

The making of I have no Mouth, and I must Scream

Among the challenges of adapting I Have No Mouth, And I Must Scream to an interactive medium was that the five protagonists were completely at the mercy of an insane, virtually omnipotent computer. The characters can do no more than endure the horrors that AM visits on them, until the very end, when one of the characters brings the story to a chilling conclusion. To preserve the story's nightmarish mood, Ellison wanted to create a game that players could not possibly win. Instead, there would be a variety of ethical ways in which way they could lose. There are ways to lose heroically, gloriously and at the peak of one's humanity -- if players do well. Otherwise, there are ways to lose ignominiously, in a selfish, cowardly, frightened manner.

The real breakthrough in uniting these ambitious goals and fantastic storyline came when Cyberdreams brought in game designer David Sears, who asked Ellison something the author had never considered before: why does AM choose these particular five people to torture? The question fired Ellison's imagination, and the two spent several intense weeks together exploring the back story of the captives -- where they come from, who they are, what they fear, what they hope for as a salvation to their terrible situation. Through this process, Ellison and Sears created five of the best delineated characters ever to appear in interactive literature: suicidal loner Gorrister; deformed brute Benny; hysterical phobic Ellen; secretive ancient Nimdok; and cynical paranoid Ted. Next, Ellison and Sears crafted five fiendish quests that prey upon the fatal flaws of these damned souls, weaving the scenarios into an epic adventure that demands players make ethical choices instead of catering to an appetite for arcade violence.

Producer David Mullich joined Cyberdreams shortly after Ellison and Sears drafted their treatment and Sears went on to a position at another software company. One of the first steps in making the project a reality was to expand the 130 page draft document into a comprehensive game design complete with all the interactions, logic and details necessary for the programmers and artists to begin their tasks. Mullich decided to complete the design himself, having created a critically acclaimed 1980 computer game based upon The Prisoner television series which, like this adventure, involved a surreal environment, metaphorical story elements, and rewards for ethical behavior. After several months, he produced an 800 page game design document containing more than 2000 lines of additional dialogue.

After considering many experienced software development companies, Cyberdreams selected The Dreamers Guild to realize the programming, artwork and sound effects. With more than sixty software professionals, The Dreamers Guild was one of the few developers with sufficient in-house talent to create a product of the caliber of I Have No Mouth, And I Must Scream. Additionally, its SAGA (TM) game engine was an ideal user interface for the player to interact with the environment and to converse with the characters in AM's world. It was decided early on that high-resolution graphics were necessary to capture the nuances and mood of Ellison's vivid imagination, and so Technical Director John Bolton adapted the engine to utilize SVGA graphics.

Mullich and Cyberdreams art director Peter Delgado had frequent meetings with Dreamers Guild art director Brad Schenck to devise art direction complementing

the surreal nature of the story. Since the story takes place in the mind of a mad god who can make anything happen, the team chose a variety of art styles for each of the scenarios, ranging from the unsettling perspectives used in German Expressionist films to pure fantasy to stark reality. Visually, the adventure's art keeps players at a tilt from start to finish.

Assistant Art Director Glenn Price and his team rendered more than sixty backgrounds utilizing a number of 2-D and 3-D tools including Deluxe Paint and LightWave. Hundreds of animations were drawn by Assistant Art Director Jhoneil Centeno and his team of animators. In addition, the art staff created a generous number of cinematic sequences, instrumental in conveying the adventure's mood of unrelenting angst.

As the game approached a playable "alpha" state, Ellison and Mullich spent many hours together fine-tuning the scenarios and polishing the dialogue. Ellison would place his manual typewriter alongside Mullich's computer on the glass-topped table in the sumptuous Art Deco dining pavillion of Ellison Wonderland, and as Mullich play-tested the adventure, Ellison typed story enhancements at a furious 120 words a minute. This final stage of course-correction was essential for elevating the adventure from being a mere game to perhaps the first true example of interactive literature.

Audio was the final element needed to immerse players into the demented underground world of AM. Cyberdreams commissioned film composer John Ottman to write more than 25 pieces of original MIDI music for the adventure, which music producer David B. Schultz of DBS Music then specially arranged for optimum performance on the Sound Blaster AWE32 card. Dreamers Guild sound effects wizards Lawrence Schwedler and James Phillipson then added haunting ambiance through the scenarios.

With more than forty speaking parts in the adventure, Cyberdreams enlisted Lisa Wasserman of Virtual Casting to cast and direct some of the finest voice-over actors performing in interactive entertainment. However, the real casting coup was when Ellison himself agreed to perform the voice of the demented computer AM, for as Ellison puts it, "in all the dialogue you will hear my smart mouth, and the cadences in which I speak, and the way my stories read." The dialogue sessions were recorded at the old Skywalker Sound facilities in Hollywood by Cheshire Multimedia Sound. Sound engineers Todd Bozung and Greg Chapman digitally enhanced many of the voices to help dramatize AM's horrifying world of insane computers, omnipotent machines and inner demons.

Upholding Cyberdream's reputation for innovative packaging, Director of Sales and Marketing Andrew Balzer commissioned Bright and Associates to create a box design that was as compelling as the adventure contained within. The box showcases a mousepad imprinted with a 3-D image of Ellison's face entangled in a web of computer circuitry. This striking image was created by Barclay Shaw, who originally painted it for an Ellison anthology featuring the original short story.

The adventure will be made available through the efforts of Cyberdreams Sales & Marketing team of Andrew Balzer and Daniel Pelli together with MGM Interactive,

responsible for North American distribution, and Cyberdream's foreign distributors.

The production, development and marketing team for *I Have No Mouth, And I Must Scream* have created a unique, mind-bending work of interactive entertainment with provocative psychological and ethical themes. The game is not for the weak, timid or faint of heart: woven into the fabric of the story are profound ethical dilemmas dealing with emotionally charged issues including the horrors of insanity, selfishness, rape, racism, paranoia, genocide, and the dark rivers of human emotion that surge beneath the civilized surface of us all.