

# **The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe**

## **Developer diary pt 2 – Developing the characters**

### **Interview: Andy Burrows – Associate Producer**

The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe features some of the most loved characters in children's literature. We're not just talking about Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy here but also Mr Tumnus, the White Witch, Mr and Mrs Beaver, the Professor and of course Aslan. And who can forget Father Christmas?

In a world where these and all the other characters are as richly drawn as the land of Narnia clearly one of the great development challenges is to ensure these personalities come alive within the video game. The connections between player and game character are vital and the entire game must enhance these relationships at every opportunity.

So when it came to defining the attributes of each character, this approach was foremost in the minds of ours. Respecting such a well-loved story meant taking care to build technologies that would enable the individual strengths (and weaknesses) to shine. Each of the four Pevensie children were designed with differing abilities – a feature that would underpin the gaming experience and lead to some exciting possibilities further down the line. These abilities help mark out unique playing styles for each of the children. When, for example, the children are faced with deep snow drifts that would impede their progress it falls to Peter to use his height and strength by giving Lucy a piggyback. Not only do we have a thoughtful and logical addition to the game play but we also strengthen the relationship between Peter and Lucy. It is a charming addition to the character development and helps us believe in the world just as we have come to do with the books.

It's worth enjoying some of skills and attributes the children show throughout the game in order to understand how much detail is being placed into the game.

Peter, of course, is the eldest and strongest (can you see Edmund wanting to help Lucy through the snowstorm?). He may be unarmed at the start of the game but you can be sure that he will find objects around to help him be a brave and stalwart brother. When Peter receives a special sword from Father Christmas you know the action has become even more serious.

Susan is the second eldest and is equipped with the ability to use ranged weapons such as snowballs and the special bow given to her by Father Christmas. Whilst her Ivory Horn gift becomes invaluable in calling for help it is her ability to use Mr Tumnus' Pan Pipes to send creatures to sleep that shows us just how adaptable this young woman is.

Edmund follows next and he proves to be the most agile of the children. He can fight of course but it is this agility that comes in useful throughout the game – especially when he starts to redeem himself.

Finally there is Lucy – the trusting soul through whom we first see Narnia in the book and who proves to be as fierce and determined as any of the White Witch's minions. Lucy has the ability to heal her brothers and sister even before she receives the wonderful Fire-Flower cordial from Father Christmas. Her hardy spirit gets release through the little dagger and the skill of climbing on top of the Wolves (amongst others) and controlling them whilst they do their best to shake her off. These are skills as exciting as they are useful – picked for the pleasure they bring to the narrative above anything else.

Of course all the abilities in the world would not enhance the game play if the control method was put beyond the reach of most gamers. It is here where the game excels once again by following a tried, tested and much trusted formula of never letting the mechanics get in the way of the game. Selecting which character to use is a matter of pressing one button to cycle

through each of the available children. Even using special abilities is as intuitive as can be. Pushing an object requires only one press of the button to grab it whilst some actions occur by being in the right place at the right time – so if you are carrying a stick and move near to a fire and – hey presto – it bursts into flame giving you a useful torch with which to proceed deeper into – well that would be giving away too much.

The point of all this of course, is to let the people and places of Narnia live. If we are to believe in the laws of Narnia then nothing should stand in our way as we immerse ourselves into the plight and hopes of four ordinary children.

The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe encourages this approach by taking advantage of the best in Artificial Intelligence. All of the Witch's minions are as diverse as the children because the AI in the game bestows abilities, fears and tendencies upon each of them. It's an individual approach that makes the Black Dwarves such challenging opponents as they keep back from the fray and fire arrows. Minotaurs will stomp into combat and display distinctively 'minotaur' behaviour as they use their horns and skulls to knock the children over. Of course there are many such creatures: enormous Giants, fast and dangerous Ankle-Slicers, howling Werewolves and the impervious Cyclops are just further examples to excite the imagination.

The AI doesn't stop there either as even the children come under its magical spell when not being directly controlled. It is here that we see the strengths of the Pevensie's working together to overcome even the seemingly insurmountable situations.

Special abilities, interactive environments, strong personalities and armies of strange and magical creatures form the backbone of an experience that rests in the hands of the player. Our humanity, our ability to share and respond in the imagination of others will take the game beyond this world. Nowhere is this more evident than when playing in two player mode. Here the game allows a second player to dip in and out – helping the first player when required or simply engaging with the action for the sheer pleasure of working cooperatively to solve the puzzles and defeat the White Witch's chilling rule. In a world where four children can become kings and queens it seems somehow fitting that we too can follow a similar destiny.