Hand Made Software Ltd.,

AKIRA

Game Design

for the

Super Nintendo Entertainment System

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Notes: for the fax version of the AKIRA game design.

1) This document is designed to be transmitted via fax to ensure the earliest availability of the design to Larry Siegel and Steve Ryno. A further (illustrated) version will be sent via airmail to arrive approximately 1 week later.

2) Because of the difficulty of including illustrations and to demonstrate the ideas more tangibly we have produced a complete functioning ROM of coded examples. This file will be uploaded to the appropriate BBS shortly after transmission of this document.

3) The music contained in the sample file is not that which is intended for the final game at all. It merely adds to the enjoyment of the demo and shows that we can do it.

Introduction

This document sets out the overall approach and game design for a Super Nintendo cartridge game based upon AKIRA. It is the first milestone requirement under the contract for the game development with Hand Made Software.

The Akira graphic novels or 'Manga' and the animated feature film based on the story, have both been used as resources on which to base the ideas contained in this design. We have also read an early draft of the Black Pearl design for the Sega Genesis game console.

Because they feature strongly in the movie and the story our design shares some of the same key action sequences that were also detailed in the Black Pearl design. This design is intended to provide sufficient detail to allow the desirability and the viability of the concepts to be determined.

It is envisaged that shortly after receipt, discussions will take place between Black Pearl and Hand Made Software to confirm the overall approach to develop the SNES game. These discussions in conjunction with this design will then form the basis for the Technical Design Review on the proposed implementation of the game.

Objectives

In proposing this design we have considered the following to be our objectives.

(These are not necessarily ranked in order of importance)

1. To design a game which can capture the verve and vigour of the Akira Manga.

2. To ensure that the design will provide scope for using all the target hardware attributes.

3. To ensure that the design is achievable within the target time.

4. To create a design that can be attractive to an age group of 16+.

5. To avoid ideas that would involve unproven game elements or new experimental code routines.

6. To faithfully represent the art style and the characterisations of the original.

7. To avoid any of the drug, sex or excessive violence elements that might create problems in gaining Nintendos' final approval.

AKIRA - The Essence.

Before embarking on the proposed game design we researched the available material extensively. We then tried to distil the essential elements that we felt represented the 'Spirit of Akira' . We wanted to find the key features that would link our game naturally to the different media versions. Here are some of the things we came up with, along with how we intend to translate these key features into the game design..

1) Colours

The original Manga graphics were printed in stark, black and white. Subsequent colour versions retained the original shading and filled the white space with bold yellows and reds. We intend that the SNES games colour scheme will use the same hues of chrome yellows and bright reds. The neon blues and purples of the night scenes will also be used to echo not only the graphic scenes but also the colours of the source.

2) Art Style

The wide eyed, clean lined, Manga art has become a strong easily identified style and where possible we will use specific art from the original comics and video. Where art is re-drawn it will be in the Manga style.

3) Action

Even the pages of the original books are filled with fast moving images and destructive sequences. Whilst a video game can have action, it will not be possible to incorporate huge animated sequences into the game. We will therefore aim to have fast action sprite games as well as very smoothly animated characters for the adventure sections. Carefully combined scrolling backdrops and overlaid sprites will be used to imitate animated cells. These will be in the style of key, memorable sequences from the film.

For example, a helicopter will fly over a scrolling city scape, or a side view of Kaneda on his "Citizen 2000" bike will zoom along the scrolling backdrop. By careful design of the graphics, many sequences can be built up in this way without them being repetitive to watch. In the examples mentioned above the city backdrop could be designed to use different palettes for day and night. They could be illuminated by the searchlight of the helicopter or the bike headlamps to give a dramatic effect for minimum ROM overhead. These will be detailed in the technical design review.

4) Explosions

One image that is often remembered from the film, it is the constant barrage of billowing explosions. We therefore consider it essential that well animated, large billowing sprites are designed. These will be used in different colours and overlaid in different combinations to produce an effect which will hopefully be similar to those in the movie. The stylish 'billowing dust clouds' will feature in the game and in the animated sections as described. Other conventional explosions will of course be featured to be used throughout the game.

5) The Sound Track

a) Music

Whilst the comics were, of course silent, they echoed with the reverberation of tribal warfare and primitive behaviour. The music for the animated feature matches the mood of Akira brilliantly. The tom-tom drumming is highly evocative of primitive tribal war drums with complex drum rhythms and complementary counter harmonies. Fortunately the sound system is the SNES is quite powerful and so we expect to do the original score full justice. The final amount of accuracy will depend upon whether the score for the music can be obtained.

b) SFX & Samples.

The essential 'game sounds' will of course be featured. In addition we hope to find space to include samples of the main characters calling out each others names. The dramatic calls of "TETSUO" or "KANEDA" or "KAY" are for a long time the only spoken sounds heard in the movie. Many avid viewers of the video often find themselves calling out "TETSUO" "TETSUO" after watching the film. We will tray hard to leave sufficient space for these haunting cries that will ensure a resurgence of memories for those that have seen the film.

6) Inevitability

The psychic child 'Masaru' says in the movie;

"It has already begun"

Indeed the whole story of Akira is the story of individuals who seem to be travelling a pre-ordained path from cataclysm to cataclysm. Students of the deeper meaning of Akira (and there are many) might describe this as the inevitability of life; "we are born, we exist, we die". This in turn becomes the metaphor for the whole of creation. Indeed the Manga itself details many theories of the Akira phenomenon. These are put forward by scientists and the psychic children. The 'BIG BANG' theory of creation is used as the underlying power that has been awakened in gifted children that have been subjected to special treatments and drugs.

Most video game types are not suitable vehicles for deep theories and character or plot development. The deep underlying fatalism and fears of Akira cannot be done full justice in a game. However, we **DO** regard the underlying "raison d'être" to be important to the faithful adaptation of 'Akira' to the SNES. We have therefore tried hard to find a plot device which will allow the game to co-exist within the Akira film and Manga universe.

The best game type for Akira would probably be that of a huge graphic adventure. Given sufficient money, memory or media, a game equal in depth and excitement to the film could be produced. This idea is extremely appealing and H.M.S. could produce this licence as a superb C.D. based game. However, we recognise that this would be too ambitious for a SNES cart. The way in which we will explain the Akira context and sub-context will therefore be by the proven device of allowing two of the psychic children, Masaru and Kiyoko, to be narrators. These will appear on screen to advance and explain the plot. Appropriate animation will show developments graphically. Text will be used rather than speech due to memory constraints.

7) Character Animation.

The movie has a high standard of animation with '160,000' drawn cells. Its production budget of over $9 million is clearly not able to be matched by this game project. Even if such a budget were available, an SNES cartridge is not the right media for an animated movie.(We are ready to take on the 3DO version!)

We cannot feature an extreme number of animation's, but we **CAN** include the graphic style and fast movement of graphic elements such as motorcycles and hover bikes. The running, jumping, walking etc. of the main character will be done to the highest number of frames possible. Our goal will be to match the 'cocky stride' of Kaneda and the movement styles of the others featured characters. The size of the character will be limited by the sprite/memory limitations but we intend that the sizes will be larger than the average SNES game characters.

8) Story Narration

The film uses the device of 'Masaru' speaking through 'Kay' to 'explain' what is happening. There is the distinct impression that the psychic children Masaru and Kiyoko are influencing many of the events in the story.

Then at the end of the film they join with Akira and Tetsuo to produce the ultimate fusion of their psychic energies. It is this sub plot that we intend to use as the cohesive force behind the game. We believe that in doing so we will remain faithful to the Akira concept whilst actually making a positive contribution to the body of work that is AKIRA.

We are proposing that our game is set up in a 'psychic warp'. A world of infinite paths to the same destination. The player must relive the events of the Akira story through the characters of Kay and Kaneda. They cannot change the inevitable final, big bang but their actions (under the control of the player) can change the matter of survival for themselves

and determine the continued existence of Neo TOKYO after the destruction caused by the combined powers of the psychic children. The psychic warp allows us to feature alternative endings whilst not contradicting the movies version of events.

9) Language

Just as the laser disk carries both the Japanese and the English sound tracks we intend that our game will simultaneously provide information in Japanese and English. Any speech will be appropriate to both languages, i.e. spoken names and non linguistic utterances such as 'Uh!' or 'Aargh'.

If the text can be supplied to us then the Japanese will be displayed in the way most acceptable to the target Japanese player. This may be classic ideograms, 'kanji' or 'kata kana' characters.

To further aid player orientation, and in keeping with the graphic novel style, we intend that locations will initially be identified by overlaid legends such as; "Deep beneath the Olympic Stadium".

10) The Target Audience.

The original Akira work has a very wide appeal to many age groups. It would not be unrealistic to consider it to be from teens to the ancient (over 40). It is estimated that over 95% of the audience will be male. As mentioned in Black Pearls overview of the Akira market, this undoubtedly matches the game buyers profile. We intend that the game play be biased towards the older late teens early twenties group.

11) Sex, Drugs and Violence.

The Manga and the Movie have all of the above. There is no technical reason that would exclude them featuring in the game. However, even if the licensees, licensor, or we the developers did not object to the inclusion, it is clear that Nintendo would not sanction a release of any product that "crossed" their guide lines.

The fact is that the game will work perfectly well and can provide full satisfaction to purchasers without any sex content.

Drugs can also be left out (NO pill on Kaneda's jacket), even though this features strongly in the film art.

Violence **IS** the problematical element. The reason being that shooting, blasting, zapping etc. are at the very core of video gaming. It is not really feasible to just have enemy robots or vehicles to destroy . We therefore propose to have images of attackers that can be shot or fought. Our suggested compromise will be that they do not die an on screen death. Instead of having graphic death sequences, they will disappear or fall out of sight off screen.

Summary of Game Elements to be Included.

1. The look and feel of the Manga will be achieved by using the same colour set and art style.

2. The 'plot' of the movie will be retained via text narration and special animated sequences.

3. The action parts of Akira will be done as complete games of proven playability.

4. The player controlled progression to the ultimate climax will be built around an action adventure style.

5. Since the end is inevitable, the players' task will be to reach that end having achieved a high 'personal aura'

6. Text and speech will be for Japanese & English speaking people.

Initial Game Design Considerations.

Having considered the Akira features and explained briefly how we intend to incorporate them we can now start to consider specific game types.

There are many existing styles of game and most could be used as a basis for an Akira licence. In recommending the way in which the game should develop on the SNES we have born in mind the initial objectives which were set us, namely that the game must be achievable within memory, machine and time budgets. This effectively rules out the use of any radical new game techniques or unproven game types.

We believe that this also rules out the use of lots of fundamentally different game styles within one cartridge.

Experience shows that when a game must contain the core routines for several different game types it ceases to be one project but becomes separate projects each competing for different resources and graphics. This was our concern regarding the disparate elements contained in the initial Genesis game design.

Some visually different styles may be used together such as side on and overhead views because they can each use the same 8 way scroll, image display engine. The inclusion of 3D or pseudo 3D game types can cause high development conflicts and detract from the playability of the game.

The game design that we propose is based upon using the SNES to do what it does well and to present the player with a consistent and natural game play environment. The following overview of the game should enable the reader to understand how the whole thing will work.

Proposed Game Overview

(with notes on rationale and other options considered)

Opening - Credits and Logos for each of the parties involved in the development. The sound of wind howling is heard.

Fade out to an overview of Neo Tokyo and the opening scene from the movie with date. Still the eerie wind sound is heard. All is still.

The sound stops. The white hemisphere of the explosion is seen to grow and envelop the screen.

The bellowing clouds are displayed on screen and the faces of Masaru and Kiyoko appear hovering in space.
Kiyoko says :It has already begun.
Masaru says the same in Japanese.

A new date appears on the screen with the location identified as Neo Tokyo. The hard thump of the drum intro starts and the scene shows a motorbike rider (Tetsuo) travelling along the road (This will use the in game mode 7 graphics).

Takashi suddenly appears in front and Tetsuo is knocked of his bike (Thus we will have used the existing graphics to match the actual film scenes)

Next the overhead of Neo Tokyo is used with an overlaid helicopter sprite to show Tetsuo being taken to the military research centre. (The large A frame building.) The text narration identifies events as they progress.

The player may exit this sequence at any time to enter the game selection screen. If this intro is watched in its entirety it will conclude with the kids explaining:
 "There are many roads to the future and you must help Kay and Kaneda to reach their own true destiny's."

In this way we will have stayed faithful to the story, will have introduced the main characters and will be ready to start the action from just after the Tetsuo/Takashi incident.

Note: As in the Genesis design we considered having the player control Tetsuo but felt that he was basically uncontrollable and was definitely the adversary. To let the player control his huge power would not involve the skill or challenge which we believe to be essential to game play.

We also considered having the player be one the psychic kids. The game would then be a more, Populous /Megalomania/ Lemmings style 'God Sim' which would we believe offer opportunities for a great game. However, it would be of limited appeal to a smaller section of the main target market and would require unproven code and design elements. This was therefore rejected in favour of the design in this document.

Main Game Selection Screen.

This will combine an overall view of Neo Tokyo with key locations marked. A cursor may be moved over each to obtain information on that location (Displayed overlaid on screen)

This is the way in which the player will direct his character around to each game location.

Images of Kay and Kaneda will be displayed as icons on the screen next to a location. The player may select either character directly. Appropriate action will then commence at the present location of the character. Alternatively the player can just point and click to a location and then to a character. In this case, the narration kids will appear and tell the player what will need to be achieved. Examples are listed later in this document but it could be something like:

" For Kaneda to travel to the stadium you must fight through a hostile motor cycle gang known as The Clowns."

The scene would then change to the motorcycle game in which Kaneda would have to avoid hazards and combat the clowns on motorbikes. If successful the player would then 'arrive' at the destination and the main game screen would be re-displayed. This would then show Kaneda icon against the stadium on the map. If the player Kaneda then wanted to explore that location Kaneda would be selected as detailed above and the explanation section would be displayed.

Having chosen to get Kaneda to a location the player could next select Kay and select her objective. If the objective for Kay contradicts the 'story junction' then Masaru's text would tell the player (for example) "Sorry Kay cannot make that journey alone. She needs Kaneda to take her".

In this way the player will be given freedom to play sections of the game independently and build up their character 'Aura level', whilst still pursuing an overall adventure that follows the Akira story.

If a player just wants to enjoy a hover bike game or a race then these games could be played over and over without effecting the advance towards the end of the game. We are aiming for a game which avoids strict levels or fixed routes. We want the player to be free to explore, fight or pursue the overall goal. We want the player to be able to guide the destiny of the two characters without it turning into a complex adventure or a conventional role playing game.

If the player does what is required by the key 'story junctions' then the story will advance and there will be the ability to achieve one of several endings. There will also be the opportunity to feature the animated plot advancement sequences as detailed earlier.

We will have given the players character choices within a branching structure. The flow of the game may be summarised as follows.

1. Credits
2. Intro -or skip intro
3. Selection Screen
4. Select Character & location
5. Display lockout or display objectives or plot advancements.
6. Play the game type
7. Display result of game
   Return to selection screens.(3)

This will continue until the final plot advancement reaches the final 'boom scene'

Alternative endings:

Big Bang : Nothing left all gone
Big Bang : Neo Tokyo left no heroes!
Big Bang: 1 hero - No Tokyo!
Big Bang: 1 hero and Tokyo!
Big Bang: 2 heroes and Tokyo!
Big bang: Very special super anim replay.

At any time, a full reset goes to the start for the credits. Soft restarts from selection screen as last displayed i.e. try that section again.

Save Game

We need to know if this is required since it will effect the design a great deal. Cart save is ideal, password save is second best.

Controls

We may allow players to set up preferred controls if space allows. Other than that the controls will be finalised during game development. The initial controls will be in the technical design review. We would like to include support for the Nintendo gun system.

Game Types.

The SNES game will encompass several "different" game types which will look and play differently but which will share code and routines.

Side Scroller.

This will depict the key location as side viewed images in the conventional 'platform style'. However the art style and the shading will be full MANGA style. This game type and graphics will be used for the fast action hover bike sections and the exploration gathering sections. Some graphics will be re-used in the plot advancement sequences. These scenes will be reused for the different game types and may be visited several times to complete the action adventure.

Overhead Scrolled.

Naturally this will depict action from overhead. To allow the player to clearly distinguish items a slight offset from the vertical will allow depth to be represented. This game type will share most of the code within the side scroller and will generally be used when larger distances and faster travel is to be represented. We would like to include a chase game using this view since these give very high play value and the films overhead scenes could be very well represented in this view.

Action Adventure

This is a variation on the side scroll and will use the same backdrop display methods. It may also share graphics with the side scroller game. In this variation the player will control the character as they search for important people, things and entrances.

The character animation will be very, very smooth and will use a higher than normal number of frames. The game style will be similar to SNES games such as Prince of Persia or Flashback.

We will include fast leaping bike sequences, as the way to negotiate the sewers, the subway and the crater region.

This major game component will be further enhanced by a range of hand to hand fighting moves which both Kay and Kaneda will have. These will enable the game to incorporate 'Streets of Rage' type action that complements this licence very well.

Mode 7

This mode which is specific to the SNES will be used extensively for the animated sequences and in the road fighting sequences. Due to the high VRAM requirements this will not be expanded to compete with the many other games of this type which already exist on the SNES and which have the luxury of using the whole cartridge for one game type.

Special Hardware Games.

We have not designed anything that will require SFX or DSP type chips to be included. If these are required then we will revise the specs. We plan on using a fast ROM of 16mbit or 2mbyte capacity. Any less will seriously affect the finished game quality.

Game Types

We have used simple descriptions of the game types on the basis that these are well known to the reader. The strength of this game will be in the smooth interaction of these games to produce a fluid Akira story based game.

Mission/Objectives

Once the overall approach has been agreed and the game types have been confirmed then we will produce (as part of the next milestone) the layouts and detailed elements to be used in the game.

Set out below are some of the objectives as a guide to the content and to identify the game types associated with them.

These missions are not set out on any special order. The player may achieve some in random order whilst others will only be presented once missions are completed.

Objectives	Location	Game Type
Trade items	Bar	Action Adventure
Find Kay	Derelict Skyscraper	Action Adventure
Get secret map	Bar	Action Adventure
Get trading items	Damaged stores	Action Adventure
Get weapons	Underground cache	Action Adventure
Rescue Ryu	Basement of A frame	Side scroller
Get to Tetsuo	Hospital	Action/side scroller
Get to Children	Sewers	Action/side scroller
Find Akira	Secret bunker	Adventure
Escape	Sewers	Side Scroller
Fight off clowns	Roadway	Mode 7 game
Fight off army	Roadway	Mode 7 game
Fight off mobs	Roadway	Mode 7 Overhead
Race to Children	Streets/Road	Mode 7 Overhead
Get Laser rifle	Street & Underground	Side/Adventure
Jump the craters	Subway	Side scroller
Get Super Bike	Assorted	Action Adventure
Rescue kids	Subway/Hospital	Side Scroller
Fight Tetsuo	The Stadium	Action Adventure
Avoid Sol	The Stadium	Side Adventure
Caretaker robots	Outside Stadium	All types!

ANIMATED SEGUÉS

These are not in order. Each will feature between the missions or at pre-determined times.

The Big Bang	As in the film.
Tetsuo hits Takashi	As in the film.
Takashi to Facility	As in the film.
Police warning School Principal	Picture and characters used as general purpose "You failed scenes".
Terrorist Attacks	Clever use and re-use of explosions over backdrops. Lots of billowing.
Sol Weapon	Tetsuos arm is shot off.
Tetsuos Nightmare	Bunny bear and car controlled by the kids attack Tetsuo
Tetsuos Destruction grows	More building and backdrops blown up with lots of billowing clouds.
The Awakening of Akira	Kay & Kaneda and then Tetsuo descend into the big fridge.
The coming together	The psychic kids are reunited at the stadium for the end.
Colonel standing.	The colonel used against various backdrops as the 'boss' behind the game obstacles.
The explanation	The psychic kids use Kay to unravel a few mysteries.
The lady on TV	Plot advancement device telling big events that have happened in Neo Tokyo.
The big bang	Akira, Tetsuo and the kids go for the big one.
The endings	Separate scenes made up from: pictures of Kaneda, Picture of wrecked Tokyo.
Special Ending	Re-run of all images seen in the game with full sound track and a few extra pictures as space permits.

Game Examples

To help in confirming the style for the licensor and to help identify memory and speed limitations we have coded a sample of the main game types for early viewing. This greatly exceeds the requirements of the initial milestone but we believe it will be of benefit in ensuring that the overall objectives are met.

Two Player

We intend that two players will be able to either play in turns as Kay or Kaneda in one game or will take turns playing in separate games. Simultaneous on screen two players will not be appropriate.

Score

We propose that the graphic of the hemispherical aura is used as an indication of the psychic health of Kay and Kaneda. This will be displayed on the selection screen. Numbers will also be displayed. A certain value will need to be reached by the time of the big bang for each different ending. The aura will be reduced by failure during the game but the player cannot die. Remember they are in a psychic warp to fulfil their destiny!

Development Time Frame

Note: Fully itemised milestones will form part of the technical development report which is milestone 2. This section is included to provide the initial framework for the crucial early stages.

For completeness, stages that have already been done have been included and marked as done..

1.   Initial early discussion of game objectives with Larry and Steve.✔
2.   Research the Akira Manga and laser disk.   ✔
3.   Discuss internally the prime objective and the SNES appropriate game types.✔
4.   Code up prototype examples to illustrate game action and style.✔
5.   Use prototypes to confirm overall machine constraints and estimate memory usage.✔
6.   Use the Akira source material to produce
     a) Overall reason for game,
     b) Appropriate game types,
     c) Appropriate art and animation sequences,
     d) Game locations,
     e) Game objectives.✔
7.   Program draft overview.✔
8.   Refine draft and finalise proposal.✔
9.   Submit (this) game design milestone✔

Next:

10. Discuss the suggested overall game design with Black Pearl, T•HQ etc.
11. Confirm game design overview and elements to be included
12. Discuss technical aspects of the now firm game design.
13. Amend or expand elements as result of discussion.
14. Produce revised game design as working document for H.M.S. coding and art production.
15. Produce examples of art and sketches of major locations.

16.   Incorporate all discussion and feedback iinto the technical design report. Including:

A)   Game flows and features.

B)   Projected memory budgets for code, art animation, music sounds sprites etc.

C)   The proposed milestone contents for milestone 3 onwards with target dates.

17.   Produce draft technical design report and review contents.

18.   Produce final technical design report and submit to T•HQ/Black Pearl as 2 copies bound with inclusions.

19.   Implement the SNES game core and working art ready for development ready for milestone 3.

20.   Establish liaison system for ongoing development.

Conclusion

This document has set out how the objectives listed at the start will be met.

Our proposal is basically that proven game types are used with Akira style art and animation. We are purposely not proposing anything that would entail unpredictable development time or might be too hard for the market to accept.

We believe that the strength of the AKIRA imagery and story combined with our proposed treatment will produce a strong selling game. This should appeal not only to the existing Akira followers but will also attract new devotees.

Our fundamental concept is to allow the games to be played in any order within an overall timeline. We are certain that by granting the player more freedom of play choice they will be more satisfied than if they were only allowed to choose route 'A'; to the Boss or route 'B'. We have combined action with adventure and remained faithful to the Akira 'plot'.

The varied (but code efficient) game types combined with the carefully designed, animated sequences will enable maximum use of the limited ROM space.
We have included breadth and depth.
We are confident that the game will be well received by SNES owners and will reward the licensors and licensees with a product that will continue the high quality Akira reputation.

Additional Requirements

H.M.S. will need to have the following supplied or agreed prior to the submission of the Technical Design Reportfor the next milestone.

1. A full set of the Akira Manga Comics.

2. The full score for the film music.

3. Feedback and agreement on the proposed game style and overall design outlined in this document.

4. Confirmed travel arrangements for the H.M.S. programmer to travel to Calabasas for 4 weeks on site game development.

5. Detailed agreement of type and amount of work to be achieved whilst on site. This should enable us to incorporate the work into the planned development schedule, and to plan the support code and support art provision. It will also help ensure that the trip is worthwhile and does not detract from the overall advancement of the project.

6. Agreement on methods of support whilst H.M.S. programmer is away from base e.g. BBS/Modem access and development equipment.

We request that **all** of the above be achieved within one week of receipt of this game design. Otherwise there will be adverse effects upon the completion of the next milestone and the target completion date of the project.