CMPUT 299 Course Project

Winter 2006

In this class you will be building a game encounter 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 of trying to build a large-scale project, you and your team will focus on building a single highly polished module consisting of only a few areas. Having designed and created your module, you should be able to play through your game in about ten minutes.

It will take some work to coordinate all the pieces needed for your game. We have divided the project into multiple portions which will help guide you through the gamebuilding 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.

During the design process each team will be assigned a producer who will need to meet with the project team briefly before each of the major project deadlines [3-8]. Any deviations from the requirements set down by this document will require approval by your producer.

Given the variety of backgrounds and experiences of students participating, some conflicts are inevitable within your teams. Your enjoyment of the project and this class will be influenced by your ability to cooperate and compromise with your team members in the design process.

1 Team Formation

Due 9:30am (before lecture) on January 24.

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, although a few teams will have 5. You are allowed to pick your own teams, but teams must be well-balanced in background and experience. No two people on any team may have the same major, excepting computer-related majors, and each team must also have at least one student from CS. All team members must attend the same lab section.

One person from your team needs to e-mail c299@ugrad.cs.ualberta.ca with the list of members in your team. For each team member, list their name, major/minor, year, areas of experience and main role in the team (e.g. developer, artist, writer, manager, etc).

You need to assign one member the role of associate-producer. This team member should be detail-oriented. Their role will be to manage some of the details of running the team, such as making sure the project can be completed on time and that the work load is distributed within the team. You also need to assign one member the role of lead designer. This team member will be in charge of the design process. Note that neither of these roles are “dictator” roles. It just means that when a decision has to be made, they will have more authority to make design or other decisions. 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 company/team 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.

Deliverables

E-mail to c299@ugrad.cs.ualberta.ca containing:

1. Team name
2. For each team member: name, major/minor, year, areas of experience and main role in the team.

2 Setting

Due: 9:30am (before lecture) on January 31.

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 less than 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 individuals or social groups will the hero have to interact with?

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.

You can describe a larger setting than you will actually build for your module, but if you do so, please indicate this clearly.

Deliverables

1. Setting of your game in a narrative form suitable for a game manual.
2. Answers to the following questions:

- Where will your story take place?
- When will your story take place?
- What sort of narration/story will drive the game?
- What cultural groups will the hero have to interact with?

E-mail these documents to c299@ugrad.cs.ualberta.ca and turn in a hard-copy of these documents before class on January 31.

3 Design Document

Due: 9:30am (before lecture) on February 9.

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:

- 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 create a design document which covers the following points:

- The name of your game.
- Establish milestones for completing the project. These should include the class deadlines, as well as any other deadlines you would like to create for your team.
- Create a budget for your game, given the budget guidelines. (See a separate guidelines.)
- 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.

Deliverables

1. Answers to additional plot questions.
2. Answer to design-related questions. (Design Document)

E-mail these documents to c299@ugrad.cs.ualberta.ca and turn a hard-copy of these documents before class on February 9.

4 Game Prototype Walkthrough

Due: Week of February 27 in lab.

By this week you will need to have a skeleton of your game complete. You should have all buildings and areas built with most objects placed in the world. All characters should be created, along with most dialog.

At this point you do not have to have to complete custom artwork, scripting, models, cut-scenes, music, sound, etc. The remainder of the project will be devoted to adding these and revising your game skeleton until you have a rich, complete module.

Finally, given your current progress on your game, update your design document to reflect any rescheduling or other changes to your project.

Deliverables

1. Walk through your module with the head instructor in lab.
2. Place a copy of your module in your group shared drive in a folder named ‘prototype’.
3. Placed an updated version of your design document in the same folder.

5 Design Issue Presentation

Due: Early March. Exact dates and times will be announced in class.

Each team will have approximately five minutes to discuss a single design issue that they have been facing in their game. This should not be a difficult technical issue, but a design issue with various tradeoffs. The class will have about 10 minutes to ask questions and give feedback about the issue that you present.

Due to the limited presentation time, you will need to be well prepared. You need to present a context for the problem, why it is an issue, and several solutions that you have considered for resolving the problem.

6 Pitch

Due: March 28 in lecture.

By this project milestone you should be essentially finished with your game. For this milestone you need to both show off the work that you have 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?

Note that you will not be evaluated according to the student comments, but you will be evaluated based on the quality of evaluation that you provide for other projects.

After these presentations, each group's project will be made available for the other groups to play and evaluate.

Deliverable

1. Updated copy of your design document e-mailed to c299@ugrad.cs.ualberta.ca

7 Peer Evaluation

Due: 9:30am (before lecture) on April 11

Peer evaluation of projects will begin after the pitches on March 28. Evaluation will be based on the following criteria. Forms will be provided for this evaluation in March.

- Is it clear what you need to do at the beginning of the module?
- Are your goals and motivations clear and compelling?
- Is the plot engaging?
- What is the pace of the game?
- Does the world have a consistent look and feel?
- Is the surrounding environment consistent with the story?
- How difficult was it to play the module?
- Did you enjoy playing the game?

You are encouraged to give immediate feedback to each team so they can fix any bugs and/or make other adjustments to the game before the final deadline.

Deliverable

1. Hard-copy evaluations of each project.

8 Final Checkoff

Due: 9:30am on April 11.

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?

An open house will be provided at some point after the final check off for other students to come and play the projects that were created.