



NOTICE!

Whereas you have been detained on account of the Governor to set forth in the first-person across the Crown Lands of the recently established Colony of Victoria, with the intent of exploration, pioneering, and prospecting.

Accordingly, all divers ill-disposed persons of speech and manner are to be avoided, such as to be found within the Colony that may assume the title of Bushranger.

*His Honor
The Superintendent
Melbourne*

GOD SAVE THE QUEEN!!!

PRINTED AT THE "TIMES" OFFICE, BAKERY HILL, BALLARAT.

COSC2352 Computer Games

Major Project: Proposal for a computer game

Matt Adair
s3204584

THE year is 1850 and with the promise of adventure you set forth for the lands of the newly established colony of Victoria, to live, to survive, to explore and, maybe, to find future riches beyond imagining. Life is harsh and unforgiving for the pioneer, do you have the tenacity and strength to survive? Despite claims from the Governor's office, this is not a land belonging to no one. And there are many about that would cause you harm.

Terra Nullius is a single player with local co-op, open world, first-person game with a focus on exploration and survival in the bushland of 1850s Victoria. It encourages freeform and emergent gameplay that involves discovering ways to live off the land and negotiate interactions with other characters as either friend or foe.

Presently the game has the working title of Terra Nullius which is used only by a browser based platform game and a Hispanic rock band. A secondary title of "The Larrikin" is reserved but maybe too culturally specific for international use. However this may also prove a unique game trademark name.

Terra Nullius is designed as an exploration adventure simulation game for the Nintendo 3DS. The target market is for players of JRPGs and adventure games crossing over to simulation games such as Animal Crossing.

Terra Nullius will utilise the unique features of the 3DS such as the touch screen to allow the player to draw their own map and make notes. The physical buttons and control pads will be advantageous for finite movement and look as well as player reactions to game stimulus such as conversations. This game will also take advantage of the unique Streetpass/Spotpass function to facilitate resource trading, information sharing, screenshots and chat. Local co-op is centered around one player visiting another player's world for the duration of the gaming session. There they can co-operate in any of the mini-games as well as construction, exploring, taking screenshots or just chatting.

Terra Nullius will be targeted towards the 13-24 age group, specifically those that have played JRPGs or other adventure type games. This game is dependent on reading and comprehension of potentially complex social situations and so a level of maturity is required, however fans of the Pokemon games should not have any problem either. A secondary target market is for female gamers who may prefer a non-violent game with a focus on character interactions. It is noted that the statistics released for the Nintendo 3DS Animal Crossing: New Leaf show that the 25-45 age group were active to the same level as the primary market for Terra Nullius.

Story



Fig 1. Russell Drysdale. *Man feeding his dogs*. 1941. Queensland Art Gallery

THE player's character is indeterminate leaving non-player characters to respond based upon how the player behaves towards them. The player is just one of the increasing number of immigrants to this land whose backgrounds are varied and largely irrelevant as a new colony is seen as a chance to start again. Several key NPC types will converse with the player throughout a game session with variances to ensure a lack of repetition.

Type name – residency, occupation, behaviour

The Bushman – itinerant, subsistence, independent.

The Settler – long term, stable, law abiding.

The Innkeeper – medium term, stable, independent.

The Swagman – journeyman, subsistence, independent.

The Bushranger – itinerant, outlaw, opportunistic.

The Larrikin – medium term, unstable, provocative.

The Squatter – short term, stable, speculative.

The Digger – journeyman, stable, speculative.

The Constable – medium term, stable, law upholder

These types will have specific frequency of appearance within the game as well as styles of behaviour that determine their possible involvement with the player and degree of conversation. The two key antagonists are the bushman and bushranger, both typifying the extents of hospitality to be found in the colony.

Each character type has the following three features to describe the scope of any interaction. Residency refers to their attachment to a given geographical location: a settler is staying for the long term as all their assets are invested in their property, while a swagman is typically travelling from job to job. The occupation refers to their ability to provide and maintain resources necessary for living. Behaviour is used to guide the range of responses to the player as well as the likelihood of initiating interactions.

Most of the characters have a reason to exist that requires them to either be occupied or travelling with purpose. The only exceptions are the Larrikin and the Bushman, where the larrikin resides in towns but is largely unoccupied, bored, brash and seeking some form of entertainment at the expense of others. The bushman is a not unfriendly loner that seeks the company of the bush only with the occasional need to gain employ for short terms. They are sometimes on the verge of madness which causes their behaviour to seem erratic or nonsensical.

The bushranger is a special character that can be considered to serve as a Boss in computer game parlance. The rumour and threat of them is more important than the meeting of them, though they will be met and more often than not at overwhelming odds. In these instances negotiation and bluff will be the way a player avoids a bad encounter rather than violence. However with cunning and guile a player is capable of overpowering a bushranger and depending on the circumstances will either cause notoriety or fame either of which can be beneficial or harmful.



Fig 2. Russell Drysdale. Four boys in Cooktown. Not dated. Art Gallery NSW

World



Fig 3. Arthur Streeton. *The Gloucester Buckets*. 1894. Art Gallery NSW.

TERRA Nullius is set in the bushland of Victoria, Australia during the lead up to the discovery of gold in 1851. The game world will be as geographically accurate as is possible with the correct locations for tracks, roads, settlements, stations as well as features of prominence. The scale of this world is set to a relative 1:1. All constructed items will be as historically accurate as possible and fully interactive so that the player may pick up, examine and use any man-made object encountered.

The bushland will consist of various trees, some of which will be interactive such as a particular type that can be cut down or a type that can be climbed. The density of scrubs and trees can also hinder passage or navigation. Grasses will be of varying height and thickness which will effect the speed of the player's movement. Frequently used tracks in the rainy season will become quagmires and risk carts overturning and horses becoming trapped. Canvas tents are the most typical accommodation encountered though there are also a few huts made of either wattle and daub or weatherboard.

Graphically this game will use two Australian painters as reference with one for distant or non-interactive elements and the other for things of interest. Arthur Streeton's landscapes will influence the general appearance of the bush while Russell Drysdale's more abstract expressionism will be referenced for characters and dwellings.

The audio during active gameplay will consist entirely of environmental sounds. The abundance of wildlife present will be reproduced as accurately as possible for general ambiance as well as more specific, directional sounds of animals useful to the player. The sound of a babbling creek will be vital for a player looking for a source of drinking water within dense bushland.

Premise

THE plot of Terra Nullius is minimal for the player to be concerned with. There are historical events and a timeline that will play out while the game is active which will see an increase in the amount of traffic through the game world as well as an increase in the types of resources associated with a growing 19th century society. The player is also free to remain living off the bush for as long as possible or exit by taking either the roads to Melbourne and Mount Alexander or dying. The exit via road choice will also enable the player to recommence the game at a later date with the game world freezing at its current state and time.

Characters present in the beginning of the game are there primarily to instruct and inform the player about the world and how to live in it. Afterwards the player is on their own and will need to be able to negotiate interactions with anyone encountered on their own terms. At regular occasions the game will present to the player an opportunity to converse and join with non-player characters in a mini-game. These can take the form of settlers, innkeepers or even other travellers that make an offer to the player to perform a task for the reward of resources or lodgings.



Fig 4. J.B Phillip. Goldfields Victoria. Not dated. State Library South Australia

Mechanics



Fig 5. Console game screen and controllers

TERRA Nullius is a game played using first-person perspective. The game view can be moved with a look controller and this will reveal the feet of the player's character. Using the L/R hand action will reveal the hands if the view is aimed low enough. The use of the view controller also enables a feature of this game that mimics eye-contact in the real world that can be precursor to interaction. A look can become a stare and if the player stares long enough at an NPC then they will respond in a way that suits the behaviour characteristic.

This game is based upon a realistic topographical model of Victoria with relevant landscape details. The player is placed within this world at a relative 1:1 scale which means that as walking is the primary means of travel, it will take a day to walk approximately 10 miles, dependent on terrain. Navigation is by dead-reckoning aided by a small compass and the ability to draw a map with personal notes or symbols. This map will auto-rotate based upon a fixed north and aligned to the players view. The player may choose to not make a map but it is likely that they will become lost and die.

At a point when the player wants their character to make camp for the night the game will revert to a cutscene style loop of the save menu and music composed that uses instruments of the day. The game camera will slowly circle around the player's campsite allowing a time for contemplation and reverie at the landscape. This mode can also be activated if the player takes the smoking pipe, a quantity of tobacco and actions them. This impromptu rest will trigger the same save menu and cutscene loop.

Alongside a realistic scale of environment is the use of realtime equating to elapsed game time. A game world day is divided into three distinct playable sessions of morning, afternoon and evening. These are assumed to require up to three hours of game time to complete. If at any point the player wishes to end a given session then they may either make camp or action their pipe. At resumption of play the game will advance to the next playable session regardless of the real time elapsed.

Player

TERRA Nullius is primarily an exploration game and features many player actions that encourage this type of gameplay. From walking as the main means of getting around to short distance running for evasion and speed. Horses can be ridden with the player's walk controller extending to the horse. The use of hands to interact with game objects will be limited to a range of possibilities suitable to the object in question. If an object such as a shovel can be picked up then it can also be dropped, thrown or wielded as a weapon. If the player should decide to wield a shovel as a weapon then they will have to answer to either an angry mob or the constabulary.

The game environment is divided into interactive and non-interactive objects with the former being less detailed and more abstract while the latter are opposite. An interactive object, be it a tree, stone, box, tool, etc. will have a finite set of actions that can be performed on it or with it. These actions will be triggered by the player using the L/R hand controller when the object is in close view.

An example list of some actions:

- gather firewood : L/R hand action over small log, attaches to hand, walk to campsite
- make map : draw on touchscreen, zoom in for detail, look with view
- explore : walk, look, map and notes
- resources : walk, look, close up, L/R hand action to examine
- negotiate board and supplies at inn : talk with innkeeper using Reaction buttons
- negotiate board and employment at station : talk with station owner using Reaction buttons
- build shelter : gather resources and L/R hand action over them to build
- build campfire : gather firewood, hold Tinderbox, L/R hand action to light, save menu
- smoke pipe : L/R action with tobacco and pipe, save menu

Spread throughout the game world are stations and inns where it is possible for the player to negotiate short term employment in the form of a mini-game that rewards either with lodgings, resources or a few shillings. These mini-games can be performed as a single player or in co-op mode and some examples are as follows:

- supplied with tools to fix fences : lots of L/R action, return
- track lost sheep/horse : track visible clues, navigating, map making, L/R action rope, return
- find source of fresh water : navigating, map making, reconnaissance, return
- fill water tank from stream : navigate, L/R action fill barrel, return
- collect firewood : L/R action chop and collect wood, return
- goods recovery : L/R action loading cart
- join vigilante mob : follow Constable, verbal response, possible L/R action with rope

Design

UPON starting the game the player's character awakens in the flat bushland with little idea of where they are. They have the clothes on their back, a notice from the governor, some paper, a pencil, tinderbox, canvas roll, short knife, a small waterbag, a billy can and some rations in the form of flour, salt, sugar, tea and tobacco. This last is purely for a pipe which when smoked pauses the game into campfire menu mode where the player can save or just admire the view.

It appears to be dawn with the sun low on the eastern horizon over some hills. Standing up the player looks around and sees to the north east an area of thick bushland, the south opens out into grassy plains and the north to east appears to be a hilly range. There are no tracks or trails visible at present. The player needs to decide which way to go. They decide to go towards the bushland as the south appears devoid of life, the hills too onerous to climb and the forest will at least offer protection from the elements and a source of firewood for the cold nights.

It takes the entire day to walk to the forest area and by the time nightfalls the player needs to have gathered enough firewood to light a fire. Further wood can be gathered later but it will be quite dark other than the starlight and moonlight dependent on its aspect. During the walk the player can take sightings, acquaint with map making and sight a traveller in the distance. Interception is possible if they choose.

This first NPC is a swagman wandering about who doesn't provide much information and may indeed be mad. He seems about 60 and his name is something indecipherable and Gaelic. He says he is walking to Melbourne but does not want to be joined. If the player tries to follow, he ignores them until nightfall and then escapes while player is sleeping. This swagman NPC explains how to gather resources, how to find water sources, the kinds of people encountered to be encountered in the colony and to be wary of some types of people based on their behaviours and appearance.



Fig 6. Frederick McCubbin. *Down on his luck*. 1889. Art Gallery Western Australia

Competitive

Two competing games offered for the Nintendo 3DS system are analysed here. They are The Oregon Trail, originally an educational game designed to teach school children about pioneer life and Animal Crossing: New Leaf which is a life simulation game. While both of these games are quite different, they both offer alternatives to most other game genres that require aggression and a form of victory over an enemy.

The Oregon Trail is the closest in similarity where the player has to guide a party of settlers from one location to another during the 1848. During the game it is possible to hunt, trade or buy items, meet other travellers and maintain the health of your party. It is available in the US from between 10 and 30 dollars, as an action adventure game for ages ten and up due to mild violence. It features low polygon count 3D objects rendered in a cartoon style for the third person view in the main screen while the lower touch screen offers an inventory, menu, health and a journey progress bar.

This game has a start and definitive end as well as limited exploration – there will be no going off the trail. It is a single player game that allows some historical accuracy in its portrayal though it is intended more as an idea of life on the trail than a simulation.



Fig 7. Screenshot The Oregon Trail. Nintendo. 2011

The second market competitor is from the Animal Crossing series that offers the player a stylised gameworld that evolves over real time and is populated with characters to interact with as well as items to be either found, hunted, bought or traded. It offers a game that responds to the time of day as well as the month to provide seasonal variety as well as social events aligned to the Japanese calendar.

There are no specific tasks to perform in this game unless the player chooses to, for instance if a flower isn't watered then it will die but the game continues. Repercussions are minimal, non-lethal and occasionally comical such as being bitten by bees makes the avatars face puffy until they sleep it off. Non-player character interactions form the most part of gameplay and these involve either short chats, quests for an item or a pop quiz.

The game is highly limited for exploration as it takes place on an island that is quite small. Unlike the Oregon Trail there is no real end to this game other than the player ceasing to play. Achievement can be measured via some medals awarded to the player for various tasks



Fig 8. Screenshot Animal Crossing New Leaf. Nintendo. 2013

Unique

TERRA Nullius offers several unique features to differentiate it within a crowded RPG market as well as the other cross-over markets it can be included in, such as adventure and simulation.

- open world
- exploration
- co-operative
- emergent gameplay
- historically accurate environment
- high level interactivity
- evolving background events

While both of the games referred to above offer some level of exploration, background events and interactivity none of them are to the same level of detail, richness or complexity. The Oregon Trail has a simple narrative structure that is rigidly adhered to and limits the player to following the trail as best as possible while negotiating the game's mechanics.

A pioneering exploration is not just about entering a new land but also should refer the player to themselves as they discover ways of responding to events that befall them. To this end Terra Nullius will have a historically accurate background narrative that progresses as the player does. Throughout a game day the player will also encounter many differing types of characters that will follow their own narrative reasoning while reflecting the evolving colonial experience.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of gaming is to be able to share that experience with others and the unique features of the 3DS will be put to good use for passing trade and information but the real joy will be in playing co-operatively. With two consoles, two players will be able to share one world and explore, build, struggle and survive.



Fig 9. Arthur Streeton. *Early summer - gorse in bloom*. 1888. Art Gallery South Australia

Market

The Nintendo corporation has a sizeable advertising presence for its games released either in physical format (cartridge/disc) or digital download via the Nintendo eShop. To augment this a marketing campaign will be initiated that features the historical and pioneer elements of the game in the form of stills and videos. In particular a video demonstrating a playthrough will be edited so that it conforms to short film narrative structures and tells the tale of an explorer in a new land.

The historical and geographical aspect will be exploited with specific attention paid to Australian institutions interested in such material such as Tourism Victoria, City of Melbourne, Sovereign Hill Museums Association, Film Victoria and other digital media bodies.

References

The Oregon Trail:

<http://www.redwagongames.com/Oregon-Trail/index.php>

The OregonTrail review:

<http://www.gamefaqs.com/3ds/637296-oregon-trail/reviews/review-149429>

Animal Crossing: New Leaf

<http://www.animal-crossing.com/newleaf/>

Animal Crossing New Leaf review:

<http://kotaku.com/animal-crossing-new-leaf-the-kotaku-review-511175422>

Nintendo 3DS statistics:

<http://www.nintendo.co.jp/ir/en/library/events/130131qa/index.html>

Pokemon 2010 statistics:

<http://www.nintendo.co.jp/event/conference2010/presentation/textE/>