

FILM BLEU: INVESTIGATING THE TAXONOMY OF COMPUTER ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

ABSTRACT

Many features found in computer role-playing games (RPGs) can be traced back to the founding father of RPGs, Dungeons & Dragons, whose pervasive influence has resulted in the homogeneity of the genre. In theory if an RPG is defined by player influenced character development, then all other features are superfluous to its taxonomy. Film Bleu is a computer game developed to specifically forgo prevalent RPG conventions and focus on crafting a character centric narrative. Players are asked to fill out a formal questionnaire after playing the game on how they would categorize it. Their responses will help provide insight on the taxonomy of the RPGs.

METHODOLOGY

Prevalent conventions of the RPG genre are identified and removed or replaced with other features in Film Bleu. Parallel to this process, is the development of a character driven narrative that is straightforward and easy to understand.

MECHANICAL CONVENTIONS

Gameplay in computer RPGs typically feature combat, character specialization, and numerically represented character growth. In Film Bleu, combat is replaced by mysteries solved via gameplay and player deduction. The absence of combat renders character specialization unnecessary. Instead of explicit numerical progression, the player unlocks more mysteries and gameplay features when they successfully solve a case.

SETTING

Medieval fantasy and science-fiction are the two most prevalent RPG settings, so Film Bleu takes place instead in a small town with a neo-noir twist. Google returned no notable neo-noir RPGs.

AESTHETICS

The tile set mapping system, often found in older RPGs, can be an indicator of the genre to some players. The game uses parallax mapping to mitigate the risk of a player identifying Film Bleu as an RPG due to tile set mapping. Advantages of parallax mapping over tile set mapping include: greater creative freedom, more realism, less repetition, layering, and easier asset manipulation. Figure 1 shows a comparison between parallax mapping and tile set mapping.

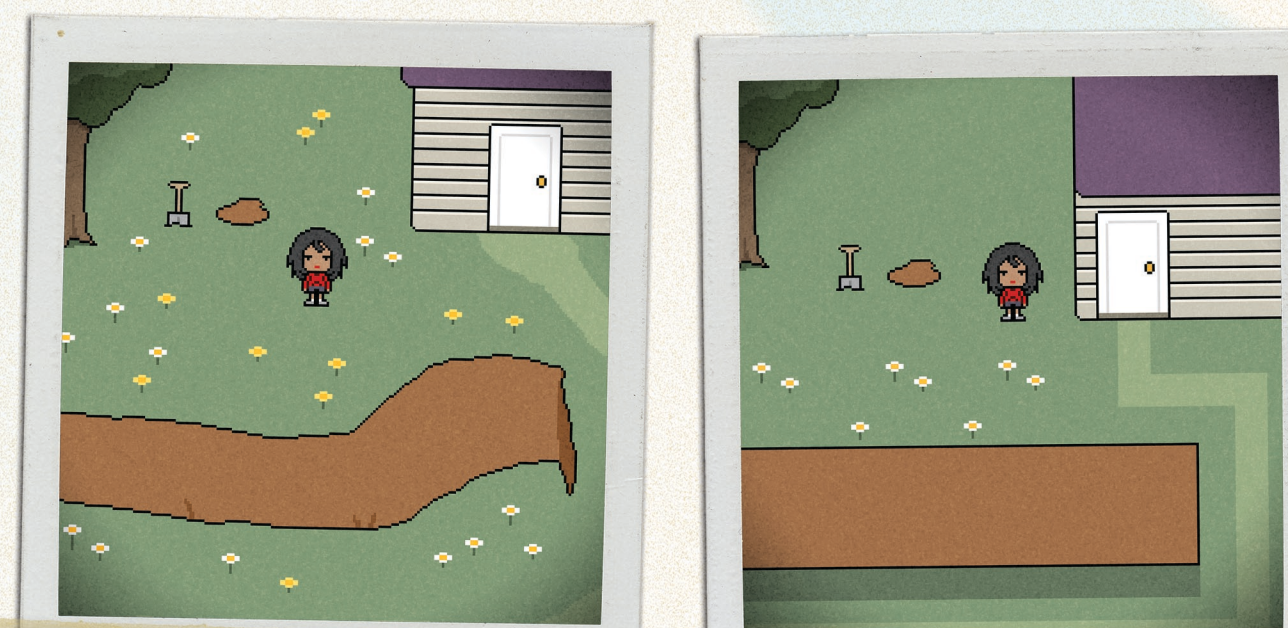


FIG. 1. PARALLAX MAPPING (LEFT) VERSUS TILE BASED MAPPING (RIGHT).

CHARACTER DRIVEN NARRATIVE

Character driven narratives focus on the individual or individuals, as opposed to plot driven narratives which focus on the action. The two narrative types are not mutually exclusive, but Film Bleu must clearly exhibit a character driven narrative. The character development will be made explicit in the narrative and dialogue.

DEVELOPMENT

Film Bleu was initially built in RPG Maker VX Ace, a Ruby-based engine for developing RPGs. The game then went through several prototypes, during which it was ported over to RPG Maker MV which runs on a JavaScript engine. The graphics were created in Piskel and Photoshop CS5. The music was outsourced. Film Bleu was developed over the course of half a year from the end of 2015 to beginning of 2016.

USER TESTING

The participants will play Film Bleu for at least 30 minutes and complete a questionnaire afterwards. The participants will not be informed of the research topic to avoid any bias. The questionnaire will ask about their computer gaming habits, preferences, familiarity with video game taxonomy, and how they would categorize Film Bleu. Five participants is sufficient for a design evaluation but more can be gathered via snowball sampling if needed.

RESULTS/CONCLUSIONS

The game is complete and user testing is currently ongoing. The user responses will draw the verdict on the game's genre and provide insight into the boundaries of the RPG genre. Once the data has been collected and analyzed, a conclusion can be drawn on computer RPG taxonomy.