

The Friendly Blacksmith

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Abstract

The proposed game is of the computer role-playing genre and features a unique resource vendor that learns the player's preferences and offers him or her the adequate quests and item recommendations. The game also features what is typically best in the genre: a wide variety of quests, interesting characters to interact with and vicious enemies to battle with, all this while exploring a virtual world with diverse and inspiring environments in all three dimensions.

Keywords: role-playing, preferences, vendor, recommendations

Resumo

O jogo proposto pertence ao género *computer role-playing* e apresenta um vendedor de recursos especial que aprende as preferências do jogador e lhe oferece as *quests* e recomendações de itens adequadas. O jogo apresenta ainda o que tipicamente se encontra de melhor no género: uma grande variedade de *quests*, interacção com personagens interessantes e combates com ferozes inimigos, tudo isto enquanto se explora um mundo virtual com ambientes diversos e inspiradores em três dimensões.

Palavras-chave: *role-playing*, preferências, vendedor, recomendações

In the world of computer role-playing games (CRPG), the player typically takes control of a virtual avatar and engages in exploring fantasy worlds, interacting with a diverse cast of non-player characters (NPC), battling enemies, completing assigned quests and “building” the avatar in a number of possible ways. For this purpose, the player often has the need to acquire resources that provide valuable aid throughout the game, generally offered by in-game vendors, for instance blacksmiths.

The proposed game is a CRPG of this kind that also features a very special resource vendor NPC: a blacksmith who is an important story character and, aside from assisting and guiding the player in many quests, will progressively learn the player's preferences regarding his or her style of play and recommend the appropriate items and quests. Thus, we call such NPC “The Friendly Blacksmith”. Preferences are captured using conversation choices, information about store interaction (for example, what items the player bought) and equipment used when battling foes.

Such preference information may even be further explored; for instance, it could be used to assign adequate characters to the player's party (implemented in a quest in the game demo) or to choose which one of multiple paths in the story is more adequate to the player. Potential uses for this idea go as far as the developer's imagination.

There is also a great focus on the equipment the player can use: throughout the game, the player will need to take great care in choosing his or her own equipment in order to overcome the game's challenges. This provides a good synergy with the item and quest recommendations provided by the unique resource vendor described above, assuring the player always has adequate help in order to overcome upcoming challenges.

Taking what is best about other games in the RPG genre, the game also features a compelling storyline with a non-linear progress with several different quests and interesting enemies to battle with, while traveling through a number of inspiring environments in all three dimensions.

In light of everything said so far, the game presents four major design goals. First, and most innovative, the *concept of a "Friendly Blacksmith"*, a character who learns the player's preferences and "understands" him or her, using such knowledge to aid the player in several ways. Second, the *strategic action* during the game's quests, constantly putting the player character's equipment and wit to proof. Third, we have the goal *freedom*, which manifests itself in allowing the player to choose which style of play suits him or her the best, with plenty of items and classes to choose from. Finally, we have the *replay value*, in tandem with the first and third already described goals. Since the player is given freedom and since, according to his or her style of play, equipment and quests may differ throughout the game, the player is encouraged to replay the game again and again in order to enjoy the full game experience.

Finally, we provide a video of the proposed game's demo, showing the idea of a "Friendly Blacksmith" in motion in context of a CRPG named "The Forgotten Blacksmith". The video is available in the following address:

<http://web.ist.utl.pt/andre.matias/TFB.wmv>

The game tells the tale of Ashon Smithsoul, the son of a legendary blacksmith who sacrificed his life 15 years ago to save his hometown by destroying an evil entity named Dark Destroyer. However, Ashon finds out that this evil entity is still alive, thus departing in a quest to find his long lost sister Kathleen Smithsoul, who is rumored to be as talented a blacksmith as their father, and together defeat the Dark Destroyer once and for all.

The game's demo was developed using the Neverwinter Nights 2 Toolset included with Neverwinter Nights 2 (developed by Obsidian Entertainment, published by Atari in 2006).