

Description:

Baldur's Gate is a 3D RPG 'Dungeon's and Dragons' type game set in the past of 'The Forgotten Realm', where the powerful rule. This deconstruction will concentrate on the original PC version, 1998. The virtual space consist of the protagonist (the Character you create) and if the player chooses, up to five other characters to combat the forces of darkness using all sorts of abilities, weapons, armor and spells/magic at their disposal. Each character has their own unique quest/goal to achieve, although it is not necessary to achieve them to complete the game, only the main characters. The player must combat all sorts of mythical monsters, creatures, and human NPC's (non-player characters), to complete the six chapters that revile the main characters past. The fights happen in a medieval environment, from temples, wilderness, inns, mines, ruins, anywhere on the virtual space. The game is over only if the main character is killed, therefore anyone in your 'party' can be slain with little consequence, where they are able to be resurrected. Although in order to complete the game it is necessary to complete each chapter where the player is given new objectives, but the virtual space allows the player to go at their own pace, and explore the world as much as they want, even the sections not involved with the compulsory sectors. *"More than just Hack and Slash: As important as fighting is to the AD&D (advanced dungeon's and dragons) game, it isn't the be-all and end-all of play. It's just one way for characters to deal with situations. If characters could do nothing but fight, the game would quickly get boring – every encounter would be the same."*¹ The Multiplayer option is similar to the single player, but with other players controlling the other party members.

Hardware:

The minimum requirements for Baldur's Gate are:

Processor	-	IBM compatible PC Pentium 166 MHz
Windows 95	-	With DirectX 5.0 or better
Ram	-	16MB
Hard Drive	-	300MB space
CD-Rom drive-	-	4X or faster
Video Card	-	2MB SVGA
Keyboard	-	
Mouse	-	Microsoft compatible

Although there are recommended requirements for the game to allow smoother game play:

Ram	-	32MB
Hard Drive	-	600MB space
CD-Rom	-	8X or faster
Video Card	-	4MB SVGA

This game does not run in DOS, therefore windows is a necessity. All 5 discs are needed in order to complete the entire game. For a modern computer these requirements are very poor, costing no more than \$500 including a monitor, speakers and the game.

Functionality:

Baldur's Gate has a textonic dynamic, as the protagonist advances in his story new characters are reviled, each with different abilities, skills, story and appearance. Each time it is played although the story is the same there are countless ways of achieving the goals and the possibility of changing the 'party' to the players advantage suiting the situations. Also new inventory items are introduced as the player progresses, weapons, armor, scrolls.

The AI of the game is very predictable, as character spawns are too. There is the possibility of the game being played exactly the same over and over because the abilities of enemies never change nor does the order in which they attack or who they attack. The only unpredictable aspect of the game is the 'Dungeons and Dragons' dice, where a random dice of 1-20 is rolled during every attack, a certain criteria determines what number needs to be reached to make the attack successful.

Baldur's Gate uses as combination of transient and intransient play. Combat "In Baldur's Gate, to allow for the real-time based combat and movement, each character and monster is on an independent personal initiative round." ¹, it relies on rounds, where the number of attacks or casting time is based on it. Where the passing of time does affect day/night, and what enemies will spawn, and certain events will trigger after days of the virtual space. This is the transient aspect. But nothing will happen if the character does nothing, there needs to be a certain trigger in order for some of these events to take place, such as a certain objective needs to be reached or a certain amount of time needs to pass.

The perspective is very personal, as the player is meant to be the character they create, mainly all dialogue is directed at the main character even if initiated by another. The cut-scenes are always directed at the main character, their dreams, their experiences, although mostly in a third person.

The access to text and story is controlled by the computer environment. 'Fog-of-war' affects visibility of what the player can see, giving another sense of controlled access.

Baldur's Gate uses conditional links to allow the player to reach goals through many objectives, and also in order to reach a certain place of the game some quests need to be complete.

The user function of Baldur's Gate involves, a bit of textonic, some configurative, and plenty of explorative. The textonic that can be added into the game is only artwork for character portrait and though cheats inventory items can also be added, which by normal play may not be receive. Configurative function involves the creation of the main character where the player determines their gender, appearance, class, race, ability scores, alignments, proficiencies and name. There are some in-game configurative functions which involve giving 'party' members scripts to follow when in combat, in order to help the player not setting targets every time combat is initiated. The entire game is based on the player's free will to explore the virtual world that is created, and thus the explorative

function is most used. There are certain restrictions, but they are mainly there to prevent unprepared players from getting slaughtered by the perils of an adventurer's life.

Game play

The player's position in Baldur's Gate is that they control the main character and up to five of his/her companions, where the player controls every aspect, from dialogue to combat formation. The player controls all this from an eagle eye view. Only cut scenes relinquish the player's control of the characters. The computer is in control of all judge aspects, AD&D rules.

The resources that available to the player during the game vary greatly. The biggest is the player's strategic ability to survive, where they are given endless opportunities to play the situation their way. The influences that the player controls are also inventory items that their characters posses, weapons is the primary source of damage to opponents, as is offensive magic spells. The armor useable by characters influences their ability to survive greatly as well. By gaining experience though combat characters can level, gaining bonus abilities, proficiency's, spells, health. Each character has a certain class, which determines what ability's they posses, also the type of armor that can be worn, and the type of weapons that can be used, each killing enemies in different methods.

As mentioned before virtual space for Baldur's Gate is the vast GUI (graphic user interface) environment that is known as 'The Forgotten Realm', a medieval time of magic. The playground involves the PC itself (monitor, keyboard, mouse), the player sitting in front of the screen.

There is no time limit in Baldur's Gate, but time does effect the events of the world. "*Timekeeping in Baldur's Gate: A GAME ROUND in Baldur's Gate is six seconds long in real time. The round in the AD&D game is sixty seconds, hence time in Baldur's Gate is compressed about ten-fold when compared to the standard AD&D rule set. A TURN is ten rounds, that is, sixty seconds.'.. 'A game DAY is just over 2 hours long in real time, again about ten-fold reduction in time in the game.'*"¹

The Goals are set at the start of each chapter, although they are not fully defined, they require the player to complete the objectives that are to follow the story line leading into the next chapter. Again, not all 'quests' that are given are necessary to complete the game, these all come into Sub-goals. They are beneficial for the player to complete, offering a magic item, gold or experience as the rewards.

Plenty of obstacles stand in the way of the player in achieving their goal, like earlier mentioned, mythical monsters, deadly creatures, and human NPC's engage in frequent combat with the player's characters, using similar or even more advanced abilities as their own. Even traps are placed in some situations to assassinate the unprepared character. Health is the judge for life and death, as long as the character has 1 health point or more, they will stay alive, although dead characters can be resurrected if certain requirements are met (except main character). There are also different difficulty levels, making NPC's stronger or weaker.

The game manual which comes with the game has everything necessary to gain a full understanding of the games concepts which is open knowledge. Combat and interaction with NPC's is random knowledge, according to the AD&D rules. Hidden

knowledge is the placement of items through out the game world, also the various strategies that may be used.

By doing quests in Baldur's Gate the player is reward, either by an item, money, experience, or ever reputation (affecting interaction with NPC's, different characters and store prices). Penalties are given for killing good NPC's, stealing, or choosing rude dialogue with some NPC's. The penalties involve calling guards in towns which attack the characters if the player does not comply with their requests, getting everyone in the game against the characters, or even loosing reputation eventually leading to negative interaction with all if loose too much. The penalties also include death, where the player must replace their dead, resurrect or load the game.

Meaning

The meaning for this game is different depending of the player. Some may only enjoy the endless battles, and choose for their goal to be to destroy the world, making it possible with the concept of levels making them more powerful, trying to achieve the ultimate character. A player may play the game for its concept of evil verse good, this game offering much of that, where the main character is immersed in evilness but must prevail to save humanity. Or a player could play it for the narrative, it tells a story of a hero, which at the end finds out is a child of Bhaal – the god of murder. Players can easily be immersed in the story line of, it really makes them feel part of it.

Referentiality

There is plenty of referentiality within Baldur's Gate, being based on the 'Dungeons and Dragons' rules, which originally was a board game involving a person as the judge which read story from a book, which is now been replaced with the computer. The board game used dice to determine battles, as does the PC game. This game is an akin to plenty of games in the following years, including the Baldur's Gate series, Never Winter Nights series, and Oblivion series. Baldur's gate uses three styles of game, Agon is the strategic aspect, Alea using the AD&D aspect, and Mimicry for the role play aspect.

Socio-Culture

The game is designed for adolescence and people with plenty of time who enjoy role play, mainly males between 15-25. The classification enforces its audience (M – Mature 15+). The game's greatest achievement is its ability to allow the player to freely explore and interact with this medieval world. Allowing player's hours of game play with new content around every corner, it was such a hit that there have been stacks of games to follow its ideals. This game is mainly a single player game, although with little Multiplayer options to play online to share control of characters. With online it is vital for teamwork, because the player will not always have full control of his party, they are to communicate with their allies to ensure their survival.

Conclusion

By analyzing the game through Konzack's^[2] method it only gives the reader a brief grasp of the overall game. It has done Baldur's Gate no justice in analyzing it because it does not give me the opportunity to express the great times I had playing the game, and the hours spent trying to make my character ever so powerful. It is possible to

play without reading anything of the manual, a learn as you go approach. But in order to understand the physics of the game it is necessary to read the game manual, to understand the AD&D combat, giving the player hints on how to better their survival. This game is very difficult, and does require many reloads of situations. Konzack's method gave me the opportunity to better understand the game as a software, not only a game to waste time with.

Word count: 2, 135

Reference:

1. *Forgotten Realms – Baldur's Gate: Game Manual*
2. Konzack, L Computer Game Criticism: A Method for Computer Game Analysis. 2002 www.vrmedialab.dk/~konzack/tampere2002.pdf