

dy·nam·ic

(dī-nám-ík) also dy·nam·i·cal (-í-k-1) -adj. 1. a. Of or pertaining to energy, force, or motion in relation to force. b. Of or pertaining to dynamics. 2. **Characterized by continuous change, activity, or progress:** a dynamic market. 3. Characterized by vigor and energy; forceful: a dynamic personality. 4. Of or pertaining to variation of intensity, as in musical sound. [Fr. *dynamique* < Gk. *dunamikos*, powerful < *dunamis*, power < *dunasthai*, to be able.] dy·nam´i·cal·ly adv.

Sanctuary Woods Multimedia Corporation presents Dynamic Entertainment, a non-linear story-telling system consisting of a series of interrelated modules that allow for a fluid, emotionally-involving experience that many products have promised, but few, if any, have achieved.

At the heart of Dynamic Entertainment is the realization that hardware can deliver little more emotive response in the player than the visceral rush of charging down virtual corridors and blasting beasts, or your friends, to bloody rubble.

At Sanctuary Woods we can provide a hardware wow factor equivalent to anyone else in the marketplace. But we're very aware of its limitations. Many companies can do it. Many are doing it. It is easy for a product to get lost in a wave of "me-too" games. It is necessary to do more.

As recent articles and previews of upcoming hardware products show us, in two or three years time the hardware wow factor will

be practically nonexistent. All computer products will have reached a level platform that film reached decades ago. VCR quality, 30 frame per second images backed by digital sound will be the norm. What's left? What will make the next generation of products stand out: from the crowd? What Sanctuary Woods is doing today.

Dynamic Entertainment grows from the same seeds that have powered entertainment since the dawn of time when the cave dwellers huddled around their fires and heard grunted, elaborately embellished tales of hunts long past. It's not the fire of technology that drives our products, it's the stories we bring to it.

There has been far too much hype already about "interactive movies" with "cinematic techniques" and "virtual gaming experiences." All are hollow phrases used by people trying to look at movie-making and story-telling from the outside, but not really having a clue about what they're seeing, how it's accomplished, or why it affects them.

A film doesn't succeed simply because of special effects. Steven Spielberg didn't buy Michael Crichton's *Jurassic Park* because it had great special effects in it. The effects were all in the imagination. He bought a story. A classic situation: ordinary people forced by extraordinary events to rise heroically above

themselves in order to survive. The story made the book, and the subsequent film hits as much as the gimmick of dinosaurs brought back to life.

The gimmick sold the first round of books, and the effects generated interest for the movie. But if the book had been a paleontological- biological tract exploring the possibilities of DNA manipulation, and how it might be used. so that scientists could study dinosaurs first hand, it would not have been a best seller. If the film had totally ignored the human side of the interaction, and given us a group of unlikeable characters, or superheroes armed with laser guns, it would not have been the most successful movie of all time.

The care that was taken with the characters and story in *Jurassic Park* was nothing special. The people are sketched quickly and the story is as thin as a DNA strand. But Crichton and Spielberg used archetypes in both character and story, archetypes that speak to us as individuals and as a culture, indeed as Joseph Campbell and others have explored, across cultures.

The mythic patterns that stirred souls around the cave fire touch us still. They are the stories of heroes risen, and monsters vanquished. They are stories of hope and courage and love. Yet the software industry en masse seems to focus solely

on the delivery system for these stories, as if you could tell a book by its cover. Why? It's easy. It's not so easy to tell a story that touches the heart.

Dynamic Entertainment begins with the belief that any game that pretends to be just like a movie, yet delivers no real emotional content or food for thought, or memorable characters, is no more entertaining at its core than somebody else's home videos. It is simply that there is nothing *better* to compare the current crop of products to. Even your neighbor's home videos would sell like hotcakes, if it was the first use of video an audience had ever seen, and if there was no alternative. Look at the dawn of the motion picture industry for more examples.

People say our technology is changing so fast these days it's impossible to keep up with it, but it's been twenty years since Colossal Cave, the first adventure game showed up on mainframe computers. Contrast those twenty years with the twelve years that separated the very first one-reel narrative film, THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY, and D.W. Griffith's epic BIRTH OF A NATION.

In twelve years the narrative film went from gurgling infancy to mass entertainment produced by a host of competitors. Adventure games twenty years after their birth are little changed in content despite the addition of the latest audio/video

trimmings, and the core audience for them remains a small portion of the entertainment market. Why?

For one thing the people creating the games were not storytellers. They didn't have to be.

Also, the market supported itself. They didn't need anybody else. The core gaming audience (comprised in the main of people drawn to *computers*, as opposed to *entertainment* per se) snapped up everything the industry produced. Now companies within the industry are too big to exist on such a small revenue pool. Now as more and more consumers are looking for entertainment, no matter what the delivery medium, they expect a far more sophisticated experience.

Dynamic Entertainment starts with the story and character modules, utilizing techniques that have changed little since Aristotle's Poetics. But a Dynamic Entertainment story is developed to address additional concerns as well.

The world presented to the player/viewer must seem to be as real as the world in any good film or book. It must be true to its universe, and the rules it chooses to make. If the world in which the story is set allows for dinosaurs to be genetically recreated, fine. But unless those canny scientists are also

transplanting brains, the T-Rex had better not start quoting Shakespeare.

In Dynamic Entertainment, this playing by the rules is expanded to include the problems and obstacles encountered, the conversations the player-directed character has with other characters, and the interface design. Each module must be consistent and not arbitrary.

The game world must present an illusion of scope. It doesn't have to be "infinite" or "virtual." It need simply feel large enough, and flexible enough, to accommodate the story for which it serves as the stage. In a SWMC Dynamic Entertainment this world shrinks and expands, depending how the player chooses to interact with it. This occurs transparently, as needed.

All story-based entertainment must have a beginning, a middle, and an end. But Dynamic Entertainment reduces the necessary linearity this imposes on us by making sure that the moments in the story that must occur to move it to the next step are invisible to the participant. The story structure is simply a clothesline upon which we hang a wide variety of interesting clothes.

The participant can choose any combination that suits his or her own sense of style and color. But they are still all hanging on

the same line. Then, like one of those double clotheslines on pulleys where you can reel the clothes in, the player, by making selections himself or herself, is pulled along through the story.

It is up to the story module to drive the player through this apparently real world Dynamic Entertainment creates with enough skill that the player doesn't notice how small it actually is. It doesn't work to simply jerk the player along by a leash forcing him or her to sniff only those fire hydrants the designer has chosen.

To use another film as an example, *Die Hard* is set almost entirely in a single building in the space of a few hours. It strictly adheres to Aristotle's unities of time, character and action. Its fabric is so carefully woven, it succeeds in carrying a passive viewer right past the seams of logic and scope. I don't recall anybody coming out of that movie complaining that they didn't visit enough locations.

The boundaries we create for our imaginary world are not a bad thing. They are not restrictions. They provide focus. They help define the experience.

As with our world, which should *appear* to be as boundless as necessary, the events that occur within it, should *appear* to be as flexible as necessary. So while we will always hang our story elements on the same clothesline where the Greeks and Elizabethans hung their drama, in a Dynamic Entertainment those elements *appear* non-linear.

Some games like GABRIEL KNIGHT and UNDER A KILLING MOON use the device of dividing the action into days. A player cannot advance to Day Two until he or she has experienced all that the designer wants them to in Day One. And there are a number of these interruptions in each game, removing the player from any sort of empathetic connection that may have been established. While these are successful products, their linearity is far too blatant.

In a Dynamic Entertainment we could divide things into days or chapters or acts, but the experience does not have to be that formal. *Sideshow* for example is divided into only four sections, but we don't draw attention to them. We provide clues to the player within the storyline that signal more natural transitions from section to section. These will take the form of short cut scenes using devices such as a long shot of the town (called "establishing shots" in film), or a sunset (called a "time cut").

These transitions do not wrench the player out of the story, but provide one element of pace.

Pace is another area where interactive stories have additional challenges beyond movies or TV. Short of physical torture (maybe charges of electricity delivered to the player via the mouse) or brain washing, there is no way to force a player to play a game at the optimum pace the Writer/Director desires.

So Dynamic. Entertainment works around the player, providing pace through the story, the design and even the interface. Problems and obstacles are constructed to accentuate pace in *Sideshow*. In the beginning section many of the puzzles revolve around conversation and exploration. Once the true nature of the danger facing our planet becomes clearer however, the problems and obstacles are much more action oriented. As in the end of a good thriller or action film when the dialogue is reduced to "Okay, over there!" "Lookout!" "Got it, let's go!" so, too is the dialogue in a Dynamic Entertainment.

The Dynamic Entertainment character module provides characters that are as real as any others in entertainment. Again, as in film, they do not have to be real people with complete lives, but they must give the appearance of being real people and those glimpses of their personalities must be consistent and

believable. One area where game designers must worry and filmmakers do not, is repeatability. A player can send his surrogate character back to a location time and time again. His actions there must "stick." If the character breaks a mirror, it stays broken on subsequent visits, or it is fixed. The environment is dynamic.

One way the design seams show during repeat visits to a scene is in interaction with other characters. Some games simply replay conversations over and over as if the player had suddenly leaped from *Jurassic Park* to *Groundhog Day*. Others leave a series of random responses to identically posed question from the player's character: "I can't tell you anything about that." "Sorry, I don't know anything." etc.

In some games, like *Under a Killing Moon*, the designers seem to shrug their shoulders, as if to say "Well, its a limitation of the medium. Nothing we can do about it." These are the same designers who tout "cinematic techniques," but who don't seem to realize that cutting between deadly-dull medium shots, or watching characters make unmotivated strolls around a 3-D rendered background, adds little of the value movie-making can bring to the experience.

Let's see how a Dynamic Entertainment is different. We all recognize it is impossible with current technology to replicate

the real-world experience of seeing the same person over and over again in the course of a brief period of time. However we come much closer to approximating the experience than the average game.

Dynamic Entertainment incorporates the CHAOS Intelligent conversation Module. The conversation changes each time the player returns to the same room. No randomness. No repetition. (Or at least that is the illusion). And no extra CD filled with a database of different conversations.

As mentioned in the clothesline allusion above, within a section of a Dynamic Entertainment any number of paths can be followed. In the opening section of *Sideshow* there are six separate major encounters with other characters, and the player can tackle them in ANY order.

This is accomplished in two layers. First -- there's nothing particularly new here, designer ignorance or laziness are the only excuses not to do this -- specific dialogue is written to accommodate the next few visits, say three to each character.

It's when the player keeps insisting on returning to a location despite the fact the game is obviously headed in another direction, that the problems arise.

You can try this one yourself. Think about what happens when YOU return time and again to the same person in a. brief period. Chances are the topic of conversation is pretty much the same. You may want to add something, or embellish a point, or confirm details, but the subject stays pretty consistent.

In an adventure game we can control the subject. If it changes, it's because the Writer/Director wants it to. When it changes, obviously new dialogue branches must be written. But if it remains the same, then CHAOS lends a hand. Two speeches only are written, each with several components. In CHAOS every element in the first speech can be used singly, in pairs, or all together, and in any order. This holds true for the second speech as well.

These sentences must follow some strict rules. They can be as specific as the Writer/Director likes, but they must be carefully built and structurally generic. A simple example: "John, I'm still worried." consists of only two elements: "John" and "I'm still worried." Both can be used in either order or one can be selected. In the case of "John" alone, it. becomes a general interrogative, referring to whatever the two characters had spoken of before.

The reply can be "I'm waiting for a call back. Try to relax." Again, both elements can be used in either order or one can be

selected in response to any combination of the first speech's elements. There are eight permutations. Interesting, but not quite good enough.

In *Ripley: The Riddle of Master Lu* we are using CHAOS to provide us with subsequent visit speeches of at least three elements each. This gives us 125 permutations. They aren't chosen randomly, but shuffled and dealt as if from a stack of cards, then the cards dealt are removed until all permutations have been exhausted. Not one repeats. This means that a player would have to return to the same location and choose to talk to the character there 126 times before he or she reached an exact repetition. The odds are slim indeed that would *ever* happen.

To sum up, Dynamic Entertainment consists of several interrelated modules or paradigms that handle the specific components of interactive story-telling. Their potent synergy allows us to produce an entertainment product that is far more involving than an ordinary adventure game, and far more non-linear than any so-called "interactive movie" to date.

One day everyone in the interactive market will be playing on the same level hardware field. Even now many realize this, and are scrambling to find that special something that will set them apart, make them unique. That special something will be content. It always has been. It always will be.

Dynamic Entertainment is about content. It is the future and it is here at Sanctuary Woods. Now.