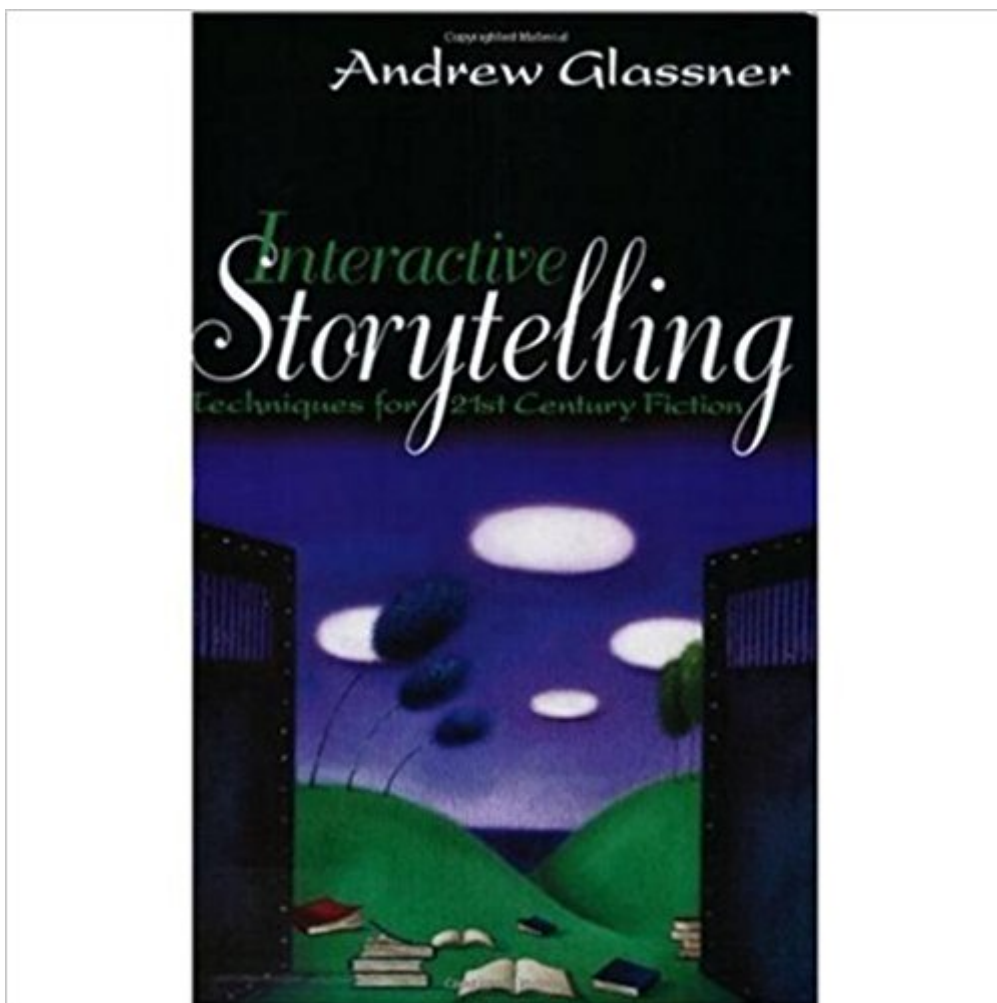The book was found

Interactive Storytelling: Techniques For 21st Century Fiction

Synopsis

We are on the verge of creating an exciting new kind of interactive story form that will involve audiences as active participants. This book provides a solid foundation in the fundamentals of classical story structure and classical game structure and explains why it has been surprisingly difficult to bring these two activities together. With this foundation in place, the book presents several ideas for ways to move forward in this appealing quest. The author has a conversational and friendly style, making reading a pleasure.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"First, this is a book that everybody who wants to make compelling games should read..."
-Slashdot.org, October 2004

Andrew Glassner is a writer-director, and a consultant in story structure, interactive fiction, and computer graphics. He has carried out research in 3D computer graphics at the NYIT Computer Graphics Lab, the IBM TJ Watson Research Lab, the Delft University of Technology, Bell Communications Research, Xerox PARC, and Microsoft Research. His research work has resulted in a half-dozen patents. He is currently developing a feature film for Coyote Wind Studios. The New York Times wrote, "Andrew Glassner [is one] of the most respected talents in the world of computer graphics research."

This book is a great introduction into understanding what goes into writing for mediums other than books. Although the focus is on video game stories, there is enough in there about other forms of media for it to be worth reading for a person not necessarily that interested in videogames.

The first part of the book is a decent introduction to both storytelling and games, at least for novices. If you know nothing at all about stories, his discussion of the three-act structure, Hero's Journey, etc. are useful primers. The same is true of his remarks on the basics of game design: challenges, competition modes, scoring systems, and so on.Unfortunately, Glassner runs off the rails when he starts to talk about combining gameplay with storytelling. He frequently makes theoretical arguments founded in preconceptions from traditional storytelling media, while ignoring the practical experience obtained by professional game designers over the last forty years. His chief argument against branching storylines, for example, is that they haven't caught on in mainstream media such as books, television, and movies. At the same time he acknowledges that branching storylines are one of the most popular ways of doing interactive storytelling on computers. The fact that flipping through book pages and rewinding the VCR is awkward, while a computer can deliver a branching storyline seamlessly, does not seem to have occurred to him.Worst of all, his perspective seems to be based more upon what he WANTS players to want rather than upon what they actually DO want. He proposes what he calls the "Story Contract," in which the author is granted exclusive control over both the psychology of the main characters and the plot sequence. Having done so, he treats this contract as axiomatic for the rest of the book -- but a good many game designers and players would strenuously object to both provisions.In addition, the book contains a great many irrelevant digressions into territory with which the author is clearly unfamiliar. He categorically condemns settable game difficulty modes (easy, medium, hard, nightmare, etc.) and airily proposes that all games should include dynamic difficulty adjustment. However, he doesn't address the points that dynamic difficulty adjustment is hard to do well, not necessarily suited to all game genres, and above all, that some players LIKE to choose a difficulty level at the beginning of the game. And what this has to do with interactive storytelling, I cannot imagine.In short, I second Jonathan Lev's conclusions, though perhaps not in such vitriolic terms. The first two hundred pages are good basic material for first-year undergraduates. The rest isn't much use to anyone who actually wants to build interactive storytelling experiences.

I don't know who is writing all these five-star reviews, but I suspect they are by friends of the author. My advice is to listen to the two and one star reviews.There is little in this 'book' of real value. Many

chapters are given over to simple ranting about how bad particular concepts are, without offering any kind of insight or solution.But the worst sins are the contradictory arguments. In one chapter he decries the use of branching narrative as completely broken and useless, that narratives are not meant to branch - and in the very next chapter he complains about the limited number of choices characters are given in the games he's played!This is without doubt the shoddiest, most badly-researched book I've ever read. I physically tossed it away, and when I came here to read others reviews, I was unsurprised to hear someone else had thrown the thing across the room too. Believe me, this work demands action.Let literary darwinism take it's course, and steer well clear.

Lots of people have been thinking recently about the holy grail of computer games, that is the melding of good quality stories with fun computer games. On the surface, this seems like it should be easy, get some good writers together with some game programmers and voila, great things should result. This excellent book shows why things are not nearly as simple as they might appear to be.The book first starts out with a basic summary of story structure peppered with examples from common movies and familiar literature. While this is a review for many, it serves as an easy read for the game programming side of the audience. It also helps establish a language so that everything can be discussed in a common way.The next section discusses all games, not just computer games and looks at some of the elements that makes these games engaging and entertaining. Also a review for many, but helpful for the author side of the audience.Finally, the really important section of the book looks at why these areas come into conflict. One fairly basic idea, which is that authors advance a story through conflict in the characters and that if a person has control of a character, they might justifiably choose to avoid conflict puts the author and the gameplayer at odds with each other. Another example shows why the commonly held notion of branching narrative structure has yet to yield a compelling experience.While many of these ideas seem obvious, it's clear that they are NOT obvious to many of the game designers out there who over and over again fall into the same traps that are described clearly in this book. The great part of this book is that it pulls together these ideas in one place, with a common language for discussion all in a clear, conversational style. While the book doesn't offer a silver bullet solution to the merging of narrative and interaction, it does show clearly where first, naive assumptions can lead to supposed solutions that simply don't work.This book is for anyone who's interested in the principles of game design from a high level, and not just pushing bits to make the next, best looking, video game. It belongs on the bookshelf along with other great explorations in the field including Chris Crawford's The art of Interactive Design.

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