

Indiana Jones and the **Last Crusade**

The Computer Game

Concept Document 10/13/88

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Synopsis

This is a concept document for a game based on the third Indiana Jones movie, to be implemented on the C64 and IBM computers by summer of 1989. The game is a hybrid of computer arcade game and book paragraph puzzle game. The player takes the part of Indiana Jones, in search of his father, and ultimately the holy grail. The game comes with a disk and two books. One book is the game manual, containing many stills from the movie as well as outtakes that will not be available in other form, and also hundreds of text paragraphs that are interconnected to form a complex, puzzle-oriented path to the final goal. The other book is the "Grail Diary" featured in the movie, giving the player valuable information and clues. The computer software serves two purposes. It acts as bookkeeper/arbitrator, referring the player to various paragraphs and keeping track of score, inventory and play history, also allowing you to save the game. It also provides action sequence resolutions, where the player battles enemies through the medium of an arcade game.

Design Objectives

This design should maximize the chance of meeting our three major objectives. It is closely tied to the movie, with the action end on the computer following the classic Indiana Jones style, and the books tying into the archaeological and scholarly angle epitomized by Henry Jones, and reflected in Indy. It should be doable on a fairly tight schedule, as the computer need only handle some simple but beautiful arcade sequences, thereby requiring less programming, with the books taking up the brunt of the development effort, so the effort is not split between two computers. And it allows a malleable game system, with much to appeal to both the younger, arcade oriented C64 audience, as well as the older, more sophisticated and less action oriented IBM audience.

Action Sequences

These sequences will use animated figures, rendered with our scaling cell animator (system similar to that extracted for Pegasus and Strike Fleet) on fully rendered bitmap backgrounds. Each computer will have customized backgrounds, but no more than 20 single screens per computer will be needed, with minimal object oriented special cases. This will allow us to have top quality game artwork (good for the box too) at reasonable cost. The cell animated figures are still as good as the state of the art in home computer action games. The depth of the arcade sequences (number of enemies, variety of obstacles, etc.) will be somewhat less, as the game will depend on the books included for complexity and variety. Control of the figures will be joystick oriented on C64, keyboard oriented on IBM. The separate games will only need to be tuned to a similar difficulty, not necessarily to identical gameplay, and minor variation from one computer version to another will be acceptable.

The action sequences will be of four basic types. There will be the standard 3/4 view for set battles, with whip and/or gun. There will be a simple maze navigation game. There will be a climbing game (for castle wall, final approach to grail, and possibly pueblo walls). And finally, a top-down scrolling version for vehicle chases (boat, car, plane, train, tank) with combat possible on the move. This last sequence will be the toughest, but we're aiming for simple and fun play, not elaborate effects.

Menu Selection

To control the flow of the game, the computer will keep track of inventory and the current state of the game. All paragraph references will come from the computer, making it much harder to "cheat" and flip ahead to see what happens. Of course, the standard save and restore options will be there for seasoned adventurers to use. Instead of a menu only, the menus will appear against backdrops. These backdrops will be artist renderings of the general stage of the game. There will be about half a dozen of these, starting with a long aerial shot of a Pueblo village in the American Southwest for the whole "Young Indy" sequence, moving on to a closeup of a Venice canal, then the German Castle from the outside, a shot of a Zepplin, and finally a hidden desert city. Some simple animation will continue in the background as the player considers his choices. Also shown will be inventory items, and perhaps a time since last save.

Play Example

The easiest way to visualize game play is with an example. We'll start with one from the middle of the movie, where Indiana is with Elsa, searching through the castle for his father.

From the game book:

147: *You step off the staircase into a corridor. It turns to the right and ends in a wall with three doors. You look at Elsa, but she just shrugs. Your options are:*

- 147A *Go through the left door*
- 147B *Go through the center door*
- 147C *Go through the right door*
- 147D *Examine the doors more closely*

Turn to the computer and enter your choice

A photograph from this point in the movie is included here

At this point, the player looks at the computer. Across the bottom is a display of your inventory: A bullwhip, a revolver (no bullets left), a Grail Diary, a metal fork with a wooden handle, and 47 Duetschmarks. Across the center of the screen is a menu highlighted with four choices. The player chooses "147D". The computer now says "Turn to section 204", and displays three new choices: 204A, 204B, and 204C. Turning to section 204, the player reads:

204: *Looking carefully at the three doors, you notice an electrical wire running into the frame of the center door. The other two doors appear normal. In the distance behind you, you hear footsteps. Your options are:*

- 204A *Go through the left door*
- 204B *Go through the center door*
- 204C *Go through the right door*

Turn to the computer and enter your choice

The player chooses 204C, and the computer refers him to paragraph 58.

58: *You open the door cautiously, and enter a dark room, with Elsa closely following. You shut the door quietly behind you and look around. The room is bare, except for a few chairs. It is illuminated only by the frequent lightning flashes from it's tall windows, and the sound of thunder and driving rain fill the air. Your choices are:*

- 58A *Wait a minute, and then go back to the corridor*
- 58B *Go out the window to climb around outside the castle*
- 58C *Break up a chair to supply yourself with a makeshift club*
- 58D *Examine the room more closely*

The player chooses 58 B. The computer loads an arcade sequence. Now the view is a beautiful rendering of a castle at night in a thunderstorm. You control Indy, moving from ledge to protruding stone to gargoyle. If you slip, you fall to the ground, to be picked up by the Nazi guards below (and referred to another paragraph). The correct solution is to make your way to a shuttered window, and use your whip to break in. You must do this timed to a lightning flash, so the subsequent thunder disguises your entrance noise. If you time it wrong, the Nazis will be alerted. If you guess right, you will find yourself in the room that the middle door led to, without setting off an alarm.

The game mechanics here are quite simple, with a few well-placed leaps necessary to get where you want to go. Players will be allowed to save the game and try until they get it right, but there will also be few cases where Indy is outright stymied in his quest. Usually failure will just set you back.

Let's assume the player does not like action games, and chooses 58 D instead. Now the computer will refer him instead to paragraph 384:

384: The only things you find of interest are a monocle in the corner and a few electrical outlets. Refer to the computer for your options.

This is a giveaway that there are variable options connected with this room. Checking the computer screen, the player sees three options:

384 A Take the monocle

384 B Use your FORK in the electrical outlet

384 C Choose again between the door and the window

If the player had not picked up a fork before now, option B would not appear. Likewise, if the player (or possibly even a computer controlled character) had been through this room and taken the monocle, it would not be an option. The fact that the options are only displayed on the computer should tip off the player that there are varying possibilities, depending on what has happened earlier or what you have with you. A clever gamer would make a point of coming back to such a room after he had found items that might be useful there, while an arcade enthusiast could simply ignore the subtleties, and go out the window.

The player chooses 384 B, and the computer refers him to paragraph 189:

189: With a startling blue flash, the fork completes a circuit. The odor of scorched wood wafts upward - good thing that wooden handle is thick! Faintly in the distance you hear angry cries. Refer to the computer for your options.

The player looks at the screen:

- 189 A *Wait a minute, and then go back to the corridor*
- 189 B *Go out the window to climb around outside the castle*
- 189 C *Pick up the monocle*

He chooses 189 C, which vanishes, leaving the other two choices and adding "monocle" to his inventory. Then he chooses 189 A. This will refer him to a new paragraph that requires him to navigate the corridor in the dark.

To make a long story short, the player can now enter the middle door safely. If he had not shorted out the electricity first, an alarm would have been sounded, complicating things and making a fight inevitable. This example of alternate puzzle solutions will be kept throughout the game.

Action vs. Story

Since the game is intended for two different audiences, it will be designed to play differently depending on the player's expectations. Someone looking for a good action game on their C64 can simply choose the obvious action oriented options, as in the first example above. They would have to go through 90% of the action sequences to finish the story, but only perhaps 20% of the paragraphs. Someone who is less agile with the joystick can nearly always find a more complex way around difficulties. This player could go through 90% of the paragraphs to avoid all but perhaps 10% of the arcade sequences. Of course, a middle ground is possible as well. It would also be feasible to even ask the player at the beginning if he wished to have choices leading to action sequences displayed on the computer with an asterisk next to them. This would give some clues at times, but would make it possible for a purist player to either seek out or avoid them.

Another consequence of this multiple solution approach to the story is replayability. There will often be several puzzle solutions to one problem, or even several action solutions (e.g. fighting your way through guards instead of climbing a wall), giving you things to discover on subsequent times through the game.

The Grail Book

This is included as a separate book to give it some identification with the Grail Book in the movie. Suitable interesting passages in Greek, Aramaic, Latin, Hebrew, and other languages will be included, as well as a variety of interesting illustrations. Translations will be present in "Henry Jones's" handwriting. It will be full of important information and clues, all mixed in with the background info, and both the game book and the computer will refer to it. It will add to the perceived value of the game package, without complicating the programming cycle.

Interface

The computer end of the game will be optimized for joystick on the C64, keyboard on the IBM (although joystick operation will be optional). The difficulty level of the arcade sequences on the IBM version will be set a bit easier than on the C64. The menu selection will also be driven off of the function keys on the IBM.

Implementation Schedules

Programming on the two versions can be started simultaneously, as soon as mid-November. The C64 version should take about 6-7 months, and the IBM 7-8 (longer because of the configuration hassles). More accurate schedules will follow more detailed design. Artwork and sound requirements are not too bad, and should be less for the two versions than for just one version of a typical SCUMM game. It is likely that the output of the SCUMM tools (BILE or SWILL or whatever they're called) will be able to be directly adapted to this game without much time from either Ron or Aric. There will be a need for a writer, and a significant amount of layout and artwork on the game book and grail diary. The product should fit on 2 sides of a C64 disk, and possibly on one but probably 2 360K IBM disks or one 3.5 inch 720K IBM disk.

Conclusion

This is the best way I have been able to come up with to meet the objectives of quality, speed, and wide audience appeal. The details are flexible and will obviously change as the design firms up, but the rest of the group agrees that the basic structure is reasonable, and could meet our objectives. I think it is innovative enough to attract some positive attention, and similar enough to existing games (Wasteland, Star Saga 1, Steve Jackson adventure book games) so it is not a great risk. Let's try it!