History of Computer Game Design:

Technology, Culture, Business

Winter 2005

Source: Softline 2 (March 1983). Front cover.

Instructor: Henry Lowood

Office: M 9.30-11; W 2.30-4, Green Library 321C

TA: Waynn Lue

Grader: Douglas Wilson & Galen Davis

T 2.15-3.30; Th 2.15-4.05 Room TBA

Schedule of Lectures-2004

Please prepare for lectures and guests by completing the reading assignments indicated. Articles listed as being "available in Coursework" are in PDF format and found on our Coursework page under "Course Materials." If you do not have a reader for this format, Download the free acrobat reader here.

If you are enrolled in one of the optional discussion sections, prepare to talk about the readings, as well. Consult THIS WEEK IN SECTION for specific assignments. Readings labeled SECTION are optional for students not enrolled in discussion section.


Week I. Introduction

January 6. Introduction to the Class


OPTIONAL READING: Henry Lowood, "Shall We Play a Game: Thoughts on the Computer Game Archive of the Future," (Conference Paper, Fall 2002.)

**THIS WEEK IN SECTION:** * NO MEETINGS THIS WEEK*

### Week 2. Games as a Medium.

January 13. Games as a Medium I: Entertainment and Communication


*More Than a Game* -- pp. 1-26; 55-85.

January 15. Games as a Medium II: Games and Storytelling

Rene will present his ideas on gameplay as a narrative framework.


**THIS WEEK IN SECTION:** Before section, visit the exhibit, "Fictional Worlds, Virtual Experiences: Storytelling and Computer Games" at the Cantor Center. Class discussion will focus on your reactions to the exhibit.

### Week 3. Writing about Games

January 20. Writing about Games and Game Journalism

GUESTS: Michael Antonucci, San Jose Mercury News; Rob Smith, Editor-in-Chief, *PC Gamer*; and Trudy Muller, senior manager of corporate communications at Electronic Arts.

January 22. Rules of Game Design?

GUEST: Noah Falstein, The Inspiracy. Noah will talk about the 400 Project, "an ambitious attempt to collect 'The 400 Rules of Game Design.'" Please look at the [400 Project website](http://www.gamasutra.com/features/20020313/kreimeier_03.htm) before class.


**THIS WEEK IN SECTION:** Read and be prepared to discuss the short collection of texts titled "Savage Review Collection," available in Coursework. Post a short comment BEFORE SECTION on the class discussion forum in Coursework--briefly give your thoughts on the ethics and content
of game reviews, based if you like on these readings. These will be discussed in class.

**Week 4. The First Generation**

**January 27. From Spacewar! to Pong and Atari**

GUEST: Al Alcorn. Al was the circuit designer for Pong and VP for R&D at Atari, in addition to working at Apple and Ampex. For some information about his career, see http://216.239.53.104/search?q=cache:http%3A//bb.vg-network.com/interviews/aainterview.html. Try out a Java simulation of the original Pong here: http://www.xnet.se/javaTest/jPong/jPong.html.


Jan. 29. Origins: Adventure and Interactive Fiction

**Dungeons & Dreamers -- pp. 1-8.**


Ernest Adams, "It's Time to Bring Back Adventure Games" (1999). Available here: http://www.gamasutra.com/features/designers_notebook/19991109.htm. (Your first visit to Gamasutra will require registration; the site is free and an important resource for research on game design.)

**THIS WEEK IN SECTION:** Sit down at a computer with full Internet access. Without getting up, find versions of Pong and the original (Crowther/Woods) Adventure. Be prepared to discuss in class: How many different versions did you find? What is your impression of the "authenticity" of the version(s) you tried? Did you find any information or guidance on the provenance or legality of these versions? Did all the versions require emulators? Be prepared to comment on differences between Pong and Adventure with regard to these questions.

**Week 5. The Game Business.**

**February 3. The Business: Historical Overview**


**February 5. The Business: Game Production**

GUEST: Bill Swartz, Founder and managing director of Mastiff. Bill's previous experience includes his roles as marketing manager for Koei America, as part of Koei's development group,
and then over a period of 12 years as managing director of Activision Japan.


**THIS WEEK IN SECTION:** Consider the two readings on Nintendo assigned for February 3. Think about what each author has to say about Nintendo and the videogame console wars ca. 1990. Now make two short lists, one for each reading, in which you write down three factors in Nintendo's competitive position in the early 1990s emphasized by the authors. Bring the lists to class for comparison and discussion.

### Week 6. Diversity in Game Cultures

**February 10. The International Scene (esp. Germany and Korea)**


*** Assignments Due Feb. 10: "Games and Narrative" and Paper Proposal ***

**February 12. Gender, Play, Contested Spaces**

*Dungeons & Dreamers -- pp. 141-147*


**THIS WEEK IN SECTION:** Inform yourself about the "Adventures of Josie True" project by looking at the articles "about Josie" on the project site here: http://www.josietrue.com. Skim the site to learn about the project, then try out the free web-based chapter of the game (it will require that you have the free Flash Player version 6 installed on your computer). For section, consider the main points in the Jenkins and Eisenberg readings for this week and be prepared to discuss how the articles help you understand what the designers of the "Adventures of Josie True" are trying to accomplish with their game. Speculate: What would Stevie Case think of Josie True (the game)?

### Week 7. High Performance Play

**February 17. Competitive and Professional Play**
GUESTS: Jess Cliffe, co-creator of the Half-Life Counter Strike mod; Team3D: David 'Moto' Geffon, team leader, and Craig 'Torbull' Levine, Team Manager; Frederic Descamps, Ultimate Arena.

Dungeons & Dreamers -- pp. 87-141; 199-210; 229-237.

February 19. Play as Performance: The Early History of Machinima and Related Forms of Subversion.


More Than a Game -- pp. 27-54.

Anne-Marie Schleiner, "Does Lara Croft Wear Fake Polygons? Gender Analysis of the "3rd Person Shooter/Adventure Game with Female Heroine" and Gender Role Subversion in the Game Patch." Updated version. Available here: http://www.openensorcery.net/lara2.html

THIS WEEK IN SECTION: Competitive multiplayer gaming demo session. Game TBA.

Week 8. Conflicts

February 24. The Violence Issue


February 26. Military Gaming and Simulation

Tim Lenoir and Henry Lowood, "Theaters of War: The Military-Entertainment Complex."

More Than a Game -- pp. 86-110.


*** Assignment due Feb. 24: "Cultures in Game Design" ***


THIS WEEK IN SECTION: "What can a game teach me about terrorism, counter-terrorism and the Middle East?" Look at these three game-related sources: (1) The America's Army website, esp. the "Special Forces HQ."; (2) The Special Force website; (3) The Sept. 12 game (play it online). Who made each game and why? What do the authors have to say about the relationship between games, reality, and simulation? Be prepared to talk in class about the opening question in this assignment.

Week 9. Role Playing
March 2. Game Engine: The Director's Perspective.

GUEST: Jake Hughes, Crystal Dynamics (Eidos Interactive). He was director and co-creator (with Tom Hall and the Anachronox team) of “Anachronox: The Movie” (USA, 2001), which received the “Best Film” and “Best Use of Technology” awards at the first Machinima Film Festival (2002) and was also associate producer and cinematographer for Anachronox, the game, while at Ion Storm. Jake will be joined by Joey Liaw, who is presently a student in the Stanford C.S. Department; Joey programmed the cine scriptor and particle editor for Anachronox and is a specialist in game engine technology.


March 4. Role-Playing Genres

Dungeons & Dreamers -- pp. 11-81; 220-228.


THIS WEEK IN SECTION: Discussion of your case history papers. Bring a one-page abstract of your paper (whether you have completed it yet or not) to section. Each student will read their abstract and get suggestions and questions from the rest of the participants about ways to improve the paper. (NB. Students in lecture who are not enrolled in section are welcome to join this meeting and read their abstracts to gather comments.)

Week 10. Virtual Worlds

March 9. Games of Life: Sims, God Games, A-Life


More Than a Game -- pp. 111-137.


March 11. Wrapup/A Word on Massively Multiplayer Games


**THIS WEEK IN SECTION:** Find a player community website. Not a game developer site, but a site maintained by and for players, with content developed by the player community. Some suggestions: sites devoted to Everquest or the Sims Online stories or game groups; Warcraft III replay sites; Neverwinter Nights community sites such as Neverwinterconnections.com; or sites maintained by multiplayer clans (Quake, Counterstrike, Starcraft, etc.). What does this site tell you about the "player community" and the social aspect of the game? Come to section prepared to talk about how the community's activities might be thought of as a "meta-game," a game outside the game.

*** Case Study due March 16 ***

- Henry Lowood, 13 Jan. 2004