LEVEL 3 - ESCREVENDO A HISTÓRIA

What do these games and movies have in common? They all violate the

Triangle of Weirdness. Do so at your own peril …

When developing a game story, you will ﬁnd there are three different types

of people in your audience.

1. Players that are into your story as it happens.

2. Players that want to get into your story in depth.

3. Players who don’ t care what the story is at all

Making your story appealing to all three types of players can be a challenge.

The best rule of thumb is to always make the story be in service of the

gameplay and not the other way around. Here are some tips on involving

story into the game.

• To satisfy players that are looking for a deeper experience, provide details but make sure they don ’ t get in the way of the story. For example, Bioshock and Batman: Arkham Asylum both have non - mandatory collectable audiotapes that reveal deeper story details

to the player without intruding in on the main story.

• Players that are just along for the ride will “ A button ” their way through audio cues and cutscenes that reveal story points. Make sure your game ’ s story is also revealed through gameplay and level design to prevent it being skipped entirely by the player;

otherwise, the player will get lost and confused5. You can also introduce story as gameplay by making them playable ﬂashbacks or puzzles.

• Start your story as late into the action as possible. This can be in the middle of a boss ﬁght, at the end of a level, or during a car chase. Keep in mind, this works best for games with traditional story. I ’ m not sure it ’ s such a good idea to start a puzzle game of Tetris with dozens of tiles raining down on the player.

• Always keep your stories lively and moving. Professional screenwriters will introduce a change in the plot or action every 15 minutes. Even with non - story games, play sessions are becoming “ bite - sized ” so they ’ re short enough for players to enjoy in short bursts.

Some games even offer extra experiences so the player can continue playing after the story has ended. Multiple endings, minigames, unlockable and downloadable content or “ deleted levels ” (akin to deleted scenes on a DVD) will let your player return to your world without having to hear the same story over again. If you create a world that the player wants to play in, they will want to come back to play.

Universal Truths and Clever Ideas

• Some games need a story. Some games don’ t. All games need gameplay.

• A story always has a beginning, middle and end.

• Never mistake story for gameplay.

• Almost ANYTHING can be made into gameplay.

• Create a world the player will want to play in, and they will come back to play.

• Make death matter.

• Keep names short and descriptive.

• Don ’ t underestimate kids: they ’ re smarter than you think.

• Stay true to a license, but don ’ t be afraid to “ make it your own. ”

THE BASICS OF GAME DESIGN

Challenges

The challenge is usually the central hub of the gameplay. The objective, and the barriers that prevent the player from achieving that objective, are what determine the challenge. By identifying your challenge, you can boil it down until it’s pure. Here are some of the standard challenges:

**Time Challenge:** The player is allowed only a certain amount of time to complete a task. This is one of the oldest challenges, and in modern games it’s usually combined with some other challenge. A simple example is a race that must be run within a certain time. WarioWare uses time challenges in every single mini-game it presents the player.

**Dexterity Challenge:** The player must accomplish some sort of feat that requires dexterity. In modern games, a dexterity challenge might be shooting a target with a pistol. It doesn’t need to be about physical dexterity, though. It could be a mental challenge, where the player has to make quick decisions in order to overcome the obstacles he faces.

**Endurance Challenge:** Sort of the opposite of a timed challenge. Instead of having a limited amount of time to complete a task, an endurance challenge tests how far the player can go before he falters. Older arcade games like Defender and Pac-Man were endurance challenges.

**Memory/Knowledge Challenge:** This type of challenge requires the player to know certain facts in order to win. Game shows like Jeopardy present this kind of challenge. In video games, usually it means teaching the player some fact, like “baboons really like barbeque chicken pizza,” and then making him recall that fact later on in the game, like using a piece of pizza to lure a baboon guard away from the door to the treasure trove of the Baboon God. Other examples include making the player memorize certain button patterns on the controller to execute combination attacks, remember his way through mazes and difficult terrain, or remember which types of keys work in certain types of locks.

**Cleverness/Logic Challenge:** Somewhat like the knowledge challenge, the cleverness challenge requires the player to figure out a puzzle without having the answer beforehand. An example would be trying to figure out what combination of buttons to press to open a door. Games like Tomb Raider and the Indiana Jones series include cleverness puzzles.

**Resource Control Challenge:** Many games use resource control as the challenge. The player is given a certain amount of a resource. He must use that resource to overcome an objective before it runs out. Strategy games like checkers, chess, and Warcraft (shown in Figure 1.2) have finite resources that the player must use to win the game.

First Impressions: In the Beginning

The most important part of any game is the first 10 minutes. Unless you make them so compelling that the player can’t put down the controls, he’ll find it very easy to quit and never touch your game again. After all, he has very little emotional investment and a plethora of other games to choose from.

The player is also likely to know a little about the setting of your game. If it’s sold in a retail store like Electronics Boutique, the player was probably attracted to the packaging. Or maybe he’s read some reviews or a brief blurb on a download site, or a friend has recommended the game to him.

Whatever makes the player purchase or download your game will also help him get through that deadly first 10 minutes. However, all this is hardly sufficient if the player still feels stupid or frustrated. As the game designer, you have to teach the player about his new environment, while entertaining him enough to keep him playing.

Middle

Throughout a game, the level of difficulty should be incremental. A game that has sudden surges in difficulty can frustrate the player, causing him to quit. A game that suddenly becomes too easy will bore the player, who might move on to something more entertaining. To ensure a gradual increase in difficulty, you need to test the game over and over to make sure it’s consistent. Then have other people test it, just to make sure you haven’t become blind to your game’s weaknesses, or to unforeseen ways of finishing it. Believe me, there will be ways of playing your game that you never imagined, often bypassing much of the content you’ve slaved over.

Finalle

The end of a game is both the easiest and hardest part to design. It’s easy because you no longer have to train the player. He already knows how to play your game as well as can be expected. You don’t need to pull your punches anymore, or worry about how you’re going to top that last challenge. It’s kind of a freeing experience, not having to worry about babying the player along anymore.

It’s also hard, because the end needs to be satisfying. The player needs to feel that he has overcome the best you could throw at him. (Which isn’t true… but he has to think that.) The finale needs to wrap up any plot hooks that might be laying about, all the bad guys who retreated earlier in the game need to show up, and you need to give out any quest items that the player needs before he fights the big bad boss.

Climax

There are two parts to an ending: the climax and the denouement (pronounced daynew-ma). The climax is the height of excitement, where the plot comes together and resolves itself in a way that’s entertaining to the audience. The denouement is the part after the climax, where any hanging plot points or clarifications are given. In Star Wars, the climax is when Luke Skywalker blows up the Death Star; the denouement is the award ceremony afterward. It’s always important to have a denouement in storybased games, so the player doesn’t feel like there’s something more he should do. The player needs that sense of closure. He needs that final sense of reward, where the game, through its characters, congratulates the player on a job well done, and assures him that they appreciate his efforts. The denouement is when you remind the player how much his character has grown in both power and wisdom, and how that growth has affected his place in the world. Using the Star Wars example, the awards ceremony shows us Luke Skywalker as a changed man. In the beginning, he was a friendless, whiny farm boy whose self-centered world view was focused purely on how tough he had it being a moisture farmer on a nowhere planet. By the end, we see him standing tall, accepting awards with some dignity along with Han Solo and Princess Leia, both of whom had looked at him like he was a backwater idiot earlier in the movie, and now look at him as an equal and a friend. Showing us this growth in the movie helps remind us of all that has happened, and brings to our minds “what comes next?”

In the climax, or the finale of the game, you want the player to use all the tricks he’s learned. Challenges have to be wide-ranging, allowing the player to demonstrate all the skills he’s learned while progressing through your game. You should allow him to use the best weapons, the fastest vehicles, or the coolest martial arts moves. Let him be the master he’s trained the whole game to be.

The end challenge has probably been fairly predictable for some time by the climax. The player will have a general idea of whom or what he’ll be facing and be raring to go. For this reason, it’s usually best to make your climax straightforward, but tough. Don’t try to throw in any unexpected gameplay or tricks at this time that you haven’t already used. The finale should be the culmination of everything that has come before, not a step in a new direction.

Finishing a good finale should leave the player sweaty and joyful. He has achieved victory after a hard-fought battle. An easy success here would be disappointing to the player. Unfortunately, this is usually too often the case. In a lot of games, the player has accumulated so much experience and equipment that it becomes hard to defeat him without cheating. There is also a lot of range in what each individual player’s abilities are, so it becomes hard to predict exactly how a player might approach your finale.

Once again, playing this battle over and over, in every single way you possibly can, is the way to find those weaknesses and overcome them. The end of your game is often the determining point on how well a player remembers your game, or how well a reviewer scores it. The finale of your game is nearly as important as the beginning in this respect. Make sure your climax is the best it can possibly be.

Denouement

The end movie is usually created to illustrate the denouement. In order to show the player how much his character has changed, and how the universe has been affected by his deeds within your game, you’ll probably plan to include something just as grand or grander than the initial, beginning movie.

Unfortunately, things will probably have conspired against you.

Games change in their making. As your game comes to life, some aspects will have become obviously undoable, and some really nice, new plot events or features will get implemented along the way. This makes the end of the game highly unstable until such time that you’ve cemented down all of the parts previous to it.

This means that your ending movie will probably be the last thing you want to create, since it needs to incorporate the whole of all that has come before it. Because of this, a lot of pressure in terms of time, money, and resources will build up. You’ll be running out of time, running out of money, and running out of people by the end of the project.

It would be easy to just let the whole thing go. To make a short, sorry little movie that barely does justice to your game.

**Don’t do that!** The players who have worked so hard to get through your game should be rewarded. Give them the best ending you can. If your game isn’t story-based, like a racing game, save something really nice to give the player after he beats that final opponent. Be creative with it. Just make sure that the end of your game receives all the attention and love that it deserves.

MAKE YOUR GAME BETTER

If You Aren’t Having Fun, the Game Won’t Be Fun

You can’t make a worthwhile game unless you’re having fun doing it. If you dread working on your game, it probably won’t be very fun. Even if you do manage to finish it, what’s the point? This isn’t to say you have to be giggling with glee through every step in the process, or that you shouldn’t take the game seriously. But people tend to be more creative when there’s laughter involved. Advertising tycoon David Ogilvy once said, “The best ideas come as jokes.Make your thinking as funny as possible.”He also said,“If it doesn’t sell, it isn’t creative.” Fun helps spark creativity, and creativity helps sell your game.

It’s Just a Game

Finally, the last thing to remember is that you shouldn’t sacrifice relationships with your family or friends because of a game. It’s easy to get lost in the work and spend long hours on it, ignoring the people you care about in the process. Creating games is not a higher calling. Your game won’t save any lives. It won’t bring about a social upheaval that brings peace to the world. You’re entertaining people. That’s important, but not as important as your own life. Don’t squander your relationships so somebody you’ll never meet can have a few hours of diversion.

What You Have Learned

* Games are for entertaining people. (But not only that.)
* To come up with clear ideas about what does and doesn’t work in games, you should study three things: your audience, other games in your chosen genre, and your own gaming preferences.
* Games should empower their players.
* A game’s challenges make up its gameplay.
* Breaking down challenges into their most basic forms allows you to use a mix-and-match method to create new, innovative challenges.
* Give the player rest breaks between challenges. This helps to create a good pace, which keeps him playing your game.
* The first 10 minutes of your game are the most important.
* Consistency and growth are the two main concepts that keep your game interesting and playable.
* At the end of your game, give the player a good sense of closure. Also, reward the player who finishes your game.
* Respect your player.
* Don’t fall into an “Us vs. Them” mindset.
* Give your game as much polish as possible, and have fun doing it, but don’t forget your family and friends in the process.