

I N T E R A C T I V E W R I T E R ' S H A N D B O O K

by

DARRYL WIMBERLEY, PH.D.

& JON SAMSEL



The Carronade Group
Los Angeles - San Francisco



Q: Are there certain types of subjects that lend themselves well to interactive titles?

A: I was once in a meeting with this guy from a studio. He had seen *Johnny Mnemonic* and said, “It’s just like a film.”

And I said, “Yeah.”

And he said, “That’s great. You know, it’s too bad you can’t make an interactive of any film.”

And I said, “Of course you can.”

He said, “Well, you couldn’t do it of any film.”

And I said, “Of course you could.”

And he said, “Well, not any film.”

And I said, “Okay. Give me a film. The hardest film you can think of.”

After a moment, he said, “Okay. You couldn’t make an interactive version of *The Piano*.”

And I laughed. First shot in the interactive version of *The Piano*. Boat lands on a beach. Second shot, woman on a beach with her piano. We establish in that shot, that the piano is the only window to this woman’s soul. The only way that she can actually communicate what is within her. And because it is so integral to her existence, in the third shot we take it away. And the entire story, which is her “world”, is her in that remote area doing anything she can think of to try to get the piano back. It’s separation anxiety. And so the interactive experience becomes— understanding the people in that place, understanding the psychology of those individuals— what are you going to do to get your piano back? And then to further confound it, in one version of the story you actually make peace with your husband, and he gets you the piano back. In another version you can’t make peace with anybody, tribesmen help you steal the piano in the middle of the night from Harvey Keitel’s character, and they put you on a boat. The last scene is you with your piano.

Q: What was his response to all this?

A: He wished he owned the interactive rights to *The Piano*.

— **Q & A**
Interactive Writer/Director
Douglas Gayeton

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This book is dedicated with love and affection to Fred H. Wagner.

"Is everybody happy?"

INTERACTIVE WRITER'S HANDBOOK - 2ND EDITION

Sponsored by Power Production Software

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PREFACE

by Jon Samsel

The premise for this book changed significantly from its inception in the Fall of 1993. Back then, I proposed a simple theory— wouldn't it be great to develop a single format for writing an interactive screenplay? The book was to be titled, "Writing the Interactive Screenplay," and would be a screenplay textbook akin to Syd Field's *Screenplay*, and other popular screenwriting books on the market— only this book would be for the interactive arena. Over the next seventeen months, I collaborated with an experienced Hollywood screenwriter and author (Darryl Wimberley), visited countless "interactive media" seminars and conventions, taped thirty-three hours of "professional" interviews, surfed the Internet, celebrated my daughter's 1st & 2nd birthdays and poured through a pile of research to answer my query. In the end, the *Interactive Writer's Handbook* (as you will come to know it) was born.

Interactive writing, I discovered, involved more than just weaving together a compelling story, characters, plot and structure. An interactive "screenplay" is but one of several key pre-production documents used to build an interactive title. Interactive titles are created by piecing together multiple design elements over the course of a title's development cycle.

Generally, writers play a role in five of these key design elements: the Design Proposal, the Prototype Screenplay, the Interactive Screenplay, the Design Document, and the Flow Module. A simple way to relate to the development process of an interactive project is to think of it as a skyscraper under construction. The design proposal is a work order, briefly explaining the title's concept, story, characters, gameplay, interface design, and the creative team. Design proposals are often used to "pitch" the title concept to multimedia producers or VCs. Many industry writers refer to the design proposal as a treatment. However, treatments usually don't include explanations of gameplay, interface design, budget overviews or bio's of the creative team. A prototype screenplay is

the built-to-scale, pre-construction model of the building. The interactive screenplay can be thought of as the map which guides one through the building from point A to point Z. The design document can be thought of as the construction blueprint utilized by the construction crew during each phase of construction. The flow module is a new document category—part screenplay and part design document, flow modules are used primarily for online episodics and advertising web sites.

The design document is perhaps the most complex and difficult document to conceptualize and create. Most writers will never be asked to create a full design document simply because it is too much to ask of any one individual. Design documents are typically created by entire design teams working together (with writers and others) to create a title's "bible."

Currently, there is much debate within the professional writing community concerning the writer's role in interactive media. Many insist that the interactive field is a prime industry for writers to flex their creative clout while the industry is still in its infancy. Empowering writers is their ultimate goal. For too long, they insist, writers have been resigned to the "low-man-on-the-totem-pole" in the film and television industries. Many professional writers (including several WGA members interviewed for this book) see themselves evolving into hybrid "writer/designers," similar to the film industry hybrids of "writer/director" and "writer/producer." Regardless of the label, writers will need to develop a unique "interactive skillset" to generate employment in this new field. That skillset is what this book will explore, along with the basic elements which make up what writers do best—creating good stories.

While the underlying principles for creating an interactive screenplay can be comparable to writing a feature film screenplay, there are some major differences that must first be explored before any writing can begin. There is another problem. As of this writing, there is no standard screenplay format for interactive entertainment. There may never be one format that becomes "the" format, simply because the power and promise of interactive multimedia are that it shifts control to the end-user. Formats are fairly rigid structures. Unlike feature films, multimedia titles have unique and varied structures depending on its category or purpose. However, each title did evolve from something—whether it was a series

of notes on a paper towel (yes, several titles actually started out this way), a storyboard, a detailed matrix or a modified film screenplay. All of them had to flush out their exposition, structure, characters, momentum, plots and story before they could even begin to get off the ground.

To understand conflict, character development, structure and story development, we'll discuss several feature films, plays and interactive titles such as *Johnny Mnemonic*, *Rocky*, *Schindler's List*, *Mac Beth*, *Wing Commander*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Myst*, *Shane* and *Voyeur*— among others. If you're not familiar with these titles, you can find some of them at your local bookstore, rent some of them on videocassette, or interact with them via CD-ROM. You'll want to be familiar with as many as possible since we'll be discussing several elements in each. We will also be referring to the original world of *Subterfuge*, written by Darryl Wimberley. *Subterfuge* was first created as a feature film screenplay and is now being developed as an online episodic series. Outtakes from *Subterfuge* are included in this book.

If you have never written an interactive document before, this book will teach you how to tell a compelling and dramatic story. If you're a career screenwriter, you will learn how to adapt your writing skills to create new kinds of documents which will serve as maps for your interactive projects.

Ready?

CLICK HERE TO BEGIN



INTRODUCTION

by Darryl Wimberley

Any time a new technology comes to popular attention, you can expect a gap between the “insiders,” those who have an intimate knowledge of the technology, and the outsiders, those who have yet to acquire (and may never acquire) the insider’s technical expertise, but who can see an application or potential for the technology that might be of little interest to the technocratic elite. This book is intended to bridge the gap between multimedia technophiles and those outsiders who see in multimedia and interactive technologies the potential to do something very simple— To tell a story.

Storytellers, it should come as no surprise, have a lot to learn from each other no matter how differently their narratives are presented. So although these pages are obviously intended for the writer who sees a new frontier— a writer who wants to develop stories for a medium which is digitally compressed, computer displayed, and interactive— it is also the case that the coming pages will greatly benefit writers whose stories are presented on movie screens or TV’s.

Stories have been told in lots of ways for a long time. From tribal and religious ritual, we have inherited stories which get retold in modern contexts at suburban bedsides, rural living rooms or inner-city apartments. Television, especially, has virtually supplanted other modes of narrative presentation, supplying stories whose analogs were told in earlier years around the fireplace or on the front porch, at bedsides, on-stage, or in amphitheaters. But even television cannot quite sever technology’s connection with its storytelling past.

The older myths survive in modern media, though usually diluted or trivialized in their presentation. And even as the shells of older narratives flicker recognizably on film or television screens, newer stories rise to

incorporate, compete with or even replace their archetypal ancestors. The skald of ancient Scandinavia, the blind poet, and the tribal shaman have given way to a new age of storytellers who use chemical emulsion, magnetic tape and, now, digital compression to tell their tales. The presentation of stories has changed indeed over the millennia but the basis of narrative itself—its concerns, its structure, its questions, its root in the human psyche—remains the same.

A tenth-century saga, fifth-century epic, or Shakespearean play might at first seem very, very different from an interactive title such as *Under a Killing Moon* or a re-run of *Starsky & Hutch*. The unfamiliar settings, cultures and (most importantly) language of older stories make them seem like alien creatures or artifacts compared with the stories we now see on TV, film or computer screens. All of these stories, however, regardless of the way in which they get presented, have a great deal in common. This book will stress the things that all stories and story-telling methods have in common and then apply those common lessons to the creation of interactive stories.

This isn't to say we won't find differences, even marked differences, between interactive presentations and the presentations of narratives from other media. It would be surprising to find a technological innovation that did not have some consequence for stories and their tellers. Computer-generated stories give us ways to develop narratives that are not possible in print, on stage, on TV or with film. But if these newer stories are to compel a mass audience, their tellers would do well to learn the lessons that older media, and older stories, have to teach. Every performer who ever spoke a line in a high school play has something to contribute to this new breed of yarn spinner. Every novelist can teach us, every poet, every movie director—even soap operas and pulp fiction have lessons that need to be learned and applied.

The worst thing that can happen for interactive innovators to believe that because his tool is new and different, it is also superior. No. That's not how it works. Film, as an example, can manipulate sight and sound, time and place in ways that the stage cannot, and yet most great film directors acknowledge the narrative contributions of playwrights and stage performers to the art of movie making. I'm always amazed when I hear, usually from academics in film school, that filmed narratives are

absolutely unique. That they have nothing in common with, and are totally divorced from, the storytelling techniques honed on stage or in literature. Do these folks ever go to a movie? *Forrest Gump*, *Dances With Wolves* and *The Age of Innocence* have one thing in common— they are filmed stories which derive from books. Both *A Man for All Seasons* and *Driving Miss Daisy* have an analogous similarity— they are films derived from staged plays. In fact, if you listed the Oscar winners in performing categories (Best Actor, Best Actress, Best Motion Picture, etc.) you'd find that a disproportionate number of winners, in fact an overwhelming majority of winners, come from filmed stories which came from novels and plays. If we're going to write stories, why not learn from the best, from all media, and then apply it to our new hard-driven forum?

One of the things we'll quickly discover studying stories are the differences between drama and prose. Good stories can frequently be rendered with equal pleasure and power over more than one medium. Frequently, that is the case. But not always. We need to understand why, for instance, Larry McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove* translates well to the screen while James Joyce's *Ulysses* does not. A storyteller who intends to write for interactive media needs to understand the relationships between stage and screen, stage and print, and print and screen— not simply for academic purposes, but because the narrative kinship and differences between these various storytelling methods can be applied directly to the new technology.

On the importance of story: Once the present Nintendo generation tires of chase scenarios, twitch games, and infinite variations on *Dungeons & Dragons*, they will want to see some marriage between buttons and narrative— something which mates a player's participation with a writer's imagination. An alliance between the "readerly" and "writerly" text. The interactive writer will then be required to develop stories which compete in quality with the narratives supplied by previously established media. Television and film, in particular, will provide the benchmark against which interactive stories will be measured. It would be fair to ask at this point what it is that interactive writers can do better than writers from other media? In particular, what does the interactive writer's technology bring to storytelling that can't already be found on television or film? Perhaps it is not the technology, but the dynamic shift

of control from the passive to the active end-user which should command center stage.

Interactive writers have at their disposal computers which can integrate graphics, photos, animation, text and music in ways that video and celluloid cannot. Computers can produce effects and environments not possible or practical otherwise. They are changing the entire relationship between the viewer and the subject. This paradigm shift, which started with videotape and VCR's, gets a real boost from interactive technology. A viewer (or "user") will soon be able to retrieve and interact with stories on demand. No standing in lines at the movies, guys. No TV Guide.

The most important and exciting thing that computers can do for storytelling is to change, fundamentally, the relationship between the storyteller and his audience. Interactive applications don't simply allow the audience to intrude into a story, they invite it. Interactive technology makes the audience part of the story, a co-producer who along with the writer, shapes the teller's tale. The interactive narrative presents the user challenges, decisions and options which steer the story, determining "the unities"— place, time and incident— out of which the story unfolds. Even more, the end-user can shape the story's tone, psychological nuance and theme in ways not before possible. For the first time, the "viewer" of the story can affect the story's path— its presentation, its development, even its outcome. This theoretical collaboration becomes a real and tangible possibility in a computer-generated, interactive environment. Interactive technology, to sum it up, adds to the dramatically rendered story the element of choice.

Choice, then, becomes the thing that distinguishes an interactive narrative from stories told on mainstream mass media. But before we wax too enthusiastically about the marriage of choice to narrative we ought to recognize at least a fly or two in the ointment.

Everyone knows how irritating it is to have a story interrupted. It doesn't matter whether the story is told beside a campfire or seen on television, interruptions are not appreciated by audiences. Network television has never really solved the problem; what television writers have done is to minimize the irritation caused when commercials appear by building their stories around commercial breaks, setting up act closures and cliffhangers designed to bring the viewer back from the fridge to the

tube. Some people have tried to fashion a virtue of this necessity, naturally. But viewers don't buy those rationalizations and neither do the people producing network programs.

Interactive narratives won't have to worry about commercials, thankfully. But interactive stories will have to find a way to accommodate the "end-user factor" in ways that prevent a similar frustration. The ideal interactive title allows for a seamless, narrative experience. But can designers offer choices to alter a narrative experience without rupturing the experience itself? How many interruptions will be tolerated in, say, a six-hour narrative? How will the viewer be offered those choices? How will on-screen options be displayed when a decision is impending? How will the commands or buttons associated with a viewer's decision intrude on the ongoing narrative's text? These are some of the problems to consider when narrative experiences mate writers and audiences together.

We should probably conclude by pointing out something that technophiles are prone to forget—A story is not a game. Writers of interactive narratives will not be able to mimic the martial arts techniques of a *Mortal Combat*. Nor should they. They will, however, be required to offer more than a choice of weapons or mayhem. Interactive writers and/or designers will have to decide, ultimately, what kind and how much choice is good. Can the technology which allows a viewer to intrude on the story preserve, ultimately, the experience which is most valued by consumers of stories? Can interactive stories ever really hope to challenge the narratives now supplied in quantity and cheaply over coaxial cable, film, and videotape? We have a lot which we can appropriate from filmed, staged, and novelized stories but even that knowledge will not solve all the problems nor fulfill the possibilities which will develop when a writer and a "reader" forge a story together.

There's a lot of exciting stuff to think about here. A lot to consider and to learn. Let's take a look, together, and see if we can make a decent start.



Ch. 1

THE DIGITAL FRONTIER

“The hardest part about producing for interactive media is teaching writers how to think like game designers. The hardest part about dealing with game designers is that they all think they’re writers.”

— Anonymous Producer

THE WRITER REDEFINED

When William Gibson wrote the book, *Johnny Mnemonic* back in 1981, he created a hauntingly surrealistic, “future world” where we follow the lead character, “Johnny,” as he jacks his way through a sea of data addicts, bitstreamers, and hoards of other undesirables in a mad quest to liberate his mind.

In the interactive version of *Johnny Mnemonic*, an original screenplay (based on the book) was created by Douglas Gayeton and John Platten. The writing team faced creative obstacles that were inherently more complex than Gibson ever had to face writing the book. The writers for *Johnny Mnemonic*— The Interactive Movie, had to break new ground.

Unlike the Columbia/TriStar feature film version of *Johnny Mnemonic*, where the story’s backbone— its screenplay— is based on an accepted motion picture industry format, Gayeton and Platten had to create a new format that worked for their specific needs. Since they were

developing an interactive movie, they decided to modify the feature film format for interactive. Before they started writing their interactive screenplay, a detailed design document first had to be created. Before this could be done, they had dream up some new characters, scene settings had to be budgeted and optimized to meet the demands of a rigorous production schedule, gameplay had to be streamlined and coded, and methods for navigation had to be decided upon.

“Writer skills in interactive/multimedia are a little bit different from writing for any other media that you would choose,” reflects Jaryl Lane, a Southern California interactive writer and instructor, **“you have to be able to write for print, for audio, maybe graphics or other visuals. You have to be able to write for video— create characters and drama. You also need to be able to design little games for people to play, things that may be entertaining for them. And then there’s this larger task that comes before you do any writing, which is the design. Now, there are a lot of people who underestimate the writer’s role. They use writers simply to create characters, storyline, dialogue, audio and narration. And that’s a legitimate use of a writer in a multimedia application. For a writer to do that task well, though, the writer has to understand what the overall design of the program is, because you have this problem of transitions. And if you don’t know about all the possible things that may happen before or after any given screen, you can’t make those transitions smoothly.”**

Writing for interactive is no simple task. Generally, you will make less money and spend more time creating an interactive title than a conventional one. You’ll probably earn more money writing an interactive title than you would delivering newspapers. Beyond that, there are no guarantees.

If there is little money to be made and such a huge learning curve to master, why bother to write for interactive media at all? How about— it’s an exciting, new industry. Writers who dive in now have a better chance at being a part of the media-hyped digital revolution. Creative boundaries are few and risks are abundant. Robert Frost, may have summed it up best when he wrote, “two roads diverged in a wood, and I— I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.” Ultimately, it’s the writer’s journey that really matters.

FIVE QUESTIONS BEFORE YOU BEGIN

If you are determined to write for interactive media, there are four questions you must answer before you begin to put pen to paper or finger to keyboard:

- 1) What kind of writer are you?
- 2) Does your project merit an interactive format?
- 3) Who are you writing for?
- 4) How does the end-user interact with your project?
- 5) What category of title are you creating?

WHAT KIND OF WRITER ARE YOU?

Strange question. The answer seems obvious. Yet what an interactive writer does and what credit that person receives is open for interpretation. A sampling of current multimedia titles on the market today reveal a variety of writer credits— Interactive Screenwriter, Interactive Designer, Writer/Designer, Instructional Designer, Writer, Screenwriter, Author, Multimedia Writer, Interactive Storyteller, Writer/Programmer, Writer/Director, Writer/Producer, Screenwriter/Co-Designer, Interactive Writer. All of the titles above essentially identify the same person or position— the writer of an interactive program. Simply stated, there is no definition attached to an interactive writer. There are only case studies and examples of those few brave souls who have ventured into the industry ahead of you.

If you're like most writers, you are looking to either sell a spec property or procure employment as a "writer-for-hire" on an assignment. Screenwriters who land a job as a "writer-for-hire" for a multimedia producer may discover that the early writing phase is similar to the collaborative process involved in a feature film assignment. You'll sit down with your producer or executive producer and come to a general agreement about the basic elements of the story you are to tell. However, that's where the similarities end.

In a feature film assignment, you'd be sent off to develop your treatment or in some cases, your first draft. You'd arrive back at a future date

to hash out your differences, then, you'd be sent off again to to what you do best— write. Notice that the writer is essentially sent off alone to write. The look and feel of what you will be turning is a given. Hollywood has an established set of standards for the format and length of a feature film screenplay.

Interactive screenwriters, on the other hand, are typically teamed up with at least three other “teammates.” A project manager, a lead designer and a lead programmer. The four form a unique creative team that co-develops the map, and eventually the blueprint for an interactive title.

The project manager is an expert on the subject the title will explore. If not, he/she typically hires a content expert, someone who knows the content intimately who can assist the project team to create an accurate title (a doctor might be hired to assist in the data collection for a medical/health title). The project manager often hires the design team and oversees the day-to-day production of the title. The project manager is ultimately responsible for the success or failure of a title's production cycle.

The lead designer's role is to be the expert in end-user psychology, making creative decisions that help best convey the message of the title to its target audience. What will the program contain? Exactly how will it look? What elements (video, animation, music, text) will be included and how will they be woven throughout the title? What paths, nodes, branching points and navigational tools will be used to help guide the end-user through the title?

The lead programmer is the technical god, deciding how all the pieces will be “coded” into an interactive title that actually works on your computer. What authoring tools will be used to assemble the title? What technical code, signifiers, definers and enabling tools will be used? The lead programmer segments the screenplay, storyboard and flow charts into pieces of a giant “puzzle.” He/she must assign these pieces to a staff of programmers, animators, designers and other technical artists and make sure that all the pieces come together to form a working title.

Screenwriters create the map of the interactive title. They are the ones who set down the images, angles, settings, length of a screen image or scene images, the order of sequences, character development, story structure, dialogue, puzzles, clues and the like. When a writer writes a

feature film screenplay, he/she creates an interconnected “world” in the form of a 120 page linear story with a beginning, middle and an end. In an interactive title, writers must break down the “story” into smaller segments or sequences (much like the format used in an audio-visual screenplay). The trick for the interactive writer is to think in nonlinear terms rather than linear ones. Although many “interactive movies” such as MGM’s *Blown Away* or Sony Imagesoft’s *Johnny Mnemonic* are enhanced linear structures, a writer cannot assume that scene one will flow into scene two in the writer’s predetermined order. Each screen image or scene must stand alone as a separate-but-related entity. Often time, scenes, stills and dialogue are used over and over throughout the program.

Making the jump from linear to non-linear thinking is no easy task. Some writers will adapt to this new way of thinking. Others will refuse.

This new writing paradigm has a lot of writers excited. Interactive writer/designer Douglas Gayeton put it this way:

“I think there’s been a lot of writers who over the past two generations have been trying to figure out how to break the confines of a book— a book starts on page one and goes to the end. I think if those people were starting now, they would be doing interactive. Because, interactivity is all based upon the principle of non-linear thought. And that is the way we think. I could talk to you and never finish a sentence— or finish an idea— because our minds are like that. And I think that’s why people have gravitated toward interactivity. Not because it’s a fad, but because it really captures the dimensionality of thought. That thought is not a linear process, it’s a multi-plane, multi-dimensional process. And a story that allows you to assimilate and capture the essence of how our thinking processes work, is a tremendously fascinating and exciting thing.”

If you’re developing a spec property, you’ll have a competitive advantage if you understand the in’s and out’s of both screenwriting and game design, especially if you’re looking to produce your own title. You’ll be wearing the hat of writer/designer. In most instances, you will develop both a screenplay and a design proposal. In some cases, you will also design a flowchart and/or a storyboard to help clarify your vision. A successful writer/designer doesn’t necessarily need to know a lot of fancy

new skills. However, one should know how to think like a game designer. It is important to understand that a writer/designer actually contributes to make and feel of the project. It will be your job to get others interested in your project. A thorough understanding of the story, structure, navigational methods, characters, etc. is imperative. Writer/designers often have a background in art, are proficient in one of several authoring tool packages such as *MacroMind Authorware* or *Apple Media Tool*, have experience in 3-D rendering and/or prior business experience.

In the past several years, the role of the interactive writer has transformed significantly. Writers used to be hired during the production process rather than before the production cycle began. Why? An interactive titles predecessor is the video game. Today's interactive programs evolved from the "shoot-'em-up, knock-'em-down titles first created by the "Silicon Valley" gaming companies such as EA, Activision, Williams and Broderbund. Gamers—the people who actually created early classics such as *Defender*, *Asteroids*, *Joust*, *Zork* and the likes were essentially "teckies." Gamers were assigned the task of creating the playing environment, the characters, gameplay, etc. Graphics, sound effects, interface and playability were far more important than story or dialogue. And rightfully so. Complex stories and snappy new dialogue would have been wasted on earlier versions of *Pitfall* or *Donkey Kong*.

However, the gaming community is now the center of a digital revolution—a sudden melting pot of gamers, book publishers, the music industry, Hollywood and the telecommunication conglomerates. This exciting new industry has been labeled everything from "Multimedia," to "The Digital Age" to "New Media." No matter what the label, content providers will always need writers.

DOES YOUR PROJECT MERIT AN INTERACTIVE FORMAT?

You have a great idea for an interactive title and now you're ready to go to the next step—to write an interactive screenplay. You've revved up your computer and your cursor is blinking patiently. But wait!

What content is your interactive project based upon? A children's storybook? A short story? A feature film screenplay? A board game? A

music video? An instructional video? A comic book? Original works of art such as a collection of paintings or photographs? A television series? A novel? A product sales presentation? An MOW? A video game? Interviews with a vampire?

There's an old saying that content is king. Nowhere is that more apparent than in the field of interactive media. The interactive media industry is simply a melting pot of existing industries—entertainment, personal computing, telecommunications, publishing and consumer electronics. These industries are creating new applications or platforms for their media: music, illustrations, text, graphics, animation, audio and video, in order to engage the end-user with some measure of interactivity with the product.

If you have an original premise for an interactive title, the first thing you need to do before you start writing is research your market. Identify the genre, interface, gameplay, structure and characters of existing titles on the market to see just where your premise fits it. Remember, no idea is truly original. Everything's been seen and heard before. Your goal, therefore, is simple. To create an original way to experience your idea.

Content is the backbone of your interactive title. All or portions of your content may already have been produced in some form. A book. A film. A song. Many writers have visions of repurposing this content and repackaging it for an interactive project. If your content was previously produced, chances are, you no longer retain the "electronic rights" to your work. The following is an excerpt from a writing deal between a motion picture studio and a writer pertaining to ownership of material:

OWNERSHIP: Upon exercise of the option, Producer shall own, exclusively and forever, throughout the universe, all rights in all languages in the Work and in the Rewrite written by Owner hereunder, including, without limitation, the following: all Motion Picture rights, all Television Motion Picture rights, all Radio rights, all legitimate Stage rights, all Home Video rights, and all allied and subsidiary rights, including, without limitation, Sequel and Remake rights, Novelization rights, Music Publishing rights, Soundtrack Album rights, Merchandising rights, and promotional and advertising rights.

Notice that there is no mention of interactive or electronic rights.

However, the contract clearly states that you give up “all rights in all languages in the Work.” Chances are, you’d lose a court battle in this dispute. If you have questions concerning “electronic rights” to your previously-produced material, consult with an experienced multimedia attorney.

A friend in the business (we’ll call him “Kevin”) once took a meeting with an up-in-coming interactive producer (we’ll call the producer “Freddie”) for a possible consulting gig. Freddie had made a bundle as a producer in the “direct-to-video” film industry and had just acquired the rights to a series of romance novels from a well-known paperback publisher. The story went something like this...

“Think of it,” Freddie mumbled excitedly between mouthfuls of pastrami on rye. “I can put ten, twenty novels on one disc. I’ll hire Joan Collins or maybe Fabio to do the introduction and we’ll shoot it on video to keep the costs down. We’ll enhance the text versions of the books with pretty backdrops of wildflowers and gazebos— all that romantic stuff women love so much. We’ll add some sound effects, some music. I figure we can crank out a title in six to eight weeks.”

Kevin wasn’t convinced. “Are you sure women will buy this?”

“Of course,” Freddie gloated. “Women love this kind of stuff.”

“How many women own CD-ROM drives?” Kevin inquired.

“Hmmm. I’ll have to have my marketing guy check on that.” Freddie countered, “The point is, we’ve got to put this thing together quick. The idea is hot.”

Kevin pushed further. “Why would someone want to read a romance novel off a computer screen?”

“Ahhhh,” Freddie scratched his head, searching for an answer. “It’s an archive thing. Twenty novels on a disc. It’ll be great.”

“If it’s such a great idea,” Kevin pushed, “Why aren’t the major book publishers already doing it?”

“Ahhhh...”

Needless to say, “Freddie” didn’t hire Kevin. The sad part about this story is, many in the interactive business have heard this same “pitch” before. Just because somebody owns some content, it doesn’t mean it

will make compelling interactive content. Look at the number of CD-ROM titles on the market today. There are literally thousands of titles. How many are actually worth buying? A handful? Why? Titles that have failed in the marketplace— consumer titles that were designed specially to make a handsome return on investment but didn't— probably should never have been created in the first place. Most of these titles were created by producer/designers because they could, rather than because they had anything original to say. Identify your content, then, define what is you want to say.

If you don't have anything new to say or if can't think of a new way for the end-user to experience your interactive idea, why make your idea interactive? Don't jump onto the multimedia bandwagon just because everyone else is doing it. Explore your "inner voice." Decide for yourself whether or not you are the type of writer who should write for interactive. Then decide whether or not your specific idea will lend itself well to an interactive format. A writer friend once relayed this thought-provoking anecdote:

Interactive screenwriting is a lot like baking homemade bread. On a good day, you mix the ingredients, put it in the oven, and it comes out looking like a golden hot loaf. On a bad day, you mix the ingredients, put it in the oven, and it comes out looking like crap. You can have all the right ingredients, follow the baking instructions, wear an apron and a funny white hat. But that doesn't make you a cook.

If you're not going to base your interactive content on an original premise, subject or idea, you might want to base it on content available in the Public Domain.

Many writers mistakenly assume that content in the Public Domain is fair game for use in interactive titles. There are probably more misunderstandings about Public Domain than about most other legal terms commonly used in the rights field. So what works are in the Public Domain? Any work produced more than 75 years ago. Any work created and published more than 29 years ago whose copyright was not properly renewed. Any work that was not copyrighted properly in the first

place (often pertaining to works first published in England). Any work entirely created and published by a U.S. Government Agency.

Content is tricky. Before you begin to create an interactive project, it is important to “clear” your content rights with an experienced attorney. For a detailed course in content rights, check out a legal resource such as the *Multimedia Law Handbook* by Ladera Press.

By the way, I later learned through Kevin that “Freddie” secured funding for his interactive title. \$200,000 for the title and \$1.2 million in development money for a series of electronic books. God bless capitalism.

WHO ARE YOU WRITING FOR?

This question is a bit misleading because it is actually two questions in one.

Question #1


Are you writing an assignment or are you writing for yourself?






Question #2

What audience or end-user are you writing for?

Are you writing an assignment or are you writing for yourself? In addressing this first question, one must identify, literally, who you are writing for. If you have been hired to write and assignment, you are writing for a producer or project manager. You’re sole function is to deliver the document (screenplay, treatment, design proposal, etc.) you were hired to deliver. In this case, who you write for will directly impact the look and feel of your writing document. If a project manager hires you to create a screenplay based on a children’s fairy tale, every aspect of your document (length, style, text, games, puzzles, format, characters) automatically begins to fit into a category. A writer then takes into account the specific tastes of the person who hired them. If you are hired for an interactive assignment, consider asking your project manager (or whoever hired you) the following questions:

 Do you prefer a specific style of interactive format?

 Can I see an example of that style?

-  What time frame do I have to work with?
-  What role do you see me playing in the development team?
-  What is your definition of an interactive writer?
-  What do you expect from me?
-  What do you expect from my work?

These questions may seem obvious, even moronic. But believe me, they are worth asking. Pose the same seven questions to five different project managers and you'll get a mixed bag of contrary responses. Why? The interactive media industry is still in its infancy. There are no set rules. Everyone is an "expert" yet no one is an "expert." In an assignment, it doesn't matter if your method of creating documents is better than your project manager's. What's important is that you deliver the goods on time and their way. That is, if you're looking out for your next gig.

If you are writing an interactive project for yourself, you have to please no one but yourself. Style, form, dialogue, length, genre—it's all up to you. It's your decision. Some writers new to the interactive industry prefer not to examine interactive documents created by their contemporaries. They feel that exposure to other styles or formats will taint their creativity and limit their artistic options. Perhaps they are right. Then again, they may just be stubborn. It is my belief that if you know someone has already invented the wheel, why waste your time trying to re-invent it? Why not examine the wheel and spend your energy attempting to improve it? If there are styles or formats or structures that are already established as seem to work well for certain categories of titles, why not learn from them?

What audience or end-user are you writing for? To address the second question, one must first identify the audience or end-user you are writing for. Each project you create is likely to appeal to a different audience. There are basically two types of end-users; proprietary audiences and consumer audiences.

Proprietary audiences are limited in scope and number. They have specific needs and interests which need to be addressed by a proprietary interactive title. Proprietary audiences are fairly easy to identify. They

are the target audience of title's sponsor. For example:

<u>Sponsor</u>	<u>Title Category</u>	<u>End-User</u>
The Richard M. Nixon Library	Interactive Kiosk	Library Visitors
Ford Motor Company	Corporate Training Disc	Sales Managers
Syracuse University	Multimedia Database	Students

Proprietary titles contain a built-in set of constraints which directly correlate to the needs of the designated end-user. A writer for a proprietary title has a tough job. Not only does he/she have to please the project manager that hired them, they must please the title's sponsor and end-users. Talk about too many "cooks" in the kitchen! Ideally, you will work in conjunction with an experienced content expert (usually hand picked by the sponsor). The content expert advises and consults, while acting as a buffer between the writer and the other creative "cooks."

Writing for consumer audiences presents its own set of challenges. A writer must first identify the subset of the consumer market most likely to use the planned title. Children? Children & Parents? Men over 40? Men under 30? Boys? Girls? Women under 30? Homemakers? College Educated Professionals? Working Class Folks?

Next, a writer should identify the consumer audience most likely to purchase the planned title. Your title might be designed for children (K-12) but it's the parents of those children who are in charge of purchasing the title.

A writer should also know the history of the consumer title market. What's been done already? What types of titles consistently appear in critics' top ten lists? What are the popular title categories? Why are those categories popular with consumers? Interactive screenwriter, Jaryl Lane, had this to say about being prepared to write:

"If you're a writer who has a pet project in your mind that you want to make, I think that that's a good place to start. And you start with whatever your pet concept is, and then look at as many multimedia applications you can get access to. By applications, I mean, going to museums and seeing kiosk applications, looking at what's been done on Philips CD-I for elementary school children. Viewing titles that are on the consumer market— on CD-ROM. And just looking at them and playing with them. Rob Steinmetz was the president

of LSS when he first hired me to do my first interactive project. He said, 'Okay, before you get started, go buy a Nintendo player.' I got a Nintendo, and I played with it until I learned I how to do it, and understood what that was about. Now, certainly the application that I was going to work on was nothing like Nintendo. But it starts you thinking in a different way. I think just playing with some of these beautiful things that are out there— spending some time with *Microsoft's Encarta*, spending some time with *Myst*, spending some time with *Quantum Gate*, is important. So that you see what's been done."

Interactive screenwriter, Carolyn Miller, had some practical suggestions for writers who want to learn more about multimedia:

"Go down to Egghead or any other software store and just look at some of the titles on display. That's a start. And it doesn't cost a dime. You could go to the library and read magazines. There are dozens of feature stories in mainstream periodicals about multimedia. There are lots of computer shows around now and the exhibits are usually free. You could rent a Philips CD-I player for very little money and rent some of the CD-I titles. The experience is going to be much the same as with a CD-ROM title. There are some differences, but you get the feeling of what interactive is all about. If you can afford it, I'd suggest you buy some programs that play on your home computer. You've got to know what interactive is and experience it firsthand."

Writers who could care less about what people think or who are not contracted to create a consumer interactive title, need not bother researching the history of the consumer title market. They will write whatever they feel like, regardless. Writers who view their documents as pieces of art— words, sentences and structures that cannot and should not be altered in any way or under any circumstance, should self publish their own books. You can wear the hat of copy editor, graphic artist, layout & cover designer, etc. But an interactive project is a collaborative effort. A writer's voice is no more powerful or important than any other team member. That's just the way it is. Those writers who plan on making a living as an interactive writer or who wish to see their titles produced, must understand the consumer market.

HOW DOES THE END-USER INTERACT WITH YOUR PROJECT?

Another way to phrase this question is—how will you immerse the end-user into your title and how will they interact with the program once they're there? To answer this question, a writer may simply need to examine his/her background as a writer. A journalist may be comfortable with a style of storytelling that is inherently different than the style of say a Hollywood feature writer. Both know how to tell a good tale and both utilize methods of “storytelling” that are valid. However, interactive writers do more than “tell” stories. Interactive writers are forced into creating a “world” which immerses the end-user into the experience. To do this effectively, a writer must first understand the differences between the various title categories on the market today—Simulation, Adventure, Interactive Storybook, Interactive Music, etc. Additionally, the writer must understand a myriad of title design structures and choose a structure that works best for the project at hand. Chapter three of this book provides in-depth analysis and detailed explanations of both title categories and title design structures.

Why must an interactive writer be concerned with the fine points of how the end-user will interact with the title? Because the format and structure of your document directly correlates to the type of “gameplay” you choose for your audience.

For example, the interactive movie, *Johnny Mnemonic*, is experienced as a full-screen, seamless, realtime movie where the end-user essentially edits the film on-the-fly. The “gameplay” experience never stops to allow the end-user make a choice, it's all done in realtime. Consequently, there is no pause while the end-user waits for a graphic or video image to appear on-screen. For this type of end-user experience, a modified screenplay format worked well as design structure for the writer. Douglas Gayeton explains his views on the subject of format:

“I've seen lots of interactive screenplays, and the one thing that impressed me was how inefficient they were. People who write interactive screenplays love to take it and throw it down on the desk so that it makes a really big, thick, heavy sound, and then say, ‘this is my interactive screenplay.’ And you're supposed to be impressed by that. But I'm not. Do you

know that the screenplay for *Johnny Mnemonic* is a hundred and thirty-five pages long? It's written in screenplay form. We were incredibly aggressive with how we put it together in the most economical, logical way. That hundred and thirty-five page document tells you how every single shot connects to every other shot and has all the conditional logic, everything in it. But by using adjectives, and by using a logic in terms of how shots are named, we could reference things in a way that was so compact that it was readable by anybody."

On the other hand, a writer creating an interactive presentation designed for a museum kiosk, may choose to modify a simple two-column screenplay format. Why? It is a format familiar to sponsors who have previous experience commissioning audio-visual presentations such as slide shows or video training tapes. The writer, rather than trying to educate an audio-visual design team, may simply choose a format that is familiar to those who will produce the title.

WHAT CATEGORY OF TITLE ARE YOU CREATING?

Developers dread them. Industry evangelists coin them. Marketing execs love them. The public is confused by them. And writers just plain need to understand the difference between them. We're talking about interactive media title categories. Yes, the labels we love to hate.

Categories are everywhere. Archeologists categorize fossils and bones to better understand the evolution of animals and our unique place in history. Microsoft has a product on the market called *Bob* which helps categorize and simplify our complex lives.

Why then, is it so difficult to categorize multimedia titles? Why can't the multimedia publishing community agree on the names of title categories? Why do developers resist labeling their titles? Why do we need to categorize titles at all?

First of all, developers are an independent, defiant breed. They pride themselves in breaking new ground, coining new phrases and developing new technology and/or innovations that dazzle and amaze us. The very thought of labels are repulsive. Call them new-tech handcuffs. Simply stated, labels = conformity.

While a developer's rebellious spirit should be applauded, this atti-

tude does not co-exist well with the marketing model. Rebellious developers typically begin to change their tune when they realize their multimedia production company isn't making any money. If a retailer or distributor were to tell a developer, "Your product isn't selling because customers don't know what it is. Frankly, I'm not even sure how to label it." I'd say a smart developer would set his/her ego aside pretty quick. Selling a product means simplifying the marketing strategy for the masses. Categorizing a title is part of that strategy.

Multimedia trade magazines are also to blame for the category confusion. Major consumer magazines are essentially, softbound advertising propaganda interlaced with occasional copy. Let's face it, the goal of any major magazine is to make money. Magazines primarily make money from advertisers and subscribers. To make money (and to justify their high advertising rates), a magazine must attract readers. Thousands of them— and quickly (ever wonder how magazines can afford to offer those free trial subscriptions?). To attract the consumer, a magazine must stand apart from its competitors by offering its own, unique outlook on the industry it profiles. To do this, magazine are constantly testing new catch-phrases and metaphors which they hope will stimulate their readers. Ever hear of the term information superhighway? Or how about the title categories— edutainment and infotainment? The problem with these catch-phrases and metaphors is that they are nothing more than catch-phrases and metaphors. They are popular for the moment, but don't withstand the test of time.

Perhaps the foremost reason it is so difficult to categorize multimedia titles is that we can't. The entire concept of multimedia is the fusion of many forms of media and mixed modes of gameplay. Many multimedia titles are hybrids of more than one kind of title category. To further illustrate, let's attempt to classify the title, *Johnny Mnemonic*. *Johnny Mnemonic* is based on a book. There is also a feature film version of the book. The game itself is part interactive movie, part adventure game, part twitch game and part simulation. Should it, therefore, be labeled an Interactive Simtwitchulation? I think not.

We don't have the answers any more than the next industry expert. But you, the writer, need to know the basic components or examples of titles and their corresponding categories. The actual name of the

category is irrelevant, so long as we all agree on why a particular title fits into the assigned category.

Here then, is our breakdown of the various multimedia title categories, along with a few examples of titles which exemplify them:

ADVENTURE GAMES

Examples

Myst - Cyan/Broderbund
The 7th Guest - Trilobyte/Virgin
Critical Path - Mechadeus
Alone in the Dark - I-Motion/Interplay

ELECTRONIC ART/PERFORMANCE

Examples

I Photograph to Remember - The Voyager Company
L-Zone - Synergy
The Complete Maus - The Voyager Company

ELECTRONIC BOOK

Examples

From Alice to Ocean - Against All Odds/Claris Clear Choice
The Enduring Vision - D.C. Heath and Company
Shakespeare - Creative Multimedia Corp.

ELECTRONIC MAGAZINE

Examples

NautilusCD - Metatec Corporation
substance digizine - substance digizine

INTERACTIVE EDUCATION (KIDS)

Examples

Math Workshop - Broderbund Software
Alphabet Blocks - Sierra On-Line
Math Blaster - In Search of Spot - Davidson & Assoc.

INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT (KIDS)

Examples

TuneLand Starring Howie Mandel - 7th Level
Freddi Fish and the Case of the Missing Kelp Seeds - Humongous
Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego? - Broderbund

INTERACTIVE MOVIE/INTERACTIVE DRAMA

Examples

Johnny Mnemonic - Propaganda Code
Quantum Gate - HyperBole
Hell: A Cyberpunk Thriller - Take 2 Interactive
Voyeur - Philips Interactive Media

INTERACTIVE MUSIC

Examples

Mega Rock, Rap N' Roll - Medior/Paramount Interactive
Xplora 1: Peter Gabriel's Secret World - Interplay
No World Order - Electronic Arts

INTERACTIVE PRESENTATIONS/KIOSKS

Examples

N/A (Numerous proprietary titles in existence)

INTERACTIVE REFERENCE

Examples

Mayo Clinic Family Health Book - IVI Publishing
Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia - Compton's NewMedia
Great Cities of the World - InterOptica Publishing

INTERACTIVE TRAINING

Examples

Structured Settlements - Transamerica Life

Harman Kardon - Image Work Communications
The Art of Interviewing - Learning Systems Sciences

INTERACTIVE STORYBOOK

Examples

Shelley Duvall's It's a Bird's Life - Sanctuary Woods
The Tale of Benjamin Bunny - Discis Knowledge Research
Just Grandma and Me - Living Books

SIMULATION/STRATEGY/ROLE PLAYING

Examples

SimCity 2000 - Maxis
Aegis: Guardian of the Fleet - Time Warner
Star Wars Rebel Assault - LucasArts
BattleChess - Interplay

TWITCH / LEVEL GAMES

Examples

Sonic the Hedgehog - Sega of America
Doom - id Software
Mortal Combat - Acclaim Entertainment

THE EVOLUTION OF DRAMA & GAMES

The timeline which follows summarizes the historical evolution of drama, videogames and delivery systems. It is not meant to be a complete account of the historical events which have transformed the world of drama and games. However, the roots of modern gaming systems can be traced back to man's need to express himself visually.

THE EVOLUTION OF DRAMA & GAMES

- 3200 BC Egyptian religious drama
- 600 BC Dithyrambs (choral performances) to Dionysus • Sophocles' use of third actor
- 388 BC Aeschylus's *Oresteia* first performed • Comedies of Aristophanes
- 1375 Noh drama developed in Japan
- 1576 The Theatre, the first English playhouse was built by James Burbage
- 1600 Shakespeare creates greatest plays
- 1888 William Friese-Greene shows first celluloid film and patented a movie camera
- 1890 Thomas Edison displays his Kinetoscope
- 1895 Lumière brothers project film on a big screen
- 1898 Charles Babbage's "Difference Engine"
- 1907 First films are shot in Hollywoodland
- 1923 Vladimir Zworykin invents first electronic camera tube, the iconoscope
- 1948 Transistor invented at Bell Telephone Laboratories
- 1953 Color TV transmissions begin in U.S. • 3-D cinema & Cinemascope launched
- 1956 The first videotape recorder is produced by Ampex Corporation
- 1960's First computer game, *Space War* developed by MIT hackers Alan Kotok & Steve Russell
- 1964 BASIC language developed
- 1970 Ralph Baer patents the Television Gaming and Training Apparatus
- 1971 Nolan Bushnell invents the first arcade video game, *Computer Space*
- 1972 Pong arcade game released • Magnavox ships *Odyssey* home game system
- 1975 Atari releases home version of Pong
- 1976 Coleco releases *Telstar* home game system
- 1977 Atari releases Video Computer System (VCS)
- 1980 Mattel Electronics releases *Intellivision* home games system • *Pac Man* and *Asteroids* released in U.S. arcades
- 1983 Nintendo introduces NES to U.S.
- 1990 Sega releases the Genesis 16 bit system in U.S.
- 1991 Nintendo's SuperNES debuts • Sega releases Sega CD
- 1992 CD-I players debut in U.S.
- 1993 3DO machines ship to market
- 1995 Sega Saturn & Sony Playstation introduced in U.S.

DELIVERY MEDIA

From a creative standpoint, it is important for writers to understand the various characteristics of the storage and delivery media commonly used in the field of interactive media. The different media formats each have their benefits and drawbacks. For the purpose of this book, we'll focus on three popular types of delivery media—Diskette, Videodisc, and CD-ROM—and how they impact the type of gaming experience a writer can create.

The wonderful thing about writing novels is that writers can create any number of worlds, any number of characters, any number of locations, hundreds of special effects, and an unlimited number of experiences. A writer only compromises his/her material if they wish to have the work published. At that point, a writer must cooperate with an editor and/or publisher to bring that vision to market. Compromises must be made. But generally, the writer's concerns are addressed in a healthy give-and-take environment. Grammar is checked. Characters are flushed out or lost altogether. The point is, everybody understands that there are few creative boundaries. The main goal is to do what is good for the story.

In a feature film screenplay, there are pre-established boundaries or aesthetics a writer must adhere to. A screenplay is generally 120 pages in length, there is a standard layout or format for what the page should look like, and screenplays have unique transitions such as slug lines, technical direction, scene headings, scene description, dialogue and dialogue direction. There are exceptions, but generally, these “rules” apply to the majority of produced feature screenplays. Screenplay boundaries were not created to squelch a writer's creative juices, but rather, to streamline the production process.

Interactive media projects have no pre-set boundaries pertaining to writing style or format. That's one of the reasons why writers and multimedia producers are having a hard time communicating. Everybody is “speaking” in different creative “languages.” There are boundaries that pertain to the technical limitations of the media. These technical boundaries pose creative roadblocks for the writer. Technical considerations include the amount of content and its playback capabilities. Generally,

writers are expected to already understand these technical limitations, but often, writers are briefed on the specific technical constraints attached to a particular project. These may include one or more of the following: development platform, delivery platform, delivery medium (if CD-ROM, the chosen standard and format), compression schemes and authoring tools to be used.

How does all this technobabble impact the writer? Essentially, it forces the writer to make design decisions before they begin to write. How much video footage can I incorporate into the project? If I use X amount of video footage, how much animation can I use? Will the project have a music soundtrack? How much and where will I use music in the project? What combination of text, illustrations, graphics, animation, audio and video can I utilize in my project? Does my project need to incorporate a search engine? How will the production team's choice of authoring engine and compression software impact my creative decisions? How will my choice of genre, interface design, gameplay and structure impact the programming aspects of the project? Should I care?

DISKETTE

The software industry first endorsed the floppy disk as a delivery medium back in the early days of gaming. They soon embraced its cousin—the diskette. There are three common types of diskettes: double-density, high-density, and extended density. The advantage of a diskette is that it is easily portable and inexpensive to replicate. However, it has a limited storage capacity. A double-sided, double density 3.5in. diskette will only hold about 1.2MB of data. Since most interactive titles need two to three hundred times more storage space to store data, diskettes are of limited use to multimedia professionals. Diskettes are great for certain types of multimedia demonstrations. More and more, writer/designers are creating interactive resumes, compressing the program, and distributing them on diskette.

VIDEODISC

Videodiscs are a standard delivery media for educational markets. They are utilized in presentation kiosks, vocational training applications, and

most visibly, for preserving the artistic integrity or archiving feature films.

Writers who need to learn about the characteristics of videodiscs are primarily those who are employed by multimedia production companies creating custom applications for the business and/or educational markets. In brief, a videodisc is an optical disc the size of your old record album. It stores its data in analog form (although new videodisc formats such as LD-ROM allow for digital storage as well) which means it can store more video data than a conventional CD-ROM.

Videodisc formats can allow four different levels of interactivity depending on how the source information is recorded. Level 1 allows you to produce a linear program with no interactive capabilities. Level 2 allows you to play branched information. All interactivity is produced and stored on the disc. Level 3 is the format most often used for true, interactive applications. Only audio and video are stored on the disc. A computer with customized software controls the branching or interactive elements, accessing the videodisc only when source material is needed. Level 4 allows you to store both data and computer information on the disc. Level 4 formats are difficult to program and have highly specialized usage.

Many writers are unaware that videodiscs are even used in the multimedia industry. Videodiscs get little press coverage because they are not the preferred media for consumer titles. Writers with a background in audio/visual productions are most likely to have working knowledge of videodisc technology and are the most likely writers to continue to utilize the media in the wonderful world of interactive multimedia.

CD-ROM

CD-ROM stands for Compact Disc-Read Only Memory. Compared to the diskette, CD-ROM is a massive, mass-market storage device. CD-ROM's can be reproduced quickly and cheaply. A single CD-ROM can currently store a little over 600 MB of data and is the medium of choice for the majority of consumer multimedia titles. Future storage capacity for CD-ROM's will likely grow as new technologies permit data to be "layered" on a single disc, thus doubling or tripling a disc's storage

capacity.

There are drawbacks to CD-ROM as a delivery medium. There are a number of competing CD-ROM formats, almost all of which are non-compatible.

The Red Book standard is used for CD-Audio. Up to 74 minutes of stereo audio can be stored into tracks or sectors on the disc.

The Yellow Book standard is used for storage of computer data and audio on the same disc. CD-ROM and CD-ROM/XA utilize the Yellow Book standard.

The Green Book standard is used for Compact Disc Interactive or CD-I. Only CD-I players can decode the CD-I formatted discs with a special operating system known as OS/9.

The Orange Book standard is used to define the writable CD format.

The most important thing for interactive writers to know is that CD-ROM has opened the floodgate of demand for interactive titles. It is the medium that will most likely be used to deliver their ideas to the consumer. And, while it appears to be the medium of the millennia, it does have its drawbacks and limitations.

THE INTERFACE

If this were a how-to book on writing and *designing* interactive programs, we would most likely devote an entire chapter to interface design—the subject is that important. What exactly is an interface? The interface is the way the user is allowed to interact with the program. A program's interface is its communication link to the user. An interface is made up of a set of instructions which can appear in writing, sometimes spoken, and sometimes by icons or other graphic elements a user can interact with. The challenge of interface design is to provide a useful, yet unobtrusive navigational system for the user— one that motivates the user to explore the title beyond the opening screen image.

The best interface designs are those that go completely unnoticed to the end-user. Quality interface design, by definition, should be transparent. If the end-user cannot navigate past the opening screen image, if they feel compelled to reach for the user's manual, somebody screwed up.

Successful interface design is never created as an afterthought. It is part of the finished project. It's intuitive. To be intuitive, an interface needs to know its audience, as well as the goal or motivation of the program. For example, the interface for a "quest" adventure title for children should provide intuitive elements that nudge children forward to explore. An interface for a music store kiosk should provide on-screen elements that effortlessly steer the customer to the song, artist, album or music category that most interests them.

A simple way to evaluate the effectiveness of interface design is to plop a CD-ROM into your computer and immediately dive into the program. You will immediately be able to tell the difference between a good interface and a bad one. The good interface will have sucked you into the program before you even noticed that you've left the opening screen image. A poor interface will stop you cold. You'll stare at the screen, shaking your head and mumbling, "I can't believe I paid fifty bucks for this."

Why should the writer be concerned with interface design? In most instances, the writer will never have to design a program's interface. At most, they may be asked to consult with the project producer and/or project designer as to the look and feel of the interface for navigational purposes. However, writer/designers, instructional writers, and writers who are creating design proposals will surely need to incorporate interface design elements into a creative document. The best way to understand interface design is to sample as many interactive titles as possible. Go to a trade show or visit your local computer store and just play. Keep a record of the interface design elements you liked and disliked—and why. Before long, you'll be as much an expert as anyone else.

Whatever you do, don't be too impressed by technology. Don't be overwhelmed. Most of all don't be arrogant. One day, you may witness a child slip a CD-ROM into his/her computer to view a fairy tale whose roots go back thousands of years. No computer standing alone can transport that little one to another world. Only imagination can do that. And a story.



Q & A

RAYMOND BENSON

Bio

Raymond Benson is an author, composer, and computer game designer who hails from West Texas. His book, The James Bond Bedside Companion, an encyclopedic work on the 007 phenomenon, was first published in the U.S. in 1984. Generally regarded by Bond fans as the definitive book on the subject, the Bedside Companion was nominated for an Edgar Allan Poe Award by Mystery Writers of America for Best Biographical/Critical Work of 1984.

As a game designer, Raymond recently wrote and designed DARK SEED 2, a sequel to Cyberdreams Inc.'s award-winning graphic adventure based on the works of horror/fantasy artist H.R. Giger. Raymond also wrote and designed the critically-acclaimed graphic adventure, RETURN OF THE PHANTOM for MicroProse Software, Inc. Prior to that, he wrote the screenplay and directed the story for the best-selling ULTIMA VII - THE BLACK GATE, for Origin Systems.

Earlier works in entertainment software include the text adventures A VIEW TO A KILL, GOLDFINGER, and STEPHEN KING'S THE MIST, all for Mindscape. His paper role-playing adventure YOU ONLY LIVE TWICE II - BACK OF BEYOND, was published by Victory Games as part of the James Bond 007 Role-Playing Games series. Raymond is currently employed by Viacom New Media, where he co-designed and wrote the screenplay for a CD-ROM adventure based on the popular Nickelodeon television show, ARE YOU AFRAID OF THE DARK? (winner—Newsweek Editor's Choice Award and Parents Choice Award for Excellence), and a children's CD-ROM based on the popular book and film, THE INDIAN IN THE CUPBOARD.

Raymond also spent over a decade in New York City, directing numerous stage productions off-off Broadway and composing music for many other shows, including Lincoln Center Institute's touring production of Charlotte's Web, the world premiere of Thomas Brasch's Paper Tiger, and Frank Gagliano's The Resurrection of Jackie Cramer. He is recipient of nine ASCAP Popular Music

Awards. As a member of the faculty for two years at The New School for Social Research, Raymond taught screening classes and courses on film theory. He has recently taught a course in “Interactive Screenwriting” at Columbia College Chicago. Raymond is an active member of Mystery Writers of America, a full member of ASCAP, and a charter member of the Computer Game Developers Association. He resides in the Chicago area.

Interview

ARE YOU A STAFF WRITER AT VIACOM? A staff designer.

SO VIACOM ASSIGNS YOU TO A PROJECT...IS THAT HOW IT WORKS? That’s usually the way it works. Although. I’m also encouraged to pitch original material. I keep my hand in other types of writing as well. I’m writing a novel at home. I write articles for the James Bond Fan Club Magazine. I still write music. I contribute music pieces to some of the games I design. I have a piece in *Ultima VII* and *Are You Afraid of the Dark?*

I’VE NOTICED THAT INTERACTIVE WRITING HAS SPROUTED FROM ITS ROOTS IN INTERACTIVE FICTION AND GROWN INTO MULTIMEDIA CD-ROM PROPERTIES. NOW WE’RE SEEING THE ADVENT OF ONLINE SERIALS SUCH AS *THE SPOT* AND A RENEWED INTEREST IN MUDS AND MUSHES DUE TO THE ONLINE EXPLOSION. ARE WE MOVING TOWARD SOME NEW FORM OF INTERACTIVE FICTION? Personally, I wouldn’t mind seeing a return of text adventures just for the sake of having them. I’ve always loved them. When you read a good novel, the pictures in your head are always better than the ones they eventually put on the movie screen. The early Infocom games are a good learning tool for the beginning writer...especially when dealing with interactive storylines. If you can get one of their clue books or maps and study how the property was constructed— particularly the good titles like the *Zorks* and the *Enchanters*. When I taught a course in interactive screenwriting at Columbia College, the first thing we did was play *Zork*.

THAT’S INTERESTING. WHEN YOU TEACH, DO YOU USE THE TERM “BRANCHING” WHEN DISCUSSING STORY PATHS? I definitely use it. In fact, I use a white board a lot to plot out my storyline with boxes...I draw what looks like a big Infocom map on the board, only my boxes— instead

of just being rooms— are more like story events. I end up making what’s called a puzzle tree— a graphic representation of my entire story. It’s not so much a map of locations, rather, it reveals the plot lines. You have to get to here, but first, you have to do this before you get to go there.

LIKE A FLOW CHART. That’s exactly what it is. It starts at the top with the first event of the game. Then it branches out. As a designer, it helps you figure out how linear or non-linear your story is. If it’s a straight path from the top to the bottom, it’s pretty linear. A good puzzle tree will look like an inverse hour glass— fat in the middle and narrow on both ends.

DO YOUR PROJECTS HAVE “ACTS?” Yes. I use the 3-Act approach too. The story is always first. I write a narrative prose version of the ideal path of the story. Then I will take that and diagram it out. I really flesh out the locations. For instance, in *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* we knew that it was going to take place in a haunted theatre so I used my theatre experience to incorporate all the elements inherent to a theatre. The stage, the auditorium, the catwalks, the costume shop, the scene shop, backstage, dressing rooms, lobby, etc. I made this big map of the theatre, then, utilizing my linear story, I scattered my plot elements around the map. That way, I could say— you discover this here, and that there, and this here. As a designer, my job was then to structure the flow of the game to work so that the player could discover all these things in a non-linear fashion— trying not to force the player to go this way or to go that way.

AVOIDING A CRITICAL PATH. Exactly. In most of my games, the beginning is funnelled— there’s an opening which pushes the player forward and discloses the problem. The player must now solve this problem. The program then opens a gate and lets the player go. The middle of the game is this free-form, exploratory world that has set plot points scattered around it. The player can experience the game in any order that he/she wishes.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE PLAYER CAN’T SOLVE OR FIND THE PLOT POINTS? My games are structured so that eventually, they can’t help but find them.

DO YOU PROVIDE PROMPTS? Once they’ve explored everything, they find them.

[LAUGHS] They just have to keep at it. Once the player finds the plot points,

it triggers the next section of the game to begin.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT WRITERS WHO ADVOCATE REPURPOSING FEATURE SCREENPLAYS INTO INTERACTIVE DOCUMENTS? I think it's possible. I've had to work on licensed products before. *The Indian In the Cupboard* and *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* were both adaptations. They can be limiting though. You've got to make it different enough from the original material so that it's a unique experience, yet you've got to retain elements that made the original material popular in the first place.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND IN THEATRE THAT HAS HELPED YOU AS AN INTERACTIVE WRITER? I always look at interactive work as theatre on the computer. I'm trying to create an emotional experience for the user. I want the user to get involved with my characters—to care about them. I want the player to discover the special world of the game. If you can immerse the user into the interactive experience like you would with a movie or a good book, where the user forgets the outside world and is lost in the computer screen, then you've succeeded.

I define the special world as a unique environment of a story or a game toward which the protagonist has a particular attitude. In other words, the special world is what the story of the game is about—it's the theme or the idea. At the beginning of a good story, the protagonist has an attitude toward the world and the environment around him. If it's a good story, he's going to change that attitude or re-enforce the attitude that he already has. I try to incorporate that philosophy into my games. If it's a first person style game, I try to make the point of view have that attitude. Take a game like *Doom*. That's a game with a lot of attitude. Even *Myst* has a unique attitude toward the world around it.

HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE YOUR WRITING STYLE? I write in screenplay format usually. It really depends on the style of the game. For graphic adventures like *Return of the Phantom* or *Dark Seed II*, the style is best described as a room by room format. For example, if my room was a lobby, my script would say ROOM - LOBBY. Next I would write everything that happens in the room as it relates to the plot. I would then write a description of the room and everything it has to have in it for the artists whose job it will be to make the room come to life visually. I describe how those room objects are used and their importance to the story. I then describe any foreground or background animation that may occur in the room—can the character run, jump, hit, etc. I describe any text that may occur on the screen...any narrative. I describe the music and sound

effects in the room. Then I list the entrances and exits. Next, I list all the hot spots in the room and what those hot spots trigger. If there is inventory use in the game, you have to describe what those inventory objects can or cannot do—if I use this item on the doorknob, what response will I get? After all that, I list any special applications or notes to the programmers—logic puzzles, flags, all the stuff that they’ll need to create.

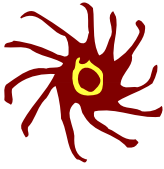
So that’s what my script looks like. A room by room, blow by blow screenplay.

WHERE DOES THE CHARACTER/PLAYER DIALOGUE FIT IN? I write the dialogue separately.

REALLY? In adventure games, my screenplays don’t read linearly at all. On the other hand, if it’s a 3D exploratory game like *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* where the player is first person, I did use a more traditional screenplay format.

HOW IMPORTANT IS INTERFACE DESIGN IN GAMING? Very. With a lot of companies, you’re gonna find that manuals are out. The game needs to be “plug ‘n play” as much as possible. Children’s titles, for example, should have an intuitive interface so that any kid can click and go.

DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR WRITERS? The interactive industry has very few auteurs. This is a very collaborative experience—even more so than perhaps a movie or a theatre production. With film or theatre, the project has the director’s mark all over it, even though there are many other people working on the project. The interactive field has a few stand out’s—the Chris Roberts’ and the Sid Meiers’. But the design team really creates the property.



Ch. 2

THE DOCUMENTS

*“If you want something from an audience,
you give blood to their fantasies. It’s the
ultimate hustle.”*

— Marlon Brando

In the early days of multimedia, writers were often looked upon as creative afterthoughts. Multimedia producers and designers created the world of the interactive experience. Writers were called in to “copyfit” the screen text to match or connect the screen images together. In other words, writers created snappy headlines and/or dialogue in a given number of characters to “fit” the screen layout. It was a difficult task. Writers often had no idea what the overall project was, let alone the message it was attempting to convey.

The end result was a market flooded with bland titles. The titles were weak on character development, the stories were flat, and the plots, thin. The game design, graphical elements and full-motion images were touted as state-of-the-art, but end-users played them once and quickly moved on to the next title. Screenwriter, Carolyn Miller commented on the early role of writers:

“One of the major challenges is, very often, what you’re writing is very short pieces of copy. The dialogue has to stand on its own. It will be connected to other things but you don’t know in what order it will be connected

so each thing is self-contained. It's not like writing a screenplay where you're building and building these pages to do what you need them to do. It's very hard to build a character in interactive because you never know when you're going to see that character on-screen. You can't build a character the same way. Structure, of course, is completely different. The writer often doesn't get involved in the structural design except for writing the dialogue or the text that appears on-screen."

Today, writers are still being hired as "copyfitters." Although, most multimedia production companies are now integrating writers into the design team early on in a title's development cycle. What the writer actually types on screen or puts down on paper varies from writer to writer, job to job. However, there are four common documents typically created by writer/designers for interactive media projects: Design Proposals, Prototype Screenplays, Screenplays, Design Documents and Flow Modules.

Before a writer starts to crank out an interactive document, they must first identify why they are creating the document. Is the document an assignment or a spec job? Will the document be used to "sell" an idea or is the idea already slated for production? Once these parameters are identified, the writer should know which document will fulfill his/her objective.

As general rule, if you've been hired for an assignment— you create whatever the hell the producer wants.

If you are writing on spec, you first need to identify your objective. Are you developing the material for use as a writing sample and/or to aid in landing an agent? Are you developing material to pitch to producers or developers? Or are you creating documents to pitch to investors? Your objective will determine which type of interactive document you should create.

Is there a spec market for interactive documents? Not quite. Interactive writer/designer Howard Burkons relayed, "Game companies have never asked me for a spec interactive script. They've only asked to read my classic writing samples."

Spec interactive screenplays are great for proving to someone that you've done your homework and that you have a basic understanding for

what writing for interactive is all about. The spec sample may even help land you an interactive writing assignment. Spec Interactive Screenplays, however, won't even be considered by the many multimedia producers for several reasons. Producers are afraid of exposing themselves to outside ideas for fear of future litigation against them. Many producers already have a slate of interactive projects waiting in the wings and wish to develop them before considering anything new. And many producers have proprietary authoring engines which use specialized coding for documents such as screenplays, so your screenplay style might not fit their requirements.

With that said, should writers even attempt to write a spec documents? Yes! Writers write. If you truly want to be an interactive writer, you can lead the charge on the digital frontier just as much as the next writer. Don't just sit around thinking about writing. As a wise shoe manufacturer once said...just do it!

DESIGN PROPOSAL

The design proposal (also referred to as a treatment, outline or level I design document) is best described as an abbreviated design document. Design proposals allow the creative team to review story and gameplay elements early on in the development process to aid in determining how all the pieces fit together. Design proposals are commonly used to "pitch" interactive projects to prospective investors and serve as story/design treatments for producers and/or publishers.

A well-written design proposal effectively conveys the idea, explains how the idea lends itself well to interactive project, and shows why the idea will perform well in the marketplace. If you are a writer/producer or writer/designer, the design proposal may also serve to demonstrate your ability to produce the idea. Kip Konwiser, VP of Entertainment for Graphix Zone, had this to say about his days working as an interactive writer/producer for rock legend Mickey Hart:

"A lot of his ideas were pretty out there. My role was to take all of that and put it into a bite-sized, consumable format that people could actually purchase; in other words, take the art and make it business."

Design proposals are also used by third-party producers to make sure that the production house and the publisher are both speaking the same language. Interactive writer Dennis Archambault, relayed his experience working with clients:

“Each stage of the production process must be approved by the client before you move on the the next stage. That way, the client knows exactly what they’ll be getting. It’s also insurance for the producer. If a client isn’t happy with something, you can always point to a signature and say, “So and So approved this on such and such a date.”

Even after your design proposal has been approved, Archambault adds, you’re not necessarily on the road to production:

“It’s in the nature of the client that once you think you have a final, the next level up says, ‘Why don’t you let me see it?’ The next thing you know, you don’t have a final anymore.”

Let’s review the key elements of the design proposal.

KEY ELEMENTS OF A DESIGN PROPOSAL

- 1) Premise
- 2) Story Summary
- 3) Character Descriptions
- 4) Interface Methodology
- 5) Story Path Structure/Navigation
- 6) Technical Features
- 7) Marketing Strategies
- 8) Creative Team Bio’s

Premise

A one paragraph description which summarizes the project and objective of the program. Sometimes referred to as a summary, a design proposal’s premise is perhaps the most important element since it is commonly used to generate reader interest. The following formula may help you

generate a premise that will “hook” the reader:

[Project Title] is a story about [Name of your Protagonist], a [Description of your Protagonist] who, after [Obstacle], wants to [Outer Motivation] by [Method of Accomplishing Outer Motivation]. We will know the [Protagonist] has succeeded at the end of the story when [Protagonist] has [Accomplishment That Signifies Success].

Example: *The Journeyman Project II: Buried in Time* is a story about you—Agent 5, a likeable player who, after being framed for altering the fabric of time and thrown in jail, must escape and traverse history to unravel the plot against you. We will know you have succeeded at the end of the interactive adventure when you gather all the evidence necessary to prove your innocence.

Another example: *Alone in the Dark* is about Edward Carnby or Edward's niece, Emily (user chooses between a male or female protagonist), a slick, private eye who, after the demise of eccentric artist Jeremy Hartwood, tries to find the reason behind his untimely death by searching through Hartwood's creepy old mansion. We will know Edward/Emily has succeeded when he/she defeats all the demons and pieces together the clues to the mystery.

Story Summary

This is where you describe in further detail, the concept/objective of the game and how the end-user will interact with, and/or “shape” the outcome of the story. In the case of an interactive drama, the spine or linear narrative of the interactive story is explained in detail.

Character Descriptions

Assuming your title incorporates characters, this is where you take the time to introduce them to the reader. Try to include such character traits as personality, physical appearance, history or back-story, and their relationship to the rest of the characters in the project.

Interface Methodology

This is where you describe how you see the user interacting with the program. Is it a written set of instructions, Quicktime icons, graphic buttons?

This is a good place to introduce a screen shot, photo or sketch of what the graphical interface might look like.

Navigation/Story Path Structure

This is where you describe the ways in which the end-user interacts with the environment. Often times the best way to demonstrate the “flow” of a program is with a flowchart or matrix. Unless you are an experienced designer, a detailed description of story path is all that is necessary for your design proposal.

Technical Features

Here’s where you wow the tech-boys with your knowledge of technological “feel” of your project. In glorious detail you will explain issues such as 2D and 3D displays, computer-rendered characters, multi-user options, online portability, auto mapping, graphics resolution, development tools, platform compatibility, etc.

Market Strategies

To demonstrate how confident you are that your idea will be a runaway commercial success, this is where you put your money where your mouth is. In short, you will explain why this project will sell, who will be buying it, how much money it could make, and why.

Creative Team Bio’s

Here’s where you include resumes or brief biographies of the principle players who will execute or add value to your project.

To better understand the elements of a design proposal, the following pages showcase the design proposal for *Magic Drum*, an interactive project in development at 360° Productions. The design proposal was created by Kip & Kern Konwiser

MAGIC DRUM

a proposal for an interactive CD-ROM game
by
Kip and Kern Konwiser

based on the treatment "Magic Drum"
by
Mickey Hart & Jay Stevens

Please contact:

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(Courtesy of Kip & Kern Konwiser and 360° Productions)

DEFINITIONS

A SHAMAN is a healer, advisor and prophet on the patterns of weather, illness, the Hunt and other concerns of survival. Cursed to remain a solitary wanderer and a saver of souls.

PALEOLITHIC is the era of the dawn of man, when people searched for ways to understand and control their hostile environment.

THE REALM OF SPIRITS is that place, beyond consciousness, where dreams are real and reality is a shadow. This is the land in which the shaman roams to heal the souls and answers the questions of men and women.

THE WORLD TREE is the keystone of the Realm of Spirits. It is the perfect tree for the shaman to make his Magic Drum and the goal of his journey.

SUMMARY

As a powerful shaman, you must explore the surrealistic Realms of the Spirits to deliver your apprentice to the World Tree. Using your control over the elements and animals, as well as the power of your Magic Drum, you must protect your pupil from Baltar, the fearsome shaman who will attempt to keep you from reaching the World Tree.

OVERVIEW

Exploring unknown worlds has always captured the imaginations of audiences in all forms of entertainment and adventure. Magic Drum takes you back to the Paleolithic Age when huge mammoths and aurochs roam the Grass Sea and cave bears guard the alpine passes.

This adventure combines the fast paced, combat-oriented action elements kids and adults have come to expect from interactive games with a heightened sensibility toward nature, rhythm and all things primal. Honor and respect are as important a weapon to the shaman as strength and cunning. To win this game, you will need the help of every village and each animal you encounter.

A great interactive adventure for the action-oriented kids, as well as an insightful exploration into man's delicate harmony with his environment, Magic Drum will entice every interactive computer user from pre-teen video-heads to middle aged white collar warriors.

(Courtesy of Kip & Kern Konwiser and 360° Productions)

MAGIC DRUM
Interactive Game
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THE GAME

You are one of the most powerful shaman to walk the rugged, primordial earth. Your curse is that you must remain a lone wanderer, an outcast, until you can deliver an apprentice to the World Tree, thereby releasing you of your shamanic duties to join your wife and child as a peaceful man of prayer once again.

As a shaman, you have a Guardian Spirit which is The Wolf. You can summon the Guardian Spirit in an instant, transforming yourself into part man, part wolf. You will use this trick often in combat.

Heaven knows you have tried with countless apprentices. However, your evil brother BAL TAR, an equally powerful shaman, has always cut the poor young lads and lasses down before you could reach the elusive World Tree, denying the reunion with your family. Each time your apprentice meets his maker, you must search the villages for another prospect and begin all over again.

However, each time you succeed in taking an apprentice to the World Tree and constructing a new magic drum, the player adds another Shaman to his family, thereby inviting opportunities to play new levels of "Magic Drum" with more a experienced shaman.

The Apprentice

You recruit the most talented boys and girls you can find, each one gifted in his own way. With your apprentice at your side, you travel from one village to the next, on your way to the World Tree. These are your Shamanic duties:

To advise the scared and hungry People on crops and hunting.

To mediate bloody inter-tribe quarrels.

To heal the sick by entering a trance state that transports you to the Realm of Spirits which exists beyond the conscious world.

(Courtesy of Kip & Kern Konwiser and 360° Productions)

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The Realm of Spirits

In the Realm of Spirits, you fly like a bird across a fantastic landscape of dark caves, underground rivers, stormy seas and angry volcanoes in search of the sick person's soul.

The journey always leads to new and unusual places and the only way to return to reality is to follow the steady beat of your apprentice's magic drum back home. The farther you travel, the fainter the drumming sound becomes. If you go too far or if your apprentice is interrupted in his drumming, you could easily end up stuck forever in the Realm of Spirits.

Always beware of the vast numbers of strange and powerful creatures who dwell here.

The Celestial Map

Each time you successfully return from the Realm of the Spirits, you will find a celestial map etched on your drum that outlines the new regions you have conquered. These are the pieces of the puzzle that will lead you to the World Tree. Every time you return safely from the Realm of Spirits, the map becomes more complete. Therefore, it is worth the risk to venture to the Realm of Spirits.

Ultimately, when you believe you have enough of the map to take you to the World Tree, you and your apprentice can take the final journey to the World Tree.

What makes this last trip so dangerous is that both you and your apprentice go into the Realm of Spirits together. That means there is no one to stay home and keep the drum beating. In other words, it's a one way trip. If you don't make it to the World Tree, you are stuck in this lonely, desolate place for eternity -- until Baltar tracks you down and devours your apprentice.

(Courtesy of Kip & Kern Konwiser and 360° Productions)

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The Animal Spirits

There will be many encounters as you travel from one village to the next. The joys of communicating with peaceful animals will be yours and a valuable part of the education one needs to successfully complete the journey to the World Tree. However, in this world of survival, you can also become a lion's supper, get torn apart by a pack of hungry wolves, bitten by poisonous insects, or stampeded by an unstoppable herd of woolly mammoths. What's more, you can bet that Baltar and his pack of mangy, man-eating dogs will always be hot on your tail.

All the cures, medicines and lessons you'll ever need are hidden in the very forest that can also devour you. Selecting various plants around you will bring up a detailed text telling you if the plant has any medicinal or nutritional value. Or, by "clicking" on an animal, you and the apprentice will learn of this creature's relationship to the environment, how it survives in the world, its family of friends and relatives who can help you better understand this strange and sometimes alienating world.

After interacting with any animal that lives in the forest, you must honor its spirit with prayer or suffer the wrath of that animal's clan. Remember: there is no way your apprentice will reach the World Tree alive without the blessing of the Animal Spirits. So you either make it easier for yourself by gaining the Animal Spirits' favor or nearly impossible by becoming one of the cursed prey of the animal kingdom.

CHARACTERS

APPRENTICES: There are five young prospects from which you can recruit. They are boys and girls, all within 10 to 15 years old. Each one begins with a special gift of the senses and develops into a full comprehension of all senses as he or she survives the journey to the World Tree.

A young boy called SWAN can mimic any sound he hears - a bird's song, a wolf's howl, even the crackling of the fire. The Animal Spirits certainly favor him as one of their own.

(Courtesy of Kip & Kern Konwiser and 360° Productions)

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Another young boy, ARDIN has an uncanny sense of hearing and can beat the drum louder and more clear than any other, allowing you to venture further than ever into the Spirit Realm without getting lost.

A young girl called TIANA has such keen vision she can sometimes see that which has yet to happen.

PIPP has the nose of a wild animal which tells him when danger is near before it can be seen or heard.

And the youngest pupil, SORENA has such a gentle touch that she can heal almost any wound with a soft stroke or kiss.

THE FOUR BASIC FORCES

The world is held in balance by Water, Fire, Earth and Wind -- the Four Basic Forces. As a shaman, you will sometimes hear clues whispered to you through the wind or rain or a crackling fire.

You can ask the Four Forces to assist you in times of danger which will unleash these natural elements upon your enemies. However, the Forces are fickle and often their assistance will do you more harm than good. Also, you can not ask too many favors of the Forces or they will consider you a pest and refuse your wishes.

MOTHER OF ALL WATERS: One of the Spirits of the Four Basic Forces, she controls the ebb and flow of oceans, rivers and lakes, quenches the thirst of all living beings and cleanses them with rain. She speaks to you in the veiled whispers of waterfalls and creek beds, revealing secrets to help you reach the World Tree. In case of an extreme emergency, she can even be summoned to wash away your foes with torrential storms or sudden floods.

FATHER OF FIRE: Not nearly as hospitable as Mother of All Waters, this Spirit can also be summoned if needed desperately. But beware, because the fire you summon can rage uncontrollably, burning your allies as it does your enemies. Father of Fire has a cruel sense of humor and does not like to be disturbed.

(Courtesy of Kip & Kern Konwiser and 360° Productions)

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UNCLE EARTH: The Spirit of mountains, father of all trees. Humans and animals play out their lives upon his back. He is difficult to arouse, but with a mere shrug of his shoulders can crumble mountains or split the earth in two.

BROTHERS OF WIND: North, South, East and West, these four Spirits comprise the last of the Four Basic Forces and control the wind and weather. They can never agree between themselves and asking a favor from one may bring on the wrath of another. When traveling across oceans or wintry mountain passes, they are the most essential Spirits to appease.

THE ANIMAL KINGDOM: The game includes a vast database of birds, insects, wild animals, reptiles, and giant prehistoric beasts that roam the earth. Encounters with these creatures is unavoidable and sometimes delightful and sometimes dangerous. Slaying a powerful beast and praying for its spirit to rest in peace can transform the animal into your apprentice's guardian spirit and it will protect the apprentice from harm.

ANIMAL MASTER: The biggest, gnarliest cave bear you can imagine, the Animal Master roams the Realm of the Spirits, keeping a watchful eye on the progress of his children, the shamans of the world. If your apprentice successfully travels to the World Tree, the Animal Master will confront the child and welcome him or her into the family of shamans.

(Courtesy of Kip & Kern Konwiser and 360° Productions)

MAGIC DRUM
Interactive Game
Page Seven

The Menu

The following display appears at the top of your screen at all times:

FOUR FORCES	MAGIC DRUM	BAG OF TRICKS	ANIMAL SPIRIT	PRAYER
-------------	------------	---------------	---------------	--------

Clicking on each category will display a menu of the following choices:

FOUR FORCES: Mother of All Waters
 Father of Fire
 Uncle Earth
 Brothers of Wind

MAGIC DRUM: Celestial Map
 Realm of Spirits
 World Tree entry

BAG OF TRICKS: Medicine Pouch
 Weapons, Tools, Gifts

ANIMAL SPIRIT: Guardian Spirit
 Transform

PRAYER: Four Basic Forces
 Animal
 Plant

* * Throughout the sample game description, the **highlighted** words represent possible windows a user may select to interact with the action of the game.

(Courtesy of Kip & Kern Konwiser and 360° Productions)

MAGIC DRUM
Interactive Game
Page Eight

A SAMPLE ADVENTURE

You begin just outside of a village like any other, a cluster of huts with a fire pit in the middle. Here, you meet your apprentice, SWAN, who has an amazing gift. With his exquisite voice, he can imitate any animal sound he hears. You find him just outside the village, singing songs with a bird and learning about its history and habitat. This is truly a child blessed by the Animal Spirits and you decide he will make a fine pupil.

The North Wind whispers the news of your new apprentice across the land until it reaches the demonic Baltar. That night, while you sleep, Baltar summons the Father of Fire to fan the dying flames of your campfire. You awaken to a blazing inferno as you see the entire forest burning around you. Through the smoke and flames, you can see Baltar's hounds chasing a screaming Swan into the thick forest.

Selecting from the **Four Basic Forces**, you summon the Mother of All Waters to bring rain. The Mother of All Waters reminds you that you can only summon her powers once in a great while. But what choice do you have? The storm comes down, quenching the flames and flooding the forest. Your friend the crocodile offers you a ride on the flood waters towards a tall tree where Swan hangs on, just above the snapping jaws of Baltar's dogs. The boy swings into your arms and you let the swift current wash you to safety.

You have escaped Baltar's first attack, but by no means vanquished him. He'll be back again and soon, you can count on it.

You spy the next village at the bottom of the valley and make your way toward it for food and shelter. Suddenly, Swan lowers to a crouch, listening with all his focus. A low growl emanates from his throat, exactly like a lion. A lion! Swan's warning gives you time to call upon your power of **Animal Spirits** and assume the form of your Guardian Spirit - the wolf - just as the lion hurls itself upon the little boy. Using your sharp claws and teeth, you engage the great beast in combat. Swan mimics a whole pack of wolves which makes the lion sense an army against him. He retreats back into the forest.

(Courtesy of Kip & Kern Konwiser and 360° Productions)

MAGIC DRUM
Interactive Game
Page Nine

Swan's ability to settle the fight without killing the beast wins him the respect of the Lion Clan. The lion is now your apprentice's Guardian Spirit, as the wolf has always been yours. You will now find "lion" listed under your **Animal Spirits** menu and can call upon their rich history or their protection in the future.

Swan suffered a gash in his leg which bleeds profusely. You borrow some of the spider's web from a black widow to treat and dress the wound.

You continue the rest of the way to the village. When the people learn of the lion battle, they rejoice. The fearsome lion had hunted the young children of this village all summer. You are presented with gifts, medicinal herbs which you drop into your **Bag of Tricks**. A party featuring the music and dance of the native people lasts into the night.

But you soon realize you've made a colossal mistake. When taking the spider's web to attend Swan's cut, you never asked forgiveness for taking the spider's home. The village is ravaged by a swarm of poisonous spiders. Three people are bitten and fall seriously ill. The villagers' hospitality turns to hostility. Will you stay in the village, dive into the Realm of Spirits and attempt to save them? Or do you run away, jeopardizing your pride and honor as a shaman but choosing your battles carefully. You realize the only path to the World Tree is to confront difficult challenges. You agree to venture into the Realm of the Spirits.

Giving Swan your **Magic Drum**, he bangs a rhythm while you fall into a trance state. You awaken on the other side of reality -- in the Realm of Spirits! You are hovering like a bird over a vast ocean. Fog-shrouded mountains cut across the horizon. You can hear Swan's steady drum beat. You fly toward the highest peak in the mountain range. As you venture closer, you can see a series of caves tunneling deep inside the mountain face. Closer still, and you see a giant spider scurry into one of the openings. This is your clue -- you follow it inside.

The cave tunnel twists and burrows deep into the bowels of the mountain until it opens into a large cavern. Enormous, sticky spider webs stretch across stalactites and stalagmites. Wrapped inside, you can see the three tortured souls of the villagers who were bitten by the poisonous spiders.

(Courtesy of Kip & Kern Konwiser and 360° Productions)

MAGIC DRUM
Interactive Game
Page Ten

Using your power of **Animal Spirits**, you disguise yourself by transforming into a spider and begin cutting the trapped souls free. However, the illusion wears off within moments and you notice large spiders venturing out of the shadows. There are hundreds of them and they aren't going to let you take their prisoners without a fight. Referring to the **Four Basic Forces**, you summon Father of Fire to burn the spiders and their webs. Father of Fire agrees to help you -- but with his own demented sense of humor.

The mountain you are inside of is a volcano and Father of Fire calls up the hot lava from the mountain's belly. You take the two souls that are in your grasp and fly as fast as you can back the way you came. The hot lava rushes into the cavern, smothering the spiders, their webs and unfortunately, the one remaining trapped soul.

With the two souls in your grasp, you shoot out the mountainside and across the sky while behind you, the entire mountain erupts in brilliant orange flame. You follow the sound of the beating drum which grows louder and louder until it is nearly deafening.

You awake by the fireside. It is still night. Swan is at your side and he helps you up with a relieved smile. The two souls you cut free have survived but the other poisoned villager will not live. Although the village ought to be grateful for your daring adventure to save them, they consider you responsible for the death of the man because you brought the plague of spiders upon them. You decide to leave before the sun comes up.

Once you have put some distance between you and the village, you offer a **Prayer** to the cave spiders in the Realm of Spirits. You hope they will forgive you but don't know whether they will. Then, you inspect your **Magic Drum** and see the Celestial Map engraved on a portion of the drum head. It displays the ocean and mountains you traveled in the Realm of Spirits. You notice that the tunnel where you found the spiders continues out the other side of the mountain and leads to a deep valley. Beyond that, you cannot make out the details.

(Courtesy of Kip & Kern Konwiser and 360° Productions)

MAGIC DRUM
Interactive Game
Page Eleven

Swan complains that he is hungry so you look around for something edible. Selecting various plants and bushes, you not only find some wild berries that are edible, but also a wide, flat leaf that makes an excellent bandage. Its sap will heal a cut and make the leaf stick to the wound. You tuck these into your **Bag of Tricks** as you munch the juicy berries. Then, you thank the bush for providing your meal and the tree for giving you medicine. You continue on your way.

Not every village you encounter requires a trip to the Realm of Spirits. Some give you shelter, food and song. Others are too scared of your kind to invite you in. Still, you need those adventures to the "other side" to add to the Celestial Map and learn how to reach the World Tree. As you travel, Swan becomes a warrior after all. After several trips to the Realm of Spirits, you are willing to take the journey to the World Tree.

Your journey begins at the Temple Caves, a sacred place where tribes meet to share new knowledge on their world. Paintings cover the walls and crude numeric systems chart the seasons, weather and movement of the great herds. Using the **Magic Drum**, you and Swan play the rhythm of the World Tree and fall into a trance together.

You and Swan emerge above the clouds, soaring toward an enormous tree trunk. Up you travel, through the branches and leaves, into the celestial patterns of stars which suddenly become a black pool of water. You and Swan feel yourself pulled and plunge over a waterfall that leaves you floating in an extraordinary pool of water.

The flow of the river leads you around bend after bend until you find yourself heading straight toward Baltar, grinning, sword in hand. He has rounded up an army of gigantic spider (no, they didn't forgive you) so you call on your own **Animal Spirits**, the Lion Clan, to aid you. This is the last great battle you will have to fight so you use every weapon and spell in your **Bag of Tricks** and every favor you have left with the **Four Basic Forces**. The battle is fierce, but you are victorious. When Baltar has been vanquished, you remember to offer a **Prayer** to him and his army of spiders.

(Courtesy of Kip & Kern Konwiser and 360° Productions)

MAGIC DRUM
Interactive Game
Page Twelve

You now use the Celestial Map on your **Magic Drum** to locate the World Tree. Here, Swan is welcomed into the family of Shamans by the Animal Master. At the World Tree, you learn and develop a relationship to drums, rituals and the final creation of your apprentice's drum from the bark of the World Tree. Successful in every way - physically, spiritually, musically - you may join your wife and child in a life of peace as your apprentice becomes your Shamanic replacement.

(Courtesy of Kip & Kern Konwiser and 360° Productions)

PROTOTYPE SCREENPLAY

Prototype screenplays are essentially 10-15 page abbreviated versions of interactive screenplays which come in two basic forms and are used for two separate purposes.

In some instances, an interactive producer may need to create a working demo of an interactive program in order to “sell” the project to an investor, publisher or a client. Rather than producing the entire project, the producer may decide to produce only a small portion of that project. In the film industry, the prototype screenplay is commonly referred to as a “trailer” and in the television industry, it’s referred to as a “pilot.” A final prototype screenplay may be 10 or 15 pages in length. They are typically self-contained documents.

Prototype screenplays are also used by writers as samples of their interactive writing styles. Since interactive screenplays come in a variety of formats, one screenplay sample may not be enough for a writer to land a particular interactive assignment. An interactive producer of *Doom*-type titles cannot be expected to hire a writer based on his/her *Arthur’s Teacher Trouble*-type writing sample any more than the producers of *ER* can be expected to hire a writer based on his/her *Seinfeld* writing sample. The television industry is pretty clear about who and why it hires certain people (yes, nepotism does help). TV producers rarely hire new writers without first reviewing writing samples from the same genre.

Finally, prototype screenplays are being created by writer/designers to serve as templates for their own interactive project “trailers.” Writers capable of producing a portion of their screenplay or design proposal on a presentation program such as *Astound* or on a multimedia assembly program such as *Macromedia Director*, increase their odds of setting the project up with a seasoned multimedia producer. This enhanced version of a prototype screenplay can demonstrate a writer’s unique skill set as both writer and designer.

INTERACTIVE SCREENPLAY

Screenplay Aesthetics

Interactive Screenplays can be the backbone of an interactive title. We say “can be” because not all multimedia developers use them. Some producers simply launch right into the Design Document and create a “screenplay” within that document. Many developers don’t even refer to the creation of story, characters, plot and structure as a screenplay. Whatever names or methods used to create interactive documents, one thing is apparent; multimedia developers need writers.

A screenplay is nothing more than a format for writers to convey dramatic stories. Interactive screenplays are no different. At their core, all multimedia titles have some form of structure which holds all the media pieces together. Some titles, such as those created for the multimedia film company, Interfilm, are designed for group interaction on the big screen. The majority of interactive projects, however, will be created for release on CD-ROM and/or interactive television and displayed on a television screen or computer monitor. And unlike a movie or television story, interactive stories factor in choices for their audience. Choices allow the individual user to affect the narrative’s outcome or presentation in an endless variety of ways.

Note that the Interactive Screenplays which we will discuss in this book were designed to integrate a user’s choice into a narrative which is “linear.” For our purposes, a linear narrative describes a dramatized story which is structured as any mainstream film. Linear narratives connect related characters and situations through a three-act structure to a single resolution. Currently, several multimedia developers are pushing the creative envelope in an attempt to simulate multiple-resolution stories that are not only true to the narrative, but fair to the user.

Let’s be careful at the outset not to give the impression that there is yet such a thing as a single, standardized format for interactive screenplays. What we can say, though, is that many of the lessons learned from other dramatic forums, screenwriting in particular, are naturally suited to interactive writers.

The most important element that both conventional and interactive screenplays have in common is that they both tell a dramatic story. A dramatic story is one in which actors and actresses, real or animated, will perform. The key word here is that the story is dramatic. A dramatic story has to be dramatized.

The first wave of interactive writers were not experienced writing drama. As in the early days of radio, and more recently, with film and television, it took a while for screenplays (and screenwriters) to overcome the legacy of their spawning technologies. Early television screenplays were slaved to a two-column format which allowed the “sound” man to dictate audio direction on one side of the page while the “writer” created dialogue and visuals on the other. It was an understandable beginning, but it didn’t last. It was cumbersome to use and, more importantly, death to read. Stories that are intended for sale must read well.

The screenplays for both television and film have evolved so that they minimize technical intrusion. Interestingly, that evolution has also resulted in a convergence between television and feature film screenplays. A dramatic television screenplay today looks pretty much like a feature screenplay. Whether it’s *ER*, or *Die Hard*, writers have matured along with their technologies. The format that television and film writers use today minimizes technical direction and maximizes sight, sound, dialogue, and—most crucially— story.

Dramatic Point of View

Dramatic point of view isn’t a visual camera direction or a character’s perspective. It’s important to understand that dramatic screenplays using dramatic elements must be told from a point of view which is different than ordinary writing and different than most prose. Laurence Perrine says that with the dramatic point of view, “the narrator disappears into a kind of roving sound camera. The camera can go anywhere but can record only what is seen and heard. It cannot comment, interpret, or enter a character’s mind.” A dramatic screenplay places the audience “in the position of a spectator at a movie or play. He sees what the characters do and hears what they say but can only infer what they think or feel and what they are like. The author is not there to explain.” *

* Literature: Structure, Sound & Sense, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1988, 5th Ed., pp. 140

It is crucial for the interactive writer of dramatized stories to realize that he/she not only doesn't have to "explain" what a character is thinking, feeling or intending, but shouldn't want to. Dramatic writers do not tell — they show. Don't tell me something like, "Johnny is sitting angrily beside the bus stop." If Johnny's angry, he should show me his anger. Maybe he slams his fist into a bench. Or maybe he refuses a ride from a friend. Properly contextualized, either situation will allow the audience to feel Johnny's emotion because they participate in it. "Genuine emotion," Perrine cautions, "like character, must be presented indirectly— must be dramatized. It cannot be produced by words that identify emotions, like angry, sad, pathetic, heart-breaking, or passionate. If a writer is to draw forth genuine emotion, he must produce a character in a situation that deserves our sympathy and must show us enough about the character and situation to make them real and convincing." *

Truer words were never penned. Interactive screenplays should not tell me anything at all about what goes on in Jack's mind or Jill's heart. Interactive screenplays should dramatize emotion; they should allow us to hear what characters say and see what they do. If you read a line like, "She shoots him an angry glance", you ought to know that you're being cheated. Glances can neither be shot nor angry.

Interactive screenplays should use language to paint pictures with which a reader, viewer, director or designer can interact. It's not that hard to do. For instance, what picture do you see here—?

"Sarah walks to the door."

Now before that picture fades compare it with these:

Sarah dances to the door.

Sarah limps to the door.

Sarah eases to the door.

Sarah slips to the door.

Sarah rushes to the door.

You get the point? In "real life," we interpret emotion by what people do. Writers have to use verbs which engage the reader to make inferences about Sarah's feelings, state of mind, and so on. That's the kind of participation that makes characters and stories come alive. It shows me a picture of Sarah instead of telling me who she is.

It ought to be obvious from the remarks above that technical descrip-

* Literature: Structure, Sound & Sense, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1988, 5th Ed., pp. 219

tions do not engage a reader's participation. Interactive screenplays should not be mired in machine language. They should not be geared for the graphics designer, programmer or other technical artists. Interactive screenplays should be as easily and accessibly read as an ordinary screenplay. They should capture, entertain or provoke the reader who wants to participate in a dramatized story. It's up to the writer to know what distinguishes a dramatic story from a story which allows its writer to editorialize about, comment upon, or telegraph his characters' interior life. The interactive writer, like the feature screenwriter, should originate and organize dramatic elements into a work of fiction which shows but does not tell.

Reality Check

Although interactive screenplays should not cater to the demands of the technical artists whose job it is to create the beast they must, as do feature screenplays, organize necessary technical elements in a clear and unobtrusive way. The interactive screenplay, after all, not only deals with story, it deals with design elements such as Architecture and Story Paths. A feature screenplay answers the query— What is the story? But an Interactive Screenplay must answer the additional query— How do I play? If you are only interested in story and want the programmers and/or designers to worry about creating the gameplay, go ahead. The technical artists will be happy to think of their own ways of making the story piece together. But are technical artists storytellers? Can they weave a dramatic narrative into a complex game structure? Well, look at the current crop of interactive dramas and you tell me.

In the film industry, writers and directors have an understanding. An unwritten code so-to-speak; you do your job, I'll do mine. It's the writer's job to create a great story with dynamic characters and dialogue that sings. It's the director's job to bring those words to life. Are writers always happy with the end result? Not always. Are directors always right? Heaven's no. Is it a perfect marriage? Not on your life. But it works. And it has worked, and worked well for decades. In the interactive industry, writers and technical artists definitely don't speak the same language. They sometimes come to an understanding, yet often times

don't. Feature writers and directors have learned how to communicate. But they've had sixty or so years to iron out their differences. Interactive is new. Rules are of the day. And everyone thinks they know everything. So while writers and technical artists take some time to get better acquainted, let's see if we can figure out what these Interactive Screenplays are made of.

Format & Mechanics

Although it is true that Interactive Screenplays can look a lot like teleplays or film screenplays, it's also true that many interactive products never get scripted at all. Interactive narratives can originate from storyboards, design flowcharts, or even notes on a napkin. There isn't enough demand, yet, to create a studio system of interactive producers seeking spec interactive texts. But that's rapidly changing. Already, feature-length narratives are being created for interactive media. In 1994, MGM released the film, *Blown Away*, at about the same time as the CD-ROM interactive movie version. The interactive movie, *Johnny Mnemonic*, has a release date which coincides with its sister, *Johnny Mnemonic* the feature film. The screenplays which have come out of these projects can help us develop a format for the future.

We're going to extract the characteristics common to these two forms and show how they can be combined to produce a model (emphasis on "a" model) which interactive screenwriters can easily use. We're going to take the feature-length screenplay as a model for the Interactive Screenplay. We could invent a new vocabulary for interactive screenplays— But why? Interactive and multimedia technophiles already suffer from an Acronym-A-Minute (the "AAM" syndrome). More practically, though, the film screenplay provides a model nearly tailor-made for interactive use.

QUICK TIPS ON FORMAT

Typos - Spelling and grammar should be exact (except dialect).

Fonts - Screenplays should be submitted in courier 12pt (unless otherwise specified).

Spine Art - Never write the title on the spine of the script (it screams “old material”).

Write Visually - Show don’t tell (unless writing technical notes).

Justification - Left justification only. Never justify to the right.

Margins - Use professional standards.

Cover Design - Keep script covers simple.

Binding - Three hole punched with two brads (three-ring binding for longer Interactive Screenplays is acceptable).

Neatness - Screenplays should be neat and clean (no footprints or dog-eared pages)

If we look for similarities of function and structure we’ll see right away that there are many similarities between the straightforward movie screenplay (or “linear narrative”) and interactive screenplays. Take a look and compare for yourself (*see Chapter 3 & Appendix*). Interactive screenplays have to do the same basic things that feature screenplays must do. Both screenplays identify characters, provide dialogue and direction, and describe activity. Both screenplays segregate the story into separate locations and separate times. Let’s see how the parts of a screenplay can be made to serve interactive writers.

Naming The Parts

If you’re already a seasoned Hollywood screenwriter, this will be familiar territory. However, you will learn some new terminology that applies strictly to Interactive Screenplays. If you’re just starting out, you need to know the basic parts of any screenplay. What follows are pages from a traditional feature film screenplay, Darryl Wimberley’s, *Subterfuge*, and an interactive screenplay, *Johnny Mnemonic* by Douglas Gayeton and John Platten.

The diagram illustrates various elements of a screenplay. Arrows point from labels to specific parts of the script:

- Transition** points to **FADE IN:**
- Scene Description** points to the paragraph describing Jupiter's Red Spot and the space-freighter.
- Slug Line** points to **INT/EXT FREIGHTER/JUPITER NIGHT**
- Dialog** points to the exchange between Jake and Sandy.
- Technical Direction** (with the note "(no example shown)") points to the instruction "He rolls over to retrieve a bottle of Scotch."

Transition

FADE IN:

Deep space. Jupiter's famous Red Spot glowers like a troll's angry eye against a backdrop of indigo sky. Three-hundred-mile-an-hour winds rage silently below. A space-freighter drifts serenely into view above.

Scene Description

INT/EXT FREIGHTER/JUPITER NIGHT

A spartan, almost military interior accomodates two recently engaged lovers. JAKE STRYKER lounges his two hundred pounds, spent and naked, beside a striking, well-toned beauty. SANDY AIMS traps one of Jake's legs between her own. Long legs has Sandy. Powerful. A mane of chestnut hair falls thick over shoulders still wet with sweat. Jake leans past her, TAPS A CIGARETTE from its pack.

JAKE
Got a light?

SANDY
Not good for you.

JAKE
Really.

SANDY
Doctors have been telling us for centuries.

Dialog

But Sandy produces a lighter, anyway. A "ZIPPO." One strike fires a PINPOINT LASER at the tip of Jake's cig. He inhales deeply.

JAKE
Just goes to show- The old vices are still the best.

SANDY
Anything for me? Old fashioned, that is.

He rolls over to retrieve a bottle of Scotch. "Johnny Walker," the label still reads. Black label.

JAKE
How 'bout this?

Technical Direction
(no example shown)

Elements of a Linear Screenplay

Transitions, Slug Lines, Technical Direction, Scene Description, Dialogue & Dialogue Direction

["Johnny Mnemonic" Shooting - Blue 5/16/94]

72.

DR. SATAI (Cont'd)
... a doctor. She, my employer, has
requested a gentleman you represent
named Johnny. Please contact us
immediately!

The message gives way to STATIC.

INT. RALFI'S OFFICE (RO-2C-WOO)

Johnny is at the wall behind him.

JOHNNY (RO-2C-M)

Johnny moves back to POSITION #1.

INT. RALFI'S OFFICE (RO-2D-WOO)

Johnny stares at the corner of RALFI'S DESK. There's lots of crap
here, but one useful thing: a weird kind of MAGNIFYING GLASS
called a ...

TRANS-VU

It takes the odd patterns (encryption code) on the fax from RO-2A
and translates them. There's a KNOB/DIAL on the handle of the
Trans-VU. As you turn it, the glass shows different encryption
codes/languages. Also in this shot is a PHOTOGRAPH of RALFI with
PRETTY and YOMOMMA. It's a weird, somewhat kinky portrait ...

JOHNNY (RO-2D-U)

Johnny takes the TRANS-VU and puts it in his pocket.

RALFI'S OFFICE - EXPLORE MODE
POSITION #3: SEATED ON RALFI'S SOFA

INT. RALFI'S OFFICE (RO-3A-WOO)

Johnny looks up at an HDTV set on the counter in front of him.

JOHNNY (RO-3A-U1)

If RO-3D-U1=T, he takes the MINI CD-ROM labeled "MEMORY BACK-UP"
out of his pocket and places it into a WIRELESS CD-ROM READER on
the COFFEE TABLE. The disc is a backup of Johnny's memories which
were wiped out when he had his implants installed. What we see on
the HDTV ...

WEIRD, DREAMLIKE FOOTAGE OF CHILDHOOD, ETC. (RO-AV-2)

Johnny is transfixed by images of a YOUNG BOY playing with a
sprinkler on a sun-drenched backyard lawn. The young boy looks a
lot like Johnny ...

Elements of an Interactive Screenplay

*Transitions, Sluglines, Address, Technical Direction, Command Options, Interactive
Modes, Scene Description, Dialogue & Dialogue Direction, Conditional Statements*

Sample page from Johnny Mnemonic Courtesy of Sony Imagesoft

Notice that the Interactive Screenplay sample from *Johnny Mnemonic* contains the same basic “parts” as those found in a traditional feature film screenplay. However, there are some new “parts” as well.

Transitions

Notice that the first thing you see at the top of *Subterfuge*’s first page is “FADE IN:” This is simply a convention. Most screenplays begin with “FADE IN:” at the top left corner. Screenplays usually end with “FADE OUT” written on the last page of the screenplay in the lower right-hand corner. Other transitions are used to indicate how you get from one scene or to the next. “CUT TO:,” “DISSOLVE TO:,” “FADE TO:” and so on are a way to tell the reader, “We are leaving this place and/or time and are going somewhere else.” Transitions usually don’t have to be included in traditional feature screenplays and many screenwriters don’t use them at all. However, they are useful— if not crucial— for the interactive writer for reasons we’ll discuss later.

Sluglines and/or Slugs

Immediately beneath “FADE IN:,” you’ll see “EXT. SPACE - NIGHT.” This is known as a SLUG or SLUGLINE. Sluglines are always written in caps and its information is practically self-explanatory. “EXT. SPACE - NIGHT” translates to an exterior location, outer space, which is designated as a “night” shot. A little aside here— many sci-fi screenplays don’t use DAY or NIGHT designations at all since, in reality, there is only artificial time in outer space. Too cute by far. The point of designating a view as “DAY” or “NIGHT” isn’t to set a watch, it’s to give the production manager (or, in the case of an interactive narrative, a graphics designer) an idea of the dominant lighting. I’d say the pitch-black backdrop of outer space looks like nighttime but the great thing is, either approach will do. No one, certainly not a reader, will give a damn how you handle sluglines in outer space (!) so long as you are consistent.

The only thing you really have to remember is that a Slugline tells us whether we’re outside or inside, where the scene’s taking place, and whether it’s day or night. How hard is that? “EXT” means exterior.

“INT” means interior. “INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT” puts you in a kitchen at nighttime.

There are variations on this theme, of course. But they’re all obvious. A slug like “INT/EXT. CAR/GROCERY - DAY” tells us we are inside a car looking out to a grocery store. There was a time when the initial SUBJECT of the scene was included in the slug. That’s not done too much anymore. Similarly, the opening shot, especially if it was a broad shot of the whole environment, used to be designated in the slug as an “ESTABLISHING SHOT.” Modern screenplays no longer require such a designation.

Good writers should abjure technical jargon for simplicity. Remember your reader. Remember that the reader isn’t there to be impressed by your facility with terminology. When you’re writing slugs, a simple EXT. or INT. LOCATION - DAY or NIGHT will usually do.

Simplicity and utility should guide everything we incorporate from screenwriting to interactive screenplays. Sluglines are simple; they’re also extremely useful. Beyond segregating a script’s dramatic activity into discreet units of time and space (that’s a fancy way of saying that you can only be in one place at one time), slugs offer a good example of how a tool developed for filmmakers can help the interactive writer and producer.

Production managers need a way to easily identify scenes which share locales. The slugline provides an easy tag which allows scenes to be consolidated and organized for that purpose.

Address

Programmers, designers and producers of interactive titles (design team members) need to identify scenes that share the same locales too. Additionally, interactive design team members need notations which tell them where in the scene the user or character is and what that user or character is doing in that scene. This notation is referred to as an Address. Addresses are often attached to the right of the slugline. Sometimes the address is placed along side the transition. Let’s dissect the *Johnny Mnemonic* page further, with notes provided to us by Douglas Gayeton, one of the game’s screenwriters:

["Johnny Mnemonic" Shooting - Blue 5/16/94]

72.

DR. SATAI (Cont'd)
 ... a doctor. She, my employer, has
 requested a gentleman you represent
 named Johnny. Please contact us
 immediately!

The message gives way to STATIC.

INT. RALFI'S OFFICE (RO-2C-WOO)

Johnny is at the wall behind him.

JOHNNY (RO-2C-M) → "M" stands for move.
 It is a command option.

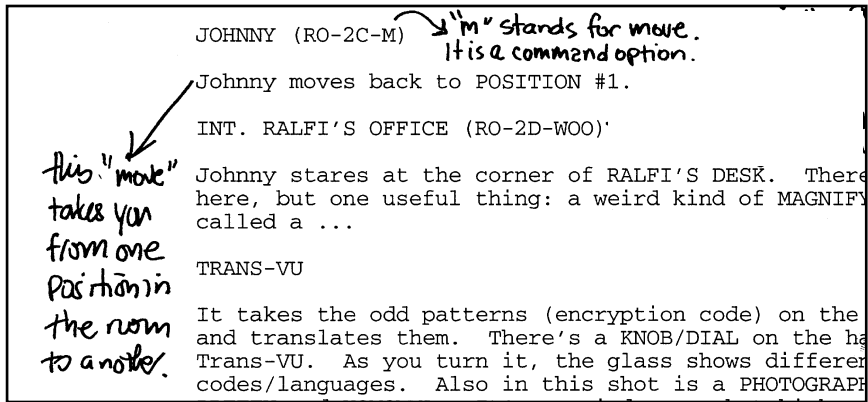
Johnny moves back to POSITION #1.

What's in parenthesis is
 an "address." "RO" stands for the
 location: "Ralfi's Office." "2C" tells
 us where we are in the location.
 "WOO" tells us what we're doing
 at the spot we're in the location

In the above sample, INT. RALFI'S OFFICE is the slugline. Within the slugline is an address, (RO-2C-WOO). "RO" stands for the location: "Ralfi's Office." "2C" tells us where we are in the location. "WOO" is a "window of opportunity" which tells us what we're doing at that spot within the location. In this particular shot from *Johnny Mnemonic*, the user is able to make a decision, thereby moving into the next part of the story. Sluglines and addresses provide useful "tags" by which scenes can be numbered, categorized or sorted in any of a myriad of useful ways.

Technical Direction & Command Options

The shorthand we saw used for sluglines is only a single example of the terminology which can be used to describe all of a screenplay's technical direction. Technical direction for a screenwriter tends to revolve around things like camera direction (PAN, TILT, ANGLE ON, etc), transitions (WIPE TO, DISSOLVE TO, etc.) or special effects. Writers of interactive dramas and/or games also have to contend with elements such as command options. Command options indicate what the character, sprite or user is interacting with within the scene. Common command options are interactions such as "move" or "use." In the following sample, the "M" in the address-- JOHNNY (RO-2C-M) indicates a character "move." Johnny moves back to POSITION #1 is a "move" which takes you from one position in the room to another.



There was a time when traditional screenwriters were enthralled by cinematic technology. Writers often felt the need to display an intimate familiarity with the vocabulary of their craft. You could see PAN's, CLOSE UP's, FULL SHOT's and ANGLE ON's on practically every page of their screenplays. An action sequence that might take ten seconds to film would take five pages to write! It's not too surprising to discover that lights, sound and action overwhelmed such screenplays. New technologies tend to dominate the writers who first use them. Interactive visionary Robert Tercek put it bluntly when he quipped, "Right now, we've got a case of the tail totally wagging the dog. The platform tail is wagging the story dog. And it makes no sense."

Traditional screenwriters, too, began to find that their TILTS and PANS and WIPES were not appreciated by directors and were not engaging for readers. They began to appreciate the difference between exhaustive detail and dramatic detail. Read Robert Townsend or Shane Black and you'll find almost no intrusion of technical direction. Compare *Chinatown* or *The Last Boy Scout* to the interactive samples in this book and ask yourself this question— If you were a Studio head, which of these screenplays would you enjoy reading? Which has told the better story? Which would you pay money to buy?

Of course, interactive screenplays tend not to read as well as traditional screenplays. After all, they're interactive! But that doesn't mean interactive screenplays have to look like Martian code. If history is any

example, interactive screenplays will evolve over time into documents which are much easier to read and comprehend.

Scene Description

Scene, Action & Characters—
Period & Place, People & Props.

Directly below the slugline is something deceptively simple— the scene description. Let's examine the first scene description from the opening page of *Subterfuge*:

Deep space. Jupiter's famous Red Spot glowers like a troll's angry eye against a backdrop of indigo sky. Three-hundred-mile-an-hour winds rage silently below. A space-freighter drifts serenely into view above.

How tough can this be? Read a thousand screenplays. You'll be amazed. Many writers have a terrible time setting up a scene. They either write way too much detail, write the wrong sort of detail, or else they leave out something essential. What we need, here, are some criteria for establishing the scene.

Establishing The Scene

There are only a few details which are essential to any scene. You have to identify those details, integrate them, heighten them and make them come alive. And you have to do it quickly. It's no accident that the best writers are also the briefest. Check out a Robert Townsend or a Shane Black screenplay— even the most complicated setups do not take much space on the page. How can you achieve a similar brevity, clarity, and power?

You can start by recognizing that there are basically only four things which you ever need to describe when you're establishing a scene. Those are: Period & Place, People & Props. Everything in the universe comes under Period & Place, People & Props— just think of it as a writer's version of air, earth, fire and water.

How much air, earth, fire and water do you need? Only what is essential. A detail isn't essential unless it's absolutely necessary to establish or advance the narrative. Many users of interactive titles get frustrated when a rich, detailed room is rendered before their eyes, only to discover that they cannot interact with all the cool objects which make up the surroundings (we are not referring to backgrounds or backdrops like those found in games like *Myst*, rather, we are referring to details within a room or arena of gameplay). If a detail is essential to gameplay or the narrative, it must be described by the writer. If a detail is not essential, it should not be described at all. If you set a story in an Alaskan camp, 1864, with a pair of Eskimos, two American gold miners and a dog every one of those details—including the dog—must serve some narrative purpose within the scene. These details and none other are the essentials of your scene.

It's important to note that Period & Place, People & Props get established immediately beneath the slug. Do not introduce dramatic elements at your whim. You don't wait until the miner speaks or the dog bites to describe the miner and the dog. All the details present at a scene's initiation must be described and organized right away. If the canine and the gold digger are present when the scene starts, they get established beneath the slug. For an example of how this works take look at the second slugline and scene description from *Subterfuge*:

INT/EXT. FREIGHTER/JUPITER - NIGHT

A spartan, almost military interior accommodates two recently engaged lovers. JAKE STRYKER lounges his two hundred pounds, spent and naked, beside a striking, well-toned beauty. SANDY AIMES traps one of Jake's legs between her own. Long legs has Sandy. Powerful. A mane of chestnut hair falls thick over shoulders still wet with sweat. Jake leans past her, TAPS A CIGARETTE from its pack.

Everything that we can see out the outset of this scene, whether its People or Props—Jake, Sandy, or cigarettes—is established vividly, concisely and immediately beneath the slug.

So far we've talked about how to select details for your scene, how

and where to introduce your scene. Let's talk now about what makes a scene enjoyable to read. You make a scene come alive with language. We've talked a bit (and we'll talk some more) about how to make language dramatic—how to “show v. tell.” But beyond reflecting the dramatic point of view, your language must also be clear, vivid, and *fast*.

As an exercise, try to write the opening page of a screenplay by establishing all of your scenes within six lines or less. That's six lines—not six sentences. Another exercise is to work on expanding your vocabulary of active verbs. Get rid of the passives—“is,” “are” and so on. When you describe a scene, combine active verbs with details that are as concrete as possible. “Stacy is tired,” doesn't paint the same picture as, “Stacy collapses beside the handrail.” “Sarah is studying,” isn't nearly so compelling as, “Sarah buries her head in a stack of textbooks.” You see the difference? Active verbs and concrete detail make for the kind of language that's a pleasure to read.

Action Description

Once a scene is established it obviously doesn't stop. New characters and action change the scene's initial conditions. A script's action should be described as briefly and vividly as are its initiating scenes. Whether it's the most complicated sci-fi environment you can envision or the simplest fist fight, a scene's action should not take up a lot of space on the page. If you find yourself writing more than half a page or so for an action-sequence, check yourself. What details are redundant? What can be compressed or deleted? What is the end goal of the action sequence? How does the writer accomplish that end goal while keeping the action fast and fresh? How does the writer express action in a way that is unique and original?

The following is a portion of an action sequence from the feature screenplay, *Subterfuge*.

Hank Bastion SLAMS SAFFRON into ROLO DEX. The CASSETTE JARS FREE-- And SO DOES SAFFRON'S LASER!

Jake dives for the laser. Hank beats him to it. Jake wrestles for control!

THE LASER FIRES. THE COCKPIT EXPLODES!! RED LIGHTS AND ALARMS!

The LASER FIRES AGAIN! Saffron CHOKES ON A SCREAM. His shoulder smokes with a burn. Hank wrenches the laser free, throws Jake all the way into the ruined cockpit. Hank levels the laser on Jake.

TREVALLE
That's enough, Chief.

Richard Trevalle stands at the cabin door with BOTH of Jake's cassettes. And Jake's .45.

Hank heaves for air.

HANK
Lemme burn him right here.
ALL of 'em. Nobody left to say
nothing.

Character Description

Even writers who can quickly and vividly establish Period, Place & Props sometimes falter when it comes to people. The same guidelines apply to establishing character as to scenes and action. You should not overwrite. You should include only those details which are essential to the narrative.

Don't describe your heroine as twenty-three years old. An exact age isn't an essential detail for any character and can create problems in the real world for casting. You need to find other ways to suggest that a character is an infant, adolescent, in mid-life, thirty-something and so on. In *Subterfuge*, Jake and Sandy are introduced during this love scene:

JAKE STRYKER lounges his two hundred pounds, spent and naked, beside a striking, well-toned beauty. **SANDY AIMES** traps one of Jake's legs between her own. Long legs has Sandy. Powerful. A mane of chestnut hair falls thick over shoulders still wet with sweat.

And this example from Steven Soderbergh's *sex, lies and videotape*:

CYNTHIA BISHOP, Ann's **SISTER**, opens her door to reveal the freshly coiffed John Millaney. They kiss passionately and begin to disrobe. Cynthia bears a slight resemblance to Ann, but is not as overtly attractive. She does, however, have a definite carnal appeal and air of confidence that Ann lacks.

Notice that the characters descriptions from both *Subterfuge* and *sex, lies and videotape* never actually come out and say the age of the characters. Nevertheless, we have a good sense of the characters' relative age and demeanor, mostly as a result of what they do and the way they are described by the writers in their introductory scenes.

Writers shouldn't try to link their characters with a specific actor or actress. Notice that our sampled character descriptions do not try to establish their fictive characters by alluding to real-life movie stars or personalities.

Some tips to enrich your character-description: When your character is doing something, you should be careful to use present-tense construction. Just as with scene description, use active verbs instead of passive ones. (Sandy traps Jake's legs vs. Sandy is trapping Jake's legs). If you can link verbs and adjectives together quickly and vividly, that's great, but do not over describe a character's appearance or activities. Finally, when you're "writing character," learn to use the dramatic point of view.

Showing Character

We spoke up top about how important it is for writers of dramatic stories to understand and use the dramatic point of view—to show vs. tell. Most quality screenplays never telegraph their characters' histories or their inner lives.

The best screenplays rarely use words that describe emotion or intent; words like "angry" or "angrily," "sad" or "sadly," "afraid" or "fearfully" and so on are words which *tell* us things which ought to be *shown*. Good writers show us a character's inner life by providing the

reader with dialogue and action. We hear what the characters say, we see what they do; this dramatized presentation allows the reader to participate in the story—to interact, if you will, with the text. If the interaction is well crafted, fictive characters emerge from the page as living people.

Interactive writers should always remember that “drama” derives from the Greek word which means, “to do,” not “to be.” Aristotle went so far, in this regard, as to assert that plot and character cannot be separated. For him, what we do and what we say are all that is possible. Freud would disagree, of course. But then Freud was a terrible dramatist.

Go back a few pages and re-examine page one of *Subterfuge* and see how its Scene & Action combine to reveal character.

Now—Make up some questions about Jake and Sandy, questions about their interior life. Is she prudish, for instance? Is he a stickler for detail? Would we call this couple aristocratic or working class? Do Jake and Sandy like each other? Love each other? Is something hung up in their relationship?

If you take a minute you’ll realize that you can give pretty good answers to all of the questions posed above. That should be interesting to you because none of the questions are even posed, much less answered directly in the screenplay. What does happen is that the scene invites you to see a series of images and to overhear a conversation; your own built-in storyteller kicks in to do the rest. You are truly interacting with the text, here. You are making guesses, imagining consequences and, whether you know it or not, your mind is “plotting” a curve, an extrapolated series of incident and possibility which you rightly expect to arrive at some destination.

The great thing about the narrative experience is that it doesn’t matter whether your guesses are right or not. It’s the story’s journey which gives the most pleasure to a reader, not its destination. The only thing we require of a narrative’s destination is that it be honest, that is—consistent with the hints and inferences and logic plotted long before.

Dialogue & Dialogue Direction

A dramatist has two basic tools with which to engage the reader. He can show us what people do. He can allow us to overhear what they say.

When a reader is given those dramatic elements, a whole universe of interaction, participation and complexity is possible. Scenes and action can show us what people do. Dialogue (if it's good) should show us what they are really saying. Good dialogue reveals character, motivation and tone in a way that keeps the reader making inferences, making guesses. Dialogue Direction occurs when (immediately in parentheses beneath the character's name) the writer tells the reader how to interpret the line. For example:

BLANCHE
(sarcastically)
Why don't you come home for dinner?

A couple of obvious problems arise with most Dialogue Direction. If the scene is well written, direction won't be necessary. If the scene is poorly written, dialogue direction won't help! Beginning writers direct dialogue all the time— it's a way to tell instead of show. Experienced writers rarely feel the need to coach the reader's response to dialogue. Good writers understand that the best dialogue, like the best scene description, shows instead of tells. Bad dialogue leaves a lot less scope for the reader's imagination. For example, let's try some soap opera dialogue:

"What is it, Suzy?"

"Oh, Doc! I feel so...so terrible."

"Is it Brett?"

"Yes. We were so in love last summer, you know, when he was at the pool and I had that job warming the suntan lotion in the microwave. But then Betsy came along..."

"Betsy the Bitch?"

"Yes. Everything started going to hell once she entered my life. I lost Brett, my job, even my tan. I am soooo depressed!"

"It pains me to see you this way, Suzy."

"Doctor Lambert, what should I do?"

So...Brett's jilted Suzy for the Bitch Betsy. Suzy's lost her guy, her job, and her tan. The Doctor's moving in for the score. Suzy's ready to

be the scoreboard. Is there anything left to the imagination in the parody offered above? Are there any issues, emotions, or motivations not told about these transparently thin characters? Notice words like “pain,” “depressed” and so on which tell us the characters feelings instead of showing them. The parody points out a serious deficit with daytime-dialogue. It specifically does not show. It always tells.

Contrast the soap with another boy-girl situation. This one comes from Hemingway’s *Hills Like White Elephants*. With only the barest of information regarding place and setting, try to see if you can “read” what’s going on in this scene. More importantly, examine how you feel about the two people engaged in the dialogue.

The place is Spain. A railroad track separates the station’s cantina from the long, white hills which stretch across the valley of the Ebro. We’ll leap into the middle of the scene—

“They’re lovely hills,” she said. “They don’t really look like white elephants. I just meant the coloring of their skin through the trees.”

“Should we have another drink?”

“All right.”

“The beer’s nice and cool,” the man said.

“It’s lovely,” the girl said.

“It’s really an awfully simple operation, Jig,” the man said. “It’s not really an operation at all.

The girl looked at the ground the table legs rested on.

“I know you wouldn’t mind it, Jig. It’s really not anything. It’s just to let the air in.”

The girl did not say anything.

“I’ll go with you and I’ll stay with you all the time. They just let the air in and then it’s all perfectly natural.”

“Then what will we do afterward?”

“We’ll be fine afterward. Just like we were before.”

What is the operation they’re talking about? Why the reference to “white elephants?” When we call something a white elephant, do we imply that it’s valuable or cheap? Precious or worthless?

Some other questions: Are this man and woman married? Is the man really concerned for the woman’s welfare? Are they going to be

“fine afterward?” Were they really okay before? What’s the point of a scene description like— “She looked at the ground the table legs rested on?”

You should be able to see by now that Hemingway’s dialogue shows instead of tells. The feelings of the story’s characters, their intentions, motivations, even facts crucial to understanding their relationship— all are presented indirectly. Anyone can be a passive recipient of soap-opera information. Not so with dramatic dialogue. Dramatic dialogue requires readers to interpret what they see and hear, to make inferences, choices and decisions. A reader engaged dramatically feels emotions precisely because he’s not told what to feel. The experience produced is honest. It’s genuine.

The only thing that soap-opera dialogue produces (and in all fairness, the only thing it’s meant to produce) is sentiment and saccharin.

It would be fatal to give the impression here that all dialogue should read like Hemingway’s. It’s important to realize that dialogue has to fit the tone and intent of your story. A sci-fi screenplay like *Subterfuge* isn’t going to explore a man’s manipulation of women in the same way as does *Hills Like White Elephants*. But any writer can enrich his/her characters’ lives by applying the tools which Hemingway’s story provides. Any story can profit from the lessons which good dialogue teaches.

If interactive dramas are to compete in the marketplace with interactive games their writers are going to have to create characters with depth and complexity sufficient to sustain several hours of participation. If interactive writers go into this competition thinking that bells and whistles, or tits and ass, will replace the well-wrought tale or the overheard conversation, we’ll be seeing interactive movies only for the short length of time it takes their producers to go broke.

Conditional Statements

Conditional Statements are “parts” of the screenplay which are unique to interactive properties. They explain what needs to happen at some point in the program in order for us to proceed or see the shot/sequence. Conditional Statements are capitalized and are created as separate lines of text. Sometimes the Conditional Statement takes the place of, or

works in conjunction with, a transition. For example, *Johnny Mnemonic* utilizes conditional statements and places them in the screenplay as separate lines of text:

JOHNNY (RO-3A-U1)

← This is a conditional statement which explains what needs to happen in order for us to see this shot, namely RO-3D-U1.

If RO-3D-U1=T, he takes the MINI CD-ROM labeled "MEMORY BACK-UP" out of his pocket and places it into a WIRELESS CD-ROM READER on the COFFEE TABLE. The disc is a backup of Johnny's memories which were wiped out when he had his implants installed. What we see on the HDTV ...

WEIRD, DREAMLIKE FOOTAGE OF CHILDHOOD, ETC. (RO-AV-2)

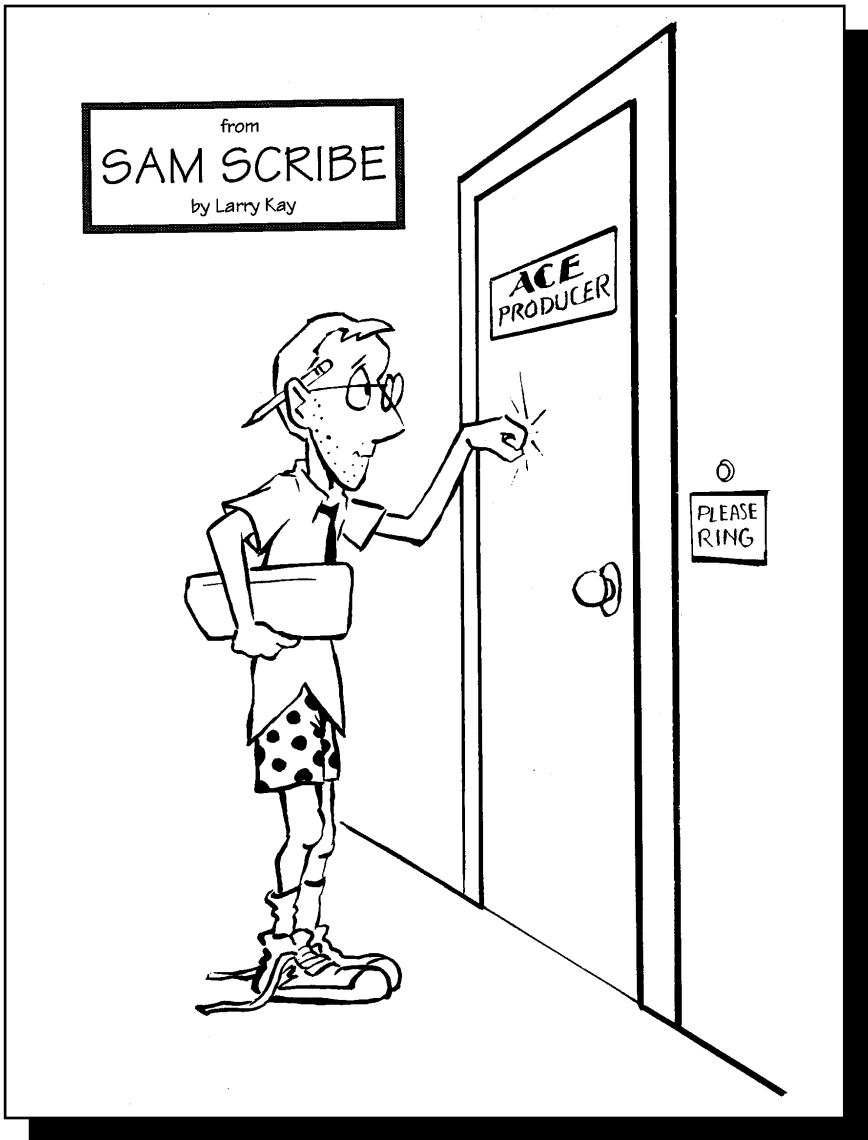
Johnny is transfixed by images of a YOUNG BOY playing with a sprinkler on a sun-drenched backyard lawn. The young boy looks a lot like Johnny ...

If RO-3D-U1=T is an equation that states "If the address RO-3D-U1 is true or is chosen, then, BLAH BLAH BLAH will happen."

Conditional statements are used in interactive screenplays to convey user choice, plot and/or paths in a program. Most of the time conditional statements bookend conditional words or phrases such as "IF" / "THEN" and "IF" / "GOTO" and are written in capital letter (*the software industry often uses the term "GOTO" rather than the command, "GOTO"*). The "answer" to the conditional statement equation is usually presented immediately after the equation. However, if there are several options to the conditional statement, options or "answers" may be tagged with a reference code for the reader refer to the choice located in another part of the screenplay. For example:

IF Billy unlocks the door, GOTO page 105. or IF Billy unlocks the door, GOTO "C"

Interactive screenwriter, Larry Kay, invented a humorous exercise that helps writers new to interactive visualize the various design elements critical to the formation of an interactive screenplay. Conditional statements, transitions, sluglines and interactive modes are all explored in a game environment. Let's take a look.



(Courtesy of Larry Kay and Toonsmiths)

SAM SCRIBE

Adventure Game

Designed and Written by Larry Kay

The **goal** of this game is to help Sam Scribe, a talented but scatterbrained multimedia writer, create a writing sample, land a job, and find his trousers.

The boxes on the **navigational map** indicate all the different locations to which you can move Sam in this adventure. The items in parentheses are important objects to be retrieved or indicate significant activities. The major nexus locations are marked by bold boxes. For example, notice that Sam's apartment contains many specific views.

There are barriers preventing entry to some of these locations. For example, you cannot get into Ace producer's office until you have put together a proper writing sample for Sam. Also, you cannot go inside his apartment until you have paid the rent to the building superintendent (it's worthless trying to sneak by the super; Sam lost his only key). First, you'll need to earn Sam's rent money: get him a day job selling shoes or try to borrow money from family and friends.

The attached **scene** (Exterior, Ace Producer's Office) shows a script formatting option for this kind of an adventure game. You'll see that it vaguely resembles screenplay/teleplay formats, adding bold type for interactive objects and italics for conditional situations.

To play this game, you would move Sam Scribe around the various screens, collecting valuable **inventory objects**. You would also be able to click on various **clickable objects** and they would animate, revealing clues, providing material for Sam's writing sample, or just there for a laugh. Sound effects are marked <**SFX**> and music effects are labelled <**MPX**>.

As you put together a proper writing sample for Sam, you'll find material in almost all everyday experiences and in his dreams. You'll also discover that Sam will be far more effective as a writer if you help him Get a Life.

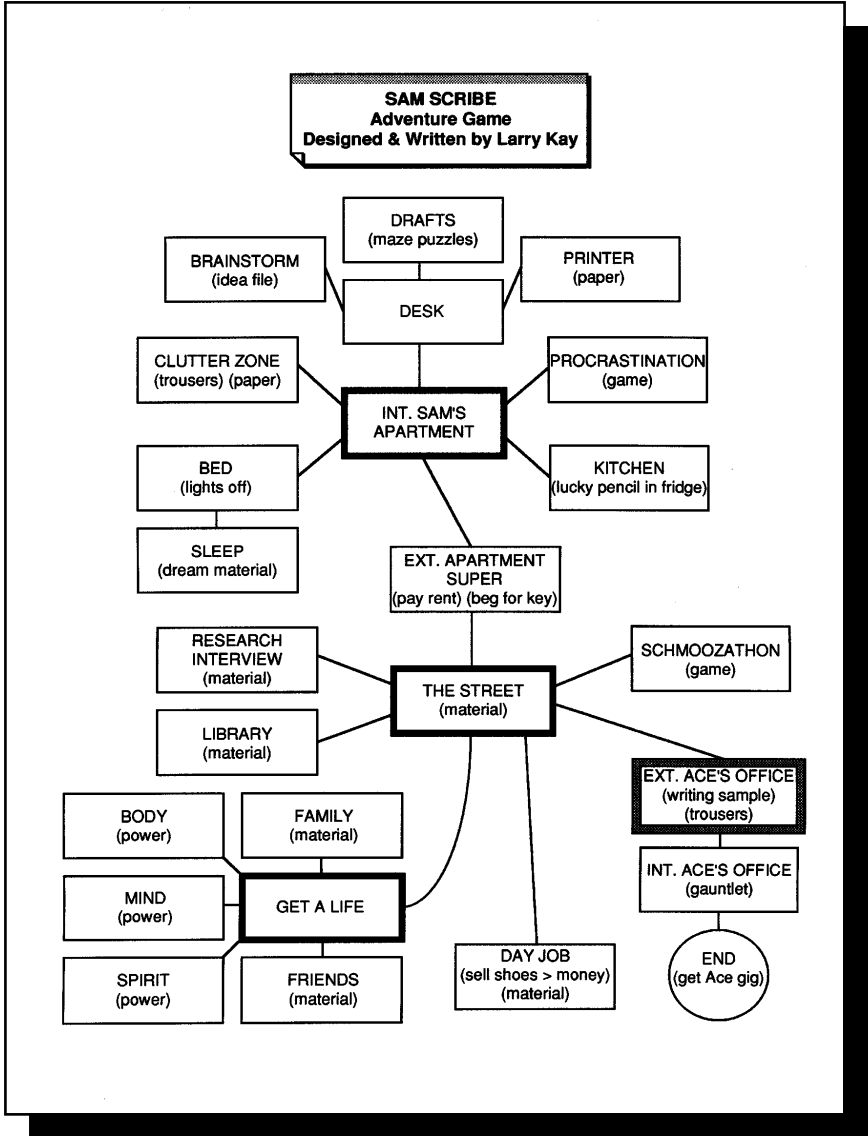
The Bookman font works well for this kind of a document since Bookman is about the same weight as the Courier font, the standard font for screenplays and teleplays. Also, Bookman's boldface and italicized characters stand out on a page, plus it's still readable after a few generations of mediocre photocopying and faxing.



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(Courtesy of Larry Kay and Toonsmiths)



(Courtesy of Larry Kay and Toonsmiths)

EXT. ACE PRODUCER'S OFFICE 1.

EXT. ACE PRODUCER'S OFFICE

DESCRIPTION:

The entrance reminds us of the Parthenon: huge stone columns, huge stone steps, huge stone gargoyles leading up to a simple wooden door. On the door is a sign which reads "Ace Producer." Nearby is a door bell with a sign which reads "Please Ring."

ACCESSES:

The Street
Int. Ace Producer's Office

CHARACTERS:

Sam Scribe Gargoyle #1
Alice Ace Gargoyle #2

ENTER:

*The first time Sam Scribe enters,
or each time Sam enters without his trousers:*
Sam WHISTLES <MFX: SAM'S THEME> as he walks up to the door. Sam is missing his trousers; he wears polka dot BOXER SHORTS. Sam <SFX: KNOCK KNOCKS> on the door. The door OPENS <SFX: CREAK>. Producer, ALICE ACE pokes her head out.

ALICE ACE
Ring the bell.

Alice slips back inside and <SFX: SLAMS> the door, pushing a gust of wind against Sam.

*Sam enters subsequently (via 01: INT. SAM'S APARTMENT)
and he wears his trousers.*

Sam walks up to the door, WHISTLING <MFX: SAM'S THEME>.

Sam enters via (03) INT. Alice's Office:

If Sam botched the meeting (in 03):
Alice hurries Sam out the door.

ALICE ACE
Don't call us, we'll call you.

Alice <SFX: SLAMS> the door.

If Sam had a successful meeting (in 03), but didn't close the deal:
Alice enthusiastically shakes Sam's hand.

ALICE ACE
Call me tomorrow morning, Sam.

SAM
Sounds good, Alice.

Alice <SFX: SHUTS> the door.

(Courtesy of Larry Kay and Toonsmiths)

EXT. ACE PRODUCER'S OFFICE 2.

INVENTORY OBJECTS:

Writing Samples (in Inventory):

If Alice is not present:

SAM

My writing samples. My great American
opus. My ticket to virtual fame and fortune.

If Alice is present:

Sam hands the writing sample to Alice.

SAM

My writing samples.

Alice reads them.

ALICE ACE

(increasing interest)

Hmmm. Hmmm. (LAUGHS) Humm.

Hmmm. Umhmmm.

If Player has solved all ten writing process puzzles, add:

ALICE ACE

Sam, this is good stuff. C'mon in.

Alice YANKS Sam inside the door <SFX: ZIP>, and OS.
The door <SFX: SLAMS shut>.

TRANSITION TO:

INT. ACE PRODUCER'S OFFICE

If Player has solved only 5 thru 9 writing process puzzles, add:

Alice hands Sam the writing samples back.

ALICE ACE

Pretty good. But needs some,... some...
je ne sais quoi. I'll know it when I see it.
Goodbye.

Alice <SFX: SHUTS> the door.

If Player has solved only 4 or fewer writing process puzzles, add:

Alice tosses the writing samples back at Sam.

ALICE ACE

Don't call us. We'll call you.

Alice <SFX: SLAMS> the door.

(Courtesy of Larry Kay and Toonsmiths)

EXT. ACE PRODUCER'S OFFICE 3.

CLICKABLE OBJECTS:

Door (when closed):

Sam <SFX: KNOCK-KNOCKS> the door.

The door OPENS <SFX: CREAK>. Alice pokes her head out.

- a) ALICE ACE
Ring the bell, dimwit.

Alice slips back inside and <SFX: SLAMS> the door, pushing a gust of wind against Sam.

- b) ALICE ACE
With a brain that small, at least you won't
get brain cancer.

Alice slips back inside and <SFX: SLAMS> the door, pushing a gust of wind against Sam.

- c) ALICE ACE
You're a prime candidate for euthanasia.
(shouts)
Ring the bell!

Alice slips back inside and <SFX: SLAMS> the door, pushing a gust of wind against Sam.

d-z) Recycle 'a' thru 'c.'

Doorbell:

The doorbell <SFX: RINGS>.

If the door is already open, add:

ALICE ACE
You here to work or here to play?

If the door is closed, add:

Alice opens the door.

If Sam has knocked on the door once only, add:

ALICE ACE
That's more like it.

If Sam has knocked on the door twice or more, add:

ALICE ACE
It's about time.

(CONTINUED)

(Courtesy of Larry Kay and Toonsmiths)

EXT. ACE PRODUCER'S OFFICE 4.

(CONTINUED)

If Sam doesn't have his trousers on, add:
Alice eyes Sam up and down.

ALICE ACE (CONT)
Dressed for success, I see.

Sam looks down and sees that he has no pants. His face
turns BEET RED.

SAM
Oopsey. Excuse me.
Sam turns and walks sheepishly, OS.

ALICE ACE
And don't come back 'til ya got a knockout
writing sample.

Alice <SFX: SLAMS> her door.

TRANSITION TO:
THE STREET

Alice Ace:

a) Alice shakes Sam's hand.

ALICE ACE
Hello, I'm Alice Ace. How can you help me?

b) Alice folds her arms across her chest.

ALICE ACE
How much of my valuable time do you wish
to waste?

c) Alice folds her arms across her chest and <SFX: TAPS> her foot.

ALICE ACE
(clearing her throat)
Ahem. Ahem. Hmm.

d-z) Recycle 'a' thru 'c.'

Sam Scribe:

a) Sam shakes Alice's hand.

SAM
Sam Scribe at your service.

(CONTINUED)

(Courtesy of Larry Kay and Toonsmiths)

EXT. ACE PRODUCER'S OFFICE 5.

(CONTINUED)

b) Sam enthusiastically pumps Alice's hand.

SAM
No gig's too big for Sam Scribe.

c) Sam WHISTLES <MFX: SAM'S THEME> and <MFX: TAP DANCES>.

SAM
(singing)
I can write. I can type.
I can draft 'til I go daft.

Gargoyle #1:

It <SFX: ROARS> then <SFX: BELCHES> FIRE, blowing Sam
back a couple of paces.

GARGOYLE #1
(basso profundo)
Excuse me. Writers give me heartburn.

Gargoyle #2:

It shakes its head.

GARGOYLE #2
(wimpy profundo)
Tsk, tsk, tsk. Meeting with Alice Ace?
Oooh, you better be prepared. She eats
writers for lunch.



from SAM SCRIBE by Larry Kay

(Courtesy of Larry Kay and Toonsmiths)

DESIGN DOCUMENT

There are few set standards for how an interactive program should be developed. Consequently, creative teams often have trouble communicating because everyone is speaking a different “language.” Several early interactive media pioneers wrestled with this issue, but none have swayed the industry itself to agree on a specific set of design standards.

What we have today is an amalgam of software designers, entertainment producers, book publishers and music professionals— each with their own vocabulary and each with their own agenda. However, the documents used as “blueprints” for producing interactive projects have emerged with several common traits. The documents themselves may differ in form, but the information they contain, and the relationship between elements is much the same.

KEY ELEMENTS OF A DESIGN DOCUMENT

- 1) Concept/Objective
- 2) Story Summary
- 3) Character Descriptions
- 4) Interface Methodology
- 5) Story Path Structure/Navigation
- 6) Description of Design Tools
- 7) Flow Chart Demonstration
- 8) Interactive Screenplay
- 9) Sample Art/Media Elements
- 10) Storyboards/Master Matrix
- 11) Marketing Strategies
- 12) Creative Team Bio's
- 13) Project Budget/Schedule

Concept/Objective

A three to four paragraph description which outlines both the premise of the project and the objective of the “game.” Sometimes referred to as a summary, the concept/objective section of a design proposal is perhaps

the most important since it is commonly used to generate reader interest. Your concept/objective should be simple, concise, and hopefully, “hook” the reader.

Story Summary

This is where you describe in further detail, the concept/objective of the game and how the end-user will interact with, and/or “shape” the outcome of the story. In the case of an interactive drama, the spine or linear narrative of the interactive story is explored in detail.

Character Descriptions

Assuming your title incorporates characters, this is where you take the time to introduce them to the reader. Try to include such character traits as personality, physical appearance, history or back-story, and their relationship to the rest of the characters in the project.

Interface Methodology

This is where you describe how you see the user interacting with the program. Is it a written set of instructions, Quicktime icons, graphic buttons? This is a good place to introduce a screen shot, photo or sketch of what the graphical interface might look like.

Navigation/Story Path Structure

This is where you describe the ways in which the end-user interacts with the environment. Often times the best way to demonstrate the “flow” of a program is with a flowchart or matrix. A detailed breakdown of story path and/or game flow is a crucial component of any design document.

Description of Design Tools

To demonstrate the team’s technical skill and ability, and to increase the overall value of a title for investors, design document often include a detailed description of the design tools or engines to be used to create the

title, detailing why that particular engine is best suited for the production. Investors typically care more about investing in the technological components of a title over its creative content. That's why so many title developers have developed proprietary tool sets or engines.

Flowchart Demonstration

This is where the designers, producers and programmers earn their salary. Flowcharts are simply graphical outlines of a title which documents all aspects of each event, including how these events link together. Creating a detailed flowchart has often been described as a hellish experience.

Interactive Screenplay

The design document usually includes a copy of the completed screenplay so that the title's characters, story spine and story paths can be easily identified.

Sample Art/Media Elements

All media components that may help bring the design document to life should be displayed. Sample art might include one or more of the following; sketches, photographs, interface screen shots, video, or other licensed media elements.

Storyboard/Master Matrix

To "show" how the project fits together in simple, visual terms, a complete Storyboard (sketches of screen shots with written explanations, partial dialogue and/or instructions) will be produced. A master matrix details exactly how all the pieces of the design document elements fit together to form a project.

Marketing Strategies

To demonstrate how confident you are that your idea will be a runaway commercial success, this is where you put your money where your mouth

is. In short, you will explain why this project will sell, who will be buying it, how much money it could make, and why. Sources of information should be cited.

Creative Team Bio's

Here's where you include resumes or brief biographies of the principle players who will execute or add value to your project. Or, as they say in Hollywood, "Who's attached?"

Project Budget

No design document would be complete without a thorough production budget. Sometimes, the design document only includes a budget overview. The project budget is usually presented in spreadsheet form (created with programs such as *Movie Magic* or *Excel*) and sometimes includes charts & graphs. The project budget breaks down how much money is needed to produce the title and how that money is going to be spent.

The modern design document (also referred to as a Level II Design Document, Super Storyboard and/or Logic Scenarios) should be thought of as the construction blueprint utilized by the creative design team to "build" a title. Design documents can be as little as 50 pages in length or as much as 1,000 pages or more, depending on the project. Design documents are created by the design team before the title commences production. However, in many instances, design document are works-in-progress and often evolve during the process of creating the title. Design documents are highly propriety in nature (that's why we're not including design document samples in this book) and vary in complexity, length and style.

To accomplish its task, an effective design document must meet three basic criteria:

It should be simple— so that the creative team understands it and knows exactly what they are to contribute.

It should be straightforward— all elements must fit together in a logical way, the document should be segmented so that elements are easy to find, and all extraneous elements should be left out.

It should be saturated— every element, every detail must be included in the document.

There is no true formula for creating a successful design document. Only trial, error and a lot of luck. If you're a writer who wants to learn more about design team strategies which include design document creation, secure an interactive writing assignment and learn by doing. Believe it or not, that's what everyone else is doing.

FLOW MODULE

Few industry insiders know what this category is, much less how to explain it to anyone. Here's our stab at it. Flow modules have literally sprouted up overnight due the birth of a new paradigm in the interactive world— the immersive web site. The fantastic growth of the Internet and the online networks has spawned the enormous growth and popularity of such serials as *The Spot* and *CyberJustice*— soap operas for the next world.

Flow modules are self-contained interactive environments linked to other environments with a common story which contain all necessary design specifications, rules, and story elements dramatized via user-controlled, non-linear pathways. Flow modules are part screenplay and part design document, made up of micro-environments linked together to form a story or message. A program typically has one master flow module linked to many smaller, interrelated flow modules— much like pieces of a puzzle. Let's examine the key elements of a flow module to get a better feel of what we're talking about.

KEY ELEMENTS OF A FLOW MODULE

- 1) The Story or Message
- 2) Boundaries/Rules of the Environment

- 3) Characters in the Environment
- 4) Physical Objects in the Environment
- 5) Animations in the Environment
- 6) Navigational Modes Through the Environment
- 7) Narration/Dialogue/Text
- 8) Music/Sound effects
- 9) Entrances/Exits/Links
- 10) Hot Spots and What They Trigger
- 11) Inventory Objects and What They Do
- 12) Programmer Notes

The Story or Message

This where you explain the theme, story or message of the flow module as it relates to theme of the entire project. The content should advance the story or provide useful information about the characters, location, etc.

Boundaries/Rules of the Environment

Flow modules should contain boundaries and rules for the environment. Are we in a bedroom? On a showroom floor? In a museum? Are there four walls, a ceiling and a floor? Are we in a 2D space such as in a page from a magazine? What are the do's and don'ts within this module?

Characters in the Environment

Many flow modules will contain one or more characters. Do we come to know the characters from the 1st person perspective or 3rd person perspective? Can the characters run and jump across the screen? Is it a text-only interaction? What does the character look like? Can we see or hear what the character looks and sounds like?

Physical Objects in the Environment

What else is in the environment? Is there a communications device such as a telephone? What about a transportation device like a transporter beam or time machine? Are there icons, logos, obstacles, and the like? What is their purpose for being here?

Animations in the Environment

This where you describe all foreground and background animations in your environment. Does the space incorporate 3D rendered objects? If so, are they just for looks or do they perform a function?

Navigational Modes Through the Environment

To demonstrate your concern for the end-user experience, you now need to explain how the user will explore the world of your environment. Will your flow module make use of conventional browsers such as Netscape or Mosaic? 3D immersive navigational tools utilizing VRML or Quicktime VR?

Narration/Dialogue/Text

This is where you detail the message or story is being told. Are we reading thoughts from a diary?, Advertising slogans? Q & A interviews? Live data exchanges? MUDs? Previously scripted character dialogue?

Music/Sound Effects

Assuming your title incorporates music or sound effects, this is where you take the time to explain what they are and how the user experiences them. Is there background music? Can we download sound bits or music clips? If we click on a hot button, will we be rewarded with a sound effect?

Entrance/Exits/Links

This is where you explain how the user advanced to another environment or link module. Via hot links? Scrolling? Can users travel back through previous flow modules or forward to unexplored modules? Does the user have to find the links (as a reward to move on to the next level) or are the links labeled in big letters so that they are moron proof?

Hot Spots

Are there hot spots within the environment and what do they reveal? Is

there some reward for finding them or are they just bonus nuggets?

Inventory Objects

Is the user required to gather objects and store them someplace for later use? If so, how does the user know they have the objects in their possession? What do the objects do?

Programmer Notes

The flow module should contain special notes to the programming team if they will be expected to create a sequence, action and/or specialized content (logic puzzles, flags, etc.).

Some of the new online episodics such as *The Spot* have become hangouts for serial junkies. While not a prime example, you could say that *The Spot* utilizes a primitive form of flow modules. The web site has been described as Melrose Place on the Net— an episodic drama exploring the outlandish lives of its inhabitants— the Spotmates. The user enters The Spot Menu and may choose one of several options— follow Tara Hartwick, Carrie Seaver, Lon Oliver, Michele Foster, Jeff Benton, and Audrie Shire through their daily adventures, play slots with the gang in Las Vegas, eavesdrop on their inner-most desires, interact with your favorite character via Spot Mail, purchase Spot-related merchandise at the Spot Shop, explore previous episodes via Back Track, view home movies of your Spotmates in action via Quick Fliks, find hidden surprises in Spot Stuff, hear the voice of your favorite Spotmate via Spot Speak— you get the idea.

When the user chooses to follow a particular character, you read a set of corresponding text which appears below that character's signature. The experience can be best described as eavesdropping on a diary entry. You learn how that character feels about other characters, their feelings about upcoming or past events, and discover clues for events yet to be explored. For example, Tara's entry in a previous link module or episode started off like this:

Audrey challenged me to a game of Monopoly last night, figuring she needs to brush up on her gaming if she is to increase her odds at craps. Crap,

I say! I don't really see the correlation between that game and Monopoly, but I felt like beating her ass at something. Especially since she lied about her winnings in Vegas.

Notice that the word Vegas is underlined. That signals that the word is linked to another flow module pertaining to either Audrey, her lies about winning, and/or her trip to Vegas. If the user clicked on the underlined word, they would be transformed to a new flow module which advances the storyline. Get it?

Flow modules utilized in properties such as *The Spot* are not very complex. After all, the serial is experienced via the Internet, a medium that moves at the speed of molasses. However, as data transfer rates for the Internet and other online networks improve, serials such as *The Spot* will be able to implement richer, more complex environments. Online episodics can be highly addictive due to the intimate relationship that develops between the user and the characters. Since new elements such as text, photos, quicktime movies, and the like are added to the episodic on a daily or weekly basis, there is a compelling reason for the user to keep coming back. It is important to not that updates alone are not enough to make your project compelling. Addictive, multi-media rich modules should be your ultimate goal.

Perhaps the best use of flow modules to date is in online interactive advertising. Big ad agencies are under pressure to develop web sites with inclusive ad campaigns. Flow modules are perhaps the best document for use in an interactive advertising campaign since they allow the writer/designer to implement the best elements of a sales campaign with “live” product interaction.

For example, you're an advertising agency developing an online campaign for a major automobile company. We'll call the company Rev Motors. Your job as the writer is to create a compelling web site with a content-rich environment which also happens to “sell” a line of automobiles. Rather than simply create ad traditional ad campaign to post on a web site (repurposing 2D content), you might opt to create a flow module which, if implemented, would immerse users into Rev Motors' World—their cars, their employees, their showrooms, and their manufacturing plants. You could add original content such as *Ask Mr. Fixit*—

a column focused on repair-related issues where users could email questions direct to the columnist and receive email answers. How about a virtual museum for car buffs to explore the make and model of all previously-released models? Users could float through 3D rendered models of the vehicles or perhaps even sit behind the wheel. How about a live chat area with a celebrity spokesperson? You get the idea. As the writer, it is your job to push your creativity to the limit. Let your imagination fly. Flow modules can be laid out in a text document just like you would use in a design proposal. If you possess design skills, you could incorporate graphic images into your flow module. The truly ambitious might create working flow modules that can be experienced online.

Whatever form your flow module ultimately takes is not nearly as important as the originality and immersive quality of your entire program.



Bio

Michele Em's first interactive screenplay was for the best-selling CD-ROM hit, RETURN TO ZORK for Activision. She wrote the interactive screenplay for Disney's PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN, and is currently writing and designing THE RISEN for Mirabilis.

Em studied filmmaking at the Art Center College of Design, going on to design and produce special effects and animation for Paramount, Universal, Orion and ABC.

She received an M.A. in Creative Writing from the University of New Mexico, where she specialized in the work of Latin American Magical Realism movement.

Em has spoken about creativity and interactivity at numerous conferences and events. She has lectured at NASA on the subject of fantasy and fiction and its role in scientific discovery, produced three documentary films, and is on the Board of Advisors for Curriculum Television's, Lightspan Entertainment.

Interview

HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH WRITING FOR INTERACTIVE MEDIA? With my background, it was natural. I've always been a writer, even before I turned professional. It wasn't like I suddenly saw a CD-ROM and decided to become a writer.

I was interested in telling stories visually. I enrolled into the photography department of the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena because I had this great portfolio of photographs I had taken through Southeast Asia. But once in school, I discovered that I had to buy thousands of dollars worth of camera equipment I couldn't afford. But the film department had all the cameras you

needed. So, I enrolled in the film department [LAUGHS]. I was always behind the camera...always shooting my own films. So, I found that the medium sort of didn't matter. I was most interested in getting my hands on equipment so I could tell my stories.

HOW DID YOU LIKE FILM SCHOOL? Art Center College of Design is like a military school for artists. They taught me discipline. It was good training for the commercial world. When you work for hire, no matter how creative or independent you are, you're still a commercial artist. Unless you're working in a vacuum.

THE ART OF COMPROMISE... Perhaps. But writers have to write with passion, keeping in mind that they're investing a portion of their life into every project. A writer should choose his/her projects carefully. You have to be centered and sort of have your finger on the pulse of what's going on around you in the commercial world. If you're emotionally invested in what you're doing, then there's a purity to what you're doing. And if you're in tune with your surroundings, you will most likely find an audience. To be commercial is just being in tune.

DID YOU USE THIS PHILOSOPHY IN YOUR SCREENWRITING? I'd taken a couple of courses in screenwriting and decided that the instructors were teaching people how to be hacks. So I fled to New Mexico and enrolled in a creative writing masters program. I studied literature. Mostly modern British novels and the Latin American magical realism movement. And it appealed to me. Literature is the true recorder of history; it provides the context for life. Latin American magical realism would segue easily from literature to the CD-ROM world.

IN WHAT WAY? Because the movement is beyond surreal. It presents a very clear picture of the evolution, history and politics of the region. You can deal with all of these issues in a creative way, yet get the point across in a totally entertaining way. You can move diagonally into people's consciousnesses with that kind of wordplay.

WHAT DID YOU DO AFTER FILM SCHOOL? I wrote a few screenplays. One was produced—a short film called *In the Interest of Science*, directed by my husband, David Em. I was in the middle of writing another screenplay when I was invited to write *Return to Zork*.

HOW DID THAT COME ABOUT? A friend of mine knew an executive at Activision. And just out of the kindness of her heart...she wrote him a letter telling him that he had to meet me because I was such an unusual talent. That I could produce or direct, whatever.

So the executive at Activision called me and said, “We’re about to produce a live-action interactive game. Would you like to produce the live action?”

And I said, “Gee, not really.”

And he said, “Well, why not?”

And I said, “Because I’ve been a freelancer for a long time in this business, and I’ve gotten out of it. I can tell you exactly what’ll happen. You’ll want me to bid on the project. I’ll go around and call all the same people you’re going to call. I’ll turn in my bids and then you’ll decide to go with one of the in-house production companies because they can underbid me by 30 percent.

WHAT WAS HIS REACTION? He was a little taken aback by that. But he didn’t miss a beat. He said, Well then, would you like to write it?”

And I said, “Yeah.”

He asked me to bring him a copy of some of my work. I gave him a screenplay I was entering into the Sundance Film Festival— about jazz musicians. I also gave him a comedy.

I think that I got the job because I was a screenwriter who actually played games. Infocom games were my favorites. I had played the text version of *Zork* dozens of times.

WHERE DID YOU BEGIN WITH *RETURN TO ZORK*? It turns out that they had already designed the game. Doug Barnett was the designer. He was very good with coming up with the gameplay and the puzzles. But dialogue was not his long suit— at least in this context. He’s actually a very talented writer. Activision needed someone to churn out a screenplay fast. It was five or six weeks before they were going before the cameras and they had no screenplay. And they had twenty-eight characters, and this whole complex scene structure that needed to have all of the clues woven into the dialogue. I wasn’t a writer—I was a paramedic.

WHAT MATERIALS WERE PROVIDED TO YOU? A two-and-a-half page story or treatment. I had to request a list of puzzles. They actually didn’t have a list, they had to create one for me. They also had a design document, which they gave to me as well. But it wasn’t much use to me. Most of what I needed,

I got from talking to the producer.

WHAT SPECIFIC CHALLENGES DID YOU ENCOUNTER WRITING THE SCREENPLAY FOR *RETURN TO ZORK*? The most important thing was to know what the puzzles were...when certain puzzles needed to be solved in the game in order to make it possible to move forward.

Another challenge was dealing with that fact that I was the outsider. Most of the production team had been working on this project for months. I had to prove myself to them, even though I was a writer who understood games. I had to keep my sense of humor about the whole thing.

Developing character was also a challenge. In order to create characters that were involving, I had to get their personalities across, their context within the story and their relevance to the rest of the characters and the rest of the game. I wove clues into their dialogue to tantalize the player to move forward, yet remember what the characters had been saying.

WHAT KIND OF DOCUMENT DID YOU TURN IN? DID IT LOOK LIKE A SCREENPLAY? No, it didn't look like anything like a screenplay. It takes a while to craft a screenplay. With *Zork*, they started casting the project while I was still writing. I had to give the actors something to work with. So, I wrote what's known in the film industry as "sides." Which are basically that character's lines. These sides were created exclusively for the auditions but they became the screenplay.

WHAT SOFTWARE DID YOU USE TO CREATE THE SCREENPLAY FOR *ZORK*? The producer wanted me to write the screenplay in *Excel*.

EXCEL? Yeah. The spreadsheet program that I didn't know how to use. You hire a screenwriter and then give them an accounting program and say, "Write a screenplay on it."

On *Pirates of the Caribbean*, the programmer asked me to write the screenplay in a hybrid programming language of their own with ASCII notations. And I did. It was ridiculous. The producer kept flipping out, saying, "The programmers are making you do their work for them." In a sense, he was right.

But to answer your question, any word processing program will work for writing interactive projects.

WHAT ABOUT FORMATS? I came up with a cross between a traditional A,

B, C outline and a screenplay— where the first scene or encounter was presented, and then there were dialogue choices. Choices based on the emotional responses that the player put in. There was the A answer, the B answer the C answer. After a player chose one, then it would default to another series of answers.

I laid out the scenes and dialogue in the best linear fashion I could. When a character is first introduced, I wrote in slug lines of character description. More like a SLUG LIFE than a SLUG LINE because I was trying to give the actors as much as possible for them to understand their character quickly. Then came the dialogue. Writing the dialogue was basically like creating a lot of one-liners.

ARE YOU A WRITER OR A DESIGNER? In the game business, the creative vision is usually attributed to the designer. Then the writer comes in and breathes life into it. Sometimes a writer is also a designer. It depends on the project. I've been called in at the last minute so many times, I feel like a retrofitter.

I CAN SEE YOUR SCREEN CREDIT NOW... Yeah. Retrofitting by Michele Em.

WHAT ARE YOU WORKING ON NOW? I'm currently writing an interactive project for Mirabilis. I'm adapting a novel called, *The Risen*. It's a suspense/mystery. Adapting a novel for interactive media is very different. I look at the novel as a form of a design document. All of the information is there, but you have to decode it. The producer and I have worked out the interactive story, the feel, the mood and the puzzles.

DOES EVERYBODY USE THE TERM PUZZLE? IT'S NOT ALWAYS A PUZZLE YOU'RE CREATING, RIGHT? Puzzle is just a term for the problems to be solved. Conundrums. Puzzle is a common term, but I think it's misleading.

WHAT IS YOUR VIEW ON INTERFACE DESIGN? Interface design is perhaps the hardest thing to work out. This is where designers really earn their titles. I believe interfaces should be intuitive so that you're not constantly thinking about which button to press.

AS A WRITER, IS INTERFACE DESIGN SOMETHING THAT YOU THINK ABOUT IN ADVANCE OF WRITING? I let it percolate in the back of my mind.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE CURRENT CROP OF INTERACTIVE TITLES? don't think anybody has created a truly interactive environment. Because a game, by its very existence, has a beginning, a middle, and an end. The art or skill of the writer/designer is to keep the player interested to finish the game.

HOW IMPORTANT IS A GAME'S REPEAT-ABILITY FACTOR? There's more to life than replaying an interactive game over and over.

[LAUGHS] TWO-THOUSAND PAGE SCREENPLAYS ARE NOT YOUR CUP OF TEA? No. I think that's really unrealistic.

I'VE MET WRITERS WHO PRIDE THEMSELVES ON ACHIEVING JUST THAT. Yeah? Well, there's a lot of people who don't understand economy of words, either. I was on a panel with a bunch of people...

EXPERTS? **[LAUGHS]** Exactly. One guy was the creative director for a big development company. He told the audience that he hired lots of writers for a project. Which I think is a bad idea. He went on to say that a screenwriter can't possibly write visually. My eyes bugged out! And a few other people on the panel started sputtering. People were speechless.

And so I said, "Well, what do you think a screenwriter does?"

And he responded, "Well, we hire one writer to do the design, another writer to do the dialogue, and then we have an art director who does the visual part. Then, of course, the producer has to re-write everything.

And I said, "You know, a screenwriter creates screenplays. Screenplays are stories told in pictures. That's why screenwriters get paid so well. Because they are visual writers who tell intricate stories through dialogue and pictures."

At the end of that panel, a member of the audience came up to me and said, "You're a very angry woman. Everyone else seems to accept the status quo. Why do you want to change it?" **[LAUGHS]** I couldn't believe it. I was invited onto the panel to defend the writer's position in the production process. I am continually amazed at how the writer's role is misunderstood.

DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR WRITERS NEW TO INTERACTIVE? It's important not to be intimidated by the technology. You need to know about the technology so that you don't get hung up on it when you're creating something that uses the technology. And don't be intimidated by the programmers. Their job is to take the information and put it into code so that everything

works. You should listen to them, but don't take all your direction from them. Their job is to think logically. Your job is to think logically, too, but your main responsibility is to the story.

HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE ONE OF THE BEST-KNOWN INTERACTIVE WRITERS IN THE INDUSTRY? It's great. But the game companies think it's a terrible thing to have stars.

DOESN'T NAME RECOGNITION HELP "SELL" A PRODUCT? Yeah, but the game companies want the public to know it's their product. I don't think players give a damn. They listen for the artistic mark. You know, does the dialogue sing. The public wants to know who these people are that created or starred in their favorite titles. Game companies should be happy when one of their creators suddenly has a cult following or something. This reminds me of the early days of the film business, where the studios didn't want anyone to know who the actors or actresses were. I don't know where this mentality comes from. But things will change. Everyone will benefit in the long run.



Ch. 3

SMART STORIES AND DESIGN STRUCTURE

*“Everything should be made as simple as possible.
But not simpler.”*

— Albert Einstein

Quality stories have a spine, some inner logic of action and dialogue, theme and metaphor which is presented in language and which we say “holds the story together.” But before we start developing spines for interactive screenplays, we need to realize that terms like “spine,” or “paradigm” or “three-act breakdown” are really only specialized vocabulary which describe structures common to all stories. Many interactive media programs are now incorporating stories into their narratives. We’re talking about real stories with three-dimensional characters.

But what is unique to interactive media is the integration of a user’s choice with a designer/writer’s dramatic structure. The three-act dramatic structure familiar to writers certainly provides a part of what we need to structure interactive stories. It provides a crucial base from which to start. But the integration of choice with dramatic presentation will make new demands and will create new paradigms for interactive storytellers.

If you were to ask ten different interactive professionals to define title design structure, chances are you’d get ten different answers. Structure is not easily defined. It is experienced, utilized or incorporated into multimedia applications each day, yet there are few who have ever

attempted to put into words the process of designing structure for interactive media.

STRUCTURE IN PERSPECTIVE

Who Killed Cock Robin? This fairy tale/nursery rhyme/narrative has at its simple core all the potential of a modern mystery/thriller. More importantly, Cock Robin shows us something we might not expect. The fairy tale shows us that stories, whether told around bedsides or engaged on CD, are derived from the same engine. No matter how differently stories get presented, they are siblings born of a common parent in a system of signification which crosses all cultures, time periods and technologies.

Linguists and anthropologists were among the first to realize that our story-making capacities are hard-wired into human consciousness. But this wasn't always the case. In fact, until the early 1900's stories weren't viewed from a systematic or structural point of view at all. Stories and language were examined as artifacts whose primary interest was historical. For instance, if a linguist in the 1800's were interested in the etiology of the word "darling," he would probably trace the word back through time, through the Middle Ages and then Old English, or perhaps even further. From its meaning in years past he would reconstruct its modern usage. The recovery of the word's genesis and "meaning" would be intimately bound up with its daily use and its history.

But what if "darling" were to be viewed from a perspective outside history? What after all if history were not the prime determinant of a word's meaning? What if a word's "meaning" were not as important as the mechanism by which it "signified"? Language viewed this way becomes the product of a system which can be viewed synchronically, apart from history, like the cross-section of an orange. Would the word "darling" then be seen as an evolution of daily use or as the product of a structure within which the sound-of-the-word was of secondary importance to the system out of which the phoneme was produced?

In 1916, Ferdinand de Saussure rocked the philological cage when he made just such an assertion. De Saussure's work asserts that language can be viewed as a system of signs (*langue*) which generate signification regardless of an individual word's history or use. A word's "meaning" is

arbitrary, in this view, but its signification is always and everywhere determined. This structural approach to signs and signifying lead to all sorts of inquiry. Vladimir Propp, a Russian Formalist concerned with literature as a function of language, found that folk tales, whether from, say, 18th century Russia or 5th Century China, could be reduced to the same functional/structural constituents. Claude Levi-Strauss applied linguistic theory and methodology to anthropological studies. He viewed myths, for instance, as structures whose details could be substituted across cultures in an almost modular way with no detriment to their function. Myths, fairy tales, bullfights, fashion design— all become texts for study in Levi-Strauss' view, and each of these "texts", as Robert Con Davis notes in his anthology, "is modeled on a flexible version of a narrative sequence, a kind of storytelling." *

It would seem that almost any phenomenon which humans can comprehend can be examined structurally as a kind of story. Levi-Strauss' work in this regard has had a major impact on other thinkers such as Jacques Derrida and Michael Foucault, for example, who have extended structuralism to every form of discourse. All basis for authority and all assumptions about "meaning" were challenged, tossed out, or deconstructed in the structuralist heyday. But wait a minute— Why is this important for the mavens of interactive technology? What's to be learned here for the interactive writer?

Technology, even in its most exotic form, can never be more than an extension of language. A new signifier on the block. It's important for interactive storytellers to know, therefore, that there is no scheme, design, or pattern which can be divined for interactive narrative that is not also a structural sibling to all the narratives that have or will exist. All stories share a common genesis in language, and language, Fredric Jameson tells us, is a "prison within whose walls all discussion and discourse, all stories, must take place."

It's easy to forget that every time a new technology is brought to the task of telling stories its proponents declare boldly that narrative itself will radically change in the new, technological wake. The users of new technologies all want somehow to be thought of as unique.

Dudley Andrew was writing in the mid-seventies about film's infatuation with itself: "If modern cinema is somehow new, as every critic has

* Contemporary Literary Criticism, Robert Con Davis, 1986, Longman, Pg. 307

suggested, its newness lies not in some mystical absence of a storyteller, or reduction of spectacle, or ascendancy of ‘film-writing,’ or any other formula of new freedom which has been advanced...” and later on, “Our stories get told in comprehensible ways, our acting has a rule behind it, the sets we use have a purposeful look, and the camera work which delivers all this to us moves meaningfully within the world it photographs.” *

Andrew was interested in the specific rules which governed the cinematic system of signifying. He was interested in the “subcodes,” the grammar, by which an audience understood that, say, a “DISSOLVE” signified a move in time or place from one scene to another. He was also interested in the larger picture, the narrative structure which film had finally to recognize in common with old-fashioned storytellers and storytelling methods of the past.

Interactive writers, and I suppose critics, need to review this very recent history of cinema. By understanding the deconstruction which Andrew and others have undertaken for film and literature, new-technology writers can incorporate the “codes,” the structures which have been seen to inform our storytelling past while working to develop or recognize the unfamiliar “subcodes” which interactive narrative will definitely contribute to the narrative future.

In the simplest terms, title design structure or smart stories can be defined as the codes which orient the end-user with some sense of location within a storytelling program, defining, among other things, how the user may navigate through that program. It is imperative that an interactive writer understand the three key elements of title design structure: Architecture, Story Spine and Story Path.

ARCHITECTURE

The interactive media program, much like the universe we live in, has a distinct set of definable boundaries. This framework of existence is known as a program’s architecture.

Architecture is an application design structure which not only defines a program’s boundaries, but identifies how a user may interact within those boundaries and what kind of control the user has in accessing those boundaries. To better understand architecture, let’s break it

* Major Film Theories, Dudley Andrews, 1976, Oxford University Press, Pg. 235

down into two parts: Open Architecture and Closed Architecture.

OPEN ARCHITECTURE

An application design structure which permits the end-user to navigate freely from one path, event, scene or location to another, no matter where those choices may appear in the hierarchy of the program.

OPEN ARCHITECTURE PARADIGM

Open Architecture - End-user free to navigate from location to location at any time. Physical transportation through time or space is limitless.

Story Spine - Classic three-act story structure with a beginning, middle and end.

Story Path - User free to choose the path of gameplay, however, critical objectives must be achieved to move through the story's hierarchy. Multiple Story Paths possible.

CLOSED ARCHITECTURE

An application design structure which insists that the end-user choose a path, event, scene or location by retracing the current path until they reach a point in the program which offers the user a new event, scene or location to choose from.

CLOSED ARCHITECTURE PARADIGM

Closed Architecture - There are very specific boundaries limiting end-user's world. End-user free not to navigate from location to location.

Story Spine - Classic three-act story structure or level spine structure typically utilized. with a beginning, middle and end.

Story Path - User must navigate within a branching or Cul-De-Sac path structure. Critical path must be achieved to move through the story's hierarchy. Multiple Story Paths not possible.

What we need to do now is to develop a structural approach to interactive stories. We're going to keep new vocabulary at a minimum, here.

Keep it simple. Let's start out by saying that interactive screenplays have two layers of structure which a writer must peel away and contend with: Story spine and story path. Let's first examine the story spine.

STORY SPINE

By inserting three-act structure into interactivity you basically give the program a spine. The interactive story's spine is simply its core storyline, a storyline with a logically connected and interdependent beginning, middle, and end. A spine can be thought of as a linear narrative which does not include user-options. A stripped-down skeleton of a story which can be used to support just about anything from flight simulators to interactive movies.

Linear narratives, and spines, are not structures which work by free association. They are not stochastic. They are characterized by a series of related and logically unified events. It's not nearly as complicated as it sounds. Have you every gone to the movies or watched a television drama? If you have, you've almost certainly experienced what critics call a linear narrative— a spine.

UNDERSTANDING STORY

We're interested in working definitions here, not ontology. Nevertheless, back in the mid-1940's a couple of writers wrote a book called *Understanding Fiction*, which described a story as a work of fiction which "broadens our experience and increases our knowledge of the possibilities of the self. Fiction is a vital image of life in motion— it is an imaginative enactment of life— and, as such, it is an extension of our own lives." *

These words by Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks came out of a critical movement whose adherents came to be called the New Critics or New Humanists. Warren & Brooks had the advantage of approaching literature from the writer's perspective. Among the many things that distinguish their book from contemporary critical works is that *Understanding Fiction* actually helps you understand fiction.

It's an old saw that good writers must be good readers. The problem

* *Understanding Fiction*, 3rd Edition, Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks, 1979, Prentice Hall, Pg. 1

is, many writer wanna-be's don't read, and worse, don't know how to read. There are bound to be folks, for instance, who, poring over Hemingway's dialogue in the last chapter, do not "see" that the man is trying to pressure the woman into an abortion which she does not want. Such persons need to work on reading before they attempt to tackle writing.

Unlike a lot of present approaches to literature which take an ideological or structuralist/de-constructivist approach to the systems which surround the story, *Understanding Fiction* keeps Character, Action and Plot as the center of its concern. Warren & Brooks insist that readers can improve their experience of stories by knowing something about how stories work. They do something else which is positive anathema to contemporary scholarship; the writers insist that stories, to be stories, must be meaningful.

What does it mean to be meaningful? It means that stories must ultimately have something to do with the Big Questions— what Faulkner called, "the verities of the soul." Sound heavy? It doesn't have to be. Just think a moment. Everything you read or see in a story involves directly or indirectly "some comment on values in human nature and conduct." *

The notion that you can have a value-neutral story is untrue. It is also untrue that stories have to propagandize or take a moral position. But good stories always involve people whose conflicts ultimately show us something about human nature or the human condition that is inseparable from the codes by which we evaluate behavior, accomplishment, heroism, cowardice— the whole spectrum of human activity.

It is important to realize that an audience's "stake" in a story rises enormously when human values are at the heart of the conflict. Remember Alan Ladd's performance in *Shane*? Would we care as much about Shane's final shoot-out if his past were squeaky clean, or if he had no compunction about killing? How about *Casablanca*? Would we care as much about Bogey's final kiss with Ingrid if the story hadn't been set against the Nazis and World War II— or if Ingrid's character had not been married in a time when marriage still meant something to a man of courage and principle?

I don't think it's an accident that Steven Spielberg received critical

* *Understanding Fiction*, 3rd Edition, Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks, 1979, Prentice Hall, Pg. 1

raves for *Schindler's List* and not for *Jurassic Park*. What *Shane*, *Casablanca*, and *Schindler's List* have in common is that their central characters are morally compromised agents placed in jeopardy simply because of their stand on a morally grounded principle. Alan Ladd's character was a gunslinger, a killer for hire before he met his moral opposites in an innocent homestead family terrorized by an aging cattleman and his thugs. Schindler was a con-man bent on gaining profit before he confronted the horrors of Jewish extermination. Schindler's sacrifice to save Jews from extermination is meaningful. Shane's sacrifice, totally fictive, totally divorced from anything like the Holocaust, is also meaningful. Bogey's sacrifice, a mix of history and make-believe, is meaningful.

Stories are not games. The experience unique to narrative is not the same thing as the experience rendered by *Mortal Combat* or roller coaster rides. Story writers have a lot more to do than simply string together a series of obstacles which pose hurdles for a character seeking an objective. That's only the barest scratch on the surface of what a story should accomplish. An interactive screenplay may offer dizzying chase scenes and fights, great erotica and environment, but if those exterior events don't have something to do with the characters' insides, the story will fall flat.

Now, does this mean good stories always have to aim for high art? Do we have to always base our stories on some historic injustice, or have at their heart, some weighty concern? Of course not. Good stories don't have to be "heavy drama" They don't have to revolve around the lives of Hitler or Ghandi. There's only one thing that a story has to do. It has to be honest.

AN HONEST STORY

It might seem only commonsensical to say that a story of any kind begins at the beginning. Not necessarily. Interactive writers need to understand that beginnings are inevitably tied up with ends. The sense of "arrival," of a culmination of action and dialogue at a certain conclusion, lies at the heart of the story experience.

In a special edition of *The Hollywood Reporter*, noted film director,

James Cameron, described the appeal of linear narrative this way. “Good movies work in a way that engages you in this process. It’s not interactive in the sense that you can influence what you’re seeing, but you are creating alternatives in your mind, laying them up against what really happens. Then you have a sense of satisfaction or betrayal...” *

Satisfaction or betrayal— Not a bad way to judge a narrative. *I’m Your Man* was a film released and billed as an “interactive movie.” The filmmakers provided a means for the audience to vote on various outcomes spun out of the movie’s mystery plot. The problem was— A single, unified narrative could not support three conclusions. Multiple conclusions can’t be sustained unless they are contrived or worse— that the “evidence” supplied in earlier scenes is ignored or amended.

A variation on the multiple ending is the “trick” ending. One of the best known writers, O’Henry, is perhaps the most dishonest. Warren & Brooks were among the first to take on O’Henry for his “surprise” endings. In *The Furnished Room*, for example, O’Henry paints the picture of a distraught young man searching for his (apparently) estranged lover. Finding a room for the evening, the young man is tortured by the smell of his lover’s perfume. The scent fills the room and drives him mad. The young gent rushes to the landlady— Had his lover recently occupied the apartment? No, he’s told. The lady was never there. The lady was never there and so the reader is left to conclude reasonably that the perfume was never there, either. Our distraught, young man only imagined the perfume; he was probably unbalanced, an implication which seems affirmed when the young man commits suicide.

But in the story’s final lines we find from the landlady herself that the young man’s lover had been there. In fact, she too had earlier committed suicide in the apartment. The perfume was definitely in the room, therefore, and the young man had smelled it. Now, it’s not a problem at all that the landlady deceives the young man. There is always a problem, however, when the author deceives his reader.

When a writer is said to have resorted to a *deux-ex-machina*, we understand that his/her story has contrived a conclusion which depends on the just-found piece of evidence or the providential intervention of some element totally unsupported by the plot. We’re familiar with these kinds of endings. They aren’t satisfying. We know at some level that the

* The Hollywood Reporter, HR Industries, Inc., BPI Communications, 1994

author of the text isn't playing fair and sins of this kind, whether by commission or omission, bring to their audiences the immediate and bitter taste of betrayal. "What happens next" in an honest story must bear a consistent and logical relationship with all that has happened before.

You run into writers who claim not to have worked out their screenplays' conclusion. "I never know how it's going to end! I just— explore!" To which Syd Field, author of *Screenplay*, replies in words I cannot improve, "Bullshit." Field goes on to say that, "The ending is the first thing you must know before you begin writing." * I think Field's right. It's fine to explore. But if a screenwriter explores for a hundred pages without a destination, I'm likely to find either a weak resolution or, worse, a dishonest one.

The writer of an honest story makes a contract with the reader— "I will give you everything you need to appreciate this story, to revel in its nuances and to anticipate its outcome. Everything I do will be done for the purpose of advancing action and dialogue to a particular conclusion which must be consistent with everything that has gone before." But what about interactive narratives? Should they work for consistent plots? Should they integrate an entire narrative work to support a final destination? And should they be subject to the same judgments of satisfaction or betrayal as linear stories? Should they, in other words, be honest?

Yes, they should. An interactive screenplay can give a zillion opportunities for exploration to its users. But the interactive narrative, like the screenplay, has to have a "spine." That spine is a linear narrative which progresses from its initial propositions to a single narrative resolution. If you start a story without knowing how it'll finish, you risk a dishonest ending. Readers and viewers should not be cheated. Stories should make sense and they should not have to appeal to some exigency or knowledge outside the text to justify their narrative's conclusion. Play fair. Don't cheat. Be honest.

It's absolutely crucial to understand that you cannot generate interesting or engaging options for your user unless you first have a first-rate spine. Ironically, too, the more interesting and complex your spine, the more important it will become to develop user-choices which do not violate your story's logic.

A word regarding multiple resolutions: If you try to drive multiple

* *Screenplay*, Syd Field, Dell Publishing

resolutions for a story from a single spine you are going to have problems. You'll have to either trivialize the story's outcome or cheat your audience in its resolution. But this does not in any way mean that interactive narratives can't have multiple conclusions. Nothing could be further from the truth. Interactive stories can have as many resolutions as disk space allows! The writer simply needs to ensure that each story-ending is mated to its own linear spine.

That gets you started. But our structural concerns aren't close to being answered. Remember that the spine we've described comes from stories which are told linearly by a writer isolated from a user. Interactive writers want to tell a different kind of story. They want to create dramas whose presentation and plot change with a user's intrusion. To tell this kind of story, we have to find a way to leave the spine and come back to the spine in ways which don't violate the story's logic. That's where Story Path comes in.

STORY PATH

The second layer of structure a writer must address is the Story Path. A story path can be linear or non-linear—it's up to the end-user. The users are free to choose which path or course of gameplay they wish to experience. Thus the lure of interactivity. However, "freedom of choice" is a misnomer. The end-user may only choose the paths that a writer or writer/designer has created. These paths can be broken down into two sub-categories:

Critical Path - A single correct path the end-user must follow to successfully complete an application. Critical Paths are also referred to as Procedural approaches to storytelling. For instance, there's a Procedural approach to driving a car: first you put the keys into the ignition, then you crank the ignition and start to engine, then you put your foot on the brake, then you slip the car into gear, etc.

Critical Objectives - The opposite of critical path. The end-user discovers elements as they reveal themselves, which are earned as the user moves through the story.

WHEN THE AUDIENCE PLAYS GOD

What happens when a linear story is entwined in an interactive structure? What happens when the audience enters the story and can interact with characters, alter scenes, perspectives and/or presentation? Will the experience be pleasant? Will they be as satisfying as good narratives such as *The Last Emperor* or *Platoon*? Or will there be dissatisfaction? Disinterest? The marriage between a text and its user raises a fundamental question: Do people really want to tell themselves stories? “People will get tired of interactive movies very quickly!” Roger Ebert says. “The whole idea of a film is to take you out of yourself and for the viewer to get control through the imagination of the filmmaker. When the viewer has control, it is kind of a dead end.” *

Audiences are never quite so passive as Ebert’s critique implies. Or at the very minimum there is some tension between the viewer’s “control” and the writer/ producer/ director’s control. The funny thing about a feature film is that whole moviegoers may seem to be completely passive, but they’re really not. When audiences watch a movie for the first time, they don’t know what’s going to happen next. Their brains take in all the outside signals-- the images, the sound, the dialogue-- and piece them together into a logical framework or story. Viewers basically interact with the information that’s provided to them and attempt to plot a trajectory for that story.

Interactive screenplays should not (and probably cannot) give total “control” to the viewer. On the other hand, what differentiates interactive titles from movies is that interactive stories don’t give total control to the “teller,” either. A good interactive screenplay should find some middle ground, some balance between button-pushing and total passivity. An interactive design must also do something else— it must give the viewer the choice to limit choice.

Recall for a moment the bedtime story. If you don’t have children, dig deep to your own childhood. A writer friend once relayed this story— “I like Robin Hood for my children. I cast Robin as a five-year old for my son and a nine-year old for my daughter. Occasionally, when I get a good one going, my children will snuggle beneath the covers without a peep.” The children, in this narrative, do not intrude. Their choice is to make no

* Int MM, S-28

choice.

He continued, “More often, though, just as Robin Hood is about to launch his unfailing arrow through the heart of the Black Knight my son will say, ‘No, Daddy, he knocks him off the horse. He knocks him off and then he ties him up and then he makes him do good to all the people he hurt.’ At that moment, I must do something interesting—I must interact with my son’s input. I must change the story to correspond with his choices, his decisions. That means I have to interrupt the story. I have to break, however briefly, the seamless narrative experience. Something else ought to be equally obvious—My son doesn’t mind the interruption. He doesn’t mind a certain break of the narrative flow provided his contribution gets worked into an honest ending. Everything changes once the Black Knight is allowed to survive Robin’s arrow.” (Among others, the boy has guaranteed himself a sequel) The most important thing that changes, though, is the relationship between the teller and the told.

In most modern stories, there is a strict divide between the storyteller and his audience. The audience is not given the authority to intrude on the text. The bedtime story (or Bertolt Brecht) offers a different model. By encouraging a child to intrude on a bedtime story, parent and child become co-creators of the story. The barrier which divides modern storytellers from their audiences dissolves between parent and child.

It seems likely that in our narrative past, we not only tolerated such interruptions, we demanded them. Greek dramas, for instance, which are now seen by quiet audiences in silent theaters, were once religious rites in which audiences, well versed in the narratives performed, did not think of themselves as “spectators” at all but as participants in their ritually-told stories. Early Greek dramas, in fact, did not even have a chorus. It’s interesting that once the “chorus” left the seats for the stage it became an extension of the writer’s voice. Once that happened, the audience became more modern in their response to the playwright’s selection and interpretation of detail. A modern vestige of the older rites can still be seen at a Catholic Mass. The liturgy is a story. It is, however, a carefully designed story which demands controlled interruption in the form of responses, prayers, and even requests from the faithful audience to their chief storyteller/priest.

But even if this kind of interruption can be made enjoyable in an

interactive narrative, can an honest ending be made compatible with a user's intrusion? Can you tell a story with a definite resolution while giving viewers choice? How many characters, after all, can kill Cock Robin? Hyper-interactivity will not lead to audience satisfaction; it will lead to betrayal, a scenario made inevitable by the tyranny of choice.

Can interactive scripts empower the user to make narrative decisions while preserving an honest ending? Yes, they can. But those scripts must start with the realization that stories, whether told at bed sides, in amphitheaters or on computer terminals, must incorporate a linear narrative. That narrative, familiar to the "passive" movie goer, will become the spine for the interactive writer.

We've talked a lot about linear story paths. But what about non-linear story paths which are common to the interactive narrative? Many writers utilize a combination of possible story paths within complex, yet unique structures to enhance the title's playability. Others simply have combined elements of flow and gameplay into their own unique formulas. With that said, we will now identify seven unique story structures which are common to many interactive titles on the market today.

BRANCHING

In an interactive program, branching offers the most rudimentary course of action for the user to navigate from one sequence to another. In a typical branching story structure, the end-user is presented with several choices or options at a pre-designated fork or node in the program. Based on the user's choice, the program or story then travels in that direction.

The majority of "first generation" interactive titles followed the branching story path structure. So do many Net-based episodic series such as *The Spot*. Branching structures are popular because they are perhaps the easiest to conceptualize and organize. As a structure, branching doesn't allow for a high degree of end-user interactivity. It does however, fulfill a key element of interactive design—user choice.

It is important that the writer become familiar with several acronyms common to interactive programs—IF, THEN, GOTO, and DEFAULT. They are especially common to game designs utilizing a technique known as "conditional branching." Simply stated, conditional branching means that something happens only IF something else happens first.

When the acronym IF is used in a sentence, a condition is created. For example, IF Jack and Jill go up the hill, THEN several things may happen:

1. Jack falls down and breaks his crown and Jill comes tumbling after.

or

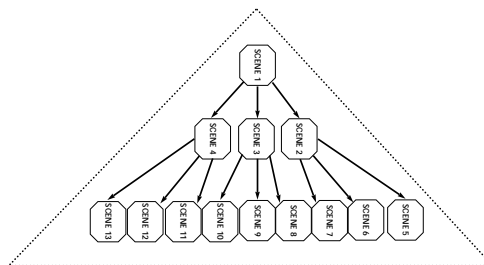
2. Jack pushes Jill over the edge and proclaims himself King of the Hill.

or

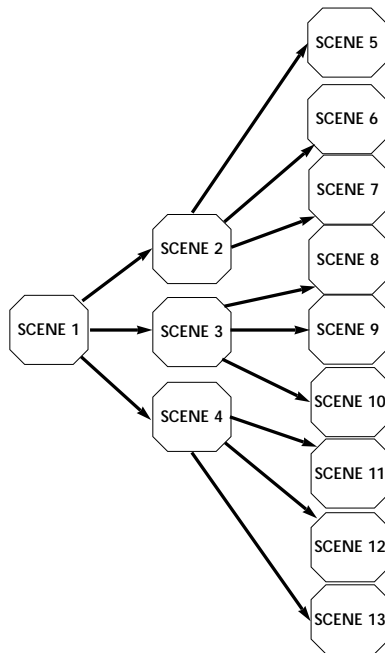
3. Jack collapses and dies of a heat stroke and Jill lives happily ever after with Humpty-Dumpty.

Options 1, 2 and 3 are called branches. In our Jack and Jill interactive program, the user reaches a point when a decision must be made. Once that choice is made, a condition is met. The program will GOTO 1 or GOTO 2 or GOTO 3. If the user makes no choice or if the program automatically makes the choice for the user after a period of time, an intelligent agent built into the program's code produces a standard action. This is called a DEFAULT.

The *StoryVision* User's Manual (screenwriting software for interactive media) states that branching resembles a "Christmas Tree" turned on its side. Others describe branching as a pyramid. Let's take a look at two diagrams which illustrate the theory of branching structure:



(Pyramid Branching Structure)



(Christmas Tree Branching Structure)

Many interactive titles offer the end-user a basic interactive experience. Users are presented with options such as turn Left or turn Right, or to choose from a limited list of multiple choice Question & Answers. In a branching structure, it does matter what choice the end-user makes. The story continues regardless of the answer. The validity of interactivity is strictly limited by the “choices” offered by the writer. For example:

Story sequence leads you into a seedy motel office. There is motel Manager standing behind a desk. Your choice is:

- A. Ask Manager for a room
- B. Walk back outside

If you choose A, the Manager gives you a key

Choose B, the Manager follows you outside and hands you a key

Notice that in both instances, the end-user received the key, regardless of choice.

In another example, a writer offers the end-user more options and/or more paths to choose from, but only one solution advances the story. The following is a classic critical path branching structure:

Story sequence leads you into a seedy motel office. There is motel Manager standing behind a desk. Your choice is:

- A. Ask Manager for a room**
- B. Walk back outside**
- C. Punch the Manager in the nose**

If you choose A, the Manager shakes his head "No"

Choose B, the office door slams shut behind you

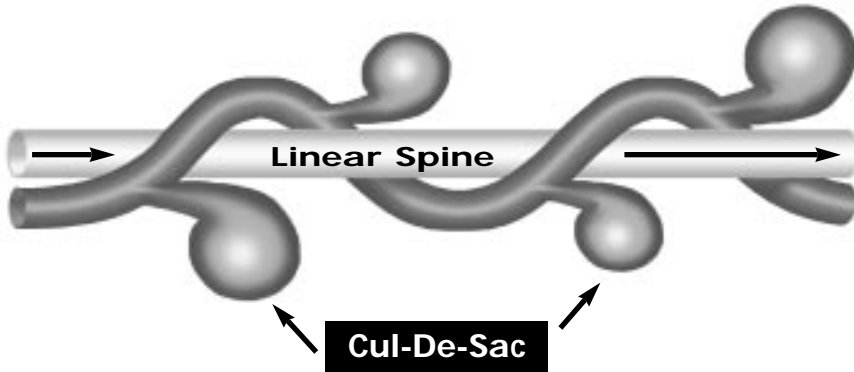
Choose C., the Manager reluctantly offers you a key

LOOP BACKS / CUL-DE-SACS

One thing you will notice about the branching paths in the above-mentioned diagrams is that the flow of the gameplay is constantly moving in one direction. In the pyramid diagram, the flow progresses from top to bottom. In the christmas tree diagram, the flow is moving left to right. A story path does not always need to flow in one direction. Story paths often branch away from the forward flow of the story into cul-de-sacs, then return to the primary story path.

Sometimes the end-user will need to branch away from the forward flow of the story path and loop back to a previous scene. Loop backs are essentially links to previously viewed scenes. For example, let's say that you're the protagonist in an interactive movie. You reach the edge of a cliff and have no way of climbing down the sheer face without dying. You suddenly recall that there was a rope tethering a horse several scenes back. You decide to loop back to the previous scene so you can get the rope you need to climb down the cliff safely. StoryVision, and some writers in the industry refer to loop backs as complex branching or webs. Again, it doesn't matter what you name the parts as long as you understand what those parts do.

The three-dimensional diagram below represents how cul-de-sac's might look as they branch off of the linear narrative, yet return to the story spine:



EXPLORATORIUM

Sometimes a cul-de-sac allows the end-user to “pause” along the story path to allow the end-user to explore a “world-within-a-world,” as with many interactive storybook titles such as *Just Grandma & Me* from Living Books. This type of cul-de-sac can be referred to as an exploratory cul-de-sac or an exploratorium. In *Grandma and Me*, for example, the first scene finds Critter and Grandma waiting in front of Grandma’s house for the bus to arrive. While the characters are waiting, the user may use his/her mouse control to “click” on an array of objects that appear on-screen. Once “clicked,” the white, wooden fence transforms into an animated xylophone which the user hears. If a flower is “clicked,” a bumble bee flies out from the pedals and lands on little Critter’s nose. There are numerous items which sing, dance, sputter and animate within the scene. It’s up to the user to explore this “world” within a game. Once the user exhausts all options within the Exploratorium, the user returns to the story spine and the “linear” narrative continues on the next screen.

What follows are actual pages from a children’s interactive storybook from Sanctuary Woods titled, *Shelley Duvall Presents Digby’s Adventures: Tales of a One Pound Dog*, written by Carolyn Miller.

SCREEN 605. SHELLEY AND DAN'S GARDEN

VISUALS AND CHARACTER NOTE:

We open with a tight close up on DIGBY, a very cute but extremely insecure little Yorkshire Terrier. Though tiny in size, Digby has a powerful imagination, particularly when something worries him or frightens him. Digby is endearingly open and honest about his feelings, and he's not embarrassed about revealing his worst fears, even when he himself might suspect they are somewhat absurd. In this regard, he is something of a Woody Allen of the dog kingdom.

During the scene, we pull back to reveal SHELLEY picking flowers, DAN through the window of his music studio, and the BIRDS in the aviary. Also visible in the screen are a LADY BUG and a wild bird's nest with several BABY BIRDS.

The garden has a "natural" look, with a free form swimming pool and many California native plants. It's a very nice yard, but right now there are leaves on the ground and the grass could use mowing -- it's time for the gardeners' regular visit. There is a fence around the garden, and a garden gate leading out of the grounds. The garden contains a very tall eucalyptus tree, and there is a bright red bougainvillea vine on the fence -- these will later be important landmarks for Digby.

DIALOGUE:

SHELLEY AS NARRATOR

Digby is a little Yorkshire Terrier, a Yorkie. He's so small he could almost fit inside a shoe box. But he loves to play, and when he's not feeling shy, he really enjoys meeting new people.

DIGBY

Hi. My name is Digby, and this is my garden... and my house. Nice, isn't it? I live here with Shelley and Dan, and lots of birds.

SHELLEY (AS HERSELF)

(hold up a toy)

Look, Digby! See what I found in the flowerbed? Your favorite toy! Want to play fetch?

INTERACTIVITIES:

(Courtesy of Carolyn Miller, Shelley Duvall and Sanctuary Woods. Game designers: Tyler McKenzie, Andrew Pratt, Lee Sheldon, Beth Agnew and Rob McMurtry.)

By clicking on each of the various characters, they introduce themselves or say a brief line or two.

A-1. CLICK ON SHELLEY. She waves at us.

SHELLEY (AS HERSELF)
Hi, there! I'm Shelley.

A-2. CLICK ON SHELLEY AGAIN.

SHELLEY (AS HERSELF)
(holding up some flowers
she's just picked)
Don't you just love these colors?

A-3. CLICK ON SHELLEY AGAIN.

SHELLEY (AS HERSELF)
(looking around for
something)
Now where did I put my clippers?

B-1. CLICK ON DAN. He leans out the window and greets us.

DAN
How ya doin'? My name is Dan.

B-2. CLICK ON DAN AGAIN. He plays some bars of a piece of music he's working on.

C. CLICK ON BIRDS IN AVIARY. They hop up and down and flap their wings a little in their way of a greeting.

BIRDS
(chorus of voices,
different accents)
Ciao! Hi! Bon jour! Tudo bem?
Hola! Buenos dias! Hello there!

D-1. CLICK ON DIGBY. He's near a jasmine bush.

DIGBY
Isn't this garden pretty? This
is a jasmine bush.
(he sniffs it)
Mmm. It smells wonderful.

D-2. CLICK ON DIGBY AGAIN. He playfully romps around the garden BARKING, ready for a good time. A leaf falls from a tree and he catches it in his mouth.

(Courtesy of Carolyn Miller, Shelley Duvall and Sanctuary Woods. Game designers: Tyler McKenzie, Andrew Pratt, Lee Sheldon, Beth Agnew and Rob McMurtry.)

E. CLICK ON LADY BUG. She flies around and lands on Digby's nose. He sneezes and the power of his sneeze whooshes her away.

DIGBY

Oh, excuse me!

F. CLICK ON A NEST FILLED WITH BABY BIRDS. The open their mouths and cry out.

BABY BIRDS

Hungry! Hungry! Hungry!

The MOTHER BIRD flies over to them carrying a juicy worm. The baby birds bounce up and down happily.

BABY BIRDS

Food! Food! Food!

POSSIBLE GAME:

THE FETCH GAME. Shelley plays "fetch" with Digby. In order to get the ball and bring it back, the little dog has to negotiate over, under and through all kinds of obstacles.

SCREEN 606. SHELLEY AND DAN'S GARDEN -- ANOTHER ANGLE

VISUALS:

Digby is lying under a tree, resting. He looks a little sad. Except for a BLUE JAY in a tree, he's alone now; Shelley has gone inside. Through the window behind him, we can see Dan in his music studio.

DIALOGUE:

SHELLEY AS NARRATOR

But even though Digby loves
living with Shelley and Dan,
something is bothering him, and
once in a while it makes him sad.

(Courtesy of Carolyn Miller, Shelley Duvall and Sanctuary Woods. Game designers:
Tyler McKenzie, Andrew Pratt, Lee Sheldon, Beth Agnew and Rob McMurtry.)

DIGBY
(with a tinge of
unhappiness)
Oh, I know I shouldn't complain.
It's like paradise here! And
really, I'd be totally happy,
except for one thing... I'm
just too small! It's so
embarrassing sometimes... and
sometimes it's even... dangerous!

INTERACTIVITIES:

By clicking on various images on the screen (the swimming pool; Dan through the window of his music studio; the blue jay; the aviary) we see his "thought bubbles" of the indignities he must suffer because he's so small.

A. CLICK ON SWIMMING POOL. Shelley is scooping him out of the water with a pole and net.

SHELLEY (AS HERSELF)
(concerned, sympathetic)
Oh, Digby, you've got to be more
careful! A little guy like you
could fall in the pool and nobody
might even notice!

B. CLICK ON DAN. He's wearing headphones as he walks across his studio. Digby, underfoot, BARKS to warn him (in a little voice) but Dan doesn't hear and nearly steps on him.

DAN
Oops, watch out, little fella! I
didn't see you way down there!

C. CLICK ON BLUE JAY. He dive bombs Digby. Digby tries to run away.

DIGBY
I'm so small even blue jays pick
on me!

Two parrots comment from the aviary.

BIG GREEN PARROT
Look at that tiny dust mop run!

ANOTHER PARROT
Oh, hush. He can't help it if
he's little.

(Courtesy of Carolyn Miller, Shelley Duvall and Sanctuary Woods. Game designers: Tyler McKenzie, Andrew Pratt, Lee Sheldon, Beth Agnew and Rob McMurtry.)

D-1. CLICK ON LADY BUG.

LADYBUG

Digby is right. This garden is like paradise. But the poor little guy. I'm about the only one here that's even smaller than he is.

POSSIBLE GAME:

KEYBOARD GAME in Dan's studio when we click on Dan's keyboard.

SCREEN 607. SHELLEY AND DAN'S GARDEN -- ANOTHER ANGLE

VISUALS:

Digby is chasing a BUTTERFLY around the garden. Outside the fence, we can see the arrival of the GARDENERS. Along another portion of the fence is a slight hollow, just large enough for Digby to squeeze through. We can see the back door of Shelley and Dan's house, and the doggie door that leads into their kitchen.

DIALOGUE:

SHELLEY AS NARRATOR

One day, Digby is chasing a butterfly around the garden. It's one of his favorite games... not that he'd ever hurt one, of course. Suddenly he hears the gardeners' truck pull up.

(SOUND EFFECTS: THE TRUCK PULS UP; THE GARDENERS' SLAM THE TRUCK DOORS AS THEY GET OUT; THEY START THEIR MACHINES UP).

DIGBY

Oh, no! It's the gardeners! With their big scary machines that could mow me down! What do I do now? Should I hurry up and try to finish my game?..... Or should I make a dash for the house and my doggie door.... or would I be better off squeezing under that little hole in the fence?

(Courtesy of Carolyn Miller, Shelley Duvall and Sanctuary Woods. Game designers: Tyler McKenzie, Andrew Pratt, Lee Sheldon, Beth Agnew and Rob McMurtry.)

INTERACTIVITIES:

There are three choices:

a. If we click on the butterfly, we see Digby chase her around the garden and right out the gate left open by the gardeners. NOTE: THE SKUNKLY STORY GROWS OUT OF THIS CHOICE.

b. If we click on the hole in the fence, we see Digby dart around the gardeners and finally burrow through the hole in the fence. (NOTE: possible frogger game here).

c. If we click on the doggie door, we see Digby dart around the gardeners and make it safely into the house. (NOTE: possible frogger game here).

POSSIBLE GAMES:

Option "a" offers an opportunity for the BUTTERFLY MAZE GAME. Both options "b" and "c" offer an opportunity for the "FROGGER GAME." In this game, Digby tries to duck and dodge the gardeners on his way to safety. We see the gardeners as Digby visualizes them in his fertile imagination. Each looks huge and wields a noisy, frightening garden machine (lawn mower, power hedge clippers, leaf blower). The machines look like terrifying creations from a monster movie. (NOTE: the frogger game could be used in both "b" and "c," but if used in both, each game should have its own unique character.)

SCREEN 101: HILLTOP

VISUALS:

Digby is at the top of a hill looking around. He is far from civilization as he knows it -- it is wild here, no houses at all. The butterfly sits relaxing on the branch of a tree, gently fluttering her wings, tantalizingly out of reach. There are trees, branches, and clumps of tall grasses (typical Southern California vegetation) growing at intervals around the hillside, and in the distance there is a shady creek.

DIALOGUE:

SHELLEY AS NARRATOR

Digby runs full tilt after the butterfly. The chase finally ends at the top of the hill.

(Courtesy of Carolyn Miller, Shelley Duvall and Sanctuary Woods. Game designers: Tyler McKenzie, Andrew Pratt, Lee Sheldon, Beth Agnew and Rob McMurtry.)

DIGBY
Wait! Where am I? I've never
been here before.
(growing fearful)
Oh, no, I think I'm lost!
(on the verge of panic)
And, and, and who knows what
could be behind all those trees
and bushes!

INTERACTIVITIES:

As we click on each possible hiding place, the "horror"
emerges and reveals itself, with appropriate commentary from
Digby.

A. CLICK ON TALL GRASSES. A huge ROARING African LION
emerges.

DIGBY
What if there's a lion who
escaped from the zoo?

B. CLICK ON TREE. A mean looking DOG CATCHER runs out with a
net.

DIGBY
A dog catcher could be just
waiting to catch me!

C. CLICK ON CLUMP OF LEAFY TREES. Two overweight PEOPLE ON
HORSEBACK gallop out.

DIGBY
I could be trampled by some
weekend cowboys!

D. CLICK ON BUSHES. A huge ROBOT-LIKE DOG runs out, GROWLING
FIERCELY. (Other possibilities: a Godzilla clone, a King Kong
clone, a creature from the Black Lagoon clone, a dragon, a
Transformer clone).

DIGBY
What if a monster got loose from
a Hollywood movie set?

E. CLICK ON ANOTHER CLUMP OF GRASSES AT THE CREST OF A HILL.
A helmeted BIKER on a MOTORCYCLE races down the hill.

DIGBY
A biker could be going too fast
to see me!

(Courtesy of Carolyn Miller, Shelley Duvall and Sanctuary Woods. Game designers:
Tyler McKenzie, Andrew Pratt, Lee Sheldon, Beth Agnew and Rob McMurtry.)

Did you notice that *Digby's Adventures* was set up to allow the end-user to “pause” along the story path to allow for exploration of the “world-within-a-world?” The end-user is allowed to click on various objects which reveal character traits, important clues, and sometimes, just plain entertains.

Exploratory cul-de-sacs can be used in many different types of interactive programs and can be utilized in conjunction with other story path structures.

ARENA

Cul-de-sacs also provide a way for the writer to create scenes within scenes. Or, if the writer so chooses, to write alternative scenes which are able to co-exist along side, or spin out from and return to the primary story—the story spine.

Remember the Roman sport which pitted gladiators against man and beast—to fight to the death? The arena of action took place in the Coliseum. The action varied throughout the day as different combinations of fighters or performers battled it out. But the end result was always the same—one fighter was victorious, the other died. The “Story” had two simple truths; one fighter had to live and one fighter had to die. How they fought, what weapons they used, what they said while fighting, and the exact method of death changed from one “performance” to the next. But the story “truths” did not. For truth to prevail, the story spine must remain unchanged.

There are two things that have to happen for a worthwhile story (interactive narrative) to come from utilizing arenas. First, as with any successful feature film, you must have a tight and compelling linear narrative—the spine has to work. The second thing that has to work are the cul-de-sacs themselves, the sub-paths by which you invite the user to influence the experience.

It's easier to show how an arena works than to describe an arena's operation in the abstract so we will attempt to demonstrate an arena by examining a scene from *Subterfuge*. Let's set you up with the information you will need to understand this sequence without having read the entire screenplay.

STORY SUMMARY - SUBTERFUGE

Jake Stryker had a great career when he was sober. When he was jockeying deep space rigs over Saturn's rings instead of hauling shit through a shuttle bay. He was a top gun space pilot and special investigator. Now he works as a shipping supervisor on space station Lunar IV.

His current lover, Sandy Aimes, is found brutally murdered. The authorities claim the motive was simple. Sandy was stealing blueprints from her employer, a high tech consortium. She supposedly nabbed the secret plans for Terra Sol Corporation's new fusion reactor plant— an un-tested discovery that promises waste-free energy to the people of Earth and its surrounding colonies.

But Jake doesn't think Sandy was stealing anything. He knew her too well. Sandy was no thief. Jake convinces Terra Sol chairman, Trevalle, to hire him as its investigator. But Earth Central Intelligence investigator, Natalie Waterston, isn't too happy to find that there's another investigator on the case. Especially an obnoxious, untrained man. Waterston refuses to provide Jake access to the government's findings.

So, with the help of a android named Rolo Dex and a crooked Earth businessman, Jake begins to piece together the elaborate puzzle— to restore his lover's reputation and resurrect his own.

Jake plans an elaborate sting operation in the cold reaches of space. To trap his employer, Trevalle, who has been selling off his company's secrets before the world discovers that the fusion reactor he's touted as "the energy source of the next century" doesn't work.

Let's take a look at some sample pages from Darryl Wimberley's feature film screenplay, *Subterfuge*. At the conclusion of this sequence, a Guard and his Partner receive a signal from a distress beeper. Turns out we've already met the brutally murdered victim whom the guards have discovered; Sandy Aimes. She was the lover of Jake Stryker, the story's protagonist. Jake begins the story as a hotshot, rocket-jock. A few years after splitting up with Sandy, we find Jake has become an alcoholic, working the loading docks on a space station above the earth.

The sequence which follows leads up to Sandy's death.

Subterfuge - Arena Sample One, Pg. 1

INT RESEARCH FACILITY NIGHT

A sphere glows white hot in its plasma cage. Sandy Aimes pads across a catwalk which spans the entire interior. A lot has apparently changed. "SECURITY TERRA-SOL," Sandy's uniform declares. And Jake's nowhere in sight. Sandy unlimbers a flashlight from her belt. And takes a private elevator to-

INT EXECUTIVE VAULT NIGHT

An executive suite tastefully decorated with antique furniture featuring a chromeplated vault on the far wall. A computer screen replaces lock and key. A coded card gives Aimes access to the keyboard; she TAPS a digital code onto the computer's screen.

EXT RESEARCH FACILITY NIGHT

A teardropped TOYOTA MOTORS up to the steel fence; "TERRA-SOL", the van's one-way windshield mirrors the sign. The passengers remain, unseen, behind. A uniformed GUARD waves them through without inspection.

The van spills a pair of THUGS into the shadows. Railguns and lasers rest casually in holsters that, in an earlier age, might have restrained rifles and handguns. A third man climbs out; "THE BUTCHER" squeezes ape-sized shoulders and legs from the van's interior. A chain secures his leather vest. A scar creases his face from jaw to ear.

BUTCHER

How much time?

THUG

Fifteen minutes to find her.

Ten or so more till shift change at the gate.

The Butcher unsheaths a knife. No laser or railgun here.

BUTCHER

Let's go.

INT EXECUTIVE SUITE/VAULT NIGHT

Sandy Aimes adjusts a camera already snugged onto a microfilm viewer, projects the film onto the vault's wall. They're blueprints. Hundreds of 'em. The camera catches the prints one by one. SNICK-SNICK. SNICK-SNICK. Almost done. Sandy doesn't see the shadow at her feet. But she feels the barrel at her back! Sandy whirls, kicks- A boot catches one of the

Subterfuge - Arena Sample One, Pg. 2

Butcher's THUGS full in the groin! Aimes goes for her own gun- But The Butcher's too quick. Sandy's railgun goes spinning across the floor. And then The Butcher collects her camera.

BUTCHER
Dirty pictures, Sandy?

SANDY
See for yourself.

BUTCHER
I don't think so.

A single fist CRUSHES THE CAMERA to junk.

BUTCHER
I'm gonna have some fun with you, Sandy. But first I got a question.

The ape leans into Sandy's face.

BUTCHER
Who you workin for?

INT METRO LAS VEGAS NIGHT

Corroded grates and cable tangle with the leavings of a Twenty-Second Century sewer. Electric CIRCUITS SPIT like snakes. Sparks drift like fireflies in the gloom. A Senior Security GUARD (DANNY) and his PARTNER edge along behind handheld lamps. Scarred helmets wink rank and service above uniforms hung with flak vests and other, well-used, hardware. A steady DRIP-DRIP OF WATER and waste keeps time with the CLICK-CLICK OF A GEIGER COUNTER.

GUARD
Couple of leaks.

PARTNER
Hot?

GUARD
A little.

PARTNER
Let's make this quick.

The senior man SILENCES his GEIGER COUNTER, pulls a direction-finder from a zippered cache. BEEP.... BEEP.... No

Subterfuge - Arena Sample One, Pg. 3

promise there. He turns to face a steel- paneled tunnel of sagging cable. BEEP-BEEP.

GUARD
Down there.

PARTNER
Hell of a place for a beeper.

GUARD
Like you said. Let's make this quick.

The uniformed men SLUDGE TOWARD the signal. BEEP-BEEP.

PARTNER
See anything?

GUARD
No.

PARTNER
I don't like it.

No reply.

PARTNER
Let's get out of here.

GUARD
What about the beeper?

PARTNER
Screw the beeper.

But the finder insists: BEEP-BEEP..BEEP-BEEP..

GUARD
We're right on top of it.

PARTNER
I don't see anything.

The Partner takes another step- INTO A PITCH-BLACK HOLE!!

PARTNER
DANNY!

A sure hand snatches him upright.

Subterfuge - Arena Sample One, Pg. 4

GUARD

Easy. You're okay.

The Guards find themselves in a steel cavern. The lamps display a spider's web of corroded cable. And then—

PARTNER

My God.

A nightmare. Twenty yards away a woman arches half-stripped and half-impaled over a steel pike. It's Sandy Aimes. Tortured legs, back and neck tremble with the effort to maintain a bridge above the spear which already teases her spine. Hands and feet bleed through wire garrots which spreadeagle Sandy above certain death. A DISTRESS BEEPER WHIMPERS alongside.

SANDY

C...! Ca...!

GUARD

METRO SECURITY! HANG ON!

(to Partner)

MOVE!

The Guards stagger toward the pinioned woman.

SANDY

Can't.... Hold it!

GUARD

HELL YOU CAN'T! WE'RE RIGHT HERE!

SHORTED CABLES bar the way. Deadly as cobras. The Guards bat them aside. BEE-BEEP! BEE-BEEP!

SANDY

K... K... Kay!

PARTNER

HANG ON LADY!

SANDY

Nine!

GUARD

HANG ON!!

SANDY

Oh, God, JAKE!!

5.

And that's it. Legs, neck and back collapse. SHE PLUNGES TO THE PIKE which waits below. The shaft blooms through Sandy's chest like a rose. BEE BEEP! BEE BEEP! BEE BEEP!!!

The story follows an exterior line of development— Who killed Sandy Aimes? The interior line of development finds a lost man who must re-discover his purpose and meaning in life while struggling to clear the reputation of his dead lover. The cops, you eventually learn, inform Jake that Sandy was killed because she was stealing technology from her employer and double-crossed her thieving partners. Jake doesn't buy that version of Sandy's death so he drops down from orbit to Earth to uncover the truth.

This is a straightforward genre. The environment is not what will account for the story's appeal, nor all the sci-fi special effects that are built into the story. What appeals about this story is the way that the exterior events function in relation to Jake's interior story. So... How can we make such a story interactive?

The easiest thing to do might be to start from scratch. Keep the characters and basic story line, but create a whole new world— a whole new structure for an original interactive experience. Interactive writer/designer, Howard Burkons, put it this way:

"However noble the notion of starting from scratch may sound, the reality is, writers are always looking for shortcuts. That's not to say it's bad, it's just a different way of working. Some ideas can be "repurposed" for interactive. Some writers have drawers filled with unfinished concepts, unpublished novels, sketches, half-finished feature screenplays— all of which, in theory, can be used as a foundation for an interactive project."

Let's assume that we wanted to take a feature film screenplay, such as *Subterfuge*, and make it interactive. One way to keep the linear narra-

tive in tact might be to create an arena, a cul-de-sac which spins off of the story spine to provide the end-user with different experiences within that environment, without betraying the story.

When the guards finally discover Sandy's body in the screenplay, only three things have to be true. She must utter the words or sounds—"K... K... Kay" and "Nine" before she dies. The Butcher must be associated with her death. And, she must die. We, the audience cannot be certain about whether Sandy is a thief or not. Functionally speaking, these are the only narrative requirements which Sandy fulfills in this particular sequence. An arena story path simply provides the writer alternate ways to depict Sandy's death, to pique the audience's interest, and provide the clue "Kay-Nine," our rosebud for the story.

The spine provides the initial and end conditions of this sequence which cannot change. It provides a tone, though, which can change. Sandy's death, a constant which must occur along the story spine, is cruel and horrible and graphic. We can change that tone, and even concrete actions associated within the sequence, so long as we don't change the narratively essential information which the spine presents.

What is presented in the linear narrative version? Well, we know that Sandy has taken something. We meet The Butcher and his goons. We hear the Butcher's dialogue with Sandy and we infer, rightly so, that The Butcher is responsible for Sandy's horrible death. That's the way the spine plays out during this portion of the linear narrative. But the spine only provides one way to "experience" this story. We can imagine any number of ways, for instance, to dramatize Sandy acquiring the photographed blueprints which she's later accused of stealing. There are any number of ways for The Butcher to find Sandy and kill her. In the story sequence that follows, we will examine how an arena provides choices to the user without cheating the user. Let's look at a few different Arena summaries which might be possible for *Subterfuge* interactive:

ARENA SUMMARY #1

Sandy breaks into the Terra Sol vault, snaps some photos, and gets to her apartment to review the prints. The Butcher breaks into her apartment. The dialogue between The Butcher and Sandy remains basically the same. A building Supe raps at Sandy's door, demanding rent. After hearing a moan

from inside, he kicks open the door. There is Sandy, lying in a pool of blood, near death. The building Supe, in this case, hears Sandy's dying words, "K...Kay....Nine."

ARENA SUMMARY #2

Sandy isn't seen stealing the prints at all. Instead she's in a secret meeting with an unknown and unseen Contact. We don't know if the person Sandy's meeting is a thief, a broker or the FBI. Sandy describes how she was able to get into the plant and how she was able to smuggle the prints out. Nothing else. Remember, the Arena cannot violate any dimension of the linear story which it must re-connect to. The Butcher appears on a balcony wielding a rifle. A shot rings out. Sandy slumps to the floor with a bullet wound to her neck. Her last words as a police officer rushes to the scene, "K...Kay...Nine."

Can you see how this works? You have lots of latitude in your arenas. Lots more can happen. In Arena #1, the end-user could explore certain aspects of Sandy's apartment— click on the television and play a futuristic version of Jeopardy. Click on a photo album and see holographic "pictures" rise up from the page. Lots of fun things can happen as long as nothing violates the logic already established in your spine.

Arenas may consist of single or multiples "scenes," command-directed to fit the viewer's specific choice or randomized so that even if a viewer made exactly the same decisions on multiple viewings, the story would vary at random. The scenes written for arenas represent alternate versions of a scene already present in the script's spine. Unlike the exploratory cul-de-sacs, which are quick, one or two sentence descriptions that can be laid out linearly in a screenplay, arenas can be several pages in length and typically appear in an attached, cross referenced Appendix to the screenplay. Arena pages are referenced with transitions to cue the reader when a scene has alternate versions.

Let's see how this might work for an interactive movie like *Jack and Jill: The Interactive Movie*. The arenas are labeled— Alternative 1A and Alternate 1B which simply means that this is an end-user option, an alternate to the original sequence, which is to begin at slugline number 1 and is the first option (A) or second option (B) in as many options as you'd choose for this sequence.

JILL (V.O.)
Be careful, Jack. The grass on this ridge
is getting mighty slippery.

ALTERNATIVE 1A:

THE PLAYER (as Jack) SLIPS ON A PATCH OF WET GRASS.

(00470CAT) Jack tumbles to bottom of hill, breaking his crown.

(00480XTC) *JACKS POV.* Jill strides toward CAM, livid.

JILL
You idiot! I warned you about the grass...

{END ALT.}

== GAME ENDS ==

ALTERNATIVE 1B:

PLAYER SUCCESSFULLY MANEUVERS JACK AROUND ALL OBSTACLES.

(00490CAT) *JACKS POV.* Jill is turned away, looking out over the valley.

(00500XTC) Jack pushes Jill off the incline. The young girl tumbles off the 2,000 ft. embankment.

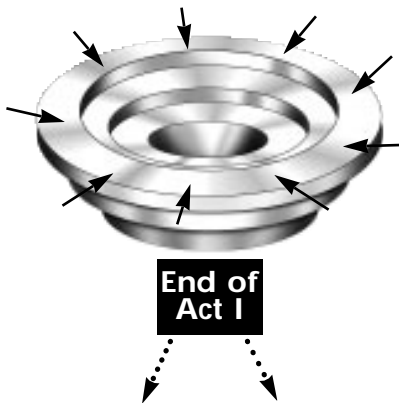
JACK (V.O.)
Who's King of the Hill now, sweetheart?

FREE WORLDS

While the structure for most story paths focus on the flow of interaction, the story path for a free world relies on a matrix or map of interconnected scenes/worlds. By creating a map, the writer merely defines the physical space of the world. A matrix must then be created to show which worlds can connect to each other. To create a free world story, a writer must actually create self-contained short-stories or “novellas.” Each self-contained world is connected by a thread—a theme, goal, mission...whatever.

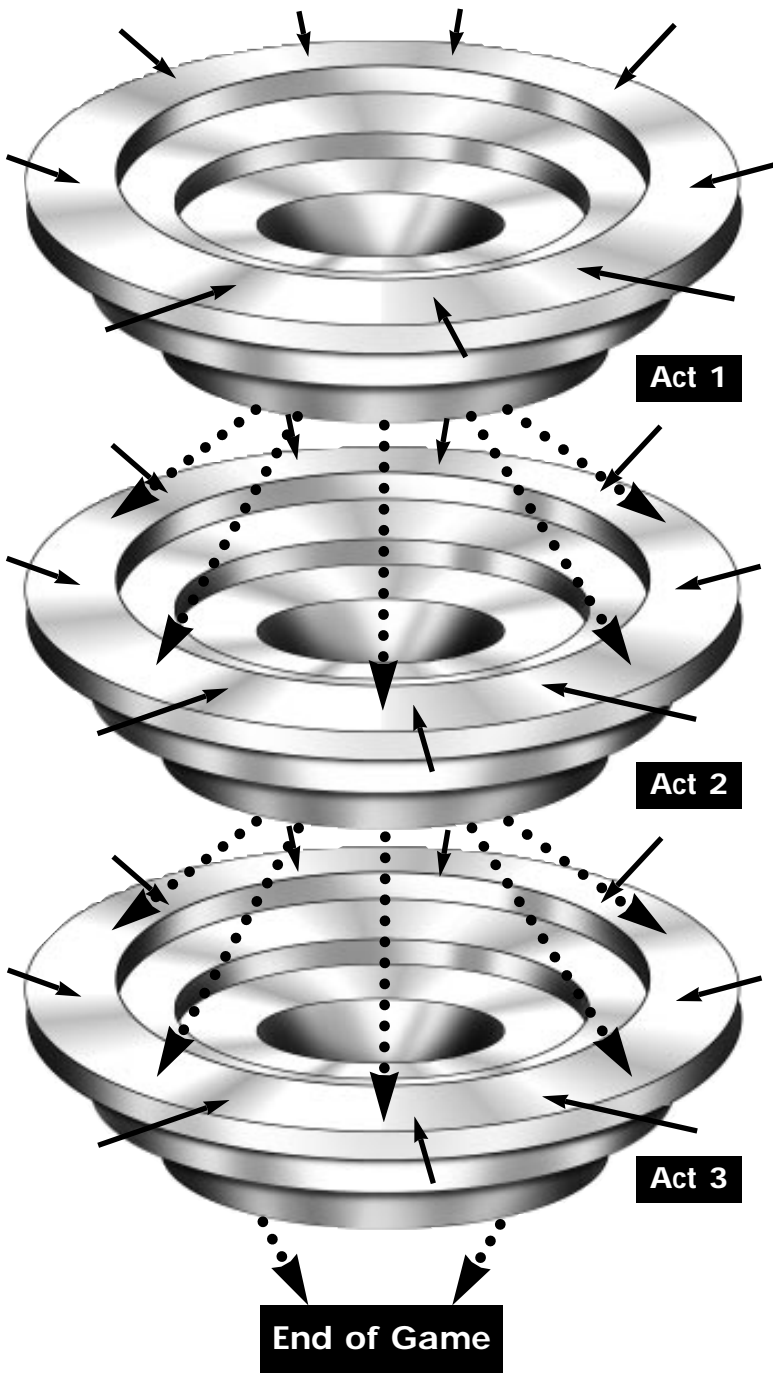
In a free world experience, touring or exploring the surroundings is often much more important than actually achieving a set objective. This poses a unique set of problems for the writer. The important thing for a writer to flush out is the overall objective of the program. If you are developing a free world tour such as *Myst*, where exploration is the main objective, traditional story structure (aka Three-Act structure) is of little significance. However, if you are developing a free world movie with a Three-act linear narrative, creating a diagram of the written project can get very complicated.

To conceptualize a free world drama such as *Johnny Mnemonic*, one might think of a downwardly spiraling sphere. Each sphere contains multiple levels, each with its own set of circumstances to solve in order to advance the plot or flow of the story. And each sphere represents a separate act of the story. (See diagram below).



Enter game at any point on upper nine-point ring. Solve three of the nine "items" and move down one ring to the middle ring. There are nine new "items" to solve on this ring. Solve three of those nine and move down to the lower inner ring. This ring also has nine "items" to solve. Solve three of those "items" and you complete Act I of the story. Act II begins just like Act I. You begin Act II at any point on the upper nine-point ring.

As Douglas Gayeton explains it, "As you enter a new experience, you have to piece together all the given objects, the clues and all of the information which is embedded in that story. It is your mission to reconstruct a plot which is a reasonable facsimile of the higher, arcing story that you've entered. I've made diagrams that resemble a sphere. The outside of the sphere has twenty, let's say it has twenty-seven points. The sphere mirrors life—we are simultaneously problem-solving a dozen things at the same time...."



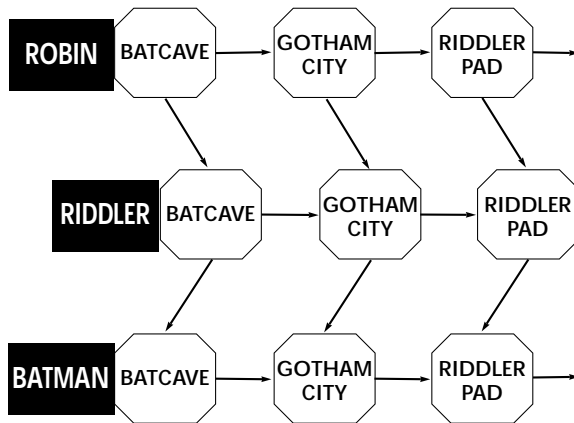
Gayeton continues, “In an interactive experience, let’s say you’re simultaneously problem-solving nine things. And let’s say you need to figure out three things to solve each of those nine things. That means that when you first come into the experience, you’re not on a path, you’re on the outside of a sphere. A sphere with twenty-seven points that you’re exposed to. If you solve three of three of the correct points, it moves you into the circle one notch because you have just solved one of the nine things. Of those nine things, there’s three things you have to figure for every nine— that comes to twenty-seven. Once you figure out three of those inner things, or three of the inner nine, you’ve just solved the first act of the story.”

PARALLEL STREAMING

Parallel Streaming describes many “states” or paths that exist simultaneously at various levels. Occasionally referred to as Harmonic Paths, Parallel Streaming is perhaps the easiest structure for writers to comprehend since it allows the writer to create a single linear narrative using multiple story paths which co-exist with the linear story. The story spine basically stays the same, however, the end-user may switch between perspectives, paths, or states at any time.

The concept of parallel streaming or harmonic paths is comparable to the well-known theater performance, *Tamara*. *Tamara* is basically a stage play set in a house, rather than on a traditional stage. Unlike a traditional performance where each audience member experiences the play from a single point of view— from their seat, *Tamara* allows each audience member to choose a character to follow around the house, wherever the action may take them. This unique perspective allows an audience member to experience a unique vantage point of the unfolding story. The audience member’s point-of-view is the story experienced through the eyes of a characters. The play, in essence, cannot be fully experienced without audience member viewing the play several times, each performance from a different character’s point of view. Viewing each perspective allows the audience member to piece together a complete story.

For example, let’s say you wanted to create an interactive episode of *Batman*. To simplify our diagram, let’s say the entire episode takes place in only three locations rather than sixty or seventy (*See diagram, pg 155*).



Notice that the bottom sequence of scenes follows Batman's unique point-of-view through the story. From the Batcave to Gotham City to The Riddler's Pad. The middle sequence of scenes follows The Riddler's point-of-view through the same story. The top sequence of scenes follows Robin's point-of-view through the same sequences in the story. The end-user may jump from sequence to sequence or character perspective to character perspective at will, experiencing the story in ways that are impossible in traditional linear narratives such as feature films.

There are many variations of parallel streaming structure that can be implemented into an interactive narrative. Variations limited only by a writer's imagination.

SIMULATIONS

Another type of story structure, known as a Simulation, doesn't really incorporate elements of pathing at all. Depending on how you look at a Simulation, it either encompasses every path imaginable or no path at all. Sound confusing?

Simulations include games such as *Microsoft Flight Simulator* and *SimLife*. *Flight Simulator* is an action game which simulates what it's like to pilot an aircraft. *SimLife* allows the user to play God by giving

them the power to build creatures by altering genetic traits, appearance, even sexual appetite, then unleashing them into the world to witness how the creatures evolve.

Simulations are the only story path structures that cannot coincide with a linear narrative structure. The flow or paths of a simulation title cannot be pre-planned. It would be impossible for the writer to pre-conceive every possible move a pilot might make in a flight simulator, or predict all the possible ways in which an armchair Darwin might try to populate the world.

In simulations, writers must first define all the major interactive elements in the program, then, assign specific characteristics (attributes & conduct) to those elements. The screenplay for a title utilizing a simulation “path” might resemble a rule book. A programmer could then take that rule book and incorporate each element’s characteristic or attribute into a workable program. Programs constructed in great detail, such as the simulations produced by Maxis— *Civilization* and *SimCity*— allow the user to interact on a realistic level with the species and environment of that simulation.



Q & A

DOUGLAS GAYETON

Bio

Douglas Gayeton recently wrapped production on *JOHNNY MNEMONIC*, an interactive feature he directed, co-wrote and co-designed for Propaganda Code and Sony Imagesoft. Gayeton also wrote and designed *WAKING HOURS*, a reality-based interactive series chronicling 24 hours in the interconnected lives of 24 people for Viacom's Castro Valley interactive television test site.

Gayeton co-wrote and directed *THE LA PROJECT*, a series of commercial spots featuring spoken word poets. The project was designed to change people's perceptions of the City of Los Angeles. Additionally, Gayeton wrote and directed the kick-off spot for Andrew Shue's *Do Something* campaign, a non-profit organization conceived to empower disadvantaged youth. He directed *TOMORROW*, a short film which explored the future of interactive television. Among those profiled for the film were Bill Gates, John Sculley, John Malone, Frank Biondi, Summer Redstone and Barry Diller. Gayeton has also worked for such firms as Iwerks, CBS/Sony, Capitol Records, MCA, Warner Bros., Virgin, A & M, and BMG.

Currently, Gayeton is writing and designing, *BIG BROTHER*, the interactive sequel to George Orwell's 1984, for Newspeak Media, Inc.

Interview

HOW DID YOU GET STARTED IN INTERACTIVE? Two years ago I was asked to direct a short on the future of television. It allowed me to see everything that people (interactive television conglomerates) were doing. It really depressed me because everything looked like...everything looked like *Microsoft Windows*. Basically, that format was going to be extended to television. When I saw that happening I immediately resolved to get on an interactive television test.

I put together a project for Viacom-- for their Castro Valley cable test-- called "Waking Hours". Twenty-four hours in the interconnected everyday lives of twenty four people in Castro Valley. The viewer was going to be able to move from one person's story to another, in real time, cutting on the fly without a buffer shot or any interface, and basically construct a story as they were going.

WHAT LED TO THIS APPROACH? The difference between an interactive and a linear story is that you can penetrate the interactive experience. "Waking Hours" was a way to get inside the lives of all these people and see what made them the same and what made them different. I was also intrigued by the personalization possible with interactivity. You make every connection, every edit, so the story you've created is yours. Interactivity empowers the individual. Another thing is that in a linear experience, the story washes over you, while the interactive story becomes tactile. You can actually touch an object within that world and basically have more of a direct, personalized experience. Anyway, that was the purpose of this "documentary." When that didn't happen, I immediately moved on to doing *Johnny Mnemonic* with Propaganda Code for Sony Imagesoft.

TELL ME ABOUT THE CREATIVE TEAM ASSEMBLED FOR JOHNNY MNEMONIC. There was a very bright guy who had done some computer games, John Platten, who wrote it with me. There was a programmer who had come from the medical world who had never worked on a game before although he was a member of the original Quicktime development team. His name was Peter Marx. It's interesting to note that in the medical world, they're used to dealing with very high-resolution video images. In terms of the most cutting edge work that's being done in video for computers thusfar, it hasn't been in the gaming world. There's no money in it. The best work is being created for the medical community.

WAS SONY CONCERNED ABOUT HOW THE AVERAGE CONSUMER WOULD FIGURE OUT HOW TO NAVIGATE THROUGH THE TITLE? Well, you don't need an instruction manual. It's so basic.

ARE THEY INCLUDING ONE, ANYWAY? I'm sure they will.

[LAUGHS] What's interesting is that I was showing *Johnny Mnemonic* on a Powerbook to Alexander Beshar, who wrote Rim. It was on his coffee table. At one point, we were talking and I looked down on the coffee table and my

Powerbook was gone. I looked in the kitchen and the Powerbook was sitting on the counter. His ten year-old son had taken the Powerbook in there, opened up *Johnny Mnemonic* from the hard drive, and was playing the movie, on his own, without me telling him anything. And he was announcing his progress every five minutes. So, I think if I had any doubts about someone's ability to figure out how to play this thing, they were totally put to rest.

I ASSUME THE ONLY REAL THING THE END-USER NEEDS TO KNOW IS WHICH KEYBOARD BUTTONS TO PUSH. Well, they're user-definable, so the user can designate what works for them. "R" is right. "L" is left. "M" is move. "U" is use. But the user can make them anything they want. The important thing is you (the end-user) forget about the screen interface.

REALLY? My feeling is that if you have an interface on the screen, you spend more time interfacing than participating in the story.

DO YOU FEEL THERE WILL EVER BE A STANDARD WRITER'S FORMAT FOR INTERACTIVE MOVIES? Oh, sure.

WHAT MAKES YOU THINK SO? Because the way interactivity has been approached is very inefficient. I mean, every story needs to be told a different way, that's true. But you don't need to have a new format or a different software engine for every story. Some simple, compelling modes of telling stories which work better than others will emerge. For example, Capcom recently went into production on a new FMV title called *Fox Hunt*. I'm told they used the same sets from my *Johnny Mnemonic* project, the same software team, the same software engine--which I'm actually a co-owner of--and even the same format from our script, right down to the way each shot is coded. Hearing about this whole series of events flattered me, especially since *Mnemonic* hadn't even hit the market yet, but more importantly, it proves my point. Standardized ways for telling stories are going to emerge, and the best models will be the most copied, like *Doom* or whatever. Every major publisher right now is trying to build and own software engines, which, in a sense, are like brand names. It's how they define their philosophy of interactivity.

YOU CAN HIT OR MISS WITH A GAME TITLE, BUT TOOLS ARE LESS OF A RISK. ESPECIALLY IF YOU ESTABLISH YOUR TOOL AS THE TOOL THAT PEOPLE USE. LIKE MACROMEDIA DIRECTOR. I was speaking on a panel last week, and I basically said just that. There's going

to come a point when there's standardization and writer/designers are able to work from the same tool. Somebody (on the panel) said, in a very snide way, that it was going to lead to very boring stories. Titles would become very generic if they were all based on the same tool. And my response was, "So what you're saying is that if I go down to Kodak and buy the same roll of 35mm film, and I use the same lab, and I have the same negative cutter, my film is going to be exactly like the next person's." I mean, come on. There's a reason why 35mm films can run on any projector in the world that's built for 35mm. It's called economies of scale. You're not going to dedicate thirty percent of your budget to programming every time you create an interactive project. That's insane.

I AGREE. Let me give you an example. I recently got together with a new software engineering team to develop my next software tool. It's called D². It does a lot of cool things, one of which is that it allows you to edit your film or video footage on an Avid, or any non-linear editing system, and essentially program your show as you go. Every edit that you create is saved for you in a code similar to its own programming language. This allows you to test out your interactive elements while still in the Avid. You can even wire the entire show in the Avid, so that when you're done cutting your show and you output it, you're essentially outputting the source code for the programming of the entire show. All that's left is some basic housekeeping code for how to get in and out of the experience-- how to create certain customized features which pertain to your project-- but the majority of work is done. You're ready to go into Alpha Testing.

WOW. It's similar to the way electronic editing liberated film people in post-production. The size of the post-production crew went from fifteen to four.

YOU SEEM TO HAVE PUT A LOT OF THOUGHT INTO THE DESIGN SCHEME OF AN INTERACTIVE TITLE. There is a reason why ninety-five percent of the interactive titles out there suck. They suck because they have nothing to do with what an emotionally engaging story is. Nothing. Five years from now somebody will say, You mean they used to do interactivity without three-act structure? Three-act structure is not some kind of recent Hollywood conceit. This is something that was refined in the body of dramatic literature over the past three thousand years. Three-act structure is a way to dramatically create an emotionally resonating experience. The fact that most interactive stories lack a three-act structure points to the fact that they're not made by storytellers. They're made by technologists. But just because they're the only ones not intimidated by technology, it doesn't mean they should dictate how a medium works.

ARE THERE ANY INTERACTIVE TITLES ON THE MARKET THAT YOU THINK ARE HALFWAY ENGAGING? *NBA Jam*. It's a game with a classic three-act structure. They always let you lead in the first quarter-- you make every dunk you want. In the second quarter, they introduce the element of doubt, and by the fourth quarter, you cannot get inside. Any lead you built up in the third quarter is lost. You're just trying to make it to the end of the game.

[LAUGHS] **That's great.** In the future people will study *NBA Jam* because of how brilliant it's put together. I can't wait to get the new tournament edition.

DO CERTAIN TYPES OF STORIES LEND THEMSELVES WELL TO INTERACTIVE TITLES.? I once heard somebody in Hollywood say that it's really about action. Action works best. They were very surprised when I said that I could take any story and make it interactive. I was once in a meeting with this guy from a studio. He had seen *Johnny Mnemonic* and said, "It's just like a film."

And I said, "Yeah."

And he said, "That's great. You know, it's too bad you can't make an interactive of any film."

And I said, "Of course you can."

He said, "Well, you couldn't do it of any film."

And I said, "Of course you could."

And he said, "Well, not any film."

And I said, "Okay. Give me a film. The hardest film you can think of."

After a moment, he said, "Okay. You couldn't make an interactive version of *The Piano*."

And I laughed. First shot in the interactive version of *The Piano*. Boat lands on a beach. Second shot, woman on a beach with her piano. We establish in that shot, that the piano is the only window to this woman's soul. The only way that she can actually communicate what is within her. And because it is so integral to her existence, in the third shot we take it away. And the entire story, which is her "world", is her in that remote area doing anything she can think of to try to get the piano back. It's separation anxiety. And so the interactive experience becomes understanding the people in that place, understanding the psychology of those individuals, and figuring out what you're going to do to get your piano back. And then to further confound it, in one version of the story you actually make peace with your husband, and he gets you the piano back. In another version you can't make peace with anybody, tribesmen help you steal the piano in the middle of the night from Harvey Keitel's character, and they put you on a

boat. The last scene is you with your piano.

WHAT WAS HIS RESPONSE TO ALL THIS? He wished he owned the interactive rights to *The Piano*.

[LAUGHS] It's just a different way of looking at things. If you're going to think with a *Dragon's Lair* mind set, you're not going to be able to figure out what *The Piano* is. If you think of a world as a volatile universe with a number of attractive nuisances to figure out in order to get to the end of the story, and if you look at it, given the structure I've showed you, then you can understand that any story can be taken and told interactively.

WHEN WRITING AN INTERACTIVE MOVIE, WHAT FORMAT DO YOU USE? I use cinematic language to tell a story so my scripts look like feature screenplays. We used *Scriptor* to format *Johnny Mnemonic*. Since I was directing the game version of *Johnny Mnemonic* as well, I wanted only film people to work on the project. And I had a producer, Louis Nader, who is a film producer. He demanded that it be written like a screenplay or else he wouldn't budget it. He ran it through *Movie Magic* when it was done. It was very, very important for me to know that everybody on the set would be able to understand what was going on.

IN WRITING THE SCREENPLAY, HOW DID YOU ADDRESS ISSUES SUCH AS END-USER DECISIONS AND CHOICE? It's called conditional logic. Basically, you take every sequence [Bob walks across the room] and give it a name or "address". In a sense, it's a code which relates to what the location is, where the physical place that person is in the room, what action is happening, and whatever other signifiers or definers you can add (is the action randomized, is it time-based, etc.). It got to the point where we were on the set of *Johnny Mnemonic* and I could say, JA-3A-M-2. And everybody on the set knew what that was.

WHAT DO YOU SAY TO CRITICS WHO SUGGEST THAT LINEAR SCREENPLAY FORMATS ARE POOR MODELS FOR INTERACTIVE TITLES SINCE COMPLEX INTERACTIVE TITLES STRIVE TO REPLICATE A NON-LINEAR EXPERIENCE? Interactive screenplays are essentially screenplays which are totally unintelligible to anybody but the person who wrote it ... except for the one used for *Johnny Mnemonic*. My point is, I've seen lots of interactive screenplays, and the one thing that impressed me was how

inefficient they were. People who write interactive screenplays love to take it and throw it down on the desk so that it makes a really big, thick, heavy sound, and they say, 'this is my interactive screenplay.' You're supposed to be impressed by the sheer size of the document. I'm not. Do you know that the screenplay for *Johnny Mnemonic* is a hundred and thirty-seven pages long? It's written in screenplay form. We were incredibly aggressive with how we put it together. It's logical and economical. That hundred and thirty-seven page document tells you how every single shot connects to every other shot. It has all the conditional logic, everything in it. By using addresses, and by using a logic in terms of how shots are named, we could reference things in a way that was so compact that it was readable by anybody.

WHAT IS A SPRITE? A sprite is anything which is sitting on the screen of an experience that the user can either click on or, it's something which is hot on the screen. A button.

I'VE HEARD PEOPLE DESCRIBE SPRITES AS ON-SCREEN CHARACTER REPRESENTATIONS. There are versions of interactivity that could allow characters to be sprites, like *Mortal Combat* or all those clickable titles such as *Grandma and Me* where the character is laid over a scene. The character is not wedded to the picture or the environment. In a cinematic experience, you don't have to use that type of sprite.

ON THE SUBJECT OF PROJECT STRUCTURE...CAN YOU DEFINE LEVEL STRUCTURE? A level game is what *Super Mario Bros.* is. The player is challenged to beat the first world in order to go on to the second world. If you beat the second world, go to the third world, etc.

CAN YOU GO BACK TO PREVIOUS WORLDS? Well, you could. But after you've spent the day trying to figure out how to get out of the first world, and then you go to the second world, why would you want to go back? You've already done it. Some games close it behind you. Some incorporate a game over. A game over situation either ends the game or sends you back to a previous level.

Level games basically subscribe to a philosophy which is known as a critical path. It's a popular gaming approach used circa 1992. Projects like *Dragon's Lair* or *Space Ace* were critical path stories where you simply had to memorize every step and every pitfall. By memorizing, you were able to define the correct path through the story...the critical path. It's a very outmoded concept.

CAN YOU DEFINE A CHINESE DOOR? It's a type of branching where you get to a fork and have to make a choice. One way leads to the correct path and the other way leads back to where you started or to a game over. It's a variation on a critical path.

HOW DO YOU DEFINE OPEN ARCHITECTURE? It's structured around the principle that you should be able to visit any environment in a world at will and put the experience together in any order you want. In interactivity, the story and the plot are not the same thing. In a film, you're given the story. Say the story is, Bob has the gold watch. Jack steals the gold watch. Bob gets the gold watch back. What unfolds in a movie is a plot about the gold watch.

In interactivity, you're given the story, and asked to create the plot. The plot is how that story unfolds, scene by scene, action by action. And because in interactivity the user creates the experience, it's the same story for everybody but everybody experiences a different plot.

By virtue of that fact, you can't have a critical path if you're really going to have a sophisticated story. For instance, a detective novel is a story about a story. The detective novel is a story about somebody working backwards with pieces of evidence to recreate another story, which is the murder or the mystery or whatever. In interactivity, it's a story about a story also. You enter a new experience and you have to piece together all the given objects, the clues and all of the information which is embedded in that story. It is your mission to reconstruct a plot which is a reasonable facsimile of the uber, or higher, arcing story that you've entered.

I've made diagrams and what they usually end up looking like is a sphere. The outside of the sphere has twenty, let's say it has twenty-seven points.

OKAY. The sphere mirrors life-- we are simultaneously problem-solving a dozen things at the same time. In an interactive experience, let's say you're simultaneously problem-solving nine things. And let's say you need to figure out three things to solve each of those nine things. Okay?

OKAY. That means that when you first come into the experience, you're not on a path, you're on the outside of a sphere with nine times three or twenty-seven plot points. If you figure out the connection of the right three plot points— find the key, find the secret door, find the lamp— you have just solved a major plot element and the story moves you into the circle one notch (maybe allowing you to enter the secret tunnel). Of those nine major plot elements, three are needed to reach the end of each of the story's three acts. Remember, these can be solved in any order. There's no correct way to do it. Figuring out all nine major plot

points means solving all three acts, and ultimately leads to the end of the story.

ARE MANY CD-ROM TITLES STRUCTURED THIS WAY? No. Most have no sense of any kind of dramatic structure. It's foolish because dramatic structure has been around since the beginning of storytelling. Three-act structure was defined first by theater and then cinema. That's why you can turn on the television to any film (in progress) and know, literally, within minutes, whether you're watching the first act of a story, the middle act or the final act. You can look at it and know where you've come in, because it's so intuitive the way in which dramatic structure works.

The problem with interactivity, for the most part, is that it's totally amorphous. There's no up and down to it. You never know where you are within it. By inserting three-act structure into interactivity, you basically give it a spine.

HOW DO YOU INCORPORATE CHARACTER ARC INTO AN INTERACTIVE MOVIE? That's trickier. Aristotle spoke about a character's tragic flaw. Our new software engine called D² allows us to track every decision a user has made by assigning it a value. Let's say the user is a character in the story--or let's say you control the moves/decisions of a character within a story. By the end of the Second Act, you've defined for me the kind of person you are. As you enter the Third Act, I've now determined the type of person you are, and therefore I know what your tragic flaw is. The tragic flaw is the wrench I throw into the works of the engine, and that tragic flaw is personalized, different for everybody.

HOW MANY TRAGIC FLAWS COULD YOU BUILD INTO A PROGRAM? As many as the disk space allows. Or as many as are necessary to the story. Six would be a reasonable number. Three would be an acceptable number. But that's a question that's related to the richness of the world that you're creating.

ANY CLOSING THOUGHTS ON THE FUTURE OF INTERACTIVE EXPERIENCES? What you're currently playing on your computer, or on your Sony Playstation or on your 3DO machine in 1995 and 1996, you will be getting as pay-per-view in 1997 and 1998. The CD-ROM market is not a means to its own end. It really is a proving ground for on-line and ITV technology. It's really a testing ground for how stories are going to be expressed. That's why people should not be creating titles with software that's not portable to ITV. Writers, need to take into account the capacities of what those mediums are going to allow us to do.



Ch. 4

STORY DYNAMICS: THE SPINE COMES TO LIFE

“People have forgotten how to tell a story. Stories don’t have a middle or an end any more. They usually have a beginning that never stops beginning.”

— Steven Spielberg

Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks begin to address a spine’s structure when they point out that all stories have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Peruse the library or the advertisements for screenwriting seminars and you’ll find endless amplifications on that observation. Much of this material will relate in one way or the other to the story’s central narrative structure. We’re going to call that linear, central structure “the spine.”

An interactive story functions the same as a movie, a myth, a novel, or stage play. There are structural commonalties underpinning these forms which interactive writers can appropriate. You can find any number of books, for instance, which specifically address the structure of the well-written screenplay. Most of these books, though, analyze the feature film’s “structure” as if it sprang into existence from the nature of the medium itself to thrill us in ways never before discovered. This implication bears the twin disadvantages of being both arrogant and untrue.

Stage plays, in particular the modern Three-Act play, have had a

direct impact on the development of the parochial “Hollywood Narrative.” Screenwriters and interactive writers shouldn’t be too afraid, or too lazy, to learn from the stage. If we read plays with any rigor, or see an opera, or recall our bedtime stories it will be clear that the Three-Act structure, the existence of Hinges, turning points, Reversals, plot-points, etc. are not something God invented for the silver screen. You don’t see literature’s contribution to screenwriting mentioned often in books for screenwriters. But the debt is clearly there.

Most how-to’s for screenwriters, as an example, speak of the Three-Act structure as if it were born fully grown from the head of the Cinema God. Now, screenplays can certainly and usefully be discussed as a narrative comprised of three acts. But the Three-Act structure certainly didn’t originate with movies. The Three-Act structure didn’t even originate with the first plays. The notion of a beginning, a larger middle, and an ending of staged narrative, gradually evolved from the rigid five-act formula which Horace dictated for Roman writers to the capricious act-breaks of the Elizabethans to the modern format.

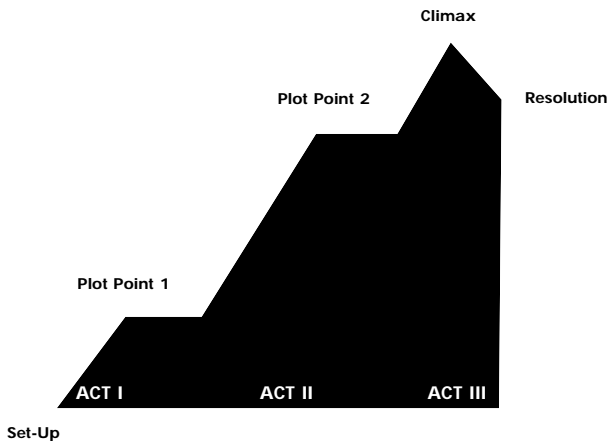
There’s an irony, now, that screenwriters may have revived the Three-Act’s favor among playwrights. Very modern playwrights chafed under the “restrictions” of the Three-Act “formula.” A simple story was not sophisticated enough for these avante tastes so that for a while, we were reading experiments which in the main produced witty or angst-ridden dialogue and very unsatisfactory stories. Beads without a bracelet.

David Mamet, the award-winning playwright and screenwriter, remarked once that screenplays forced him to go back and learn how to tell a story. It’s not an accident that plays like *Miss Saigon* or revivals like *Phantom of the Opera*, both examples of drama firmly scripted to the demands of three acts, have resurged to enjoy not only commercial but critical appeal.

Feature-length screenplays now follow the same Three-Act structure common to plays as diverse as *King Lear* or *Ten Little Indians*, but that was not always the case. It took a while for screenwriters to discover that movies have three acts. Now that this structure is practically taken for granted, there is a tendency for screenwriters (and their gurus) to dismiss the idea that they have anything at all to learn from playwrights. A few good writers, like Mamet, have realized that stage and screen ought to

offer complimentary lessons.

The biggest thing that playwrighting can contribute to the interactive writer is a structure within which to initiate, develop, and “pace” dramatic conflict. This is what we’re calling the interactive script’s spine. It’s not enough to know that certain functions have to happen in the spine. Those events also have to happen at a certain time. A diagram of Three-Act structure might look something like this:



MODEL FOR THREE-ACT STRUCTURE

Not only do dramatic events have to be plotted to occur at certain times, they must also be arranged in certain proportions. Playwrighters speak of “pyramids” and “dramatic arcs” when they analyze their craft. It’s not an accident that most narratives have a larger second act than a first or third act. It’s not an accident that first and third acts for many plays seem roughly proportional. The beginning of a story, and its end, should not occupy the viewer’s attention longer than its middle.

FADE IN

A tight play or a good interactive screenplay has to be honest. If you’d like to make sure that happens, know your ending. You can’t have an

honest beginning until you know how the narrative will finish.

Once you have your ending you can connect it to the very first seconds of your story. We can see something here which is common to all good drama. Good stories provide some kind of trigger which gets the story going quickly, a precipitating incident which serves to introduce the main characters and place them in immediate conflict. How are we introduced to Mac Beth? How are we introduced to Darth Vader? One character may offer introspection and terror; the other may offer science-fiction escape, but structurally, both *Mac Beth* and *Star Wars* provide a trigger which:

- 1) Initiates the major conflict which will fuel the story,**
- 2) Introduces the main character(s) around whom the conflict will complicate,**
- 3) Sets-up the ongoing objectives for the major character(s) in the story**

Notice that a story can't set-up any ongoing objectives unless the initial "trigger" is synchronized with the story's conclusion. The "trigger," like all other elements, has to be honest.

What are some triggers we can learn from? Read *Mac Beth*. Poor Mac's just back from a furious battle and already his Lady is planting the seeds of ambition which (at the play's First Major Reversal) sees Mac Beth kill his Uncle at prayer.

How about *Hamlet*? The Prince is called on-stage to encounter a ghost. The Greeks really know how to kick things off!

The trigger doesn't always have to involve the story's protagonist. Frequently, in fact, both in opera, movies, and in theatre, a trigger is more effective when it introduces the antagonist instead of the good guy. Let's face it, Darth Vader's more interesting than Luke Skywalker. But the important thing to note is that all good stories start quickly to establish conflict, which can be experienced from the dramatic point of view. Additionally, the triggers occur in the same relative portions of the narrative. The trigger for *Star Wars* serves the same function for its story as does the trigger for *Mac Beth*. They are structurally identical.

THE TRIGGER TO PAGE 10

It's important to note where the trigger occurs and how long it takes to pay-off. A good story can't take twenty minutes to start. An interactive story is no different. It must have a trigger which "sets up" future conflicts while "paying off" an immediate conflict. The trigger must do its job within the first eight or ten pages of your story. (*See Subterfuge—the first nine pages which are included in the Appendix of this book*). Notice how characters and conflicts are introduced actively and quickly. Notice how an immediate pay-off (the love scene between Jake and Sandy) can set up a future plot-possibility. When Sandy is killed, Jake has a stake in vindicating his partner's reputation. He has a dramatically motivated reason to pursue "the Truth."

This business about a character's motivation is important. Too often writers try to make situations prompt activity. It's better when the character's motivation provides the logic which makes action either necessary or believable. The trick here is to create dramatic situations where the external events of the story and the inner life of the character work hand in hand. It starts from the First seconds of your story. It starts with the trigger.

REVERSALS— ACT I, ACT II

Now that we've started our story with a trigger, are there other elements common to dramatic stories which can help the interactive writer? And do these other elements also occur at set places and times within the narrative?

Playwrights often speak of "Reversals" within a dramatic story. There are many small Reversals within a narrative, even within a given scene. But writers have known for a long time that there are only two major Reversals which always occur, and which must occur, in a Three-Act drama. In screenplays, these moments have a variety of names; "Hinges," "lynch-pins" or "Act-breaks" are a few. One writer in particular, Syd Field, has an excellent book which applies the notion of "plot points" to the screenplay.

The dramatic Reversals which successful plays use to close Act I and

Act II function differently than other Reversals or incidents which occur throughout the story. A major Reversal, or Hinge (or Act-break, pick your term) takes the narrative in a different way than the path initiated by the narrative's trigger. As the term implies, the narrative is in some sense reversed. Just as with screenplays, a Hinge sends the staged play's story in a new direction. Such a Reversal takes place roughly a quarter of the way through the story (just before the end of Act I), and occurs once again around three-quarters of the way through the narrative at the conclusion of Act II. It's important that you understand the idea that dividing something into "acts" is not arbitrary. Three-Act structure, and its many variants, are all ways for generalizing about what kind of things happen in a story and, more importantly, when they happen.

The pattern described by a Three-Act analysis fits stories of all kinds, even stories written before acts of any kind were a subject of study. *Romeo & Juliet*, for instance, is not a play divided into three acts. Shakespeare didn't even write his early plays into acts. The plays' divisions, when they came, were fairly arbitrary. What's interesting, though, is that when we compare Shakespeare's narrative structure with modern feature film screenplays, we find two things to be true:

- 1) Shakespearean plays and Hollywood movies are structurally identical, and**
- 2) Both Shakespeare and Hollywood produce stories which conform to the Three-Act paradigm**

Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet* has a beginning, a middle, and an end which incorporate the same trigger, two major Reversals, complication and climax which characterize films as diverse as *Die Hard* and *Casablanca*.

Start with the play's First scenes. Romeo isn't introduced as a lover here. Romeo's family name, Capulet, is defiled by Old Montague when he says, "Thou villain Capulet,—Hold me not, let me go."

But something happens which completely changes Romeo's relationship to his own family and to the hated Montagues. That something "triggers" the rest of the story.

Romeo essentially crashes a party. Juliet's father, the head of the

Montague clan, gives the party in his daughter's honor. It's there that Romeo loses his heart to the daughter of his father's mortal enemy. It's that fast. Once the conflict is initiated, there are only two possibilities. Either Romeo will capture Juliet's affection or he won't. The First Act presents a problem which seems without solution. Romeo can't even see this girl, let alone court her. To risk seeing Juliet, Romeo must risk his own death.

It's worth noting here that good dramatic stories must involve some cost to the participants. In the case of tragedies, something painful must be exacted from the characters in a story. In comedies, the stakes are artificial and complicated, but they're assented to as "real". Writers use words like "jeopardy" or "stakes" to describe this dramatic requirement. Take a look at *Romeo & Juliet*. What's at stake? Bitter hatred! Powerful families in deadlock! Torn loyalties! The dogs of war! All opposed to young love.

Most of the First Act sees Romeo thwarted. Romeo cannot approach his love, much less court her. But then something changes. The story's First Major Reversal takes place on Juliet's balcony. Romeo climbs to his love and wins her heart. Notice that this scene changes the inner lives of the two young people as well as the outer circumstances of their story. Notice too that the lovers' first tryst occurs roughly a quarter of the way through play. The impediments and conflicts of the previous scenes pay off with a small epiphany, here. But that would not, in itself, be enough to qualify this moment as a Major Reversal. Recall that a Three-Act structure supports only two Major Reversals. The lynch pin we're describing in the balcony scene doesn't simply reverse the outer direction of the story—it reverses the inner lives of the character as well.

The dimension of inner change is perhaps the most neglected in discussions of screenplay structure. Outside events are only worthwhile when they affect a character's head and heart. At the beginning of Shakespeare's play, for instance, Romeo isn't in love with anyone. He certainly isn't expecting to fall in love with a Montague. Juliet never expected to fall in love at all. The play's Hinge must reverse not only the external events of the story, it must also change either our sense of the characters' inner lives, or the characters' perception of their inner lives. The inner story, in other words, must reverse synchronously with the

outer story or you won't have a satisfying Hinge.

What works for plays works even more favorably on-screen. It doesn't matter whether the story is intended as a "serious" work or something "just to entertain." It's not enough for Luke Skywalker's home to be destroyed by Darth Vader. Luke must simultaneously learn that his father was a famous Jedi Knight. He must fall heir to a quest. That's a Reversal.

At the other end of the dramatic spectrum is a film like *Schindler's List*. It isn't enough, here, for Oskar Schindler's workers to be routed from their ghetto homes into a Nazi labor camp. It isn't enough for Herr Schindler to witness the beginnings of the systematic destruction of the Jews. Schindler's inner life must reverse as well.

When Oskar sees his workers driven like beasts from their homes, he empathizes for the first time with a group of people whom until that point he had regarded as chattel. The moment occurs just about a quarter of the way through Spielberg's four-hour drama. It occurs just before the end of what would be Act I. The director allows a mote of color to intrude onto this particular piece of his black & white horror. Almost like a bookmark to keep the spot. The color comes with a little girl, a small child in a red coat who wanders through the carnage. Oskar is never the same again. Talk about a change in circumstance. Talk about a change in a character's inner life. This is a major Reversal. Look where it occurs. Did this occur by accident? Do other stories have this kind of structure? Remember *Casablanca*? WHEN does Ingrid stroll into Bogey's juke joint?

A successful story has a Hinge before the end of Act I and again before the end of Act II. The First act's Reversal sends the viewer into a series of complications and obstacles which reverse the First direction of the story. The First Reversal functions here like firewood for the story's midsection. It initiates the serious conflicts which will account for the lion's share of the characters' inner story.

THE SECOND REVERSAL - ACT II

It's not arbitrary that the story's middle turns out to be a lot longer than its beginning or end. The complications which multiply in the story have

to be paced and have to account for several levels of conflict. But the Second Act must end sometime. If it is to end satisfactorily, the story cannot simply declare victory. There's more work to be done. One last twist, one more Major Reversal needs to take place before the end of the Second Act.

Look again at *Romeo and Juliet*. The Second Act sees the lovers overcome the obstacles which kept them apart. They make love. They even marry. They seem to have found a niche between their families' hatred that is safe. What's left to do in the story?

What's left is murder. Mercutio, appropriately named, is lured into a duel with a member of the Montague clan and is killed. Romeo, defending his kinsman's honor, slays the slayer and is banished. Exile, in these years, is worse than death. But worse than being cut off from hearth and home, this Second Reversal cuts Romeo off from Juliet. It changes, once again, the characters' inner story, and it brings closure to the narrative by setting up the Third and final Act. The Second Reversal changes the story's exterior events and the characters' inner lives along lines that are congruent with the story's final resolution. That's the function of Hinge #2.

Schindler's List is a much longer narrative, but proportionately, its reverses occur in the same place and serve the same function as the Reversals in *Romeo & Juliet*. Recall that the movie's First Reversal (Oskar witnesses the liquidation of the ghetto) triggers a big change in the exterior events of the German's life and circumstance. Subsequent to the ghetto's liquidation, Schindler goes from having his own workers under his own control to having prison-laborers placed under the command of a brutal Nazi commandant. That's the outer Reversal. But there's also the inner story. The First Hinge changes forever the way Schindler feels about his Jewish workers. He cannot be indifferent anymore. He cannot place profit solely above his feelings for the people he's helped to enslave.

The story's First Reversal sets up its Second. We see that small, red-coated girl once more. We see her, in fact, about three-quarters of the way through the story, just before the end of Act II. But this time the child is dead, stretched on a pyre of blackened bodies. Oskar is there, trying to feign disinterest, or, more accurately, trying to feign self-interest. The

First Hinge changed the way Oskar felt. This Second compels the German war-profiteer to action. The story reverses one last time. Oskar literally buys his workers from the Nazis. He moves them, protects them, saves them. The businessman who had wanted nothing more than to be known as a great industrialist, works feverishly, now, to create a plant which produces nothing.

RESOLUTION, CATHARSIS & ACT III

The Third Act brings a new stability out of the chaos begun and stirred in Acts One and Two. Luke defeats Darth Vader. Schindler defeats racism, genocide and Death.

A good story has to allow catharsis. The Greeks viewed catharsis as a kind of healing. In westerns & sci-fi films, the catharsis comes after the bad guy is defeated. The catharsis for *Star Wars* comes when Princess Leia confers honors of war upon her heroes. Schindler's list offers a more sobering, more meaningful kind of catharsis. A handful of stone's on Oskar Schindler's tomb reminds us of the many who survived World War II and of the many who did not.

In both of these dramas, though, whether serious or science-fiction, we can see a pattern which shouldn't need a lot of specialized vocabulary to understand. All of these stories exhibit structural elements which are identical in placement and function. Those elements do the same things. They occur in the same place. In each case we see:

The First Reversal (Hinge #1) occurs just before a quarter of the way through the story. The Second Reversal breaks shy of the three-quarter mark. For a four-hour drama, the First Reversal should occur 50 minutes or so into the story while the Second Reversal (Hinge #2) occurs sometime before the three-hour mark. Now it turns out that a properly written, properly formatted feature screenplay should average around one minute of screen-time per page. That means a two-hour, standard-length film will have its first hinge break around page/minute 25-30; Hinge #2 will occur somewhere shy of page/minute 90. This pattern is real; it repeats this way for thousands of films, videos, TV programs, plays—! Check it out.

Don't get hung up thinking these pages/times have to be exact! Especially with an interactive screenplay. The screenplay format you

choose may significantly alter the placement and page count of Reversals. On the other hand, the locations/pages provided are useful targets. They indicate the relative place along the story's time-line in which various narrative elements invariably occur. Let's reiterate the elements charted along our schematic. The elements we discussed are:

The precipitating incident, or Trigger.

Two Reversals, or Hinges (remember where they need to occur)

A Climax which peaks close to the story's end.

And then the audience needs a moment of Catharsis.

Whether its *Star Wars* or *Shakespeare*, *Johnny Mnemonic* or *Schindler's List*, we find Three-Act structure at the spine's core. The analysis provided above isn't exhaustive by any means. But it will provide you with a good skeleton on which to build your story, a good way to critique your own work.



Q & A

TERRY BORST

Bio

Terry Borst has co-written the interactive screenplays for WING COMMANDER III and WING COMMANDER IV. (Wing Commander III has been nominated by the Interactive Academy of Arts and Sciences for Best Writing & Wing Commander IV is the most expensive video game ever made). His "traditional" screenwriting credits include the TV movie sequel to the DeNiro film MIDNIGHT RUN, the independent feature film PRIVATE WAR, and an episode of the BBC action-adventure television series BUGS. In addition, he has performed uncredited rewrites on USA Cable movies and independent features, and developed screenplays for the producers of The Hunt for Red October and other independent producers in Hollywood. He is currently writing and designing a new interactive title and developing other projects in both the interactive and television arenas.

In the past, he has published both poetry and fiction, and is a member of the Writers Guild of America as well as being listed in the Directory of American Poets and Writers. His parchment includes a Master of Fine Arts from UCLA and a Bachelor of Arts from UC Berkeley.

Interview

WHAT IS YOUR PROFESSIONAL WRITING BACKGROUND?

Originally I was a fiction and poetry writer. Professional in the loose sense of the word since generally, fiction and poetry don't really pay [LAUGHS]. I went on to film school and received a Masters degree at UCLA. Since getting out of school, it's been the usual screenwriter's route-- working on a bunch of low-budget features initially-- slowly working my way up the ladder.

ANYTHING PRODUCED? One feature film called *Private War* which I co-wrote. There were unaccredited re-writes on a few other USA cable-type of films as well. Right before the *Wing Commander* projects, my writing partner (Frank DePalma) and I wrote the screenplay for a television sequel to *Midnight Run* which Frank directed.

HOW DID THE WING COMMANDER ASSIGNMENT COME ABOUT?

As is often the case with assignments, it was being in the right place at the right time. I friend of ours who used to be a creative exec at Fox was working as a story editor/creative exec at Electronic Arts. She called us and said 'Gee, there's this interactive project that's in need of a screenwriter. Why don't you send me a sample?' We send samples out all the time-- if I had a nickel for every time I sent a sample out, I'd be a rich man and could retire...

[BOTH LAUGH] Little did we know at the time that the sample was for Chris Roberts, the designer of the *Wing Commander* franchise. He was looking for Hollywood screenwriters who could turn a completely computer-generated project to one that would incorporate a great deal of live action video. Chris Roberts liked our sample and BANG-- we were hired.

HOW DO YOU COLLABORATE WITH ANOTHER WRITER ON AN INTERACTIVE PROJECT?

It's no different than collaborating on any other project. Frank and I have been writing together for ten years. We've been doing this sort of thing so long, we've got a system down. The way it doesn't work is the way people tend to think it should work-- which is something out of *The Dick Van Dyke Show*. Unfortunately, it doesn't quite work out that way because it seemed like they had a lot more fun. Our methodology starts off with my partner and I in the room together. We're face to face. We try to structure the piece with 3 x 5 index cards in order to work out each scene in advance. We see how the scenes fit together in terms of a traditional three-act structure.

JUST LIKE A FEATURE ASSIGNMENT? Well, there are differences. With a feature screenplay, the number of scenes is 45-50 scenes for a two-hour movie. So that's 45-50 index cards. With interactive projects like *Wing Commander*, the number of scenes totaled 200-300 index cards. Instead of tacking the cards to a bulletin board, Frank and I had to put them on the floor. The great thing about index cards is that you can lay them on the floor and walk around the structure of your story. The cards can double as your flow chart. We have a couple of photographs of the two of us standing amid some pretty wild structures.

I'LL BET. Flow charts are really a vehicle which allows us to discuss every scene in detail...the beats of the scene, etc. By the end of this exercise we know our structure so well, we are able to go off separately. One of us can write Act I while the other person is writing Act II.

We moderm stuff back and forth constantly to make changes to each others work. The closing to our writing methodology is essentially putting all the pieces together. So you could say that our methodology has three acts as well...the beginning is when we are together in the room, the middle is when we are off separately writing, and the end (when we have the luxury of doing so) is when we work together in the same room, dotting the I's and crossing the T's.

AS A DESIGN TEAM MEMBER, WHAT IS THE WRITER'S ROLE IN THE PRE-PRODUCTION DESIGN PROCESS? In the interactive arena, I'd say it's different from project to project. I think the biggest single factor is how close the project is to production. On *Wing Commander III* for instance, we were brought in extremely late in the process. They (Origin) had tried unsuccessfully to create a script in-house. The first day of shooting was set. Cameras were ready to roll. The gaming elements had been determined. The interface had been designed. But they still didn't have a screenplay.

HOW FAST DID YOU HAVE TO WRITE THIS THING? We had a first draft completed in three weeks.

YIKES! That's two hundred fifty pages of material. It was insanity. We went to Austin, Texas for three days and sat down and talked with the producer, director and game designers about everything. From that point on, Frank and I were pretty much left to our own devices.

THAT WAS A RISKY VENTURE ON THEIR PART. True. But we would ship off bits and pieces as soon as we could to get feedback from the team. I think we synced up nicely under the circumstances. *Wing Commander IV* was different because we were on the project from the start. What that meant was that we were much more involved in aspects of game design. *Wing Commander* is in essences, a flight sim. At the heart lies the missions that you fly. The design team had to come up with all new missions and our initial role as writers was to provide suggestions or the skeleton for each mission. We'd say things like 'wouldn't it be great for the story if at this point we had to land on the planet surface after taking out a bunch of tanks...maybe there's a ship landing as you're landing and you have to shoot that ship too. Things like that.' Once the missions and overall

story concept were agreed up, we went off to write the treatment. After that was delivered and approved, we went off to Austin again for another three-day marathon session with the design team. So on *Wing Commander IV*, we worked much more closely with the game designers throughout the scripting process.

DID YOU GET ALONG WITH THE DESIGN TEAM MEMBERS? Often times, we'd want to do things one way and the game designers would want to do things another. Frank and I do not claim to be expert game designers or puzzle-masters. We know story and we'll take no back seat to anybody in terms of story, character, narrative and so on. Game designers know what has been done before and what will be an entertaining experience for the user. Both sides would constantly push the creative envelope. But Chris is the guy who had to make the final call. The buck stopped with Chris Roberts.

WERE YOU ABLE TO IMPROVE UPON YOUR INTERACTIVE SCREENPLAY FROM WING III TO WING IV? Well, that was our goal. To provide a greater integration of character and gaming so that the experience is as rich as possible. We really wanted to integrate the story flow, the gaming flow--all of the elements.

HOW DOES THE INTERACTIVE WRITER INTEGRATE THE GAMING ELEMENT INTO A SCREENPLAY? The term "gaming" has such a wide definition. I guess *Myst* is a game but there is no winning or loosing. Winning and loosing has always been associated with games. I guess the best way to integrate gaming into the screenplay is to first define the type of experience you're trying to provide the audience. Is it going to be a "transport sim" experience like a flight sim or driving sim? Or is it a shoot-em-up twitch game? Or is it an immersive exploratory experience like a *Myst* or *7th Guest*? Once you define the gaming genre, the trick is to develop something new and original. That's not easy to do. And that's probably why interactive projects rely on a creative team rather than on one individual.

IS THE GAMING ELEMENT MERELY A DIVERSION FROM THE LINEAR NARRATIVE? The interactivity should not be a diversion. This is an entirely different new medium we are working with and what it should not try to do is simply ape what previous mediums delivered. The experience of watching live-action video, for example, on a computer screen is simply not going to compete with a 70mm theatrical film. Why in the world should anyone sit down in front of their computer and involve themselves with this new experience? It's not

because they will be enveloped in this rich, filmatic visual and sound experience. It is the interactivity. That's what is brand new. As a writer, the idea is to explore where the interactivity can take the audience. The audience gains some control over the narrative, but not complete control. The boundaries of the world must still be created and defined by the writer/designer. What we end up with is a more collaborative experience between the audience and the writer/designer. That's exciting. My goal then as the writer is to get beyond the stop-start experience that interactivity is today. We are still trying to figure out how to do this.

HOW DO YOU DECIDE WHICH PLAYER POINT-OF-VIEW TO INCORPORATE INTO YOUR PROJECT? There are basically two models that I've seen used. First person P.O.V. is pretty cool but there is very little interaction possible. Your mouse or joystick has a limited amount of verbs at its disposal. I think it's six. Up, down, left, right, forward, backward. Or you're given some text choices for example of how to respond to somebody. The options boil down to yes, no, and maybe.

The alternative P.O.V. has been the third person where you have an alter ego that's on-screen. By definition, that's a more distancing experience and less immersive. As an industry, we are struggling with these issues every day. Unfortunately, so often interactivity is simply a diversion. Ultimately, it should be the beating heart.

WHERE DO YOU STAND ON INTERFACE DESIGN? One of the most exciting aspects of this new media is there are number of possible interfaces that can work for any given project. In film, there is basically one interface (unless you consider the option of filming in either black and white or color). It doesn't matter if you are watching a French film or a film from Hong Kong. The grammar has been established. We understand a cut and how a montage works. In interactivity, everything is open for interpretation and manipulation. I think interface design comes down to your audience and the type of experience you want them to have. *Johnny Mnemonic's* clean interface has its merits. A very busy interface can be a lot of fun too. What you do want to have is an intuitive interface. Unfortunately, I still haven't met a truly intuitive software interface. Even though the Macintosh system interface is described as intuitive, it's not for someone who has never worked on a computer before. If I sat my mom down in front of a Mac, she'd still be doomed. I've seen enough people wave mouses in front of their computer screens hoping that something would work [LAUGHS].

AS AN INTERACTIVE WRITER, HOW DO YOU BEGIN? LET'S TRY AN EXERCISE. I'LL TELL YOU MY STORY IDEA AND YOU TELL ME HOW YOU MIGHT MAKE IT INTERACTIVE: JACK AND JILL WENT UP A HILL TO FETCH A PAIL OF WATER. JACK FELL DOWN AND BROKE HIS CROWN AND JILL CAME TUMBLING AFTER.

I first need to identify three things. The audience, what your aiming for, and what kind of genre that you're going for. There are a few questions I'd ask about my audience. Would I like to create an experience where my audience is in the world with Jack and Jill? Is this a world where Jack and Jill and the player grow as a result of their experiences together? Or are they solving a mystery of some kind? Is that more what this experience is about? Is this about the player showing Jack and Jill what he/she knows?

Next I'd try to flush out more of the story. What is it that the player is aiming for? After Jack fell down the hill, what did Jack do? Chase after Jill and give her holy hell? Does he leave Jill and never see her again? Why were they at the top of the hill? Does the story actually start earlier? What is the goal of the experience? Once that's defined, I'd identify how the player interacts with this experience. Will the player become a character that interacts with Jack and Jill? Is the player Jack? Is the player Jill? Can the player become Jack or Jill? Is it possible that the player be Jack one time and Jill the next time? These would be my initial type of questions.

The next thing I'd do is identify the genre of the piece. Is it a twitch game? Is this a children's title? Is this an educational experience? What the experience is not going to be is as important as what it finally becomes.

But you know, the most important thing to consider before you start writing is what interests you.

LET'S TALK ABOUT SCREENPLAY STYLE. WHAT DOES THE PAGE LOOK LIKE? A "proper" screenplay format hasn't yet been established in interactive media which is good because we are still figuring things out. The traditional screenplay format for feature took years to develop. I've seen scripts from the early 30's and a style was definitely evident at that point. But that was with the advent of sound...in film, all the modern elements we've come to know were locked down.

In *Wing Commander III & IV*, we felt that what was important was to create a screenplay that would look as much like a traditional feature screenplay as possible. Why? Because actors had to read it and a crew had to break it down. Traditional Hollywood elements were being brought into a CD-ROM game.

IF TRADITIONAL HOLLYWOOD ELEMENTS WERE NOT GOING TO BE INCLUDED IN A PROJECT YOU WERE WRITING, WOULD YOU HAVE USED THE SAME FORMAT? That would depend on the project. I wouldn't necessarily be a need to use a feature screenplay structure. On *Wing Commander III*, for example, the initial in-house effort to write a script didn't look like a feature screenplay at all. Nobody on the set would have known how to read it or budget it. Now we still had to do some new and different things. We had to create a document with a structure that we thought would best serve the project as a whole.



Ch. 5

THE ANATOMY OF CHARACTER

*“I’m not a writer. I’m just someone who
writes plays and scripts for a single purpose—
to serve as skeletons awaiting flesh and sinew.”*

— Ingmar Bergman

SHOW, DON’T TELL

A story’s outside events are always a vehicle for a story which goes on inside the heart. Whether it’s Oskar Schindler’s story, or Luke Skywalker’s or Tarzan’s; it’s the inner story’s stakes that make the exterior threats, jeopardy, car chases or comedy satisfying for the audience. It’s not an accident that the “inner-story” receives so much attention from analysts of fiction, for it’s here that critics and writers alike contemplate the ways in which storytellers create “Character.”

For Aristotle, the development of character was totally determined by the exterior action of the plot. In that sense, Aristotle was perhaps a true dramatist. It’s definitely true that dramatic works, such as an interactive screenplay, must find ways to show character instead of telling us who the characters are, what they feel, what motivates their actions and so on.

Plot has been called the logic of human motivation; dramatic stories cannot separate the development of plot from the presentation of character. We know people, in drama, by what they say and do. If a writer editorializes, if she tells me that this line of dialogue is “sarcastic,” or that

the character glances “fearfully” toward a fictive partner, then I’m going to know that some work necessary to compelling characterization has not been accomplished. Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks call the kind of characterization which goes on in feature film and interactive screenplays indirect. Let’s review the opening pages from John Sharp’s feature screenplay, *Yellow Beach*:

FADE IN:

INT. DWIGHT’S VAN - MORNING

WIPERS beat time across a greasy windshield. Beyond the glass, an unseasonable fog is slowly drifting from the pristine front lawns of McLean, a wealthy suburb of Washington, D.C.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL THE INTERIOR of what appears to be a Ford Van. The dashboard is splattered with a hundred different hues of paint. Sitting on the dash, a baseball cap with an Orioles patch, also splattered with paint.

A SUN VISOR is tortured by fish-hooks and trout-flies.

We now see the face of the driver as he glances at an address pad, then scans the addresses of the passing houses. His name is DWIGHT MURPHY. A thirty year old man with black hair hanging limp to his shoulders, Dwight has the kind of brooding good looks wise women know to avoid.

Suddenly, a white mansion comes into view, rising up out of the mist like some psycho-house from a horror movie. Dwight checks his address book. It’s a match. He drops the pad and reaches for the gear shift.

EXT. WHITE MANSION - A SHORT WHILE LATER

It’s big. The sort of place a doctor might own. In the driveway, a solitary police car, its motor silent. Across the lawn, a piece of yellow tape flaps in the morning breeze: “POLICE LINE - DO NOT CROSS.”

THE VAN pulls up front. Dwight steps out and pulls on his baseball cap. He opens the rear doors of the van and removes a paint-splattered tool-box. Slams the doors shut.

BEHIND THE WINDOW OF THE POLICE CAR

A FAT COP reads TRUE CONFESSIONS magazine. KNUCKLES TAP against his window. The Cop looks up.

Dwight pulls out an I.D. card and presses it up against the glass: “DWIGHT R. MURPHY - STATE CONTRACTOR #03937”

The Cop lowers his mag. He rolls down his window and hands Dwight a key. Dwight tips his hat and heads off up the driveway. The Cop studies him. A look on his face like he just ate something bad.

INT. WHITE MANSION, FOYER

Dwight steps into the foyer, a marble entrance decorated with expensive antiques from the Orient. High, vaulted ceilings give the space a tomb-like quality. Dwight's eyes dart around the entranceway. The silence is eerie.

CUT TO:

INT. WHITE MANSION, THE LIVING ROOM

Sunlight battles velvet drapes. A coffee table. A grand piano. Bookcases filled with books on psychology, literature and the arts.

Dwight enters, almost stepping on an unfinished game of Scrabble sitting on a Persian rug below him.

AT THE BOOKCASES

Dwight examines a row of Family photographs; A GRAY-HAIRED MAN, his attractive WIFE, and their THREE smiling CHILDREN.

A book captures Dwight's attention. He removes the leather-bound volume and opens it, revealing a macabre etching from Dante's vision of Hell; a monstrous, fire-breathing Devil standing atop the walls of the City Of The Dead.

Dwight quickly closes the book.

CUT TO:

INT. WHITE MANSION, KITCHEN

A HAND PULLS OPEN A KITCHEN DRAWER, revealing a set of wood-handled carving knives. Dwight holds up one of the knives. The gleaming, stainless, terrifying blade. He slips the knife back into the drawer.

CUT TO:

INT. WHITE MANSION, CHILD'S BEDROOM

A ladder lies twisted and broken on the floor near a bunk bed. Next to the ladder, a glass-eyed doll stares upward like an orphaned war refugee. Dwight stands in the doorway, staring at the wreckage.

WE HEAR THE FAINT SOUND OF A CRYING CHILD. A HAUNTING CRY. SPINE-CHILLING.

Perspiration beads on Dwight's forehead.

CUT TO:

INT. WHITE MANSION, MASTER BEDROOM

A piece of yellow police tape is draped across the bedroom doorway. In the room, beyond the tape, a large antique four-poster bed sits in the middle of the stark white bedroom. The bed is covered with a plastic sheet. Dwight pulls aside the police tape and enters the room.

Dwight glances around the room...at the walls. He turns in a slow circle, finally coming to rest on a far wall, a point that we cannot yet see.

From the look on his face, it may be just as well. A look of utter disgust.

Dwight opens his toolbox, revealing a mess of rollers, brushes, putty knives, masking tape, dust masks and rubber gloves. He removes the gloves and slips them on, contemplating the task ahead of him.

As Dwight stares at the far wall, THE CAMERA MOVES IN A SLOW CIRCLE BEHIND HIM, COMING TO REST ON THE FAR WALL.

The once white wall is now splattered with blood, pockmarked with a thousand shotgun pellet holes. The wall is dented with several depressions in the plaster, caused by the impact of several bodies.

Dwight takes a couple of deep breaths before he ties the dust mask to his face.

INT. DWIGHT'S VAN - LATER THAT DAY

Dwight undresses as he drives. The trick is removing the paint and blood splattered coveralls without swerving into traffic. Stripped to his underwear, THE CAMERA NOW MOVES IN CLOSE ON DWIGHT'S FACE.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. WHITE MANSION, MASTER BEDROOM

The gray-haired Man and his Wife plead for their lives.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. DWIGHT'S VAN

Dwight winces as a shotgun FIRES somewhere in his head.

FADE TO BLACK:

Dwight Murphy is our lead character. You, the reader, can infer or imagine the character's emotions, intentions and inner life as you read the printed page. You create your own "subtext," along with the subtext created by the writer. You begin to "plot" the future circumstances of Dwight's "story" as you imagine his inner life. Nothing in the text tells you whether your inferences, guesses, or imagination will be the same as the writer's.

A screenplay should not tell what a character is. It should show what a character says and does. Dialogue and action are the scalpels with which a writer bares a character's inner story. But there's something else needed, too. Something we usually take for granted. That something is Context.

CONTEXT

Let's conduct an experiment of the mind. No paper required. Suppose you are told that a man has just viciously slapped a boy at a street corner? Without knowing anything else, how do you feel about that man? Do you imagine him being tall or short? What is his hair color? Is he attractive or unattractive? How about the boy— what images come immediately to mind? How do you interpret the events reported? How would you define the situation based this first report? What's going on?

Take a moment and jot down a brief description of your first impressions; how you feel about the man, your guess as to the man's background, how he looks, and so on. Finished? Your impressions might look something like this:

The Man Who Slapped the Boy - First Impressions

- | | | |
|----------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| ✓ 45 years old | ✓ Blue collar worker | ✓ Probably abused as a child |
| ✓ Dark hair | ✓ Slightly overweight | ✓ Going through a divorce |
| ✓ Unshaven | ✓ Uneducated | ✓ Don't like this guy |

Let's review the same situation, only now you learn that as the man viciously slaps the boy, the boy drops a gun he was pointing at the man's head. Take a moment to review your initial impressions. Are your

thoughts, feelings, and interpretation the same?

You get the point. Without knowing the context of an external action, it's impossible to create a character's inner life. And don't protest that the reader/end-user can figure it out after the fact. That's a cop-out. It's not up to the reader/end-user to provide essential information for the scene's characterization— that's the writer's job. Remember those connect-the-dot coloring books you used to have when you were a child? A writer must provide the dots so that the viewer/end-user can correctly fill them in. Bad writers cheat at this process. Good writers don't.

CONTEXT & ETHICS - QUESTIONS OF VALUE

A story's historical or cultural context can't exist without a concomitant ethical context. *The Journeyman Project* doesn't compel the end-user simply because it presents photo-realistic images of the abuse of time travel, causing the world to teeter on the brink of disaster. The interactive adventure staples those images with a challenge. It's the same challenge which forces itself on the game's protagonist— you. The challenge is— Is what you see right? *Schindler's List* doesn't compel audiences simply because it presents pictures of organized violence against Polish Jews. The film asks the audience— Is what you see morally right?

A story cannot provide circumstantial context without moral context. Even the most trite stories cannot exist without some kind of ethical dimension. Remember our mental experiment— The man who slapped the boy? It isn't just that a moral context allows us to experience the scene differently (once we know that the boy is say, a robber trying to kill the man), it's that, apart from a moral context, we couldn't experience the scene at all.

What holds true for this simple experiment becomes even more important for more complex narrative works. Remember our early discussions of Shane and Luke Skywalker? We feel empathy for these characters not simply because of their external circumstances, but because their circumstances force a choice which reflects either directly or indirectly on human values.

Structural analysis can do a great deal to help us understand how stories work. But if we decide that the ethical component of a character is

somehow passé or peripheral, we will miss what the essential component for character development.

Drama works by placing characters in situations of conflict and conflict can't consist simply in car chases. Conflict doesn't occur automatically when a man is pitted against another man or against Nature or any combination of external antagonists. The deepest experience of conflict comes when an audience sees a character pitted against himself, against his own demons, his own vices, his own insecurities. We experience tremendous tension watching Shane struggle to decide whether he should once again pick up his gun. We hold our loved one's hand when Bogey puts Ingrid on that plane. We hold our breath when Oskar Schindler compiles his list— Why? Because these characters are doing what's right and it costs them.

CONTEXT, CLIMAX & COST

The climax of almost any story, paper-thin or profound, sees the protagonist make some kind of choice. If that choice is to be compelling, it has to involve some question of Right & Wrong. A story's ethical dimension, in fact, is what makes dramatic “cost” possible. Why should Shane (or we!) care whether he kills another man? Why does Bogey agonize over Ingrid? What makes Oskar Schindler “get involved”? Why does Luke reject “the dark side” of The Force? None of these core questions about character can be answered unless we recognize that fictive characters are beings bound more closely to codes of value and ethics than are the people we experience in “real” life.

RESOLUTION V. SOLUTION

A story's climax is often thought of as the narrative's last major experience of dramatic conflict or action. The story's outer conflicts are resolved with some sort of “closure” at the climax while at the same time, some inner conflict is resolved. But note the word “resolved.” The most compelling climaxes do not “solve” their characters' problems. The best stories do not usually let their protagonists off the hook.

Casablanca offers an obvious example. Bogey loses the love of his

life and is almost certainly going to be tagged as a member of the Resistance. Another example—Oskar Schindler frees his employees, but is then forced to flee for his own life. This isn't to say that sappy endings can't produce memorable characters. How many times have we watched *It's A Wonderful Life* or *Star Wars*? But I would say that even these stories leave some aspect of their narratives unresolved—their heroes do not triumph unscathed. Whether it's *Voyeur*, *Star Wars*, *Wing Commander III* or *Schindler's List*, the most compelling stories force their characters to pay a cost for whatever “stability” the narrative finally achieves.

OUTER STORY / INNER STORY

Once we understand that a character's most important conflict is personal and relates to the character's sense of what is right or wrong, it's easier to see that one of the major functions of the story's circumstance and action is to provide the arena within which those values get tested. It takes a great deal of work, however, to allow a character's values to emerge naturally from the story's circumstance and environment. Good writers understand that the deeper a conflict is seeded in a character's heart, the more important it is to go about dramatizing the resulting conflict indirectly. Characters don't gain empathy if they're used for either prescription or propaganda.

THE FACTS, PLEASE

Writers need to make sure their outer story is in balance with their inner story. It takes a lot of time to research, understand, and create a believable—Period & Place, People & Props out of which character can “come alive.”

Schindler's List provides an excellent example of a filmed story based on a heavily researched novel which spends a great deal of imagery and imagination re-creating the context of an unfamiliar Period & Place, People & Props. The story also provides an ethical conflict which pits the lead character's deepest ambitions against what he knows to be “right.” The outer story and the inner-story are well researched and balanced. We can't appreciate Oskar Schindler's inner dilemma unless his outer cir-

cumstances are made both clear and vivid.

The lesson to take from this example is— do your research! The best feature film screenwriters, like the best novelists, know their story’s environment, people, and history. Interactive writers should require the same work of themselves.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

One way many writers seek to avoid the tedious business of reading and research is to draw upon story and characters which come out of their “personal” experience. Beginning writers are often told to “write from your experience.” Personal experience is touted by screenwriting seminars and books as the bedrock for building successful character. But hold on a second. Oskar Schindler and Iszaka Stern were fairly compelling characters in *Schindler’s List*, but the novelist, Thomas Keneally, was certainly never enslaved in a Polish labor camp. Nor was he ever imprisoned at Auschwitz. Neither was Steven Spielberg. Neither were any of the film’s major actors or actresses. None of these people had any “personal experience” of the story they created. And yet it is a gripping and compelling story with an unforgettable cast of characters. Screenwriters Douglas Gayeton and John Platten wrote the interactive movie, *Johnny Mnemonic* without ever having experienced the terror of having a microchip implanted in their heads. Neither did the novelist, William Gibson for that matter. How is this possible? It would seem there has to be another way to build character besides “being there,” otherwise films like *Schindler’s List* and interactive dramas like *Johnny Mnemonic* could never be made.

Thomas Wolfe was criticized not long ago when he downplayed “personal experience” as the basis for great fiction. Wolfe’s contention, in a nutshell, is that personal experience needs to be united with knowledge and social context if stories and characters of substance are to emerge. Wolfe offered the advice that writers who’d like to write something worthwhile should copy some of the habits and techniques of journalists. The journalistic impulse can be made to serve fiction well. The payback for your story can be enormous. Wolfe offers an anecdote which involved Emile Zola. Zola was appalled by the conditions which coal

miners of his period endured and was determined to write a novel which would expose, among other things, their condition.

Zola wasn't a coal miner. He had no "personal experience" of the labor, no personal connection with the men and women who performed the labor, nor anything else connected with coal mining. But he didn't back away from the story. And he didn't settle for a third-hand account of the coal miners' existence. He did some research. Emile Zola posed as a mining inspector and rode down a series of shafts to a mine's dark belly.

Most of what Zola saw were things he expected. The smells were pungent and distinct. Perhaps he even felt a tightness in his chest, a touch of claustrophobia. Those would have been the things a lesser writer might have settled for. Zola didn't.

Wolfe relays the story that while Zola was at the bottom of the mine, he saw a pony hauling up a cart of coal. It occurred to Zola— This animal is much larger than a man. The elevators are very small. How was the pony lowered from the surface? Zola asked one of the supervisors how they'd managed to transport the animal down the shafts. He got a look of bewilderment in reply. The beast had not been transported, Zola was told. But then, how did the beast get down here? The beast has always been down here, came the reply. The beast was born here. As were his parents. All the beasts which Zola could see, ponies that were once bred in fresh air, sunshine and wide fields, were born here by their mothers and their mothers' mothers in darkness and in filth.

Zola was devastated by the casual cruelty of what he had learned. In a single afternoon's journalistic research, the pony became the image for every man, woman and child condemned to labor and die below the sun in the anthracite bowels of the earth.

The lesson here is straightforward. If you want to create a character who is a demolitions expert, you need to learn something about explosives, the military, stress and terminology familiar to a seasoned demolitions expert. If you're fortunate, a portrait will emerge which shows but does not tell. Recall Herr Schindler there, on his horse on the hill overlooking the ghetto. A little girl wanders through the carnage. A little girl in a red coat. It is context which allows us to experience Evil and Innocence side by side in this scene. It's the accumulation of facts gath-

ered from previous scenes, as well as previous action and dialogue which allows us to interact with and experience something powerful about the Jewish “situation” and about Oskar.

Facts are necessary to provide a context which allows us to be shown and not told a character’s inner story. It’s easy to see that a story set in the past or in an unfamiliar culture requires a journalist’s nose. But it wouldn’t hurt to also take a journalistic attitude toward those things with which we assume are familiar. Most of us have quite a bit to learn about the things we think we know. Write from your personal experience, surely, but be wary of writing about it.

THE THREAD

Actors and actresses are famous for “discovering” a character’s thread, which is nothing more than an interpretation of a story’s character. When directors or performers talk about the thread of a story they almost always are concerned with the thing that gives a character’s development both continuity and meaning. It’s almost Aquinian to hear discussions in this regard, as if the performer is stripping away all that is “accidental” about a character in order to reach what is essential.

A character can’t have a core and a story can’t have a “thread” unless the writer provides it. You can’t provide that thread if you don’t recognize what a thread is and how it functions within the narrative. Let’s take a look at a couple of familiar screenplay characters and try to discover the character’s “thread.”

I want to use characters from examples we’ve already discussed. It would be great to discuss characters derived from interactive narratives, but so few of us have shared the collective experience of any one interactive title, it’s much easier to discuss familiar films. With that said, let’s examine Rocky Balboa from *Rocky*, and Oskar Schindler from *Schindler’s List*.

Recall, please, that you always have an outer story which we can hear and see and an inner story about which we make inferences and guesses. The inner story can prompt a question as simple as Who Done It? But more often, the inner story will pose questions about motivation, intention, and feeling. Most of all, the inner story has to do with what the

character needs.

Writers frequently say that the key to discovering character is to identify the single need which runs from the story's beginning to its end. That core need is said to be the thread to which everything connects. Syd Field provides an analysis of *Dog Day Afternoon*, for instance, in which it is explained that Al Pacino's primary need in the story is to get money for his lover's sex-change operation. That dramatic need, Field tells us, triggers everything else.

The thing is, Field describes the character's dramatic need in terms of things which can be seen—the outer story. It might be useful to think of the exterior things that a character strives for as objectives, or goals rather than as “needs.” A “need,” for our purposes, is something that goes on inside the character. A goal is something the character pursues in the outer story and identifying that goal will not always lead you to the thread of continuity we're trying to find in character development. Some stories present goals which change. Other stories present multiple goals. There are films like *Dog Day Afternoon* which provide a protagonist with a single goal on page one, that never changes during the course of the entire narrative. Other stories, however, just don't fit that pattern.

A character's goal can change. What he needs on the outside is subject to context and opportunity. A character's core need, however, remains constant in a narrative. How does a character grow? See if this is useful: A character grows as the relationship between his goal(s) and his core need changes.

Most analysis of character concentrate on either the goal or the need. A character certainly must have a goal in the story—Pacino's goal in *Dog Day Afternoon* is to get money for his lover's operation. But Pacino's need probably has something to do with a raging desire for love, or for companionship or even dominance that are revealed and dramatized as he pursues the story's visible goal.

As noted above, a character's goal can change. Indeed, at a story's inception, the driving goal of the story may not even be present. What if a character pursues more than one goal in a story? How do we know which goal is “the thread?” How do we establish priorities among the various goals which may arise during the story? It is here that Narrative Reversals offer an important clue as to how goals and needs become integrated into a story.

REVERSALS, GOALS & NEEDS

Recall that a Three-Act story has two major reversals which occur just before the end of Acts I and II. One of the reasons these hinges are so important is that they initiate or complicate goals for the protagonist's pursuit. Major Reversals 1 & 2 also force a protagonist to either fulfill his/her core need, or to sacrifice that which he/she has most desired throughout the story.

What kind of goal can a major reversal initiate and how does it relate to a character's core need? First of all, notice that we're talking about a particular kind of character here, a "protagonist," that is, the character or occasionally the duo, central to a story. To understand how hinges work for these characters, we first have to see that a protagonist's goal and need are developed simultaneously.

Let's go back to *Rocky*. Rocky Balboa tells his lover at the top of the third act that if he can "go the distance," he'll know he's not "just another bum" from the neighborhood. That dialogue spells out Rocky's goal— To "go the distance," fifteen rounds with Apollo Creed, and it gives us a strong sense of Rocky's core need, that is, to attain some measure of self-worth, self-respect. We can't characterize Rocky's core need without some kind of moral context; Rocky's notion of self-worth is very much rooted in moral judgment. A leg breaker for a local loan shark and a hood, Rocky is called a "creep" in the movie, a "leg breaker," a "waste of life." Rocky doesn't want to be known that way.

Rocky's road to self-respect is linked to his goal, but it's important to know that "going the distance" wasn't a goal at the story's beginning. Even when Rocky begins training to fight Apollo, he isn't thinking of going the distance. He expects, in fact, to get his "face kicked in." And Rocky isn't facing his core need squarely at the story's beginning either. He could never make himself so vulnerable in the story's early pages.

So what turns Rocky's story, and life, around? Turns out that Rocky Balboa gets a chance right before the end of Act I to fight world-champion Apollo Creed. This is the narrative's First Major Reversal; it provides Rocky with a basis for a goal that will help him fulfill his core need. It reverses the external direction of the narrative and it provides a 180-degree turn for Rocky's inner growth.

But Rocky doesn't change all at once. At first, the chance to fight Apollo seems only to drive Rocky's feelings of rage and inadequacy. Gradually, however, that changes. A crusty trainer and a young woman provide much of the vehicle for that change. By the end of Act II, Rocky charges up an endless flight of steps an ebullient man. We've reached Rocky's Second Major Reversal. The hinge here doesn't reverse what happens in the outer story. It signifies instead a sea-change in Rocky Balboa's heart and provides a defining moment for choice. Rocky chooses to acknowledge his core need and to fulfill it; he chooses the possibility for self-respect over a life of leg-breaking and despair. The ordeal which the boxer endures in his pursuit of self-respect is almost a confession, an expiation for what had been "a waste of life."

We started out looking for a thread. This story's thread can't really be defined as just the outside story, nor as simply Rocky's core need. The story's thread has to do with the dialectic which exists between Rocky's twin pursuits of goal and need. Keep that in mind this pattern: An outer goal helps a character to fulfill a core need. The character pays heavy costs when he chooses to fulfill that need. A moral context operates to endorse, absolve or complicate the character's choice. And what does the character choose?

TO FULFILL OR TO SACRIFICE?

Rocky's determination to go the distance with Creed helps the boxer achieve a sense of self-worth. Rocky's dramatic choice is to either pay a cost for attaining self-respect or go back to being a leg-breaker. Rocky chooses to "go the distance" because pursuing that goal helps him fulfill his core need. Rocky's need for self-respect is endorsed by the moral code within which the story works. Rocky's need is "good." His pursuit of goals which answer that need are noble and "good." What happens, though if the goal you pursue for an entire story and a need you have struggled to satiate turn out to be evil?

Oskar Schindler provides an example of a character whose core need comes into conflict with his sense of right and wrong. The protagonist of *Schindler's List*, for all his pretense, has feelings of inadequacy as deeply ingrained as Rocky Balboa. In a telling scene with his wife, Oskar proud-

ly declares that whereas Oskar's father had never more than 35 employees in his life, Oskar now has 350. It doesn't bother Oskar in the least that his "employees" are slave-labor, that they are Jews who will not even receive the minimal wages Nazi law ironically requires Oskar to pay. Oskar's "goal" from the first scene when he's courting Nazi officers is to build a magnificent manufacturing facility. The War gives Oskar this opportunity, the Jews provide him with labor, and Schindler's more than happy to make hay while the sun shines.

Oskar's drive to build his war plant provides the outer story for Schindler's List just as Rocky's training regimen provides the outer story for Stallone's film. But there is an important difference between the two narratives. The difference is— Rocky's core need gets fulfilled. Schindler's core need gets sacrificed.

What inner need can we see in the character of Oskar Schindler? Liam Neeson once remarked that even after portraying Schindler so brilliantly, he still regarded the German as something of an enigma. Schindler, after all, was not a particularly nice guy. He was a womanizer. He had no compunction about breaking the law, lying or bribing. He seemed, in fact, to be very comfortable with the sleazy side of human nature. He showed no compassion or pity for anyone.

And yet it was this man who gave away his fortune and risked his life to save 1,100 Jewish people when many "good" people watched passively as Jews were slaughtered by the millions.

Schindler may have been moved to act because he had a certain moral code that could not be squared with what he most wanted for himself— to be known. His core need is to be respected by his competitors and Party members alike. To be publicly acknowledged as successful and important drives everything that Oskar does.

A desire for money does not describe Schindler's core need. Oskar wouldn't care to be the richest man in the world if that wealth carried with it the penalty of anonymity. Money, for Oskar, is only a means to an end. Throughout the film, Schindler seems to be thinking— If only I can establish this manufacturing facility, if only I can amass this fortune, why— Everybody will know who Oskar Schindler is then! Everyone will know!! Throughout Spielberg's film, we're given hints of how important it is for Oskar to be known. Oskar wants to walk into any

restaurant in Germany or Poland and have everyone know that he is a lover, a player, and a big shot. But not a butcher.

By the time Oskar does become well-known at nightclubs, casinos and restaurants of quality, a couple of things have happened which taint his trophy. First, Oskar discovers that his Nazi Party is exterminating Jewish men, women, and children by the trainload. Second, Schindler discovers, probably to his irritation, that he has a conscience. Oskar Schindler turns out to be, against all odds, a truly righteous man. A righteous man is not a perfect man. A righteous man doesn't have to aspire to either humility or anonymity. A righteous man is simply a man who sees what is right and tries to achieve it. A righteous man may give up what is most dear to himself in the face of a more compelling need for others.

Oskar Schindler comes to see that his exterior goal— solidified in the story's manufacturing facility— is inimical with the image or "presentation" for which Oskar wants to be remembered. Oskar Schindler would love to have been known as a wealthy manufacturer. He wouldn't even mind, in another war, being known as a wealthy munitions manufacturer. But Oskar does not want to be well known as a killer of helpless men, women, and children.

The major reversals we discussed earlier function the same way in Oskar's story as they do for Rocky Balboa's. First Reversal— Oskar watches as a German Commandant routs the Jews from their Polish ghetto. He sees the girl in the red coat winding her way through a mass of people marked for labor camps or death. Oskar's witness of the ghetto's liquidation forces him, for the first time, to realize that the laborers upon whose shoulders his profits depend are not chattel, but are living people with pain and fear and children. That's a problem for Oskar, an unanticipated variable in his formula to become well-known. A prick to his conscience.

But Schindler doesn't give up his dream for fame right away. It takes a while before the Jewish holocaust becomes vivid and close enough to persuade Oskar to give up his core need. The Second Act is almost finished before the German war-profiteer fully accepts responsibility for his role in the Final Solution. It takes a final straw to make Oskar see that his celebrity, and his audience, are hideous.

The second hinge provides that straw. Where the story's first hinge

prompts Oskar to recognize the terrible wrong that is being committed against his Jewish employees, the story's Second Major Reversal provides the straw that prods him to act. Oskar stands, hat in hand, next to a mountain of burning human beings. Oskar sees with us the body of a blond-haired little girl stretched limp and dead as a doll in her tiny red coat. The very next scene we see Oskar plotting to buy his Jewish employees from their Nazi Commandant.

The story's first hinge provides a moment of recognition., The second hinge provides the impetus to act. In order to act, Oskar must first make a stark choice between what he knows is right and what he knows is wrong. That choice has to carry with it some consequence; it has to cost Oskar something. And it does. The man who worked and schemed to acquire a fortune loses it all to save his Jewish workers. That is not the kind of decision which, in the Germany of World War II, would get you invited to many cocktail parties.

The conflict between what Schindler wants and what he knows is right produces the thread which holds his story together. A story cannot create interesting characters without this kind of conflict. *Schindler's List* generates conflict at many levels. But the main conflict which holds our interest centers around Schindler himself as we watch Oskar caught between his need for recognition and his recognition of what's right.

Oskar establishes a munitions plant near the story's end in his own hometown. Hometown boy made good. The plant was operational for seven months, the film tells us, and was a model of non-production. There's a nice irony here as Schindler's manufacturing facility becomes a vehicle for his own salvation—as well as for "his" Jews. An even nicer irony plays out when Oskar Schindler, never really well known during the war, becomes very widely known after the war for reasons he could not have imagined.

BAD GUYS

It's easy enough to see how the pattern of goal, need, and choice pull an audience into empathy with Rocky Balboa or Oskar Schindler. But what about a truly evil character? How can the pattern apply to the Bad Guys?

It's interesting to note that, in earlier eras frequently regarded as

uptight— say the 1950's, you could find many more powerful and interesting protagonists who were, without question, Evil. If we can be honest with ourselves, we must admit that evil characters fascinate us at least as much as “heroes.” Mark Twain was not an aberrant creature when he chose, “Heaven for climate,” and “Hell for conversation.” The truth is, a character's probity has nothing to do with whether we, the audience, “like” him or not. Shakespeare's *Richard III* is perhaps the most evil character ever created. He is both a man-killer and a child-killer! A totally ruthless, savage creature. And yet at the story's end, when Richard facing countless foes on a bloody field cries out, “A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!” there is not anyone in the audience who would not gladly give Richard what he needs to fulfill his magnificent “need.”

Most people who have trouble analyzing the relationship between human values and fiction mistake the purpose of a story's moral context. A moral context does not exist to prescribe behavior. It doesn't exist to proscribe behavior, either. A story's moral context exists to make its characters compelling and complicated. Fiction is the one place in our lives where we can value a person's competency over his morality. Think of *Citizen Kane* for a moment. We don't mind Kane becoming corrupt. We don't mind his ruthless and vicious treatment of friends, lovers and enemies; in fact, we revel in it. And the reason we revel in this experience, the reason we like Kane being a Bad Guy, is because he's good at it.

Now it's true that Kane meets an ill end. The newsman gets his come-uppance. The story's reversals, in fact, require that Kane have a tragic fall from grace. But those who see only the punishment of evil in Kane's fate misunderstand the function of moral codes in make-believe.

Competency outweighs morality in competition for an audience's empathy. It's a hell of a lot more important to be interesting than to be nice. And while it's true that we admire Oskar Schindler nobly risking his life and limb to save his Jewish employees, it's also true that we admire Citizen Kane for the risks he takes in his ruthless pursuit of power.

So whatever happened to the bad guys of stories past? Where are the Kanes, Richard III's, and Mac Bets? Modern movie-stories have no compunction at all about killing a couple of hundred people. We don't mind reveling in slow motion over a woman's rape or torture. We love to follow serial killers, so long as they're safely in second place. But mod-

ern stories almost never have as their protagonists characters who are truly evil.

Evil characters in modern cinema tend to be either drug addicts or foils. *The Bad Lieutenant* offers an example of the former; it's hard to say whether Harvey Keitel's character is evil or, merely, ill. In *The Silence of the Lambs*, Hannibal Lecter does truly terrible things, but even Hannibal's evil is modified by his insanity. And Hannibal only exists as a foil for innocent Clarice Starling.

Hollywood is obsessed with creating characters an audience will "like." Studio developers are notorious for writing into an otherwise interesting character some tinge of Good. Actors happily go along, saying things like, "My character doesn't wake up wanting to be bad." Oh, really? Well, let's look at some real-life bad guys. Stalin used to order executions over breakfast. Atilla the Hun said his greatest pleasure consisted of staring into the eyes of his victims as he took their land, raped their women, and killed their children. Would you rather take examples from make-believe? Truly evil characters probably don't start their days thinking up ways to be nice.

Every character needs to be well-rounded, of course. Every character needs some mix of the bestial and benign to be believable. But producers, agents and performers make a huge mistake when they assume that audiences cannot "like" an evil character unless that character's behavior is somehow expiated or excused. "I'm Okay, You're Okay" works fine for transactional analysis, but it's a poor substitute, in drama, for Evil.

Evil, especially when left undiluted, has fascinated audiences over the centuries. The word needs to get out that bad men and bad women make fantastic protagonists. A story's moral context doesn't exist to say that heroic choices (Schindler's) must appeal to us more than evil choices (Mac Beth's, Richard III's, Citizen Kane's, etc.). Evil characters pursue outer goals which serve corrupt needs. It's the costs they incur along the way and the skill with which they overcome obstacles and adversity that make bad guys interesting.

THE PATTERN

If you were to examine a thousand stories of all kinds, across all cultures, the tension between outer goal and inner need will repeat again and again. Whether it's Oskar Schindler or Luke Skywalker or Ivan the Terrible, successful characterization occurs when an outer and inner story drive a character to a moment of choice. Goal and desire meet. The character must then act to take what he most needs, or to sacrifice it.

You can't account for a story's satisfaction by looking at any of these elements in isolation of the other. The outer story and the inner story are complimentary. You can't satisfy an audience unless you have goals and need set into some kind of dramatic conflict. You can't have conflict without choice. You can't have interesting choices unless there's some kind of meaningful cost involved. It's a seamless whole that storytellers strive for. Nothing else will last.

WHAT TO DO AND HOW TO DO IT

Let's bring this home by giving you ways to make the preceding chapters useful for your work. What should you do with these discussions of structure, character, point of view and the rest? What should you pull from *Rocky* or *Schindler's List*?

What you should take from all these analysis is a pattern which you can apply to your own work. Knowing the pattern is no guarantee of success, of course. Knowing what works in other stories doesn't mean you'll be able to originate good material yourself. But the patterns you see here ought to give you a framework within which to develop and critique your own work. It ought to make your story-choices more informed, better integrated, more likely to be successful.

These remarks also ought to help you see if things are going badly. If, for instance, you're looking over one of your own stories and you can't clearly identify an opening trigger, a hinge at Act I and Act II, a climax, resolution or catharsis-- then you need to take a long walk and start over.

Similarly, if when examining your work you get conflicting ideas about your character's inner needs, or if you can't clearly identify how the character's goals further or frustrate those needs, then you probably aren't going to have characters who command much empathy from an audience.

If you find yourself telling instead of showing, something in your story or dialogue probably needs work.

There's a lot to digest from these past few chapters. A lot to apply. Now, for something concrete:

Go out and rent a half-dozen or so critically acclaimed films. Then beg, borrow or steal a half-dozen interactive dramas and break them down scene by scene. If the films or interactive movies are based on novels or plays, break those stories down scene by scene. Then pull back and look at the Big Picture. Do you see precipitating incidents early in the story? Major reversals at a quarter and again at three-quarters of the way through the story? How about the characters? Do they have goals which either help or hinder the fulfillment of what's inside their hearts? It's doubtful many interactive dramas will hold up under such a test. Successful films, however, have to. See if the patterns we have proposed hold up. Do some homework.

As a writer, you have to be able to recognize patterns in the works you see, read, and/or interact with, and you have to apply those patterns to your own work. A hint to this process: Instead of imagining yourself as writing a story, imagine yourself performing it. Kevin Alber, a writer/director/actor hyphenate, recently stated that some of the best actors/actresses think a lot like writers and some of the best writers think a lot like the great performers. Most people have no idea how hard an "honest" performer works to discover the "thread" that makes his/her character come alive. It's very possible that the best performers go about discovering his/her character in much the same way that good writers create them.

There are no common denominators for how performers accomplish this task. Every extreme exists. You may have heard the anecdote which took place on the set of *Marathon Man*, a film in which Dustin Hoffman plays a character who is abducted and horribly tortured by a former Nazi portrayed by Sir Laurence Olivier. Hoffman stayed up all night, so the story goes. He ran, he drank coffee, didn't sleep all night long. He arrived at the set the next morning unshaven, unbathed and looking like a wreck.

"My God what's happened to you?" Sir Laurence inquired. Hoffman explained to the older man, proudly, how he'd prepared for the

scene.

Apparently, Sir Laurence's reaction wasn't what Hoffman expected. After listening patiently to the ordeal through which the younger man had put himself, Olivier just shook his head and said something like, "My boy, why don't you just learn to act?"

It's a humorous story. But the truth is, both men prepared properly for their scenes. Hoffman's "method" was perfectly suited to the character he wanted to capture. Olivier's cool, clinical approach was perfectly suited to the cynical, cold-blooded Nazi he portrayed in the story.

As a writer, you'll probably need to choose a "method" somewhere between Hoffman's and Olivier's. You can even throw in some Tom Wolfe for good measure. But whatever you do, building character will require a lot more than a summary of attributes. It will require work to portray even the simplest inner life believably. The writer-thinking-as-a-performer will realize that each scene must have a mini-story, a mini-goal for the performers—some outcome which does more than provide exposition. The performing writer understands that individual scenes can't be convincingly portrayed unless there is some "thread" which holds the scenes together, some overall tension which exists continually between a character's goal(s) and need.

Writers and performers have a similar imperative to commit to a story. You can't write a story half-enthusiastically and expect the story "to play." As a performer, you can't "play" a scene half-way. The corollary to commitment is risk. Writers have to take risks to create interesting characters. Imagine Oskar Schindler as a do-gooding Catholic and plot what consequences that characterization would have for his story! Writers, like performers, must place themselves at risk if they are to create characters who "play" on-screen.

This chapter has been aimed at making you understand how good stories make their characters come alive. It's a chapter designed to help you see patterns, faces in the clouds, which you can use to create and critique your own work. It's also a chapter which encourages you to think of yourself as a performer. When you've done your homework and you're ready to write, don't be embarrassed to cast yourself in the roles you create. Don't be afraid to "do" Rocky Balboa, Hannibal Lecter or Joan of Arc.

Commit yourself. Take a risk. See what happens.



Q & A

LARRY KAY

Bio

*Larry Kay specializes in writing and designing animated adventure comedy entertainment and family edutainment. He wrote and co-designed **FREDDI FISH AND THE CASE OF THE MISSING KELP SEEDS** for Humongous Entertainment, which has become the most award-winning children's CD-ROM title released in the past year. Larry recently wrote and designed Activision's **MUPPET TREASURE ISLAND** adventure game. He is currently writing, designing, and executive producing his original creation, **TOOBERS SURF AND DESTROY** in association with*

Toonsmiths and MediaX, to be published by Grolier/3-Prong Plug.

*Larry consults on new media projects for select clients, including: Broderbund, Colossal Pictures, Disney, Tribeca Films, and Vortex Media Arts. He contributed chapters to Ladera Press's **Multimedia Law Handbook**, 2nd Edition, plus articles to *Morph's On-Line* and *New Media Magazine*. He co-founded Writers Connection's annual **Writing for Interactive Multimedia** conference.*

*Prior to Larry's multimedia epiphany, he was a TV/film writer and producer. He wrote cartoon episodes for MGM/UA's **PINK PANTHER** series and is a graduate of the Hanna-Barbera Animation Writing Program. He wrote and produced educational films, television documentaries, and travelogues for a range of clients, including: PBS, the New York City Board of Education, and the United States Constitution Bicentennial Commission. He was also music coordinator for the 1989 award-winning feature film, **TRUE LOVE** (released by MGM/UA), and RCA soundtrack album which produced two Billboard Top 40 hits.*

Larry taught television, film, and audio production courses at New York University, Syracuse University, and abroad as an Arts America Cultural

Ambassador specializing in quality low-budget production techniques. He holds an M.S. in Television & Film from Syracuse University, and a B.A. in Interdisciplinary Studies from the University of California, Berkeley.

Interview

HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH INTERACTIVE? I kept reading in the trades about this thing called interactive, digital, multimedia whatsiwho-its. I started looking at these adventure games and seeing what they were about. And I said, “Oh, this is kind of cool.” I liked the *Monkey Island* series created by Ron Gilbert, and lo and behold, I got introduced to him. He had left LucasArts and had formed a company called Humungous Entertainment. I sent him some of my linear writing samples and he liked my work. Then he said, “Write something interactive.” Ron had an idea about a character he called *Freddi Fish*, and he showed me a couple of ways to format an interactive game design document.

Speculatively, I wrote him a twenty-page, interactive writing sample and that was the beginning of *Freddi Fish*. I don’t, as a rule, write on spec. But I figured that even if I didn’t get the gig, I would still have a good writing sample. Fortunately, he really liked my writing and hired me to write and co-design the *Freddi Fish* game with him.

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT? We got together for a marathon design weekend where in two days we basically designed the game. Ron taught me to follow some intelligent principles of game design for this type of adventure game. Designing the game was not nearly as difficult as it first seemed. I then proceeded to write a 50page treatment and a 250-page design document. I always kept in mind that my central purpose was finding a good story with good characters. The title basically launched my interactive writing career.

WHAT ELSE HAVE WRITTEN? I just completed *Muppet Treasure Island* for Activision. It was based on a feature film script for the soon-to-be-released film of the same name.

WAS IT DIFFICULT TO TAKE A LINEAR SCREENPLAY AND MAKE IT INTERACTIVE? Yeah. In a linear screenplay you want to move extremely purposefully, and with extreme focus toward inexorable set up of causes and

effects toward an end. In a game, you still want an end, but you want to be able to meander all over the place. The strength of writing often comes down to the strength of the characters. A simple story well told. That's the big challenge; to do that in a medium requires complexity, complications and randomness.

WHY DO YOU ENJOY WRITING FOR INTERACTIVE MEDIA? I like to play games and solve puzzles. One of the things that drew me to this field was the opportunity for a larger quantity of my writing to remain in the final product, unlike in film and television, where so much of what you write just can't fit on the spine of a linear format. It's an eleven-minute cartoon, or it's a hundred and twenty page screenplay, or whatever, and that's that. In multimedia, it's still possible to push those barriers out a lot further.

That doesn't mean a writer should engage in hyper-creativity. Every project must have a solid narrative spine, a clear beginning, middle, and an end. If you do not know what the end of your game is before you start writing, you will probably get lost trying to get there. I spend a lot of time creating this macro-structure before I actually write the design document and/or screenplay.

HOW ARE ISSUES SUCH AS CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT BEING DEALT WITH DURING THE WRITING PROCESS OF, SAY, AN INTERACTIVE ADVENTURE? Well, in the classic adventure game, the player usually has to find some object, place or condition at the end of the game. How you get there involves navigating through all kinds of barriers and roadblocks, or collecting and solving secret combinations. The recent new twist for adventure characters is to reveal a character's ghost. Something is revealed to or about that character early on in the game. The character's pain or flaw needs to be dealt with somehow during the adventure in order for there to be growth in that character.

ARE THERE ANY INTERACTIVE PARADIGMS THAT YET TO SEE, THAT YOU'D LIKE TO EXPLORE? One idea that really interests me is what I understand to be sort of classic branching strategy, or narrative strategy, is the idea of an interactive soap opera. Where John and Martha decide to do it on the couch. Or John and Martha decide not to do it. Or, you the player have the option at certain decision nodes for certain things to happen or not to happen. That interests me for that genre and that makes a lot of sense for that genre. Ultimately, all of those different story permutations would need to be written. Meaningful narrative choices would grow exponentially.

I suppose the solution that some writers have been using to make that par-

adigm more manageable is to use a kind of pyramid or tree, where it branches out and branches out, and then it hinges back to a node. And then it branches out and branches out, and then it hinges back to another node. And so forth. Always hinging back to these nodes. And if that can be done well, wonderful.

But right now, this type of branching feels really artificial to me. Really forced. The true way to write those branching stories is to write all the zillion and three different scenes. And really flush out where those characters are going. I would love to see that done with soap opera characters.

NOW THAT YOU ARE WEARING THE HAT OF PRODUCER, HOW HAS THIS CHANGED YOUR OUTLOOK ON THE WRITER & PRODUCER RELATIONSHIP? Before I was a writer, I was a producer in film and TV, so I was already somewhat sensitized. I became a writer sort of by accident, when I was a tv/film producer looking for some original scripts to produce. Anytime I found a property that was any good, some other producer with more clout and more money would come along and buy it. So, since I couldn't acquire a property I decided to make some of my own. How hard could that be? Gasp! I think writing is much harder than producing. And writing for multimedia is much different than any other form I've ever written for.

The most dramatic way that being a producer has changed my outlook as a writer and game designer is that everything I write I am now doubly aware that it better be great material or it's definitely gonna get cut. In fact, I've been the most brutal wielder of the script axe on my current project, *TOOBERS*, where I'm also executive producer. I'm constantly aware of our production and software development needs, and now doubly aware about whether I'm communicating clearly and succinctly enough so that the rest of the team can actually actualize the actual script.

HOW HAVE YOU GROWN AS A WRITER HAVING THIS NEW PERSPECTIVE? I guess becoming brutal with the script meataxe, or to paraphrase Hemingway, I've hard-wired my shock-proof bullshit detector. I've definitely become a better game designer now that I am privy to the entire software development process. I've noticed that I communicate to my consultancy clients on a more technical level, asking detailed questions about software engine, authoring system, base platform, product release dates, the experience of the engineers and programmers and artists. Once I understand the limitations of a project going in, I can design more effectively and ultimately write to those specs.

DO YOU EVER HAVE WRITER'S BLOCK? OR CREATOR'S BLOCK?

IF SO, HOW DO YOU GET AROUND THIS OBSTACLE? No, I can't really afford writer's block. Nothing like a good swift deadline to kick in the creativity. I think writer's block often occurs when you don't trust your ideas. Creativity is like a muscle, the more you use it the stronger it gets. I don't subscribe to the notion that every writer has a finite amount of stuff to say and uses it up. But on the other hand, I know that I, like most writers, must be careful not to burn out. I definitely have some days that are surprisingly productive, while other days I have to trudge through on technique. When I get a little rest between projects or drafts, I'll start a little fresher and be more free and spontaneous with my creativity. Ideas generate more rapidly, I feel free to throw out a lot of material on my way to finding the good stuff.

WHEN YOU ARE ABOUT TO START WRITING A NEW INTERACTIVE TITLE, EXACTLY HOW DO YOU BEGIN? DO YOU STARE AT A BLANK COMPUTER SCREEN AND TYPE, FADE IN? DO YOU SCRIBBLE NOTES ON PAPER? DOES A PREMISE COME FIRST? The premise definitely comes first. On an assignment, the client will almost always have a fairly decent preliminary concept. I try to find out as much as I can about what the client wants and all those technical, budgetary, market parameters as early as possible.

Typically, if I'm brought in at the beginning or some time early on in a project, we'll meet. Initially, I see my role as two-fold: I contribute my ideas, and I work very hard to embrace the ideas of the client. I like to take copious notes, writing down whatever anybody says. Then I type them up, number each item, cut them apart, and begin to sort them on top of two large work tables in my office. I sort them one way, then another. Soon, clusters and patterns begin to emerge. I try to work quickly so that nothing takes on undue importance. I try to remain very fluid, very open to new ideas. I'm jotting down new ideas, images, bits of dialog as I keep moving. I try to include everything, even if it gets put into a miscellaneous pile. And then I take those numbered notes and sort them on the word processor. Then I'll fax or e-mail that to the client.

Usually, I'll require feedback from the client at this point. Depending on deadlines and the scope of my participation, we'll meet either in person or on the phone. Naturally, the client read what I've written before we talk about it. I prefer that the client has read it at least a half-day before we meet, so that the old "back brain" can chew on it and get a little distance.

It's right around this time that we begin to filter the ideas, making preliminary decisions about a super-structure, agreeing that some ideas are definitely keepers. But I still like to keep it fluid for now.

Sometimes research is involved. If that's the case, I'll do a little of this at the very beginning. The earlier I can do preliminary research, the more quality ideas I'll bring to our meetings. If content experts are involved, the earlier I can meet with them, the better. I take what they have to offer very, very seriously.

After we go through the notes a second round, I move toward some decisions.

It's very important to make creative decisions, otherwise meetings drag on endlessly and the spirit can get kicked right out of a project.

Decision making is a big challenge in writing for multimedia because these projects can get behemoth very quickly. I've seen projects die right at this point when decisions aren't made. And it's at this juncture that I've also seen projects flourish -- that's truly rewarding.

I like to write a synopsis, about 20 pages, to give everyone a sense of what the project is now about, what decisions have been made, what questions are still open, where we think we'll emphasize. If it's more than about 20 pages, it becomes harder for the client to read quickly and wrap their heads around it.

At this point, if I can take a couple of days off from the project, I'll get some objectivity and be able to respond more openly to others' ideas. I won't be so beholden to my own authorship. It'll be easier for me to embrace others' authorship. Generally, I feel pretty comfortable about my own creative contributions on a project, secure my creative thumbprints will be all over it without my pushing too hard.

So, some of what I do as a designer and writer is to make sure that the client's ideas are all over it, too. I can't count the number of times I've laughed out loud because I came up with a good bit and someone else punched it up or used it in a better spot. And those little epiphanies that get triggered when the client says something just right, or I have a rough idea and the client shapes it just right, or vice versa. Those are creative highs -- thrilling and rewarding. I know that I'm going to learn a lot on each project, or at least I hope so. At least, that's the ideal.

Now that the super-structure is set, it's time to pound out the treatment.

That's where the project begins to really come to life. That's where it's time for tough decisions. That's where the editing axe gets sharpened.

Since these design documents get so huge and difficult to read, doing a detailed treatment is, in my judgment, the best way to begin to insert the interactivity without the whole thing getting too convoluted too quickly. My treatments tend to be pretty lengthy, from about 50 pages to 150 pages. But I believe that the treatment can be the most valuable milestone in the writing process.

Ideally, I like to take a week off from the project at that point, again to get

some distance and recharge to write the design doc. I prefer it when the client can make real comments on the treatment, and I have to deliver my speech about how this is the least expensive time to make the changes, so make them now. A good producer gives me copious notes right on the manuscript plus a few pages of summary notes.

So, finally I write the design doc. I view this last process as simply detailing the treatment. Of course I'll make some new discoveries and reshape things a bit, and a good client will keep me posted on ideas from that end, too. For an adventure game, my design docs range from around 200 pages to 350 pages, depending on what the client will actually, realistically produce. Usually, the design doc gets a polish once the client has commented.

AS AN INTERACTIVE WRITER/DESIGNER, EXPLAIN HOW YOU PITCH A NEW IDEA TO A PUBLISHER: Before I pitch an idea, I put together a fairly full proposal. Sample writing, navigation maps, concept illustrations. I pitch somewhat selectively, and try to pre-qualify that a producer might be interested in this particular category or may consider me for one of their assignments. A successful pitch more often leads to a writing assignment than to actually placing my spec project. Placing a spec project happens very rarely, but pitching one of my own original creations gives a producer an idea of what my own peculiar passions and voice are all about in case an appropriate assignment opportunity comes up.

AS A PRODUCER, DO YOU ACCEPT PITCHES FROM 3RD PARTY WRITERS? IF NOT NOW, WILL YOU? IF YOU WILL, WHAT WOULD YOU EXPECT THE WRITER TO CONVEY? Not presently. I currently have a full slate with my own creations. But as I continue moving into the role of creative director and executive producer for Toonsmiths, I'm sure I'll begin to look selectively. A writer would need to convey to any producer the ability to actualize the entire design doc. To stay the course. Good ideas, structure, dialog, visualization, sounds -- and most importantly, compelling reasons why this should be an interactive project. Plus, a good producer should look for a writer's ability to work with others' ideas. And if it's entertainment, it's gotta be entertaining. Fun and fresh. And for me, also non-violent.

IF THERE WERE A MAGICAL NEW SOFTWARE PROGRAM THAT WRITERS, DESIGNERS, PROGRAMMERS AND PRODUCERS COULD UTILIZE TO CREATE/EXPLAIN THEIR IDEAS TO ONE ANOTHER, WHAT FUNCTIONS WOULD IT HAVE? Data base, data base, data base. If

new ideas are coming into a project, there must be some extremely well-organized method of keeping track of all the new stuff. Otherwise, material will get lost or confused or jumbled or misconstrued. Once the design doc is in production, all new ideas, changes, deletions have to be kept track of. Before production starts, that's the time for new ideas. But as soon as the production gun fires, I believe it's time for everyone to bring new ideas in very judiciously. Otherwise, budgets and deadlines disappear.

IN YOUR OPINION, WILL THERE EVER BE STANDARDIZED FORMATS FOR INTERACTIVE SCREENPLAYS? SHOULD THERE BE? I

I don't think there should be standardized formats for these unique documents. Every project has its own specific needs. But that said, once a team or company finds a niche, it should standardize everything appropriate, including parts of the writing formats. But we've got to be careful about standardizing too early in the development of our young industry, in ways that might limit or calcify creativity and interactivity. Also, if I may get up on my soapbox for a moment, I think those companies who are secretive about their design doc formats are cutting themselves off from growth and harming the industry. That attitude places more emphasis on HOW a writer communicates than on the actual ideas. It's amateurish.

WHAT'S THE WORST ASPECT TO THIS (INTERACTIVE) BUSINESS?

Bad products hurt us all. Anyone who puts a cruddy title on the market risks alienating consumers, and that keeps all of us down. Our industry won't become a mass-market industry until the quality product overwhelms the cruddy product. But that's not to say that bigger budgets are the answer.

The writer, more than any other element on a title, can make magic without a big supporting budget. Though, that's not to say that a good writer should be anything less than well-paid. In fact, good money well-spent on a good writer at the beginning of the development process will save beaucoup bucks later.

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THIS NEW CATEGORY OF INTERACTIVE WRITING...INTERACTIVE EPISODIC SERIALS FOR THE INTERNET & ONLINE (AKA THE SPOT)? WHAT NEW AVENUES OF EMPLOYMENT ARE OPENING UP TO WRITERS?

The great thing about the Internet and world wide web is that you can put your stuff out there without necessarily using a powerful distributor as an intermediary. A good way for new writers to build up credits is to bootstrap a pet project. Shooting live-action with a minicam, or even digitizing key stills or artwork with audio, is a way to get

some credits with a team of colleagues who are all trying to break in. Multimedia, to a certain extent, is supplanting garage-budget feature filmmaking. Not much money, but great opportunities to learn new ways of making stuff interactive, build up credits, make contacts, and perhaps attract a following via word-of-mouth.

1995 was the year that lotsa folks put up web sites for the first time. Now lots of those sites are abandoned. I believe that if you can create a serial or episodic series and keep it updated for a whole year, you'll attract some kind of a niche audience and that it will almost surely lead to some new opportunity.

THERE IS A ZEN SAYING THAT GOES, "IN THE BEGINNER'S MIND, THERE ARE MANY POSSIBILITIES, BUT IN THE EXPERTS MIND, THERE ARE FEW." NOW THAT YOU ARE AN INDUSTRY GURU, DOES THIS PHRASE MEAN ANYTHING TO YOU? I guess that since I still believe that there are "many possibilities," there's no way I could be an "industry guru." Even though I've built up some decent credits and have a real passion for this industry and means of expression, I don't yet consider myself an expert. My father's definition of an expert is somebody who has done something once. And I've also heard it described about "experts" that an "ex" is a has-been and a "spurt" is a drip under pressure. I believe that those who fancy that they know it all have peaked. We are in a young industry and I suppose it makes more sense that we behave like youths: having fun, experimenting, doing naughty things, disobeying our elders, learning how to grow up, and seeing a universe of many possibilities.

ANY THOUGHTS ABOUT INTERACTIVE WRITING YOU'D LIKE TO DISCUSS THAT I HAVEN'T COVERED? Back on my soapbox then. One reason there's so much violence in electronic games is because of LAZY WRITING. It's so much easier to write the game-equivalent of a schlocky horror film than it is to put as much game challenge and entertainment into a non-violent product. As with movie audiences, there will always be an audience for horror. But there's potentially greater audiences for family comedy and heroic adventures, for example. Other genres besides horror can translate to games, too. It's up to the writer to figure out how and lead the way. If we don't, the mass market our industry craves will never be held. And if the mass market isn't held, those non-participants will continue to see this industry as worthy of little more than contempt and censorship.



Ch. 6

TOWARD AN INTERACTIVE AESTHETIC

“It is the function of art to renew our perception. What we are familiar with we cease to see. The writer shakes up the familiar scene, and as if by magic, we see a new meaning in it.”

— Anais Nin

Why is it important for interactive writers to create stories of quality? Why does it matter?

Currently, producers of interactive stories don’t have to worry a lot about the quality of their product. In the short run, novelty is the stimulus to sales. Every new technology goes through this kind of thing. People forget that when films first came along back in the mid-1800’s, its users weren’t interested in anything like a quality story. In fact, early films weren’t used to tell stories at all. A camera could shoot virtually anything and people would line up to pay and see the result.

The same thing is happening in interactive media. The first interactive producers to get their product on the shelf are bound to attract the most attention. Any kind of interactive project, whether it’s *The Journeyman Project*, *Speed Racer* or *Deep Throat*, will initially spark interest. But interest in the new technology will eventually invite its comparison to other storytelling media. Interactive programs and films will

be critiqued beside mainstream movies, video releases and television. At present, there is an enormous gap between the quality of multimedia stories and the quality of stories delivered on film or videotape. This gap will have to narrow. If it doesn't, consumers of stories will return to the big screen or tube and gamers will stick with Nintendo.

It will be no small thing to woo an audience desiring full-fledged stories into the interactive arena. The biggest challenge interactive producers may have to overcome on their road to establishing a market is the notion that because their technology is "different" their stories will be judged, appreciated, and critiqued in ways vastly different than audiences now judge, appreciate or criticize established media. That won't happen. A story cannot masquerade as a game and a game will not be fulfilling as a story.

A second obstacle between interactive creators and their as-yet-to-be-won audience has to do with aesthetics. Many interactive producers assume that as digital technology comes closer and closer to reproducing the sights and sounds of reality, audiences will flock to the new, interactive form of storytelling.

Digital technology already produces imagery comparable to that created by chemical emulsion. Full-motion video is now a reality-- just check out the game, *Johnny Mnemonic*. 3-D replications of the human face and form will soon become a reality. And Virtual Reality, once perfected, would seem to finally establish digital imaging as the simulacrum of narrative technology.

But will Virtual Reality systems be able to tell stories more powerfully than older, more imperfect simulations?

It's an interesting and important question. Filmmakers initially made claims that celluloid's ability to represent reality gave it "special" status. This was a new storytelling machine whose experience was alien to the experience of staged drama or literature because, after all, film was a medium which mimicked reality.

However, the experiences of audiences over the last fifty years or so has shown that the cinema's ability to recreate reality may not be at the heart of its appeal. It is pretty obvious that the experience of a person viewing a film is different than the experience of a person reading a book or even watching a play. The phenomena of film, prose, and staged

drama are not the same. Considering these and similar comparisons, an early German theorist, Rudolf Arnheim, cited photography as the basis of film's "special" appeal. Verisimilitude, the ways in which moving pictures can copy "reality," becomes for Arnheim the thing that distinguishes the movie-experience from the novel experience (pardon the pun). Other folks like the Brazilian, Andre Bazin, had a slightly different and perhaps more interesting view. Bazin writes that filmed drama has an "asymptotic" relationship with reality. An asymptote is a curve which comes closer and closer to a fixed line without ever actually touching it. Bazin suggests with this analogy that it's the slight differences between the filmed world and the "real" world which account for cinema's appeal. In reality, for instance, we cannot manipulate time. We don't "WIPE" or "DISSOLVE" from our present to our past or to our future. We also can't "CUT" from one place to another. We don't "PAN" our yards looking for the newspaper, "REVERSE SHOT" when arguing with our boss, or "DOLLY" home from work.

What we can do, almost to perfection, is record the sounds and sights which the "real world" provides. We can mimic movement and color to the point of verisimilitude.

But most of the time we don't want verisimilitude. *Schindler's List*, to offer a recent example, abjures color film for black & white. The story's location in time and culture only partly accounts for that decision. Janusz Kaminski, the film's Oscar-winning cinematographer, spoke in an NBC interview about how excited he was to have the chance to work in the more primitive black & white film stock. Among other things, Kaminski asserted that color film can "distract" audiences, can call the audience's attention away from where it "ought to be." For Kaminski, our attention ought to be on the faces of the people affected by the story. And many filmmakers would agree with Kaminski that black & white film explores the "landscape of the human face" more powerfully than is possible with colored stock.

Kaminski's remarks regarding black & white film stock need to be understood in terms of a general aesthetic. Whether it's *Schindler's List* or *Jurassic Park*, filmmakers do not try to "reproduce" the "real world." They seek instead to exploit the gaps between the quotidian world and its presentation in a way that most powerfully satisfies an audience.

Sometimes a reproduction of the “real world’s” sight, sound, movement or dimension serves that goal. But just as frequently it does not.

Movies gain their appeal as much by the ways in which they depart from reality as the ways by which they mimic it. Andre Bazin’s insights need to be understood by those persons who see interactive and virtual reality technologies as the next heirs to storytelling. The technophile who believes that full-motion video or virtual reality are natural progressions of the movies’ quest to reproduce reality and that this progression will of itself enhance the storytelling experience is simply mistaken. Bazin would argue that a technology which perfectly mimics reality cannot be satisfying as a storytelling form.

The differences between the story-world and the real-world are crucial to the storytelling experience of all media. Radio, novels, plays, and films, being unable to mimic reality, require their audience to use its imagination. Future storytelling technologies will require the same. If there is a difference or uniqueness to interactive media, it’s the difference between audience being a spectator to audience becoming a participant.

We could spend more time examining the ways in which filmed texts and interactive texts borrow from other sources. We could spend even more time discussing what makes these story presentations different for their viewers than the experience humans have with novels, poetry, or short stories. But it’s more important to end by reminding ourselves what all of these storytelling technologies have in common.

We’ve spent some time looking at the particulars of interactive documents such as the screenplay. What kind of language shows instead of tells? What is the dramatic point of view? What needs to happen when we establish a scene? These are but a few of the new paradigms and skill sets which interactive writers need to master.

We’ve also spent time taking what might be called a macro-look at stories. We’ve analyzed the structure of the screenplay as a model for interactive screenplays. We also took a structural look at the architecture necessary for interactive programs to function. But we specifically abandoned structuralist’s paradigms when we began looking at ways to distinguish good films from bad ones— good interactive narrative from lifeless ones. That distinction led us to consider the ways in which characters come to life on stage and screen. We took a look at the thread which

weaves interesting characters. We traced the relationship between context, conflict, and choice. We developed patterns to explain the thread which must always exist between a narrative's inner story and its outer story.

All of what you have just read and learned should give you a decent start. But it's not enough, by itself, to guarantee you'll create a good story. No analysis, no matter how noble, can achieve that.

Where do you go from here?

First, experience interactive media. Go to a museum and interact with a kiosk. Buy a game machine or upgrade your computer system to CD-ROM. Dive in, get you feet wet, twitch, morph and have fun. Then, reach inside yourself and ask, "What stories can I tell better?"

Secondly, learn the difference between writing from your experience and writing about your experience.

Lastly and definitely not least, you need to read. It's interesting how books still fuel the narrative fires. Why is it that filmmakers, in particular, people who laud the moving image above all else, return so often to the printed page for their stories? Why does that happen over and over again? The answers may lie in the fact that imagination is conjured through language. Language provides the structure from which we derive meaning. Language allows us, maybe even forces us, to invent stories, to see bat-wings in ink-blots or faces in the clouds. It's useful and maybe even important to watch movies, television and other visually-based stories. But these are relatively passive experiences compared to what happens when the human mind engages the printed page.

Read, then. Read often and well.

And maybe, occasionally, you ought to tell somebody a bedtime story.



Q & A

ROBERT TERCEK

Bio

Robert Tercek is a producer/director of television and interactive media projects. In 1995, he and producer Sally DeSipio started a partnership. Their mission: to create new characters and story franchises that work on every platform, from TV to CD-ROM to the Internet.

*In 1994, Tercek directed and executive produced **TURBOCHARGED THUNDERBIRDS**, a re-make of the classic 1964 British TV series.*

*Previously, Tercek was the founding creative director at 7th Level, Inc. He designed several interactive titles, including **MONTY PYTHON'S COMPLETE WASTE OF TIME**, **MONTY PYTHON'S DESKTOP PYTHONIZER** and **TUNELAND STARRING HOWIE MANDEL**.*

Prior to joining 7th Level, Tercek was the Director of the On-Air Promo Department at MTV: Music Television. He supervised the creative hothouse which generated short films, channel ID's, promos and animation. As a television director, he created over 500 broadcast campaigns. Additionally, Tercek was the Creative Director for the launch of MTV Asia, the Hong Kong-based service broadcast via satellite to 44 Asian countries.

Tercek entered the entertainment industry as an artist and educator. He was an instructor of Fine Arts and English in the U.K., Germany and the U.S. In 1985, he received a Fulbright Grant for the study of verbal and visual communication in the Federal Republic of Germany.

Interview

AS AN INTERACTIVE MEDIA PRODUCER, WHAT SORT OF THINGS ARE YOU HEARING FROM WRITERS? The professional writers in

Hollywood that I've dealt with all seem to have a keen desire to work on interactive projects of some sort. But they're very vague on what it is they want to do. So my first word of advice is, get familiar with this medium. I know this sounds like an old saw, but the point is, it really helps to model your project on somebody else's project.

It's not enough to say, "Well, it's a show, and here's the character and the story." You've got to describe the mission, the challenge, the obstacle, and the interactivity. I think writers overlook that aspect a lot.

HOW DOES THE WRITER CREATE A TRULY ENGAGING INTERACTIVE EXPERIENCE? That's the principle hurdle in interactive. I am constantly confronting that myself because I'm focusing on story-based entertainment, not gaming. It's a damn tough puzzle to solve. How does a writer make a story a game, or how does a writer create a story engaging enough to be more than just a point and click environment? Where's the narrative? How does the narrative get built in?

Writers need to remember that they are telling stories with pictures. That's why I'm confident TV writers are going to succeed in this business, though they currently are not considered adept at interactive screenwriting.

I THINK THE PROBLEM COMES DOWN TO UNDERSTANDING INTERACTIVE DESIGN STRUCTURE. That's why the best thing to do is to rip off somebody else's structure.

[LAUGHS] And improve on it. This is standard procedure in the rest of the entertainment industry. In movies, television and advertising we refer to existing well-know work as a model for new ideas. If you don't have the resources to make prototypes, then point to somebody else's work.

WHAT ABOUT PITCHING? DO WRITERS NEED MORE THAN JUST A GREAT IDEA? I used to do elaborate storyboards for pitches and I found it doesn't get you anywhere. The execs don't read storyboards, they don't understand what the hell you're talking about. Frankly, it's much easier to say it's "*Myst* with characters." They understand what that means. Or if somebody says, it's "*Doom* but you can look up and down," that's cool. Okay, now it means something. As opposed to the standard pitch, "It's a deep, thrilling, cyberspace interactive adventure with multiple points of view". What the heck is that? During a pitch, you are much better off using existing properties as a common reference point. High concept pitches work because they're easy to green light.

Once there is interest in the concept, then you can flesh it out with storyboards, maps, pictures, flow charts and so on.

YOU'VE RECENTLY SET UP YOUR OWN COMPANY. ARE WRITERS STARTING TO PITCH YOU THINGS? Yeah, I get pitched all the time.

DESCRIBE A TYPICAL PITCH FROM A HOLLYWOOD FILM WRITER WHO'S NEVER WRITTEN FOR INTERACTIVE. Typically, what I see is badly written, poorly presented, and badly thought out. The quality of the presentation says a lot about the quality of thought behind it. I would like to see the quality of presentations improve.

DO INTERACTIVE PRODUCERS LISTEN TO MANY PITCHES OR READ SPEC MATERIAL FROM WRITERS? Sure, if the writers sign a waiver. I'm speaking from the point of view of an executive at a company that might accept a pitch. The fact is, the company may be liable for anything they look at from the outside. We live in a litigious society. Most companies are going to ask you to sign a waiver that basically says if the company has anything like this in the works or if they are even thinking about something like this, or if they ever publish something like this and it resembles in any way something that you may be sending to us, you waive all claims and all rights against it.

Now, with agents, when they set up a meeting, there's an implicit relationship there so you're not going to violate it. But I know many companies who just won't deal with agents. Period. Their attitude was, we don't need agents to do this. A year ago, that was definitely the case. Agents weren't selling you anything that you couldn't find on your own by going to conferences and being available. Today, that's changing. Agents are better versed in the medium and the deals are becoming more conventional. Agents are going to provide a useful function in this business as they do in the rest of the entertainment industry. But it is still a bit early in the evolution of this business.

HOW DOES A WRITER GET A BREAK IN THIS INDUSTRY? The best way for a writer to get into a company is to send a letter to the person who's making the creative decisions. Send the letter to that guy and say, "I'm a damn good writer. I've got these credits in this medium. But I'm brimming with ideas and thoughts and I would love to contribute to any project you've got going. I'm not coming in with a pitch, I'm coming in to find out if I can work with you. So you guys don't have to make me sign some dumb waiver."

And in that meeting, the writer says, "I've got an idea for interactive such-

and-such that's going to blow your mind and totally reinvent this medium."

And they're gonna say, "Gee, we gotta look at it."

Some production companies have a mutual non-disclosure agreement. Before you can have a meeting with them, both sides sign an agreement saying that whatever is discussed in the meeting, it is agreed that neither side will disclose to any third party what you discussed. In addition, if either side works on something that the other guy brought up in this meeting, we agree that there's some compensation due to the other side.

So it comes down to four ways for writers to get into the producer's door; one is the waiver, which I feel has a chilling effect. The second one is if an agent opens the door for you. Then you're better off, but not every writer has an agent. Third thing we talked about was how a writer can get his foot in the door by sending an unconventional, enthusiastic letter. Especially if you can point out what your unique skills are. And really emphasize those skills, don't just tuck them away in a resume. The final point, the mutual non-disclosure agreement, is a trend that we'll see a lot more of.

WHAT'S YOUR ASSESSMENT OF THE INTERACTIVE MEDIA INDUSTRY TODAY? My approach to making interactive projects is just like TV. It's collaborative, team-based. As a I director I might look at the property and there might not even be a script, just a bunch of characters and a vague notion of who's doing what. My job is to make a show for the audience. So I try to assemble a team to create that experience. One or more writers may be a part of that team. They will contribute to the story design.

The title I chose, by the way, for interactive is usually creative director/designer. I usually don't take a writer credit.

WHY IS THAT? Because I feel like my job is to shape the entire experience and put as much emphasis on the interface design/graphic elements as the story/dialogue. Frequently in interactive, a writer is hired after people have figured out what the product is, what the characters are, what they do... So in one sense, writers are coming in and doing a polish. The writer's got to add some flesh and sometimes insert a few extra bones here and there.

At present, there isn't a great demand for original screenplays that don't come with underlying technology attached. Frankly, the spec script market is tough in every medium. Maybe that will change in interactive media. If there were a writer out there completely conversant with the medium and that writer had had many successful hits and could write projects in the format that the programmers needed, I'd totally embrace that person. I'd say, "Great. So and so has

written a terrific interactive thriller and we have the talent lined up. Let's make this. Let's shop this package around."

We're years away from that.

WHY YEARS? Because you have this tail-wagging-the-dog thing going on. The technology tail is wagging the entertainment dog. It's really dumb. The companies funding interact projects start with the technology so they try to shoe-horn the story into it. Below-the-line technicians are more highly valued than above-the-line talent at this stage in the industry's evolution. It's like the cinematographer saying, "We have this particular lens. Can you write a show that works with this lens?" That's what's going on right now.

IS THAT BECAUSE SO MANY COMPANIES USE PROPRIETARY SOFTWARE ENGINES? Yep. That's part of it. Part of it's because there's too many platforms out there. And part of it's because venture capital guys are single-minded. They can only deal with technology. They have a hard time dealing with creative people who know story. Maybe they're right. Maybe creative people are too flaky to bank on if you're a venture capitalist. But I know of one Hollywood investor who said he's no longer investing in companies, he's investing in people. I think that's a real enlightened approach.

The difference between software and entertainment is that the entertainment industry looks for creative ideas. The software industry looks for product.

PRODUCT MEANING... Product means they're looking to fill a particular market niche. When Hollywood looks to fulfill a niche, that's when you get all those really tacky summer movies. All those sequels and "merchandise" pictures. That stuff's got product written all over it. Most of the current crop of interactive titles feel like "product" to me.

The entertainment industry is supposed to look for stories. They are supposed to strive for entertainment value. I'm not saying that Hollywood always does, because movies like *Tommy Boy* come out with frightening regularity.

[LAUGHS] SO THE SOFTWARE INDUSTRY MIGHT CREATE A HEALTH CD-ROM WHEREAS THE ENTERTAINMENT PEOPLE MIGHT CREATE A CD-ROM WHERE THE USER ENTERS A SUBMARINE TO EXPLORE THE TOPIC OF HEALTH BY TRAVELING THE BLOOD VESSELS OF THE BODY. Exactly. Children's edutainment. Every start-up company is making product for the perceived market niche called "children's edutainment." Most of these titles suck. And guess what? Kids aren't

learning anything. It's neither entertaining nor educational. It's boring, and it makes parents feel good. I'm not keenly interested in interactive edutainment, though I understand the potential for interactive education is great. The closer it gets to curriculum, the better it gets.

Edutainment is neither fish nor fowl. It's neither educational nor entertaining. Greatness comes from integrity. What weakens the story is when you try to be all things to all people. That's what you get when a marketing wizard tells you that there's a market for something that's educational and entertaining.

HOW WOULD YOU CATEGORIZE THE MONTY PYTHON PROJECT YOU WORKED ON? *Monty Python's Complete Waste of Time* is interactive entertainment, period. There's a game there, but it's such an insanely obscure game, only somebody into self-torture would really pursue it. *Monty Python* is really the first thing on a computer that'll make you laugh. That's no small accomplishment.

With this project, top creative priority was to preserve the integrity of the Python franchise. I think that's why it succeeded where a lot of other shows whose content derived from television failed. We wanted to be true to the Python spirit rather than just display Python content.

IS BRANCHING STRUCTURE ON ITS WAY OUT? Don't dismiss branching stories. I think branching stories can be really cool. I just don't think anyone's done a really cool one yet.

Writers today should be thinking about what kinds of stories, characters and situations work. The top ten network television shows work because the situations and the characters are beloved. The audience doesn't want them to go away. It's no different whether it's a soap opera, *Oprah*, an action series or the *X-Files*. The point is, the audience comes back for more of the same each week. Television is the medium of never-ending stories. Every week you get another chapter, another episode in the grand saga. This is an aspect of TV that really lends itself to interactivity.

I don't think a feature film or a book, which is a story that has a beginning a middle and an end, a conclusive end, is a property that lends itself to exploitation as an interactive title.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE OR DEFINE THE DESIGN DOCUMENT? They're a big hassle. A monumental nightmare. How do you create a design document that you can read and enjoy the way you can read a screenplay?

DO YOU DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN A SCRIPT AND A DESIGN DOCUMENT? Now I do. The word script, first of all, is off limits, because it means two different things to the writers and the programmers. So screenplay is what I call the creative document commonly known as the script. The screenplay contains all of the dialogue, action and gaming elements. Later, the screenplay is adapted or translated into a technical design document, with codes, addresses, etc., that are needed by the programmers. A design document is the thing I hand to the programmer. The screenplay is the first step, and later translated into the design document. We're working with a writer now who came up with a fantastic interactive screenplay. It was so charming. The client was just laughing and loving it. Then we sat down with the technology guys and walked through it, and it was a big old downer because we had to face the grim reality of the technical limitations of the medium. The poor writer's going to find out what happened to his story when I send the copy of the design document to him.

SHOULD A WRITER BE CONCERNED WITH THE TECHNICAL LIMITATIONS AHEAD OF TIME? A writer should shoot the moon on the first pass. I think you should push as far as you can, no matter what you're writing. Go for it. Because the first draft is where the imagination can run wild. That's where you're going to get your pleasure. It's the most fun time in the whole project. Then you have something to measure the subsequent compromises against.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE INTERACTIVE TITLE? Besides *Monty Python's Complete Waste of Time*, I'd say *Doom* is the best experience I've had on a PC. It's immediately understandable from a gut level. I didn't need to read a book to understand what was going on. The first time I got my ass blasted I said, "I get it. Move fast." It didn't matter that the game was poorly rendered because that wasn't the point.

You can complete *Doom* in segments. And I want you to know how important that is, because I'm not one of these guys who sits there and plays a forty hour game.

I'm against the concept of the forty hour epic experience. I think it's a mistake. For the same reason we don't have epic poets on prime-time television. There's a reason why entertainment experiences are a couple of hours long. And why TV is a half hour long or an hour long. It's been proven thousands and thousands of times. Plays have been around for thousands of years and the format seems to work. I'd rather see an interactive story that consisted of a series of episodes or segments, instead of a single massive epic.



Ch. 7

THE ART OF THE DEAL

*“Talent is what you possess;
genius is what possesses you.”*

— Malcolm Cowley

Now that you’re an expert on the art of interactive writing, you’ll have to brush up on the art of selling. As a writer for the interactive media industry, both skills are critical to your success.

In Hollywood, if you are an expert storyteller, literary agents will beat down your door for the chance of representing you. Once you’re a signed client, agents become your mouthpiece to the entertainment community— setting up meetings and sending out material in the hopes that a sale or assignment follows. It is important to keep in mind that agents or managers are essentially glorified salesmen acting on your behalf. They are not gods. Nor are they prerequisites for success. Good agents are, however, critical to the writing “team”.

In the interactive community, writers who are expert storytellers and salespeople have a distinct advantage over writers who possess only one of the two skill sets. The reason? Agents do not yet play a major role in interactive writer networking or negotiations. Many software producers and publishers have little or no experience dealing with guilds, unions or agencies. As the interactive media industry matures, this will, of course change. In the meantime, the writer must learn how network with the “insiders”, submit appropriate material, set up meetings, and hopefully, negotiate employment without the aid of professional representation. This is not to say that once a deal is on the table, a writer should attempt to negotiate on his or her behalf. While it is possible for a writer to negotiate his/her own agreement, it is not recommended. If you’re fortunate

enough to have a producer/publisher lay an offer on the table, it wouldn't be a bad idea to have an experienced attorney or agent in your corner. Until then, writers venturing into the uncharted waters of interactive should arm themselves with as much advance information as possible.

With that said, this chapter will examine the art of the deal—the key issues or deal points involved in an interactive agreement, writer fees, and issues pertaining to the writer as an independent developer.

THE INTERACTIVE WRITER AGREEMENT

There is no standard work-for-hire agreement for an interactive writer. Likewise, there is no standard agreement for the spec sale of an interactive screenplay. The Writers Guild of America, an emerging force in the interactive industry, has yet to issue a set of minimums or even a suggested set of minimums for interactive writing. Until that day, it is the independent writers and a handful of agents and attorneys who must forge uncharted boundaries of writer compensation.

To this date, many interactive writer agreements provide that the writer receive salary up-front from a producer or publisher (employer) for developing a title or series of titles. Additionally, it is possible for seasoned writers to receive a royalty on top of the base salary, tied to the number of units sold. There are several ancillary deal points that also should be addressed in any writer agreement.

THE ISSUES

The four key issues involved with interactive writing deals are: (1) compensation; (2) delivery; (3) intellectual property rights; and (4) ancillary components. It is important that the writer understand how each of these issues are addressed and how they interrelate.

COMPENSATION

How much money a writer take home is what compensation is all about. Compensation includes all up-front salary (a flat fee or buy-out as opposed to a time-based rate), deferred payment, milestone bonuses, and royalties.

The most often asked questions concern royalties. How are they determined? Often the writer will be told that there is an industry standard or that the particular publisher always provides some set number, but there is room for negotiation. Developers with hot content or ideas should seek the best deal based on potential profit to be made. The ultimate number should be agreed upon after considering the amount of profit to be made and the level of risk involved for both sides.

If royalties are based on net revenue, which is often the case as publishers will argue that royalties should be based on the cash they actually receive after expenses, the next critical step is defining what is deducted from gross revenue as part of the equation. Publishers will, of course, want as many deductions as possible and writers will argue that fewer deductions are appropriate. The ultimate equation should reflect the charges that actually apply to the product and some percentage of overhead. For example, your product should not be charged for all the advertising costs if other products are advertised as part of some group promotion. Net revenue deals can be difficult to monitor and excessive charges against revenues are commonplace. If possible, the writer should negotiate a cap on expenses and a minimum royalty.

What follows is a list of topics that should be brought up during negotiations:

COMPENSATION DEAL POINTS

✱ When will the money be paid? In stages? What are the required milestones for payment? Immediately in full or partially based on milestones on development? What is a fair process for determining if the conditions are satisfied?

✱ How is the percentage royalty set? On what is the royalty based, gross revenue, adjusted gross revenue or net revenue? If the royalty is a percentage of the adjusted gross or net revenue, how is the adjusted gross revenue or net revenue defined? - What is deducted (marketing expenses, shipping, taxes, etc.) and how do you audit for fairness? How are revenue from bundled products handled? How are refunds and returns handled?

✱ When are royalties paid? 30 days after the publisher sells the title? 30 days after publisher receives payment? Is it a monthly or quar-

terly payment? How is this audited?

- ✱ How are the merchandising sales revenue from such things as T-shirts, online, and toys to be handled?

DELIVERY

Setting the right delivery expectations and parameters for the writing phase is crucial to a good working relationship. Realistic development time tables and a mechanism to resolve issues are the two key aspects in dealing with this area. Below are some of the issues that should be addressed during the negotiation:

Of all the areas, the delivery deal point section is the one in which writer input is crucial. Only the writer knows what he/she is capable of delivering and over what time period. If the writer doesn't focus on this area, he/she may be saddled with unrealistic schedules and goals that in the end, will not make either side happy.

What follows is a list of topics that should be brought up during negotiations:

DELIVERY DEAL POINTS

- ✱ Setting realistic development time schedules (milestones) with some back-up plans for delays;

- ✱ Establishing page count goals and/or cut off's

- ✱ Building in incentives to meet the schedule, preferably in the form of milestone bonuses;

- ✱ Addressing the issue of change orders from the publisher, making sure not to penalize the writer unfairly for radical changes not foreseen;

- ✱ Setting a realistic approval process (comment period) that doesn't delay development yet ensures a quality product;

- ✱ Establishing reasonable boundaries on the extent and amount of revisions or rewrites that may be requested

- ✱ Providing for a resolution process in the event of disagreement (a mutually trusted third-party familiar with the area could serve as an arbi-

trator or mediator)

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

The most important issue in the intellectual property area is ownership - who will be the owner of the title and associated rights. Most publisher funded deals are based on the idea that the writer is a contractor providing a service, the end product of which is owned by the publisher. The outcome of who ultimately owns the product will depend on how far along the writer/designer is in developing the product (the more developed, the better the argument that the writer/designer should retain more ownership) and how the product will be distributed. For example, a publisher may feel actual ownership is less important if the publisher has exclusive rights to distribute the product in certain territories or through certain channels or for some time period.

The issues surrounding the intellectual property area are central to the deal, especially the ownership of the produced title. If you as writer do not end-up owning the developed title, do not despair. Many a novice writer has reached success by first creating a hit product for his/her first publisher, then moving on to better deals because of the new found reputation.

What follows are a number of additional intellectual property issues that may arise during writer negotiations:

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY DEAL POINTS

- ✱ Has all the content for the title been approved through a rights clearance process?

- ✱ Who will own the copyright to the product and related intellectual property rights? Will this ownership be for all code or just characters and storyline? Will the writer be able to retain design formats, software engines, and the like for use in other titles not related to the product?

- ✱ What about merchandising rights?

- ✱ Are there options/rights of first refusal on future titles of writer? Is this an exclusive writer agreement? Will the writer receive first option to develop derivative and ported products?

★ What about rights to repurchase the intellectual property through some buyout mechanism (i.e., will writer have the right to repurchase the titles intellectual property rights if sales fall below a set figure?).

★ To what extent will each party receive a grant of licenses for use of trademarks of the other?

ANCILLARY COMPONENTS

Several ancillary deal points crucial to a writer's agreement should be addressed during negotiations:

ANCILLARY COMPONENT DEAL POINTS

★ Provisions for Paid Ads. Will the writer receive credit other than on-screen credit (i.e.: instruction manuals, box sleeve, poster, award submissions, etc.).

★ Does the writer retain the right of first refusal on all sequels and remakes? At what payment rate?

★ Does the writer maintain any novelization rights? At what payment rate?

★ The Drop Dead Clause. What happens if the publisher/producer decides to terminate you from the project or terminate the project completely? Is the terminating party required to pay the other party some form of compensation?

★ Will the writer receive complimentary copies of the title upon general release?

★ Will the writer be utilized as a consultant or intermediary should the title be localized into another market (i.e.: German version, French version)?

★ Confidentiality provisions regarding sensitive material provided by the parties (often referred to as no-quote's).

★ Will the producer/publisher pick up writer's travel and lodging expenses for research, meetings and/or appearances? What about a travel

per diem?

★ Will the producer/publisher pick up the necessary Writer's Guild pension and welfare payments?

CONCLUSION

Although no two deals are exactly alike, issues concerning compensation, delivery, intellectual property and ancillary components should be addressed during any proper writer negotiation. A successful negotiation does not always conclude in a deal. Sometimes, negotiating parties agree to disagree and discontinue the deal. However, a written document that is deemed fair and equitable by both parties is the crowning achievement.

WRITER FEES

In an attempt to survey the interactive writer fee landscape, we polled several dozen writers, designers, agents, attorneys and producers and gathered together their thoughts on writer compensation. From this, we were able to piece together a chart we've labeled the Interactive Writer Deal Point Guide to serve as a negotiating tool for the writer. Keep in mind that this chart and the corresponding fees/conditions are not "normal" or "ideal" compensation rates, nor are they intended to be a standard set of minimums. The data merely states a range of possible compensation rates available at the present time in the industry, based on a poll of over 30 writers and agents. Interactive writer rates and deal points will no doubt, improve as the industry grows.

Before you examine the Deal Point Guide, you may need to review some of the terminology that's included. *Possible* means that if the deal point is negotiated, the writer is likely to receive it. *Not likely* means that in most cases, the writer will not receive this deal point. The following deal points are explained in more detail:

ROYALTY A payment based on a percentage of revenue generated by a program, often corresponding to the actual number of units sold. Writers should carefully examine how the production company defines the term "royalty" in a contract—is it based on "net" or "gross" proceeds, as well as how they define both of those terms.

CREDIT Job titles which serve as recognition for those people who worked on a project, placement of credit may appear on-screen and/or off-screen.

PAID ADS Credit which appears on non-standard items such as a program's poster, box art, documentation guides, hint books, on-line teasers, billboards, promotional flyers, demo's, etc. Paid ads usually have to be spelled out in detail.

MILESTONE BONUS Specific compensation for a pre-established amount to be paid at a pre-established date in time, used as an incentive/safeguard by two negotiating parties.

SEQUELS & REMAKES Clause which affords writer the first opportunity to write the sequel or remake of a writer's previously produced material. Fees are typically pre-established to be no less than those derived from original program.

NOVELIZATION RIGHTS Clause which affords writer the first opportunity to write the novel and possibly the hint book version of the property at a pre-established rate.

EXPENSES Advance payment or reimbursement to writer from production company for the cost of travel, materials, research, lodging, location per diem, and other out-of-pocket costs which the writer may incur over the course of writing the program.

COMP COPY OF TITLE Producers typically furnish the writer with a complimentary copy of the title upon release. However, if it's not in the agreement, the writer may actually have a hard time securing a free copy.

NO QUOTE One of the most overlooked and important clauses is a writer agreement. A no quote agreement prohibits a production company from releasing the terms of the writer's deal to future employers. Often times, a negotiating producer will reference a writer's fees with previous employers to determine "proper" compensation. This works against a writer who has previously worked below his/her rate and severely hampers a writer's chance of raising his/her fees in the future. Especially important clause since many interactive writers currently work for low fees.

WGA PENSION AND WELFARE An important clause for non-WGA writers who hope to someday join the guild as well as for WGA writers who are required to pay this guild fee. This clause requires a production company to pay the writer's WGA pension and welfare fees.

INTERACTIVE WRITER DEAL POINT GUIDE (NOVICE WRITER)

<u>Document</u>	<u>Work For Hire Rate</u>
Design Proposal	\$1,000 - 3,000
Screenplay	\$1,000 - 20,000
Design Document	\$1,000 - 10,000
<u>Deal Point</u>	<u>Work For Hire</u>
Royalties	0 points
Credit	Screen credit in program w/ placement at producer's discretion
Paid Ads	Not likely
Milestone Bonus	Not likely
Sequels & Remakes	Not likely
Novelization Rights	Not likely
Expenses	Not likely
Comp Copy of Title	Possible, upon general release
No Quote	Not likely
WGA Pension & Welfare	Not likely, unless production company is a prior WGA signatory

INTERACTIVE WRITER DEAL POINT GUIDE (A-LIST WRITERS)

<u>Document</u>	<u>Work For Hire Rate</u>	<u>Spec Sale Rate</u>
Design Proposal	\$1,000 - 3,000	\$ 1,000 - 10,000
Screenplay	\$1,000 - 20,000	\$25,000 - 80,000
Design Document	\$1,000 - 10,000	\$ 5,000 - 35,000
<u>Deal Point</u>	<u>Work For Hire</u>	<u>Spec Sale</u>
Royalties	0 - 5 Points w/ studio publisher 0 - 15 points w/ indie publisher	0 - 5 Points w/ studio publisher 0 - 15 points w/ indie publisher
Credit	Screen credit in program w/ placement negotiable. Product document credit likely.	Screen credit in program w/ placement negotiable. Product document credit likely.
Paid Ads	Possible	Possible
Milestone Bonus	Possible \$1,000 -20,000 per X number of units sold	Possible \$1,000 -20,000 per X number of units sold
Sequels & Remakes	Possible	Possible
Novelization Rights	Possible	Possible
Expenses	Possible	Possible
Comp Copy of Title	Possible	Possible
No Quote	Possible	Possible
WGA Pension & Welfare	Possible	Possible

AN INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY LAW PRIMER FOR MULTIMEDIA DEVELOPERS

The following Intellectual Property Law Primer For Multimedia Developers was written by J. Dianne Brinson and Mark F. Radcliffe. J. Dianne Brinson has a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Russian, summa cum laude, from Duke University and a law degree from Yale Law School. She is the author of a number of articles in the intellectual property field and is a former member of the Executive Committee of the Intellectual Property Section of the State Bar of California. She has practiced law at firms in Los Angeles and Atlanta. She is a former tenured law professor at Georgia State University and has taught at Golden Gate Law School and Santa Clara School of Law. She is now in private practice as a consultant in Menlo Park, California. She may be reached at lader-apres@aol.com.

Mark F. Radcliffe is a partner in the law firm of Gray Cary Ware & Freidenrich in Palo Alto (formerly Ware & Freidenrich). He has been practicing intellectual property law, with a special emphasis on computer law, for over ten years, and has been chairman of the Computer Law Section of the Bar Association of San Francisco and the Computer Industry Committee of the Licensing Executives Society. He is a member of the Multimedia Law Group at Gray Cary Ware & Freidenrich and represents many multimedia developers and publishers. He has spoken on multimedia legal issues at the AAP, National Association of Broadcasters annual convention, Game Developer's Workshop, Seybold San Francisco, and IEEE. He has a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry, magna cum laude, from the University of Michigan, and a law degree from Harvard Law School. He is the author of the chapter on legal issues in the National Association of Broadcasters book Multimedia 2000. He has been quoted in the New York Times, Wall Street Journal and the San Francisco Examiner on legal issues and multimedia. He can be reached at mradcliffe@gcwf.com.

An understanding of legal issues is essential to success in the multimedia industry. Mistakes can cost the multimedia developer tens or even hundred of thousands of dollars in legal fees and damages. Delrina lost hundreds of thousands of dollars and had to recall all of the copies of its screen saver last fall when it lost a copyright suit. Delrina distributed a screen saver in which one of the 30 modules showed the comic book character Opus shooting down Berkeley Systems' "flying toasters" (made famous in Berkeley's "After Dark" screen saver program). Berkeley Systems sued Delrina for copyright and trademark infringement. The court ruled for Berkeley Systems, prohibiting further distribution of

Delrina's product and requiring Delrina to recall all of the product not already sold.

Two leading multimedia developers, Michael Saenz and Joe Sparks have been in court since the fall of 1993 in a dispute about the ownership of the copyright in their successful game, *Spaceship Warlock*. The dispute focuses on whether Joe was an employee or independent contractor of Reactor, Inc. (Mike Saenz's company) when they developed the game. If Joe is right in claiming that he was an independent contractor, he is co-owner of the copyright and has a right to half of the profits from the game. These profits could be worth hundreds of thousands of dollars.

This primer will help you understand the legal issues in developing and distributing multimedia works. It is based on the *Multimedia Law Handbook* from Ladera Press, which has been endorsed by the Interactive Multimedia Association. This summary of the law should not be viewed as "answering" most questions (the *Multimedia Law Handbook* discusses these issues in more detail in 340 pages and includes eighteen sample agreements to show how these issues are dealt within actual transactions; you can order the book by calling 800-529-3501). Legal matters in multimedia are frequently complex and you should not rely on the information in this primer alone. You should consult with experienced counsel before making any final decisions. Multimedia products require a knowledge of the four major forms of intellectual property as well as the laws governing rights of publicity, defamation and libel.

There are four major intellectual property laws in the United States that are important for multimedia developers:

- ✴ Copyright law, which protects original "works of authorship."
- ✴ Patent law, which protects new, useful, and "nonobvious" inventions and processes.
- ✴ Trademark law, which protects words, names, and symbols used by manufacturers and businesses to identify their goods and services.
- ✴ Trade secret law, which protects valuable information not generally known that has been kept secret by its owner. This primer

will focus on U.S. copyright law because copyright law is the most important of these laws for most multimedia developers and publishers.

COPYRIGHT LAW

There are two reasons why it is important for you as a multimedia developer or publisher to be familiar with the basic principles of copyright law:

- ✱ Multimedia works are created by combining “content” -- music, text, graphics, illustrations, photographs, software that is protected under copyright law. Developers and publishers must avoid infringing copyrights owned by others.
- ✱ Original multimedia works are protected by copyright. The Copyright Act’s exclusive rights provision gives developers and publishers the right to control unauthorized exploitation of their works.

Copyright law is a “federal” law and the law does not vary from state to state (although the interpretation of the law may be different in different courts).

Basic Principles

This section summarizes the basic principles of copyright law, including the types of works that are protected by copyright, how copyright protection is obtained, and the scope of the protection.

Works Protected

Copyright protection is available for “works of authorship.” The Copyright Act states that works of authorship include the following types of works which are of interest to the multimedia developer:

- ✱ Literary works. Novels, nonfiction prose, poetry, newspaper articles and newspapers, magazine articles and magazines, computer software, software manuals, training manuals, catalogs, brochures, ads (text), and compilations such as business directories.

- ✱ Musical works. Songs, advertising jingles, and instrumentals.
Dramatic works. Plays, operas, and skits.
- ✱ Pantomimes and choreographic works. Ballets, modern dance, jazz dance, and mime works.
- ✱ Pictorial, graphic, and sculptural works. Photographs, posters, maps, paintings, drawings, graphic art, display ads, cartoon strips and cartoon characters, stuffed animals, statues, paintings, and works of fine art.
- ✱ Motion pictures and other audiovisual works. Documentaries, feature films, travelogues, training films and videos, television shows, television ads, and interactive multimedia works.
- ✱ Sound recordings. Recordings of music, sounds, or words.

Obtaining Copyright Protection

Copyright protection arises automatically when an “original” work of authorship is “fixed” in a tangible medium of expression. Registration with the Copyright Office is optional (but you have to register before you file an infringement suit, and registering early will make you eligible to receive attorney’s fees and statutory damages in a future lawsuit). Here’s what “original” and “fixed” mean in copyright law:

- ✱ Originality: A work is original in the copyright sense if it owes its origin to the author and was not copied from some preexisting work.
- ✱ Fixation: A work is “fixed” when it is made “sufficiently permanent or stable to permit it to be perceived, reproduced, or otherwise communicated for a period of more than transitory duration.” Even copying a computer program into RAM has been found to be of sufficient duration for it to be “fixed” (although some scholars and lawyers disagree with this conclusion).

Neither the “originality” requirement nor the “fixation” requirement is stringent. An author can “fix” words, for example, by writing them down, typing them on an old-fashioned typewriter, dictating them into a tape recorder, or entering them into a computer. A work can be original

without being novel or unique.

Example: Betsy's book *How to Lose Weight* is original in the copyright sense so long as Betsy did not create her book by copying existing material - even if it's the millionth book to be written on the subject of weight loss.

Only minimal creativity is required to meet the originality requirement. No artistic merit or beauty is required.

A work can incorporate preexisting material and still be original. When preexisting material is incorporated into a new work, the copyright on the new work covers only the original material contributed by the author.

Example: Developer's multimedia work incorporates a number of photographs that were made by Photographer (who gave Developer permission to use the photographs in the multimedia work). The multimedia work as a whole owes its origin to Developer, but the photographs do not. The copyright on the multimedia work does not cover the photographs, just the material created by Developer.

Scope of Protection

Copyright protects against "copying" the "expression" in a work as opposed to the idea of the work. The difference between "idea" and "expression" is one of the most difficult concepts in copyright law. The most important point to understand is that the protection of the "expression" is not limited to exact copying either of the literal words of a novel or the shape of stuffed bear. Copyright infringement extends to new works which are "substantially similar". A copyright owner has five exclusive rights in the copyrighted work:

- ✱ **Reproduction Right.** The reproduction right is the right to copy, duplicate, transcribe, or imitate the work in fixed form.
- ✱ **Modification Right.** The modification right (also known as the derivative works right) is the right to modify the work to create a new work. A new work that is based on a preexisting work is known as a "derivative work."

- ✱ **Distribution Right.** The distribution right is the right to distribute copies of the work to the public by sale, rental, lease, or lending.
- ✱ **Public Performance Right.** The public performance right is the right to recite, play, dance, act, or show the work at public place or to transmit it to the public. In the case of a motion picture or other audiovisual work, showing the work's images in sequence is considered "performance." Some types of works, such as sound recordings, do not have a public performance right.
- ✱ **Public Display Right.** The public display right is the right to show a copy of the work directly or by means of a film, slide, or television image at a public place or to transmit it to the public. In the case of a motion picture or other audiovisual work, showing the work's images out of sequence is considered "display."

In addition, certain types of works of "visual art" also have "moral rights" which limit the modification of the work and the use of the author's name without permission from the original author.

Anyone who violates any of the exclusive rights of a copyright owner is an infringer.

Example: Developer scanned Photographer's copyrighted photograph, altered the image by using digital editing software, and included the altered version of the photograph in a multimedia work that Developer sold to consumers. If Developer used Photographer's photograph without permission, Developer infringed Photographer's copyright by violating the reproduction right (scanning the photograph), the modification right (altering the photograph), and the distribution right (selling the altered photograph in his work). A copyright owner can recover actual or, in some cases, statutory damages (which can be as high as \$100,000 in some cases) from an infringer. In addition, courts have the power to issue injunctions (orders) to prevent or restrain copyright infringement and to order the impoundment and destruction of infringing copies.

The term of copyright protection depends on three factors: who created the work, when the work was created, and when it was first distributed commercially. For copyrightable works created on and after January 1, 1978, the copyright term for those created by individuals is the life of

the author plus 50 years. The copyright term for “works made for hire” (see below) is 75 years from the date of first “publication” (distribution of copies to the general public) or 100 years from the date of creation, whichever expires first.

Generally, the copyright is owned by the person (or persons) who create the work. However, if the work is created by employee within the scope of his or her employment, the employer owns the copyright because it is a “work for hire.” The copyright law also includes another form of “work for hire”: it applies only to certain types of works which are specially commissioned works. These works include audiovisual works, which will include most multimedia projects. In order to qualify the work as a “specially commissioned” work for hire, the creator must sign a written agreement stating that it is a “work for hire” prior to commencing development of the product (please note that this primer deals only with United States law; most foreign jurisdictions do not recognize the “specially commissioned” work for hire, and you need an assignment to transfer rights in those countries).

Avoiding Copyright Infringement

Current technology makes it fairly easy to combine material created by others— film and television clips, music, graphics, photographs, and text into a multimedia product. The technical ease of copying these works does not give you the legal right to do so. If you use copyrighted material owned by others without getting permission you can incur liability for hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars in damages.

Most of the third-party material you will want to use in your multimedia product is protected by copyright. Using copyrighted material without getting permission - either by obtaining an “assignment” or a “license”- can have disastrous consequences. The owner of the copyright can prevent the distribution of your product and obtain damages from you for infringement, even if you did not intentionally include his or her material. An assignment is generally understood to transfer all of the intellectual property rights in a particular work, although an assignment can be more limited in scope. A license provides the right to use a work and is generally quite limited. A discussion of the terms of licenses and assign-

ments is beyond the scope of this primer; it requires several entire chapters in the *Multimedia Law Handbook*.

Consider the following example: Productions, Inc. created an interactive multimedia training work called *You Can Do It*. The script was written by a freelance writer. *You Can Do It* includes an excerpt from a recording of Julie Andrews singing *Climb Every Mountain*. It ends with a photograph of Lauren Bacall shown above the words, “Good luck.” In this example, if the Productions staff did not obtain permission to use the recording of *Climb Every Mountain* or the photo of Lauren Bacall, *You Can Do It* infringes three copyrights: the copyright on the song, the copyright on the Julie Andrews recording of the song, and the copyright on the photograph. Productions is also infringing Lauren Bacall’s right of publicity (which is separate from copyright) by the commercial use of her image. Furthermore, if Productions did not acquire ownership of the screenplay from the freelance writer, Productions does not have clear title to *Do It*, and distribution of *Do It* may infringe the writer’s copyright in the screenplay. Any of the copyright owners whose copyrights are infringed may be able to get a court order preventing further distribution of this multimedia product.

There are a number of myths out there concerning the necessity of getting a license. Here are five. Don’t make the mistake of believing them:

- * Myth #1: “The work I want to use doesn’t have a copyright notice on it, so it’s not copyrighted. I’m free to use it.”

Most published works contain a copyright notice. However, for works published on or after March 1, 1989, the use of copyright notice is optional. The fact that a work doesn’t have a copyright notice doesn’t mean that the work is not protected by copyright.

- * Myth #2: “I don’t need a license because I’m using only a small amount of the copyrighted work.”

It is true that *de minimis* copying (copying a small amount) is not copyright infringement. Unfortunately, it is rarely possible to tell where *de minimis* copying ends and copyright infringement begins. There are no

“bright line” rules.

Copying a small amount of a copyrighted work is infringement if what is copied is a qualitatively substantial portion of the copied work. In one case, a magazine article that used 300 words from a 200,000-word autobiography written by President Gerald Ford was found to infringe the copyright on the autobiography. Even though the copied material was only a small part of the autobiography, the copied portions were among the most powerful passages in the autobiography. Copying any part of a copyrighted work is risky. If what you copy is truly a tiny and nonmemorable part of the work, you may get away with it (the work’s owner may not be able to tell that your work incorporates an excerpt from the owner’s work). However, you run the risk of having to defend your use in expensive litigation. If you are copying, it is better to get a permission or a license (unless fair use applies). You cannot escape liability for infringement by showing how much of the protected work you did not take.

✴ Myth #3: “Since I’m planning to give credit to all authors whose works I copy, I don’t need to get licenses.

If you give credit to a work’s author, you are not a plagiarist (you are not pretending that you authored the copied work). However, attribution is not a defense to copyright infringement.

✴ Myth #4: “My multimedia work will be a wonderful showcase for the copyright owner’s work, so I’m sure the owner will not object to my use of the work.”

Don’t assume that a copyright owner will be happy to have you use his or her work. Even if the owner is willing to let you use the work, the owner will probably want to charge you a license fee. Content owners view multimedia as a new market for licensing their material.

In 1993, ten freelance writers sued the New York Times and other publishers over the unauthorized publication of their work through online computer services. And the Harry Fox Agency and other music publishers have sued CompuServe, an online computer service, over the distribution of their music on the service.

✱ Myth #5: “I don’t need a license because I’m going to alter the work I copy.”

Generally, you cannot escape liability for copyright infringement by altering or modifying the work you copy. If you copy and modify protected elements of a copyrighted work, you will be infringing the copyright owner’s modification right as well as the copying right.

When You Don’t Need a License

You don’t need a license to use a copyrighted work in three circumstances: (1) if your use is fair use; (2) if the work you use is in the public domain; or (3) if the material you use is factual or an idea.

Fair Use

You don’t need a license to use a copyrighted work if your use is “fair use.” Unfortunately, it is difficult to tell whether a particular use of a work is fair or unfair. Determinations are made on a case-by-case basis by considering four factors:

- ✱ Factor #1: Purpose and character of use. The courts are most likely to find fair use where the use is for noncommercial purposes, such as a book review.
- ✱ Factor #2: Nature of the copyrighted work. The courts are most likely to find fair use where the copied work is a factual work rather than a creative one.
- ✱ Factor #3: Amount and substantiality of the portion used. The courts are most likely to find fair use where what is used is a tiny amount of the protected work. If what is used is small in amount but substantial in terms of importance - the heart of the copied work - a finding of fair use is unlikely.
- ✱ Factor #4: Effect on the potential market for or value of the protected work. The courts are most likely to find fair use where the new work is not a substitute for the copyrighted work.

If your multimedia work serves traditional “fair use” purposes - criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching, scholarship, and research - you have a better chance of falling within the bounds of fair use than you do if your work is sold to the public for entertainment purposes and for commercial gain.

Public Domain

You don’t need a license to use a public domain work. Public domain works - works not protected by copyright - can be used by anyone. Because these works are not protected by copyright, no one can claim the exclusive rights of copyright for such works. For example, the plays of Shakespeare are in the public domain. Works enter the public domain in several ways: the term of the copyright may have expired, the copyright owner may have failed to “renew” his copyright under the old Copyright Act of 1909, or the copyright owner may have failed to properly use copyright notice (of importance only for works created before March 1, 1989, at which time copyright notice became optional). The rules regarding what works are in the public domain are too complex for this primer, and they vary from country to country.

Ideas or Facts

You don’t need a license to copy facts from a protected work or to copy ideas from a protected work. The copyright on a work does not extend to the work’s facts. This is because copyright protection is limited to original works of authorship, and no one can claim originality or authorship for facts. You are free to copy facts from a copyrighted work.

Creating Your Own Works

Naturally, you don’t need a copyright license for material which you create yourself. However, you should be aware that the rules regarding ownership of copyright are complex. You should not assume that you own the copyright if you pay an independent contractor to create the work (or part of it). In fact, generally the copyright in a work is owned by the individ-

ual who creates the work, except for full-time employees working within the scope of their employment and copyrights which are assigned in writing.

PATENT LAW

While copyright law is the most important intellectual property law for protecting rights in multimedia works, a multimedia developer needs to know enough about patent, trademark, and trade secret law to avoid infringing intellectual property rights owned by others and to be able to take advantage of the protection these laws provide.

Works Protected

Patent law protects inventions and processes (“utility” patents) and ornamental designs (“design” patents). Inventions and processes protected by utility patents can be electrical, mechanical, or chemical in nature. Examples of works protected by utility patents are a microwave oven, genetically engineered bacteria for cleaning up oil spills, a computerized method of running cash management accounts, and a method for curing rubber. Examples of works protected by design patents are a design for the sole of running shoes, a design for sterling silver tableware, and a design for a water fountain.

Obtaining Patent Protection

There are strict requirements for the grant of utility patents and design patents. To qualify for a utility patent, an invention must be new, useful, and “nonobvious.” To meet the novelty requirement, the invention must not have been known or used by others in this country before the applicant invented it, and it also must not have been patented or described in a printed publication in the U.S. or a foreign country before the applicant invented it. The policy behind the novelty requirement is that a patent is issued in exchange for the inventor’s disclosure to the public of the details of his invention. If the inventor’s work is not novel, the inventor is not adding to the public knowledge, so the inventor should not be granted a

patent.

To meet the nonobvious requirement, the invention must be sufficiently different from existing technology and knowledge so that, at the time the invention was made, the invention as a whole would not have been obvious to a person having ordinary skill in that field. The policy behind this requirement is that patents should only be granted for real advances, not for mere technical tinkering or modifications of existing inventions.

It is difficult to obtain a utility patent. Even if the invention or process meets the requirements of novelty, utility, and nonobviousness, a patent will not be granted if the invention was patented or described in a printed publication in the U.S. or a foreign country more than one year before the application date, or if the invention was in public use or on sale in the U.S. for more than one year before the application date.

Scope of Protection

A patent owner has the right to exclude others from making, using, or selling the patented invention or design in the United States during the term of the patent. Anyone who makes, uses, or sells a patented invention or design within the United States during the term of the patent without permission from the patent owner is an infringer - even if he or she did not copy the patented invention or design or even know about it.

Example: Developer's staff members, working on their own, developed a software program for manipulating images in Developer's multimedia works. Although Developer's staff didn't know it, Inventor has a patent on that method of image manipulation. Developer's use of the software program infringes Inventor's patent.

Utility patents are granted for a period of 17 years. Design patents are granted for a period of 14 years. Once the patent on an invention or design has expired, anyone is free to make, use, or sell the invention or design.

TRADEMARK LAW

Trademarks and service marks are words, names, symbols, or devices used by manufacturers of goods and providers of services to identify their

goods and services, and to distinguish their goods and services from goods manufactured and sold by others.

Example: The trademark Wordperfect is used by the Wordperfect Corporation to identify that company's word processing software and distinguish that software from other vendors' word processing software.

For trademarks used in commerce, federal trademark protection is available under the federal trademark statute, the Lanham Act. Many states have trademark registration statutes that resemble the Lanham Act, and all states protect unregistered trademarks under the common law (nonstatutory law) of trademarks.

Availability of Protection

Trademark protection is available for words, names, symbols, or devices that are capable of distinguishing the owner's goods or services from the goods or services of others. A trademark that merely describes a class of goods rather than distinguishing the trademark owner's goods from goods provided by others is not protectible.

Example: The word "corn flakes" is not protectible as a trademark for cereal because that term describes a type of cereal that is sold by a number of cereal manufacturers rather than distinguishing one cereal manufacturer's goods.

A trademark that so resembles a trademark already in use in the U.S. as to be likely to cause confusion or mistake is not protectible. In addition, trademarks that are "descriptive" of the functions, quality or character of the goods or services have special requirements before they will be protected.

Obtaining Protection

The most effective trademark protection is obtained by filing a trademark registration application in the Patent and Trademark Office. Federal law also protects unregistered trademarks, but such protection is limited to the geographic area in which the mark is actually being used. State trademark protection under common law is obtained simply by adopting a trademark and using it in connection with goods or services. This protection is lim-

ited to the geographic area in which the trademark is actually being used. State statutory protection is obtained by filing an application with the state trademark office.

Scope of Protection

Trademark law in general, whether federal or state, protects a trademark owner's commercial identity (goodwill, reputation, and investment in advertising) by giving the trademark owner the exclusive right to use the trademark on the type of goods or services for which the owner is using the trademark. Any person who uses a trademark in connection with goods or services in a way that is likely to cause confusion is an infringer. Trademark owners can obtain injunctions against the confusing use of their trademarks by others, and they can collect damages for infringement.

Example: Small Multimedia Co. is selling a line of interactive training works under the trademark Personal Tutor. If Giant Multimedia Co. starts selling interactive training works under the trademark Personal Tutor, purchasers may think that Giant's works come from the same source as Small Multimedia's works. Giant is infringing Small's trademark.

Trade Secret Law

A trade secret is information of any sort that is valuable to its owner, not generally known, and that has been kept secret by the owner. Trade secrets are protected only under state law. The Uniform Trade Secrets Act, in effect in a number of states, defines trade secrets as "information, including a formula, pattern, compilation, program, device, method, technique, or process that derives independent economic value from not being generally known and not being readily ascertainable and is subject to reasonable efforts to maintain secrecy."

Works Protected

The following types of technical and business information are examples of material that can be protected by trade secret law: customer lists;

instructional methods; manufacturing processes; and methods of developing software. Inventions and processes that are not patentable can be protected under trade secret law. Patent applicants generally rely on trade secret law to protect their inventions while the patent applications are pending.

Six factors are generally used to determine whether information is a trade secret:

- ✱ The extent to which the information is known outside the claimant's business.
- ✱ The extent to which the information is known by the claimant's employees.
- ✱ The extent of measures taken by the claimant to guard the secrecy of the information.
- ✱ The value of the information to the claimant and the claimant's competitors.
- ✱ The amount of effort or money expended by the claimant in developing the information.
- ✱ The ease with which the information could be acquired by others.

Information has value if it gives rise to actual or potential commercial advantage for the owner of the information. Although a trade secret need not be unique in the patent law sense, information that is generally known is not protected under trade secrets law.

Obtaining Protection

Trade secret protection attaches automatically when information of value to the owner is kept secret by the owner.

Scope of Protection

A trade secret owner has the right to keep others from misappropriating and using the trade secret. Sometimes the misappropriation is a result of industrial espionage. Many trade secret cases involve people who have

taken their former employers' trade secrets for use in new businesses or for new employers. Trade secret owners have recourse only against misappropriation. Discovery of protected information through independent research or reverse engineering (taking a product apart to see how it works) is not misappropriation.

Trade secret protection endures so long as the requirements for protection - generally, value to the owner and secrecy - continue to be met. The protection is lost if the owner fails to take reasonable steps to keep the information secret.

Example: After Sam discovered a new method for manipulating images in multimedia works, he demonstrated his new method to a number of other developers at a multimedia conference. Sam lost his trade secret protection for the image manipulation method because he failed to keep his method secret.

RIGHTS OF PUBLICITY, LIBEL AND OTHER LAWS

In addition to the intellectual property laws discussed above, you must also be familiar with the several other areas of law that deal with the right of the individual to control his image and reputation. The right of publicity gives the individual the right to control his name, face, image or voice for commercial purposes. For example, Ford's advertising agency tried to persuade Bette Midler to sing during a Ford television commercial. She refused. They hired her backup singer. The performance of the backup singer was so similar to Bette Midler that viewers thought Bette Midler was singing. On the basis of that confusion, she sued and won \$400,000 in damages.

Libel and slander protect an individual against the dissemination of falsehoods about that individual. To be actionable, the falsehood must injure his or her reputation or subject them to hatred, contempt or ridicule. The individual can obtain monetary losses as well as damages for mental anguish.

If you intend to use pre-existing material from television or film, you may also have to deal with the rights of entertainment unions to "re-use" fees. These unions include the Writers Guild, the Directors Guild, the Screen Actors Guild, American Federation of Musicians and the

American Federation of Television and Radio Artists. Under the union agreements with the film and television studios, members of these unions and guilds who worked on a film or television program have a right to payment if the work is re-used. Although you as the multimedia developer are not signatory to these agreements and may not be directly liable for these payments, the license from the film and television studio generally makes you responsible for them. These payments are generally modest. However, if you are using many clips these payments can become quite expensive.

If you use professional actors, directors or writers in developing your product, you will also need to deal with these unions. Most of the unions have very complex contracts developed specifically for their traditional film and television work. They are still trying to understand how to deal with the multimedia industry, although both SAG and AFTRA have developed a special contract for multimedia projects. You should be aware that if you use professional talent, you should be prepared for the additional complexity arising out of these union agreements.

HYPOTHETICAL MULTIMEDIA WORK

This section will apply these legal rules to the creation and distribution of a new multimedia work based on a retrospective of the Academy Awards. The work is being created by a new company, Hollywood Productions. Its intended market is individuals and film students. It will be distributed on a CD ROM and laser disk. The work will consist of the following elements:

- Videoclips from the Academy Award ceremonies.

- Magazine articles about the winning movies.

- Excerpts from various books about the awards and the film industry, including *Final Cut*, *Reel Power*, and *History of American Film*.

- Software to permit access to the material in numerous ways.

- Still photographs.

- Film clips of news programs and excerpts from winning motion pictures.

New video works created by Hollywood Productions to explain basic film industry concepts.

Music, including some of the hit songs from the winning motion pictures.

A. TEXT WORKS AND COMPUTER SOFTWARE

The magazine articles, the excerpts from the pre-existing books and the computer software may be treated differently from a legal point of view. Hollywood Productions is creating the new text and the computer software. As the creator, it will probably own the copyright in those elements, either through the work-for-hire doctrine or assignments.

On the other hand, Hollywood Productions must go to the owners of the copyrights, or licensees of the copyrights, in the magazine articles (or perhaps the authors of the articles) and books to obtain the rights to use these materials in its work.

B. PHOTOGRAPHS

Copyrights in photographs are initially owned by the photographer, although they may either be assigned to another party or transferred to the photographer's employer under the work-for-hire doctrine. The determination of who owns the appropriate rights in the photograph can be very difficult and time consuming because of fragmentation in this industry. For example, the fact that a photograph appeared in the *Forbes* does not necessarily mean that the *Forbes* owns the copyright in the photograph. *Forbes* may only have a license to use it once in its magazine. Common limitations in the licensing of photographs include the color of reproduction, the medium (i.e. newspapers, magazines, etc.), and attribution as well as those relating to numbers of copies.

The rights required for an interactive multimedia work would be quite different from those which are normally granted to use photographs. For example, the photograph may appear several times throughout the work and the number of its appearances could be controlled by the viewer. Such flexibility is quite different from the rights traditionally granted in the photography industry.

C. FILM CLIPS AND VIDEOS

Once again, Hollywood Productions must distinguish between video which it has created (for which, if the legal issues were properly structured, it will own the copyrights) and those for which it needs to obtain rights. The “authors” of a videotape may include the actors, directors, scriptwriters, music composers and the cameramen. To avoid the problems of joint ownership of copyright, Hollywood Productions should obtain the appropriate agreements from the individuals who are creating its videotapes. The use of the videoclips from the ceremony may require multiple clearances including clearing the music used in the videoclip, obtaining the license from the copyright owner, paying reuse fees to the entertainment unions such as SAG and Directors Guild, and clearing the rights of publicity of the participants. In addition, if Hollywood Productions uses the “scripted” performances, it will have to pay reuse fees to the writers if they are members of the Writers Guild.

D. NEWS PROGRAMS AND OTHER STOCK FILM

Stock footage is available from “stock houses” in many cities. Materials available from stock houses range from historical footage of various locations to commercials. Other institutions, such as television stations, may also license their newscasts. These institutions generally base their royalty on the type of use of the film. For example, different royalties are due for use on national television or regional television. Since the multimedia work would not fit easily into any of these categories, Hollywood Productions would probably have to negotiate a special license with these institutions.

E. FEATURE FILMS

The use of feature films can be particularly complex and expensive. Feature films are frequently based on a novel whose use is licensed to the studio. The film may also use music developed by a third party. Consequently, the owner of the copyright in the film may not have the necessary rights to the music or the underlying novel to permit their use in the multimedia work. This situation is further complicated by provi-

sions of the various motion picture industry guild agreements (such as the Screen Actors Guild and the Directors Guild of America) which require payment of fees upon incorporation of parts or portions of the film into another work. Hollywood Productions may also have to obtain rights of publicity releases from the individual actors depending on their contract with the studio.

F. MUSIC

To use music in the new work, Hollywood Productions may require obtaining rights from several different parties. The rights necessary depend on whether or not Hollywood Production records the music itself or wishes to use the performance of a third party. Since the music will frequently be sound tracks from a particular motion picture, Hollywood Productions will need to clear the rights to particular performances of the music. Rights in music are quite complicated. The rights which Hollywood Productions must consider obtaining are described below:

1. Mechanical rights. Mechanical rights are the basic right to use a musical composition. They do not include the right to publicly perform the music (see below). A mechanical license also does not permit the use of the music with still or moving images. Such use requires a “synchronization” license (see below). Although copyright law provides a compulsory license for mechanical rights, most licensees prefer to obtain these rights commercially through the Harry Fox Agency or other similar agencies. This preference is based on the very onerous payment and accounting requirements imposed on the “compulsory” license in the Copyright Act.

2. Synchronization license. If the music is to be synchronized with still or moving images on a screen, the licensee must obtain a “synchronization” license. Although these rights may also be handled by the Harry Fox Agency, in some cases Hollywood Productions may need to contact the musical publisher directly.

3. Public performance rights. Hollywood Productions will probably also need a license for public performance because its multimedia work will be shown to students and other audiences. Such a showing would be

considered a public performance. A performance is considered public if it is “open to the public” or at any place where a substantial number of persons outside of the “normal circle of family and social acquaintances” gather. Most music publishers permit either ASCAP or BMI to license their public performance rights. These rights do not apply to a particular performance by a particular individual or group to use the particular recording of a performance of the musical composition. Thus, obtaining a mechanical license to “Yesterday” would not permit Hollywood Productions to use The Beatle’s performance of the song.

4. Right to a particular performance or recording. As described above, if Hollywood Productions desires the musical composition to be performed by a particular group or individual, it must also obtain the right of the copyright holder in that particular performance. The licenses described above are limited solely to the right to use the musical composition. Thus, unless Hollywood Productions is prepared to have new artists record the music, it must negotiate with the holder of the rights to the particular performance which it desires to use. These rights are generally held by record companies.

CONCLUSION

An understanding of legal issues is critical to success in the multimedia industry. These issues are complex because of the youth of the industry and the many industries upon which it draws to create its products. The Multimedia Law Handbook, which has been endorsed by the Interactive Multimedia Association, provides a guide to these issues.

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Q & A

RICHARD THOMPSON

Interview

WHAT IS YOUR BACKGROUND? I went to Stanford Law School and Harvard College. After law school, I worked at the law firm of Rosenfeld, Meyer and Sussman. I did all sorts of general practice, litigation, corporate law and also entertainment law. Then, I went to the firm of Silverberg, Rosen, Leon and Behr. I was eventually made a partner. I co-founded Silverberg, Katz, Thompson and Braun in 1989. This year, I moved to Bloom, Dekom, Hergot and Cook.

I've spoken at industry events such as Digital World and Digital Hollywood. I taught a course at U.C.L.A. Extension. I'm sure there are other places I'm not thinking of.

WHAT KIND OF INTERACTIVE CLIENTS DO YOU REPRESENT? Mainly writers and producers.

DO YOU REPRESENT PRODUCTION COMPANIES AS WELL? I represent a few such as Cyan, Xiphias and 7th Level. I also represent entertainment producers, many of which are getting into multimedia production.

CAN YOU EXPLAIN THE ROLE OF THE ATTORNEY IN THE DEAL-MAKING PROCESS? The role of an attorney. First, if I am the only representative, the client might come to me and say, "So and So likes my work and wants to make a deal with me. They want to hire me to write a game." So, I sit down with the client and work out a deal proposal based on my knowledge of industry parameters and the information the client tells me about the particular project. Then I go and make the deal proposal to the company that's going to hire the client. Sometimes the company makes the initial proposal. Usually the

company solicits one. Then I negotiate out the basic deal terms with the company. The company prepares the contract, which embodies the deal terms. I review the contract, make comments on it, negotiate my comments, the contract gets finalized, and everybody signs it.

If there is an agent involved, or if the client is very hands-on, the client or the agent may make the initial presentation to the other side and we'll negotiate the basic deal terms from there. Sometimes people come to me with the basic deal terms already negotiated, and all I have to do is write the contract, or review the contract that somebody else has written that embodies those terms. Typically, though, even where I have a sophisticated client or a client is represented by an agent, I'll still sit down with them in the beginning and discuss what the deal should be.

DO INTERACTIVE WRITERS NEED BOTH AN AGENT AND AN ATTORNEY? Well, I think that in any case where you need either you need both. The kind of person who doesn't necessarily need any kind of representation is somebody who has a relationship with one company where they've worked a long time and they just want to keep on doing the same deals over and over again. They are prepared to be paid a fairly modest wage for their work, and don't aspire to gain control of their own destinies.

If you want to be paid better or to develop more industry relationships, or to gain control over your own destiny, then you probably need representation. Very few writers are capable of doing those things on their own. And it's not the best use of their time if they are, because they should be writing. That's what they do best.

Agents are very important in helping to get the word out about writers, to help them develop relationships and to get particular projects submitted to the appropriate buyers. The buyers are going start looking to them (agents) more because they're going to want them to perform the screening function of weeding out the good material from the bad, for them.

I suppose there are deals for which an attorney is not required, because the deals are non-negotiable. But it may still be a good idea to pay an attorney to review the deal to help the client decide whether to accept the non-negotiable terms or walk.

DURING THE DEAL-MAKING PROCESS, WHAT ARE THE MAJOR DEAL POINTS WRITERS SHOULD INSIST ON IN A CONTRACT?

Point number one. Lots of money.

[LAUGHS] Point number two is to define as closely as possible what work the client is really doing and when the client gets paid for it. There's a real tendency for these projects to spin out of control and go on forever. Writers usually don't earn much money on an interactive deal so it (the project) really shouldn't take up a year and a half of the client's life. You won't be able to eat if you do that. It is also important to try to define what the writer actually has to do to get the money.

Another thing a writer should insist on is a royalty. There are situations when writer's can't get a royalty. For example, the writer is coming in on something that is a pre-existing property or something that has a lot of design work already done on it. Many software companies don't want to pay royalties. The reality is, that once a writer who's any good gets involved in a project that is already under way, the whole thing often times must be substantially redesigned. It turns out to be a huge amount of work for the writer and that warrants a royalty.

A writer needs to figure out the scope of the work. If the work is more than just coming in and laying some copy on top of something that's essentially done, then I think it's something that merits getting a royalty. It's an important deal point.

OKAY. Another important deal point is credit. Since there is no such thing as Writers Guild protection for credit in this business, the only credit that writers are entitled to is what they negotiate for in their contract. And even though software people tend to think that credits aren't important, credits are important. In large measure, they define who people see you as in the business. Your stature and your ability to make future deals is heavily dependent on what you've already done. And it may not matter so much whether the credit is in the opening titles or in the closing titles of the program. But it is important if you contributed to an interactive title not to receive a weak credit like— Additional Dialogue Written by...

WHAT ABOUT SEQUELS OR REMAKES? Some games lend themselves to sequels or add-on modules. The 11th Hour is a sequel to The 7th Guest. Linear projects, like film and television projects, are now spinning out of games. Myst is a perfect example. Any kind of project that involves writing, if it's something that the client is interested in being involved with, I try to negotiate a contractual right to be attached to it.

Lastly, this is a plug for something I believe in which not everybody necessarily does, is to insist that the publishers sign the WGA Interactive Agreement.

WHY SHOULD THAT BE A WRITER DEAL POINT? If the producer signs the agreement, you get pension & welfare benefits paid for. You also support the interactive business to become a unionized business, which, in the long run, will be a great benefit to writers.

WHAT ARE FIVE ISSUES OR DEAL POINTS A WRITER SHOULD WATCH OUT FOR? One is that software companies like to condition payment on their acceptance of the material as opposed to the delivery of it. That means that as long as they say they don't like it, they can keep sending you back to the well. They can make you keep on writing and rewriting until they decide they like it.

Another similar kind of problem is that deals are frequently cut-off deals rather than pay-or-play deals.

WHICH MEANS... Whenever they feel like it along the process, they can fire you and put somebody else in your place.

Another thing to watch out for is wacky royalties. Frequently, a deal is phrased so that it appears you will receive real royalties, but the royalties are dependent on things like the entire production costs being recouped out of ten percent of the gross revenues before anything gets paid. It looks like you're getting a piece of the wholesale price, when in fact, you're getting a piece of a piece of the wholesale price.

ANYTHING ELSE? Some publishers take the position that they're entitled to a first-look at future projects. In my view, that's something a writer shouldn't do. You're in business for one project at a time. If the publishers want your future projects, they should pay for that right. They shouldn't get it for free.

I've also seen situations where companies try to make various rights in the contract dependent on whether you get credit or not. There's no objective basis for determining what credit you will actually receive. There's no Guild protection. Even if a company signs the Writers Guild Interactive Program Contract, the contract doesn't address the issue of credits.

WHAT KIND OF SALARY CAN A WRITER EXPECT TO RECEIVE WHEN HIRED TO WRITE FOR AN INTERACTIVE PROJECT? I would say that the general range is around thirty or forty thousand dollars. People with experience and credits may get sixty or seventy. If you're dealing with a publisher who thinks he's hiring you to write dialogue (copyfitting), they may offer as little as ten thousand.

ARE WRITERS SELLING SPEC INTERACTIVE PROJECTS? Yes. But what you get is the sale. You don't get any more money. It's hard to sell an interactive project. Especially off a pitch. If you're a writer who wants to get an interactive project off the ground, you need to put together a design document and an entire creative team. You practically have to put together an entire business plan for the product before you can land a deal at all. The nice thing is, when it's your original product, it's pretty much a given that everybody will give you royalties.

HERE'S A SITUATION. AN AUTHOR OF A BEST-SELLING CHILDREN'S NOVEL IS APPROACHED BY A MULTIMEDIA PUBLISHER TO CREATE AN INTERACTIVE STORYBOOK BASED ON THE NOVEL. WHAT KIND OF MONEY COULD THE AUTHOR EXPECT TO RECEIVE FOR THOSE RIGHTS? There's a huge range. It depends on who the publisher is, how famous the property is and how hot it is. Also, is it something that lends itself to the interactive arena or not. I've done deals for no guarantee and I've done deals for a couple hundred thousand guarantee. Typically, the authors of the underlying material are not involved in the multimedia title, except possibly as a consultant. Additionally, there is almost always a royalty for this kind of thing. Anywhere from a three percent royalty up to a fifty-fifty arrangement with the publisher. The most common range for royalties is five percent on the low side to fifteen percent on the high side.

If they (publishers) have to give away five percent for all the music rights they're clearing, then, correspondingly, they're not going to want to give away more than ten percent for the underlying rights. Since the underlying rights deal is typically the first deal that's made, the publisher's going to want to be conservative. That's a real problem with negotiating royalties for underlying rights.

Royalties have a lot to do with the types of royalty burden on the product. If a project has name actors performing in it, and there's going to be all sorts of music that's going to involve clearances and royalty payments, then clearly, a publisher will want to pay the writer less. As a rule of thumb, publishers don't want to give away more than fifteen points on a product for all of their clearances.

WHAT'S THE HIGHEST SALARY YOU'VE EVER NEGOTIATED FOR AN INTERACTIVE WRITER? I've done a few deals in the range of a hundred thousand dollars. One hundred thousand is really high. I've done deals that, for the total payday, the client could receive as much as two hundred thousand. But then, that would involve other services besides just the writing.

CAN YOU EXPLAIN HOW ROYALTIES WORK? The classic kind of pattern for royalty is where you're working for a publisher and the publisher pays you a cash salary as an advance against your royalty. The royalty is a first unit royalty based on the publisher's net receipts. The publisher's net receipts correspond on some level to the wholesale price of the title. But there are different kinds of wholesale prices, depending on what kind of buyer they're selling to and whether there's a rack jobber or a middle man who's taking a piece.

And then, of course, there are bundling deals, which have little or no profit built into them. Publishers also license off rights for platforms that they don't develop on themselves. On foreign deals, publishers get a whole lot less than the full wholesale price, and they pay you according to whatever they get. And they (publishers) will typically deduct out of that before they calculate the royalty. They'll deduct off the top things like shipping, insurance and taxes. And then they want to deduct cost of goods, which is a big gray area— anywhere from a buck a unit to as much as seven or eight dollars a unit.

Publishers may also deduct advertising, which is another question mark. Historically, they've always deducted things like co-op advertising allowances, which were never very significant. But now that we're entering an era where publishers spend significant amounts of money to launch a title, deducting all the promotional expenses can be a very, very, significant issue.

ARE WRITERS ACTUALLY SEEING ANY ROYALTIES? Yes. I don't know anybody who's gotten rich off of them. I think the individual you hear about who drives the Ferrari, also lives in a one-bedroom apartment. The person just chose to take his/her entire profits and buy a Ferrari because they're that kind of person. A writer of a hit title can potentially see tens of thousands of dollars in royalties. It's exceedingly unlikely that a writer will ever see a hundred thousand dollars in royalties.

WHEN WILL A WRITER START SEEING ROYALTY STATEMENTS IN THE MAIL? About nine months from the title's ship date at the earliest. For example, take a writer who is writing a title designed for a Christmas release. The writer is hired in say, November of 1994 for a product that's intended for a Christmas, 1995 release. So he writes and writes and writes. Finally, he finishes. The title is completed and it ships in September of 1995. The title will have some sales in the 3rd Quarter of 1995, but the bulk of the title's sales will come in the Christmas Quarter. A publisher won't be paid for their Christmas sales until the 1st Quarter of 1996. Let's say that the 1st Quarter sales for 1996 are also strong. The publisher won't be paid for those sales until the 2nd Quarter of

1996. The publisher won't account for your first royalties until 60 days after the close of the 1st Quarter. So, you'll probably receive your first royalty statement in May of 1996 for a title you started in November of 1994.

WOW. It gets better. Your first statement will reflect substantial sales, but the first sales are going to go to recoup your advance against the royalty. You're not going to get a check. In this example, you're more likely to see a check in August of 1996.

Royalties are a shared risk and a shared reward. But when you're playing nickel, dime, quarter poker, you are never really going to cash in.



INTERACTIVE SAMPLES

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AUTHOR BIO'S

SAMPLE INTERACTIVE PAGES

The following is a screenplay excerpt containing game instructions from *Surf City*. Produced by Philips Sidewalk Studio, *Surf City* presents the animated story of a Sixties California Beach town and the teenagers who live there. The town's interactive environment offers users more than 20 games and activities including animated music videos, featuring classic songs by The Beach Boys and Jan and Dean.

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SURF CITY - CASPACITA Beach (Orientation & Help)      8/27/82

              RYAN (V.O. CONT.)
    (beep)
    To build your own hot rod, begin
    by moving your sunburst to the
    wheel you want to use, then
    press an action button. But if you
    want to do something else in the
    garage, press on the "Down" sign.

IF the user presses on the TELEPHONE, the following is heard:

              RYAN (V.O.)
    To choose a channel, move your
    sunburst to it and press an action
    button. The channel you choose
    will appear below. If you change
    your mind, you can choose another
    channel. And if you want to do
    something else in the garage,
    press on the "Down" sign.

IF the user selects a channel, a MUSIC sign appears on the screen
and the following message is heard:

              RYAN (V.O.)
    Okay, now you've got something to
    build on. For more fun, press
    your sunburst to the "Next"
    sign and press an action button.

if the user presses on the TELEPHONE, the following is heard.
(CHECK: This help message should be programmed to play before and
after the user has accessed the various choice simulation messages.)

              RYAN (V.O.)
    If you want to change the part you
    just selected, move your sunburst
    to the part you want and press an
    action button. To get more car
    parts, move your sunburst to the
    "Next" sign and press an action
    button. If you want to stop
    building your hot rod and do
    something else, press on the
    "Down" sign
  
```

(Courtesy of Philips Sidewalk Studio)

Surf City - Computer Draft (HermanChk & H&P) Version

After adding or editing and saving, if the user presses in the "Next" sign, the following is heard:

FROM (V.O.):
[voice] good! Now it's time to
give your machine some finalizing
touches -- so press in the "Next"
sign for a color check.

If the user presses in the "Next" sign, the following is heard:

FROM: this voice message should be programmed to play before and
after the user has selected the color check screen and chosen a
color.;

FROM (V.O.):
If you wish to change what you
just selected, press your handrail
to your left choice and press an
action button. But if you're
ready to put the finishing touches
on your set, press your
handrail to the "Next" sign and
press an action button. If you
want to stop building your boat and
start assembling the press on
the "Next" sign.

After choosing and playing back, the "Next" sign appears on
the screen and the following message is heard:

FROM (V.O.):
Hey, that's a really nice-looking
set it looks like. If you wish to look
at the color check your screen
to the "Next" sign and press
an action button.

If the user presses in the "Next" sign, the following is heard:

FROM (V.O.):
If you want to end your boat and its
action press in the "Next" sign
sign.

If the user presses in the "Next" sign, the following is
heard after the set has been built:

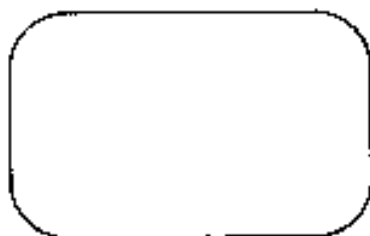
FROM: Thank you for building your boat

FROM: THANK YOU FOR
[voice] building
my color watch when you're
done.

Surf City Writing/Design Credits

Created for CD-I by Gary Drucker; Written by Gary Drucker, Steve Segal, Walter
Williams; Interactive Design Team - Chris Angelli, Tom Mott, Rebecca Newman;
Technical Writer - Larry Tuch (Courtesy of Philips Sidewalk Studio)


DAO



Audio/Video	Graphics	Links	Area/Over
<p>Press UP to display screen. Build menu and overlays.</p> <p>Play Audio A, place "When" button.</p> <p>Play Audio B, place "How" button.</p> <p>Play audio C, place "Examples" button.</p> <p>As the "When" button, go to DAO.</p> <p>As the "Examples" button, go to DAO-1.</p> <p>As the "How" button, go to DAO-2.</p> <p>As Manufacturer, return to UOOS.</p>	<p>Screen shows upper portion of CTR form.</p> <p>Button labeled "When."</p> <p>Button labeled "How."</p> <p>Button labeled "Examples."</p> <p>A menu button is displayed at LL.</p>	<p>A. NI</p> <p>B.</p> <p>C.</p>	<p>The Currency Transaction Report or "CTR" is the primary tool for reporting cash transactions under the Bank Secrecy Act. In this lesson, you'll learn when to use it, . . .</p> <p>. . . how to fill it out . . .</p> <p>. . . and which types of cash transactions are exempt from reporting.</p>

(Two-column sample courtesy of Learning System Sciences and Larry Tuch)

DAA



Programming	Graphic/UI	Labels	Feedback
<p>Display screen by splitting up.</p> <p>Play audio: A</p> <p>If the following words for hyperlinks: CASH, GROUP, ONE, CUSTOMER, SINGLE BUSINESS DAY.</p> <p>Play audio: B</p> <p>Power prompt</p> <p>Hyperlink: link</p> <p>CASH = CASH + GROUP = GROUP + ONE CUSTOMER = ONE + SINGLE BUSINESS DAY = CASH +</p>	<p>Screen shows optional text block:</p> <p>TEXT reads as follows: A CTR must be filled out whenever you perform a cash transaction on behalf of one customer and come more than \$10,000 in currency in a single business day.</p> <p>The following words in the text will be highlighted for hyperlinks: CASH, GROUP, ONE CUSTOMER, SINGLE BUSINESS DAY.</p> <p>"CTR" icon is located in LA.</p> <p>Power prompt: Select a highlighted word.</p>	<p>A. NT: You must file a CTR whenever you perform a cash transaction - on a group of cash transactions - on behalf of one customer that total more than \$10,000 in currency in a single business day.</p> <p>B.</p> <p>In order to apply these guidelines, you'll need to know when they cover in detail. Select any highlighted word or group of words to learn more about a particular guideline.</p>	

(Two-column sample courtesy of Learning System Sciences and Larry Tuch)

```

1.  MARTIAN
    - IF THE "MARTIAN IS GONE" THEN
The Martian and some staff are gone, with a charred spot
on the ground telling us they were there.

IF THE "MARTIAN IS GONE" GO TO BIRTH (2)
IF THE "MARTIAN IS GONE" GO TO NEVER (3)

- IF YOU HAVE MET MARTIAN AND YOU DON'T HAVE STANDARDS
  THEN
    MARTIAN
    Hey, pal. Are you going to help me or
    not?

- IF YOU HAVE NOT MET MARTIAN THEN MET MARTIAN IS THE
  FIRST STEP

The Martian is a little sample, with four arms and three legs,
and is standing in front of a small opening in the wall
open, always pointing out across him.

    MARTIAN (CONT'D)
    Well, you won't help
    me in the open air,
    but, however, a better way of
    could you have me and information
    alpha-numericator adjustment?

- IF YOU TALKED THE MARTIAN THEN THE "MARTIAN IS GONE" AND
    MARTIAN (CONT'D)
    (Indignity)
    Hey, Earth Suck! You must be dumb!

- IF YOU LOOK AROUND THEN YOU ARE "LOOKING AROUND" BUT
  there is a reflection of a face, like a mirror, lying on the
  ground near the Martian.

- IF THE "MARTIAN IS GONE" AND YOU ARE "LOOKING AROUND"
  THEN
    MARTIAN (CONT'D)
    Hey, it's up. Tell you it's
    the defining situation
    its beauty.
    Great, earth people, you know a
    little bit of science.

- IF YOU ARE "LOOKING AROUND" BUT YOU DON'T HAVE A WEAPON
  THEN YOU HAVE A WEAPON.

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(Sample interactive screenplay pages from the ScriptThing
User's Manual courtesy of ScriptPerfection Enterprises)

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-- IF YOU <HAVE A WIDGET> AND <GIVE THE WIDGET TO THE MARTIAN>
THEN YOU <GAVE WIDGET> AND YOU DON'T <HAVE A WIDGET> AND
YOU DO <HAVE DIAMONDS> AND

    MARTIAN (GROANS)
    Thanks a million. Say, I hear some
    diamonds lying about in the T-1000
    bay when I was on Jettison Five -
    they're great for trading in the
    '90s, you know--and if I could, you might
    have some use for them. Help yourself!

YOU NOW HAVE SOME DIAMONDS

-- IF YOU <HAVE A WIDGET> AND YOU TRY TO <GIVE THE WIFE
<VAPORIZED> AND

    MARTIAN (GROANS)
    Say! That's fine, you really should
    travel, huh baby.

WITH A SPARK BOLT HE WHIPS OUT A VAPORIZED ROY, THE NEW
VAPORIZED ROY.

IF YOU'RE <VAPORIZED> THEN YOU'RE DEAD END

IF YOU <HAVE A WIDGET> THEN YOU GO BACK TO MARTIAN
END

-- IF YOU <HAVE DIAMONDS> THEN THE MARTIAN IS GONE.

GOTO MARTIAN (2)
GOTO NORTH (2)
GOTO RIVER (2)

2. NORTH
A wilderness with a small path wandering into the mountains.

-- IF YOU DON'T <MEET THE CRISP> THEN

    BARBARIAN (GROANS)
    You idiot! What in the hell are you?
    You leave your people like that?

-- IF YOU <HAVEN'T MET THE CRISP> THEN YOU HAVE <MET THE
CRISP> AND

WELCOME YOU WALK FOR A WHILE, YOU'LL MEET A BARBARIAN CRISP.

    BARBARIAN CRISP (GROANS)
    Hey, dude, come on over baby, I'll
    kill your friend!

```

(Sample interactive screenplay pages from the ScriptThing
User's Manual courtesy of ScriptPerfection Enterprises)

IF YOU HAVE DIAMONDS AND GIVE THE DIAMONDS TO THE CHIEF
THEN YOU COOPER WITH DIAMONDS AND

SABARIAN CHIEF (CHIEF)
May, yes. Like I was only looking
with you. But I got your credit
initials. Well, you want to try it

IF YOU HAVE DIAMONDS AND COOPER WITH DIAMONDS AND GIVE
THE CHIEF THEN YOU HAVE THE BOAT AND DON'T HAVE
DIAMONDS AND

SABARIAN CHIEF (CHIEF)
You want to try it.

He gives you an initial credit and generously only takes
half your diamonds

IF YOU COOPER WITH DIAMONDS AND DON'T HAVE THE BOAT
THEN

SABARIAN CHIEF (CHIEF)
No, no. I was looking at you
with you.

IF YOU HAVE THE BOAT GO TO MARTIAN III

IF YOU COOPER WITH DIAMONDS AND DON'T HAVE THE BOAT
THEN AND HAVE A SLIT THROAT.

IF YOU DON'T HAVE A SLIT THROAT AND YOU TRY TO FIGHT
HIM THEN YOU HAVE A SLIT THROAT.

IF YOU DON'T HAVE A SLIT THROAT AND YOU TRY TO RUN
THEN YOU HAVE A SLIT THROAT.

IF YOU DON'T HAVE A SLIT THROAT AND YOU TRY TO
KIDNAP HIM THEN YOU HAVE A SLIT THROAT.

IF YOU HAVE A SLIT THROAT THEN

Then you go to the hospital and die. The explosion will
kill you and your friends.

IF YOU HAVE A SLIT THROAT THEN YOU'RE DEAD IN

GO TO MARTIAN III

GO TO MARTIAN II

1. FIGHT

A violent, bloody fight. A violent struggle on the ground.

(Sample interactive screenplay pages from the ScriptThing
User's Manual courtesy of ScriptPerfection Enterprises)

4

1- IF YOU DON'T SWAY THE BOAT THEN YOU CAN'T CROSS THE RIVER.

2- IF YOU TRY TO CROSS RIVER THEN YOU HAVE TO CROSS RIVER.

3- IF YOU TRY TO CROSS RIVER AND YOU CAN'T CROSS THEN YOU'LL DROWN.

IF YOU DROWN THEN YOU'RE DEAD (5)

IF SWAY THE BOAT THEN CROSS RIVER TO FOREST (4)

GO TO MARTIAN (1)

1. FORGET

Sorry, but you're afraid of WOLVES

GOTO YOU'RE DEAD (5)

2. YOU'RE DEAD

LOOM

(Sample interactive screenplay pages from the ScriptThing User's Manual courtesy of ScriptPerfection Enterprises)

```

1  HARTIAN
    => YOU HAVE NOT SEEN HARTIAN?

The Hartian is bright purple, with four eyes and three legs,
and is standing in front of a small space ship with the back
open, clearly peering out around him.

        HARTIAN (CONT'D)
            (all four eyes close-
            down in the open engine)
            Oh, wonderful, another pair of needles!
            Could you head to the decontamination
            alpha-gamma-processor adjustment room?

2  YOU LOOK AROUND

There is a collection of unfamiliar objects lying on the
ground near the Hartian.

3  YOU PICK UP A DIAMOND

4  YOU GO ABOUT IN THE DARK?

        HARTIAN (CONT'D)
            Thanks a million! Hey, I have sure
            diamonds lying about in the dark
            from when I was on the planet before--
            they're great for traction in the
            dark, you know, and I thought you might
            have some use for them. Help yourself!

5  YOU HAVE TWO DIAMONDS?

6  YOU LEAVE DIAMONDS

7  BERTY

A wilderness with a small path winding into the mountains.

8  YOU HADN'T MET THE CHIEF?

after you walk for a while, you'll meet a Barbarian Chief.

        BARBARIAN CHIEF (CONT'D)
            Hey, look, give me some help, OK?
            Give me diamonds.

9  GIVE THE DIAMONDS TO THE CHIEF

        BARBARIAN CHIEF (CONT'D)
            Hey, wow. Like I was only joking
            with you. But I got this great
            instantaneously built you suit to try it

```

(Sample interactive screenplay pages from the ScriptThing
User's Manual courtesy of ScriptPerfection Enterprises)


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-- BUY THE BOAT
                                DAPPAN-TOO SMILES CONTENTLY
                                AND NODS AGAIN.

He gives you an inflated price and generously adds taxes
to his price.

1 MARTIAN
-- THE MARTIAN IS GONE.

The Martian and space dealer are gone. Only a (faded) page
on the ground telling us they were ever there.

1 RIVER
A violent, rushing river. A forest beside on the other
bank.

-- YOU ARE IN THIS RIVER

4 WIDGET
None. But please note my notes.

5 SQUIRK DEAL
USER VARIABLES
BUY MARTIAN          TRUE
MARTIAN IS GONE      FALSE
LOOKING AROUND       TRUE
HAVE A WIDGET        FALSE
GAVE WIDGET          TRUE
HAVE DIAMONDS        FALSE
MARTIAN IS GONE      TRUE
MET THE WIFE         TRUE
OFFER HIM DIAMONDS   TRUE
HAVE THE BOAT        TRUE
TRY TO CROSS RIVER   TRUE

```

(Sample interactive screenplay pages from the ScriptThing
User's Manual courtesy of ScriptPerfection Enterprises)

```

1  [MARTIAN]
    *->  YOU SEE <MARTIAN IS HOME> THEN
    IF THE <MARTIAN IS HOME> GO TO NORTH (2)
    IF THE <MARTIAN IS HOME> GO TO RIVER (3)

    *->  IF YOU HAVE <MET MARTIAN> AND YOU ONLY <HAVE DIAMONDS>
        THEN
    *->  IF YOU HAVE ONLY <MET MARTIAN> AND <MET MARTIAN> IS NOT
        TRUE AND
    *->  IF YOU KNOW THE MARTIAN THEN THE <MARTIAN IS HOME> AND
    *->  IF YOU LOOK AROUND THEN YOU ARE <LOOKING AROUND> AND
    *->  IF THE <MARTIAN IS MAD> AND YOU ARE <LOOKING AROUND>
        THEN
    *->  IF YOU ARE <LOOKING AROUND> AND YOU FIND A WIDGET
        THEN YOU <HAVE A WIDGET>
    *->  IF YOU <HAVE A WIDGET> AND YOU <ARE VICIOUS TO THE MARTIAN>
        THEN YOU <HAVE WIDGET> AND YOU DON'T <HAVE A WIDGET> AND
        YOU DO <HAVE DIAMONDS> AND
    *->  IF YOU <HAVE A WIDGET> AND YOU ARE TO LEAVE THEN YOU ARE
        <VAPORIZED> AND
    IF YOU'RE <VAPORIZED> THEN YOU'RE DEAD (5)
    IF YOU <HAVE A WIDGET> THEN YOU GO BACK TO MARTIAN
    (2)

    *->  IF YOU <HAVE DIAMONDS> THEN THE <MARTIAN IS GONE>
    GOTO MARTIAN (1)
    GOTO NORTH (2)
    GOTO RIVER (3)

2  [NORTH]
    *->  IF YOU HAVE <ONLY THE SHEEP> THEN
    *->  IF YOU HAVEN'T <MET THE SHEEP> THEN YOU HAVE <MET THE
        SHEEP> AND
    *->  IF <HAVE DIAMONDS> AND YOU <ARE VICIOUS TO THE SHEEP>
        THEN YOU <LOSTEN HIM DIAMONDS> AND
    *->  IF YOU <HAVE DIAMONDS> AND <LOSTEN HIM DIAMONDS> AND YOU
        THE <SHEEP> THEN YOU <HAVE THE SHEEP> AND YOU'D <HAVE
        DIAMONDS> AND
    *->  IF YOU <LOSTEN HIM DIAMONDS> AND YOU'D <HAVE THE SHEEP>
        THEN

```

(Sample interactive screenplay pages from the ScriptThing
User's Manual courtesy of ScriptPerfection Enterprises)

```

IF YOU <HAVE THE BUNT> GO TO HARTMAN (1)

-- IF YOU <OFFER HIM BISHOPS> AND DON'T <HAVE THE BUNT>
  THEN YOU <HAVE A SLIT THROAT>.

-- IF YOU DON'T <HAVE A SLIT THROAT> AND YOU TRY TO FIGHT
  HIM THEN YOU <HAVE A SLIT THROAT>.

-- IF YOU DON'T <HAVE A SLIT THROAT> THEN YOU TRY TO RUN
  THEN YOU <HAVE A SLIT THROAT>.

-- IF YOU DON'T <HAVE A SLIT THROAT> AND REQUESTED FOR
  REDEMPTION HIM THEN YOU DON'T <HAVE A SLIT THROAT>.

  / IF YOU <HAVE A SLIT THROAT> THEN

IF YOU <HAVE A SLIT THROAT> THEN YOU'RE DEAD (3)

GO TO HARTMAN (1)
GO TO NORTH (7)

/ FLEE

-- IF YOU DON'T <HAVE THE BUNT> THEN IF <DON'T CROSS> THE
  RIVER

-- IF YOU TRY TO CROSS RIVER THEN YOU <TRY TO CROSS RIVER>.

-- IF YOU <TRY TO CROSS RIVER> AND YOU <DON'T CROSS> THEN
  YOU'LL <DROWN>.

IF YOU <DROWN> THEN YOU'RE DEAD (3)

IF <HAVE THE BUNT> THEN CROSS RIVER TO FOREST (4)
GO TO HARTMAN (1)

/ FOREST

GO TO YOU'RE DEAD (3)

/ YOU'RE DEAD

DONE

```

(Sample interactive screenplay pages from the ScriptThing
User's Manual courtesy of ScriptPerfection Enterprises)

[illegible]

(Courtesy of Jaryl Lyn Lane)

Outline
of the "Initial Armature" CD Program

1. Introduction by Dr. Sidney Harman (30-60 seconds)
2. Chronology of innovations with slides of product
3. Harman Kardon products by category and by distinct features

RECEIVER:

All discrete components
High Current
Ultrawide Bandwidth
Low Negative Feedback

Note: this will create a "tree" of 2 or 3 max.
top priority functions per Design Element in
technical and then everyday language.

Multi Channel

Home Theater
difference in clips
difference in circuitry
ease of use

DSP (Digital Signal Processing)

CD's

RLS (Real Time Linear Smoothing)
4 visible disks/change four at a time without rotating
3 D's Bit stream/yr, 1 BIT?
1 Bit Digital convertible(?)
Digital Isolation
power supply away from other key
components
circuit topography
anti-jitter circuitry
isolation of elements in circuitry/boards
minimization
discrete analog circuitry in output stage

CASSETTE TAPE DECKS:

Frequency response with Dolby B
Single deck quality in double deck
Precision mechanism construction
Wow and Flutter
Alignment/beatmatch
Tapeless heads/tape permalloy

Production Company: IMAGE WORK COMMUNICATIONS
Client: HARMAN KARDON

(Sample page from "Initial Armature," an interactive training CD-ROM program, courtesy of Image Work Communications, Harman Kardon and Dennis Archambault)

Continue to T 5.5 :

- T 5.5. Continue to next Menu Selection.
- T 5.6. Quit Program.

5

Menu Selection 8: (Mirawala Banarwala)

- Paths to:
- 9.1.0. Begin Program: MSB
 - 9.2.0. Narration and Graph (Chap. 2 Fig. 6).
 - 9.3.0. Narration and sound simulation of high frequency clipping.
 - 9.3.1. Narration and sound simulation of a 'stage' and how individual instruments and voices can be distinguished.
 - 9.4.0. Narration of the need to have an extended range to counter roll-off. Function and Benefit statement.
 - 9.5.0. Hot Button Path Menu
 - 9.5.1. Return to Menu Selection 3
 - 9.5.2. Return to Menu Selection 6 Index
 - 9.5.3. Return to Menu Selection 8
 - 9.5.4. Return to Customer Question.
 - 9.5.5. Continue to next Menu Selection.
 - 9.5.6. Quit Program.

Menu Selection 9: Low Negative Feedback

- Paths to:
- 9.1.0. Begin Program: MSB.
 - 9.2.0. Narration and Graph (Chap. 3 Fig. 8) of the chart.
 - 9.3.0. Narration and sound simulation with and without low negative feedback
 - 9.4.0. Narration that (1.) lowers distortion; stabilizes circuits; and, that (2.) distortion is

(Sample page from "Initial Armature," an interactive training CD-ROM program, courtesy of Image Work Communications, Harman Kardon and Dennis Archambault)

MENU SELECTION 8: ULTRA WIDE BANDWIDTH
Path 8.1.0. - 8.2.0.

VISUALS

WE SEE Graph 36 of Harman
Kardon's Audio Manual.

WE SEE the 0.0 line ANIMATING
to the 100kHz rolloff. The (for audio
range) 20kHz mark on the Graph is
highlighted as mentioned

NARRATION

ULTRA WIDE BANDWIDTH
MEANS THAT THE RECEIVER
CIRCUIT MAINTAINS A LEVEL
RESPONSE OVER A WIDE
FREQUENCY RANGE AND THAT
THE CIRCUIT IS LINEAR OVER
THAT SAME BANDWIDTH.

HARMAN KARDON STANDBY
ARE MINIMALLY FIVE TIMES
THE AUDIO RANGE OF 20 KILO
HERTZ.

(Sample page from "Initial Armature," an interactive training CD-ROM program, courtesy of Image Work Communications, Harman Kardon and Dennis Archambault)

MENU SELECTION 8: ULTRA-WIDE BANDWIDTH
Patch 8.5.0.

VISUALS

We SEE the Harman Kardon
Graph 9b of frequency response.

Continue the above:
Below, we SEE a chart of
frequency roll over occurring
early in 'Brand 9b' amplifier.

We SEE text and HEAR it
as follows:

CLIPPING

OSCILLATION

DISTORTION

We SEE the Harman Kardon
logo.

NARRATION

HARMAN KARDON'S ULTRA-WIDE
BANDWIDTH AMPLIFIERS ARE
MORE PHASE LINEAR THAN
THOSE COMPETITIVE DESIGNS
WITH LIMITED FREQUENCY
RESPONSES.

WITH COMPETITIVE UNITS THAT
ROLLOFF SOONER, THE RESULT
CAN BE HEARD WITHIN THE
AUDIO BAND. THEIR LOW COST
OF AMPS ARE EASILY
OVERLOADED. WE CAN HEAR IT
BY ITS CLIPPED, OSCILLATED
AND DISTORTED NOISE.

LET'S HEAR SOME SIMULATED
SOUNDS TO REPRESENT THESE
TYPES OF NOISE:

CLIPPING SOUNDS LIKE THIS

OSCILLATION SOUNDS LIKE
THIS:

DISTORTION SOUNDS LIKE
THIS:

HARMAN KARDON AVOIDS
THESE DISTORTIONS BECAUSE
IT DESIGNS ITS CIRCUITS WITH
ULTRA-WIDE BANDWIDTH.

(Sample page from "Initial Armature," an interactive training CD-ROM program,
courtesy of Image Work Communications, Harman Kardon and Dennis Archambault)

MENU SELECTION BY ULTRA WIDE BANDWIDTH
F2.D. 8.3.1.

VISUALS

We SEE the Harman Kardon
logs

We SEE an ANIMATED stage
with instruments appearing as
they are played.

NARRATION

HARMAN KARDON HAS MORE
DETAILED REPRODUCTION OF
MUSIC. THIS RESULTS IN AN
ACCURATE SOUND STAGE SO
THAT THE LISTENER CAN
AUDITORIALLY LOCATE THE
INSTRUMENTS BEING MADE.

LET'S HEAR A SIMULATION OF
THIS AURAL STAGE.

(Sample page from "Initial Armature," an interactive training CD-ROM program, courtesy of Image Work Communications, Harman Kardon and Dennis Archambault)

MENU SELECTION 6) ULTRA WIDE BANDWIDTH

Path 6 4 0.

VISUALS

We SEE a Photo of a discrete element wideband transistor.

We SEE a Graph of the extension of several hundred kHz

We SEE the empty stage of Path 6.3 I. ANIMATION.

Continue ANIMATION as instruments appear. We HEAR them.

We SEE the text appear as mentioned.
Function statement: Built Better
Benefit statement: Sounds Better

NARRATION

BECAUSE HARMAN KARDON USES 100% DISCRETE CIRCUITRY, IT IS POSSIBLE TO USE SPECIALLY SELECTED WIDEBAND TRANSISTORS AND LOCAL FEEDBACK LOOPS. THESE EXTEND THE BANDWIDTH OUT TO SEVERAL HUNDRED KILO HERTZ FOR EACH STAGE OF AMPLIFICATION.

HARMAN KARDON RECEIVERS DELIVER MORE OPEN, SMOOTHER AND DETAILED REPRODUCTION OF MUSIC WHICH RESULTS IN AN ACCURATE SOUND STAGE. THIS CREATES THE ABILITY FOR THE LISTENER TO LOCATE THE INSTRUMENTS BEING PLAYED.

HARMAN KARDON IS BUILT BETTER AND IT SOUNDS BETTER.

1

(Sample page from "Initial Armature," an interactive training CD-ROM program, courtesy of Image Work Communications, Harman Kardon and Dennis Archambault)

MENU SELECTION 8: ULTRA WIDE BANDWIDTH
Path 8.5.1 - 8.5.6.

VISUALS	NARRATION
We SEE the text appear as named:	AT THIS POINT, YOU COULD CHOOSE ONE OF THE FOLLOWING: 8.5.1. TO RETURN TO THE INDEX SCREEN FOR ALL OF THIS CD'S PROGRAMS; 8.5.2. TO RETURN TO THE RECEIVER'S INDEX SCREEN; 8.5.3. TO BEGIN AGAIN MENU SELECTION 8 ON ULTRA WIDE BANDWIDTH; 8.5.4. TO GO TO CHAPTER 2'S CUSTOMER QUESTION; 8.5.5. TO CONTINUE TO THE NEXT MENU SELECTION; OR, 8.5.6 TO QUIT THE PROGRAM ENTIRELY
8.5.1. Return to Menu Selection 3.	
8.5.2. Return to Menu Selection 5.	
8.5.3. Return to Menu Selection 8.	
8.5.4. Return to Customer Question.	
8.5.5. Continue to next Menu Selection.	
8.5.6. Quit Program.	

(Sample page from "Initial Armature," an interactive training CD-ROM program, courtesy of Image Work Communications, Harman Kardon and Dennis Archambault)

K-271

When Blair arrives at the new nav-point, he
sees...

...A cap ship. But unlike any he's ever seen. *
It is sleek, massive, and devoid of insignia. *
It also appears unescorted. *

IF Blair accepted the IFF codes, he receives a *
transmission from his wingman (OR Sosa IF he's *
flying solo) -- *

WINGMAN OR SOSA (COMM SCREEN) *
Activate IFF codes, Colonel. *

(NOTE: IF Blair's wingman is Catscratch OR a
Red-Shirt, he is now vulnerable as usual.)

IF Blair activates the Confed IFF codes
(available through his comm channel menu), he is *
able to fly close enough to the cap ship without *
meeting any resistance to begin firing on its *
engines, bridge, and turrets. But as soon as he *
opens fire, those sleek, unmarked fighters he's *
seen before (Black Lance ships) will emerge from *
the cap ship and defend it. *

IF Blair does NOT activate the Confed IFF codes
(OR does not have them), the Black Lance *
fighters will launch from the cap ship long *
before he gets within range to attempt disabling *
it. This stiff resistance will make his *
objective very nearly (but not completely) *
impossible to achieve. *

(NOTE: IF it's not completely used up, Pliers'
cloak will be very useful here.)

Once the cap ship is disabled, Dekker comes on *
Blair's screen -- *

DEKKER (COMM SCREEN)
Fire us in there, boss.

Blair fires his pods. After a moment --

DEKKER (COMM SCREEN)
We're in, boss. Keep those
bogies away from me while I do my
thing.

Blair must now fend off attacks from remaining
Black Lance fighters until he's bought Dekker
V amount of time.

Borac/De Palma - Wing Commander IV - Series K - 5/21/95 (P598)

(Sample page from "Wing Commander IV," an interactive game
produced by Origin Systems; written by Terry Borst and Frank DePalma)



Q & A

MICHAEL HALPERIN

Bio

Before entering the motion picture and television industry as a writer-producer, Halperin wrote, produced and directed documentary and educational media. Long before the phrase “interactive media” became the buzz, he wrote one of the first interactive programs for the U.S. Air Force.

*Halperin went on to write, produce and direct award-winning productions in the non-theatrical field. He is the recipient of the Chris Award from the Columbus Film Festival, Bronze Medal from the New York Film and Television Festival, two awards from the National Safety Council, and an award from Instructor Magazine for writing and producing the Best Educational Film. Additionally, he received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to write the screenplay, **PROMISES TO KEEP**.*

*Halperin’s theatrical credits include staff work as the executive story consultant for The Fall Guy, and writing for such television series as **STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION**, **FALCON CREST**, and **THE EQUALIZER**. In 1983, he helped develop one of the most successful animated television programs in syndication, **MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE**.*

*Halperin co-wrote and co-designed **VOYEUR**, the innovative interactive movie for Philips. The Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences voted **VOYEUR** Best Drama and Best Story for 1994. Since then, Halperin wrote **WHERE IN THE USA IS CARMEN SANDIEGO?** (CD-ROM Deluxe version), and **WHERE IN SPACE IS CARMEN SANDIEGO?** for Broderbund. He also wrote the interactive project **DIVE**, for Fathom Pictures.*

Halperin co-authored the award-winning, best-selling new young adult novel, Jacob’s Rescue, published by Bantam Books. He also authored A Screenwriters Guide To Character Development: The Character of Character, published by Lone Eagle Publishing. Halperin is on the faculty of the School of Communication Arts, Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. He has a degree in Communications from USC and a Ph.D. in Film Studies.

Interview

HOW DID YOU GET STARTED IN INTERACTIVE? I was working at Rockwell International as a motion picture writer/producer/director in their television-film department. The Air Force was developing a program for training mechanics who worked on jet engines. They had an idea where the mechanics could come into an area, ask questions or perform a repair, and receive immediate feedback. We were working with mainframe computers at the time and we came up with this idea of putting sensors into a jet engine. Those sensors would feed into a computer and that computer would then feed the information into a reel-to-reel videotape machine. When one of the Air Force mechanics came in for his final, he would enter a carrel (an enclosure) and face this jet engine which he would be expected to perform diagnostics on. It was basically a large television screen that would light up with a Staff Sergeant saying something like, "Welcome to this process. You have reviewed your manual and now it's time to put you to the test." Every part of the engine was numbered. The mechanic would then start to work on the engine. If the mechanic did something correct, that action was fed into the computer and the Staff Sergeant would appear on-screen and congratulate the mechanic. There was a great time lag at the time because the computer was searching videotape. Then the mechanic could move on to the next thing. If the mechanic performed an incorrect action, the Staff Sergeant would appear and say, "That was incorrect. Go back to manual page 86 and try again." The mechanic would have three chances to do it right. The whole idea was to wash the guy out or pass him.

We just thought it was a neat training method at the time. Today, interactive training is very common.

HOW DID YOU JUMP FROM INTERACTIVE TRAINING FOR THE MILITARY TO INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT? Well, many years passed. I was brought in by Mattel. They had a marketing problem with an action figure product on the market called *Masters of the Universe*. They were getting phone calls and letters from these little kids who didn't know how to play with the toy. It's a sad commentary...

[LAUGHS]. But seriously, they (the kids) didn't know which characters were the good guys or the heroes and which ones were the villains. They didn't know how the characters should interact. Mattel was looking for someone to come in who could create a bible they could use for merchandising, training, comic

books, and an animated television series.

AREN'T BIBLES USUALLY CREATED FIRST? Not for toys. Most toys are just put out on the market.

HOW DID MATTEL EVALUATE YOU AS A WRITER? I had written a sword and sorcery screenplay. They read it and liked what I had done. I got the job. I wrote the bible for *Masters of the Universe*. The basic characters were already done by Mattel. I created the planet of Eternia, the relationships between the characters and how they interacted with each other. I turned in a rather lengthy bible. Then I was hired on as a Creative Consultant to help approve stories from Mattel and Filmation (the animation company). That was a lot of fun.

Then a funny thing happened. Remember Intellivision?

THE GAME SYSTEM? Yes. The one that was on the market against Atari. They wanted to create a game based on *Masters of the Universe* so they called on me to help them create the scenarios of the game. That was my official foray into interactive media. It was a very simple game with very big pixels. It was a level game where the idea was to gain control of Castle Greyskull. The player started out on level one battling the least of Skeletor's minions and each successive level became more and more difficult. The final level was the battle royal between He-Man and Skeletor for control of the castle.

DID YOU CONTINUE TO WRITE GAMES? I'm a television/film screenwriter who also writes books. The next time I wrote a "game" was when Ken Goldstein called and asked me to work on *Voyeur*.

WHAT KIND OF IMPACT HAS THE SUCCESS OF VOYEUR HAD ON YOUR CAREER? When *Voyeur* first came out, I was asked to speak at a number of conferences and seminars. I can't say that it has had a tremendous impact on my career. Except people always say, "Oh, you're the guy who wrote that." I'm listed on the CD as co-writer because after I wrote the original version, they brought in a couple of other writers.

EXPLAIN THE WRITING/DESIGN PROCESS FOR VOYEUR. Ken Goldstein was working with P.O.V., a division of Philips. He had come up with a basic premise or story for the game. I took his story and expanded it into a full-blown adventure-murder-mystery story. Then I created all the characters, complete with biographies, how they interact, what they do, and so forth. From there,

Ken and I developed the theatrical narrative. There were primarily four narratives. The trick, of course, was to make those four narratives work together.

Once we had that down, I created the scenes. They were very short scenes...45 seconds or so. You have to be very careful what you put into scenes. What I tried to do was bring as much characterization and motivation into it as possible. I think it's fairly successful in that direction. Next, Ken and I created the matrix or authoring system. We did it in a very high-tech way-- our high-tech system consisted of a blackboard and chalk.

[LAUGHS]. The matrix is like a flow chart which points out how everything connects. We structured the matrix like a grid and cross-checked to see if all the scenes would work together-- that there was no duplication of characters, etc. We had 240 scenes in the program and every scene works with every other scene, even if it's part of another story. When you play the game, it feels very seamless. That was our gameplan-- to give it (the game) a seamless look.

HOW DOES THE CONSUMER VERSION OF *VOYEUR* DIFFER FROM YOUR ORIGINAL VERSION? The story premise changed. Originally, it was a story of corporate greed, murder and intrigue. Now it's a political story. The original version was very funny.

Voyeur is complex but not complicated. In my opinion, most interactive projects are not complicated. The design may be complex, but the writing is not complicated. Most interactive writers write in linear style because they are writing in segments.

There are opportunities in the interactive field to develop totally new paradigms which I think will help make narrative interactive much more exciting and much more accessible.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY "NEW PARADIGMS?" New ways of thinking. Most interactive stories today are told using branching structures-- "if you do this, this happens." New paradigms or structures will make gameplay much more interesting.

HOW LONG DID IT TAKE YOU TO WRITE THE ORIGINAL SCREEN-PLAY FOR *VOYEUR*? About eight to nine months. That's for the entire Design Document.

HOW MANY PAGES IS THE AVERAGE INTERACTIVE SCREEN-PLAY? It depends on the length of the program and how much stuff you have

in it. Ken and I used a custom version of *Hypercard* to write *Voyeur*. It was very writer unfriendly. I usually write using *Microsoft Word*.

AS A WRITER, WHEN DO YOU BECOME INVOLVED IN WRITING AN INTERACTIVE PROJECT? In every instance, except for *Carmen Sandiego* where I was just brought in to write clues and stuff, I've been involved from the very start. My feeling is that in order to write a project properly, the writer has to be involved at the proposal stage, or at least, during the initial design stage. Writers for interactive media should be writer/designers. I think it is going to take time for that to happen because most writers have difficulty telling non-linear or branching stories. Eventually, most writers in this industry will be writer/designers.

I did a project for Fathom Pictures where I was brought in at the very beginning. The production company had a producer/designer assigned to the project and I was the writer/designer. I was involved with what the project was going to look like on screen even before the project was written. I sat with the programmers and we discussed topics such as:

- *How much room we had to work with on the disc*
- *How much we could fit on the disc*
- *Could we use full-motion video and should we?*
- *What was the interface going to look like?*
- *How would we convey directions*

During these meetings, my input certainly wasn't taken as gospel. But I was part of the design process. At least I was consulted. It's very difficult for a writer to have an overall picture of what they are doing if they are not involved early on in the design of a project.

There are a lot of writers who are hired to come in and write little bits of dialogue or gags. And they like that. They don't want to get too involved in the design process of an interactive project.

What we are seeing here is similar to the early days of the film industry. Look at the credits of any number of old motion pictures and you'll notice credits like "Scenario by" and things like that. You say to yourself, "What does that mean?" The film industry evolved and so will this industry.



Q & A

JARYL LYN LANE

Bio

Jaryl Lyn Lane specializes in creating corporate interactive presentations and training titles. She has written and designed numerous interactive projects for companies such as Learning Systems Sciences, including the 1992 Silver Cindy Award Winning corporate interactive title, THE ART OF INTERVIEWING. Additional interactive titles include; THE HUMAN QUEST: EXPEDITION OF DISCOVERY, STRUCTURED SETTLEMENTS, AREA SALES MANAGERS, HFC PRODUCT PLAZA, and WELCOME TO LAZARUS to name a few.

Previously, Ms. Lane wrote and produced 65 half-hour episodes of the syndicated talk show, JUST BETWEEN US. She worked as a media producer for GTE Information Communication Center and worked as an independent writer/producer/director on a broad range of video and audio programming for educational and corporate clients, including; Biosphere II, ARCO, Lee Pharmaceuticals, Farmers Insurance, Hughes Aircraft, Home Savings and Loan, Big 5 Sporting Goods, Rockwell International Space Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, CBS Educational Media and Century 21 Real Estate.

In 1995, Ms. Lane was a panel moderator at the Children's Interactive Media Festival. She recently taught the course, Writing For Multimedia, at U.C.L.A. Extension. Ms. Lane holds an B.A. in Philosophy and English literature from U.C. Berkeley.

Interview

I UNDERSTAND YOU TAUGHT A COURSE AT U.C.L.A? I taught a seminar at U.C.L.A. Extension on "Writing for the Interactive Multimedia

Marketplace.” I feel the (course title) is a bit misleading, because the marketplace is so vast. But it draws people into the class who are trying to get a job in the interactive business. Which is a legitimate concern, but my feeling is that before they need to worry about getting a job, they need to know what skills they need to have in order to do the job. Some writers will be capable of doing it, and others who will find it too different, too much of a departure from working in a linear format. I try and give my students as much a picture of what that design process might involve, and to open up their minds so that they’ll think in new ways about their subject.

SOUNDS LIKE THE INDUSTRY IS REDEFINING WHAT A WRITER IS.

I think the writer is being redefined. I do a lot of work in corporate training and communications programs, and I’m labeled an Instructional Designer. I think Instructional Design is a very small part of it. There’s also this thing called Interactive Design— creating your diagram, your picture, and knowing how everything’s going to work together. It gives the writer more control over the product and ultimately, makes them more valuable.

WHAT ARE YOUR STUDENTS MOST INTERESTED IN LEARNING ABOUT?

Basically, they want to know where to start— what are the steps in the process? How do you go about doing it? What does a producer want to see? What will my screenplay look like when it’s done, and what does it need to include? And there isn’t any set answer to that. I present them with options. If you’re doing this kind of a program, you might want to use this sort of format. If you’re doing that kind of a program, you might want to use this other format. A writer needs to understand that you are writing for multiple audiences. You’re writing for producers, graphic artists, talent, and you’re writing for programmers. The programmers are really the new element in the equation. You’re not writing programming language, but you have to be able to convey, in a succinct way to a programmer, what will happen on a given screen when a viewer makes a certain choice.

CAN A TRADITIONAL SCREENPLAY FORMAT DO THAT?

The format doesn’t really allow for it. You could probably plug it in the same way that you’re plugging in your screen directions, but then a programmer’s gonna have to read through your screen directions and pull that out.

WE’RE TALKING ABOUT CORPORATE TRAINING PROGRAMS, RIGHT?

Right. As a writer/designer, you design your interface and you set

your rules. Then you just create whatever's gonna go behind that. It's up to the programmers to assemble what you've written according to the rules of the program. Some Writers Guild members and other screenwriters who have taken my class have really enjoyed it. I think they were reassured and relieved to find out that when they follow this process... that it's not as hard as they thought it might be. When they start going through the design process they realize they are not creating an infinite number of possibilities for every scene. I think some of them are amazed at how intricate the design can become when you start considering all the feedbacks and loopbacks and various options that take you to different screens. Even with a very simple menu-based program, you need to lay out that diagram so that you see where all your element are gonna go and what they're gonna be before you write them.

WHAT TERMINOLOGY SHOULD WRITERS BE FAMILIAR WITH?

They need to know the misnomer, authoring program. The term has nothing to do with authoring. It has to do with assembling.

WHY ARE SO MANY WRITERS EXPLORING CAREERS IN MULTI-MEDIA?

I think any writer knows that choosing to be a writer as his/her life's work is not choosing a lot of stability and security. Writers are always looking for new ways to market their skills and new ways to express themselves. I think that's part of it. They are also buying into the hype of what interactive multimedia may someday be. They may be afraid that if they don't learn how to write this stuff, they're going to be left behind. I think everybody's kind of buying into that. When a writer even hears the words "interactive multimedia" they kind of, you know, go blank in the eyes.

[LAUGHS] It's a real conversation stopper when people ask you what you do. But I think people who have been exposed to it a little bit are truly intrigued by it. They discover that the architecture of their design can provide a very unique experience for their audience— more than in any other medium. Creatively, it's very unexplored territory. And I think it (interactive multimedia) has the potential for really changing the way people think.

HOW PROFOUND. Well, I think it is. It won't necessarily be, but I think it has the potential. Non-linear thinking is different from traditional education and traditional entertainment. There is still some reluctance— a hesitation within the entertainment community. I think it is because of the video quality. And the amount of video that can fit on a CD-ROM— the storage that's possible on a CD-

ROM. It's very similar to the feeling when everything started going to videotape. Filmmakers bemoaned the loss of the visual quality and the richness of film going to video, which had a very different look and quality to it. But video was so much more accessible. I think that's what we're going through again. You're getting something that's very accessible in terms of manipulating information. I assume that the problems of quality and storage will be resolved eventually.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE INTERACTIVE WRITER AND THE END-USER? As audience, we've been conditioned—we've been told stories for so long. Film has been the best way to tell a visual story. It's beautiful. It sounds great, you have great actors, and it's a wonderfully, rich experience. But now there are different ways of telling or showing a story. Now, for the first time, we're really thinking about audience participation. How is the audience going to interpret this vision and make it their own vision? We've never had to think that way before.

DO YOU THINK WRITERS SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN THE INTER-FACE DESIGN? That depends on the project and who's on your creative team. If your team is made up of a writer, a graphic designer, a video producer and a programmer, I think the writer is going to have an awful lot of input. On the other hand, you may have a director or a producer with their own vision. They may decide to just have the writer create specific elements for them. You can look at a writer's role in basically one of two ways: as a word smith—a person who puts the ideas or the characters in the proper language. Or you can look at the role of the writer in a broader sense—as a creator. I think most writers have that desire to participate in the creative process—to come up with something new and to have their vision guiding the viewer's experience.

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT ARE THE MOST INTERACTIVELY ENGAGING TITLES ON THE MARKET TODAY? Well, of course I haven't seen them all. So there may be some wonderful things that I can't even mention. I tend to be most intrigued by the things that are different, that are using interactivity in a new way, titles that are intuitive. *Myst* may be the most successful of those. It's a challenging program. You have a lot to discover in there and a lot of little puzzles to solve. But when you start up *Myst*, you can immediately start moving and discovering things. You do not have to be told anything. All you have to know is how to move your mouse and click. To me that's very successful design. The *Carmen Sandiego* series also has a unique

design.

WHAT ABOUT KIOSKS? THEY DON'T SEEM TO GET THE CREDIT THEY DESERVE. Many kiosks are very successful. Go to the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles. They have two very stunning interactive pieces there. One is an interactive multimedia database on the Holocaust. I found it to be a very rich experience. They had a beautiful little piece— a timeline of the L.A. riots. You could click on a date or time or a place and immediately access a video clip. There were huge amounts of video in there— beautifully woven together.

ANY CLOSING THOUGHTS? I think we're getting into a era, in the near future, where we will be communicating more visually and less verbally in many ways. It's a more efficient way of communicating if you have enough control over your visual element. We'll have to wait and see what evolves as people become more familiar with these tools and explore new ways of using them. The creative possibilities are still wide open.



Q & A

JOHN VOURLIS

Bio

John P. Vourlis is the co-founder of StoryVision, the firm that produces the software tool, StoryVision, which enables screenwriters to write for the interactive market. Vourlis has a diverse background. He holds a B.S. in Engineering and an M.A. in English-- both from Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. He has worked as an Operations Engineer at the NASA Lewis Research Center, where he was responsible for the design and development of test facilities for Space Propulsion Technology research, and as a Technical Writing instructor at Case Western Reserve. Vourlis also has an M.F.A. in Film Production from U.S.C.'s School of Cinema Television, where he supervised a directing workshop with Academy Award winning director, Ernest Pintoff. He is also the author of a screenplay currently in development.

Interview

WHO ARE THE CREATIVE PEOPLE BEHIND STORYVISION? The main core of the company came out of USC film school—the graduate film production program. We also have a technical background. Brian Sawyer, the president of the company, has a background in computer science. He's developed a lot of software—including *VP-Expert*, the world's best-selling, PC-based expert systems software and object oriented software.. I have an engineering degree. I used to work for NASA, and I taught technical writing at Case Western Reserve in Cleveland, Ohio. Ralph Smith is our graphic/user interface designer. He was an interactive multimedia specialist at Fitch RichardsonSmith, Inc. David Arendash brings to StoryVision a wide range of experience in computer graph-

ics and user interface development. He was a developer of *Harvard Graphics 3.0*, specializing in object-oriented drawing functions.

WHEN WAS *STORYVISION* FIRST RELEASED? January, 1994.

HOW DOES THE SOFTWARE PROGRAM WORK? Basically, *StoryVision* provides you with the tools and space to create a diagram or flow chart of an interactive product, which is the first thing you really need to do when you write for interactive. You need to plan out the flow of the story because there's so many possible storylines—so many different directions a story can go. Writer's need to be able to create some kind of graphical outline of the story to complement the text. *Storyvision* allows you to connect that flow chart directly to the text. And attach text files to each node of the flow chart.

BY TEXT FILES YOU MEAN... Whole scenes, in screenplay format. Whatever format you want to write it in; whether its a treatment format, character description, a bible... And it does that by talking to other word processing programs. So you don't have to learn a new word processing program.

WHAT TYPES OF WORD PROCESSING PROGRAMS WILL *STORYVISION* WORK WITH? We recommend *Microsoft Word* for Windows, or Word for Mac. It works with just about any common word processing software program.

WHAT ABOUT A WRITER WHO CURRENTLY USES, SAY *SCRIPTOR*?
HOW COMPATIBLE IS *STORYVISION* WITH *SCRIPTOR*? Well, it's my understanding that *Scriptor* is a macro that fits over a word processing program. *StoryVision* utilizes something we call a scene template. You configure your template however you want to. If you want your template to be configured to work with *Scriptor*, then you'll attach *Scriptor* to your word processor document, and that document will always be called up every time you enter your word processor to create text for another scene.

It works the same with other screenwriting programs such as *Final Draft*. If you're going to use *StoryVision* with any of those kind of programs, you should make sure you have enough memory on your computer.

StoryVision also lets you organize and manipulate your text files in the way that you could not do in the original program. You can cut and paste and move around really simply and quickly. You can move the graphical elements around, and it will automatically restructure your text.

StoryVision provides a way for game designers/writers and programmers to communicate with each other. Writers are used to the screenplay format. Programmers usually start off with a flow chart. When you combine the writer's ability to actually create the text and gameplay with the programmer's ability to program that kind of information, you've helped to simplify the collaborative process.

WHAT ARE WRITERS SAYING ABOUT *STORYVISION*? They like the fact that they're able to organize such a complicated project (an interactive project) in such a simple way. A writer may need juggle a 500 page interactive screenplay with say, 150-200 possible scenes. The interconnections or paths between those scenes is potentially a logistical nightmare. A tool like *StoryVision* eliminates the nightmare.

I NOTICED IN YOUR USER'S MANUAL THAT YOU TALK A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF STORY STRUCTURES. WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO DEFINE ONLY THREE OR FOUR STRUCTURES? In a general sense, the structures we chose to talk about cover everything. But there are many variations of those. Every writer has their own language. We talked to a lot of different writers and looked at a lot of different interactive products to see how they were laid out and identified the underlying principles behind them.

There's the simple branching structure, which is used in projects such as advertising kiosks to *Microsoft's Encarta*. Those are simple text or graphics based programs that go from one subject to another, and are linked in a very straightforward way.

When branches start becoming complicated, they start to look like webs instead of branches or Christmas trees. There's no hierarchical structure, but they're basically branching systems.

Then there's another group of systems which we call worlds. And those are systems that are based on creating an environment. *Myst* is a world game—something that immerses you into an environment. It uses branching, but it's not really scene based. It's location based.

SO *MYST* IS AN ADVENTURE GAME— THE USER IS ON A QUEST. HOWEVER, THE EXPERIENCE WAS CREATED USING A WORLD STRUCTURE. Exactly. There is one other category we call simulations. Take *Sim City* for example. Its locations are not really defined as locations— but as possibilities. Instead of defining a scene that takes place, you define all the ele-

ments in the scene, and then let the scene happen however it would happen. It's a much more computationally intense, but much more interesting, because nothing is predetermined.

WHAT ABOUT *STAR WARS REBEL ASSAULT*? It falls somewhere between a simulation and a world structure. There is a very defined world for *Rebel Assault*, but it's got that flight simulator aspect to it. In a flight simulator game, there is no way to define every possible path that the flight's going to take. What you define are things like how fast you're going, the lift and drag, and all of the basic flight components. The computer and the player interact with each other to create the flying experience.

HOW DO YOU DEFINE STRUCTURE? I was listening to Howard Burkons, I think, discussing structure for interactive. I think he described it as a stream. Everything flows in a stream from the beginning to the end, but you can navigate up and down the stream, and cross the stream, yet you still have a goal. You're still going somewhere, but the path is not pre-determined.

ANY ADVICE FOR WRITERS NEW TO INTERACTIVE? Writer's shouldn't be afraid of the technology. In fact, what they really need to know is that they don't even have to consider the technology. How many Hollywood screenwriters do you know who know how to operate a 35mm Panavision Gold camera? All writers need to know is how to tell a compelling story. They need to be able to create a world that immerses the audience. They don't need to worry about the technology, and that's what we're trying to do with *StoryVision*. We're trying to free people from worrying about lingo and hardware and all that stuff that creates obstacles to creativity.



CARL BRESSLER

Bio

Carl Bressler is the President and agent responsible for feature films and television at Montana Artists, a below-the-line talent agency representing Directors of Photography, Production Designers, Film/non-linear Editors, Costume Designers, Line Producers and UPM's-- servicing production needs of Feature Films, Television, Commercials, Music Videos and Live Action Games.

Carl began in the entertainment industry as a music producer and concert promoter. He studied entertainment law in Los Angeles and was a student of Stella Adler, working the Los Angeles stage as an actor for seven years.

Building from a solid below-the-line foundation, Carl is expanding Montana Artists into Interactive Media, representing individual talent as well as moving in packaging elements.

Interview

WHAT IS MONTANA ARTISTS? WHAT DOES THE AGENCY DO? My agency began as a traditional below the line agency. Initially representing cinematographers, production designers and costume designers for feature films, television, videos and commercials. In 1991, I started representing film editors and then in 1992, I started representing UPM's and line producers,. At this point, there are no signed line producers or UPM's (at the agency). But I do negotiate UPM and line producer deals. I also do that for directors when asked to step in. I just signed my first director. In June of 1993, people started calling me up and asking me if I had cameramen who'd work electronic games. Live action, full-motion video games.

AND YOU'D SAY... Well, they'd say, "How about a thousand dollars a week?" And I'd say, "I got clients that make three thousand for ten hours. Call me when you get serious." And they'd say, "You don't understand this business." And I'd say, "You're right. I don't even know if it is a business."

[LAUGHS] So in October , 1993, I went up to San Jose and visited the Multimedia Expo. I spent three days going to every panel and asking questions of every panelist. I started to get a glimmer of what this business could be. Since then, my nose has been bleeding 'cause my learning curve has been so vertical.

[LAUGHS] I started convincing my clients to work for literally a fraction of their rates, and to work on games as a way of opening up future opportunities. Soon after, I signed one of my clients, Roberto Schaefer, to DP Johnny Mnemonic, the game. Roberto introduced me to the production designer, Jean-Phillipe Carp, the next day. Jean-Phillipe had just gotten off the boat from Paris (he was the production designer of the film, *Delicatessen*). I signed him too. Several months after Johnny Mnemonic wrapped, I signed the game's director, Douglas Gayeton.

DESCRIBE THE ROLE OF AN AGENT. To me, what an agent does is procure, negotiate, advise and counsel. Procuring is finding work. Negotiating is getting the best terms for the client without making the buyer hate the client. Advice is of the day and counseling is long-term. In other words, the agent is a mirror. This is where you said you want to go. Are you doing that or do you see yourself falling away from your dream plan?

SOUNDS LIKE YOU'VE GOT TO BE ONE STEP AHEAD OF YOUR CLIENTS. I have to learn in order to be an effective counselor. Not only deal points— deal points are easy because everything is based on an earlier model. However, interactive media was built by the venture capitalists and the attorneys. Models are being created every day.

And now, you see all these creative people leaving the firms that they founded. They're basically going away to come back. They're starting affiliate labels to be distributed by the mother ship. That's from the record company model. William Morris and ICM represent developers and other creative talent using the television directors' model— the X/ Y axis. They basically sign as many developers as they can, go to all the funded companies with a production slate and say, "We'll give you this developer for these two projects and this developer for that project. They basically fill in the slots on an X/Y axis— plac-

ing the TV directors (for example) on one end and the television programs/episodes on the other end. Then they just fill in the blanks between them.

We've seen a lot of executives from home video and the Hollywood studios cross over to interactive media. You're going to see that change. You're going to see some of the people who were pioneers in this industry finally landing those positions. One recent example is Paul Provenzano who left Acclaim and is now with Fox Interactive. Paul will be of great use to Fox because he really knows what he's talking about.

WHAT ABOUT INTERACTIVE WRITING DEALS? There are two kinds of interactive writing deals. One is writing an interactive screenplay. Well, what does that mean? Does that mean the fair market value of the game design document itself? Or does that mean writing the game design document and then writing the screenplay? To me, they're separate elements. Because when a production designer draws drawings, the reason they're a production designer and not a fine artist is because those drawings can be built.

Then there's the kind of writing which is really a game design document. This takes the writer into another area because they have to not only be technical in their writing, and their understanding three-act dramatic structure, but they also have to understand the people who are going to build what they write.

A WRITER-DESIGNER? A writer-designer. Absolutely. A different animal. Much like the move from silent movies to talkies. Some made it and some didn't. I've heard of some writers who were sent in to write dialogue. They eventually write five hundred lines of dialogue and are paid \$5,000 to \$8,000.. It's totally non-WGA and it's not a screenplay. It's dialogue. So many of these twitch games hire writers to create gag lines. But there's going to be other kinds of post-Myst titles where a writer will build on characters, dialogue and stories. Some very interesting stuff is coming.

HOW DO YOU SEE THE ROLE OF THE AGENT EVOLVING IN AN INDUSTRY LIKE INTERACTIVE MEDIA THAT IS CONSTANTLY CHANGING? I'm morphing. It's an old expression all of a sudden. Three years ago it was new. I'm morphing into an above-the-line packaging agent for new media. That's what's happening for me. And that's really happening because people are asking me to do it. People are bringing me titles and properties and saying, "Can you do something with this?" Agents are an enzyme. They make things happen. They're a catalyst. An agent should look at situations,

understand talent for what its abilities are, and then move it in those situations as many times as possible so that you have a chance to optimize its creative expression.

HOW DOES AN AGENT GO ABOUT SECURING WORK FOR THE CLIENT? TYPICALLY, HOW DO YOU DO IT? I have ten thousand people plus in my database. I make fifty to a hundred phone calls a day. I'm constantly steering clients in the right direction— like shepherding. I'm a sheep herding dog. And make sure they go where they ought to be. Now, how does an agent do that? Well, not only am I hanging out with people from Paramount and Universal, but I'm also hanging out with people with Microsoft, Intel and Apple. And I try to retain friendship relationships with high enough people, like the VP's of corporate strategy and corporate business development. These people give me a sense of where things are heading and what to pay attention to. Eventually, we cut to the chase and talk about what projects are on their boards and how I might be of use.

WHAT'S BEEN THE REACTION OF INTERACTIVE MEDIA PROFESSIONALS TO THE WHOLE CONCEPT OF THE "AGENT?" In interactive media, many people have said to me, "Oh, we don't need agents." And I say, "No, you don't need agents because when you started your business, it was a very small business. Very small margins. Basically what happened was you went out and found who you wanted to work with. And you might have gone around the world to find those people. You're successful and that's why you're successful. I'm meeting you now, because you're still in the game. But the truth is, as the game widens— like any tree that grows— you'll find that some of your competitors have agents. And then you find that some of the people you want to do business with have representation. And then you will discover that maybe you ought to have one too. Not just for the sake of having an agent. But to allow you to be in two places at once.

MANY INTERACTIVE PRODUCERS WHO UNDERSTAND WHAT AGENTS DO, HAVE NO PROBLEM WITH THEM. OTHERS DO NOTHING BUT CRITICIZE AGENTS AND THINK THAT THEY'RE THE WORST THING THAT EVER HAPPENED TO THIS INDUSTRY. I agree. I moderated a panel the other day at Digital Hollywood and there was a well-known multimedia producer in attendance— someone who I had a hard time getting on the phone because he had no idea what an agent was or what an agent did. He came up to me after the panel and said to me, "I want to talk to

you.” And I said, “Why is that?” And he said, “Well, now I know what you do.” A lot of that had to do with the educational process. Just like an agent can’t expect to be a player in the multimedia industry without every having played an interactive game.

ARE AGENTS MAKING MONEY IN INTERACTIVE MEDIA? Most games are budgeted in the three hundred to five hundred thousand dollar budget. That’s for the whole production of the game. The money is spread out over a twelve to eighteen months period. So what do you have? You have people making too little money and working way too hard for it. I see deals where someone’s showing me a five hundred thousand dollar game, and I’m looking at this game, and I’m realizing that if I book the lead programmer, the lead art director and the project manager on it, the three of them together might make two hundred thousand dollars for the length of their employment over eighteen months. I have one client, a cameraman, who makes half a million dollars a year. I might have to manage those three interactive deals from conception to execution over eighteen months, yet earn less than half what I make from one commercial cameraman a year.

As an agent, you have to look at the bottom line and say— is this the business I want to be in?

IN THE FILM INDUSTRY, CREDIT SEEMS TO BE A VERY, VERY, BIG ISSUE. WHEN AN AGENT CAN’T NEGOTIATE FOR ANY MORE MONEY, YOU NEGOTIATE CREDIT. HOW IMPORTANT IS CREDIT IN THE MULTIMEDIA INDUSTRY? I would say that credit is very important to people because in a nascent business, in a business at this stage, everyone is trying to figure out their place in the pecking order. Who’s going to be Cecil B. DeMille or Otto Preminger, or Howard Hawks of multimedia. So, I think credit is very important because creative talent generally want the recognition. It’s especially important when you’re not getting paid a lot of money. You sure want people to know you did the work and that your proud of the work you did.

AND WHERE IS THIS CREDIT APPEARING? A lot of times it’s the back title, an exit title, if it’s not a front title. Front titles are unusual because writer/designers want to get a gamer into the game right away.

WHAT ABOUT POSTER OR BOX CREDIT? IS THAT NEGOTIABLE? That depends on the job. But if you’re the director, designer, writer or producer, I don’t think that’s a problem. If it is a problem, you have to look at the team

you've picked to work with, because if they're going to try and short-change you on something that costs them absolutely nothing, then they're going to short-change you in other ways.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE OR HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE INTERACTIVE MEDIA? Intelligent fun. And what do I mean? I mean, everybody talks about the graphics. Who cares about the graphics if the game is boring? It's like writing. Who cares if it's accurate prose or grammar if it's boring? I don't care if something is grammatically correct as long as it touches me or makes me laugh or cry. I want to see people to engaging in the level of experience that the writer/designer intended for them to experience.

I know a lot of people who didn't make it in the film business who are trying to make it in interactive multimedia. I think they should (learn to) connect with what they do best and focus on that. Work on it. Sculpt it.

ANY ADVICE FOR WRITERS? In the film business, producers expect to hear pitches. And interactive producers with a film background will say, "Listen, I don't want to see game design documents and scripts. I want pitches." Well, a spec script is still a spec script is still a spec script. Which means, that the more work you do before you show it to somebody, the more creative control and ownership you're going to retain. So any producer who says, "No, no, no, I just want to hear four lines about your game," they either don't understand the game business, or they don't understand why you'd want to own any of your own work.

Many interactive producers initially hired people to only write lines of dialogue. Which meant that a writer didn't know what the hell was going on in the game. It was very difficult to write. Writers were powerless. I think what's happening now is that writers are saying, "Alright, to get an education, that deal was fine. But now that I know what's going on, this game sucks. I can make better games with great characters and great stories."



Q & A

HARVEY HARRISON

Bio

Harvey Harrison is an author and literary/software agent for Jim Preminger Agency in Los Angeles, California. Previously, Harvey worked for Columbia Pictures Television/TriStar Television as Vice President of Business Affairs. He also worked as as Head of Sales for the animation firm, TMS Entertainment, Inc., as an entertainment attorney for Dern, Mason and Floum, and for Sy Fischer Company/Taft Entertainment in business affairs and as a packaging, literary and software agent.

Harvey earned a B.A. in Philosophy from Yale College, and a J.D. from Stanford Law School. Harvey is the author of numerous works, including: Ethics And Negotiation: The Search for Value and Freedom in Hollywood, International Journal of Applied Philosophy; The Shape of Things to Come: An Essay On Interactive Aesthetics, Los Angeles County Bar Association Intellectual Property and Entertainment Law Section, New Technologies 101: A Practical Approach For Entertainment Lawyers. He is a founding member of the Committee for the Arts, member of the Los Angeles Copyright Society, and has served on the membership committee of the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. Additionally, Harvey has served on Barristers Board of Governors, Beverly Hills Bar Association.

Interview

HOW DID YOU BECOME INVOLVED IN THE NEW MEDIA INDUSTRY? About a decade ago, maybe a little longer, I was working at another agency and we were representing animation studios in a packaging capacity—

studios such as Hanna-Barbera. I was involved with various video games of the era like Pac Man, Frogger, Donkey Kong— and packaging them for Saturday morning television. A kid showed up in my office one day with an Apple floppy disk with a graphic adventure game on it and I said, “Oh my goodness!” That’s when I first foresaw the convergence which everybody now sees is happening. And that’s basically how everything got started over ten years ago. I threw myself into it.

YOU WERE A PIONEER. There’s an anecdote attributed to an early filmmaker who was also a magician. Many of the old filmmakers were magicians. He was asked about the future of motion pictures and he said, “Well, except as a tool for parlor magicians, I don’t think there’s much future in it.” And I get a smile and a laugh from people. He might have been correct except for the arrival of the great software artists like Chaplin, Eisenstein and Griffith.. My mission then, was to find the Chaplin of interactive entertainment and help bring that vision to an audience.

YOU WENT FROM THE AGENCY TO... I worked for an animation studio. The I worked at TriStar. I came back to the agency business over five years ago. When I returned, I reactivated my network of relationships in the software industry and said to my colleague, Jim (Preminger), “We are going to get into the interactive field” and he said, “Swell.” And that’s what I’ve been doing ever since. Initially, bringing writers from motion pictures and television into the interactive field, but for quite some time now, I realized I had to make that next commitment— which was to represent designers as well. I am now doing that and working with many of the major electronic publishers.

HOW DO YOU DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN WRITERS AND DESIGNERS— SINCE MANY WRITERS CLAIM TO BE DESIGNERS AS WELL? That is a very, very difficult question to answer because— I guess the short answer is— I don’t. I understand your question because when I have a writer who is hired to write a screenplay or an episode of a half-hour television series, we spend no time trying to discern what a screenplay is. Or what a screenplay for a half hour episodic series is. None of the time spent making that deal is devoted to those issues. Whereas in the engagement of a writer or designer— or both— for an interactive title, quite a bit of time is devoted to shaping, what exactly, the artist is being hired to do.

INTERESTING. In making a deal for a writer or designer, the publisher typi-

cally asks for a certain “deliverable item” and describes it (to me) in a phrase.

And I say to my client, “Are you prepared to deliver this?” Whatever that phrase is.

And my client says, “What is that?”

And I say, “I don’t know. I thought that you’d know.”

And then we take another loop in which my client talks to the producer or the publisher and they have a meeting of the minds on what that deliverable item is. There is no common vocabulary (in this industry) and what I find myself doing on behalf of my clients is defining the scope of the work. Usually, it’s a two part process. One part is the client talks to the publisher to make sure they are understanding each other. Then, the client talks to me. Then, I talk to their (the publisher’s) negotiator. That way, we go all four corners of the rectangle. And it works! [LAUGHS].

Another thing that I am aware of— unlike in film or television deals— is that it’s almost impossible to put page limits, sets of revision limits, or any other scope of limitations on the quantity of the work. Sometimes they’re just not applicable and as long as the writer or designer and the publisher are in sync, you have to go with that. The more experienced the designer is, the less significant this is as an issue. The more inexperienced, the more difficult.

And so I think it’s a greater issue for people coming out of motion pictures and television who want to write in the interactive field. I’ve also found that, in general, that the work involved in writing the interactive project is greater than what is liberally projected by a writer. It’s a lot of work.

AS FAR AS PAY SCALES FOR WRITERS ARE CONCERNED, DO YOU FIND IT IRONIC THAT IT TAKES MORE WORK TO CREATE AN INTERACTIVE TITLE, YET THE PAY SEEMS TO BE LESS THAN FOR THE TYPICAL SCREENPLAY? OR DO YOU FIND THAT THAT’S NOT TRUE? Well, I don’t see it as surprising in light of the fact that motion picture and television are mature, globally established media with products that are widely consumed. I think software is growing dramatically, but the economics are different. And I think people understand this. I think it (the interactive industry) tends to create a little bit of a magnetic repulsion for writers who are working successfully in motion pictures and television. I think that on a creative level, writers for motion pictures and television find interactive multimedia captivating. But on a purely business basis, when they must choose between making more money on a television assignment or less money in the interactive field, they are forced to make a financial decision.

IN YOUR OPINION, DO INTERACTIVE WRITERS WANT THE PROTECTION OF A “GUILD,” WITH AN ESTABLISHED SET OF MINIMUMS AND BENEFITS? With clients who work in the interactive field, I don’t find artists yearning for the protections of a Guild. That may be due, in part, to the fact that software designers tend to be very, very independent by nature, or else they wouldn’t have become involved in this business in the first place. Also, when I negotiate a deal in the software publishing field, it is very frequently the case that the negotiator on the other side says to me, “Now Harvey, before we get started, I want you to know our main objective is to do what’s fair.” There really is a culture of fair dealing which one encounters very often in the interactive field.

HOW IS THE DEAL MAKING PROCESS FOR INTERACTIVE DIFFERENT FROM THE TRADITIONAL, LET’S SAY, HOLLYWOOD DEAL? While there are many, very bright and very fair people in motion pictures and television, the negotiating process for both has its own culture, which places more value on making deals through the “friction” process. Whereas in the interactive field, the values seem to favor avoiding friction in the negotiating process. There are many Hollywood deals that are made with that same spirit of collaboration— many, many deals. But there are many that are not.

DO YOU THINK THIS CONTRAST IN STYLE HAS FUELED THE MULTIMEDIA ARTIST’S FEAR OF HOLLYWOOD? I emphatically believe that that’s part of the reluctance of the software culture to become more involved with the Hollywood culture. In fact, if there’s anyone in the Hollywood culture that is often perceived in the negative way, it’s an agent. Some of those negative perceptions are justified.

I was interviewed once and the interviewer said, off the record, “ I think that you’re the worst thing ever to happen to this industry.”

And I said, “Why?”

He said, “Because this is an honest, friendly, personal, handshake business.”

I said, “I am an honest, friendly, personal, handshake kind of guy. I’m not here to change that. But when the Hollywood style of dealing does come in, when the major studios come in and have huge bargaining power over you, I think I’m going to be the best friend you ever had.”

I don’t think he was convinced.

ANY OTHER STORIES YOU’D LIKE TO RELATE? I was talking to a friend who’s a publisher and I said, “I think the central issue is the difficulty in

introducing the interactive element into motion pictures and television, or into entertainment.”

He said, “No, it’s introducing entertainment into the software.”

WHAT INTERACTIVE GENRES DO YOU ENJOY MOST? Children’s edutainment. This is what I love about this medium— it really works for kids. You don’t have to tell a kid to interact. Unfortunately, many people tell kids not to interact. Since a piece of software can cost fifty or sixty dollars, it’s going to be much more difficult for a kid— more difficult than just going to the neighborhood store and buying a package of baseball cards. It’s not a purchase that a child is going to be able to accomplish alone. It’s a parent/child purchase, together.

The kid will come to the parent and say, “I was just at Billy’s house and I was playing this game and I love it.”

And then they’ll either rent it or buy it. Hopefully, it’s software that a parent and child can play together. Most parents want to participate with their kids in an experience where they see them grow intellectually.

HOW DO YOU EVALUATE NEW TALENT? Most of the writers or designers that I’m thinking of signing already have products out there. So I look at their work. That’s generally how I do it, I usually evaluate a finished product.

ANY ADVICE FOR WRITERS LOOKING TO BREAK INTO THE INTERACTIVE BUSINESS? I think it would be a heck of a good start if they went to some of the software stores and starting playing some of this stuff. I have people approach me regularly from the motion picture community and say, “Gee, I want to be in the interactive field.”

And I say, “Okay, that’s cool. What are some of you favorite titles?”

They kind of stare at me funny as say, “I’ve never played any.”

Imagine this scenario. I’m at a Hollywood party and someone comes up to me and says, “Harvey, I’m really interested in being a screenwriter for motion pictures.”

And I say, “Great, what are some of your favorite movies?”

And they reply, “Well, I haven’t see any movies.”

How would you react?



Q & A

LARRY TUCH

Bio

Larry Tuch is a screenwriter with credits in Network television, interactive media, and corporate video. In the area of traditional entertainment, he has written for the NBC television series COLOMBO and QUINCY. His interactive projects include THE RANDOM HOUSE KID'S ENCYCLOPEDIA (Knowledge Adventure), WHERE IN THE WORLD IS CARMEN SANDIEGO? (Broderbund Software) and five children's titles for Philips Interactive Media's Sidewalk Studio. He has also designed and scripted training CD-ROM's for the banking and retail industries, as well as multimedia marketing presentations for Transamerica Assurance Corp.

In the area of educational media, Larry has scripted films and videos for such organizations as Walt Disney Educational Media, CRM/McGraw Hill and Churchill Films— programs which have been awarded a Cine Gold Eagle, a Christopher, and gold and silver plaques from the Chicago International Film Festival.

A member of the Writer's Guild of America, west since 1975, Larry serves on the Guild's Creative Media & Technologies Committee which advises the Guild's Board of Directors on new media trends and issues. As a CMAT committee member, he has helped plan and coordinate Guild presentations and special events at new media trade shows and conferences. He is one of the creators and co-producers of Digital World's Creative Cafe, a series of nine open forum sessions presenting top creative professionals in the world of interactive media. In addition, he created New Media Expo's Interactive Forum and the Cybershore Bay Club, a lunchtime panel on interactive entertainment for the San Diego Multimedia Conference.

Interview

IF I WAS A MULTIMEDIA PRODUCER, WHY WOULD I HIRE A WRITER SUCH AS YOURSELF? Part of what I provide is a combination of traditional creative services that any writer provides, ie, You give me an idea, I'll make it walk and talk and fly. And I'll even use the English language to excite somebody from the moment they start reading it on paper. So I'm providing you two things as a writer: One, I'm providing you with story, flair and showmanship, because that's the core of interactive entertainment. At the same time, I'll write it in such a way that it becomes a sales piece. Because that's also what you're asking for. You're asking for a chance to take the next step when you go and pitch it to whatever strategic partner you're in business with, whether it's the money partner, the publisher, what have you.

But at the same time, since this is the new frontier, I'm also bringing a certain amount of knowledge of where the bodies are buried, what the terrain is, who your friends are and where you need to go for what information.

HOW DO YOU DETERMINE WHAT STRUCTURES BEST FIT THE PROPERTY THAT YOU'RE BEING ASKED TO WRITE FOR? The best thing to do is not to start by thinking of structure. People are going to find multiple solutions for creative problems. It's best not to get too wedded to conventions. You need conventions, because, quite frankly, you can't recreate the universe every time you start a new project. You need conventions as building blocks. At the same time, if you get too wedded to conventions then the development stops.

HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE INTERACTIVE MEDIA AND HOW IS IT EVOLVING? Well, it is the idea that you can really synthesize what people are used to getting from traditional entertainment with this machinery that we call interactive. There's sort of a spectrum. One end of the spectrum is the absolute traditional application software/game where you've got menus and inventories and all that sort of stuff. And at the other end of the spectrum, traditional linear entertainment, where the writer has carefully crafted each moment in order to provoke an emotional response, and to build a resolution. With interactive, the question is how to merge the two. How and where do they meet and what's the balance in the middle?

The challenge is to have the replayability that is inherent in the traditional, conventional programmed game structure. And yet at the same time, have the

richness, depth, surprise and emotional power that traditional linear entertainment offers. Great linear creativity where the writer and director are able to start you at a certain point, sneak up on you with new information, then punch you in the stomach, give you a rest period, and then hit you with another moment. And along the way you begin to give a damn about wanting to see it all the way through, because you either hate someone and want to see them finished off, or you love someone and want to see them prevail.

HOW DOES THE WRITER APPROACH STORY STRUCTURE FOR INTERACTIVE MEDIA? The first thing I do is not to make decisions on structure. The first thing I do is define the nature of the experience. What is the user supposed to be able to do...where are they supposed to be able to go. Take *Johnny Mnemonic* as an example. John Platten and Douglas Gayeton decided that they wanted to use real human characters in a filmed environment on CD-ROM. They wanted to put these characters in the middle of the action, but they didn't want the dramatic narrative interrupted by on-screen interfaces.

At this point, notice they still haven't decided how the hell to do that. They haven't decided on what the structure is, or the design. And the programmers haven't come in to help them do it. And I would take the same approach. For instance, if you said, "I'd like to do a story about a medieval city." I would say, "Fine. What do you want to do within a medieval city?" Once you've defined your environment, you have to then decide how many different ways you want to experience each specific piece of the environment. Do you want to experience it at its different stages in history? Do you want to find out who lived there and learn something about them? Do you want to simply develop the environment a little? And what kind of games can I play while I'm there? Maybe I'll allow you to create the environment. Maybe I'll put you in a slider, and I'll allow you to slide from the year 600 to scene 1450. While you are sliding, the furniture will change, the windows will get smaller or larger, and if you pause for a moment, other programming will kick in.

Once I get that whole list of stuff, then I look for structure.

And then third, I ask the programmer, "How realistic is this?" The programmer tells me what's doable and what's not doable. At this stage of the game, programming is wedded to the creative effort because the programmer is an enabler. And the art and the beauty of what a programmer can do has now pushed that envelope. Most programmers want to do that—to push the envelope. You (the writer) just have to convince the programmer that the on-screen effect will be worth the effort.

CAN WRITERS AND PROGRAMMERS WORK TOGETHER? I think it's obligatory for every member of the team to learn enough about the other person's job to have an appreciation of what that person can offer and to be a good ally. Programmers should appreciate what writers and graphic designers do, and writers should appreciate and learn all they can from programmers.

A LOT OF WRITERS LACK EXPERIENCE WRITING FOR INTERACTIVE. WHAT IS INHERENTLY UNIQUE ABOUT WRITING FOR INTERACTIVE? WHAT DO WRITERS NEED TO LEARN? Well, I think you can take a lesson from what we've just been talking about. I mean, I pointed out that the best way to get really entertaining end product is to start with ideas that are entertaining.

Writer's should not be drowned by the mystique of the complexity surrounding multimedia. If you dive right into it and learn everything there is—from MacroMedia Director to interface design, you'll be nothing more than a slave to everything you've learned. As opposed to creating from your primary strength—storytelling.

Also, writers need to learn a lot more about interactive products, because nothing makes its point so fast as seeing how something works.

The next thing is to take some seminars. I'm learning how to use *MacroMedia Director* right now. I can already appreciate what programmers using this tool are going through. I'm able to chat with them intelligently. So a little exposure to some of the enabling software, a few classes, will put you into the culture a little bit. You'll have an appreciation for what's involved and what it takes. And also, by virtue of building some of these elements, the fact that these elements do exist. It gives you an understanding of the strings and wires behind the scenes, so to speak.

I would also say read everything you can. Go to some of the (industry) conferences, and look at lots and lots of software. And if you belong to a professional organization, pay attention to what they do. If you're an IICS member or Writers Guild member, whatever other organizations you may belong to, those are hubs of information. And when they put together panels or special evening meetings, go, listen, pick up the stuff.

DO YOU PLAY A LOT OF MULTIMEDIA TITLES? As much as I can. The irony is that my writing schedule makes it difficult to look at everything that's worth seeing. But when I do put the time aside to play stuff, I tend to focus on two areas: edutainment and story-based games. I'm very partial to the exploratory side of edutainment because I think it offers me an avenue for designing soft-

ware around my favorite subjects. For example, I'm a great fan of nautical archaeology. When I have free time, I love to sit in a nice comfortable chair and read about excavating Spanish galleons, because there are really two stories. One is the back story, the actual history of the shipwreck. The other one is the detective story of actually finding the wreck. And I love that. As soon as I can find someone who can back me, I will create CD-ROMs in which people have that kind of experience.

A HOME EXPLORER KIT. Yeah. The world armchair explorer. Looking at actual titles, I like a lot of Knowledge Adventure's titles, especially the Imax adaptations, the *X-Men Cartoon Maker* and *Casper's BrainyBook*. My first interactive writing assignments were on children's programs for Philips and I got a good look at how well-developed content complements and influences good design. Programs like *Surf City*, *The Wacky World of Miniature Golf* and *Crayon Factory* are good examples of how a lot of the entertainment values we associate with good children's television can be blended with interactive design and produce a kind of charm and sense of fun that makes for a quality product. My kids play these particular titles alot.

Interactive entertainment will prove to be a very rich area for pushing the envelope in terms of spurring new techniques and sub-genres. And that's important because the cross-fertilization of traditional entertainment and interactive design is going to build the medium - and the industry - by forcing us to find better ways of entertaining.



Q & A

CAROLYN MILLER

Bio

Carolyn Miller is a scriptwriter with a special expertise in writing and designing interactive projects. Initially beginning her career as a newspaper reporter and magazine journalist, her work spans writing for TV, cable, and feature films, as well as interactive projects.

Among the more well-known CD-ROM titles she has contributed to are: THE POCAHONTAS ANIMATED STORYBOOK (Disney Interactive), WHERE IN THE USA IS CARMEN SANDIEGO? (Broderbund Software), SHELLEY DUVALL PRESENTS DIGBY'S ADVENTURES (Sanctuary Woods), THE RANDOM HOUSE KIDS ENCLYCLOPEDIA (Knowledge Adventure) and VIRTUAL BIOPARK (AND Communications w/ Simon & Schuster). One of her favorite recent assignments was writing the narration script for THE TOY STORY ANIMATED STORYBOOK (Pixar w/ Disney Interactive). Another was serving as co-concept-designer (with Janis Diamond) on a cutting edge voice recognition product for girls, for Voice Powered Technology, Inc.

Presently, Carolyn is serving as Content Editor for a major information-based CD-ROM project, supervising and coordinating the work of a large team of researchers and writers. The project, with the working title JAPAN ON JAPAN, is being produced by UCLA and IMMediacy.

Her TV credits include the long-running children's show, CAPTAIN KANGAROO, and numerous Afterschool Specials, one of which earned her an Emmy nomination.

Carolyn has spoken at numerous conferences about writing for new technologies including the Maui Writers Conference, the San Diego Multimedia Conference, the Children's Interactive Media Festival, Digital Day L.A., New Media Expo, and the Creative Cafe at Digital World. She has also appeared as a guest lecturer at the UCLA Extension Writer's Program and Loyola

Marymount University. In addition, she contributes articles about the new media to the Writers Guild JOURNAL and to other publications.

She is an active member of the Creative Media and Technologies Committee (CMAT) of the Writer's Guild of America, west, and of the IICS. She also serves on the Advisory Board of the Fullerton College Multimedia Training Program.

Carolyn is a native of San Francisco, California, and resides in Los Angeles. She has a B.A. in English Literature from Cornell University and an M.S. in Journalism from Northwestern University.

Interview

WHAT IS YOUR BACKGROUND? I have a degree in English Lit. and a Master's Degree in Journalism. The Journalism degree turned out to be really helpful even though I haven't been a practicing journalist for many years. People seem to like the fact that I have a genuine respect for facts and that I can write concisely and clearly. A lot of interactive projects are text based— or use very short snippets of things and you have to be able to write clearly. Many of them (projects) have informational content so having a journalism background was helpful. Also, I have a background in writing television scripts for kids and the children's arena is a really hot area right now in multimedia.

WHAT IS YOUR BACKGROUND WORKING WITH CHILDREN? I wrote for a show called *Captain Kangaroo*—

OH, THAT UNPOPULAR SHOW... [LAUGHS] That show. I worked for several years with them in New York. I've done Afterschool Specials, which were Emmy Award winning shows. One of my projects was nominated for an Emmy. I've done a lot of other kid shows. I worked on a kid's show for the Disney Channel. I've also worked on regular entertainment projects— Hollywood projects. A lot have never been produced but I've sold them.

IT'S INTERESTING HOW SO MANY HOLLYWOOD PROJECTS NEVER MAKE IT TO THE SCREEN. IS IT THE SAME IN THE MULTIMEDIA INDUSTRY? No. So far, everything I've written has been made. It's really satisfying. I think multimedia producers are much more careful about the projects they get involved with. Maybe it's because they start at a different place. They start with a concept and they're really sure by the time they pull in

the writer that they're going to go ahead with it.

WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR MULTIMEDIA CREDITS? My first assignment was for And Communications. It was a project called *Virtual Biopark* and it was a very interesting project—very challenging in what it offers. I was hired to write pieces of the prototype screenplay and all of the information about one of the animals—the cheetah. After that, I went to Broderbund and I did *Where in the U.S.A. is Carmen Sandiego?* I worked on that along with a few other people. Also, I've worked on the update to *Where in the U.S.A. is Carmen Sandiego?* They hired me a second time to work on that same project because it changed as it developed. It became more interactive than the first version. And I think this happens a lot in interactive games—they keep updating them. It's not like a book or a film. As the technology improves, they (the producers) upgrade the interactive project.

I just finished the sequel to *Shelly Duvall's It's a Bird's Life*. It's called *Shelly Duvall Presents Digby's Adventures - Tales of a One Pound Dog*. Shelly wrote the story but I was hired to create the screenplay. It's an interactive storybook. A neat project. And I just finished an assignment for Knowledge Adventuer, the *Random House Kid's Encyclopedia*. I am working on the fictionalized characters who are, in a sense, the guides through the material. I brought in another writer to work with me on it because it's such a big job—which needs to be completed in a very short time. Now I'm working as a design consultant on Disney's upcoming Animated Storybook, *Pocahontas*.

HOW DID YOU LAND YOUR FIRST INTERACTIVE JOB? Well, I was always really interested in interactive and I sort of put the word out and I guess it was probably word of mouth that got me my first job. A couple of people told some producers about me and that sort of laid the groundwork for my first job. I also did a lot of self-education. I took a lot of meetings. I went to a lot of conferences such as New Media Expo and Digital World. I also joined the IICS (International Interactive Communications Society).

HOW DOES A SCREENWRITER GO ABOUT BREAKING INTO THE MULTIMEDIA INDUSTRY WITHOUT ANY INTERACTIVE CREDITS?

Well, most writers don't have interactive experience. Multimedia producers are looking for a couple of different things. They certainly want someone who can write clearly and they want someone (who has written) in the genre, even if it's not interactive. Say it's an interactive action/adventure project, producers will look for someone who's done action/adventure projects in television or film,

even if the material hasn't been produced. The writer will need to provide a sample screenplay just as they would for any other kind of writing job. Producers want someone who they can rely on and someone with professional credentials.

HOW IMPORTANT IS WRITER/PRODUCER COMMUNICATION? It's crucial! Without good communication, you can end up in trouble really fast. The communication has to be ongoing because interactive projects tend to evolve and change during the development process. When I first get involved in a multimedia project, I generally write some sample scenes for them (the producers) to make sure that we're all on the right track. I can adjust my style before I get in too deep. I wouldn't be doing that for a TV project or movie because, basically, they know what they're going to get.

HOW WOULD YOU CLASSIFY THE *PUTT PUTT* SERIES OF TITLES? ARE THEY EDUCATIONAL TITLES? Not really. It's a children's story with educational components to it, but it's got a really engaging character—Putt Putt. They (the producers) created a wonderful little world to explore. They give the user some challenges and there are unexpected things that happen along the course of the story. You don't know exactly who you're going to run into or what happens next. It's a little bit like real life in that you wake up in the morning and you never know exactly what's going to happen to you the rest of the day.

HOW DO YOU DEFINE INTERACTIVE? I think it has to do with lots of choices and a unique weaving of the visual, music, sounds and graphics. It's a whole new mix than has never been experienced before. It's something that draws you in and makes you a participant. Like *Myst*. The visuals make it really intriguing. You are sucked into the story and made to explore it. I know people who are totally hooked on *Myst*. People who actually did not go to their jobs for days. There's something very compelling about the story.

WHAT SOFTWARE DO YOU USE TO CREATE INTERACTIVE DOCUMENTS? Basically, *Microsoft Word*. I use the same tools that I use for writing a feature screenplay.

WHEN WRITING AN INTERACTIVE SCREENPLAY, CAN COMPONENTS SUCH AS CHARACTER ARCS BE INTEGRATED INTO THE INTERACTIVE STORY? I don't think character arcs can be integrated into interactive projects. I think it really depends on the structure or genre of the interactive project. For instance, if you take a game like *Carmen Sandiego* which

has very much a story component in each of the little cases in the beginning, middle and end— those characters don't change. The character of the chief of detectives— he's always the same kind of a guy. It may be a little bit like a sitcom. You've got comedy. Each character has their own unique traits and quirks. But the characters don't change over the course of the game no matter how many times your play it. In other kinds of games, the characters can change— they can have an arc. But you have to structure the game differently. One way may be to have the character work through different levels. They can develop and grow through the course of the game.

DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR WRITERS WHO ARE LOOKING TO BREAK INTO MULTIMEDIA? I think the first thing a writer needs to do is really become educated about what multimedia is and make sure it appeals to them. Not every writer responds to multimedia. You have to be very light on your feet because so many things change while you're working on a project. So you have to be flexible. You have to be well organized and often have to develop your own systems for organizing material. Networking is really important. It's like a lot of other writing situations. Very word of mouth— who you know. An agent may be helpful. But ultimately, it's up to you.



Q & A

HOWARD BURKONS

Bio

Howard Burkons specializes in creating entertainment projects for both multimedia and classic media. He recently wrote and designed the JAMES BOND MUD for the Microsoft Network, as well as the interactive game, HOT PURSUIT, for Electronic Arts. Some of his additional multimedia credits include the interactive action-comedy, TANK GIRL, for MGM/GTE Imagetrek, THE ACTION ANDERSONS for Interfilm, HIGH SCHOOL SURVIVAL GUIDE (#101), for Sony, and VIRTUAL MUSIC, an interactive television series. Burkons also wrote, designed and directed the film noir interactive game, PSYCHOMETER, for Electronic Arts.

Burkons is attached to produce several feature films, including John Q for Island World and Columbia Pictures, GRAVITY HILL for 20th Century Fox, and produced HIGHWAY HEARTBREAKER for CBS. His traditional writing credits include the television movie, DEAD END, for Fox Broadcasting, GARAGE BAND AND BUZZ—two situation comedy pilots for Nickelodeon, and WINTER IN LISBON, an independent feature film. His software company, Planet Ranch, has several titles in various stages of development.

Interview

YOU MUST HAVE AN INTERESTING BACKGROUND... I came to Los Angeles to be an actor. I got my SAG card and did some acting, maybe three or four jobs a year, and found it incredibly boring. Not the acting, the waiting. The auditioning. The sitting around. I slowly got into production work. I was a PA—you name it. I did that stuff for years. Eventually, I became an Assistant Director, Second AD, then First AD. Then I went to work for some producers

and became a personal assistant— a Kato Kaelin.

[LAUGHS] I just read an article, they call them (assistants) Katos now. That was fun, and interesting, and I learned a lot. At some point during that production world experience, I worked on a kids' show for the Disney Channel. I began to read a lot of scripts and I thought, you know, I could do this. I'd written a lot in college and I'd won some writing awards, but writing was lonely and I am very social. So I never really thought about becoming a writer. I got together with a friend of mine who was a puppeteer and a magician, and created a game show for kids called *Game Master*. I had played countless hours of games as a kid— chess, checkers, Chinese checkers and so on.

We sold the show to Lorimar and they went to all the networks and nobody bought it. Nobody wanted a kids' game show. This was before there was a Nickelodeon.

Before long, I started writing different things; spec scripts, television episodes. My writing partner at the time, Blake Snyder (*Blank Check* and *Stop or My Mom Will Shoot*) and I heard that Warner Bros. was looking for writers to create a *Police Academy* game. It was to be created on a VHS-based platform. Hasbro had invented a computer playback machine that took a videotape and broke it down into four stories. You could jump from track to track within the video tape and sort of get an interactive experience. They got all the actors from the *Police Academy* movies except for Steve Guttenberg, and they made the game. But by the time they shot the new footage, Hasbro abandoned that technology. CD-ROM was coming. That's how I got into the gaming business.

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST GAME TITLE? I managed to work on a number of different titles— ghost writing dialogue, on-screen text, that sort of thing. Jim Simmons, who's an executive producer at EA, asked me if I'd like to work on this game called *Psychometer*. I wrote it but it's never been released. In fact, I'm encouraging them to develop it further. What we set out to do with *Psychometer* was extremely ambitious. And a thousand pages later, I had a design and story outline, which we then took the first five minutes and scripted. Five minutes of linear time, which is about forty minutes of interactive time. Which translated into about six hundred pages.

WOULD YOU CALL THAT A PROTOTYPE SCRIPT? It was a prototype script and it was also based on a prototype design engine— which also served as a writing tool. Part of what I was there to do was to help them figure out how to create future projects. A writing template.

DO YOU STILL USE THAT TEMPLATE? No, it's their tool. I only used it for one project. That tool is probably like a crayon today. It's evolved over the last several years. A good writing tool helps the writer organize his thoughts. It doesn't create your thoughts. The ability to organize an interactive document, to create worlds or branches, to have a thumbnail sketch of where you are at any given moment, and where you are within that world at any given moment, is just crucial.

IF PUBLISHERS REALLY WANT TO FOSTER CREATIVITY AND NEW IDEAS, WHY ARE THEY SO SECRETIVE ABOUT THEIR DESIGN TOOLS? WHY IS EVERYTHING PROPRIETARY? It's competition. Tools provide an advantage to the design of your game. Interfilm Technologies is going to market and license their interactive writing tool, which is a wonderful tool for a branching writing game. Ultimately, when the playing field evens out, it will come down to who's got the best content.

WHAT DO YOU SAY TO WRITERS WHO WANT TO KNOW HOW YOU WRITE FOR INTERACTIVE? I say to them, you write an interactive script by taking your computer, your typewriter, or your pencil like you always do—you just write. Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of water. Jack fell down and broke his crown and Jill came tumbling after. Then you put that sheet down. You take another sheet of paper and write, Jack and Jill went up the hill, and about halfway up they stopped and they got it on.

[LAUGHS] And that's the end of that adventure. And then you write another adventure, Jack and Jill blew off the hill, they went roller blading that day. Now you have the beginnings of an interactive story. It started at some point, Jack and Jill...then different things happened. If you add some kind of technology that allows you to link those stories together, then you have interactive design. But to show that you understand interactive writing, you could write a little spec story that's maybe five or ten pages long, and maybe a hundred pages wide depending on how intricate you want to make it. Game companies have never asked me for a spec interactive script. They've only asked to read my writing samples. If I'm trying to get a job writing a comical game, I give them a comedy script. If I'm trying to show them that I can write drama, I show them drama. If they had a science fiction adventure type of thing, I'd show them that. Not all writers write everything well, and some writers write a lot of things well. You go to your strengths and you write what works.

I also think that if you want to get into this business and you're willing to

work really hard, there's work to be had. But if someone hasn't done well in TV and hasn't done well in movies, that doesn't mean they can now write for interactive. Two years ago, you could fool multimedia companies. You could give them a screenplay and they wouldn't know how to read it, let alone form an opinion about it. That's changing as they work with more professional screenwriters.

YOU MENTIONED WRITING A PROJECT FIVE PAGES LONG AND A HUNDRED PAGES WIDE. Well, that depends on the type of game you're writing for. What I end up having is basically a screenplay. But if I'm designing a world, I'm describing that world in greater detail than I might in a regular screenplay.

WHAT ELEMENTS ARE IMPORTANT TO INCLUDE IN A GAME? If it's a "world" game, you put into the description of the world everything that's necessary and no more. That means that if there's an art director on the project, he's got to be able to read it and know what everything looks like. The description must be on the page. More importantly, the clues the gamer has to find must be described as well and accurately. Ultimately, a programmer is going to turn what you've written into a language that's technical.

A good game involves you emotionally, and a great game, the game of tomorrow, the games that are starting to happen today, actually give you an emotional payoff. I know gamers who play games to win and they get there as fast as they can and then they're done. Then there are gamers who explore everything and hunt everything and search everything, 'cause they're really into mastering every element of the game. But I find myself replaying games that I like all the time, because I enjoy them. I've covered every inch of territory in many of these games, so that I've learned every bush, or looked under every rock, but still I go back and play again.

I remember the first time I played Nintendo. Being a good Dad, I bought Nintendo for my children. I would reward myself with a little bit of Nintendo at eleven o'clock at night after the kids were asleep. The sun would come up the next morning and I would go, Oohhhh...what am I doing here? I remember the first time I called the Nintendo Help Line. I couldn't believe I was spending money and making phone calls 'cause I needed to find out where they had that sword hidden so I could get to the next level...

[LAUGHS] But I learned that you could go on an adventure and become a little sprite that would evolve into a living creature.

ANY ADVICE FOR WRITERS JUST STARTING OUT? If you're starting out, I really think the best way to begin is to go back to that Jack and Jill analogy.

WHAT IF A WRITER HAS A SCREENPLAY THEY WANT TO CONVERT? I think that's a mistake. For the purpose of learning, don't take something you've already done. Start with a blank piece of paper. Too often, writers come to me with wonderful linear entertainment that's been "repurposed" for interactive. The first question I usually ask is, "Why is this better interactive?"

And they say, "Well, I read in *Variety*..."

WHAT IS IT ABOUT INTERACTIVE THAT'S SO SPECIAL? In an interactive game, getting there is half the fun. It's all about the combined exploration experience. It's the depth. And the medium here is interactive. When somebody comes up with something that's really, truly interactive, I get very excited. They start with a new idea. You can't bring preconceived experiences to interactive.

WHAT ABOUT INTERACTIVE MOVIES? I'm a proponent of those experiences. We are truly coming out of the nickelodeon stage and about to start making two-reelers. Look at *Zelda* or *Space Invaders* or early *Donkey Kong*. They're wonderful games. They're still fun to play. Absolutely a blast. Titles like *Wing Commander* are not going to go away. They're going to be around for a long time to come. But their evolution is ongoing. As storytellers of today, our job is to try and help that marriage of technology and entertainment as we move forward. Who can say what the future may bring? No one can, 'cause there's always some brilliant young guy or gal out there who's going to invent some new way to get there.

HOW IMPORTANT ARE THE CHARACTERS THAT INHABIT THE INTERACTIVE EXPERIENCE? When I get to the end of a game and I find myself caring about whether my character wins or loses, then I know I'm having a good interactive experience. The inverse is also true. If I play a game, get to the end and kill the last monster, then I rescue the princess, I expect something. I expect a resolution, some reward for my efforts. Like a kiss from the princess before I pick her up and walk off into the sunset. All of those great story emotions that are engrained in us from childhood.

In order for a game to work emotionally, you have to care about these characters and the interactive experience has to be the entertainment. But it's in the doing, in the finding. A twitch game where you win something meaningful is so

much more exciting than just a twitch game.

If it's a story-driven experience, there are expository elements of the story. Who the character is, what the character's facing, what challenges the characters are facing, and what your goals and objectives are.

EXPLAIN HOW THREE-ACT STRUCTURE CAN BE USED IN AN INTERACTIVE PROJECT. Act One— What is the action and how is it set into motion. Act Two— You sort of play those permutations out. The goal of getting them is the Third Act. Getting all the information or tools that will be necessary to achieve your goals ends the Third Act. To me, a good game has many endings. Or as many as you can afford to produce.

I've used the pyramid as a model for interactive gaming. All the endings are along the base, which is an upside down pyramid. So we've started at the bottom and we've worked out. And all the world that is encompassed within that pyramid, is our world. You want to get to the endings up here. The reason I like the pyramid model is that the player is working their way towards conclusions. And the conclusions shouldn't be a singular point. I don't believe that there's a winning scenario in a good game.

Though some of those endings are more or less successful from a results point of view, they should all be equally successful from an experience point of view. If you're designing something for kids and they have the opportunity to do anything that might be considered deviant behavior, they're going to do that. If that means killing off people or losing, well, so be it.

YOU REALLY THINK THE END-USER WANTS DIFFERENT GAME ENDINGS? If you design in such a way that you're thinking in terms of one end, I think that's counter-productive to the interactive experience. Because you want to get the feeling that you're entering a world that has limitless boundaries, and the boundaries should get wider...Why not be able to capture the princess nine different ways? Or save the princess nine different ways? For example, let's say that along the way to saving the princess, you kill her father. It was an accident. Is the princess still going to kiss you or is she going to hump your bones?

On the other hand, what if you didn't kill her father. Because you didn't kill her father, you were whacked sixty times with a whip. That's a choice you made. When I get to the princess she may want to soothe those wounds. You still have the same goal— to get to the princess— but the way you experience the resolution is very different.

WHERE IS INTERACTIVE GOING? In a couple of years, you'll play Pong with a tennis racket in your hand. You'll stand in front of a TV set and swing a racket. You'll be playing an opponent, and if you win, Christie Brinkley will smile at you from the stands. That may be the game part, but after the match, you might get in a car with a digitally enhanced and licensed Christie Brinkley, and head to the beach where bad guys attack you. Now you're James Bond.

If you play anything on the Internet, and you start getting into an interactive experience that's really moment to moment, person to person. Everything about gaming will change.

There will still be classic entertainment. I still want to see *It's a Wonderful Life* on Christmas Eve. I want to see it for the hundredth time. I want to see it and I want to cry.

BLACK AND WHITE OR COLOR? Black and white. I want to hear, Atta boy, Clarence. I'd be lying to you if I said I didn't. I want to see Charlie Chaplin. I want to see *2001: A Space Odyssey*. I want to see *Beavis and Butthead*. You know, from the sublime to the ridiculous. I want to be entertained. I think the novelist is going to become an important part of the world of interactive writing. Novelists write worlds. And some of the best movies originated from novels.

WHAT DOES THE WRITER NEED TO KNOW ABOUT GAME STRUCTURE? All of it. I mean, that's like saying, I'm going to write a script but I don't know what the end is. When you're writing something interactive, you have to create the world. You have to know what your objectives are. Economy of purpose is essential. If you have a finite numbers of choices, you want each choice to be extremely potent. You want it to be crucial to getting to the next experience. I think experience is a better term than level. You know, in a level design we have a certain number of experiences at this level, then another experience at this level. They're experiences. Emotional highs and lows. You have to overcome all the obstacles to get to the next one.

THEY'RE ALMOST LIKE INDIVIDUAL ACTS... They really are. It's almost like a seven act TV movie structure. In games you're always fighting the big monster at the end of the level. Well, at the end of the first act of a TV movie, you give the audience something really salacious and juicy so they don't change the channel. When you've killed these one-headed beastie at the end of the second level, you get the two-headed beastie...

You need a key that lets you into the next room, or you get some knowledge. Emotionally you gather the experience of accomplishment. Then you get

some kind of knowledge that propels you forward and provides you enough interest to play on. That's what's missing from the older games, because they didn't worry about that. Now that things are becoming more and more dramatic, they will have to do it. I mean, that's where the writer is essential. Writing was the last thing that people used to think about. It was almost an afterthought. But that's changing.

WHERE DOES THE WRITER START FIRST? STORY OR STRUCTURE? I start with concept. Then I flesh out the story. Which is not so much plot as design. You have to understand how the technology will work for the particular project and how the audience will interface. A writer/designer must decide how to indicate audience choice, and how to indicate those choices to the player.

WHAT KIND OF SCREEN CREDIT DO YOU PREFER, WRITER/DESIGNER? Writer/designer, without a doubt. It's a lot of work to write an interactive project.. It's hard to keep everything fresh. That's where the writer comes in.

NONDISCLOSURE AGREEMENT

In connection with your review of certain confidential information of My Company ("My Company's Abbrev."), we ask that you read and accept the following conditions on My Company's disclosure of such information:

"Proprietary Information" shall mean all information obtained by you from or disclosed to you by My Company which (i) relates to My Company's past, present or future research, development or business activities or the results from such activities or (ii) which My Company has received from others and which My Company is obligated to treat as confidential or proprietary. Proprietary Information shall not include information previously known to you or publicly disclosed without breach of an obligation of confidentiality, either prior or subsequent to your receipt of such information. You agree that you shall hold all Proprietary Information in confidence and shall not use any Proprietary Information except as may be authorized by My Company in writing. You shall not disclose by publication or otherwise to any person any such Proprietary Information. You further agree that at any time upon request of My Company you shall return to My Company any and all written or descriptive matter including, but not limited to, financial information, descriptions or other papers or documents which contain any such Proprietary Information, together with all copies thereof. You acknowledge the receipt of consideration.

If the foregoing reflects your understanding, please sign this Agreement in the space provided below.

AGREED TO AND ACCEPTED BY:

(My Name & Company)

(Date)

(3rd Party Name & Company)

(Date)

Sample Non-Disclosure Agreement



WRITERS GUILD OF AMERICA, WEST, INC.

8955 Beverly Boulevard • West Hollywood, California 90048-3456
 (310) 350-3000 FAX (310) 350-8080



The Interactive Program Contract . . .

WHAT IT IS:

The Interactive Program Contract, covers writing and/or designing interactive digital programs produced for disc, cartridge-based platforms and on-line services.* Writing for interactive television is covered by the WGA Agreement and is not eligible for the Interactive Program Contract.

**Excluding certain news format reporting and other text-only on-line journalistic writing.*

HOW IT WORKS:

Using the contract is simple. Producers specify their name, address, financial structure, the title of the project, and the amount of money which will be paid to the writer(s) for their services — the writer's "gross compensation."

By signing the contract, producers agree to make standard pension and health contributions equal to twelve and one-half percent (12½%) of the writer's gross compensation. For example, if the writer is paid \$20,000 for a project, the producer will contribute 12½% of that amount, (\$2,500), on behalf of the writer to the Writers Guild Pension Plan and Health Fund (6% and 6½%, respectively).

After the Interactive Program Contract has been completed, please send to: Department of Industry Alliances, WGAw, 8955 Beverly Boulevard, West Hollywood, CA 90048.

The Pension & Health form, along with appropriate contributions, should be sent to: Producer-WGA Pension Plan, 1015 North Hollywood Way, Burbank, California 91505.

WHO IT BENEFITS:

Writers and designers of interactive programs earn contributions on their behalf to the Guild's pension and health funds. The Producer-Writers Guild of America Pension Plan and Writers Guild-Industry Health Fund are among the most comprehensive pension and health plans in the entertainment industry.

By using the Interactive Program Contract, non-Guild writers may become eligible for membership to the WGA. Limits for Interactive Programs are currently interpreted on a case-by-case basis.

Producers using the Interactive Program Contract gain access to the most skilled and experienced writing talent in the entertainment community.

For Questions:

John Greenberg
 Vice President
 Tel: (310) 205-2341
 Fax: (310) 350-8080
 jgreen@wgausa.com

Dept. of Industry Alliances

Ms. Catherine Matthews-Rye
 Senior Administrator
 Tel: (310) 313-1888
 Fax: (310) 313-1887
 cmatthews@wgausa.com

■ INTERACTIVE PROGRAM CONTRACT ■

Letter of Adherence ■ Single Production Only

Company: _____ Phone: () _____
 Street Address: _____
 City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Financial Structure

Corporation: ☐ Partnership* ☐ 10% or more owner: ☐
 Joint Venture* ☐ Sole Owner: ☐ DBA: ☐

If Corporation, name of State in which Corporation is registered: _____

If Corporation, names of officers and principal owners: _____

*List names of Partners or Joint Venturers: _____

TITLE OF PRODUCTION: _____

COMPENSATION: (Writing and/or Designing Service): _____

LENGTH OF PROGRAM (in Minutes): _____

WRITERS EMPLOYED UNDER THIS CONTRACT

Name: _____ SSN _____

Name: _____ SSN _____

On behalf of the writer(s) employed on the above-named Interactive Program, the undersigned Interactive Program Producer hereby agrees to make contributions to the Producer-Writers Guild of America Pension Plan ("Plan") and the Writers Guild-Industry Health Fund ("Fund") as set forth in Article 17 of the 1995 Writers Guild of America Theatrical and Television Basic Agreement ("the 1995 WGA BTA"), by reference incorporated herein and available on request. Producer agrees to be bound by the terms and conditions of the Plan Agreement and the Fund's Trust Agreement. No other terms of the 1995 WGA BTA shall apply to the employment of such writer(s).

Currently, the contribution rates set forth in Article 17 are six percent (6%) of gross compensation for writing services in the Plan and six and one-half percent (6.5%) of gross compensation for writing services in the Fund.

Accepted and Agreed:

(Company) _____ (Prior Name and Title) _____
 By: _____ (Date) _____
 (Signature)

WRITERS GUILD OF AMERICA, WEST, INC. on behalf
 of itself and its affiliate, WRITERS GUILD OF AMERICA, EAST, INC.

By: _____

— For Office Use Only —

Accepted this _____ day of _____, 19____, Producer-Writers Guild of America Pension Plan and Writers
 Guild Industry Health Fund. By: _____ Title: _____

* Return completed form to:

Department of Industry Affairs
 Writers Guild of America, west, Inc.
 8915 Beverly Boulevard
 West Hollywood, California 90068

* For Questions:

SO CALIF: Lori Lieberman, Kay Schaefer
 Phone: (310) 265-2511 Fax: (310) 330-8783
 NORTHERN CALIF: Susan Gorkaritz
 Phone: (415) 323-1898 Fax: (415) 323-1897

WGA Interactive Program Contract



SCREEN ACTORS GUILD

5400 Wilshire Blvd.
Suite 1500
Beverly Hills, CA 90210
(310) 276-7500

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SAG INTERACTIVE AGREEMENT

Because of the rapid development of interactive/multimedia technology and the introduction of such platforms as CD-I, CD-ROM, and 3DO, it was imperative to create a contract which covers performers in this type of work and to allow for expansion of the medium. As a result, in June, 1991 the Screen Actors Guild created the first Interactive Agreement in the entertainment industry. It covers all forms of media productions including but not limited to film, videoscope, and other forms of electronic publishing.

The Interactive/Multimedia Agreement is the official contract under which all SAG members must be hired, and in which producers wishing to use non-union talent must become signatory.

This is such a rapidly evolving medium that developers of interactive/multimedia projects are urged to contact the Interactive Department of the Screen Actors Guild as projects are envisioned. To date we have had over 2000 performers work in a variety of performer capacities in multimedia productions, including several animated projects. Over \$25 million in revenue has been generated.

For further information, please call Michael Prohaska, the Senior Administrator of Interactive Contracts at (310) 548-6847 with any questions you might have.

SAG Interactive Agreement

INTERACTIVE MEDIA AGREEMENT BASIC RATES

RECOGNITION:

- The Guild is recognized as the exclusive bargaining agent for all principal performers throughout the United States and extra performers in the production of material for interactive media recorded within the United States of America. The term "Performers" as used herein means those persons covered by this Agreement.
- The terms and conditions of this Agreement apply to programs produced by Producer in the United States, its Commonwealths and possessions, and to programs for which Producer engages Performers within the United States, its Commonwealths and possessions, wherever such programs are produced.

MINIMUM SCALE FOR PRINCIPAL PERFORMERS

7-01-94

To

5-30-95

On Camera Performers

- | | | |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| 1. | Day Performers
Including Solo/Duo Singers | \$ 504.00 |
| 2. | Three Day Performers
Including Solo/Duo Singers | \$1,278.00 |
| 3. | Weekly Performers
Including Solo/Duo Singers | \$1,752.00 |
| | 6 day
Overnight location | \$1,927.12 |

Characterized Dancers, Swimmers, Stunters, etc.

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------------|------------|
| 1. | Rehearsal days only | \$ 297.00 |
| 2. | Work Days | |
| | Solo/Duo | \$ 504.00 |
| | 3 or more | \$ 447.00 |
| | 9 or more | \$ 386.00 |
| | Weekly Contract | |
| | includes rehearsal | |
| | Solo/Duo | \$1,621.00 |
| | 3-8 | \$1,487.00 |
| | 9 or more | \$1,362.00 |

RESOURCES

TEXT STOCK HOUSES

Corporation for National Research
Initiatives

1895 Preston White Drive #100
Reston, VA 22091

Ph: 703-620-8990

Fax: 703-620-0913

Copyright Clearance Center

27 Congress Street

Salem, MA 01970

Ph: 508-744-3350

Fax: 508-741-2318

GUILDS, UNIONS & PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

American Federation of Musicians

1501 Broadway #600

New York, NY 10036

Ph: 212-869-1330

800: 800-237-0988

American Federation of Television
and Radio Artists (AFTRA)

West Coast:

6922 Hollywood Blvd.

Hollywood, CA 90028

Ph: 213-461-8111

East Coast:

260 Madison Ave.

New York, NY 10016

Ph: 212-532-0800

American Society of Composers,
Authors & Publishers (ASCAP)

West Coast:

Ph: 213-466-7681

Fax: 213-466-6677

East Coast:

1 Lincoln Plaza

New York, NY 10023

Ph: 212-595-3050

Fax: 212-724-9024

Directors Guild Of America (DGA)

West Coast:

7920 Sunset Blvd.

Los Angeles, CA 90046

Ph: 310-289-2000

Fax: 310-289-2029

East Coast:

110 West 57th Street

New York, NY 10019

Ph: 212-581-0370

Fax: 212-581-1441

Graphic Artists Guild

11 West 20th Street

8th Floor

New York, NY 10011

Ph: 212-463-7730

Interactive Multimedia Association

3 Church Circle #800

Annapolis, MD 20401

Ph: 410-626-1380

IICS - International Interactive
Communications Society
14657 SW Teal Blvd. #119
Beaverton, OR 97007
Ph: 503-579-4427
Fax: 503-579-1075

Multimedia Development Group
2601 Mariposa Street
San Francisco, CA 94110
Ph: 415-553-2300
Fax: 415-553-2403

NMAA - National Multimedia
Association of America
4920 Niagra Rd. 3rd Floor
College Park, MD 20740
Ph: 800-214-9531
Fax: 301-513-9466

Picture Agency Council of Amercia
(PACA)
1530 Westlake Avenue North
Suite 600
Seattle, WA 98109
Ph: 206-286-8502

Screen Actors Guild (SAG)
West Coast:
5757 Wilshire Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90036
Ph: 213-954-1600

East Coast:
1515 Broadway
44th Floor
New York, NY 10036
Ph: 212-944-1030

Software Publishers Association
1730 M. Street NW #700
Washington, DC 20036
Ph: 202-452-1600

Songwriter's Guild of America (SGA)
West Coast:
6430 Sunset Blvd.
Hollywood, CA 90028
Ph: 213-462-1108

East Coast:
276 Fifth Ave.
New York, NY 100
Ph: 212-686-6820

Writers Connection
P.O. Box 24770
San Jose, CA 95154
Ph: 408-445-3600

Writer's Guild of Amercia
WGA West:
8955 Beverly Blvd.
West Hollywood, CA 90048
Ph: 310-550-1000
Fax: 310-550-8185

WGA East:
555 West 57th Street
New York, NY 10019
Ph: 212-767-7800

PUBLICATIONS / REFERENCES

Making A Good Script Great
Linda Seger
Samuel French Trade
ISBN: 0-573-60690-0
Price: \$10.95

Multimedia Demystified
Random House/NewMedia Series
ISBN: 0-679-756-03-5
Price: \$30.00

The Multimedia Directory
Jon Samsel & Clancy Fort
The Carronade Group
ISBN: 1-885452-10-1
Price: \$59.95

Multimedia Law Handbook
Diane Brinson & Mark F. Radcliffe
Ladera Press
ISBN: 0-9639173-0-7
Price: \$74.95

Multimedia: Making It Work
Tay Vaighan
Osborne: McGraw Hill
ISBN: 0-078-81869-9
Price: \$27.95

Screenplay
Syd Field
Dell Publishing
ISBN: 0-440-57647-4
Price: \$10.95

MAGAZINES / NEWSLETTERS

Interactive Age
Ph: 718-647-6834
Content, technology and communications magazine

Inter@ctive Week
Ph: 516-229-3700
The latest industry news on technology, content and communications

Internet World
Ph: 815-734-1261
A magazine for Internet Users

Multimedia Merchandising
Ph: 310-458-3102
Monthly on the interactive retail market

Multimedia Monitor
Ph: 703-241-1799
A monthly newsletter profiling the latest industry developments

Multimedia Producer
Ph: 914-328-9157
Monthly, for creators and developers of interactive multimedia

Multimedia Wire
Ph: 301-493-9290
An electronic daily covering the converging media and technology marketplaces

New Media Magazine
Ph: 415-573-5170
Monthly, mass-market consumer oriented magazine

The Red Herring
Ph: 415-780-0158
Monthly, on technology, finance, strategy & investment

Wired
Ph: 415-904-0660
Hip, monthly covering everything from the CommerceNet to The Magic Death

FADE IN:

Deep space. Jupiter's famous Red Spot glowers like a troll's angry eye against a backdrop of indigo sky. Three-hundred-mile-an-hour winds rage silently below. A space-freighter drifts serenely into view above.

INT/EXT FREIGHTER/JUPITER NIGHT

A spartan, almost military interior accomodates two recently engaged lovers. JAKE STRYKER lounges his two hundred pounds, spent and naked, beside a striking, well-toned beauty. SANDY AIMES traps one of Jake's legs between her own. Long legs has Sandy. Powerful. A mane of chestnut hair falls thick over shoulders still wet with sweat. Jake leans past her, TAPS A CIGARETTE from its pack.

JAKE
Got a light?

SANDY
Not good for you.

JAKE
Really.

SANDY
Doctors have been telling us
for centuries.

But Sandy produces a lighter, anyway. A "ZIPPO." One strike fires a PINPOINT LASER at the tip of Jake's cig. He inhales deeply.

JAKE
Just goes to show- The old
vices are still the best.

SANDY
Anything for me? Old fashioned,
that is.

He rolls over to retrieve a bottle of Scotch. "Johnny Walker," the label still reads. Black label.

JAKE
How 'bout this?

Sample pages from Subterfuge, a feature screenplay by Darryl Wimberley

2.

SANDY

I'd say terrific except we've
got an orbit to make in two hours.
Unless you'd like to stay here
forever.

JAKE

Worth considering.

He keeps the Scotch as he swivels on top. That's when we see
Jupiter swell through a porthole over the lovers. And that's
when we see that Jake and Sandy share a spaceship's cockpit.
A control panel displays a PAIR OF TV MONITORS set side by
side. A battery of computer displays. And as Jake tongues his
partner we hear—

CONTROLLER

Titan Control to Falcon Seventy-
One. Come back Seventy-One.

A haggard, bearded CONTROLLER appears on one of the panel's
two TV screens.

SANDY

Shit.

JAKE

Forget him.

SANDY

Jake!

CONTROLLER

Titan Control to Falcon 71. I
need a reply Pilot Seventy-One.

JAKE

Hell.

Jake disentangles himself, reaches up to switch on the TV
monitor placed right beside the Controller's. A crisply
starched uniform pops up on the second screen; Jake Jake
faces Titan Control clean-shaven with his pre-recorded
response:

ON TV MONITORS

JAKE (FROM MONITOR #2)

Master Pilot Jake Jake here—

3.

CONTROLLER
Jake, we need your vectors.

JAKE
-I'm sorry I'm not at the helm
to take your call.

CONTROLLER
Goddammit!

JAKE
-But if you'll leave your
designator and frequency,
I'll get back to you as quickly
as I can.

CONTROLLER
Here we go again. Jake-! Jake,
get your ass onscreen! STRYKER!

JAKE
Jake Out.

BACK TO SCENE:

Jake's screen goes dead. So does the Controller's. Jake
returns, smiling, to his lover.

SANDY
One of these days you're gonna
get caught.

JAKE
But not today.

He takes a long pull of Scotch.

SANDY
You ever plan ahead?

JAKE
For the next two hours.

SANDY
How about two weeks? Two years?

JAKE
You're gonna be Earth-side,
aren't you? Some fatcat job.

Sample pages from *Subterfuge*, a feature screenplay by Darryl Wimberley

4.

SANDY
That's me. What about US,
Jake? Any idea where we'll
wind up?

JAKE
Sandy- Just take what's here
now.

SANDY
And after that?

JAKE
We'll see.

EXT RESEARCH FACILITY NIGHT

Stars wink bright as diamonds in a desert sky. A sprawl of windowless buildings mushrooms beneath inside a triple fence. CREDITS RUN as ROBOTS jerk along to patrol the perimeter. Checkpoints and chain-linked fences augment TV monitors and other hi-tech sentinels. SECURITY GUARDS AND DOGS work in tandem with their mechanical analogs. A CRAWL ONSCREEN establishes the place: "NEVADA." And the Time: "SIX YEARS LATER."

INT RESEARCH FACILITY NIGHT

A sphere glows white hot in its plasma cage. Sandy Aimes pads across a catwalk which spans the entire interior. A lot has apparently changed. "SECURITY TERRA-SOL," Sandy's uniform declares. And Jake's nowhere in sight. Sandy unlimbers a flashlight from her belt. And takes a private elevator to-

INT EXECUTIVE VAULT NIGHT

An executive suite tastefully decorated with antique furniture featuring a chromeplated vault on the far wall. A computer screen replaces lock and key. A coded card gives Aimes access to the keyboard; she TAPS a digital code onto the computer's screen.

EXT RESEARCH FACILITY NIGHT

A teardropped TOYOTA MOTORS up to the steel fence; "TERRA-SOL", the van's one-way windshield mirrors the sign. The passengers remain, unseen, behind. A uniformed GUARD waves them through without inspection.

The van spills a pair of THUGS into the shadows. Railguns and lasers rest casually in holsters that, in an earlier age, might have restrained rifles and handguns. A third man climbs

5.

out; "THE BUTCHER" squeezes ape-sized shoulders and legs from the van's interior. A chain secures his leather vest. A scar creases his face from jaw to ear.

BUTCHER
How much time?

THUG
Fifteen minutes to find her.
Ten or so more till shift change
at the gate.

The Butcher unsheaths a knife. No laser or railgun here.

BUTCHER
Let's go.

INT EXECUTIVE SUITE/VAULT NIGHT

Sandy Aimes adjusts a camera already snugged onto a microfilm viewer, projects the film onto the vault's wall. They're blueprints. Hundreds of 'em. The camera catches the prints one by one. SNICK-SNICK. SNICK-SNICK. Almost done. Sandy doesn't see the shadow at her feet. But she feels the barrel at her back! Sandy whirls, kicks- A boot catches one of the Butcher's THUGS full in the groin! Aimes goes for her own gun- But The Butcher's too quick. Sandy's railgun goes spinning across the floor. And then The Butcher collects her camera.

BUTCHER
Dirty pictures, Sandy?

SANDY
See for yourself.

BUTCHER
I don't think so.

A single fist CRUSHES THE CAMERA to junk.

BUTCHER
I'm gonna have some fun with
you, Sandy. But first I got
a question.

The ape leans into Sandy's face.

BUTCHER
Who you workin for?

Sample pages from Subterfuge, a feature screenplay by Darryl Wimberley

6.

INT METRO LAS VEGAS NIGHT

Corroded grates and cable tangle with the leavings of a Twenty-Second Century sewer. Electric CIRCUITS SPIT like snakes. Sparks drift like fireflies in the gloom. A Senior Security GUARD (DANNY) and his PARTNER edge along behind handheld lamps. Scarred helmets wink rank and service above uniforms hung with flak vests and other, well-used, hardware. A steady DRIP-DRIP OF WATER and waste keeps time with the CLICK-CLICK OF A GEIGER COUNTER.

GUARD
Couple of leaks.

PARTNER
Hot?

GUARD
A little.

PARTNER
Let's make this quick.

The senior man SILENCES his GEIGER COUNTER, pulls a direction-finder from a zippered cache. BEEP.... BEEP.... No promise there. He turns to face a steel-paneled tunnel of sagging cable. BEEP-BEEP.

GUARD
Down there.

PARTNER
Hell of a place for a beeper.

GUARD
Like you said. Let's make this quick.

The uniformed men SLUDGE TOWARD the signal. BEEP-BEEP.

PARTNER
See anything?

GUARD
No.

PARTNER
I don't like it.

No reply.

7.

PARTNER
Let's get out of here.

GUARD
What about the beeper?

PARTNER
Screw the beeper.

But the finder insists: BEEP-BEEP..BEEP-BEEP..

GUARD
We're right on top of it.

PARTNER
I don't see anything.

The Partner takes another step- INTO A PITCH-BLACK HOLE!!

PARTNER
DANNY!

A sure hand snatches him upright.

GUARD
Easy. You're okay.

The Guards find themselves in a steel cavern. The lamps display a spider's web of corroded cable. And then-

PARTNER
My God.

A nightmare. Twenty yards away a woman arches half-stripped and half-impaled over a steel pike. It's Sandy Aimes. Tortured legs, back and neck tremble with the effort to maintain a bridge above the spear which already teases her spine. Hands and feet bleed through wire garrots which spreadeagle Sandy above certain death. A DISTRESS BEEPER WHIMPERS alongside.

SANDY
C...! Ca...!

GUARD
METRO SECURITY! HANG ON!
(to Partner)
MOVE!

The Guards stagger toward the pinioned woman.

Sample pages from *Subterfuge*, a feature screenplay by Darryl Wimberley

8.

SANDY
Can't.... Hold it!

GUARD
HELL YOU CAN'T! WE'RE RIGHT HERE!

SHORTED CABLES bar the way. Deadly as cobras. The Guards bat them aside. BEE-BEEP! BEE-BEEP!

SANDY
K... K... Kay!

PARTNER
HANG ON LADY!

SANDY
Nine!

GUARD
HANG ON!!

SANDY
Oh, God, JAKE!!

And that's it. Legs, neck and back collapse. SHE PLUNGES TO THE PIKE which waits below. The shaft blooms through Sandy's chest like a rose. BEE BEEP! BEE BEEP! BEE BEEP!!!

INT COCKTAIL LOUNGE NIGHT

CREDITS ROLL WITH JAZZ OVER a bar set beside a wide, double-paned window. WAITRESSES ferry drinks to a mixed crowd of WELL-DRESSED COUPLES and WORKING CLASS STIFFS. STU, a BARTENDER right out of "the Forties," mixes a Scotch and soda. We follow the Bartender and highball down a polished counter to- JAKE STRYKER. Six years of Scotch later. A still-strong physique idles, now, beneath a broad-shouldered jacket and coveralls. Stu offers Jake the Scotch and soda.

BARTENDER
Got one for ya, Jake.

JAKE
I'm busted, Stew. Really.

BARTENDER
1941. "The Maltese Falcon."
Peter Lorre played one of the
bad guys. Who was the other?

9.

JAKE
This is charity.

BARTENDER
C'mon. Who was he?

JAKE
Kasper Gutman. The Fat Man.
Guy who played him was Sydney
Greenstreet.

BARTENDER
No cigar, mister.....

Stu pushes him the Scotch.

JAKE
Thanks.

BARTENDER
Just don't say I give 'em
away for nothing.

Jake takes the drink. A TV winks to life over the bar. Jake's
NARRATION begins:

JAKE (V.O.)
It'd been six years since
I'd seen Sandy Aimes. Six
years since I'd lost my
Pilot's License. And six
months since I'd breathed
real air. By "real air" I
mean something not farmed
in a tank. Not squeezed out
of some Godforsaken sewage.
I was bored. I was broke. And
I wanta tell you: When you're
parked twenty-four thousand
miles above the Earth, it's
hard to hitch a ride.

A wry smile turns Jake to the window. And there, rolling up
from the frame's horizon, sweeping and magnificent, is the
planet Earth! A newscast draws Jake to the bar's widescreen
TV.

ON TV

RICHARD TREVALLE relaxes before a network's long-legged
achnor. ANGELA STEVENS speaks to the camera.

Sample pages from Subterfuge, a feature screenplay by Darryl Wimberley

GLOSSARY

Acta non verba - Actions not words.

Act One of the main divisions of a drama or screenplay.

Application - A software program that performs a specific task, such as word processing, database management, etc.

Adaptation - Presentation in one medium of work originally designed for another, as in a interactive adventure game developed from a film

Affiliated Industries - Enterprises that intend to leverage the resources of the interactive multimedia industry by investing in tools and development companies that provide market access.

Allied Arts - Single individual, boutiques and small service-oriented proprietorships in the areas of graphic design, photography, imaging, illustration, animation, computer training and software development.

Alpha Stage - The first, pre-published version of a program utilized for testing purposes.

Angle - The positioning of a camera in relation to the subject: ANGLE ON JOHN, HIGH ANGLE, etc.

Author - A person who creates a project using an authoring tools or authoring systems.

Authoring - Programming for computer-based interactive properties

Authoring Tool - Specialized computer software used by programmers and/or developers to create interactive programs.

Backstory - Events which took place before the main story commenced.

Beta-test - A period near the end of a software development cycle used to work out problems before the software program is released for general distribution.

Blanking - Electronic cut-off of the video signal. For example, as a CD-ROM searches between various sequences, the video image typically disappears from the screen

Branching - In an interactive program, offering several possible courses of action for the user to choose in order to move from one sequence to another.

Bug - A problem or incompatibility in hardware or software.

Business: Action introduced to build up or reinforce characterization, sequence, or the like

"C" Language - A powerful authoring language used by programmers to creating complex programs.

CD-I - (Compact Disc-Interactive) A format for storing different types of information (graphics, video, sound, text...) in a compatible form on a compact disc.

CD-ROM - (Compact Disc Read-Only Memory) A format for storing information digitally on a compact disc.

Command - An instruction to the computer from either the user or software

Commentary - The voice-over spoken remarks or explanations that accompany a program's visual presentation

Computer - A programmable (changeable) device that accepts input, manipulates data and outputs data in some form.

Content - Software; all that is contained in a software title.

Continuity - The sequence of events to be presented in a program; the smooth linking of one event or scene to another

CPU - (Central Processing Unit) The basic "chip" that processes instructions in a computer.

Credit - Titles that name the people who worked on the program; Main title credit, end title credit, etc. **Cursor**: A symbol on a computer screen that acts as a pointer for some action taking place.

Critical Path - A single correct path the end-user must follow to successfully complete an application

Critical Objectives - The opposite of critical path. The end-user discovers elements as they reveal themselves, which are earned as the user moves through the story

Cursor - A movable point on a display monitor that indicates where the next character or pixel on the screen can be entered, replaced or deleted

Custom Application - A program designed to an individual user's specifications or needs.

Cyberpunk - The use of available or appropriated technology to obtain, analyze, and disseminate information relating to survival or personal freedom.

Database - An organized set of data with structured routines for storing and retrieving.

Design Document - A document that lays out the actual details of the application such as presentation methods, story, instructional strategies, flowcharts, gameplay and other important details that provide a clear picture of the final pro-

ject.

DGA - Director's Guild of America.

Digital - A system of discrete symbols used to represent and manipulate data.

Digitize - To convert or represent data (such as a picture, sound, text, etc...) in digital form.

Disc - A plate of magnetic material used to store data in digital form.

Disk - Short for diskette, an easily transportable disc.

Diskette - A thin, flexible magnetic disk in a semi-rigid protective jacket used to store and retrieve data.

Dissolve - An optical effect in which fade-in is superimposed over fade out so that one shot replaces another.

Document - Anything you create with an application that resides in a computer.

DOS - (Disk Operating System) This operating system was developed in 1981 by Microsoft Corp. and is the standard operating system for IBM-compatible personal computers (also called MS-DOS for Microsoft-DOS).

DPI - (Dots Per Inch) This is a measure of resolution or detail used for screens (monitors) and printers.

DVI - Digital Video Interactive. A format for recording compressed, digital video on a compact disc, providing up to 72 minutes of full motion video.

Early Adapter - One of the first to embrace, develop and/or produce interactive multimedia software or hardware.

Easter Egg - A hidden sequence or image embedded into the program by the designer to place his/her unique "signature" on the program. Easter eggs are typically triggered by a unique combination of player actions and serve as a reward for "expert" players.

Edutainment - (Education and Entertainment) Combining important educational information with exciting ways of presenting it.

Electric Word - Online conversations; books and/or information available either online or on CD-ROM.

Element - A media, graphic or logic component of an event.

End-User - (also, User). The individual who interacts with the completed application or project.

Environmental Analysis - A complete description of the physical installation and surroundings of an application, including people, and other items.

Establishing Event - (also, Establishing Screen, Establishing Scene & Start

Frame) The first event or screen that appears when a user begins an application.

Ethernet - A network of high-speed transmission cables and software.

Event - (aka scene) A segment of a presentation that is either a menu or choice frame, or the elements that are presented after a user interaction has occurred, until the next interaction is required.

EXT. - Exterior.

Fade In - Traditionally the first phrase in a motion picture screenplay describing the opening image of a film; the transition from black screen to picture.

F.A.Q. - Frequently Asked Questions.

File - Information such as data, text, or a program that is stored as a unit under a specific file name.

Flow Chart - A graphic outline of a presentation that documents all aspects of each event.

Flow Module - A self-contained interactive environment linked to other environments with a common story which contain all necessary design specifications, rules, and story elements dramatized via user-controlled, non-linear pathways.

Format - 1) The arrangement of data on a data storage device 2) The arrangement or layout of graphic screens, hot buttons, or text.

ftp - File Transfer Protocol.

Graphic - Any pictorial representation of information.

Hacker - Someone who is devoted to writing software or experimenting with the workings of a computer. Often used inaccurately to mean someone who uses computers mischievously.

Hot Buttons - (also, Hot Spots, Touch Points, Icons) Areas on a screen that can be activated by the end-user to interact with the application.

Hypertext/Hypermedia - Software that allows users to explore and create their own path through written, visual and audio information. Capabilities include being able to jump from topic to topic at any time and follow cross-references easily.

Icon - A graphic or pictographic symbol used to represent an abstract or concrete object or process in the computer.

Immersive Technology - The technology which enables an individual to plunge,

drop or dip into a virtual world so as to cover and/or surround the body or senses completely.

Implementation - The programming translation of the written document into an operating program.

Interactive Media - Another term for multimedia and interactive technology.

Information Window - A window (small area on the screen) that provides prompting, or other information for the end user

Infotainment - Multimedia program information that is not only clear and understandable, but exciting too.

Instructional Designer - An individual who designs the instructional strategy and content flow of an interactive application based on specific objectives.

INT. - Interior.

Interaction - The active participation and involvement of an end user in directing their movement through an application by making choices, answering questions or controlling elements of the program.

Interactive - Software that responds quickly to certain choices and commands a user makes.

Interactive Movie - A convergence of film/video and computer technology whereby the end user actively controls the program experience or effects how events of the program unfold through one's actions, choices, and decisions.

Interface - The mode of communication between end-user and the program, utilizing keyboard commands and other control devices which manipulate the program's on-screen action.

Kiosk - A self-contained interactive unit that is user operated (also called point-of-purchase displays in commercial outlets when customers can actually buy products shown on the kiosk)

Linear - A video, audio or interactive sequence designed to be played from beginning to end without branching or changing.

Location - The setting where a program, in whole or in part, is to be shot or created.

Logline - One line story plot summary.

Machine Language - A low-level coding system of statements and commands to the CPU that instructs it on how and when to manipulate data.

Mastering - The combination of all the program elements in to final form.

Media - Material or technical means of artistic communication using forms such as film, voice, computer graphics, etc.

Memory - The area within the computer which stores recorded information, either permanently or temporarily..

Menu - A table of contents or a list of choices in a computer program.

Milestone - A pre-established date in time, used as an incentive/safeguard by two negotiating parties, for the purpose of clarifying delivery date and/or reward for completion.

Monitor - A screen that will accept and display computer program information.

Mouse - A small screen-pointing device that a user moves on a horizontal surface to control a cursor on the screen.

Mouse Potato - The online and interactive-TV generation's answer to the couch potato.

MOW - Movie of the Week.

Multimedia - Combining sound, video or many other media into one presentation.

Net - Abbreviated form of Internet.

Net Surfing - Exploring the Internet.

New Hollywood - Entertainment industry power shift from the traditional motion picture venue to the interactive arena.

New Media - Another term for multimedia and interactive technology.

Off screen (OS) - Action or sound closely related to a screen image but not included in it, as when an unseen character cries, "Help, police, help!"

Open Architecture - An application design structure which allows the end-user to navigate freely from one event, scene or location to another. In programming terms, open architecture makes it possible to use graphics, text, or data from other non-related systems or devices.

Optical Disc - A videodisc that uses a laser light beam to read information from the surface of the disc.

Parallel Streaming (aka Harmonic Paths) - A story path structure whereby multiple "stories" coincide with or run parallel to a single linear narrative. The user may switch between perspectives or paths at any time.

Pixel (Picture Element) - The smallest controllable spot on a display screen.

Platform - A hardware system supporting one or more unique software codes (i.e: Apple Macintosh, Windos '92, 3DO, Sony Playstation, etc.).

Play-Life - The amount of time the typical player/user will use the program.

Play-Mechanics - The program's rules or procedures.

Plot - The plan of action of a novel, play or screenplay.

Port - The translation of a program from one platform or operating system to another.

Portfolio - A series of timed video/graphic stills. producing a slide show effect.

Premise - A hypothetical "what if..?" that provides the basic idea of a production.

Producer - A person in charge of the financing and coordination of all activities in connection with the production of a software title.

Program - A set of instructions written in a computer language that tells the computer how and when to manipulate data.

Programmer - One who inputs the coded instructions and data in a logical sequence of operations to be performed by a computer.

Public Domain - The condition of being free from copyright or patent and, hence, open to use by anyone.

Publisher - A business firm which distributes software to consumers including storing, selling, shipping and advertising; distributor.

RAM (Random Access Memory) - A temporary type of memory that stores data and instructions that a processor is working with at that moment. Most RAM erases when the power is turned off.

Random Access - The ability to access information by direct address as opposed to linear search of data.

Royalties - A payment based on a percentage of revenue generated by a program.

Real Estate - A slang term for the available space on a CD-ROM.

Real-Time - The ability of a computer to process data fast enough so that the user perceives no time delay between giving instructions and seeing the results.

Recognition - The abilities of a computer to recognize, understand and respond in natural "human" language.

Record - The contents of a specific field or file.

Remedial Feedback - In an instructional application or interactive presentation, explaining to a user why a particular response was wrong.

Resolution - The measure of quality for output. Higher resolution means finer

detail and smoother lines and type.

Rewrite - To revise or write over in different form.

ROM (Read-Only Memory) - A stable, permanent or semi permanent type of memory that stores key data that is used by the computer. It can only be read.

SAG - Screen Actors Guild.

Screenplay - A story written in a series of scenes, containing characters, and dramatized through actions and dialogue in a particular format.

Screenwriter - A person who writes the instructions, designs the characters and/or creates the world of a story, screenplay or interactive program for the production team to follow.

Search - To look for a specific frame on a disc or tape, this is the area in interactive programs where branching commonly occurs.

Seek Time - The amount of time it takes the hard disc to find the right sector (place) where a given piece of data is stored.

Segment - Material accessed together to form a unit of information, or the information between a start and a stop frame.

Segue - A transition from one program segment to another. Also used in audio dissolves.

Sequence - A related series of shots, unified by some element they hold in common-- setting, concept, action, mood, character, etc.

Silicon Alley - New York City's interactive media hub that is home to many computer-related companies.

Silicon Valley - The area between Palo Alto and San Jose in California that is home to many pioneering electronic and computer companies.

Simulation - A representation or emulation of a real-world activity or event (as in simulation rides such as Disneyland's Star Tours).

Software - A set of instructions written in a computer language that controls a computer's functions.

Spec - Speculation.

Split screen - Different pictures or graphic elements shown on portions of the screen/monitor simultaneously.

Sprite - A small bitmap image or graphical picture that can be moved independently around the screen, producing animated effects.

Sponsor - The individual, corporation, or other third party responsible for funding an application.

Storyboard - A plan or outline of a program set forth in sketches, still photos, etc.

Stringer - Freelancer.

Subplot - A secondary plot in a play, novel or screenplay.

Submenu - A menu within a program that refers to only one portion of the entire program.

Summative Evaluation - A formal measurement of the effectiveness of a completed application.

Super Storyboard - Documentation that describes all audio, video, graphic and logical control elements (gameplay) for an interactive application.

Synopsis - A brief outline of a proposed project.

Synthespian - Synthetic Actor. Used in 3-D computer animation to describe sophisticated human forms that can be imported into a virtual world. Also "dolls," "vactors," or "electronic puppets."

System Prompting - Feedback for an end-user that is controlled by the system.

SysOp (System Operator) - BBS SysOp's regulate electronic bulletin board systems.

Target Audience - The group to which the program is intended to appeal.

Text Editor - A computer program designed to manipulate text.

TIFF - Tagged Image File Format.

Timeout - A situation which prompts a system default branch to be executed when a user does not respond within a set period of time.

Transition - A passing from one condition, form, stage, activity, place, etc to another. Also known as Signifiers and Definers.

Treatment - Summary of a proposed project's contents, generally between three and thirty pages. Commonly used to "sell" the project. Also known as a Design Proposal.

Turing Test - A criteria of artificial intelligence stated by Alan Turing that a computer can be considered intelligent if it can fool a person into thinking that it is another person.

User - (see End-User).

User Contact-Hour - A unit used to measure the total "length" of an interactive application if all material provided were accessed.

User Friendly - A term used to define anything that has been designed with the

user's needs and capabilities in mind.

User Interface - The area in which the user and computer interact.

Vanity Board - A program screen which displays names and accumulated high-score statistics.

Vaporware - A term for software (and sometimes hardware) that is discussed and/or advertised but is not yet available or which does not exist.

VC - Venture Capital.

Videodisc - A thin, circular plate on which video, audio, and data signals can be recorded for playback or storage.

Virtual Interface - A computer interface that simulates a three-dimensional space in which the user can interact.

Virtual Reality - An artificially constructed space in software in which to interact with others or a computer.

V.O. - Voice Over.

VR - Virtual Reality.

WGA - Writer's Guild of America.

Window - A portion of a screen where an image may be displayed independently of the principle image, an entry segment of an interactive videodisc program.

www - World Wide Web.

Zero-Sum - An interactive game or contest where the outcome produces both a winner and a loser.

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