

# COMP08035 Computer Games Design

## Week 03 Lecture - Game Setting and Characters





## The Setting (1/6)

- The design and creation of a digital environment is critical to the success of your game
- Every bit as important as character design
- Particularly important for new players of the game – first impressions are crucial
- Less important for very experienced players who can enter a *flow state* and be relatively unaware of the setting – unless it gets in the way!

## The Setting (2/6)



- Getting the look and feel of the game right helps players to suspend disbelief and enter the game more fully
- It's very important in “selling” the game to new players
- “Graphics versus gameplay” debate in the industry – *both* need to be good

# The Setting (3/6)



Questions about your environment:

1. Is it set in a particular period in history or geographic location?
2. How realistic is your environment?
3. Are there people or beings in the world?  
What are they like? How is their society organised? What do they value, e.g. trade, conquest, fighting skills, peace, wisdom?  
What are their hairstyles and clothing like?



## The Setting (4/6)

Questions about your environment:

4. Are they religious or superstitious? Do they have churches or temples?
5. Indoors, outdoors or both? What is the furniture like? The buildings?
6. How can you create the look and feel of your game with art, sound and music?

# The Setting (5/6)



Questions about your environment:

7. What emotions and feelings are you trying to inspire in the player of this game? How will you do it?
8. What constitutes right and wrong in the game? How will the player know this?
9. How and why will the player be rewarded or punished?

# The Setting (6/6)



Questions about your environment:

10. What choices are you offering the player?  
Are there both violent and nonviolent ways of succeeding?
11. What about ethical choices? Is lying, cheating, stealing OK? What about torture or slavery? How does player choice affect the gameplay?
12. How realistic is any violence in the game?



- Art
- Architecture
- History
- Anthropology
- Literature
- Music
- Religions
- Product Design
- Classic Movies
- Classic TV
- Art Movements
  - e.g.
    - Art Deco
    - Art Nouveau
    - Romanticism



# Character Development (1/3)

- Can be art-driven, e.g. Lara Croft in *Tomb Raider*





## Character Development (2/3)

- Art-driven characters tend to be superficial and one-dimensional
- Far more frequently characters are story-driven – this produces more realistic and believable characters
- This requires a fully-developed backstory before you can begin to visualise the character's appearance





# Character Development (3/3)

Guidelines for character development:

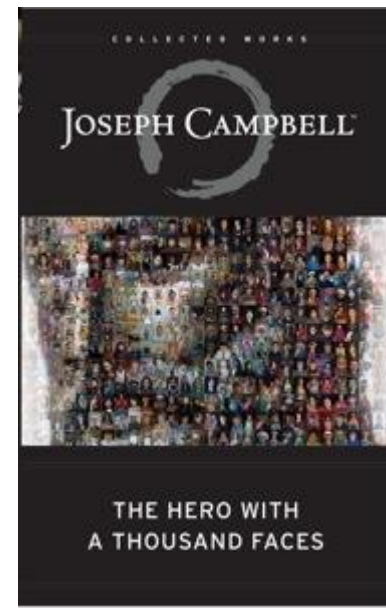
1. The character should interest and intrigue the player;
2. The character needs to get the player to like him/her/it;
3. The character needs to change and grow in the light of experience.

Point 3 is the most difficult to achieve.

# Character Archetypes (1/10)

- Classic literary theory has identified a number of character archetypes found in most stories dating back to ancient myths and legends
- Same character can play different roles within the same story
- Applies to most computer games
- Sometimes called the monomyth

Campbell, J., 1993. *The hero with a thousand faces*, London: Fontana



# Character Archetypes (2/10)

## The Hero

- Can be an individual or group
- Centre of the story
- Story revolves around a conflict and how the hero resolves the conflict
- Player must identify with the hero
- Hero changes and grows within game to maintain player's interest



# Character Archetypes (3/10)

## Mentor

- Character who guides the hero
- Think Obi Wan Kenobi in *Star Wars*
- Can be the internal voice of the hero or another character or characters



# Character Archetypes (4/10)

## Higher Self

- The hero as he/she aspires to be
- Ideal form of the hero
- Sometimes the game is all about transforming the hero into his/her higher self
- Hero may have a character flaw of some kind which needs to be overcome
- Hero may have to make amends for past actions



# Character Archetypes (5/10)

## Allies

- Characters who are there to aid the hero
- With allies hero can do things that would be impossible alone
- Not necessarily friends of the hero but can have a common enemy or a common goal, for example





# Character Archetypes (6/10)

## Shape Shifter

- Most elusive archetype
- Appears in one form and is then revealed later in the story as another
- Could be an **ally** or **mentor** who later turns out to be a **trickster** or a **shadow**
- Think Saruman in *Lord of the Rings*



# Character Archetypes (7/10)

## Threshold Guardian

- Prevents the hero from progressing until he/she has proved to be worthy
- Can be hero's own self-doubt, or another character or characters
- Think Yoda in *Star Wars*



# Character Archetypes (8/10)

## Trickster

- Often neutral character who makes mischief for the hero
- Can be a sidekick for the **hero** or the **shadow**
- Achieves his ends through being clever or resourceful against superior force
- Think Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit*



# Character Archetypes (9/10)

## Shadow

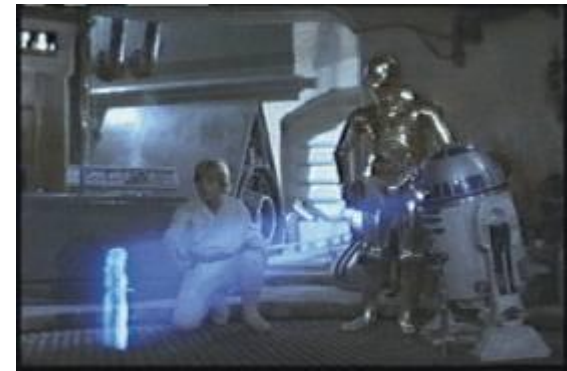
- Second most important character after the **hero**
- Can be even more important
- The ultimate evil the **hero** must overcome
- Can be the **hero**'s dark side, or another character or characters
- Think Sauron in *Lord of the Rings*



# Character Archetypes (10/10)

## Herald

- Used to divert the story/**hero** in a different direction
- Can be positive, negative or neutral
- Provides a motivation for the hero to progress
- Think R2D2 in *Star Wars*



# Character Development Questions

1. Are your characters art-driven or story-driven?
2. If art-based, how will you ensure that you get the look of the character that makes them identifiable?
3. If story-based, how will you convey personality and attitudes to the player? e.g. narration, dialogue, gameplay, backstory, or something else?



# Character Development Questions

4. How does the character's grammar, vocabulary, tone of voice, speech patterns contribute to the player's understanding of him/her/it?
5. What will intrigue and interest the player?
6. What will encourage the player to like him/her/it?



# Character Development Questions

7. How will he/she/it change and grow throughout the game?
8. Does the character correspond to one (or more) of the mythic archetypes you've learned about? If not, why not?





# Practical

- If you haven't already, nail down one single design idea that everyone agrees with;
- Work on developing the setting and characters for your game;
- Document your work;
- Record progress in your individual blogs.

