
CGMB534 Game Design

Chapter 15: Role-Playing Games

Objectives

- Know the definition of role-playing games and the game mechanics common to them
- Understand the history and evolution of role-playing games from tabletop to computer
- Design character attributes for a role-playing game

Objectives (Cont.)

- Define a world and setting suitable for a role-playing game
- Understand the use of experience points and character level for this genre
- Know the different gameplay modes within this genre

What Are Role-Playing Games?

■ Overview

- Objective is to experience a series of adventures in an imaginary world, through an avatar or a small group of characters whose skills and powers grow over time
- Essential parts are the quest or story and character growth
- Victory consists of completing the quests

What Are Role-Playing Games? (Cont.)

- CRPGs and war games
 - Both include combat governed by rules
 - CRPGs—small group of characters who exhibit growth; no factories to produce more units
 - War games—large group of identical units; factories produce more units

What Are Role-Playing Games? (Cont.)

- CRPGs and action games
 - CRPGs
 - Tactical challenges
 - Non–action-related activities such as buying and selling as well as conversations with other characters
 - Action games
 - Physical challenges
 - Non–action-related activities are rare

What Are Role-Playing Games?

(Cont.)

- CRPGs and adventure games
 - Both have rich storylines, highly detailed characters, and exploration challenges
 - CRPGs—player-defined character; characters defined by numeric attributes that improve over time; complex internal economy
 - Adventure games—avatar provided by the game; concentrate on a single character; puzzle challenges; no numeric attributes; personal growth

Game Features

- Exploration and combat make up a big part of most CRPGs
- Themes
 - Saving the world is a common theme
 - Try a unique approach
- Progression
 - Long quest broken into episodes
 - Major challenge at the end of each episode
 - Optional side quests

Game Features (Cont.)

- **Gameplay modes**
 - Exploration and combat—actions include setting a destination, designating an NPC to attack, and using special skills
 - Conversation—uses dialog tree
 - Trade—buy and sell items
 - Inventory—manage carried objects

Core Mechanics

- Rolling dice—know the probabilities to get the result you want
- Character attributes
 - Characterization attributes—determine general abilities and qualities; change infrequently
 - Race
 - Sex
 - Character class
 - Physical, mental, moral, and social attributes

Core Mechanics (Cont.)

- Character attributes (cont.)
 - Status attributes, experience, and character levels
 - Attributes that change frequently
 - Experience points and character level measure the character's growth
 - Cosmetic attributes add richness to the game

Core Mechanics (Cont.)

- Magic and its equivalent
 - Concept that allows characters to influence the world, themselves, or other characters, by means not available to us in real life
 - Science fiction implements magic as “advanced technology”
 - Use of magic restricted by character class
 - Define magic, how it’s invoked, and how it’s limited

Core Mechanics (Cont.)

- Skills and special capabilities
 - Obtaining new skills for a character is similar to upgrading a unit in a strategy game
 - Skill trees provide a growth path similar to a tech tree in war games
- Character design
 - Most CRPGs allow the player to create the character
 - Roll dice to generate points to distribute among character attributes

The Game World and Story

■ Settings

- Tend to be fantasy and science fiction settings
- Must be appealing to explore
- Some CRPGs provide an editor to enable players to create scripted adventures in the game world

The Game World and Story (Cont.)

■ Story

- First, determine the game's overall quest—the ending
- Then, design the episodes that the player experiences from the beginning to the end
- Add side quests
- Write an enticing opening

The Presentation Layer

- Interaction model
 - Party-based in single-player CRPG
 - Avatar-based is becoming more common, however
 - Avatar-based in multiplayer online games
- Perspective
 - First person or third person for avatar-based models
 - Aerial perspective allows player to see all members of the party at once as well as surrounding terrain

The Presentation Layer (Cont.)

■ User interface

- Wide range of actions—interface can be complex
- Hide the mechanics to aid the player's immersion
- Repetitive tasks—instead of making the player try repeatedly, automate the repetition and show a progress bar
 - If the character has low skill at the task, it will take a long time
 - Allow the player to interrupt and abandon the attempt

Summary

- You should now understand
 - How to identify a role-playing game
 - How to describe the development of the role-playing game from tabletop to computer
 - How to design character attributes
 - How to define a world and story
 - How to use experience points and character levels
 - How to select gameplay modes