

Live: What a Concept! ... Networked Games



Jon Parise, October 2001

Based on the paper by Chris Crawford

Background

- The interest in interactive entertainment is rising.
- There's no opponent like a live opponent.



Advantages of Networked Games

- Ability to provide interpersonal interaction
- Makes the game about people, not things
- Saves computing resources that would otherwise be used for AI simulations

Issues

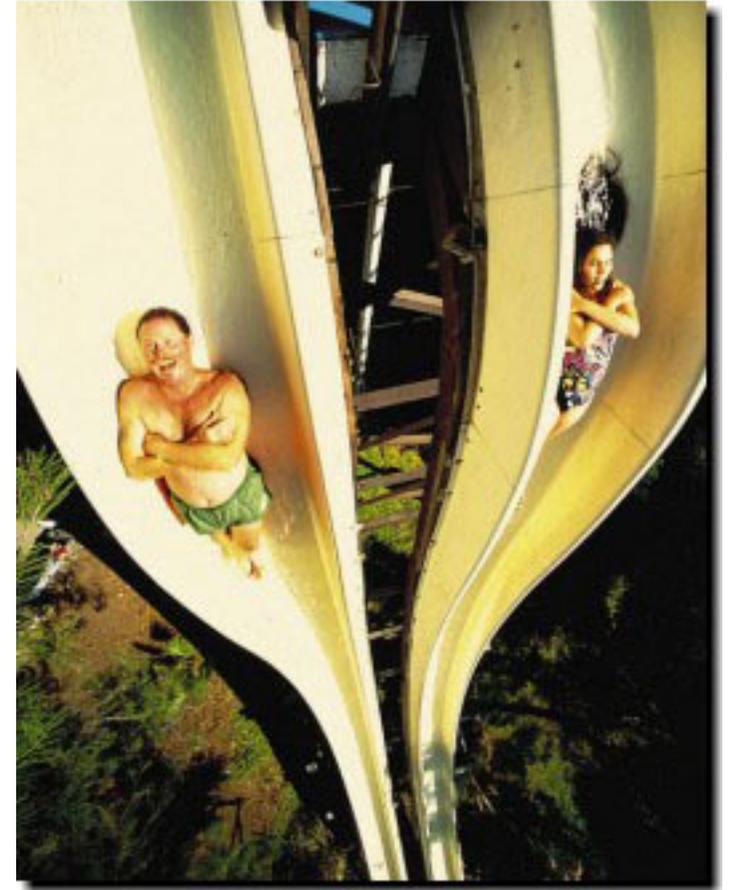
- Dropout
- Timing
- Dramatics
- "Nazis and Dorks"
- Group Size
- Freedom
- Egalitarianism

Dropout

Dropout occurs when an active participant leaves before the game has reached its natural conclusion.

- Time for dinner
- Localized network outage

The game may collapse if that player's role was crucial.



Dropout Compensation

- Immediately replace the missing player
- Limit each player's interaction to voting
- Reduce the duration of the game
- Make the experience turn-based over intervals of time
- Implement "bridge artificial personality"

Timing

Caused by time zone differences between players

Solutions

- Offline, delayed-response interaction
- Players meeting at the most convenient time

Dramatics

Players may fail to do interesting things, making for a boring game. Alternatively, they may engage in overdramatic nonsense.

"Nazis and Dorks"

Stereotypes and interpersonal expectations can be disrupted when a single player chooses to alter or embellish his character.

Solutions

- Establish "player profiles"
- Limit games to certain "types" of players

Group Size

- If too few people are involved, the interaction becomes inflexible.
- If too many people are player, the group becomes socially unmanageable.
- The ideal group size depends on the people involved.
- Start with the classic seven person group and modify it.

Freedom

Should players be allowed to interact using freeform text or canned phrases?

- The two are not mutually exclusive and can be mixed in the same experience.

Egalitarianism

Not all players are equal (richer, smarter, prettier).

Solutions

- Base game status on a kind of karma
- Points awarded for being true to one's character.
- Encourages players to spend more time online, developing their characters.