Daniel Wendel
6.883
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Location-Based Game Idea

In coming up with an idea for a game, I tried to think of something that was a natural use of the technology, and that in fact could not really be played in any other way with anywhere near the same effectiveness. I'm not sure I fully succeeded in meeting my goal, but I think a game that was truly going to take off and change the way people interact with the technology would have to.

My game idea is similar to some that I have heard about, such as an "environmental detective" outdoor game or a "hide and seek" indoor game. I call it "Castle," after a very old computer game that I used to love to play (in fact I can still sing the theme song). As far as I can tell, it was the first real RPG (complete with ascii graphics!). I played it on an 8086.

The basic story behind the game is that you are captured and locked in a caste full of monsters, magical creatures, and special items, and your goal is to get out unharmed. The castle also presents certain puzzles in the form of rooms that react differently to the use of different special items.

The way I would transfer this idea to an indoor location-based game is to load the map of a building into the client, and then display a picture showing the player in the room on the map (and maybe the neighboring room as well, but nothing more.) This use of location technology is not to tell the player exactly where he or she is in the map, but rather to tell the game system where the player is so that all movement and room searching can be done physically rather than virtually.

The objects in the rooms would be real, physical objects, except that the game system would imbue them with certain special powers. For example, picking up the magic wand (perhaps a small wooden rod) would allow the player to fend off attacks from a wizard. As I said, the objects would be real, but they would also be tracked by the game system through the use of attached beacons in the form of RFID tags or Bluetooth transmitters. This way, the game system would always know how a room should react to the player or what monsters could and could not attack the player. Some items could show up as dots on the map once a player entered the room, and some could be special secrets that required a careful *physical* search, something that is impossible in virtual computer games.

Monsters would also show up as shapes on the map as they moved around, and could have real "line of sight" algorithms. If a player saw a monster coming down the hall, he could wait around the corner for it to pass by, and then carefully sneak off behind it.

The one substantial change I would make to the game from the original is to allow more than one person to play. In fact, have a large map that was mediumly multiplayer (10 players or so) would make the game work the best. Even a map the size of MIT could be used, with hundreds of players and special items! Because items would be physically carried by players, players who meet in the hall could opt to trade a few items in order to allow them to explore new areas. Less competitive, more team-oriented people could actually work together, using the combined strength of all of their items to survive challenging situations.

Another technology that would make this even cooler is if the player's map devices (PDAs, probably) could play sounds, for example the snarling of a monster in the next room or the "beep beep" of a metal detector special item as the device got closer to a stash of gold coins. One step beyond this is to actually modify the building in which the game takes place, adding speakers and lights that are controlled by the game system so that monster rooms growl and secret passageways only light up when a player is carrying a torch object.