Case History Prospectus:
The Secret of Monkey Island and *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge*

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Significance of This Topic

LucasArts ruled the adventure game market in the early 1990's. Titles such as *The Secret of Monkey Island* and *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge* defined the genre with their simple point-and-click interface and humorous engrossing game world, setting the standard for countless games to follow. The success of these two games owe much to the innovation and imagination fostered by the unique design process at LucasArts and its business strategies; however, its recent sequels, *The Curse of Monkey Island* and *The Escape from Monkey Island*, did not reach the classic status of their previous installments. In addition, many similar games that imitated the first two games of the series couldn't match their success either. Several factors have contributed to the success of the first two installments: groundbreaking interface, the state of the industry at the time, highly polished look and feel, and great humor. In the case study, I plan to describe the reasons that made the first two games set apart from the rest.

Background Information

In the early years, adventure games were text only. Using text for input and output, the player could look at objects to get their description, take objects and use them, and solve puzzles. Infocom produced many popular hits, such as the *Zork* series. In the mid 1980's, a young Californian couple, Ken and Roberta Williams, founded Sierra-On-Line and produced graphical adventure games that allowed the player to move his character in a virtual graphic world. Graphical adventure games such as *King's Quest* and *Space Quest* were revolutionary, but they still used a text parser input system as the interface. Shortly after, LucasArts released games that used SCUMM, Script Creation Utility for Maniac Mansion, in which the player used the mouse to interact with objects and characters.

LucasArts Entertainment Company was established year 1982. In 1987, LucasArts released *Maniac Mansion*, featuring a point-and-click graphical user interface using the SCUMM-engine, which became the foundation of many adventure games from LucasArts. *The Curse of Monkey Island* was first released in 1990 for DOS in the U.S. and later ported to Mac and Atari. *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge* was released in 1992.

In *The Secret of Monkey Island*, you control the hero Guybrush Threepwood, who must go through three trials in his quest to become a pirate. The game takes place in the Caribbean, where there's a shortage of pirates due to a ghost pirate roaming about the sea. In the quest, Guybrush finds himself in trouble with Ghost Pirate LeChuck, who felt in love with Elaine Marley, the Governor of the Melee Island.

In *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge*, Guybrush arrives at Scabb Island to find the greatest treasure of all time, the legendary Big Whoop. He must sail across three islands to get all parts of the map to the Big Whoop, and he must face more obstacles when LeChuck is resurrected. This sequel is similar to the first game, although it boasts some technological improvements.

Ron Gilbert was the designer behind the first two Monkey Island games. He is responsible for the original concept, design, writing, and the SCUMM engine. Tim Schafer and Dave Grossman are also responsible for programming and writing as well.

Outline

• Introduction: In this section, I will briefly describe the games and their impact on the adventure games to come. The sense of immersion is significantly heightened by the use of the mouse interface and the well-polished story line and humor. These factors, along with the state of the industry at the time, helped the first two installments of the series achieve their classic status.

• Background information: I plan to divide this section into three parts: the state of the adventure game industry in the early 1990's, brief explanations of how the first two installments of the Monkey Island series distinguished themselves from the rest, and the designers who were involved (Ron Gilbert, Dave Grossman, and Tim Schafer).

• Storyline and game-play: In this section, I plan to give a synopsis of the two games and explain how the game-play was different from the other adventure games, such as *King's Quest* and *Zork*, released during that time.

• Technology: The games' innovative technology contributed significantly to their success. I plan to divide this section into two: the SCUMM engine and the revolutionary point-and-click interface. The SCUMM engine, used by all LucasArts' adventure games, allowed the developers to easily create the content, and made resource management much easier. I will then compare this system to some of the content creation utilities for other games. The point-and-click interface was revolutionary at the time. In an interview with Ron Gilbert, he says, "I wanted Maniac Mansion to do something that involved a complete connection between the player and the game." To interact, the player would use the verbs on the screen with the object, unlike the keyboard input method of the adventure games at the time. In Infocom titles, like *Zork*, the player sometimes struggles with its verb/noun parser, trying to figure out what the designer meant. Ron Gilbert referred to all these text adventures "second-guess the parser" games in an interview. The technology behind the series significantly contributed to the connection between the player and the game.

• Evaluate game design: In addition to the innovative technology that allowed more immersive game environment, the first installments of the series seamlessly integrated creative storyline, humor, and romance. The story creates an immersive mood of strangely twisted and anachronistic 18th century Caribbean. The dialogue is witty, and jokes are full of references to the pop-culture at the time. In addition, Ron Gilbert added other elements in adventure game design, such as never letting the player get killed. He is also responsible for inventing cutscenes, the noninteractive animations that are used to propel the story forward. In an interview with Ron Gilbert, he reveals his method for designing his games and puzzles. Once he had an idea and an outline of the objectives, he

would try to make the story non-linear. Also, Ron Gilbert wanted Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's revenge to be more challenging and to reach further into the mass market, and he does so by providing an easy mode. These games set the standard regarding story telling and interactivity.

• Its impact on adventure games (technological, cultural factors): In this section, I plan to describe the games' technological and cultural impact on the adventure games that followed. I will also describe the subsequent Monkey Island games (The Curse of Monkey Island and The Escape from Monkey Island) that were released many years later and describe various factors that made these games less successful than the first two installments of the series.

• Future:
No particular style or company has dominated the adventure game market since, and the genre itself is slowly disappearing as more action-orientated games gain popularity. In interviews, game designers from LucasArts give insights as to why that is the case. Based on these interviews and looking at the current games in the market, I plan to make projections on the direction that the industry is headed.

Preliminary Bibliography

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