

What Makes A Great Game:

A Gentle Reminder for Programmers

It's easy to get lost in all the details of building a great video or computer game - so easy in fact, that we can forget the parts of a game that make them fun to play. The following serves as a gentle reminder of what prompts players to play games in the first place. Refer to this reminder in the event that you get bogged down or distracted with confusing C++ syntax, or lines and lines of Visual Basic statements and DLL structures.

1. Remember the player is the main character. Here's a secret between you and me: People play games to gain a sense of control. If you can manage to program your game in a way that puts the player in control, then you've already won half the battle. This doesn't mean to suggest that the game should be easy. It simply means that when a gamer runs home from school or drives home from work to play a video game, she wants to feel the control that she didn't have during the hours between nine and five. The outcome of a game - whether it's a win or a loss - should never be random, but the result of a good, controlled game play instead.

2. KISS. Remember that acronym? It stands for Keep It Simple Stupid. We all know that programming a game is hard business, but believe us when we say we don't want to be reminded of it. The difficulty of programming a game should never be part of the game play so when possible, make the game easy to start, easy to navigate, and of course, easy to play. We're not asking for pre-school strategy here, but on the other hand, we don't want to feel as dumb as a pre-schooler either. Forget the hundred page manual. Nobody except the truly obsessed is going to read it anyway. Build your game for the average Joe and everyone will be your fan.

3. Add plenty of action. And add lots of it too. The more action you add to your game, the more attention players will pay attention to it. And the more that players pay attention to your game, the more addictive your game gets. For every action that a player's character makes, have the game react and then prompt the player for more.

4. Make the story a good one. Nothing is worse than playing a game only to wonder what you're doing and why. Purpose is and always has been a human obsession. But without it, we're left wandering... in the darkness... wondering bizarre things like how the house would look in a coat of bright pink paint. Don't give your players the opportunity to waste time like that. Give them a mission and make sure your game reminds them what the mission is at opportune times and why they must complete it.

5. Give us eye candy. But make it relevant. The graphics in a game shouldn't be distracting, they should make our eyeballs glaze over with satisfaction upon

seeing them, and then salivate for more. Graphics should contain clues and entice us further and further into the game until we've beaten the thing.

6. Make it real. Fantasy games are okay, but what makes them cool is the fact that they're realistic. It's hard to get into something that isn't familiar or that there's no way we could ever experience. But if you can implement some reality into your games, players will appreciate it and relate to it on a whole new respectable level.

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