

Course Project

CMPUT299, Fall 2005

September 28, 2005

Version 1.1

In this class you will be building a game using the Neverwinter Nights engine, the Aurora Toolset, and ScriptEase. The ScriptEase tool is part of a research project at the University of Alberta designed to greatly simplify the amount of work required to write scripts for games.

Time constraints for this course are such that you will not be able to build a game on the scale of Neverwinter Nights. Instead, you will build a small world with 4-5 short chapters or scenes. The entire game should take at most a few hours for a player unfamiliar with your game. Each design team should be able to play through the core portions of their game in less than 30 minutes.

It will take some work to coordinate all the pieces needed for your game. We have divided the project into six portions which will help guide you through the game-building process. It is important to start early and monitor your progress so that you can make modifications early if there are errors in your design, or if your designs are overly ambitious.

1 Team Formation

Due 11:00am (before lecture) on September 20, 2005.

A large portion of the work you do in this class will be done with your project teams, so it is important to find a team that can work well together. Teams should have 4 members. You are allowed to pick your own teams, but teams must be well-balanced in background and experience. No more than two people in the team may have the same major.

One person from your team needs to e-mail c299@ugrad.cs.ualberta.ca with the list of members in your team and the following information for each team member:

- Major/minor
- Year
- Areas of experience
- Main role in the game design (e.g. developer, artist, writer, manager) Although team members may specialize in certain areas, they should split up the project load as equally as possible.

Think of your team as a start-up company. As part of your e-mail you should tell us your proposed company name.

Finally, you should also include a brief description of how disputes in the game-design process will be handled.

Teams are not final until approved by the head instructor.

2 Setting

Due: 11:00am (before lecture) on September 27, 2005.

After completing the labs each team member should have adequate experience to begin thinking about the type of story that can be told using Neverwinter Nights (NWN), the Aurora toolset, and ScriptEase.

In roughly two pages, or 500 words, describe the setting for your project. Answer the following questions directly and also weave them into an introductory narrative:

- Where will your story take place? (eg; city/countryside/forest; earth/space)
- When will your story take place? (eg; past/present/future)
- What sort of narration/story will drive the game? (eg; rescue/lost identity)
- What cultural groups (races/factions) will the “hero” have to interact with?
- NWN supports areas that will act as a single setting for (usually) prolonged action. How will these settings be broken down into NWN modules?
- What is the exact size/scope of the world being created?

It may be useful to consider that you are writing the first few pages of your game manual. You need to introduce the world and begin to draw the player into your universe. From a practical standpoint, carefully consider the interactions which will be available outside the main plot, as building a realistic world can be quite time consuming.

Your proposal should be placed in the shared folder for your group on the class server. You must also turn in a hard copy in lecture which will be returned to you with comments, etc.

3 Design Document

Due: 11:00am (before lecture) on October 6, 2005.

Given the feedback on your project setting, take the ideas there and expand them into a more detailed project proposal that should cover most of the major details of your project. Address the following questions directly and weave the answers into an introductory narrative:

- Who are the main character(s) in your story?
- What is their background? (Family, social, ethnic distinctions)
- How did they arrive at the beginning of the story?
- What are their motivations (needs, desires)?
- What difficulties will be faced? How will they overcome these difficulties?
- Other parameters for story? (eg; no killing)
- Target audience?

Separate from the items described above, you need to turn in a plan for your project covering the following points:

- What is the name of your game?
- Divide your project into 3-5 chapters or sub-projects that are somewhat independent.

- Establish milestones for completing the project. These should include the class deadlines, as well as any other deadlines you'd like to create for yourself.
- Budget the amount of time it will take you to complete each milestone. Estimates of time are fine; you will need to revise the estimates and totals as you progress through the project.
- What will you change in your project if you are running out of time?
- Describe any challenges you may anticipate:
 - What is the nature of the use of scripting in your game? (How do you expect to utilize the scripting capabilities of NWN? What are potential difficulties associated with your scripting plans?)
 - What models and backgrounds will you be using in the game?
 - What custom artwork will you be using?
 - Anything else we should know about?

Deliverables:

- Expanded introductory narrative including setting and plot elements.
- Answers to additional plot questions.
- Answer to design-related questions. (Design Document)

To submit these documents: (1) E-mail a copy of your proposal to c299@ugrad.cs.ualberta.ca, (2) place your proposal in the shared folder for your group, and (3) turn in a hard copy in class which will be returned to you with comments, etc.

4 Storyboard

Due: 11:00am on October 20, 2005.

Now that you have a completed project proposal it is time to get to work on the next stage of game development: your storyboard. The purpose of a storyboard is to provide visualization of the major milestones or landmarks in your game. You should have a single slide for each major change of locale and plot point in your game.

You will use PowerPoint to build the slides for your storyboard. You can include screenshots of your game, concept artwork, floor plans or maps; whatever will best visualize the game you are creating.

In order to make your storyboard you will first need to build the major areas of your game, although many of the details can be left unfinished. After completing this milestone, the major regions of your game should be completed. Remaining project time will be spent scripting these areas, adding conversations, and filling in a realistic world.

It is likely that, in the process of making your storyboard, you will discover revisions that you want or need to make to your original project proposal. These changes can be summarized in a short document that will be turned in with your project.

By the deadline above, submit the following items to your shared folder:

- PowerPoint file containing storyboard slides.
- Text walk-through of slides. (You annotate slides with comments in PowerPoint or turn in a separate document providing a walk-through of the slides.)
- Description of project revisions and justification.

Be ready to do a walkthrough of your storyboard with the instructor and TA in lab.

5 The Pitch

Due: 11:00am (in lecture) on November 8, 2005.

By this project milestone you should be well on your way to finishing your game. For this milestone you need to both show off the work that you've done and sell your story idea. We will have a lecture set aside for presentations, each group will get approximately 10 minutes for their presentation. Imagine that this is your one chance to sell your ideas to a group of industry insiders. (If possible, we will have representatives from the games industry attending this lecture.)

The exact format of your presentation is up to your team, but at a minimum you need to:

- Introduce the background of your story
- Introduce your main character
- Introduce the main plot elements
- Show screen shots and/or animations from your game
- "Sell" your game to your target audience

One way to get ideas of how you might want to present your material is to look on the web for movie and game trailers. For instance, see:

http://jade.bioware.com/index_story.html

In addition, each student should be prepared to give feedback for the other projects presented, based on the following criteria:

- Were the presenters well-prepared?
- Do you understand the premise of the story?
- Would you be interested in playing this game? (Why/Why not?)
- Would you invest your own money in producing this game?

You will rank the presentations by the order of which you would be most likely to invest in and briefly justify your rankings.

Note that the evaluations by other students will not drastically affect your final marks, so the goal is not to create a game that will appeal to everyone. But, game companies are trying to make money, so it is important to be aware of the issues they would consider in evaluating a game.

Finally, you should once again turn in a hard- and soft-copy updating your original milestones and project estimates to reflect your current project status.

6 Final Checkoff

Due: 11:00am on November 30, 2005.

For your final project check-off you need to provide the following:

- Your completed game scenario.
- A walk-through of the game detailing how to play through your scenario.

- A summary report describing the work you did for the project. Be sure to point out interesting scripts that were written or models and textures that were designed, and where they appear in the game. Make sure that you discuss what worked well, and what didn't. What do you know now that you wish you knew at the beginning of the project?

In the last lab section you will also be responsible for giving a demo of your program to the instructor and to other students. Each group member will also have to play scenarios created by other students, filling out evaluation forms. Marks will be given both based on the evaluation received, but also on the quality of evaluation used for other students.

Peer evaluation will be based on the following criteria, although you may not have time to evaluate all the areas below in detail.

- Story: Is it clear what you need to do at the beginning of the game? Are your goals and motivations clear and compelling?
- Plot: Is the plot engaging? How linear is the game? Is there more than one way to solve the problems you encounter?
- Aesthetic quality: Does the world have a consistent look and feel?
- Environment: Is the surrounding environment consistent with what you would expect to see given the story background?
- Difficulty: Is the game too easy or too difficult?
- Entertainment value: Do/did you enjoy playing the game?