

CS 491 Game Proposal

Sherman the Ant

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1. Title and Developer Information

Game Title: Sherman the Ant

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2. Game Overview

Sherman the Ant is an adventure game that casts Sherman in a backyard quest to rescue the Queen Ant Helga from the clutches of the dastardly and maniacal Rodney Roach. The game is made for entertainment purposes although the player must have some basic problem solving and reasoning skills. The game will have a compelling background story to provide appeal, and it will also be a family friendly adventure full of interesting obstacles.

This game is designed to be run on a console or a personal computer which has a controller both of which are XNA compatible.

As mentioned earlier Sherman the Ant is an adventure game. According to Wikipedia:

An adventure game is a type of computer entertainment program or video game, characterized by investigation, exploration, puzzle-solving, interaction with game characters, and a focus on narrative rather than reflex-based challenges.¹

This is exactly what is involved in the game. Rodney the Roach has captured Queen Helga as he has long wanted to bring chaos and pandemonium to the happy and prosperous ant hill of whom he has always been jealous. Sherman, in his quest to rescue his captured queen is challenged with a myriad of hurdles. Sherman, who has always been a studious, honorable, patriotic, and well known ant, has been voted by his colony to take on the challenge of rescuing Queen Helga. He is charged with the task of navigating the huge (especially to an ant) backyard which is fraught with perils, allies and enemies, and the unfamiliar. To add to his plight the weather challenges in a backyard are formidable indeed.

Sherman will play several roles throughout his adventure. He will take on the role of investigator as he must communicate with some venerable elder ants of the colony that are

¹ "Adventure game." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 9 Feb 2008, 21:10 UTC. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 11 Feb 2008 <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Adventure_game&oldid=190247495>.

wise to the ways of the Roach and what lies awaiting Sherman in the backyard. He will also have to communicate with critters that he meets along the way, and decide who can and who cannot be trusted. Sherman will also be an explorer as he searches the unknown. Finally Sherman will have to be a puzzle solver as everyone he runs into will not be upfront with valuable information, testing him to make sure that he is worthy of their knowledge and assistance.

This game targets a younger generation but can be enjoyed by anyone looking for a fun-filled challenging adventure. The game is designed as a single player game, but can be enjoyed as a family quest, with everyone participating in the quest. It is anticipated that this game will be E-rated using the ESRB system.²

The ultimate goal for Sherman in the game and therefore the winning condition is to outsmart Rodney the Roach and rescue Queen Helga from his clutches. The player acts as Sherman in his adventures traveling through the story world. The player views the world from a third person point of view as the "camera" follows Sherman. The player will be Sherman, they will not get to pick an avatar, rather they will simply be Sherman.

The setting of game is the large backyard of the Johnson family. This setting has a very well defined boundary and from Sherman's point view will suffice as "worldly." There are many major locations defined in the backyard such as: Sherman's own ant colony, a neighboring foreign ant colony, the sandbox, the lawn (with the dreaded sprinklers), the fence, the flowerbed, etc. In the backyard world there is an abundance of other critters he must interact with as well. This includes other insects such as the centipede, the spider, the scorpion, the bee, termites, beetles, the butterfly, the caterpillar, the grasshopper, etc. It also includes the far larger critters such as the dog, the cat, birds, rabbits, squirrels, mice, the rat, as well as the members of the Johnson Family themselves. Sherman will have different interactions with all of these NPC's, some of which will be friends and some foes, and some with motives of their own.

² "Entertainment Software Rating Board." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 1 Feb 2008, 05:04 UTC. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 11 Feb 2008
<http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Entertainment_Software_Rating_Board&oldid=188320670>

The structure of the game does not include defined levels, rather it progresses as Sherman interacts with NPC's and gains information from them, providing him with clues and options on what should be done next in the game. In the game Sherman (the player) can choose to pursue different avenues at any given point during the game. He could venture to unexplored parts of his world, or return to reexamine previously ventured areas and characters for clues that may have been missed or overlooked.

3. Gameplay

There will be no scoring in the traditional sense, in that the player will not accrue some arbitrary numerical reward for progressing through the game. The player however may collect some significant "ant awards" for milestone achievements or discovering important clues. Such rewards would be awarded to Sherman by his comrades, and could consist of things like colored ribbons, e.g. the blue ribbon of courage and the red ribbon of cunning, that Sherman can wear proudly as he continues in his quest. Not only will the ribbons be used as a "scoring" mechanism, but they will also represent an increase in some of Sherman's physical abilities, e.g. his strength. However the ultimate reward for Sherman would be rescuing Queen Helga and the undying gratitude of his ant colony.

The way that Sherman navigates his backyard environment is primarily by walking. He is also able to sprint for short distances. Sherman interacts with the backyard environment by lifting and carrying objects (as should any good ant) and by being able to climb almost anything. Sherman has a keen eye and has the ability to notice things of particular importance when he picks them up. He also interacts with NPC's by being able to communicate with all of the backyard critters.

In order for the player to win the game (for Sherman to rescue Queen Helga), the player will have to first guide Sherman to a confrontation with Rodney the Roach. The way that Sherman will reach this point, is by solving mini-mysteries, gathering clues, and collecting enough ribbons (strength enhancers) to find and challenge Rodney. Once he encounters Rodney, a showdown of wits will occur and Rodney will challenge Sherman with a final riddle. If Sherman has been thorough enough through his adventure, he will be able to outwit Rodney and Rodney will have

no choice but to hand over Queen Helga. However, if not, Rodney's ultimatum will stand and Sherman will have to return back to the backyard to search for the answers he needs.

Sherman keeps a backpack which serves to hold his inventory of useful things he has collected in his quest. In his backpack, if he is cunning enough, he will have items such as "ant cipher glasses", a helpful lever, a foldable leaf raft, and he will always have the "mysterious marble" that has been passed through his family from generation to generation.

Time in the game is cyclical in the sense that day and night will pass as this is an important factor in determining which critters are out and about at any particular instant in time.

However, time will not be linear in the sense that there will be no day count or any sort of deadline that is set on a time basis; simply there will just be night and day. The player will not be able to speed up or slow down time. However, the player can have Sherman "sleep" in which case he will awaken with the clock moved forward 12 hours in time (e.g. from day to night or night to day). This feature is to avoid the player having to sit around and wait for the clock to pass if he wants to interact with a NPC who is currently unavailable.

Sherman does not have a health meter, he is either alive or dead. There are a few things that are lethal to Sherman, such as going in the water without a raft, being stepped on by larger things like the Johnson family dog or the family members, and finally, poisons that the not-so-friendly backyard critters might slip him. If it should happen that Sherman befalls an untimely demise, then the game will restart to the previously saved point. As previously mentioned, Sherman upon receiving "ant awards" will accrue strength, which is Sherman's only "boostable" power. As also noted, he has the power of a keen eye and climbing abilities.

The control device required is a controller that has a joystick and at least three buttons. The joystick will be used for locomotion, guiding Sherman through his backyard world. One button is used for calling up the menu which would include options such as sleeping, saving, retrieving backpack items, etc. The second button is used to call up a map of the backyard. The final button is used as the action button, which the player uses to have Sherman interact with the other critters and certain objects. The HUD will probably consist of a clock indicating the time of day and a mini-map.

Sherman will advance in the game by gaining knowledge, earning ribbons, gaining strength, and solving puzzles/mini-mysteries all which lead him to his ultimate goal of defeating Rodney and saving Queen Helga.

4. Audio and Video

Sherman the Ant is a 2-D game. The main view of Sherman navigating the backyard is an overhead view. There are also times in which Sherman enters a place such as the inside of a tree, where the view is changed to a side shot. It is animated but not necessarily with a “classic cartoon” or “anime” look. As the game is intended for a younger audience, the screen will always be well lit and colorful. Day and night will be distinguishable by using an overall tint of the screen. Also, when Sherman interacts with his fellow backyard critters, there will be another screen change, showing the faces of the parties involved.

There will be light music playing during exploration game play with intensity increasing when Sherman is on the verge of discovery or in proximity of danger. There will be text based dialogue with animation of the appearance of speaking and the music will cease during dialogue. When conversing with fellow critters the player will be given a selection of responses some of which may elicit different reaction and/or answer from the conversing critter.

This is a backyard world. The terrain consists of brown sandy areas in the sandbox, green grassy areas in the lawn, sidewalks, a wooden deck, and other random plant-life.

Environmental effects include rain from sky and sprinklers and the season is springtime.