

CMS.922/CMS.610 Media Industries and Systems, Spring 2006  
Prof. Christopher Weaver  
**Lecture 5: Voting for the Class Projects**

Today the class votes on the game concepts and the top 3 or 4 projects will become the class projects. The students posted their game concepts on the class website this past week so that all the students could read about each others' concepts. Voting will be done by secret ballot. The professor goes through the game concepts briefly so that everyone is well briefed on all the concepts. The students were required to view the concepts prior to class and this exercise merely served as a refresher.

Geoff "Goldworld"

Chris "Avatar: The Elven Wars."

Doris "Kafka Revisited"

Not many students had read the book, "Kafka" and the main character was a distant memory.

Gabe "War"

Alec "Atonement"

Daniel "Unearth"

Soloman "Surreal World"

David "Starfighters"

Dante "Exalted: Prince of the Earth"

Ash "Dreamwalkers"

Rob "An Epic Journey"

Dana "Sevtown"

Albert "Kanpai"

Jimmy "EZha vs. King Dragon"

Jon "Odyssey"

Kapil "Epoch"

The vote was taken and the four winning concepts are Goldworld, Dreamwalkers, Starfighters, and Kafka. Team leaders are those who submitted the idea and they chose their team members from their classmates. Once the groups are relatively set, the professor asks all the students about their strengths. Three are reasonable balanced but one of the groups has skill sets that are heavily slanted towards story alone.

A problem arises because Team Goldworld has 4 people plus an auditor; Starfighters and Kafka have 3 team members plus a shared member between the two teams. Technically Starfighters and Kafka only have 3 real team members. The only solution at this point seems to be to cut one of the four teams.

The reason the professor has taken the time to talk about the composition of the teams is because of teambuilding and fairness. Teambuilding is a process to assemble a well-balanced team, and fairness is important because at the end of the course all students will be submitting their concepts to the same judges.

### **Level Design**

Level design is basically about pacing. Varying the pace is important because games that start out really high or “angry” have no place to go. Pacing is very important. You can’t run someone on adrenaline at 150% for the entire game. They will die along the way or their concentration will break and they will fail. It’s for this same reason that you can’t sprint an entire marathon.

What is the most prevalent user for whom you’re designing? The “perennial intermediate” (casual games are the exception). In an ideal world, the intermediate group will only get to 5 levels of a 30 level game. This group has no intention of finishing the game. This is an important concept to the students because they can’t get caught up in the entire 350 page back-story of their game. In the pitch, students should show a few of the levels and their best ideas. The game needs to vary in terms of excitement and difficulty. When you create puzzles that are unfair, people won’t like you. People don’t like capricious or arbitrary game design and very few people take the time to compliment a game. If you’re not careful, your game will be in the midst of a flame war of criticism on the internet.

### **Know when to stop**

Leave your presentation at a high point. If your presentation is tight, sweet, and exciting, get out of your own way. The goal is to win the prize and get your “funding”.

Remember what your goal is and work toward it. If you want to go out separately and sell it to the third party, you can do all that beyond the pitch but remember that all of that is ancillary to your goal for this class.

### **What’s next for the team leaders?**

Team leaders need to meet and establish who will do what, when they’ll do it, how they’ll do it, etc. If the programmers don’t have anything to do in the beginning because they’re waiting on a storyline, they ought to provide a reasonable cross check to keep the group honest and attuned to reality in terms of time constraints.

One method of laying out a game is called agile development. There is also the Cabal style—propagated by the people at Half Life which is a limited free for all. In cabal style, everyone throws in their ideas, they get argued, and when the arguing is exhausted, the remaining game design points are done. Sometimes it works, most times it doesn't. The Professor thinks that you need really unique people for this method to work. The professor's preferred method is the modified waterfall. Its effectiveness stems from its iterative nature.

Team leaders will meet with their team members and establish which method to use and also establish a schedule in accordance with the milestones. Leaders are responsible for holding to these milestones and they will meet with the professor concerning their team's progress. Leaders will write weekly reports for the professor as to where they are, and where they think their team members are. The individual team members will also write weekly reports as to where they think they are. It's an interesting exercise and tells the professor a lot about how the teams are doing. The project is 40% of the grade and students will need to do the requisite work for the projects if they want to do well.