

## **Harry, Ron, and Hermione**

Most role playing games revolve around the narrative of a certain character, or in some cases an overriding endeavor for a group of characters to accomplish. While this provides for a driving motivation for a narrative, it is constraining in that often characters come off feeling like puppets. To bring a better simulation of reality to the game, the accessory characters must be given their own lives, motives, and goals. In this game, each character has a personal agenda that they must accomplish in order to further the narrative of the game. The individual action of each character fits into an overriding story in which the characters interact. Over the course of the game, not only does the overriding story progress from beginning to middle to end, each of the character's lives go forward independently of the others. The emphasis of the game shifts from a single narrative to the individual micronarratives.

The cast of characters consists of Harry, Ron, and Hermione of the Harry Potter series. Like most RPGs, each character has individual strengths, weaknesses, and special powers. Unlike most RPGs, each character also has individual goals to accomplish in each level. The game cannot advance until each character completes their goals.

The game opens with a video animation introducing the story: the gamer sees the inside of Harry Potter's closet at #4 Privet Drive. The camera pans over a letter with "First Day of School: September 15" and then over an alarm clock with "5:59am, September 15" on it, then over a sleeping Harry. The alarm sounds, Harry awakes, turns

off the alarm, and dons his glasses. From outside we hear the thump of Dudley coming down the stairs. The video ends and the game view is presented.

The game view is a third person isometric view centered on the “lead” character. Here it is Harry. He is slightly illuminated from the background in order to differentiate him from the other characters that the gamer does not have control over. His personal goals are displayed at the lower right corner of the screen: “Get Hedwig. Sneak out of house.” From here, the game plays much like a usual RPG. The player may move the lead character by using the arrow buttons and interact with the environment by double clicking objects around him or dragging items in the inventory window onto objects around him. Harry must explore and navigate this environment until he completes his personal goals, at which time his level is completed and the game shifts to a different character. The screen will cut to a video animation of Hermione’s background: her parents drop her in Diagon Alley and she must find all of her books to finish the level. The game will then play the same as it did with Harry as the lead character, except that Hermione and her goals will now be the central focus of the gamer. The pattern will also repeat for Ron so that at the end of level One all characters have made it to Hogwarts.

This level system will continue throughout the game, essentially dividing the story into chapters. Each character will have their own story to carry out in every chapter, and there will be no time gaps between chapters throughout the narrative. The characters’ stories come into contact with each other and a subsequent story is generated, but the emphasis remains on the individual. The goal is that throughout the game, the gamer has taken each of the characters throughout an entire, continuous episode of their lives.

The most novel parts of this game will involve chapters where two or more of the characters interact in the game space. For instance, in a chapter involving potions, Ron and Harry have to collect items for a secret potion while Snape's back is turned. Here, the characters are participating in the story at the same time in the same place. This presents a problem in how the gamer is able to control both of their actions at the same time. In these cases, the lead character will still be directly under the control of the gamer. The other character will be computerized with instructions to follow the main character, along with some simple AI to keep the other from getting stuck in the environment while following the lead character around. By hitting the Tab key, the gamer can instantly change the lead character to whoever is available. This allows the gamer access to the specialized powers and qualities of the different characters.

Each character still has their own agenda for the chapter, and none of the characters can advance until they have all completed all of their tasks. This issue is a challenge to the gamer in that he or she is burdened with completing all of these tasks, and the order in which they are accomplished matters. For example, in the potions level, one of Harry's goals is to open a box of magical worms and one of Ron's goals is to fix his wand. If Harry opens the box before Ron's wand is fixed, Ron will be unable to free himself of the worm that attacks him and the game will be over. In this way, the gamer is forced to keep the interests of the individual in mind as they pilot the team of characters through the narrative.

This game is intended to be an exercise in the development of a larger narrative through the summation and layering of smaller sub narratives. These smaller narratives are highly driven by the character's internal motivations, so one can see how the overall

narrative is a result of the sum of internal character needs, making this an experiment in character development. Whereas in a regular RPG the gamer will come to identify with a single character or motivation, here the experience has been multiplied by three independent and equally important characters. This will increase the level of interest in the game, since instead of having a single character with a single motivation, there are three avatar characters for the gamer to identify with.