

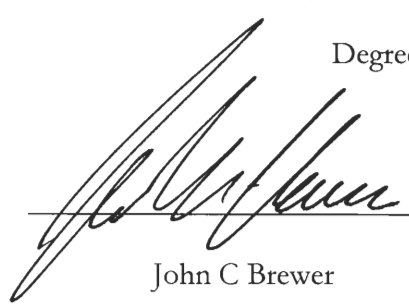
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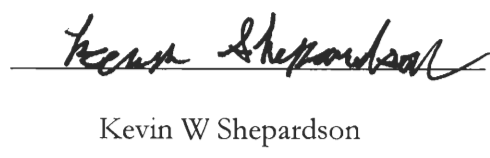
STORYTELLING IN COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT

An Interactive Qualifying Project submitted to the Faculty of the

WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Science by

  
John C Brewer

  
Kevin W Shepardson

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Approved by   
John M Wilkes

Worcester Polytechnic Institute

Abstract

STORYTELLING IN COMPUTER  
ENTERTAINMENT

by John C Brewer and Kevin W Shepardson

Project Advisor:

Professor John M. Wilkes  
Department of Social Sciences

The purpose of our project was to experimentally determine the extent to which storytelling affected player commitment to a particular computer entertainment application. We gathered our data using a custom built application for monitoring player activity. We analyzed our data based on amount of plot in the version the player played and on their MBTI personality types. We concluded that the level of plot does make a difference on people's playing habits.

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## *Chapter 1*

### INTRODUCTION

The computer entertainment industry has been steadily growing for over 20 years. Since the initial creation of simple arcade games, the novelty and entertainment value of computer and video games has intrigued people old and young. The market has grown from a field populated mainly by hobbyist and amateurs to a fixture of life in the United States and elsewhere. In the summer of 2002, while the economy was sliding into recession, video game sales soared 20%<sup>1</sup>, showing that computer entertainment had reached the mainstream, and would be a major financial consideration for technology companies in the future.

#### A Historical Perspective

Originally, many video games had no story whatsoever. Certainly, no explanation was required for Pong(1972)<sup>2</sup>, one of the earliest forms of interactive video entertainment. Since the 1960's, technology has made great leaps and bounds. Pong gave way to more complex games, such as Asteroids and Missile Command(1983), each of which was based on a simple story told before the game was launched, and not elaborated on as the story progressed. During this period of video game history, players largely played in video arcades. The competition and incentive to keep playing was to reach the top of the machine's high score list, which encouraged players to compete with each other.

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<sup>1</sup> MSNBC.COM, "Video game industry booming", August 13 2002,  
<http://www.msnbc.com/news/793421.asp>

<sup>2</sup> Gamespot.com, "The History of Video Games",  
<http://gamespot.com/gamespot/features/video/hov/index.html>

Later, developers wrote games that progressed the story as the player played the game. Often this progression would take the form of written text at the completion of a phase of play. Often action games like Wolfenstein 3D (id Software, 1989), Doom(id Software, 1993), or Super Mario Bros. (Nintendo, 1986) utilize this form of storytelling.

In time, developers began to write games that revolved around their story instead of their technology. A video game became a means of communicating a story just as one might with a novel or film. In moving toward story-based computer games, Developers turned to pen-and-paper role-playing systems, such as TSR's Dungeons and Dragons, for inspiration. In the mid 1980's, Enix released a game for the Nintendo Famicom system called Dragon Quest, a game that emphasized story over action. Dragon Quest would inspire a then-struggling development house called Square Co. LTD to develop a product called Final Fantasy<sup>3</sup>, which would in turn spawn numerous sequels and become one of the computer entertainment industry's greatest success stories.

### The Question

The question our study addresses is that of whether users of computer entertainment products are inspired to play a game more often or for a longer total period of time if the game has a well-developed plot line? How much the story line adds to user enjoyment of the game is of interest to people and organizations in a number of sectors as the investment of time and money involved in developing complex and interactive storylines is growing as the games become more complex and graphically interactive.

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<sup>3</sup> Gamespot.com, "The History of Final Fantasy",  
[http://www.videogames.com/features/universal/finalfantasy\\_hs/](http://www.videogames.com/features/universal/finalfantasy_hs/)

One practical commercial application of this research would be to inform the larger development housing and publishing companies that are currently driving the computer and video entertainment industry about the importance of their development. As video and audio reproduction technology allow the creation of simulations that approach film-captured realism, the quest for market share and popularity will not be decided by the quality of the graphics and sound, but by the immersiveness of the gaming experience viewed in more holistic terms. The two major factors outside of technology that must be considered are those of story and gameplay. This study is intended to determine the extent to which the story affects the degree of immersion and replayability of a particular product.

### The Hypothesis

Our predicted results from this study were that at increased level of development of plot lines, more players would complete the game, and potentially play it multiple times. At lower plot levels we anticipated the player losing interest before reaching the game's conclusion. We also speculate that gameplay and graphical quality play a role in the players enjoyment of the experience. However, for technical reasons we decided to hold both of those variables constant rather than vary them. Finally, we predict that players of different personality types (as defined by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, or MBTI) will respond differently to the differing plot levels.

The implications of our hypothesis are that, all other things being equal, a computer entertainment application that has an immersive plotline will outperform its equally technically developed but less "motivated" counterpart in terms of player dedication.

In addition, our hypothesis about the behavior of players in this environment was that players with a strong "F" MBTI characteristic would be more likely to

respond to our more high developed plot lines, due to greater emotional attachment to characters in the game.



## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Previous Research

Our project group was able to find little research on the impact of plot lines in regards to user immersiveness in video games. The direct research done by the computer entertainment community has mostly proceeded under the assumption that the deeper the plotline is, the more immersive and therefore successful the game will be. Although it might be justified when citing certain examples (such as the work of Bungie Studios' Marathon or Halo series), there are other strong examples showing a contrary point.

We found no evidence of any prior study that indicated a research team actually created an application that had a variable plot level such as Sweeper Nine has to test this theory. It has always, as far as we can tell, been an underlying assumption of game designers the world over.

#### The Goals of the Computer Entertainment Industry

One of the primary objectives of computer entertainment of the past ten years was to enter the so-called "main stream" of entertainment. Many publishers and developers have sought to see computer entertainment elevated to the same level of cultural acceptance as movies or books are today. Indeed, several points of view have been weighed in determining how interactive computer entertainment can come on par with existing mediums of storytelling. Some believe that the current trend in industry to hire screenwriters for new applications is flawed<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Freeman, David, *What Screenwriters Don't Know About Games*, Game Developer, January 2003, page 42.

Others pursue the belief that the nonlinear possibilities of interactive storytelling lend themselves to a new branch of narrative that has never been fully explored<sup>5</sup>.

#### Contrary Cases

An interesting case in the study of plotlines in computer entertainment solutions is the Funcom 2000 release *The Longest Journey*. This game was widely critically acclaimed as one of the finest examples of storytelling ever to be released by the industry<sup>6</sup>. It earned a 90% rating from PC Gamer, the best-selling review journal of the industry. Gamesdomain.com listed it a Top Game. Gamespot.com formally review it at 9.3, and an average poll of 1,554 players in 2003 named ranked it at 8.9. However, in its release year of 2000, it only sold less than 1,000 units in the United States.

On the other side are games like Cavedog's *Total Annihilation*. Cavedog's entry had very limited plot but boasted technological advances well ahead of its competitors. *Total Annihilation* was also met with great critical acclaim, and grew to be one of the largest and most famous games in its genre.

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<sup>5</sup> Kelley, Heather, *Narrative Games: Finding Another Side to the Story*, Game Developer, February 2003, Page 64.

<sup>6</sup> *The Longest Journey*, PC Gamer, February 2001, pg 97.

## *Chapter 3*

### EXPERIMENTAL METHODS

#### How we went about testing storytelling

The initial challenge of our project was to develop a method of testing whether the player actually would use a particular computer entertainment application more if said application had a deeper storyline. Because the actual game play element was largely irrelevant so long as it was consistent, we decided that a simple application specifically designed to collect data on the users usage would be the best way of collecting the information we wanted. The technical aspects of the design and implementation of this application will be discussed in the following chapter.

Our program recorded certain very specific pieces of information about the player's play habits. First off, it recorded each time the program was started or stopped. It also recorded the plot level that the particular installation operated at. Once that was complete, the program recorded the start of each mission, and the player's score at the end of the mission. All records in the log file, were, of course, timestamped, so that the length of time in play could be recorded.

To facilitate the release of the Sweeper Nine program, we enlisted the aid of WPI's Game Development Club (GDC), a club some 50 members strong with a mailing list of 150. With this large a pool of potential users, we anticipated a reasonable return size.

Sweeper Nine was deployed by means of WPI's web server. Requests for participants were sent out over both the newsgroup wpi.students, and to the

undergraduate mailing list at WPI (however, the latter was denied by the administrator of that list).

The original design for Sweeper Nine called for the program to discreetly communicate the log files back to the server of its own accord. After discussing this policy with both members of the WPI student body and with members of WPI's network operations staff, the IQP teams decided it would be more practical and less potentially offensive to the more privacy-minded members of our community to simply ask the user at the title screen to upload their log files of their own free will.

Under these grounds, a website was installed on one of the IQP team member's personal machines connected to the WPI network to facilitate the uploading of these logs. The website came on line 9 February 2003 and continued operation through the end of the project.

## *Chapter 4*

### TECHNOLOGY

#### Developing Sweeper Nine

The original design of Sweeper Nine was to develop a simple game that would allow us as the IQP team to research play habits of various people under controlled circumstances. Early in our design process we decided the program would be developed in Microsoft Visual Basic® for rapid creation and debugging, and deployed to run on Microsoft Windows 2000® or better computers.

The system architecture of Sweeper Nine is built around a psuedo-object oriented design that was developed by sketching the game's layout and flow on paper before beginning the coding process. Although no formal patterns of Object Oriented design or analysis were used, due to the rapid need for the final product and the small development team, the final product utilized an engine that encompassed all the requirements of the program as a whole.

The customizability of Sweeper Nine was allowed by using XML data files to encode the game's plot and play features into a single coherent form. The XML files provided a method both of organizing the games raw media resources, in the form of bitmaps primarily, as well as providing a structure to the missions that the game is composed of. The XML objects also provided a convenient data structure within the program to store the objects as a DOM tree.

The Sweeper Nine engine had three constants hard coded into it, which were intended to select the plot level displayed on a per-machine basis. Each time Sweeper Nine was started, it would check the Windows registry for the key that

would tell it what plot level to run under. If the plot level was not present, the program would select a plot level randomly, and assign it to the software, and then store that level in the registry so that future runs of the program would always run at that level. By creating the key at run time instead of install time, uninstalling the program would not delete the key that was in the registry, thus preventing the user from changing plot levels by uninstalling and reinstalling the program.

To reduce system demand, the program was developed using Microsoft DirectX® as the media engine, and the program utilized only prerendered two-dimensional graphics.

## *Chapter 5*

### CREATIVE

Every game has at least some kind of story. Whether this story is simple to the point of being implicit, or complex enough to warrant interrupting gameplay with pre-written storytelling sequences, the plot is still there. A game's story serves as a unifying element, holding the entire game together, especially for games with several different gameplay modes. The story also greatly adds to the game's entertainment value, in some games frequently causing the player to want to advance simply to find out, "What happens next?"

The most basic, primitive level of game storytelling is that used in many of the early arcade games, in these cases the player had only the vaguest idea what the images on the screen meant. For example, "These are ping-pong paddles and that's a ball – we're playing ping-pong" or "This is my spaceship, and those are alien spaceships that want to destroy me."

Some games have only slightly more involved storytelling, giving a paragraph or two of story at the beginning of the game, and sometimes concluding with another snippet of story at the end.

In mission-based games, a common practice is to add further story information at the beginning and/or end of each mission, as in the intermediate version of Sweeper Nine. Sometimes, additional bits of story are provided at certain points during the mission, and some games add extended sections of story at key points of the game, in between two missions. Sweeper Nine uses this storytelling method in its most story-rich version.

Some games go even further in their stories, further blending the gameplay with the story. On occasion, this blending is so thorough and the storytelling so elaborate that the game becomes almost as much a movie as it is a game.

The primary requirement of the script for Sweeper Nine was that it provide justification in the plot context for the events in the game. The player had to be told the meaning and significance of the images on their screen, and what role the player's character had. In addition, the player needed to know why these events were occurring – the history behind them, and the motivations of individual characters involved.

“Where am I?” “What am I doing there?” “Why am I doing that?” “What are those things on the screen, and what's their part in this?” These are just some of the questions that must be answered in game context. In Sweeper Nine, this is accomplished primarily through the dialog between the various characters.

Another major requirement of any script, including that for Sweeper Nine, is that it must be self-consistent. Though not impossible, it is extremely difficult to plot-justify something that doesn't seem to fit into the game universe as it has been presented to the player. While some players would enjoy seeing, for example, a vessel from a major science fiction television or movie series, such a thing would be incongruous in the game environment. It is sometimes tempting to introduce a foreign element into the game for amusement value or for some other reason, doing so disrupts the suspension of disbelief necessary to the creation of a properly involving and entertaining game environment.

A game's manual can be a useful storytelling tool. Many players read a game's manual before ever running the game itself, so the manual can be used to introduce them to the game universe. It can describe the history of the game universe, establishing the frame of reference within which the rest of the story is



built. Also, it can describe various elements of gameplay in both story and gameplay terms, such as explaining the properties of different weapons and enemies, while at the same time justifying them in the game universe. The Sweeper Nine manual does several of these things. It gives the background of the game universe, and of the player's character, explaining why the player is doing what they are doing. In addition, it explains the player ship's shape and properties, as well as the properties of enemy ships, providing useful, gameplay-relevant information in a story-oriented context.

The first step in writing the story for Sweeper Nine was deciding on a setting. An outer-space environment is the easiest to set the game in from a technical standpoint, so the setting would be in the science-fiction genre. In order to justify the gameplay style, a wartime setting was preferable. After deciding on the above setting components, all that was required was to flesh the story universe out by adding details and history. Exactly when and where are these events occurring? They are happening in late 2943, in space in various systems. Who is at war, and why? The democratic Alliance of Free Peoples (AFP) has gone to war with the totalitarian Coalition of Unified Worlds (CUW) over the CUW's unprovoked annexation of an AFP border world after years of escalating tensions between the two superpowers. Who am I, what am I doing, and why? You are Robin "Switchblade" Therendson, an ace fighter pilot on a high-risk frontline assignment. You joined the AFP military after CUW forces annihilated your home colony in an unprovoked attack that was later glossed over.

Due to Sweeper Nine's short, simple storyline, developing the actual plot was a relatively brief and easy step. In order to reinforce the "good guys" impression of the AFP, their first military action was liberating the recently lost colony. The early missions in the game are set during this action. To give the game closure, the final mission ends with a major victory by the AFP. The remaining missions

are written to build up to this ending. Mission four (“Betrayed”) is intended to add a degree of depth to the story, enhancing emotional involvement and character development. Two non-gameplay dialog sequences expand on the storyline and provide additional information about the characters and events.

When writing the actual dialog, it was important to develop leading characters as fully as possible, keeping a clear idea of each character’s personality in mind throughout the script. Most of the characters that had a large number of lines had distinct personalities:

The base officer is very professional, with a long period of service already under his belt. He has forged close unofficial friendships with many under his command.

Sweeper Nine is a cynical, sarcastic hotshot with a strong rebellious streak, though this hasn’t kept him from becoming friends with the base officer. Recalling his past leaves him very dark and solitary, in stark contrast with his normal cavalier attitude.

Sweeper Seven is snide, disdainful, and egotistical. He’s also a high-ranking Coalition officer that doesn’t care about any life but his own, and is responsible for the destruction of Sweeper Nine’s home colony.

Sweeper Eight is fiercely loyal, and highly ethical. He was a very close friend of Sweeper Six, and resents anyone that tries to take his place.

Sweeper Ten is very levelheaded, and rigidly moral. His optimism, morality, and innate calm make him the natural mediator among the Sweepers. He always has trouble understanding (or tolerating) anyone that doesn’t behave ethically.

The Alliance of Free Peoples is also a character of sorts. It is a democratic state, and has never had good relations with pirate worlds, or with the tyrannical CUW. The unprovoked seizure of the Zillizt System has brought about an “enough-is-enough”-type attitude, as the AFP decides to free the citizens of the CUW from their government’s brutal repression and eliminate one of the galaxy’s greatest threats to peace and freedom.

The Coalition of Unified Worlds is a brutal totalitarian state, ruling its citizenry through fear and repression, and killing anyone that refuses to submit to their rule. Although it is never explicitly stated, this is what happened to Sweeper Nine’s home colony of New Royalston. The CUW’s ultimate goal is to rule humanity, and they make no secret of this.

The medium-level plot version of Sweeper Nine is stripped of most of this character development and historical information, giving only a small amount of backstory. Even in the full-plot version, many things that are spoken of above are not explicitly stated, and some are not even implied. If the player is spoon-fed or force-fed the entire backstory, it can disrupt suspension of disbelief by over-saturating the player with information. To maintain a smooth flow of story, many things must be left out, although they can sometimes still be implied.

## *Chapter 6*

### RESULTS

#### Output vs. Input

The Sweeper Nine deployment method (using WPI's web server) had the advantage of being able to track the number of times that a user downloaded our test program. Because of the user-intervening return mechanism we employed, only 12.5% of the users who downloaded our software actually returned a log file. Although our sample size was significantly smaller than we were hoping we were able to draw some potentially useful conclusions from it anyways.

All told, some sixteen users took our program from the website, and presumably installed it on their computers. Sweeper Nine was programmed to randomly select the plot level without bias, so we can assume that about five users got each plot level. It is interesting to note that all the responses we got back were from the third plot level. Presumably the users of the lower plot levels lost interest in our project, and due to the anonymous nature of the survey, it is impossible to track and recover those motivations.

To our considerable surprise, neither of the returned logs made it particularly far in our program. Apparently, the program we produced did not incite a great deal of interest by those who used it. Faced with a rather statistically problematic result set, we decided to draw our conclusions from another source; the lack of data.

Our information shows at least 16 unique copies of Sweeper Nine at large in the WPI community (possibly more could have been cloned of those downloads).

Since we had such a small result, and from interviewing a few people we knew played the game and did not respond, we drew the following reasons for lack of participation:

- Lack of interest in playing a computer game (in general or this one in particular).
- Technical difficulties/incompatible personal system.
- Lack of time to play in any meaningful way.

The first and third points would seem to be functions of the population base we tested this product on. WPI's student body is traditionally a very busy group of individuals and might not have the time to play what is considered by many to be a waste of time. Another individual pointed out to the IQP team that when given the choice between playing our admittedly below professional quality piece of software, or one that was developed professionally, the professionally developed game would win almost every time, and therefore our survey measure suffered as a result of the industries' own successes.

Much to the dismay of our IQP team, WPI had no records of the MBTI scores of the students who did return our logs.

Complete logs of the returned results are available in the appendices.

## CONCLUSIONS

Our conclusion for this project is that plot line does indeed make a difference. Although our sampling was too small to make a very firm conclusion, we can conclude from the lack of responses with first or second level plotlines that players were more compelled to play the highest-level plot line. Post-study analysis and informal discussion with members of the survey indicates that many of the difficulties suffered by the project may have been a lack of technical sophistication that would allow the project's only measure to compete successfully for the participant's time.

The reasons for our lack of success in gathering a large number of data points lay in several assumptions we made about this project, which seemed reasonable at the time of conception, but later proved to be unfounded. Primarily, we made these three assumptions on our project:

1. **We would draw from a relatively large community with a high probability of taking part in our study (WPI Game Development Club).** The WPI Game Development Club frequently develops games similar to Sweeper Nine and can amass large groups of its members and those on its mailing list to test those games.
2. **Players would invest approximately 1-2 hours playing the game.** Sweeper Nine's total running length was just under 40 minutes, plus time fighting "boss" characters, during which the mission clock stopped running.

- 3. The majority of players we collected data for would have MBTI data available.** A large portion of the WPI community has their MBTI data on record, and the two groups that the GDC draws from largely (the freshman and junior classes), have rather <sup>high</sup> percentages of their student body on record with the university (approximately 60 and 80 percent, respectively).

Unfortunately, these assumptions did not hold for our study. Upon discussing the general lack of participation with members of the populations we tried drawing from, we came to these conclusions on why our turn out was so low:

- 1. We launched during a particularly stressful term.** Sweeper Nine reached the WPI Population during the third of four terms, C Term. C Term is chronologically the shortest of the four main terms at WPI, and several students expressed worries that if they became involved in playing a video game during that period that their work might suffer.
- 2. Participants misestimated or misunderstood the length of the game.** Sweeper Nine was designed to be played through in under an hour. However, many people we talked to after our study said that they were under the impression the game would take longer to complete, time which they could not afford to spend on it.
- 3. Those who did try the early versions of the game encountered some technical difficulties.** Our initial release was not as well tested as our team would've liked, and sometimes exhibited behavior unbecoming of a piece of software when installed. Also, there were serious speed issues on slower user machines.

With these conclusions in mind, we can see how our presentation to our potential participants should be modified to clear up the misunderstandings around the project, as well as more carefully selecting a launch date for the program. We do not believe that our MBTI analysis was flawed. However, it has not been tested due to the participatory failure of this project.

#### Future Work

This project accomplished major advances in the study of how to collect research on plot line effects. We believe that a similar project with greater resources and stretched over a longer period would be more successful in answering the questions we initially laid out.

Our project team would like to encourage this project to be repeated by another team of researchers using the lessons our team learned during the execution of this study. As our study progressed, we discovered many avenues of research and questions to be answered. Perhaps most interesting of these would've been possible to answer with a more diverse data set than we possessed; would the story line have broadened the appeal of Sweeper Nine (or any other video game) to a wider audience of people? Such a question is fundamentally important to the field of computer entertainment as the market tries to reach the elusive "main stream" of cultural acceptance, and would be well worth the time and effort of a team following ours to investigate.



## *Appendix A*

### THE SWEEPER NINE SCRIPT

The date: October 21st, 2943

With the unprovoked invasion of the Zillizt star system by the Coalition of Unified Worlds, tensions between the CUW and the Alliance of Free Peoples have suddenly erupted into all-out war. As a member of the AFP's elite front-line assault squadron, known as the Sweepers, it's your job to clear the way for the main body of the AFP liberation forces.

You are Robin "Switchblade" Therendson, also known as Sweeper Nine. Your career with the Alliance military began ten years ago, when your home colony of New Royalston was annihilated by CUW forces in what was later glossed over as an "unfortunate diplomatic incident". Wanting to be a part of what you knew would eventually degenerate into war, and to finally avenge the deaths of your family and friends, you quickly rose through the ranks, becoming an ace pilot and participating in numerous skirmishes with the CUW military before being promoted to Sweeper.

Your time for revenge is at hand. Fly in ahead of the main fleet, and neutralize all enemy defenses. You have been authorized (and encouraged) to use any means necessary to ensure a swift and decisive victory for the AFP with a minimum of friendly casualties.

### **Tutorial Mission: New Wings**

#### **Sweeper Nine**

#### **En Route to the Zillizt System**

**Base:** Niner, this is base - it's just come to my attention that you skipped the pre-launch briefing again.

**Sweeper Nine:** Yeah. What of it?

**Base:** Therendson, you bullet-brained rocket jock! Your spaceframe's been overhauled! If we hadn't gotten through to you before your autopilot cut out, you would have been in serious trouble.

**Sweeper Nine:** I'm sure I could have straightened it out quick enough...

**Base:** Rob, how many times have I told you - your sidearm is NOT for use on your ship's computer system!

**Sweeper Nine:** Yeah, yeah. Tell you what - why don't you give me a quick walkthrough of the new controls and capabilities I'll be working with.

<Training exercises>

## **Mission One: Point of Entry**

### **The Zillizt Two Liberation Fleet Outskirts of the Zillizt System**

**Sweeper Nine:** Uh, base, I'm picking up multiple signatures on my long-range screens - think it's about time to tell us just what we're doing out here??

**Sweeper Five:** I was just wondering about that myself...

**Base:** Be patient, Niner, we were waiting until you got in close before we gave you your mission briefings. There have been some...er...leaks of intel leading to a couple of embarrassing ambushes. Until we find and plug the leak, only top command staff will know your mission until we brief you at the last minute.

**Sweeper Nine:** Sounds like we're going to have some exciting times out here - my kind of fun.

**Sweeper Twelve:** Absolutely!

**Sweeper Seven:** Get on with it, base. We're running out of space between us and those bogeys.

**Base:** You are about to reach the perimeter defenses of the Zillizt System, which the CUW siezed last week. We've put your approach vector through what appears to be one of the less well-defended areas. It's up to you to punch a hole in those defenses so we can establish a beachhead on one of the outer planets. That's all you need to know for now.

**Sweeper Ten:** Not much of a briefing, is it?

**Sweeper Nine:** It'll have to do. Let's get 'em!

<Body of mission>

**Sweeper Nine:** Base, what are you trying to pull? This, a poorly defended area? We're coming up pretty fast on a very large signature.

**Base:** Negative, Niner. We're not reading anything but small craft for over eighty thousand clicks. Your instruments must be malfunctioning.

**Sweeper Ten:** Uh...base ... I'm reading it too.

**Sweeper Eight:** Sea of stars, it's HUGE!

**Sweeper Nine:** It's definitely there, base - I've got visual. Looks like a heavy attack frigate. Directly ahead of me.

**Base:** We still don't read it Niner - and we can't target the fleet's cannons on something we don't read. Looks like you're on your own.

**Sweeper Nine:** Great.

**Sweeper Eight:** Ten - let's get in there and help Niner out. No way one guy could take down that frigate alone.

**Sweeper Ten:** Hang in there, Niner - we're on our way, but it'll take us a while to reach you.

**Sweeper Nine:** Roger that. I'll see what I can do.

**Sweeper Ten:** Wow! Base, Switchblade just took out the frigate on his own!!

**Sweeper Eight:** Way to go Niner!

**Base:** Good work Rob.

**Base:** Eight, Ten, return to your positions in the formation. Looks like our leak managed to get a message to the Coalition fleet.

**Sweeper Two:** Would have been a lot worse if you hadn't waited so long on the briefing - the Coalition might've gotten here with more than just a frigate.

**Base:** The new policy does seem to work. What we're more concerned about back here is the fact that they managed to hide that frigate from our long-range scanners.

**Sweeper Nine:** Well, do something about that. I'd hate to go up against a cruiser without some long-range fire support.

## **Mission Two: Foot in the Door**

### **The Zillizt Two Liberation Fleet**

#### **Zillizt System stagin area**

**Base:** Alert! Alert! Enemy forces incoming on multiple vectors! Prepare to scramble all ships!

**Sweeper Nine:** I see them on my scope, base. You won't be able to get ships out here before we've got company.

**Base:** Then it's up to you and the other Sweepers out there to knock out as many of the attackers as possible. The base defenses can hold out long enough for our ships to launch.

**Sweeper Nine:** Roger that, base. Let's rock and roll, boys!

**Sweeper Six:** Niner, how do you figure the Coalition ships managed to get here so quick?

**Sweeper Nine:** My guess is that Johnson's security boys haven't plugged our little leak yet.

**Sweeper Seven:** In any case, may I suggest we focus on the task at hand?

**Sweeper Fifteen:** Right you are, Seven. "Ours is not to wonder why, ours is but to shoot and fly."

**Sweeper Eleven:** You sure that's how it goes?

**Sweeper Fifteen:** Close enough, at least.

<Body of mission>

**Sweeper Nine:** So much for their fast attack craft. Aw \$&\*# - here come their big brothers.

**Sweeper Ten:** You handled the last frigate fine, Niner. We'll concentrate on the ones coming down our own throats.

**Sweeper Nine:** I can handle it. You worry about your own skin.

<Boss battle>

**Sweeper Nine:** Base, at least tell me that you could see that thing.

**Base:** No such luck, Niner. We still haven't figured out how they're evading our long-range sensors.

**Sweeper Four:** Well, if you can't read them but we can, why not give us something to help you get a lock?

**Base:** Interesting idea, Four... I'll have Tech Section see what they can do for you.

**Sweeper Nine:** Make it quick, guys. Things get much nastier and the next capship I run into might do a little more than scratch the paint.

**Base:** We'll do what we can.

### **Mission Three: Rock and Roll**

#### **The Zillizt Two Liberation Fleet**

##### **Zillizt Asteroid Belt**

**Base:** As you gents may have noticed, you're approaching the Zillizt System asteroid belt. Our intel reports indicate that the CUW forces have neglected to properly fortify several sections, believing them to be sufficiently treacherous in and of themselves.

**Sweeper Nine:** Let me guess. We'll be flying in through one of these sections.

**Base:** Right. Our guns will pulverize the big rocks ahead of you, leaving small, easy-to-destroy chunks.

**Sweeper Nine:** And lots of them...

**Base:** Er... You...aren't...required to destroy all of them - our point defense guns can deal with any that get in our way. Just clear a path for yourselves and eliminate any resistance you encounter.

**Sweeper Nine:** Roger that, base. Over and out.

<Body of mission>

**Sweeper Nine:** Base, what did the fleet do, pulverize a #&%\* planet?! I've got a nearly solid wall of rock coming at me!

**Base:** Our scopes showed a large number of signatures pulling in front of you, then retreating fast. They must have been tugs throwing you some extra rocks.

**Sweeper Seven:** Anything you could do...

**Base:** Negative, Seven. You're too close - anything we have that would clear those rocks would take you out with them.

**Sweeper Nine:** Sounds like we're on our own.

**Sweeper Ten:** As usual.

**Sweeper Eight:** Oh, well. Race you boys to open space!

**Sweeper Nine:** You're on!!

<"Boss" battle - massive quantities of asteroids>

## **Mission Four: Betrayed**

### **The Zillizt Two Liberation Fleet** **Deep in the Zillizt System**

**Base:** Seven, why are you breaking formation?

...

**Sweeper Six:** Seven, you're getting a little close...

**Base:** Seven, respond please.

**Sweeper Six:** Seven?

**Base:** Seven, respond immediately!

**Sweeper Six:** Base, Seven's locking on to me! He's fir... . . . . .

**Sweeper Eight:** John!

...

**Base:** I regret to inform you that Sweeper Seven has just shot down Sweeper Six. He is now pulling away from the formation in the direction of Zillizt Two.

**Sweeper Eight:** He's MINE.

**Sweeper Seven:** Therendson, are you listening? This is Parlat Cariend. Does that name sound familiar?

**Sweeper Nine:** You're the Coalition bastard that ordered the breaching of the New Royalston dome...

**Sweeper Seven:** Correct! Just thought you ought to know how close you were to that revenge you've always wanted.

**Sweeper Five:** You're the leak!

**Sweeper Seven:** Very astute, Thomas. But now, I really must dash. It's been a pleasure!

**Sweeper Nine:** Base, this is Sweeper Nine, requesting permission to break formation and pursue the traitor.

**Base:** Permission granted Niner. Cariend cannot be allowed to reach the Coalition forces guarding Zillizt Two.

**Sweeper Nine:** He won't. Trust me. I've waited too long for this to let him get away now.

**Sweeper Eight:** Sweeper Eight, requesting permission to likewise break formation and pursue.

**Base:** Under the circumstances, such permission is hereby granted to all Sweepers.

**Sweeper Eight:** Save some for me, Rob! John deserves justice.

**Sweeper Nine:** Anybody that catches up can have a piece. I'll be sure to leave lots of pieces floating around.

**Sweeper Seven:** Coalition Star Navy, this is Commander Parlat Cariend, requesting assistance. Please send all available forces to engage enemy.

**Sweeper Nine:** Looks like a bumpy ride, boys.

<Body of mission>

**Sweeper Seven:** Coalition Navy, this is Cariend requesting heavy fire support! I am running low on power and being pursued by Alliance vessels.

**Coalition Base:** The Coalition Star Navy thanks you for your assistance, and hereby grants you an honorable discharge. You are no longer useful to us.

**Sweeper Seven:** No...NO!

**Coalition Base:** Goodbye, Parlat.

**Sweeper Seven:** HELP ME!!

**Sweeper Nine:** Looks like it's just you and me, Cariend. It's time for you to pay for what you've done.

<Boss battle>

**Sweeper Nine:** Burn in hell.

**Sweeper Two:** Good riddance to bad rubbish.

**Base:** Gentlemen, I hate to break up this emotional scene, but it looks like we're going to have a change of schedule. This pursuit has brought us past the orbit of Zillizt Four, and you are nearing the orbit of Zillizt



Three. Services for Johnathan Grinwell, Sweeper Six, will be postponed until after we liberate Zillizt Two. Until replacements can be found and trained, please close the formation gap left by the absences of Sweepers Six and Seven.

**Sweeper Five:**Roger that, Base.

## **Mission Five: Salvation**

### **The Zillizt Two Liberation Fleet**

#### **Approaching Zillizt Two**

**Base:** This is it, gentlemen. The CUW has Zillizt Two very well defended, and it's up to you to clear the way for the liberation forces. The Zillitians are counting on you!

**Sweeper Nine:** Don't worry, base. We won't let them down!

**Base:** We have a lot of confidence in you boys. Just remember, this close to a populated world, there are bound to be civilian ships flying through the combat zone. We want to avoid any civilian casualties if at all possible. The CUW ships probably will most likely fire on any civilians that get in their way, so try to take out any that do so.

**Sweeper Eleven:** We'll get the dirtbags if they try anything of the sort!

**Sweeper Fifteen:** Absolutely!

**Sweeper Nine:** So what are we waiting for? Let's free Zillizt Two!

<Body of mission>

**Sweeper Nine:** Oh, great, orbital weapons modules! Base, have you got that solution ready yet?

**Base:** Sorry, Niner - it would have been ready in time if we hadn't had to rush forwards. I'm afraid you're on your own.

Not quite on your own, actually.

**Sweeper Nine:** Who?

This is the Zillizt Liberation Army fighter squadron - we saw the fireworks and decided to make our move.

**ZLA:** Zillizt Two's planetary cannons won't be giving you any trouble.

**Sweeper Nine:** Remind me to buy you guys a round of drinks sometime!

**Base:** Er...Niner...the orbital defenses?

**Sweeper Nine:** Right.

<Boss battle >

<Fade to black>

"We are here today to honor the life, career, service, and sacrifice of Lieutenant Commander Johnathan Grinwell, Sweeper Six. The position of Sweeper is the most difficult and dangerous in the Star Service, and it requires a special kind of courage and dedication that few possess. Let any who wish now share their memories of John Grinwell."

**Sweeper Eight:** I first met John thirteen years ago, at the Academy...

...

"In Commander Grinwell's memory, we now commit this wreath to the endless space. As is traditional, the number six will never again be assigned to a Sweeper, to remind us all of the sacrifice made. From the stars we are born, and to the stars we return."

**SWEEPERS:** Amen.

...

"Rob, hold up a minute."

"Sir?"

"I know you've got a lot on your mind right now, but you ought to know - your two hundred hours of flight time are up. If you want to, you can retire from service."

"And if I do?"

"I won't lie to you - you're our best pilot...but, as we've been reminded recently, being a Sweeper is a dangerous job, and no one will think the less of you if you quit now."

"Forget it. Since I took out Cariend, the nightmares are gone, but I still have trouble sleeping. He may have given the order, but he wasn't exactly alone. I don't think I'll be able to get a decent night's rest until the Coalition can never do to anyone else what they did to me."

"In that case, I want you in the briefing room at 0900. We've decided to catch the Coalition off guard, and take Illiad without a long offensive campaign."

"Are you serious? We're going to attack the Coalition capitol directly?"

"Quite serious. HQ figures that if we remove the central leadership of the Coalition, it will fragment their forces, and the resultant divisions and infighting should make liberating the rest of the Coalition worlds a piece of cake. Some of their less well-guarded border colonies might even break away on their own."

"I'll be there."

"You'll actually attend a briefing? That'll be a first!"

"Shut up."

## **Mission Six: Deadly Distress**

### **Alliance strike fleet**

### **Kannarrad System**

**Base:** All right, gentlemen, remember - the fleet won't be helping you out on this one. We need to let the shipyard get a distress call out, to give the

impression that we're going on a campaign against CUW production facilities.

**Sweeper Nine:** We went over this in the briefing, base. Just make sure that tiny fleet you've got back there is enough to cover our backs.

**Base:** That's enough, Niner. Try to set a good example for the new Sweepers, OK?

**Sweeper Nine:** Whatever. Let's just get the job done.

<Body of mission>

**Base:** You're coming up on the shipyards - each of you, disable your assigned section.

**Sweeper Nine:** Roger that, base.

<Boss battle>

**Base:** All right - everybody on the carrier ASAP - off to Tohuwennuk.

## **Mission Seven: The Fox and the Hounds**

### **Alliance Strike Fleet**

### **Tohuwennuk System**

**Base:** All right, gentlemen. We've got signal jammers installed on all of your ships. We'll activate the jammers from here, cutting off the shipyards' distress signal partway in, to give the impression that the shipyards were destroyed quickly, as by a large fleet, and to prevent the distress call from giving away the actual size of our strike fleet. All you have to do then is take out your assigned sections.

**Sweeper Nine:** Sounds simple enough. Let's do it!

<Body of mission>

Jammer engaged

<Boss battle>

Jammer disengaged

**Base:** All ships, prepare for immediate departure! Sweepers to the carrier!

<Fade to black>

**Sweeper Eight:** Anybody else want more coffee?

**Sweeper Nine:** Why not? Not like a guy could sleep at a time like this, anyway.

**Sweeper Ten:** Heh - yeah.

**Sweeper Fifteen:** Hey, guys, I was thinking - why is it that all these worlds have such funny names? I mean, the names for most worlds mean something, or are the name of some place on Old Earth, right?

**Sweeper Ten:** Well, back during the First Migration, a lot of little factions wanting to get away from all of the big factions went off and settled their own planets. Back then, most of the factions had their own languages.

**Sweeper Fifteen:** They didn't all speak Uni?

**Sweeper Ten:** Nope. So a lot of the planets' names mean something in a language that nobody uses any more.

**Sweeper Eight:** Yeah - I heard on the newscomm about some study on languages - it said that of the 600 languages once spoken on various worlds, only 53 are still in use today, and only about a hundred more are recorded at all.

**Sweeper Fifteen:** But I thought everybody spoke Uni...

**Sweeper Seventeen:** Hey, man - you're from one of the Inner Worlds, aren't you?

**Sweeper Fifteen:** Yeah - New New New York. You?

**Sweeper Seventeen:** Europaia Three. What about you, Nine?

**Sweeper Nine:** I . . . was ... from New Royalston.

**Sweeper Seventeen:**By the Moons - I'm sorry - I didn't know.

**Sweeper Sixteen:** How did you survive?

**Sweeper Nine:**I was out in our system's Oort cloud, on a comet mining expedition. When I got back, I found that the CUW forces had blown a hole in the dome, and all the air had leaked out. A population of thousands, wiped out in a matter of minutes.

**Sweeper Sixteen:** But ... if the dome was breached, wouldn't everybody be killed instantly?

**Sweeper Nine:** Those near the breach were. But that amount of air takes a long time to escape. My family was on the opposite side of the dome from the blast . . . it took them over three minutes to die.

**Sweeper Sixteen:** Sea of stars...

**Sweeper Eight:** I thought Fifteen was thick...

**Sweeper Fifteen:** Hey!

**Sweeper Eight:** ...but you - making Bob recall the worst event of his life.

**Sweeper Sixteen:** Hey, man - I'm sorry -

**Sweeper Eight:** To think they replaced John with...YOU.

**Sweeper Ten:** Hey, ease up on him, okay? He's just a kid. Stop treating him like he was flying number Seven.

**Sweeper Eight:** Yeah. Whatever.

"Now hear this: We are approaching Illiad. Prepare to drop out of hyperspace and attack. Sweepers to your ships!"

**Sweeper Nine:** That's our cue. Let's get those bastards.

<Fade in>

### **Mission Eight: Odyssey's End**

**Alliance Space Fleet**  
**Approaching Illiad**

**Base:** As expected, most of their guard fleet is out of the way. Even so, there's going to be some pretty heavy resistance.

**Sweeper Nine:** Understood, base.

**Sweeper Ten:** Approaching Illiad defensive perimeter...

<Body of mission>

**Sweeper Eight:** Yikes! They seem to have left a welcoming committee here for us!

**Sweeper Nine:** Nothing we can't handle, of course.

<First boss - frigate about as strong as those in early missions>

<More enemy ships>

**Sweeper Nine:** And now comes the real fun - their Orbital Defenses. Probably as tough as those protecting the Alliance capital on New Venus. Here goes nothing!

<FINAL BOSS>

**Sweeper Nine:** Yahoo! Burn, baby, burn!

**Sweeper Ten:** Fleet, the path is clear.

**Base:** Roger that, Ten. The liberation fleet is moving in as we speak. Good work, people!

**SWEEPERS:** AWRIGHT!!

*A p p e n d i x B*

THE RETURNED LOGS

First Log

2/12/2003[2:29:09 PM]:Loading Game  
2/12/2003[2:29:17 PM]:Loading C:\Program Files\Sweeper  
Nine\GameData3.XML  
2/12/2003[2:29:31 PM]:Finished Loading from XML  
2/12/2003[2:29:31 PM]:Finished Loading Completely.  
2/12/2003[2:29:31 PM]:Gamemode switched to Main Menu  
2/12/2003[2:29:49 PM]:Starting Mission MSN1  
2/12/2003[2:29:49 PM]:Player Score is 0  
2/12/2003[2:31:29 PM]:Starting Mission MSN2  
2/12/2003[2:31:29 PM]:Player Score is 0  
2/12/2003[2:40:12 PM]:Starting Mission MSN3  
2/12/2003[2:40:12 PM]:Player Score is 181211

Second Log

2/12/2003[3:17:58 PM]:Loading Game  
2/12/2003[3:18:05 PM]:Loading D:\Program Files\Sweeper  
Nine\GameData3.XML  
2/12/2003[3:18:21 PM]:Finished Loading from XML  
2/12/2003[3:18:21 PM]:Finished Loading Completely.  
2/12/2003[3:18:21 PM]:Gamemode switched to Main Menu  
2/12/2003[3:18:36 PM]:Starting Mission MSN1  
2/12/2003[3:18:36 PM]:Player Score is 0  
2/12/2003[3:19:30 PM]:Loading Game  
2/12/2003[3:19:37 PM]:Loading D:\Program Files\Sweeper  
Nine\GameData3.XML  
2/12/2003[3:19:52 PM]:Finished Loading from XML  
2/12/2003[3:19:52 PM]:Finished Loading Completely.  
2/12/2003[3:19:52 PM]:Gamemode switched to Main Menu  
2/12/2003[3:19:56 PM]:Starting Mission MSN1  
2/12/2003[3:19:56 PM]:Player Score is 0  
2/12/2003[3:21:36 PM]:Starting Mission MSN2  
2/12/2003[3:21:36 PM]:Player Score is 0



2/12/2003[3:29:22 PM]:Restarting MSN2  
2/12/2003[3:29:22 PM]:Starting Mission MSN2  
2/12/2003[3:29:22 PM]:Player Score is 0

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