ If it is truly original, it still might be an idea worth fighting for, however.

# Concept Development

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- The first phase of game development is concept development.
  - It starts with the first game idea.
  - The main goal is to take this idea, refine it and flush it out to decide what the game will be all about.
  - You must decide on story and character elements, gameplay, setting, and so on.
  - Concept art should also be developed.
  - In the end, a concept or pitch document is written, followed by a more detailed project proposal.
- If you work for an independent developer, this phase will not likely be funded by another company ... few people pay to sit and think!

# Think about how your game mechanics work



# Concept Development

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- For a concept to be successful, you must keep in mind the publisher's goals, needs, and concerns when developing it.
  - Publishing strategy (many inexpensive games, or a few more expensive projects).
  - Risk tolerance.
  - Scheduling constraints.
  - Licensing conditions and issues.
  - Preferred platform and technologies.
  - Type of game wanted (totally new, sequel, conversion, adaptation).
  - And so on.

# Concept Development

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- The key elements that can be manipulated during concept development are:
- Gameplay
  - What is involved in playing the game?
  - Good gameplay is independent of time or budget availability.
- Scope
  - How big is the game?
  - Effectively determines cost and schedule constraints.
- Technical Risk
  - What potential difficulties lie ahead?
  - Too much risk will scare away a publisher ... not considering or discussing it will too!



# The Concept Document (or Pitch Document)

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- The point of this document is to convey the goal and purpose of the proposed game.
- This helps management (or a prospective publisher) assess if the game is viable, timely, and feasible.
  - The purpose of this document is to sell the game concept to the key decision makers needed to approve further development.
- The document should be brief, approximately five pages in length, more or less, and should discuss the topics on the following slides.



# The Premise (or High Concept)

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- A short paragraph description of what the game is about and what its unique hook is.
  - Can be as short as one or two sentences.
  - If your game cannot be summarized in this way, it could be too unwieldy and complex.
  - Must be exciting and catch the reader's attention.
- An example:
  - Echoing back to the Gladiators and arenas of ancient Rome, human, alien and other more sinister warriors are locked into battles where there can only be two outcomes – victory or death ... (UT3 aka UT2007)

# Player Motivation

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- This section should discuss the player's victory condition and what will drive the player to actually play the game to that end.
- For example, a player could be driven to complete, solve puzzles, or explore the game world.
  - Think back to the player motivations discussed earlier in the course.

# Unique Selling Proposition (USP)

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- In essence, this section describes what makes your game stand out from other games.
  - What makes your game unique?
  - Why is it special?
  - What are its distinguishing characteristics?
  - What features make it exceptional?
- Think of the things you would like to put on the back of the packaging for the game, and you are on the right track.

# Target Market

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- This is a statement of who the intended players of the game are.
  - Children?
  - The mass market?
  - Niche market of special interest fans?
- This section also generally includes some historical information about how this type of game has sold to the target demographic.

# Genre

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- The goal here is to provide a basic genre statement for your game.
  - What genre(s) are you choosing for your game? Just what type of game is it?
  - How will your game be following or breaking with genre conventions?
- Explain any new twists your game provides on genre conventions or on the genre itself.

# Target Rating

- The point here is to identify the target Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) rating for your game.
  - What rating are you aiming for?
  - Why?



# Target Platform

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- In this proposal section, you identify the target platform(s) on which your game will be played and defend your selections.
  - Hardware requirements, operating system requirements, and other software requirements.
- As development costs rise, more and more games are cross-platform projects.
  - Released on several systems to leverage costs and increase chances of success.
- This trend might change because of differences in console hardware and capabilities though ...



# License

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- If your game will be adapted from a licensed property, this should be discussed in this document.
  - How will the license be used?
  - What kind of deal has or will be made with the licensor?
  - Will it be exclusive or non-exclusive?
- Also include any additional information about the property's popularity and appeal to particular markets.

# Competitive Analysis

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- This is an analysis of potential competition to the proposed game, both in the present and in the future.
  - What games are out in this genre?
  - How did they do? Why will this be better? (Be sure to relate this to your game's USP.)
  - When the game is ultimately released, what will competition be like then?
  - How will the game compare, and succeed?
  - Why will this game earn precious shelf space in the retail market?
  - Will new games and technology make the game obsolete as soon as it is released?

# Goals

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- What goals are there for this game?
  - What are your expectations for this game in creating an overall player experience?
  - What mood are you attempting to achieve?
  - Are you trying to provide excitement, tension, suspense, challenge, humour, nostalgia, sadness, fear, or a happy feeling?
  - What do you want the player to ultimately walk away with after playing this game?
- How will the game achieve these goals?

# The Project Proposal

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- The project proposal is a follow-up to the concept document, providing further details than those given earlier.
  - The purpose is to present the details of the game to a party already interested in the game (likely after the concept document).
- This document is longer than the concept document (ten to twenty pages).
  - It should include all the sections from the concept document in more detail, and provide additional materials as well.

# The Hooks

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- ◉ A hook is an element that will attract players to the game and keep them and their attention there.
  - Why would anyone buy this game?
  - Choose the three to five best game features that best answer this question and provide more information here.
  - Hooks can be based on visuals, audio, gameplay, story, mood, and so on.

# Gameplay Mechanics

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- This section of the game project proposal essentially describes what the player does in the game.
- It should list several (10-20) elements that describe the experience of playing the game.
  - What challenges does the player face?
  - What actions can the player take?
  - What activities does the player participate in?
  - From what perspective is the game played?

# Online Features

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- ◉ If your game contains any online component, it should be discussed here.
  - Will it support online multiplayer play, or just provide an online community for players?
  - What scale of multiplayer play?
  - Will gameplay be competitive, cooperative, or both?
  - What kind of game location and player finder services will be provided?



# Technology

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- If special software or hardware technologies are to be incorporated into your game, you should discuss these technologies here.
  - Will you be licensing game engine software?
  - Will you require specific peripherals or special-purpose hardware for your game?
  - Will your game require custom technology specifically built for your game?

# Art and Audio Features

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- Discuss any unique art and audio features of the game in this section.
  - Particularly those that are main selling points for the game.
- Examples of such features include:
  - Licensed music
  - Professionally scored music
  - Orchestral or live performances
  - Motion capture for character animation

# Story and Characters

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- Most games have a story behind it.
  - In some cases the story plays an integral role in the game; in others, it is only to provide some basic background behind the game and to give the player an idea as to why the game is being played.
- A game proposal should include a summary of the game's story elements.
  - Main plot ideas.
  - Main characters.
  - Problems faced by the characters.
  - The villains in the game.
  - How the player will ultimately overcome all of this.

# Walkthrough

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- This is typically a one-page description of what it is like to play the game.
- The form this takes can vary ...
  - In some cases, the walkthrough focuses on the first hour of gameplay, and provides a fair amount of detail on this critical period.
  - In other cases, the walkthrough goes through the entire game from start to finish, but in much less detail.

# Production Details

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- Describe the current production status of the project in question.
  - Are you still in concept development?
  - Has the game been designed yet?
  - Is there a prototype available yet?
- Discuss additional production details of your project, including development team, budget, and schedule in separate sections, as follows.

# Development Budget and Schedule

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- This is a statement of how long the game should take to develop and what the costs involved will be.
  - Since this is early in the development cycle, this will be an estimate, but do as much as possible to make it an educated one.
  - This is a critical part of the proposal, and is also one of the more difficult parts.
- This usually includes a profit and loss (P&L) statement, and some estimate of return on investment (ROI).

# The Team

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- This is a list of who is on the development team, what their credentials are, and what their roles will be.
  - If the team is established, what games have been produced together.
  - If the team is new, list the credits for the major team players.
  - What are the team's experiences with the target platform, genre, and so on.
- Publishers invest in people, not just ideas.
  - Ideas can be cheap and plentiful.
  - It takes good people to turn ideas into reality.
  - The team ultimately determines success or failure.



# Risk Analysis

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- This section of the proposal discusses the potential difficulties that could be faced in developing the game.
  - Itemize the potential problems.
  - Identify why they pose a risk to meeting project goals.
  - Summarize plans for minimizing or eliminating these risks.
- Too much risk is a bad thing, but so is not identifying or discussing it!

# Concept Art

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- Include concept drawings and sketches of elements from the game.
  - Main characters.
  - Character classes and races.
  - Scenes and locales from the game world.
  - Interface layout.
- Also, discuss the art style to be used in the game. Will it be realistic, cartoonish, or some other style?

# Summary

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- In the proposal summary, you reiterate why the proposed game will be a great game.
  - Repeat the major selling points.
  - Justify why your team is the right group of people to pull it off.
  - Show that you understand the publisher's goals, needs, and concerns.
- Include anything else you think will help gain final approval of the proposal.