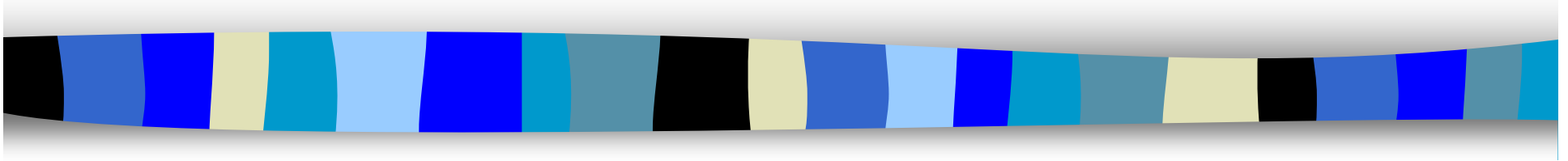


Characters in Games



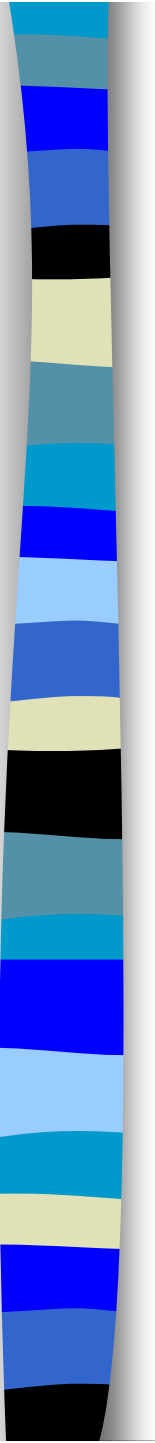
Jan. 30, 07

Topics in Game Development

UNM

ECE 495/595; CS 491/591

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Why are characters important?

- Bring game to life; otherwise abstract
- Provide vehicles for gameplay (goals, obstacles, conflict, etc.)
- Pull us into the game
- Provide entertainment:
 - Compelling personalities
 - Add conflict or humor
 - Add color

Characters in linear stories

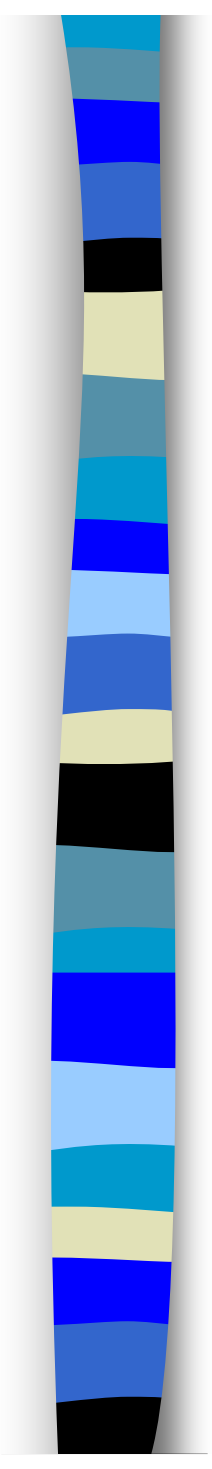


- Are created entirely by writers and actors
- Audience interaction or control not possible

Characters in Games

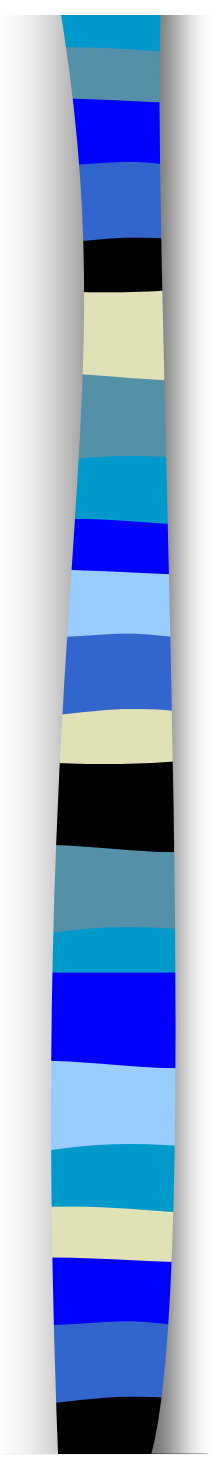
- Allow for player interaction
- Allow for player control (“*agency*”)
- May allow for partial creation by player





Two major types of characters:

- Those that player controls (***player characters***)
 - Usually the protagonist – the main character
 - May or may not be represented on screen
 - May be more than one per game
 - May communicate in various ways
- Those that the computer controls (***Non-player characters*** or ***NPCs***)
 - Wide variety of roles
 - Wide variety of AI

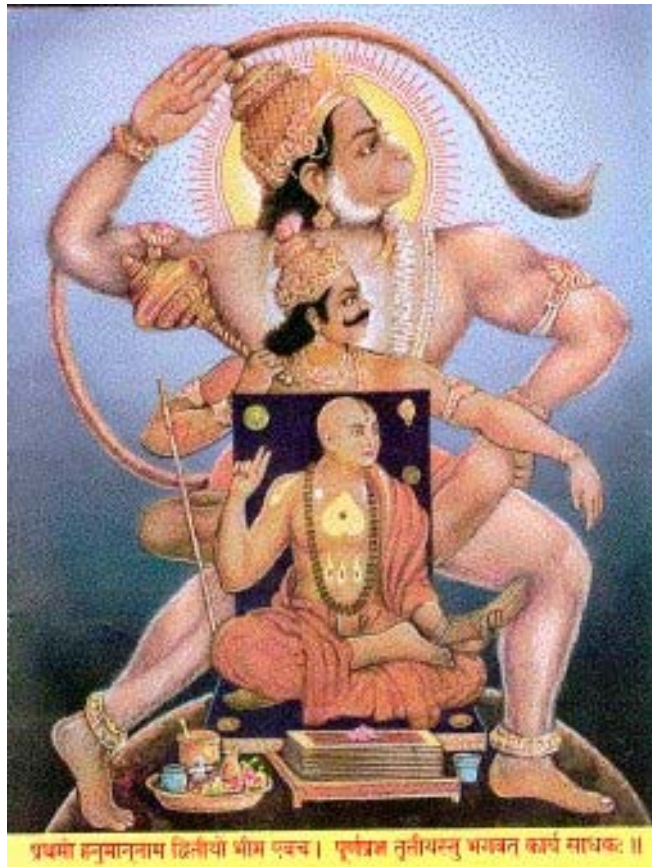


Players and characters:

As a player you can...

- Be the hero – protagonist
- Be sidekick of hero – assistant
- Be an unseen voyeur
- Play as yourself
- Control whole group of characters (team, military unit)
- Have a God-like role, control a society

Avatars



- From Hindu religion: an incarnation of a deity, a physical representation
- In games: player controlled characters who are represented graphically on screen
- Graphic avatars include :
 - A character
 - An icon
 - A weapon
- Not all player characters represented by avatars!

With avatars, player may...

- Select character's body parts, clothing
- Give name to character
- Select special skills or profession
- But some avatars are pre-rendered, unchangeable



First person POV

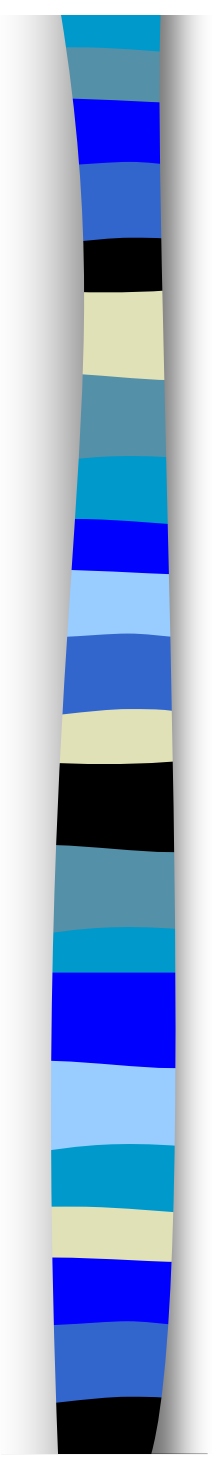


- As if seeing action through own eyes; you “become” character
- Don’t see body or face, but may see hand or weapon
- The “I” experience
- Highly immersive
- Player fills in own personality
- But visual limitations: no way to have character hug, kiss, etc.

Third person POV

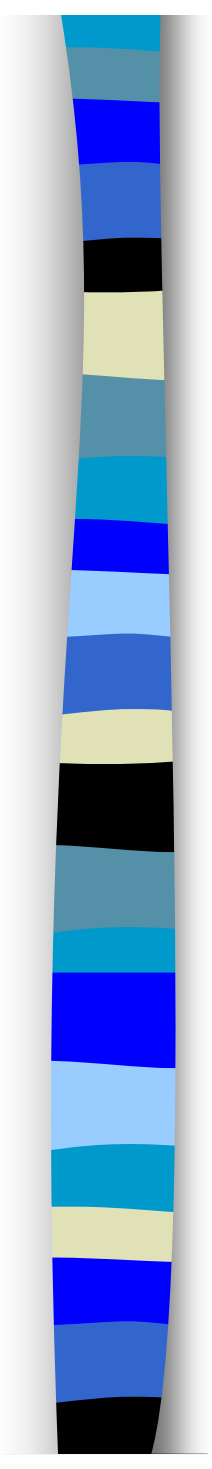
- You observe your character – like watching movie
- Less immersive than 1st person POV
- But good for games where need to see whole body (running, jumping)
- Gives character strong identity
- But limits ability of player to invest in character





Player POV

- Advantages and disadvantages to both 1st person POV and 3rd person POV
- Some games jump between POVs -- mixed
- POV greatly impacts way of experiencing game
- Needs to be decided early on: impacts on basic design, graphics, gameplay



Many types of NPCs

- Allies of protagonist (friends, fellow warriors)
- Neutral characters (shopkeepers, drinkers in bar)
- The antagonist or antagonists
- Henchmen of antagonist
- Red herrings (seem villainous but innocent)
- A helper you can summon (gives hints, assistance)
- NPCs may provide clues, or color, or humor

In developing a character:

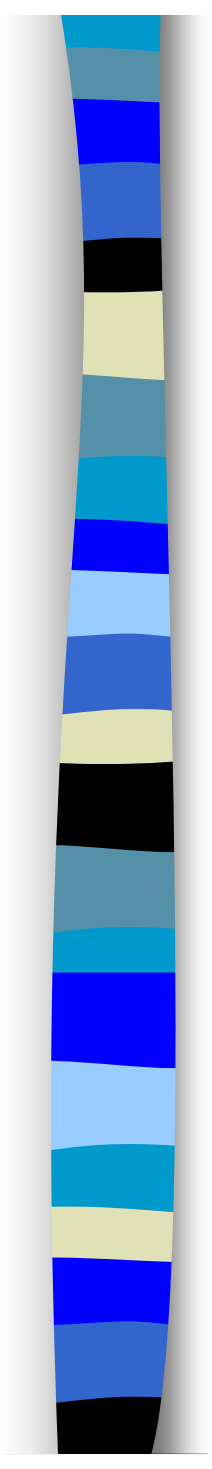


- Begin with its personality... strengths, weak points, desires, fears
- Also consider its role in game
- Then work on appearance (should reflect personality):
 - Face, body, hair
 - Costume
 - Props
- Then work on movement, posture, expressions

Character development:

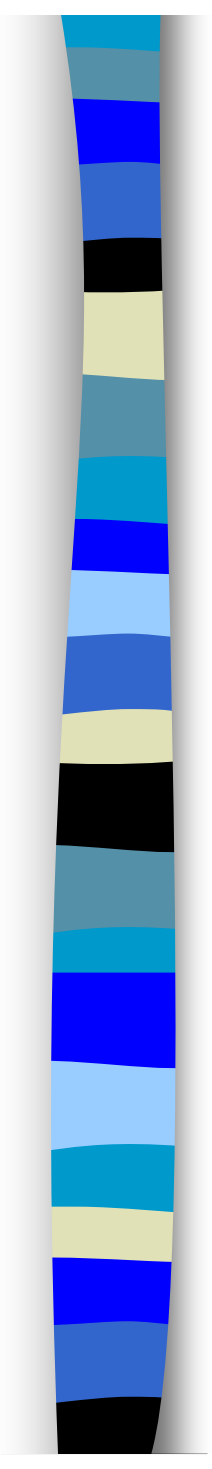
- Important for the protagonist, antagonist, even minor characters
- Rich characters have:
 - Backstory (personal history)
 - Psychological makeup
 - Fears, hopes
 - Motivation
- Good characters are **vivid** (in personality, appearance)





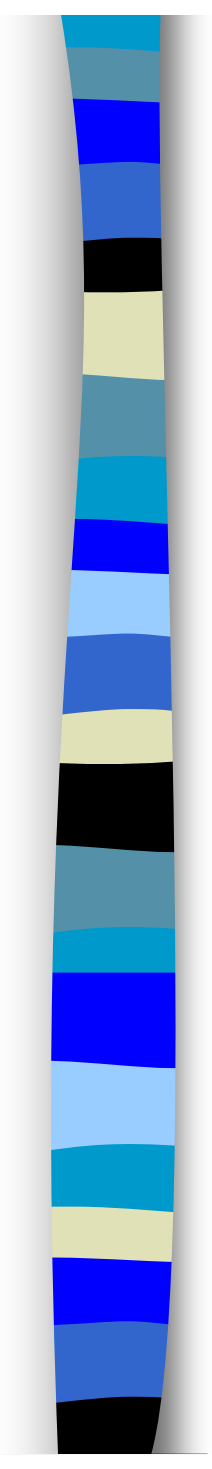
Overall look of characters: cuteness vs. coolness, realism

- Depends in part on target audience
- Also on type of project; some types call for realism
- Cuteness an advantage in international markets (Mario, Sonic the Hedgehog)
- Players more forgiving of cute characters -- less picky
- But cuteness can be turn off to teens, young adults



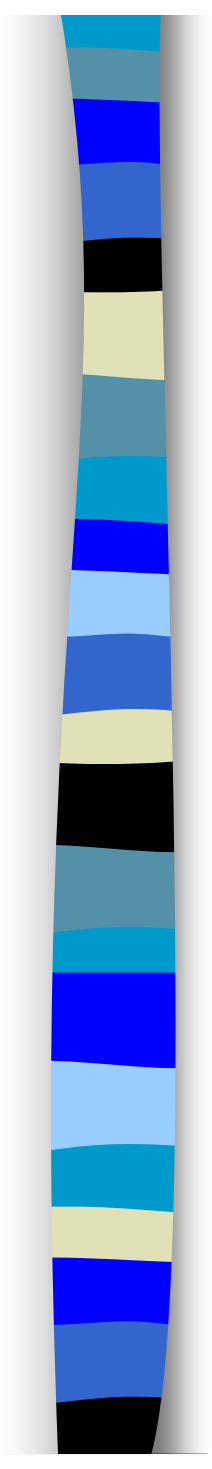
Ways of revealing character

- How do players know who characters are?
- Ways to reveal their “insides” include:
 - their physical appearance
 - what they say
 - what they do
 - their interactions with other characters
 - what other characters say about them, or how they react to them



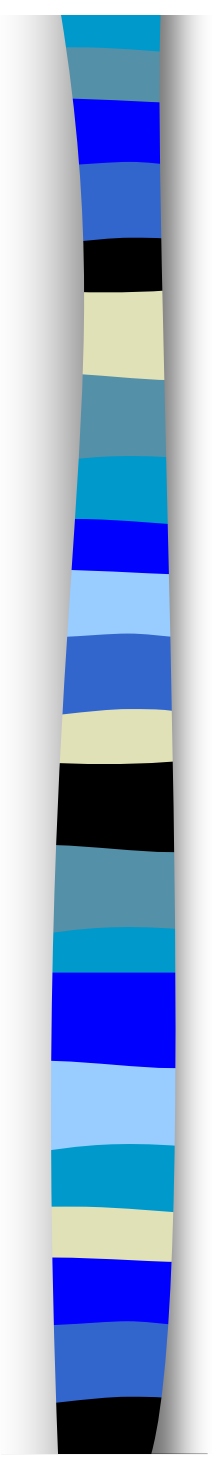
Ways to show character change

- As with linear stories, can have ***character arc*** (protagonist can change, grow -- cowardly to brave; self-absorbed to caring for others)
- But challenging in games (non-linear, short scenes, emphasis on action)
- An approach: can have character grow level by level with new challenges (acquiring courage, empathy)
- In some genres, characters can gain increased powers, skills, experience (***character advancement***)



Dialogue in games

- Can reveal character or plot or clues
- Should reflect personality, background of character speaking
- Is generally short, focused
- Can be in both cut scenes and interactive sequences
- Dialogue choices user makes can lead to various outcomes, consequences



Types of interactive dialogue

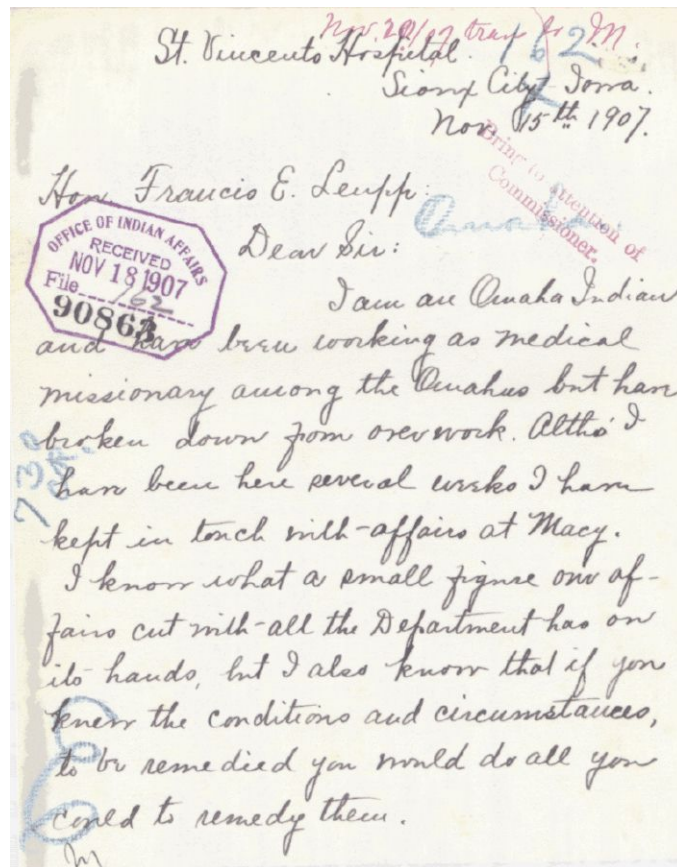
- ***Natural language interface***: can speak to a character (via typing or oral speech), it understands, responds appropriately
- Players can speak “in character” to each other (via text or oral speech)
- Player can select from list of intentions or emotions; other character responds
- ***Dialogue tree***: player given multiple choices of lines, pick one, other character responds (different response for each line)

Information can also be conveyed orally via:

- Telephone call
- Voice mail message
- TV or radio broadcast
- Overheard conversation



Communication via text

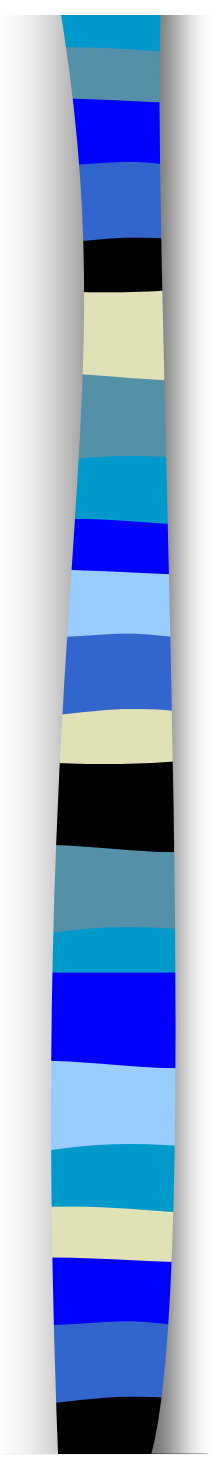


■ Various forms of text can be useful to:

- advance plot
- reveal character

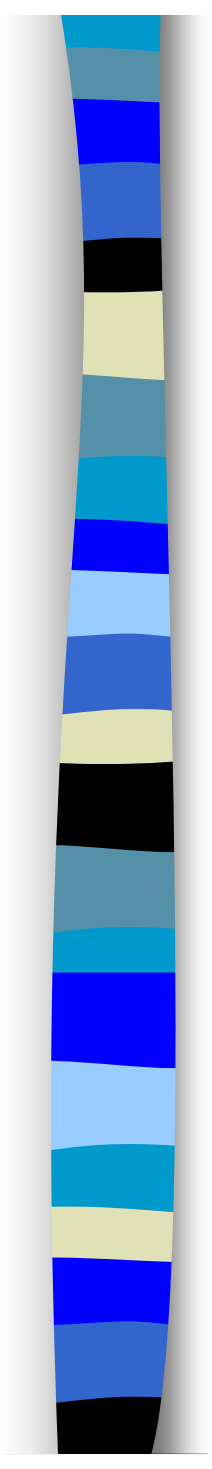
■ Possibilities:

- Letters
- Journals
- Newspapers
- Emails
- Computer files
- Secret messages



When describing your characters, include in your proposals:

- Name
- Gender, approximate age
- Physical description
- Role in game (protagonist, antagonist, other)
- Ultimate goal in terms of game's story
- Profession, special skills at start; potential by game's end
- Enough backstory to explain personality
- Strengths and weaknesses



Also be sure to include:

- What role the player plays in game
- What the player POV will be
- What forms of communication the game will include