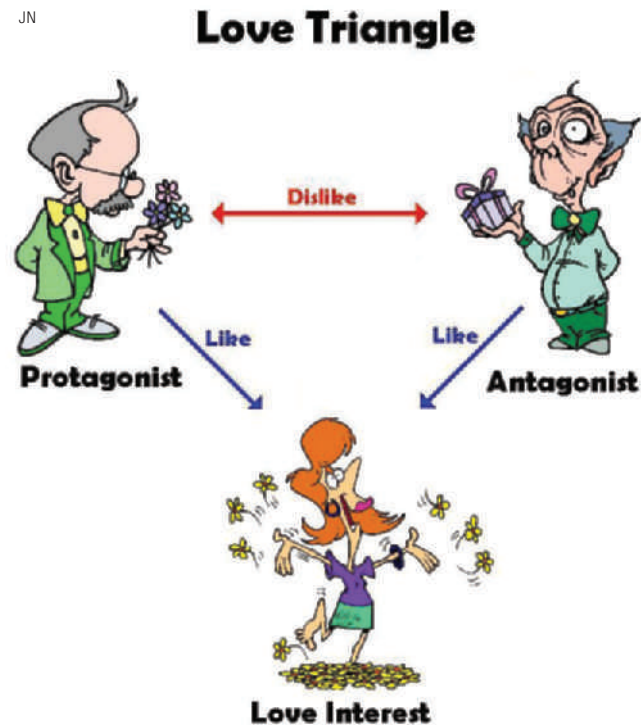


## Character Development Elements

Basic character development in a story involves the relationships among characters and the changes they might undergo throughout a story. The elements of the *character triangle* and *character arc* play a significant role in development of character relationships and character change.

### Character Triangle

A *character triangle* forms a powerful three-way relationship among characters in a story. In this relationship, contrasting characters (usually the protagonist, antagonist, and supporting) are connected in threes. The most common example of this is a love triangle in which the protagonist and antagonist both vie for the attention of the same love interest (supporting character). There can be many triangles in a story, and the character's role can change based on each of these triangles. For example, the same protagonist who's involved in a love triangle might also be involved in a career triangle—where the protagonist and antagonist compete for the same position at a company. Each of these triangles represents subplots in a story and must be connected in some way.



A twist on the love triangle—the most common type of character triangle.

### Cocktail Party Character Quotations

I was at a cocktail party shortly after *The Space Bar* shipped. The woman I was chatting with started telling me about a game she'd been playing and how much she was enjoying it. Then she began to quote characters in the game—*my game*! Hearing my writing being repeated was astounding. All those hours of sitting at a computer, writing, rewriting, wondering if it worked, all melted away. I had reached her, given her a meaningful experience, and she wanted to share that with someone else. It's magic.

—Patricia A. Pizer (Creative Director, ZeeGee Games)

### Positive Effects on the Player

Compelling storylines increase player immersion in a game—while memorable, entertaining characters give the player someone to relate to and make the game experience more enjoyable.

—Deborah Baxtrom (screenwriter and filmmaker;  
Full-Time Faculty Member, Game Art & Design, Art Institute of Pittsburgh Online)

## Character Arc

A protagonist rarely changes during the course of a story—but the character always *grows*. Even a passive protagonist learns how to turn the tables on an antagonist and become strong enough to reach a specified goal—growing as a result of the events in the story. The process of character growth and development is called the *character arc*. This arc consists of several levels and is illustrated through a character's behavior rather than monologue or dialogue. Understanding a character's value system is the core of character development. The following character development levels are based on sociologist Abraham Maslow's *hierarchy of needs* model. The levels begin with the smallest unit, the self, and expand to the largest (and most abstract) unit, humanity.

Diagram by Per Olin



Based on Abraham Maslow's model, the *social hierarchy of needs* can be used to map a character arc in a story.

### Level 1: Intrapersonal

In the *intrapersonal* level, the protagonist is concerned only with his or her own needs and thoughts.

### Level 2: Interpersonal

In the *interpersonal* level, the protagonist bonds with another character in a one-on-one relationship. This other character could be a lover, friend, colleague, or family member. The protagonist is no longer just looking out for himself or herself, but another character as well.

### Level 3: Team

In the *team* level, the protagonist bonds with a small group of characters who have common interests. These characters could be members of the protagonist's circle of friends, family, sports team, or activity club. The need to *belong* is fulfilled at this level. An example of this level occurs in many MMOGs that involve the formation of guilds with other players.

### Level 4: Community

In the *community* level, the smaller team becomes part of a larger organized network, which could include a neighborhood, city, school, or company.

### Level 5: Humanity

In the *humanity* level, the protagonist often goes through what Maslow calls *self-actualization*—spiritual growth that can occur now that the protagonist has achieved comfort, love, and acceptance among a larger community.

Sometimes protagonists can start at a higher level and move down the ladder. Michael Corleone in *The Godfather* is one example. These characters are really anti-heroes or transformational antagonists. The character arc illustrates that the protagonist is either better or worse off from experiences in the story.

Eidos



The protagonist in *Hitman: Blood Money* fights for his own selfish needs.

Reprinted with permission from Microsoft Corporation



Master Chief in the *Halo* series fights for all of humanity.

## Point-of-View

Games usually have specific player *points-of-view* (POV). Some POVs are seen through the eyes of the player's avatar in first-person perspective, and some allow the player to observe the avatar in third-person perspective.

### First-Person

In a *first-person point-of-view* (POV), the player sees through the eyes of the avatar. In a *first-person shooter* (FPS), the player also sees the avatar's hand holding a weapon in the lower portion of the screen. This POV can sometimes enable the player to bond with the character, because the player steps into the character role physically and cannot observe the avatar separately. However, this POV makes it more difficult for the player to form a mental image of the avatar because the character cannot be seen onscreen. Some developers use cut-scenes and in-game scripted

sequences to address this—shifting the perspective of the game so that the avatar can be seen in third-person POV. These sequences can sometimes feel like interruptions and take the player out of the game world. This can be avoided by creating a cinematic sequence as an introduction to the game, and by including images of the avatar in the game interface menu system (discussed further in Chapter 8). Packaging and poster art associated with the game (and usually handled by the marketing department) can also depict images of the avatar. First-person games can also use reflective surfaces (e.g., mirrors) to show the character to the player.



First-person point-of-view (POV) in *Borderlands*.

Take-Two Interactive

### First-Person Identity in Film

Assuming that a first-person POV could help the audience identify with the protagonist, several filmmakers in the 1950s tried this technique. The first and only film shot in first-person POV was *The Lady in the Lake*. Although innovative at the time, audiences didn't relate to the character—partially because they were never able to form a mental image of him. In *Dark Passage*, starring Humphrey Bogart, the film begins with first-person POV (as Bogart, hiding in a garbage can, is dumped out of a truck and rolls down an embankment). The transition is made to third-person POV as we see Bogart's character—but we don't see his face because it is wrapped in bandages. As the bandages are removed, the POV shifts again to first-person—and then permanently shifts back to third-person after the bandages have been completely removed, revealing a new identity. We never see the character's "original" face.

## Third-Person

In *third-person POV*, the player can see the avatar onscreen. This allows the player to retain a mental image of the avatar, but it does not provide the feeling of truly inhabiting the body of a character and seeing the world through the character's eyes. The

Electronic Arts



Third-person POV in *Dante's Inferno*.

ability to see the avatar at all times could put the player in the role of *observer* rather than *player character*. However, players often allow themselves to eventually bond with the character onscreen as the game continues. When you create an avatar who will be seen onscreen, it's especially important to ensure that the avatar's look (including color scheme) can be easily differentiated from the rest of the characters onscreen. In third-person action-adventure games, players can often see the game by looking over the character's shoulder.

Since movies are rarely shot in first-person POV, third-person games such as the award-winning *Uncharted 2* and *Batman: Arkham Asylum* often has a cinematic feel. The main characters of a third-person game are often marketed as movie stars; in fact, the character of Lara Croft might be considered the first attempt at creating a game icon. Cinematic suspense is created by allowing the protagonist to be seen onscreen, especially when players can see a threat—such as an enemy approaching—before the character does. It could be argued that there is also more emotional connection to a character that the player can see onscreen (third-person POV), rather than one that can only be seen periodically in a mirror or represented as a disembodied hand holding a gun or other object (first-person POV).

### ..... *Uncharted Series:* Nathan Drake as “Everyman”

Sony Computer Entertainment America



*Uncharted 3:*  
*Drake's Deception*

Story and characters have great potential to drive games and help them become a really cinematic experience. A good example is the *Uncharted* series on the PlayStation 3, which revolves around the protagonist Nathan Drake. The personal background story and relationship of the protagonist to Sir Francis Drake provide a credible frame for the adventure story in the first game. The character artists also went to great lengths to make the character a naturally attractive “everyman” persona to whom both men and women can easily relate.

—Dr. Lennart E. Nacke (Assistant Professor, Faculty of Business and Information Technology, University of Ontario Institute of Technology)

## What's in a Name?

Each of your characters (especially your protagonist) should have a strong, distinctive, and memorable name, which might even reflect the character's personality traits. Here are some examples:

**Gordon Freeman (*Half-Life*):** The last name indicates a hero character—someone who wants or fights for freedom. This has universal appeal.

**Max Payne:** The possible translation of this name into “maximum pain” suggests someone who is in pain—and might give a great deal of pain to others. Since this character is motivated by revenge over the death of his wife, this name is particularly fitting.

**Duke Nuke'Em:** This name suggests that the character is the “duke” of “nuking” or killing people.

**Cate Archer (*No One Lives Forever*):** The last name suggests the character is precise and on target, just like an archer.

**Leisure Suit Larry:** This name suggest a bachelor character who might have a Vegas lounge-lizard style.

**Kate Walker (*Syberia*):** This is an appropriate name for an adventure character who spends much of the game walking into various buildings, exploring strange rooms, and uncovering hidden secrets.

**Fox McCloud (*Star Fox*):** This name suggests that this character is clever (as a fox), and spends most of his time in the air rather than on ground.

**Master Hand (*Super Smash Bros.*):** It's no accident that this character consists of a white glove that is larger than any of the other fighters in the game. Master Hand's moves range from flicking, poking, slamming, swatting, punching, and throwing.

**Protoman (*Megaman III*):** This name suggests the “first” of its kind—and it is! Protoman was the first robot created by Drs. Light and Wiley together: the prototype of what was to become the Megaman cyborg.

**Sam Fisher (*Splinter Cell*):** This undercover cop is good at “fishing”—baiting enemies and performing stealthy operations.

**Sonic The Hedgehog:** The sonic moniker is related to the speed of the character, who's faster than the speed of sound!

**Viewtiful Joe:** Normally an ordinary Joe, this character can transform into the larger-than-life Viewtiful Joe—a virtual superhero who can slow down or speed up time.



Guybrush Threepwood from the *Secret of Monkey Island* series.



Dante from the *Devil May Cry* series.

## Visual Character Development

The physical characteristics of game characters are art-driven, but they also need to correlate with the character's role in the story. For this reason, you need to develop a character's personality before you create the character's appearance. If you were creating a *hero* character, how would you indicate strength while hinting at vulnerability? You might make the character tall and muscular, but you might make the character appear sad. If your character is a trickster who starts off as an *ally* but becomes a *shadow*, how would you provide a subtle visual hint that this character is not quite what he or she seems? You could have the character's hands clench into fists periodically, or make their eyes dart around occasionally.

Blizzard Entertainment



NCsoft



Characters from *World of Warcraft* (left) and *City of Heroes* (right).

Aspects of a character's physical appearance include gender, age, facial features (including hair and eye color), body type (tall, short, large, small, muscular, flabby, angular, round), skin color, health, and abnormalities or distinctive physical characteristics (moles, acne, nervous ticks). Your character should also have an identifiable pose that differentiates the character from the others. Would players be able to pick out your characters if they were all in shadow?

You should also consider each character's costume—including clothing, armor, and accessories such as shoes, glasses, hats, gloves, and watches. What is the color scheme of the character's costume? If the character is a protagonist and the game is viewed in a third-person perspective, make sure that the character's colors stand out against the environment and are differentiated from the colors worn by other characters in the game.

Are there any props associated with this character? Consider weapons, bags, briefcases, and any other items the character might be carrying. Make sure your character's prop can be identified with the character. A great example of a character prop is the hat belonging to Odd Job in *James Bond*; the hat is worn only by the character and is also used as a weapon.

## Techniques

There are several art techniques used in games that help to convey the physical characteristics of game characters. Software associated with these techniques and phases of game art production are discussed in Chapter 10.

### Concept Art

*Concept art* involves creating several views of a character (front, sides, back) using pencil sketches or 2D digital renderings. A strong profile or silhouette is essential for your character to be instantly recognizable. The color scheme of your character's costume should not be too busy nor contain more than three or four colors. A character should also have distinctive features, which could include particular facial characteristics (Mario's moustache), accessories (Harry Potter's spectacles), or even a hairstyle (Lara Croft's braids).



Character concept drawings from art director Mark Soderwall.

### Modeling

*Modeling* involves creating a character's size and stature in 3D (from 2D assets). The modeling process begins with the creation of a 3D wire mesh, to which 2D textures related to the character's skin and costumes are applied.

The majority of 3D programs use polygons as building blocks because these shapes provide the illusion of 3D on the 2D surface of a screen. The artist starts with a 3D space of infinite size within the computer, defined by its center (or origin). From this point, distance is measured along three axes: X (side to side, or horizontal), Y (up and down, or vertical), and Z (toward and away). A point in space can be defined by providing figures for X, Y, and Z. When three points are defined, the computer software joins them together and fills in the space—creating a polygon. Models are constructed by joining several polygons to the initial polygon.

Unlike film and television animation, 3D models in games must work in real time. Although computer graphics systems are getting more powerful, they still have limits to the number of polygons they can move around. Modelers attempt to build efficient, low-polygon models. As the hardware becomes faster, artists will be able to work with more polygons, allowing characters to have less angular curves and more detail.



Wireframe and flat shaded models of Kratos from *God of War*.



Craig Ferguson



Texture skins are applied to 3D model meshes.

## Texturing

*Texturing* involves creating 2D surface textures (e.g., skin, costumes) known as *texture maps* that modelers apply to 3D wire meshes. Texture maps give depth to the character's physical appearance. Applying texture maps involves cutting apart, peeling, and spreading a model's parts flat for painting. Some programs contain an integrated painting program that allows the artist to paint directly onto the model in 3D. In addition to texture maps, other maps can be applied to models—isolating areas of the model that contain the map's property, such as reflection, transparency, glow—and even bumps!

## Animation

Character movement is conveyed through *animation*. Initially, *rotoscoped animation* photographed and traced an actor's movements to add realism to character movement. In most 2D games, animation is restricted to small areas of the screen that are controlled by the player or respond to commands given by the player. These small areas are often referred to as *sprites*, and might contain a character or object that moves over a static or scrolling background. These sprites are animated in short sequences, which isolate an individual action made by a character. The process of 3D animation is similar to stop-frame animation. Using the *keyframing* technique, an animator creates each pose of a movement and sets sequential keyframes to generate animation files. *Motion-capture*—where an animator captures the motions of real people, placing markers on joints of the person to track movement and create motion data—is becoming more popular. All of these techniques will be discussed further in Chapter 10.

## Style

The characters in the game world are often created in a style that fits with the look and feel of the game environment. (The environment is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.) A consistent character style helps maintain the game's harmony. In many

children's games, for example, the character style might be referred to as "cute." In *Conker's Bad Fur Day*, cute characters were transplanted into an adult-oriented game—complete with vulgar dialogue. The irony worked for the adult audience. If this had been reversed and a villain in a children's game appeared as an HR Giger-esque alien, this might terrify a young audience! Many artists feel that they must copy popular styles to get noticed. This myth occurs in all areas of entertainment—music, screenwriting, filmmaking—and it couldn't be further from the truth. Exposing yourself to game-art styles is a valid way to learn your craft, but the important thing about style is to make it your own. Art styles used in game worlds are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

Amanita Design



*Machinarium* has a distinctive visual style.

## Verbal Character Development

*Narration*, *monologue*, and *dialogue* refer to verbal commentary, discussions, or interactions among any number of characters in a game. The use of verbal communication in a game can occur through voiceover audio (discussed further in Chapter 9) or onscreen text.

### Narration

*Narration* specifically refers to verbal commentary made by the narrator in a game. The narrator could be one of the NPCs in the game, or a special narrator character whose role is only to inform the player about the game's backstory or provide unbiased comments on events that are happening in the game. The narrator might or might not appear visually onscreen.

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*Portal: Still Alive* offers a good example of first-person narrative.

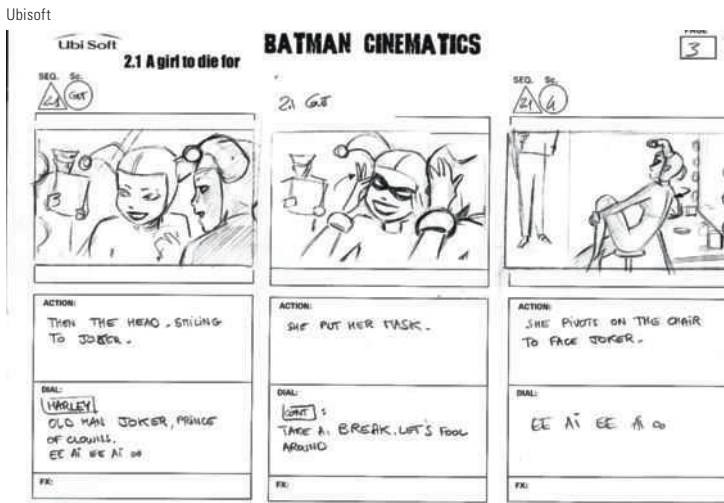
### Monologue

A *monologue* is usually a lengthy speech given by one of the characters in a game for the purposes of illustrating the character's emotions or personality characteristics—or to reveal that character's inner thoughts. Shakespeare's soliloquies—including Hamlet's angst-ridden “to be, or not to be” speech—are examples of monologue.

## Dialogue

*Dialogue* technically refers to two-person verbal interaction. However, it is used in games to refer to verbal interactions among any number of characters. Keep in mind that characters are a *part* of the story and should not talk *about* the story. The events that occur in your story are much more important than what the characters say. The purpose of dialogue is not just conversation. Go to a public place and eavesdrop on a conversation. It will most likely take at least a few moments for you to understand what is being discussed. This is because conversation is *context-specific*—depending almost entirely on the relationships, backgrounds, personalities, and motivations of

the speakers. In multiplayer games that allow the players to interact through their characters, the dialogue is often more context-specific (and realistic) because the characters are real people. However, this sort of dialogue often does not move the game forward. In fact, in-game conversations sometimes do not have anything to do with the game at all. Dialogue created for non-player characters (NPCs), on the other hand, should fulfill the purposes discussed in the following sections.



Storyboards from *Batman: Vengeance*.

## Reveal Character

The dialogue should reveal the character's background—including personality, physical, and social characteristics. (See the end of this chapter for a discussion of incorporating these characteristics into a character synopsis.) Text dialogue must reflect any specific vocabulary and choice of words. Each of your characters will have a certain way of talking, so any voice-over dialogue also must reflect certain audio speech patterns—such as tone, volume, pace, accent, and any speech abnormalities (such as a stutter or lisp). If one of your NPCs is an impatient person, you might want the voice-over artist to speak at a hurried pace and use an irritated tone.

## Reveal Emotion

Dialogue can reflect any emotion—anger, sadness, happiness, disappointment, excitement. Understand how each character might express any of these emotions. If an impatient character is always impatient, how would you change the character's tone if he or she became angry or *extremely* impatient?

## Advance the Plot

The game story's plot can be advanced through conversations among characters, but this method often sounds forced. Narration is the preferred method of advancing the plot. Some games become tiresome when players have to scroll through endless dialogue among the characters explaining what's going on in the story. Perhaps this could be handled better by having a text-based or voiceover narrator fill players in on the plot. Some well-written character dialogue can advance the plot brilliantly, but this takes a great deal of subtlety and a lot of practice.

## Reveal Conflict

A dialogue exchange can reveal that there's conflict happening between the characters in a game. However, a much better way to handle conflict is through the actions of the characters. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

## Establish Relationships

Dialogue can help establish relationships between the characters. If not written well, this can also be very awkward. You've probably noticed forced dialogue in games where characters say things like, "Remember—you're my brother!" or "Brother John, ..." to make it clear to the player that the characters are siblings.

## Comment on Action

Some dialogue exists so that characters can comment on or react to the action in the game. Again, this must be written subtly to avoid throw-away dialogue such as "Ouch—that hurt!" (unless this is a comedic moment) or "Why do you think Mary hit Bill?"

### Dialogue in *Earth & Beyond*

The sample dialogue on the following page from Loric (an NPC) shows specifically how game dialogue differs from screenwriting. Game designers must anticipate all possible dialogue choices a player could make. Note that the following excerpt reads more like a "map" of these possible choices (similar to the story tree discussed in this chapter). Loric's dialogue is much more extensive, revealing the character's personality and mood, while advancing the story. The player dialogue, on the other hand, is terse—representing choices rather than revealing the player's personality (which cannot be assumed by the designer). The script reads like a flowchart—with "if/then" statements involving the player dialogue.



Electronic Arts

LORIC 005T

Never mind. Why imitate the Ancients and their celestial example when you can hang around Earth Station, have a Coke, and bore yourself into a daze? Why dream when you can phase out? You know? You think deWinter is doing something to the air here?

*[If the Player responds:]*

PLAYER

I don't know.

LORIC 006T

Breathe in. Go on. It's like there's something in it. It's like she's desperate to have us think it's wonderful. She owns the air, you know.

*[Continue after 005]*

*[If the Player responds:]*

PLAYER

Yes.

LORIC 007T

I think so, too. I think she's changing things. Things most people take for granted—like the air. Know how long it's been since I had a breath of independent air? Know how long?

LORIC 008T

Aw, never mind. I need some money to get to Deneb. Ten credits is all I ask. Will you help me or not?

*[If the Player responds:]*

PLAYER

Forget it.

LORIC 009T

I just want to stand where everything in sight hasn't been bought and sold and already owned by somebody else. What's ten credits to you?

*[Continue after 008]*

*[If the Player responds:]*

PLAYER

I guess I can spare ten credits..

LORIC 010T

You made the right choice. Be generous to the adventurers. You never know when you might be one yourself.

LORIC 011T

When I get there, I'll remember you. You and the ordinary people just like you. It'll be different there. Better. I'm sure of it.

*[Continue after 009]*

## Movement

There are several forms of movement that should be considered for all characters—such as signature gestures, idle movements, and walking cycles.

### Signature

A *signature* movement is an action move (usually a gesture) that showcases a character’s personality and character type. If an antagonist character (such as a sharp-clawed monster) is supposed to instill fear in the player, you might want to include a signature move that appears foreboding—such as having the monster slice through all objects in its path with its claws.

### Idle

An *idle* movement takes place when the character is “waiting” for something to happen—usually for the player to make a decision that involves that character. Sometimes these idle movements can be humorous. Leisure Suit Larry, for example, holds his breath and changes colors accordingly while waiting for the player to resume control over him.

### Walking Cycle

The *walking cycle* is the most basic of character actions, and it reveals much about a character’s personality. For example, Mario’s comfortable yet energetic walking cycle illustrates his easygoing nature. The importance of reflecting character attributes through movement cannot be overlooked. As discussed earlier, motion capture is one way of accomplishing this.



Konami

Solid Snake’s signature pose reflects the character’s alert readiness (*Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots*, shown).



Sega

Sonic the Hedgehog shows impatience through his idle movement by tapping his foot.



Nintendo

A wide range of movements is used for the player character, Link, in *The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures*.

## Background, History & Advancement

Aspects of a character's social background include race, religion, class, home life, education, occupation, skills, relationships with other characters, political views, and hobbies. The concept of character advancement is integral to a game's story, a character's history, and the concept of player control.

### Becoming Somebody Else

Many MMOs allow players to create customized character profiles. This is a set of attributes associated with the character, such as name, gender, age, clothing, and skin/eye/hair color. Gender swapping has become a common practice in these games, enabling players to assume identities they do not get the opportunity to explore in the real world.

### Class & Race

In many games, character attributes such as *class* and *race* can be chosen by the player. The MMO *EverQuest*, for example, allows players to choose from over 14 different attributes—each of which is tied to a unique skill level. Here are some examples of online games and their associated classes or races:



Class selection options in *Conquer Online*

- *World of Warcraft*: human, orc, or tauren (minotaur)
- *Alliance*: Iron Coalition, Gigacorp, Bios, Belters, or Rixian Unity
- *Starcraft*: Terran, Zerg, or Protoss
- *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*: soldier, medic, engineer, or lieutenant

## Skill

Character advancement is usually accomplished through an increase in statistics—such as strength, experience, and skill. Characters in particular classes or races are often further divided into various skill levels. One fighter might be skilled with a sword and another with a bow. Most game characters have at least one special skill or power that is identified with them. If your character fulfills the hero archetype, create a skill that fulfills a fantasy. Look at some classic superheroes for examples: Superman has x-ray vision and can fly “faster than a speeding bullet.” Spiderman can climb walls and has unusually strong intuition (spider sense).

Frogster Interactive Pictures AG



Skill choices in *Runes of Magic*.

### Subversive Games

I think most games are political in nature, even if the politics are implied. Tom Clancy’s *Rainbow 6* is a “political game,” just as much as *Deus Ex* is—in that the player is submitting to a patriarchal, conservative figure (or organization), accepting the values and context placed upon the situation: Good people follow orders, the goal is to follow orders, violence is a means of implementing a government’s will, anyone not aligned with the government is “bad” by definition, the player is a part of a hierarchy, etc. That’s all highly political, but somehow we just accept this. It’s only when a game is subversive that people call it out as “political.” In my view, this medium can prompt interesting questions about the role we play in the world, much more actively than in film. We need more subversive games.

—Harvey Smith (Co-Creative Director, Arkane Studios)



## Character Description

To get started with character development, you need to write a *character description* (also known as a *character synopsis*) for each major character. A character description represents a brief summary of a character's life. The purpose of putting together a character description is to explore each of your characters in depth—to understand where they come from and who they are. Think of your characters as real people. (Even if they're fantasy creatures or monsters, try to give them some human characteristics.) How will they react or respond to situations that might have absolutely nothing to do with your story? How will they relate to others in the real world? Elements of a good character synopsis include all the elements discussed in this chapter, such as the following:

- Name
- Type (class, race, archetype, fantasy/mythic/historical)
- Gender/age
- Physical appearance (body type, height, hair color/style, eye color, skin tone, costume, color scheme, signature pose, profile, gestures, facial expressions, distinguishing marks)
- Background and history
- Personality characteristics (reflect these back onto the character's physical appearance; mood, motivation, nervous ticks, idle moves)
- Vocal characteristics (vocal tone and pace)
- Relevance to story synopsis

The following is a character description of Ariad from *Earth & Beyond*:

*Ariad: Leader of the Jenquai Traders. Young and appears a bit flighty at times—but this is a cover for a shrewd negotiator. Ariad might be described physically as light, airy, flowing, almost elfin. In typical Jenquai fashion, she has spent her life in low-G, and she is unnaturally tall and thin, with long, precise fingers and fragile limbs. She possesses an unearthly grace. Less a trader than an artisan, she sees trade as a vehicle leading to truth, order, and beauty. Typically dresses simply but elegantly, adorning herself with one or two exotic baubles of unsurpassed beauty. She is in her late 20s.*

After you complete your character synopsis, summarize each character's physical appearance, personality traits, and relationship to the story in just a few sentences. Use one paragraph per character and identify each character by name. Character synopses and summaries can be incorporated into documentation as part of the planning process. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 11.

## Game Storytelling & Documentation

Once you have come up with a game story, you need to incorporate components of the story into several game documents (discussed in more detail in Chapter 10). These documents help organize your ideas and clearly convey them to others. The *concept* document is intended to express the basic vision of the game, and it includes the game's premise. Sometimes this document is expanded into a proposal—which provides more detail on the game's story and characters. The *story treatment* is usually a one- to two-page summary of the game's overall storyline. It should not be a detailed discussion of all the possible paths that characters can take in the game. Instead, it should incorporate the story's theme, structure, and a few significant plot elements. A standard script containing dialogue might be created for cinematics and cut-scene producers/dialogue sessions, while a story tree or flowchart might be created to map out the story's structure. Finally, the *game design document* provides a reference for the development team and includes plot elements related to gameplay.

.....

You have learned how to tell stories in the traditional sense, and you have learned how stories can be very different when applied to games. This difference is tied directly to *gameplay*—the subject of the next chapter. It could be argued that gameplay is the essential storytelling component in games; it is a non-traditional device that allows the player to take on the role of storyteller. As you read through Chapter 6, consider how the game story and character development elements you've learned in Chapter 5 apply directly to gameplay. Your goal is to successfully blend story and gameplay elements together into a rich game-playing experience.

## :::CHAPTER REVIEW EXERCISES:::

1. Create a premise, backstory, and synopsis for an original game idea that targets either Boomers, Xers, or Millennials. Describe your target market in detail, and outline why you chose to create this sort of content for this group.
2. What role do *cut-scenes* play in a game, and how can they sometimes compromise *immersion*? Choose a cut-scene from a pre-existing game and identify three reasons you think it is being used. Is the cut-scene necessary? If you were on the game development team and were told that the scene had to be removed, what would you do to ensure that the reasons for the cut-scene were still being fulfilled? Create a synopsis for an original cut-scene and discuss why it is essential to the game experience.
3. Choose a tabletop game with a distinct setting or premise. (If you want to see some cleverly designed tabletop games, go to Funagain Games at <http://www.funagain.com>.) After familiarizing yourself with the game, discuss how you would adapt it to electronic form. What story elements would you expand on to create a more enriching, immersive experience for the player?
4. If you were to create a customized character based on yourself, what would it be like? Describe yourself in terms of a game character. What are your physical and personality characteristics, goals, strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes, general mood? Discuss other characters that might also appear in the game. (*Note:* These characters might not necessarily be helpful but could represent obstacles that prevent you from reaching your goals.)
5. Write descriptions for three characters associated with an original game idea. At least one character should be a player character. What elements will you include in your character descriptions, and how will the player and non-player characters differ?
6. How do you distinguish the main player character from the game environment? Choose one of your original characters and discuss three specific ways you could ensure that players can always easily detect where the player character is and what the character is doing.
7. How do the visual features of a game character reflect the character's personality? Discuss how you would utilize profile, facial expressions, gestures, poses, costume, character movement, color scheme, and even associated objects to reflect the personality of one of the original characters you created.
8. Using the original game story you created, construct a five-page scene involving at least two of the characters you described in the previous exercise. Make sure one of your characters is a player character and one is a non-player character. How will you distinguish between the dialogue written for the player characters and NPCs? (*Note:* You are not writing a linear cut-scene, but one in which the player still has control of the avatar.)