21 Adventure Game Design Tips
written by Bill Tiller with Larry Ahern

Introduction

Over the past nine years Larry Ahern and I have worked with many different adventure game designers and on many adventure games. We both contributed heavily to the game designs for all those projects. Larry even got to co designed The Curse of Monkey Island with Jonathan Ackley. During those projects we have learned a lot about the genre including these basic adventure game design 'rules', or you could just consider them 'strong suggestions'. The word 'rules' seem a bit strong for such a flexible genre as adventure games. Also many of these 'rules' can be applied successfully to other game genres as well.

- Bill Tiller

As you notice there are 21 tips, and we'll be posting 1 every week, starting with today. We hope you find them useful, and please, please comment as much as possible on them - if you agree / disagree, if you have used them in your own work - if so tell us about it! Maybe you even have additions to make to a rule, we want to hear it. We'd like to thank Bill and Larry for allowing us to print these.
And now, here is the very first rule from the experts.

1) Show the barrier before you show the way to overcome it. Clearly define the problem before you send the player looking for solutions. If the goal of the level is to save the princess, use a cinematic at the beginning showing the villain carrying her off to his castle. When the section becomes playable, it's very clear that the player needs to get into the castle and save her. The "how" part is the game.

Roger Tober: I sort of agree, but I think it's a bad idea to overuse cinematics for storytelling. I wouldn't show a video of the girl being taken; I would leave clues that show she was taken for the player to piece together. Of course, this could lead to an overall feeling of no goal at first, but some of my favorite games played like that. For instance, you're supposed to meet her at a location, but when you get there, she isn't there, and then you start finding clues as to what happened to her and what you must to do find her.

Bird Buckseed: I'm most satisfied with a game in which I know everything I do will lead me towards an intermediate aim that I know will lead me towards the overall goal… I prefer as few puzzles as possible in which the character has no motivation to try to solve it other than "ooh, this looks like a puzzle, let me try it". Ultimately, building up your game like that will lead to the unfortunate "try everything with everything" approach, much sooner than expected.

2) Don't wear out the player character's shoes. Keep locations close or make shortcuts to get to those locations. Edit out the tedium. When films portray characters doing legwork, they edit it down to key points that convey the necessary information. Make that interactive via portals or shortcuts that bypass the uneventful 20-minute walk across town to the crucial clue. Also, if a player solves a puzzle for one item in a sequence, don't make him repeat the same solution for the remaining items unless there's some potential for variation (just cut away to the conclusion).

Gabezz: Yeah, that was a problem I had in Simon The Sorcerer. There was a lot of walking, and whilst there were also a few short-cuts, they were situated too far between and came too late in the game. It was quite fun to walk around and discover the new locations for yourself, but it became too tedious after a while.

3) Keep the player entertained even when they are not solving puzzles. Make sure there are other things for the player to do and see when the puzzles have them stumped. This can range from mini-games, to interactive toys, to interactive dialogues with NPC's, to exploration, to viewing active elements of your living, breathing game world.

DaveGilbert: This is key - having lots of "stuff" in the background really helps in fleshing out the game world. Dialog is also very important - it can turn a generic stock NPC into a very memorable and interesting character.

4) Reward the player with animated sequences, new areas, or new powers for solving major puzzles. Players want to feel a sense of accomplishment, so don't just show them the same overused reach animation when the character finds an object that changes the course of the game. If it's a big deal, there should be a resulting dramatic animation payoff and then possibly some new territory, both physically and interactively, to explore. Other reward ideas include a point system with bonuses, new playable characters to unlock, bonus levels, new physical appearances for player characters, or access to behind-the-scenes or 'making of' materials for viewing after the game.

Esseb: Or vice versa, don't show a unique animation of the player trying to reach an object high up on a shelf, if it's not possible to get that object. Only makes the player twist his mind trying to figure out how to reach it.

Roger Tober: Cut scenes are a little rough for amateur developers, but the other ideas like adding more areas is something that's easy to do and probably more rewarding for the player. I remember playing Betrayal of Krondor and having the same rewarding feeling when a written piece with still pictures was added after a task was completed. I've never found points to be rewarding, a little too abstract. I think it should be something in the game that is useful.

5) Show the consequences of the Player Character's actions. If he foils a villain's plans, show how it affects the villain. If a player cuts off the power to a building, show how that affects the people inside. If the player releases a hideous voodoo curse, leaving a swath of death and destruction in its wake, by all means let the player visit that swath and suffer at the hands of the curse's survivors!

Roger Tober: I think it would get interesting when you see changes in the game world. Like [DOTT] tentacle, when Betsy Ross makes a different flag and you see the flag flying in the future. It could be something as simple as taking something from a character's home and later seeing that character without it, or looking for it. Has anyone noticed how often Day of the Tentacle gets brought up in these kind of Discussions? They did so much right. Using different characters for the player, changing situations, interesting puzzles, humor and imagination.

6) Provide subtle but entertaining and clear clues to give the player a fighting chance at solving the puzzles. Don't try to create any ultimate stumpers. Puzzles in these games are challenging enough without a little help from the designer. The path to a solution should be fun, whether the player rushes down it because the way is immediately clear to them, or whether they're unsure of the direction and are forced to search around a bit. There should be fun in the tangents and detours, and often this is where much of the character and detail of your world exist. Take advantage of it.

Igor: Agree, one of the hardest parts of game design. If there are too little clues, players complain the game is too hard… though, if there's too many of them, players complain again, that you are practically "giving away" solution. I think a lot of beta testing is the only way to get it just right.

2ma2: Designing puzzles is a tough task. Since you know them, you tend to make it even more tricky than it needs cause you think that's it's to easy and everyone will solve it instantly. Also, something that one must think at is; is it clear what the current action will do. One example is Floyd SB, where you had both a rock and a vase in the inventory. A puzzle was breaking the vase with the rock, which makes sense but it's not very likely that you'd come upon unless you, like I, tried every item on every other item while completely stuck. The solutions could be a small hint like looking at it, it says "it seems to be something inside of it" in which your aim is clear: acquire this something (break it being the solution). This aim is important. Many times, the player does not know WHAT to do with certain things, and providing hints, like the character saying "Gee, I must get into that somehow" gives you the task, and then the actual game play, figuring out what to do to accomplish this, can take place. This is a crucial part of the storyline work of course, but can be of great help when dealing with smaller things as well, like something mentioned within the context.

7) Vary the puzzle types and styles throughout the game to keep things fresh. Repetition is boring and can discourage people from playing your game. But if the puzzles are unusual and unexpected, players will be intrigued and stick with your game much longer. Don't be afraid to use arcade or platform style puzzles too, as long as they aren't too hard and can be bypassed by those who don't like this style of puzzle.

8) Make the player care by creating drama and empathy. We all relate to Luke Skywalker because we hate doing boring chores for our parents and would rather go off exploring the world and seeking adventure. We empathize with him and his dreams vs. the reality of his tedious existence. Then when his aunt and uncle are killed we really feel bad for him and want him to have revenge more then ever. In The Secret of Monkey Island, Guybrush Threepwood just wants to be a pirate. That's good enough for starters, but the game really gets interesting when he falls for Elaine and comes into conflict with Fester Shinetop. The drama kicks in when the villain attempts to drown Guybrush in order to kidnap and marry Elaine himself.

Roger Tober: This tip somewhat works for Sam and Max, as we are interested in solving the crime with them, but humor makes it different, like using Max as a circuit breaker, etc. But even in comedy, I think we have to be somewhat involved in the character's plight in order to get involved with the story. The important thing is to make the main character someone that we like, because then we will naturally empathize with them. Making them imperfect by adding some flaws to their character helps give them depth and make them more human, but they still have to be likeable.

9) Let players interact with the villain. Don't have him commit a terrible crime at the beginning, then sit in his hideout until the end of the game waiting for the player to come to him. Design multiple confrontations that build in intensity. The villain should react to the hero's progress, trying to stop him or slow him down, and their conflict should evolve. This doesn't necessarily mean that players need to chat with the bad guy every 5 minutes (too much access destroys the illusion of threat), but there should be confrontations, reactions, twists, turns, reversals and the like, as well as interactions with his lieutenants and cronies.

Ionias: I'm not sure that I agree with this 100% Some stories are about the "WHO" did the crime and not about the "HOW" to stop the crime. Giving away too much (i.e. interaction with the villain.) could ruin all the suspense. On the other hand I can see where player interaction with the villain, although he's not aware he's the villain could be very good for the story. Albeit hard to accomplish.

10) Use interesting situations, NPC's and dialogue to transform even your most rudimentary puzzles into entertaining gameplay. If you have a standard lock and key puzzle, at least make the person with the key unusual and entertaining. For example, the voodoo villagers in The Secret of Monkey Island took the cannibal stereotype and turned it on its head-they wanted to eat you, but had recently become vegetarians in order to limit their cholesterol intake.

11) Design puzzles and locations to minimize small, single-use animations. Animation is expensive, so save your animation budget for rewards and sequences that the player will see multiple times.

2ma2: I couldn't disagree more. Making unique small animations makes a game world alive. The only problem is making them slow and blocking, which will hinder gameplay and delay the progress, which is highly annoying. Teen agent was a nice example (of animations, not the horrific puzzle design and pot), whilst Broken Sword does the opposite and annoys the hell outta me. The answer instead lies in how you make them. Lesser complex animations could work just aswell as mega smooth eye candy with 40 frames. Full Throttle is still among the top games graphics-wise, and it doesn't delay the gameplay

Tim the Furnish: I guess this is one that really applies more to companies than to one-man-bands... budget? What's that? Still applies up to a point, though' - if you do a few general bend-down-pick-something-up or lean-over-press-something animations you can then place objects in your rooms at the right place to reuse the animations. Suddenly you've well on the way to having a proper interactive world and no more drawing needed. You can even use them for non-essential events, trying something and it not working for example. It's much nicer to see someone try to pick something up and fail than it is for them just to say "I can't pick that up" without trying.

12) Use the language of film. Edit the game the way a film or TV show is edited. Our visual language is a familiar style taught to us through TV and film and perfected over the last 100 years. It is the clearest most effective way to speak to your audience. For example, if the player is following an NPC to a certain

location with no opportunity to interact en route, then don't show them walking all the way over there. Watching people walk is boring. Instead, use a film editing trick called a 'cut', to instantly transport them to their destination. Players understand what happened and can fill in the blanks, as well as realize that action's lack of significance. There are a lot more rules about film language but it would take another article to list them all. I suggest anyone who wants to learn these get a book on the subject or take a class at a local junior college.

13) Listen to everyone's ideas and pick out the good ones that match your vision. Despite the fact that many games have one person's name on the cover, it most certainly doesn't mean that that person came up with every idea themselves. Nor usually does it mean he wrote all 7,000 to 10,000 lines of dialogue typical to an adventure game. Most production staffs include designers, scripters, writers, artists, and testers that help come up with all the ideas. It's the team leader's job to elicit, inspire, encourage, nurture and direct these ideas (along with a healthy dose of his own), and then keep the ones that fit with his image of the game, and set aside the ones that don't.

14) Plan ahead when designing your game, and be realistic about what you can achieve. Completing a small, solid project is better than having a grand vision never realized. I've done the latter myself when I was younger, and have seen many a film student's work go unfinished after realizing he'd bitten off more than he could chew. Meanwhile, filmmakers who did work that was short, but brilliant, were often rewarded with bigger budgets the next time and went on to create their grand vision.

Seph: I never saw the point of this sort of thing when I made my first games: The A pirate's Life Trilogy and Saving the City. When I realized how bad the dialogue was, that's when I woke up and realized I must plan.

15) Don't tease the player with things they can't access. The most interesting place in the game should be right where the action is, or where it's going. Do not show anything in the background that is too distracting, confusing, or intriguing unless you are going to let the player interact with it eventually.

Roger Tober: I think there's kind of a balance to seek between too many things to interact with and too few. If it's too few, the player feels very steered, if there's too many, overwhelmed. I would say too few is better than too many, though.

16) Don't underestimate the importance of music, voice acting, and sound effects. Music sets the mood and the emotional state for your game. Sound effects make your images come to life. Great character voices are so very important. Be especially careful whom you cast as your main characters. A miscast lead character with an irritating or otherwise inappropriate voice can ruin an otherwise successful game. Great casting choices, on the other hand, elevate a pretty good game to a higher level.

Roger Tober: I realize these things are important to adventures, but I personally am experimenting in not using them. My thoughts are this; we read comics and don't expect sound effects and music. Why is that? (Rhetorical), because the comics aren't written for music and sound effects. I played MI 1 without them and I think it was my favorite monkey island game. It wasn't written for sound effects, and I don't think it would have improved the game. Think how many non-adventure games you play that don't have sound effects or music, most of them being puzzle games. Text adventures don't use them and many people get upset when they're added. Unprofessional voice acting can ruin a game, and then there's the lip sync problem, which is annoying when it doesn't work. When you have a limited amount of resources for game development, should you spend it on bad actors, terrible music, and goofy lip synch; or focus on story development and puzzles? I could be wrong, but I think it's story and puzzles that will make or break an adventure. Write the game for the media, and you can do an amazing job with limited resources. I think if it's done well, people will accept and even pay for a high quality adventure without these things, and much less money can be charged because of lower production costs.

Igor: I wouldn't agree with Roger, that sound effects and music are "less important" aspects of game. For me, they are two of the most important ones- because they build atmosphere! In contrast to what have other said here, I don't think that story is THAT important for a good game (at least not for games such as CMI, etc.)… For me puzzles and atmosphere are two of the factors that make me decide whether the game is good or not. And because the sound (which is in my opinion even more important than graphics and as important as dialogues) builds or destroy good atmosphere, I'd say it's VERY important.

17) Games are about wish fulfillment, so don't let the gameplay feel mundane or like work. The player doesn't want to be reminded of his life, he wants to do something exciting for the short period of time he is playing your game, whether it's saving the world or just wearing someone else's shoes for

awhile. Some games let you play the hero, while others, such as The Sims revolve around more mundane activity, but players get to be someone else and do things they couldn't or wouldn't do in real life. That is the aspect of wish fulfillment. You'll notice that there is no expansion pack called The Sims: Commute to Work.

18) Make the quests clear, cogent and manageable. If the player asks at the beginning of the game "what do I do?" you have a serious problem. Whether it's a mentor sending players toward the adventure, a character's plea for help, or putting the player character's butt on the line, something needs to clearly propel them in the right direction. In the Monkey Island games there is always the good ole' Voodoo Lady to remind the player of his goals. Cogency means clear and logical. So, if I give the old man a sacred root he will tell me about the secret entrance to the castle. That is pretty straight forward. But if I have to push him over a log so his arm accidentally triggers the secret latch to the passageway, then things are getting a little muddled and confusing. Why can't the player push the lever himself? How is the player supposed to know that this is going to happen in order to be motivated to try it in the first place? Make sure the goal is manageable. In Full Throttle, in order to escape the town of Mellonweed Ben has to get three things: gas, new forks for his chopper, and a blowtorch. This is a manageable quest. But let's say for a moment that Ben also needed to get grease for his chain, light bulbs for his head light, spark plugs, a catalytic converter etc. That might be too much, and too hard to manage. Eventually, players will start to forget which quest they are actually on and get bored with the lack of real progress.

Roger Tober: There's also a passive way to show something needs to be found or done. For instance, having a machine that clearly has a part missing, or having the character say something like "This looks like some sort of device used for travel." So you know that it requires something to be made useful again. Most of the time while playing the dig, I had a pretty good feeling of what needed to done.

19) Don't waste the players' money with multiple solutions to a single puzzle. If you animate both solutions the player is probably only going to see one of those animations, but he paid for both when he bought the game. However, do provide payoffs for failed attempts-this is a great chance to build character. If there are obvious (but incorrect) solutions that most players will try, make sure there are some entertaining animations of the Player Character failing. Players will be bored out of their minds if your character stands there and says, "That won't work" to all but the correct answer.

Squinkycakes: Or at least have the Player Character say something humourous about it. For example, when he/she/it tries to "pick up" another character, "I can't pick that up" can be replaced with "He's not my type" ;)

Jon Kneller: I kind of disagree here, on 2 points. Firstly, I support the use of multiple choices, as long as they are well signposted. In Indy it was even on the game box, and as a result this feature was very well received. Secondly, for small puzzles, I would advocate multiple approaches to a solution as a way of avoiding frustration: "Why the hell do I need to find one particular drawing pin in order to burst a balloon when I have a pair of scissors, a knife, a pencil etc. to hand?" The result is the same whichever you use, you have still managed to work out the approach required, and you get the small payoff of the balloon exploding without running around for hours looking for an item that, due to the law of averages, you missed before. You probably wouldn't even need a new animation!

20) Never give the player a tool that can too easily be used to solve a number of puzzles (e.g. a gun, some dynamite, a blowtorch). Make the items very puzzle specific-unique to that problem. Also, make sure it seems somewhat reasonable within the fiction that items like these wouldn't be available to your character (you wouldn't want a game whose central character was a mobster, if you are going to have him solving lots of obscure lock-and-key puzzles. He'd most likely have a gun). In Full Throttle the designers knew allowing Ben to hold onto the blowtorch would let him get into the junkyard and the gas tower, and generally cause a big ruckus. So to prevent this, as soon as the player finds the blowtorch, the game cuts to Mo's shop and plays a cinematic of Ben handing it over to help with the repairs. There was never an opportunity for the player to use the blowtorch to solve puzzles.

Trumgottist: On the other hand, it's very nice when an item is reused in several creative ways and it's not just one puzzle per item. Multi-use items are fun. As always, the design is a balance act.

21) Have fun. If you aren't having fun with your game, most likely your players won't either. If you enjoy what you're doing and like the work you're producing, it will probably show in the final product.

11th February 2003

Rule No. 1

1.) Show the barrier before you show the way to overcome it. Clearly define the problem before you send the player looking for solutions. If the goal of the level is to save the princess, use a cinematic at the beginning showing the villain carrying her off to his castle. When the section becomes playable, it's very clear that the player needs to get into the castle and save her. The "how" part is the game.

Comments:

Are we talking of knowing what to do on a step-by-step basis (I need to get into the lab and find evidence of…)? In which case, I agree.

Or are we talking of knowing what you need to achieve at the end of the game? All of the best games, for me, involve working out what's going on and then how you're going to deal with it.

Posted by Steve Ince

Then you are UNcool, Courthold! :p

;)
m0ds

Posted by m0ds

Hey, Myst is cool! :)

Posted by Courthold

Oh I completely agree that with adventures that aren't like Myst (i.e. good adventures :-P) there should be a set task that you have to do. However I believe you should take it a few steps further. For instance, let say your first goal is to kill someone and then rendezvous with your boss. So you start off with just having the kill in mind…you find a way to do complete the task and then you're done. So now your second objective is to find your boss at, lets say, the Green Pub…but you're presented with underlying problems such as how to get out of the room you're currently in, how to find your way to the pub etc. And after a good few minutes of gaming you'll make your way to the pub but not find your boss. An adventure game should always keep you on the edge of your seat; however…puzzles shouldn't be dragged out TOO long before completion.

I must sound really confusing…sorry, its 2 am and I'm bored as all hell.

Posted by Guybrush122

I sort of agree, but I think it's a bad idea to overuse cinematics for storytelling. I wouldn't show a video of the girl being taken; I would leave clues that show she was taken for the player to piece together. Of course, this could lead to an overall feeling of no goal at first, but some of my favorite games played like that. For instance, you're supposed to meet her at a location, but when you get there, she isn't there, and then you start finding clues as to what happened to her and what you must to do find her.

Posted by Roger Tober

I'd go one step further and say that you need to give the player not just one but multiple tasks to do at any given point. Sure, your overarching aim might be to rescue the princess, but if the player is left stranded somewhere completely different with no clue what to do next to achieve that aim the hint book is never far away.

Ideally, the game should provide you with both an overall aim, several intermediate aims (Get Into The Castle, Get Sword To Kill Villain With, etc.) and several levels of short-term aims going down to individual puzzle level (get past the guards at the door -> steal magic portion of invisibility -> distract wizard -> find object to distract wizard with -> etc.).

I'm most satisfied with a game in which I know everything I do will lead me towards an intermediate aim that I know will lead me towards the overall goal... I prefer as few puzzles as possible in which the character has no motivation to try to solve it other than "ooh, this looks like a puzzle, let me try it". Ultimately, building up your game like that will lead to the unfortunate "try everything with everything" approach, much sooner than expected.

Posted by Buck Birdseed

Nice Common sense rule. The last thing you want is for the player to hit a brick wall without any idea of how to get past it, because then they get frustrated and start reaching for the walkthrough.

Posted by PTDC

I like the "dividing the game in chapters" bit used in MI as well. One doesn't necessarily have to show a big screen displaying "Chapter 7: Guybrush Kicks Insanely-Large Buttocks", but at least have some sort of cutscene in between each "chapter" so that people know what's going on.

I tried to do this in Cubert when first designing the game; dividing the game into four parts. However, as the game progressed, where the parts began and ended became more ambiguous, or so it seemed to me. I'm glad the game was still clear enough for people to say nice things about it, though!

Posted by Squinkycakes

Someone hasn't learned the shear joy and excitement that *is* LENCE FLEARHE!!12

Bestest feature EVAR In N E GME!

(In other words, I was joking :)

(as in, I think it's the most stupid thing anyone ever made a computer do)

Posted by Esseb

Great tip! It makes perfect sense, but I could have never come up with things like this myself.

Posted by Scid

Yeah, I absolutely agree.
The problem of many fan- or amateur-adventures out there is, that
1.) The story is mostly very abstruse
2.) Due to lack of cutscenes/intros/storytelling, the player gets thrown in there, with at least a bit of

information about the character, but with no clear target.

In professional games, this would be much worse than in an amateur-adventure, because the pros are generally much longer (longer playtime). Anyhow, imho, it's quite de-motivating when I don't exactly know what to achieve next.
Positive example: Cubert Badbone.
I always knew what I had to achieve. (and the puzzles were quite logically too.)

I very much liked how MI dealt with this. It was separated in these different chapters, so you always had a clear, more or less close, target to achieve. (For example the three quests to become a pirate. You could solve them parallel-ly, and they were independent from each other.)

I'm using this 3-quest-idea too... Anyhow I just realized this doesn't completely stick to the first "rule", but it worked well in MI, though you tried to follow one quest, and meanwhile could "ignore" the locations you didn't have to visit, so it didn't become too complex anyway...

If I'm starting to analyze MI instead of posting a reply to the "rule", stop me.. ;)

Posted by ei8th

Yeah, I always think it's important, particularly in adventure games, to make the player know where they're going. It can be frustrating and no fun at all if you're completely lost, with no idea what's going on or what to do next.

Posted by Gabezz

I love lens flare! But I wouldn't use it for a cartoon game. It would seem too out of place. But I think you should use it in realistic games because it looks cool, it makes the game seem more like a dramatic action flick and it helps make the game feel more realistic.

-Bill Tiller

Posted by Green Beard

You don't have to give the player much in the cinematic, just the basic information. If you really want to add more details and background information I would suggest allowing the PC to find it themselves either by talking to a NPC or finding it somewhere else, like in a book or craved on a grave stone. Just don't blow your art budget on the secondary information.
Also the point of this rule is to avoid a situation where you pick up all the items you need to solve the puzzle before you even know what the puzzle is. The task or problem must be clear first, and then give some sort of hint how to solve it.

-Bill Tiller

Posted by Green Beard

I think the important bit is that you know there is a damsel in distress, not how you get to know it.

But cinematics, sure. With Award Winning* actors and LENSE FLARE.

*nominated for best burger frying at McDonald's restaurant 4353 January 2002.

Posted by Esseb

Sounds logical. You don't want a game in which you'll have to figure out what the problem is.

I'm wondering how detailed you can go, though. Do you need to explain *why* the princess was captured? Or why are YOU the one that has to save her?

Posted by Erwin_Br

Cool tip, thanks! I certainly agree that cinematics are needed. :)

Posted by m0ds

Adventure Game Tips - Number 2
written by Bill Tiller with Larry Ahern

2.) Don't wear out the player character's shoes. Keep locations close or make shortcuts to get to those locations. Edit out the tedium. When films portray characters doing legwork, they edit it down to key points that convey the necessary information. Make that interactive via portals or shortcuts that bypass the uneventful 20-minute walk across town to the crucial clue. Also, if a player solves a puzzle for one item in a sequence, don't make him repeat the same solution for the remaining items unless there's some potential for variation (just cut away to the conclusion).

Comments:

When B. Tiller releases his game, if it doesn't follow these points I'll be seriously let down :p

;)
m0ds

Posted by m0ds

Maps obviously eliminate a lot of the problems. The one in Broken Sword: Shadow of the Templars was excellently used. However, Grim Fandango proved that walking is not necessarily a problem, if the ambience is of a high enough caliber.

Posted by X

One of the great failings of the otherwise excellent Gabriel Knight 3 was the fact that you had to walk through the town again and again and again. The way it was solved in GK1, with the map, was much more elegant.

Posted by Buck Birdseed

I also think that too much "walking" is annoying.
I don't know if anyone agrees with this but in MI2:LCR it seemed that there was a lot of walking at the end in the tunnels…
I also think that "walking" around can help more, for instance, it can help with discovering more things on

your way…um.

-lalalaLuke

Like in Monkey Island 2, when you were putting in the pegs in the big tree, you didn't need to do it for all the holes. That was nice. In CMI, when you could double click to hop over to the next screen, that was, as well, as nice.

I think it's good in Sam & Max that you only need to search through the tunnel of love once for the Mole man and then after that you're just taken there automatically. It'd just be so tedious having to do it over and over.

:)
m0ds

Then again, the navigation of Larry 7 didn't do it for me. The exploration was reduced to a minimum because you always went from where you were to where you wanted to go without "traveling"

It's also a 'cheap' way to increase the amount of hours it takes to complete the game.

I also think it can be 'overdone'. You don't have to cut too much away, imo.

Remember the Tunnel of Love in Sam and Max? Once you found the Moleman's place you don't need to 'ride' the attraction anymore. So when you walk in, you immediately step into the blind lad's room. I think it wouldn't hurt to walk through the tunnel first, before getting there.

Too true. In short, don't make a game like Escape From Delirium, where one puzzle is followed by another 20 screens away, which involves going back 20 screens again to pick up and object LOL etc. Cool, thanks!

:)
m0ds

I couldn't agree more here. That was one of the things that bothered me in (otherwise great) Syberia. There were tons of locations, that had no other purpose but to make player click on the other side of screen to pass it… and there was no map that would speed up game play.

Yeah, that was a problem I had in Simon The Sorcerer. There was a lot of walking, and whilst there were also a few short-cuts, they were situated too far between and came too late in the game.

It was quite fun to walk around and discover the new locations for yourself, but it became too tedious after a while.

Posted by Gabezz

Adventure Game Tips - Number 3
written by Bill Tiller with Larry Ahern

3) Keep the player entertained even when they are not solving puzzles. Make sure there are other things for the player to do and see when the puzzles have them stumped. This can range from mini-games, to interactive toys, to interactive dialogues with NPC's, to exploration, to viewing active elements of your living, breathing game world.

Comments:

I liked the mini-games in the casino of "Leisure Suit Larry 1". I don't know if you can consider Monkey Island's insult sword fighting as a mini-game, but it sure was heck entertaining! :)

Posted by tekky

Very good tip :)
I'm hoping I'll have time to add extra stuff to my little adventure. I do have some dialogue trees in there but as I'm discovering, lip-synching is a bitch with 3d characters.
Hopefully the script will be funny though :)
Car bomb in Sam and Max is the best mini game distraction I've seen so far I think :) Usually I prefer high levels of interactivity with the scenes.

Posted by Sycada

I'll keep that in mind. It makes sense though. Easter eggs can help too; it's just a pain trying to find them! LoL.

;)
m0ds

Posted by m0ds

This is key - having lots of "stuff" in the background really helps in fleshing out the game world. Dialog is also very important - it can turn a generic stock NPC into a very memorable and interesting character.

Posted by DaveGilbert

Yep, the best tip so far! Can't wait for the next one.

Posted by Igor

It also distracts the player so it doesn't feel that the only goal is to solve puzzle after puzzle. I think this is the best tip so far.

Posted by Erwin_Br

Adventure Game Tips - Number 5
written by Bill Tiller with Larry Ahern

5) **Show the consequences of the Player Character's actions.** If he foils a villain's plans, show how it affects the villain. If a player cuts off the power to a building, show how that affects the people inside. If the player releases a hideous voodoo curse, leaving a swath of death and destruction in its wake, by all means let the player visit that swath and suffer at the hands of the curse's survivors!

Comments:

I'll probably make one big list yep, but these separate ones can stay up so you can read everyone's comments too.

Posted by Courthold

Will there be a nice comprehensive printable list of all of these great tips at the end?

Posted by Scummbuddy

Oh right, you meant tip #4 mods, my bad.

Posted by Esseb

These tips are wonderful. Some are just minor details which can do a lot of good for your game, like this one.

Posted by Erwin_Br

They never said to use cutscenes in tip #1 either mods. It was just an example.

And I love this tip. I love it when stuff I do causes consequences in a game. Like if solving a puzzle involves making someone believe he is dead, then later seeing him pestering the village trying to spook people.

Posted by Esseb

I think it would get interesting when you see changes in the gameworld. Like tentacle, when Betsy Ross makes a different flag, and you see the flag flying in the future. It could be something as simple as taking something from a character's home and later seeing that character without it, or looking for it. Has anyone noticed how often Day of the Tentacle gets brought up in these kind of Discussions? They did so much right. Using different characters for the player, changing situations, interesting puzzles, humor and imagination.

Posted by Roger Tober

Ahhh, I thought you were basically saying use cut-scenes again, but now I understand what you really mean, show that something affects someone. Like in DOTT, in the future, we get to see the guys in the prison cell as a result of Blue Tentacles scheme (even though this isn't triggered by the player).

Anyway, I agree with this tip, the only drawback I can find is that it would certainly mean a lot more character art! ;)

m0ds

Adventure Game Tips - Number 6
written by Bill Tiller with Larry Ahern

6) **Provide subtle but entertaining and clear clues to give the player a fighting chance at solving the puzzles.** Don't try to create any ultimate stumpers. Puzzles in these games are challenging enough without a little help from the designer. The path to a solution should be fun, whether the player rushes down it because the way is immediately clear to them, or whether they're unsure of the direction and are forced to search around a bit. There should be fun in the tangents and detours, and often this is where much of the character and detail of your world exist. Take advantage of it.

Comments:

Designing puzzles is a tough task. Since you know them, you tend to make it even more tricky than it needs cause you think that's it's to easy and everyone will solve it instantly. Also, something that one must think at is; is it clear what the current action will do. One example is Floyd SB, where you had both a rock and a vase in the inventory. A puzzle was breaking the vase with the rock, which makes sense but it's not very likely that you'd come upon unless you, like I, tried every item on every other item while completely stuck. The solutions could be a small hint like looking at it, it says "it seems to be something inside of it" in which your aim is clear: acquire this something (break it being the solution).

This aim is important. Many times, the player does not know WHAT to do with certain things, and providing hints, like the character saying "Gee, I must get into that somehow" gives you the task, and then the actual gameplay, figuring out what to do to accomplish this, can take place. This is a crucial part of the storyline work of course, but can be of great help when dealing with smaller things aswell, like something mentioned within the context.

Good idea squinky, The GUI in my game, Kinky Island, has a "brain" icon in which you can click and the main character will say something that gives you a slight hint.

I don't know if you ever played Interstate 76 (not an adventure game) but it had a good "notepad" system that when you looked at it, it gave you a briefing and changed as you completed each task. That was useful.

m0ds

Puzzles need to be fun. This is one way. My favorite implementation of this is to have something happen when the player is getting warm. Maybe it's just a comment by the character, or something that they do that shows the player that he's getting close. I also think puzzles should be multilevel. If condition1 and condition2 and perhaps even condition3 are true, puzzle is solved. When each one of these conditions is

met, something happens, but the puzzle is solved when all three (or more) are met. An example is in MI4 when the catapult guy had to be given something to eat, and the puzzle of the catapult solved while he was eating.

Posted by Roger Tober

Well, how about an optional hint system? The Neverhood, for example, had a little mailbox in which you received hints for the next puzzle you needed to complete, and whether you read the notes in the mailbox or not was completely up to you. Still, if you had progressed far in the game, it soon became painstakingly tedious to go alllll the way back to the room with the mailbox. And if you progressed even further, the guy writing you the notes eventually died, leaving everything up to you...

Posted by Squinkycakes

Agree, one of the hardest parts of game design. If there are too little clues, players complain the game is too hard... though, if there's too many of them, players complain again, that you are practically "giving away" solution. I think a lot of beta testing is the only way to get it just right.

Posted by Igor

It took me 4 years to solve one puzzle in MI and then I adjusted the contrast on my screen. 4 YEARS!

Posted by PTDC

Nice :)

Posted by m0ds

This is one of the hardest parts of adventure game design. You need to find the right balance.

Posted by Erwin_Br

Good stuff.

Posted by Scummbuddy

Adventure Game Tips - Number 7
written by Bill Tiller with Larry Ahern

7) **Vary the puzzle types and styles throughout the game to keep things fresh.** Repetition is boring and can discourage people from playing your game. But if the puzzles are unusual and unexpected, players will be intrigued and stick with your game much longer. Don't be afraid to use arcade or platform style puzzles too, as long as they aren't too hard and can be bypassed by those who don't like this style of puzzle.

Comments:

I'll die a happy man if I never encounter another "I'm hungry, get me an apple and I'll give you this key" puzzle.

And the "puzzle theory" is good, read it people!

Posted by Esseb

----quote----
Maybe they can do better graphics or better animations, but when it comes to puzzles we're all on the same footing.

That goes for story too!

Posted by Erwin_Br

I definitely agree with this tip. I feel that puzzles are just as important as story in an adventure. After all, that's really what you are doing when you are playing an adventure; you're solving puzzles, and exploring, I suppose. The puzzle theory page posted by Erwin was very interesting. This is one place an amateur is really on the same level as a professional.
Maybe they can do better graphics or better animations, but when it comes to puzzles we're all on the same footing.

Posted by Roger Tober

Just don't make puzzles obscure, ack!

Posted by m0ds

Make sure to read the 'puzzle theory' on AGDzine. It lists a lot of puzzle types and styles.

--Erwin

Posted by Erwin_Br

Adventure Game Tips - Number 8
written by Bill Tiller with Larry Ahern

8) **Make the player care by creating drama and empathy.** We all relate to Luke Skywalker because we hate doing boring chores for our parents and would rather go off exploring the world and seeking adventure. We empathize with him and his dreams vs. the reality of his tedious existence. Then when his aunt and uncle are killed we really feel bad for him and want him to have revenge more then ever. In The Secret of Monkey Island, Guybrush Threepwood just wants to be a pirate. That's good enough for starters, but the game really gets interesting when he falls for Elaine and comes into conflict with Fester Shinetop. The drama kicks in when the villain attempts to drown Guybrush in order to kidnap and marry Elaine himself.

Comments:

Yeah, and it's important to start off with something that's interesting and that will get the player interested, but to make the drama happen in front of the player so that they feel part of it, and thus involved in the story. A bit like in Half-life. :)

Posted by Gabezz

This tip somewhat works for Sam and Max, as we are interested in solving the crime with them, but humor makes it different, like using Max as a circuit breaker, etc. But even in comedy, I think we have to be somewhat involved in the character's plight in order to get involved with the story. The important thing is to make the main character someone that we like, because then we will naturally empathize with them. Making them imperfect by adding some flaws to their character helps give them depth and make them more human, but they still have to be likeable.

Posted by Roger Tober

This doesn't go with every game, I think.

I mean, try to apply this 'rule' to Sam and Max.

--Erwin

Posted by Erwin_Br

You bent my wookie!

Posted by PTDC

I wasn't a Luke Skywalker fan myself, I empathized more with chewie. He must get so hot in the summer.

Posted by Courthold

Empathy, mmmmmmm

m0ds

Posted by m0ds

Adventure Game Tips - Number 9
written by Bill Tiller with Larry Ahern

9) **Let players interact with the villain.** Don't have him commit a terrible crime at the beginning, then sit in his hideout until the end of the game waiting for the player to come to him. Design multiple confrontations that build in intensity. The villain should react to the hero's progress, trying to stop him or slow him down, and their conflict should evolve. This doesn't necessarily mean that players need to chat with the bad guy every 5 minutes (too much access destroys the illusion of threat), but there should be confrontations, reactions, twists, turns, reversals and the like, as well as interactions with his lieutenants and cronies.

Comments:

I think it's fair to assume that this tip only applies to games where there _is_ a villain, and the villain's identity is known.

Posted by Nellie

Think of Die Hard, for example. Some very nice bad guy < > good guy interactions :)

m0ds

Posted by m0ds

This is a good point. In my previous project, Thod, I failed in creating many confrontations with the Villain. There were a few meetings with the bad guy, although he was not known to be bad until near the end.

Posted by Seph

Whoever's posting with no username could you log out / log in again, or stop posting like that if it's intentional.

Posted by Courthold

"ScummBuddy:
So, how do you propose a good story with no antagonist?"

I'm not saying that there can't be an antagonist. I'm just saying he shouldn't be the ultimate bad guy in charge of his minions of evil. How many games have you played with that context? Was the story deep? No. I don't know if you played Syberia, but the story was about trying to find a certain person and the trail that he left. There was a bad guy in one leg of the journey, but not the head of some great organization that was going to take over the world. One dark antihero in control of the evil forces is comic book stuff. If that's what you're shooting for fine, it's just getting a little old.

Posted by [unknown (possibly Bob)]

I'm not sure that I agree with this 100%. Some stories are about the "WHO" did the crime and not about the "HOW" to stop the crime. Giving away too much (i.e. interaction with the villain.) could ruin all the suspense.

On the other hand I can see where player interaction with the villain, although he's not aware he's the villain could be very good for the story. Albeit hard to accomplish.

Posted by Ionias

So, how do you propose a good story with no antagonist? The better stories leave us with the morals and the ideals that came from the interaction between the protagonist and the complimentary. Do you mean like in Escape from MI, when LeChuck wasn't the ultimate baddy and Ozzie was (at least for awhile)?

Posted by Scummbuddy

I'm tired of the master bad guy who is at the bottom of all things evil. I think it's been done to death. I know story is about struggle, but I think there has to be more. Syberia is an example of a game with no overall bad guy that worked exceptionally well. I like Sherlock Holmes stories, but I don't particularly like the ones with Professor Moriarity.

Posted by Bob

Monkey Island is *the* school example of that.

Posted by Erwin_Br

Adventure Game Tips - Number 10
written by Bill Tiller with Larry Ahern

Use interesting situations, NPC's and dialogue to transform even your most rudimentary puzzles into entertaining gameplay.

If you have a standard lock and key puzzle, at least make the person with the key unusual and entertaining. For example, the voodoo villagers in The Secret of Monkey Island took the cannibal stereotype and turned it on its head—they wanted to eat you, but had recently become vegetarians in order to limit their cholesterol intake.

Comments:

This is a pretty neat tip. I think it's also a challenge to transform even the dullest puzzle to an interesting situation. LucasArts has a great reputation on this. (I suddenly remember a monkey wrench)

Posted by Erwin_Br

Adventure Game Tips - Number 11
written by Bill Tiller with Larry Ahern

Design puzzles and locations to minimize small, single-use animations.

Animation is expensive, so save your animation budget for rewards and sequences that the player will see multiple times.

Comments:

I guess this is one that really applies more to companies than to one-man-bands… budget? What's that? Still applies up to a point, though' - if you do a few general bend-down-pick-something-up or lean-over-press-something animations you can then place objects in your rooms at the right place to reuse the

animations. Suddenly you've well on the way to having a proper interactive world and no more drawing needed. You can even use them for non-essential events, trying something and it not working for example. It's much nicer to see someone try to pick something up and fail than it is for them just to say "I can't pick that up" without trying.

As for rewards… yeah, but nobody really expects huge animated rewards to the same extent in home-made fayre. I'd much rather play a game with animated actions and a well-written scrolling "You emerge from the castle, bruised and battered but triumphant, clutching the gem of Hjgoiwwkotmfme in your bloodied palm. Your puppy bounds over and licks your leg. It stings like hell, but you smile all the same. 'Time to go home,' you tell him. 'My work here is done'." than one with a huge animated ending but nothing but text-boxes all over the screen while playing the darn thing.

Posted by Tim the Furnish

I couldn't disagree more. Making unique small animations makes a game world alive. The only problem is making them slow and blocking, which will hinder gameplay and delay the progress, which is highly annoying. Teen agent was a nice example (of animations, not the horrific puzzle design and pot), whilst Broken Sword does the opposite and annoys the hell outta me.

The answer instead lies in how you make them. Lesser complex animations could work just aswell as mega smooth eye candy with 40 frames. Full Throttle is still among the top games graphics-wise, and it doesn't delay the gameplay

Posted by 2ma2

Hehe, it was too expensive to publish more :P

--Erwin

Posted by Erwin_Br

Short, but sweet.

m0ds

Posted by m0ds

Adventure Game Tips - Number 12
written by Bill Tiller with Larry Ahern

Use the language of film.

Edit the game the way a film or TV show is edited. Our visual language is a familiar style taught to us through TV and film and perfected over the last 100 years. It is the clearest most effective way to speak to your audience. For example, if the player is following an NPC to a certain location with no opportunity to interact en route, then don't show them walking all the way over there. Watching people walk is boring. Instead, use a film editing trick called a 'cut', to instantly transport them to their destination. Players understand what happened and can fill in the blanks, as well as realize that action's lack of significance.

There are a lot more rules about film language but it would take another article to list them all. I suggest anyone who wants to learn these get a book on the subject or take a class at a local junior college.

Unless the aliens pretend to be human and wear human masks and human clothes, of course.

I hope that many amateur developers are using the rule described above, since it might be very annoying when you've got to sit through a long walk over and over again.

Posted by Erwin_Br

It's quite true, a lot of the things with game development and films are the same. Character interaction is one thing; treat them as real human beings, change and develop them for a situation how a real person would react. (Obviously this might not apply to aliens etc. :p)

Posted by Courthold

Adventure Game Tips - Number 13
written by Bill Tiller with Larry Ahern

Listen to everyone's ideas and pick out the good ones that match your vision.

Despite the fact that many games have one person's name on the cover, it most certainly doesn't mean that that person came up with every idea themselves. Nor usually does it mean he wrote all 7,000 to 10,000 lines of dialogue typical to an adventure game.

Most production staffs include designers, scripters, writers, artists, and testers that help come up with all the ideas. It's the team leader's job to elicit, inspire, encourage, nurture and direct these ideas (along with a healthy dose of his own), and then keep the ones that fit with his image of the game, and set aside the ones that don't.

Comments:

Me too. Other people always look at things very differently then you do. I let others also 'judge' my artwork.

Posted by Erwin_Br

I take ideas from others, but as long as they're not plot ideas. For the Thod trilogy I've worked out my plot and I don't want it any different, but I still go for ideas for puzzles etc, mostly from my testers.

Posted by Seph

A nice one.

Posted by vel

Adventure Game Tips - Number 15

written by Bill Tiller with Larry Ahern

Don't tease the player with things they can't access.

The most interesting place in the game should be right where the action is, or where it's going. Do not show anything in the background that is too distracting, confusing, or intriguing unless you are going to let the player interact with it eventually.

Comments:

I remember being very frustrated by the beach in Puerto Pollo (Curse of Monkey Island) - I was convinced there was some puzzle involving either the chickens or the little red button by the fort... I kept going back to that location, and I must have tried feeding everything conceivable to those chickens. I wish there had been at least some kind of payoff!

Posted by Jon Kneller

Another thing that's sort of related that just occurred to me is having one zillion things in the inventory, so you grab one item at a time and put it on something and listen to the character say "That doesn't work." And then you find out that none of them work, so you move on to the next item in the background and repeat.

Posted by Roger Tober

I think there's kind of a balance to seek between too many things to interact with and too few. If it's too few, the player feels very steered, if there's too many, overwhelmed. I would say too few is better than too many, though.

Posted by Roger Tober

I don't like those games in which you can pick up and put in your inventory EVERY useless item, like in DreamWeb.

Posted by Erwin_Br

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very true. I would go a step further and say let the player interact with everything possible. (within reason)

Posted by Ionias

No one wants the players mad at the creators.

Posted by Scummbuddy

very good one!

Posted by krkode

Adventure Game Tips - Number 16
written by Bill Tiller with Larry Ahern

Don't underestimate the importance of music, voice acting, and sound effects.

Music sets the mood and the emotional state for your game. Sound effects make your images come to life. Great character voices are so very important.

Be especially careful whom you cast as your main characters. A miscast lead character with an irritating or otherwise inappropriate voice can ruin an otherwise successful game. Great casting choices, on the other hand, elevate a pretty good game to a higher level.

Comments:

Adventure game music. It's what I live for!

:)
m0ds

Posted by m0ds

>>>Well, all I was saying is that a good adventure can be written without voice acting or music, and I still believe it. <<<

Yes, agree. As a big adventure fan, I play any point&click game, no matter if it's in 320x200, with no sound and speech, etc.

But I won't lie to you, that I find games with good sound and graphics much more appealing and interesting (what would be The Dig without it's amazing music and sound effects?). Also, I don't believe that *new* games without sound would have any chance on commercial market (I'm not talking about cult classics here).

There are different (lower) expectations for amateur scene of course. But that's why we call it "amateur"
:)

Posted by Igor

>>>when you say that comedies don't have stories<<<
I didn't say that :)

Posted by Igor

Well, all I was saying is that a good adventure can be written without voice acting or music, and I still believe it. People are still playing and paying for text adventures and these don't even have graphics. I'm just interested in trying some alternatives to the mini-movie adventures that are so expensive to produce. I think your confusing story with drama when you say that comedies don't have stories, but why quibble over syntax.

Posted by Roger Tober

As I already said: I'm not talking about adventures without storylines (that would actually be impossible- there must be at least some kind of story if there are characters (even old Mario platform games had one)... to tie-up together puzzles).
We are talking about how *important* is story itself for separated adventure styles.

Posted by Igor

Humor does have to side track the story somewhat. It kind of has a purpose of its own, I'll go along with that. I suppose that's why Seinfeld called his show a show about nothing, but the stories in his comedies were still very carefully worked out, just more farcical in nature.

Posted by Roger Tober

I'm not sure why you think that humorous games don't have a story.

They do have a story, but I agree with Igor because you just can't compare the story of Sam and Max with Grim Fandango. I don't need to explain that GF had a much thicker story. Instead of focusing on the story, Sam and Max focused more on humour.

I'm sure there are a few games that focus on both, but I can't name one (or haven't played one).

Posted by Erwin_Br

I'm not sure why you think that humorous games don't have a story, but the games you mentioned all had very good stories, they were just humorous. I also disagree with the idea that Syberia didn't have puzzles. If it didn't, I would have gone through the game in an hour or less and it took me quite a few hours, as much as most adventure games I've played. The puzzles were very much part of the game, which is good puzzle design, although there were a few "hide the item in a crowded scene" type, which I personally think is a cheap trick.

Posted by Roger Tober

First happy new year everyone! Hope you had a great night! :)

>>>I agree that a story is only one tool in an adventure game, there's also exploration and puzzle solving.<<<
Yes, agree. That's actually my point. Adventures, while the most story-driven genre among games, they are still games in the first place. TLJ was amazing (my second most favorite adventure actually), but honestly, it felt more like an interactive movie or a book, than a game. Syberia went even farther and almost didn't have puzzles anymore, which bothered me...

The way I see it: there are two kinds of adventures- you have story driven ones (TLJ, Syberia, Broken Sword, Grim Fandango...) and humor-puzzle ones (CMI, Dott, SamnMax...), where story-line isn't of such big importance, but they build more on the whole atmosphere, humor, characters, puzzles.

In general, I prefer the second one.

Also agree with Krkode- it's the balance between those elements that is important. But it's up to the author of the game what he/she will emphasize more: atmosphere or story.

Just my opinion.

Posted by Igor

Dialogs build story, so it's hard to separate the two, but I suppose if you had a bunch of pointless dialogues with the character not really going to an eventual ending, then you could have dialogues without story. Stories always have a beginning, middle, and an end, and revolve around a crisis that needs solving.
I agree that a story is only one tool in an adventure game, there's also exploration and puzzle solving. In monkey Island 1, the story was the trials of a guy that wanted to be a pirate. He had to overcome the great swordmaster. The puzzles fit very well into the story, there weren't any sliders or anything. The insult sword fight might have been the best adventure puzzle I've ever played. It involved multiple characters and situations, fit perfectly with the story, and was fun.

Posted by Roger Tober

Oh, one more thing: I never said games don't need to have a story. Of course they must have it- otherwise it's pointless. I just said I don't find it as important in games as dialogs, puzzles, characters and atmosphere in general (music, voices, graphics...).

Posted by Igor

Hm, you should first define what you mean with "story" anyway.

In all honesty I can't say that I really liked story in CMI (despite being my favorite adventure). It had great dialogs, great characters, great atmosphere, and great puzzles.
However story itself was one big cliché (now, if you want an example of a game, that I think, had a good developed story (for a game, that is), I'd say it's TLJ. But that's completely different style).

If I say it differently: if CMI would be a movie, I wouldn't care less about it. But as game, along with puzzles, atmosphere, characters, etc. it packed itself in an amazing game.

Posted by Igor

They are indeed a small team of students who are coming together to work on this game. They don't work in the gaming industry (yet) so technically they aren't professionals.

I'm not sure when you can call a game 'professional'. I can put together a game in 5 minutes and sell it, does that make it a professional game? Are there certain 'rules'?

I agree that it's a question of time and resources.

It's a bad idea to put in some bad voice acting or music just so you can say: 'Hey, my game has music and spoken dialogue!'

Posted by Erwin_Br

The voice acting and graphics for that game look very professional. But it's kind of what I'm talking about, this is probably a team of people making a professional game, even if they don't call it that. Unless they don't care, they need to charge 20 to 30 dollars for a game like that. If I remember right, they've been at it for a couple years now. It's a question of time and resources. I'd have to check that game though, because even with the great graphics and voice acting, it still might not be good. For instance, why doesn't it have a name yet? I hope it has a plot, and it's not just a bunch of random events that people think are really funny. After looking at those graphics though, I think I'll work on mine a bit more when I get the story and puzzles finished.

Posted by Roger Tober

Don't underestimate our 'amateur' musicians. I happen to know quite a number of people who are quite able to match the big guys in the professional industry.

Voice acting is a whole other story, though. Not many of us have a professional recording studio, for example. Finding good voice actors is hard, but not impossible.

Check out 'Our Still Unnamed Project Joe', for example. You can play voice samples on their website. In my opinion these guys sound pretty good and will add more to the game.

URL:

http://php.hku.nl/~jeroen16/synthetix/project_joe/

I agree that music and/or voice acting can't make a bad game better. And bad music and/or voice acting could definitely break an otherwise good game.

Therefore I think it's wise to focus on story and puzzles first, then on graphics. After these things are 'finished' you could concentrate on music and perhaps voice acting as well.

Posted by Erwin_Br

Addition to earlier post.
Like I said, I don't think that voice acting and music don't add to an adventure, they do. But looking at it rationally, most garage type game writers aren't going to have the budget to get professional musicians or professional actors for their games. That leaves some tagged on music that they hope they don't get sued for, or some amateur music, added to some amateur voice acting. Personally, I think it would be better to concentrate on story, puzzles, and graphics, and leave the others off. But, to each his own. If you can find good actors and musicians, these things can add to a game.

Posted by Roger Tober

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sometimes music hinders one's thinking, I have to turn off the music while doing my math homework or something :p …But then I've never played a game that REALLY made me think a game like Monkey Island has good music too, one that doesn't hinder concentration.

Posted by krkode

I think CMI had a story, and a pretty good one.
Games without a story are simulations. If you like the Sims, then you don't need a story. Or more to the point, if you like a puzzle game with lots of sound effects and music, then you don't think a story is important. I can play these types of games, but not for very long. I can play a game like free cell much longer, because the puzzle is so deep, you might not consider it a puzzle, but it really is. If free cell had sound effects I would turn them off, the same as I would turn off the music. I still stand by what I say, that it puts the accent on something that is not very important to a game.

A story and puzzles are the heart and soul of an adventure game. If you don't agree with that, your game is going to stink.

Posted by Roger Tober

I agree with krkode.

Posted by Erwin_Br

The aspects you guys speak of are analogous to a balance system - where you chose how much of what you want in your game. Different people have different preferences. As Igor said, he likes atmosphere and puzzles, Roger said he likes story - and that's why the best games are balanced :)

Posted by krkode

I wouldn't agree with Roger, that sound effects and music are "less important" aspects of game. For me, they are two of the most important ones- because they build atmosphere!

In contrast to what have other said here, I don't think that story is THAT important for a good game (at least not for games such as CMI, etc.)…
For me puzzles and atmosphere are two of the factors that make me decide whether the game is good or not.
And because the sound (which is in my opinion even more important than graphics and as important as dialogues) builds or destroy good atmosphere, I'd say it's VERY important.

Posted by Igor

I think the amateur games that have the quality you're talking about are just taking longer to get finished.

Story and puzzles are the most difficult parts of the game, of course.

Posted by Erwin_Br

I agree, I just think we should experiment with the adventure genre. We have these multimedia mini-movie type games, and they're a lot of fun.
I bought Syberia and enjoyed it, but I can't buy too many games in this price range. I would be glad to pay 5 dollars for a well written graphic adventure that dispensed with some of the animation sequences after the puzzle, and voice acting, but had a well written plot with interesting puzzles and had about 20 hours of gameplay. The amateur games I've seen haven't quite gotten to that level, but hopefully they will. The graphics are approaching it, but the story and puzzles need work, and those are the fundamentals that make a game fun. That's not to say I don't disagree with this tip, only that its focus is on the less important aspects of a good game, of course it is tip no.15 or whatever.

Posted by Roger Tober

Bad or no Lip sync has never bothered me, but I agree that bad acting or poor quality recorded voices can really put a game down.

But sound effects and good voice acting can elevate a game to a higher level, I agree with that too.

Voice acting isn't necessary for a game though. Sound effects aren't either, but they aren't difficult to add and it really adds something.

Posted by Erwin_Br

I realize these things are important to adventures, but I personally am experimenting in not using them. My thoughts are this, we read comics and don't expect sound effects and music. Why is that?(rhetorical), because the comics aren't written for music and sound effects. I played MI 1 without them and I think it was my favorite monkey island game. It wasn't written for sound effects, and I don't think it would have improved the game. Think how many non-adventure games you play that don't have sound effects or music, most of them being puzzle games. Text adventures don't use them and many people get upset when they're added. Unprofessional voice acting can ruin a game, and then there's the lip sync problem, which is annoying when it doesn't work. When you have a limited amount of resources for game development, should you spend it on bad actors, terrible music, and goofy lip synch; or focus on story development and puzzles? I could be wrong,
but I think its story and puzzles that will make or break an adventure. Write the game for the media, and you can do an amazing job
with limited resources. I think if it's done well, people will accept and even pay for a high quality adventure without these things, and much less money can be charged because of lower production costs.

Posted by Roger Tober

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wonders how monkey island would've been with voices :)

Posted by krkode

Right on. That's why I am playing each voice for my 100+ characters. My voice is THAT great.

This is a good tip. You become more engrossed in Day of the Tentacle when there are voices and sound effects when compared to not having them.

Posted by Scummbuddy

Adventure Game Tips - Number 17
written by Bill Tiller with Larry Ahern

Games are about wish fulfillment, so don't let the gameplay feel mundane or like work.

The player doesn't want to be reminded of his life, he wants to do something exciting for the short period of time he is playing your game, whether it's saving the world or just wearing someone else's shoes for awhile.

Some games let you play the hero, while others, such as *The Sims* revolve around more mundane activity, but players get to be someone else and do things they couldn't or wouldn't do in real life. That is the aspect of wish fulfillment.

You'll notice that there is no expansion pack called *The Sims: Commute to Work.*

Comments:

Hmmm, you have a point there.

I think the reason why I play adventure games are the same reasons why I read a book and watch a movie: To go through an interesting story, or to meet interesting characters.

Posted by Erwin_Br

I've been thinking about this and I don't think wish fulfillment is the reason I play adventure games. It's the reason I play simulations like driving games or once in a while flight games, but I play adventure games because they look either interesting or funny, pretty much for the same reasons I see movies.

Posted by Roger Tober

Great tip. Also good examples Roger. Very much agree here.
While I do think that it's much more difficult to present a "mundane" premise, where nothing *really* big is going to happen (as opposite to classic blockbuster Hollywood cliché: an ordinary person gets to save the world/town/day...) in an exciting new way, it pays out a lot if you do it successfully.

Posted by Igor

A lot of games do it Erwin, for instance, using animals instead of people is one that's become somewhat overused. We see the same thing differently because an animal is in its place and it makes it more humorous, and these same mundane things that a person would be doing seem suddenly very funny. Syberia did it with the automaton engineer, his human characteristics made it funny, the same thing with an actual human wouldn't have been nearly as funny. You could say it was because of the automaton, but actually, it was the automaton acting very human that brought humor. It's like looking in the same drawer over and over when we lose something, it's funny because we all do it, and we like to laugh at ourselves as long as it's not really us. On the other side of the coin, you can have a character that is perfect and cool, and seems very stiff and uninteresting. Have that same character have trouble using an electric can opener or something and he's suddenly more interesting. The Sims was such a strange example because this is a game using very mundane activities with a new perspective.

Posted by Roger Tober

:)

Posted by krkode

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krkode, I was joking. That's what I meant by no really,... the Sims was also a joke as if it were really an expansion pack.

Posted by Scummbuddy

Interesting, Roger. Any examples of games you've played that accomplished that?

Posted by Erwin_Br

This is a tough one, because sometimes by adding a new perspective, mundane things can become interesting and vise versa.

Posted by Roger Tober

aaah, but he was talking in English wasn't he ;)

Posted by krkode

…but in some languages there's no difference between the male and female pronoun.

Posted by deadworm222

I think he used "he" as just a generalization…

Going along with the commonly used ways of the past, where "man discovered the wheel" "when man first set foot on…"

I know it's kinda unfair, but that's life… :p

Posted by krkode

Actually check www.thesims.com

and why does the player have to be a he.

No really, this is a very important thing to remember when developing the game and the characters of the game. Without this games are not as much fun.

Posted by Scummbuddy

Adventure Game Tips - Number 18
written by Bill Tiller with Larry Ahern

Make the quests clear, cogent and manageable. If the player asks at the beginning of the game "what do I do?" you have a serious problem. Whether it's a mentor sending players toward the adventure, a character's plea for help, or putting the player character's butt on the line, something needs to clearly propel them in the right direction.

In the *Monkey Island* games there is always the good ole' *Voodoo Lady* to remind the player of his goals. Cogency means clear and logical. So, if I give the old man a sacred root he will tell me about the secret entrance to the castle. That is pretty straight forward. But if I have to push him over a log so his arm accidentally triggers the secret latch to the passageway, then things are getting a little muddled and confusing. Why can't the player push the lever himself? How is the player supposed to know that this is going to happen in order to be motivated to try it in the first place? Make sure the goal is manageable.

In *Full Throttle*, in order to escape the town of Mellonweed *Ben* has to get three things: gas, new forks for his chopper, and a blowtorch. This is a manageable quest. But let's say for a moment that Ben also needed to get grease for his chain, light bulbs for his head light, spark plugs, a catalytic converter etc. That might be too much, and too hard to manage. Eventually, players will start to forget which quest they are actually on and get bored with the lack of real progress.

Comments:

There's also a passive way to show something needs to be found or done. For instance, having a machine that clearly has a part missing, or having the character say something like "This looks like some sort of device used for travel." So you know that it requires something to be made useful again. Most of the time while playing the dig, I had a pretty good feeling of what needed to done.

Posted by Roger Tober

Yes, in the Dig you were supposed to feel lost, insecure and alone. Having an information kiosk with Chester popping up wouldn't have been good.

Posted by Scummbuddy

Mostly agree here.

There are games however, where the players are intentionally left in the dark… and they need to find out what to do themselves.

I'd say The Dig is a good example of this type of puzzles. Such structure gives you the feeling of discovery and helps to create an atmosphere of the unknown.

Posted by Igor

I agree with this comment entirely, and I have, in fact, been thinking of this recently, as I'm playing through Simon the Sorcerer for the first time. After you're given the quest, that's it. "Find the staff of Naffel the necromancer". Well where is he? "No idea". And you can't even ASK anyone else! I had to use a walkthrough, not for the answers to the puzzles, just mostly for an idea of what on Earth I'm meant to be doing. Very annoying.

Posted by Jared

Plus repeating them to the player at least 2-3 times in dialog should be good, 3 being MAX, unless player asks again.

Posted by Scummbuddy

Good tip, by the way…make your puzzles easy but not too hard and relatively obvious, given a few clues.

Posted by krkode

This reminds me of Indian Jones and the Fate of Atlantis

before you look down, beware of possible spoilers

In the part where you HAVE to get Sophia to volunteer for the knife throwers trick, I could never have guessed that I had to push her so she would accidentally do it. I thought that was a cleverly made puzzle, yes, but it was hard to figure out given the clues. If they made Indy talk to himself saying something like

"I have to get her to do it, somehow!" then maybe we would get the hint, but I could never figure it out and had to resort to a walkthrough…

Posted by krkode

Good tip, and by making what we need to do plain, it gives us a goal that we feel good about accomplishing.

Posted by Roger Tober

Adventure Game Tips - Number 19
written by Bill Tiller with Larry Ahern

Don't waste the players' money with multiple solutions to a single puzzle.

If you animate both solutions the player is probably only going to see one of those animations, but he paid for both when he bought the game. However, do provide payoffs for failed attempts—this is a great chance to build character. If there are obvious (but incorrect) solutions that most players will try, make sure there are some entertaining animations of the Player Character failing.

Players will be bored out of their minds if your character stands there and says, "That won't work" to all but the correct answer.

Comments:

I kind of disagree here, on 2 points.

Firstly, I support the use of multiple choices, as long as they are well signposted. In Indy it was even on the game box, and as a result this feature was very well received.

Secondly, for small puzzles, I would advocate multiple approaches to a solution as a way of avoiding frustration:

"Why the hell do I need to find one particular drawing pin in order to burst a balloon when I have a pair of scissors, a knife, a pencil etc. to hand?"

The result is the same whichever you use, you have still managed to work out the approach required, and you get the small payoff of the balloon exploding without running around for hours looking for an item that, due to the law of averages, you missed before. You probably wouldn't even need a new animation!

Posted by Jon Kneller

Only 2 more tips to go. Wowee!

Posted by Scummbuddy

…or then you could make multi-play PATHS, just like Indiana Jones and Fate of Atlantis. That was very cool.

Posted by Largo LeGrande

"What would I have done if I hadn't have brought along this shovel? No... it's not worth thinking about..."

m0ds

Posted by m0ds

I think that the multiple solution/ending is a pitfall that game writers fall into because of the critics. The problem is, adventure puzzles are much more complex than a shooter or a role playing game, so adding multiple solutions and multiple endings is more complex. However, I think some puzzles could be more like strategy games thus giving them multiple solutions, and because they would have multiple solutions, they could be used more than once by slightly changing the circumstances, like strategy games do. I've thought about trying something like this, but haven't come up with a way to do it ,yet.

Posted by Roger Tober

You're definitely right about the need for entertaining failures.

However, I'm not so sure about never having multiple solutions. I loved these in 'Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade'. Somehow it made the game feel less like 'read the designers mind or fail' (something which graphic adventures have often received criticism for).

Granted, you could, for instance, skip the *entire* zeppelin sequence by finding a book which taught you how to start up a bi-plane. This could be seen as a major waste of game resources, but the game managed it quite cleverly. There was a points tally, much like the old Sierra games, except that this one was stored on the save game disk.

You could add to the points on the save disk by solving the puzzles in a different manner (on your next play through the game). So, seeing that my points hadn't reached 500 (or whatever) provided the motivation to play through again. This was in turn rewarded by being able to see other parts of the game.

Of course you don't want to waste development time. But if you can convince your players to play through the game again (using something like the points system, or your own device), then you're providing replay value. So maybe it's not *always* such a waste of time or money?

Posted by theothertim

"If there are obvious (but incorrect) solutions that most players will try, make sure there are some entertaining animations of the Player Character failing."

Or at least have the Player Character say something humorous about it. For example, when he/she/it tries to "pick up" another character, "I can't pick that up" can be replaced with "He's not my type" ;)

Posted by Squinkycakes

Yeah, who DOESN'T get sick of "That doesn't work" and "I don't think he'd like that". Grrrr!

Posted by Jared

Don't waste the players' money with multiple solutions to a single puzzle. <-- Or if you're releasing your

game as freeware: Don't waste your time with multiple solutions to a single puzzle.

I think it depends on the adventure, however.

I agree that it's recommendable to make animations for failed attempts rather than saying, "That doesn't work" to all incorrect answers.

Posted by Erwin_Br

Adventure Game Tips - Number 20
written by Bill Tiller with Larry Ahern

Never give the player a tool that can too easily be used to solve a number of puzzles (e.g. a gun, some dynamite, a blowtorch).

Make the items very puzzle specific—unique to that problem. Also, make sure it seems somewhat reasonable within the fiction that items like these wouldn't be available to your character (you wouldn't want a game whose central character was a mobster, if you are going to have him solving lots of obscure lock-and-key puzzles. He'd most likely have a gun).

In *Full Throttle* the designers knew allowing Ben to hold onto the blowtorch would let him get into the junkyard and the gas tower, and generally cause a big ruckus. So to prevent this, as soon as the player finds the blowtorch, the game cuts to Mo's shop and plays a cinematic of Ben handing it over to help with the repairs. There was never an opportunity for the player to use the blowtorch to solve puzzles.

Comments:

Last tip, here we come! Set printer on idle....

Posted by Scummbuddy

On the other hand, it's very nice when an item is reused in several creative ways and it's not just one puzzle per item. Multi-use items are fun. As always, the design is a balance act.

Posted by Trumgottist

"It's very annoying when you find an item which _could_ clearly be used to solve the problem but the designers have the character simply say "That won't work"."

Nicely put, Wishi. I agree :)

Posted by krkode

Actually, I made the same mistake with my game in development. Now I have to find a way to make it useless or to make it disappear or to find another solution to the puzzle that needs the object in question.

Posted by Erwin_Br

Definitely agreed. It's very annoying when you find an item which _could_ clearly be used to solve the problem but the designers have the character simply say "That won't work".

Posted by Wishi

Adventure Game Tips - Number 21
written by Bill Tiller with Larry Ahern

Have fun.

If you aren't having fun with your game, most likely your players won't either. If you enjoy what you're doing and like the work you're producing, it will probably show in the final product.

<u>Epilogue</u>

And so we end our weekly Adventure Design Tips feature. Next week we'll post all 21 tips in one article for your convenience.

We would again like to thank Bill Tiller and Larry Ahern for their work and we would also like to thank *you*, for reading and commenting on the articles. We hope you enjoyed it.

Comments:

you are welcome.

-Bill Tiller

Posted by Green Beard

That's a great idea. There were some good discussions after some.

Posted by Scummbuddy

How about including some of the comments in the article?

Posted by deadworm222

LoL krkode

Posted by m0ds

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y3$, \/3|2y g00|) j0|3 ||\||)33|)

translation for the non-1337 *grin*

Yes, Very good job indeed
:D

Thank you for the tips, I'm sure they'll help me in the near future, especially this last one :)

Posted by krkode

Nice stuff, well done Bill Till0r and Larry Ah3rn.

:)
m0ds

It's...sooo true....

<sniff> They're all gone...and all good. I want to thank them both for collaborating to bring us this list.