




STORY TELLING IN MMORPGs

I'M A SPECIAL SNOWFLAKE, JUST LIKE YOU!

TIMOTHY CAIN

HERES THE MEAT





YOU SHALL
NEVER POSSESS THE
PUMPKIN OF FARMER
WILKINS!

ZONE STORIES



EPIC WORLD STORY



STARTING STORY TOO

SINGLE PLAYER RPG's

- SRPG's have been doing this for 30 years or more
- I know, I am biased - it's what I have done



WHO AM I?

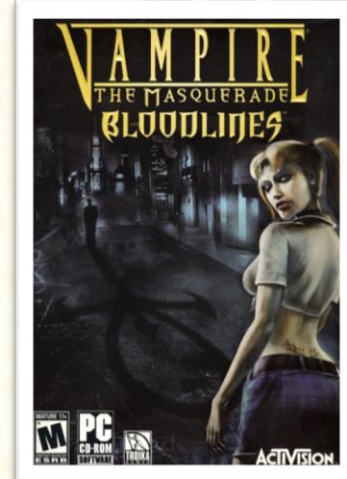
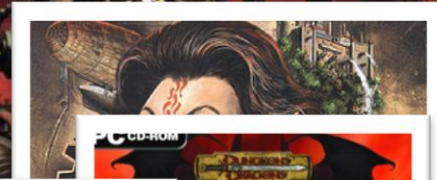
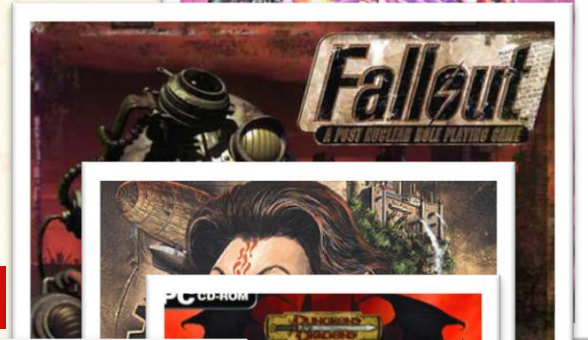
My history in the games industry:

- Design Director at Carbine Studios (2008+)
- Programming Director at CS (2005-2008)
- Lead Programmer/Designer at Troika Games (1998-2005)
- Lead Programmer/Producer at Interplay Productions (1991-1998)
- Programmer at Cybron Games (1981-1986)

MY PAST GAMES

- Bard's Tale Construction Set
- Fallout
- Arcanum
- Temple of Elemental Evil
- Vampire Bloodlines

All single player RPGs...



SINGLE PLAYER RPGS

- World revolves around player
- Player actions change everything
- Either
 - Linear, or
 - Non-linear and adjusts to player's level
- Game ends!

*All of these make the player
seem special!*



THE MMO CONUNDRUM

How do we tell a zone-spanning linear narrative when players...

- are one of thousands of players?
- can skip zones?
- out-level local content?
- have friends at different levels?
- hate forced content?
- cannot differentiate between world story and zone story?
- will never stop playing?



FAILED APPROACHES

- Lore bombs
- Movies
- Linear
- Instanced
- Lots of short stories
- Sandbox

OUR SOLUTION

- Put big world spanning story at the end because:
 - Player knows all of the characters
 - Player knows all of the locations
 - Player is powerful



START AT THE BEGINNING WITH A STORY

- Small so people understand it
- Acts as a tutorial
- Personalized so people care
- Selected by the player (as a background)

MID LEVEL

- Leveling up
- Learning abilities
- Getting items
- Crafting
- Completing quests
- Earning achievements
- Making friends (guilds, dungeon parties, etc)

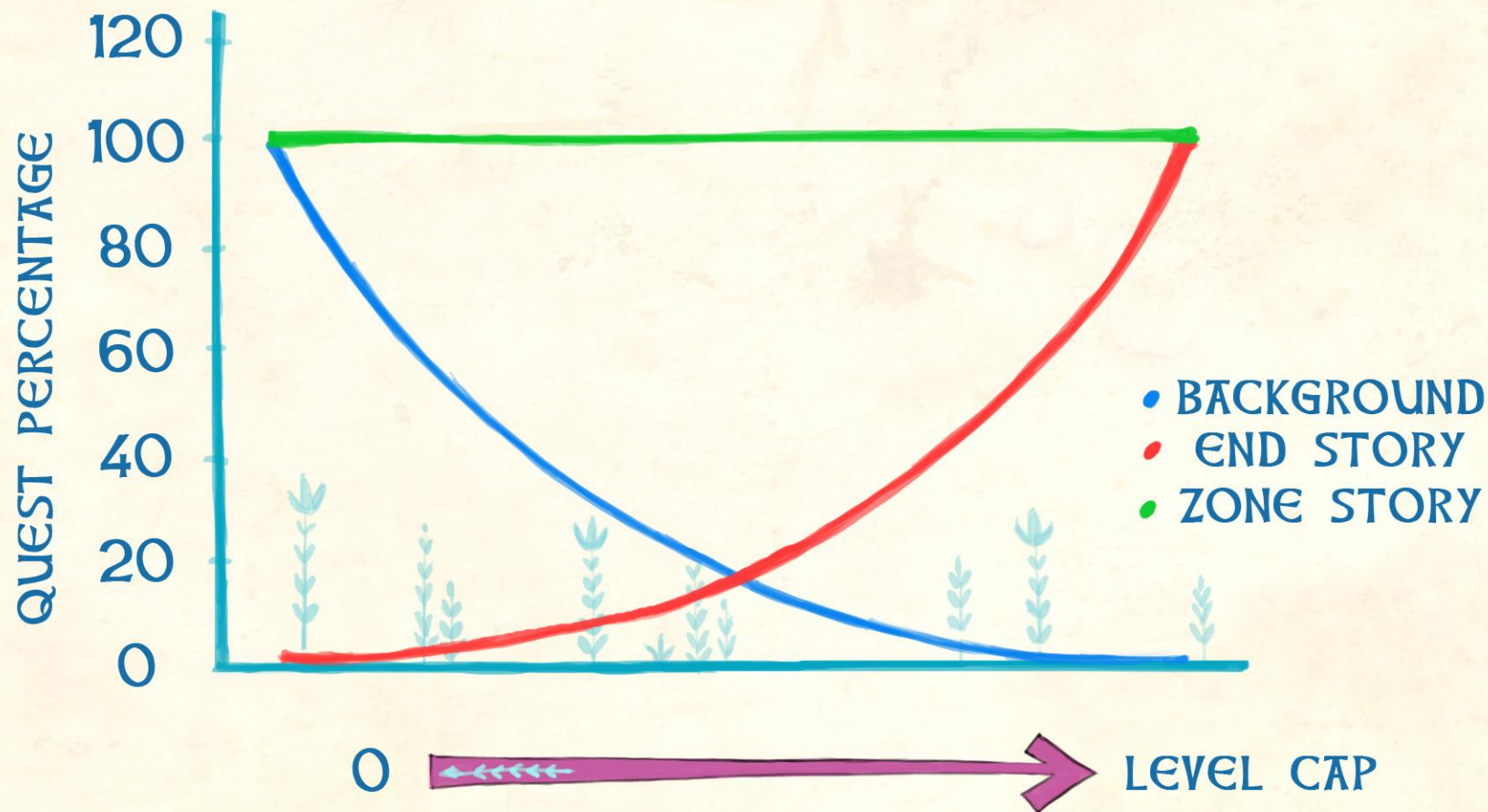
WE STILL HAVE STORIES!

- Meeting NPC's
- Finding locations
- Learning about factions
- Hearing lore
- ...zone stories!

GREETINGS
BACKWOOD NPC. WHAT'S
THE LEAST AMOUNT OF
FACTION I NEED WITH YOU
TO PURCHASE THOSE
SILK GLOVES?



QUEST DISTRIBUTION





END GAME

- Leveling has stopped
- Stage is set
- The real story can begin



WORLD STORY

- Spans the whole game world
- Involves many already-met NPC's
- Has a big finish (40 hour story)
- It really does end. But don't worry. We have lots of other things for the player to do.

ADVANTAGE of END GAME STORY

- Players are all the same power level
- Designers can assume players:
 - understand their class role
 - have met powerful NPCs
 - have traveled to most zones
 - know the world setting
 - own a flying mount
 - are powerful!



WORLD STORY EXAMPLES

Let's look at how world story can be
woven into existing zones

EXAMPLE 1

- Boss in keep on a mountaintop
- Not instanced but hard to get to
- Landing area swarming with tough critters



EXAMPLE 2

- Level 60 instance in the middle of a level 20 zone
- Locked – key provided during world story



EXAMPLE 3

- Level 60 boss in a level 60 zone
- Elite
- Lieutenants
- Warned by locals that you need a special device to kill her...that you get in the world story



BEING A SPECIAL SNOWFLAKE

- Soloable
- Consequences
- Newspaper
- Instance access
- NPC reactions



REWARDING THE MAX LEVEL PLAYER

- Story
- Items
- Money
- Recipes
- Fame

AFTER WORLD STORY ENDS

- PvP
- Crafting
- Dailies
- Housing
- Item set completion
- Raiding

EXPANSION

- World story has loose ends
- NPC's got away
- New locations hinted at
- Consequences to player's actions, e.g. angry factions



THANK YOU
ANY QUESTIONS?