

Glossary of game-specific terms

Artificial Intelligence (AI) In terms of games, these are the coded routines that attempt to provide the illusion that the ‘inhabitants’ of the game landscape have an independent intelligence that is both unpredictable and conforms to a logic of context. A ‘good’ artificial intelligence routine does not just do the unexpected, but the player of the game should be able to recognise ‘why’. It is related to artificial intelligence within computer science research, but its aim in the computer game is the satisfying *illusion* of the presence of another independent intelligence. Opposing AI that sufficiently emulates human intelligence to the point where it can consistently defeat a player would be unlikely to appeal to the players of computer games.

Bug A mistake made in the coding of a computer game that results in a breakdown of in-game logic. Can be used to refer to errors that allow the player of a game to acquire ‘unfair’ advantage not intended by the game’s designers. Can be frustrating, as the game fails to behave as expected, but can also allow the authorial constraints of the game’s designers to be subverted. Useful bugs are often posted to Internet sites, while those that are simply programming errors are often fixed by ‘patches’ that must be loaded over the top of the original game.

Cheat Not as damning a term as might at first seem, at least within the context of the computer game. Cheats are often left in a game’s structure as a legacy of testing by the game’s designers, and as an aid for reviewers who would not want to play a game through in conventional fashion. Frequently published to the Internet or in hobby magazines before the game is even available for retail sale, cheats can range in effect from changing any of the variables in a game, from the number and type of weapons available, to the degree of independent action taken by characters controlled by the computer AI.

Deformability The possibility that one might effect the in-game environment in more ways than are purely necessary to progress through the game. Often considered to have a close relationship with the possibility of immersion, and usually used to describe the extent to which it is possible to damage or destroy areas of in-game landscape.

Easter Egg So called with reference to the eggs hidden away by adults for children to find at Easter, these are related to secrets, but are necessarily deliberately hidden in the game landscape as rewards for proficiency of playing or reading. Does not always relate to a physical object to be found, but can be any deliberately concealed event, space or object.

Full-Motion Video (FMV) An animated sequence, usually used to explain plot progression, during which the player moves from playing the game to watching the events unfolding on screen.

Immersion The conceit that the player is 'in' the action. Most often referred to in the context of first-person games where the initial conceit is that what the protagonist sees is what the player sees on screen.

Isometric A variation of a top-down view of the in-game landscape that presents some illusion of depth by allowing a view of three sides of objects. Such a view can often be rotated through the four major compass points.

Level A term that has multiple usages in the context of the computer game, which indicates just how structured a form it can be. It might refer to the succession of individual confrontations that make up the body of the game, as in early arcade video games where one moved from level to level (or screen to screen) of increasing difficulty. It is more likely to be a reference to a large and distinct area that is geographically closed ('Venice' in *Tomb Raider II*, for example) or the equivalent to the 'floor' of a building. Depending on the game, increase or decrease in level indicates increasing difficulty of play. It can also refer to the progression of skills of a protagonist or other character, particularly within roleplaying games.

Point and Click A method of interacting with the game that depends

on moving a cursor over an object and then clicking a mouse button to activate information or response.

Real-time The need for a continuing sequence of responses if the game is to take account of the presence of the player. A game running in real-time does not wait for player input in the manner of a traditional turn-based boardgame.

Secret A difficult to access area or item that it is not essential to locate to further the progression of the game.

Tech-tree A method of emulating technological advance within computer games, often by devoting resources to 'research' activity. Earlier advances (acquiring building technology, for example) open up further possible advances (such as sequentially more complex structures). Diagrammatically expressed, a technology-tree would resemble a family tree. The reliance on tech-trees in real-time strategy (RTS) and management sims reflect the frequency of use of progressive models of understanding for the basic underlying structures of computer games.

Top-down A point of view that places the player at a fixed position as if gazing down on the landscape from above.

Walkthrough A description in prose of the various actions a player must take in order to complete a level or a game. Often mechanistic (and lacking in any description of Easter Eggs or Secrets), they normally provide no more than instructions on how to progress further in plot terms.