CHAPTER 21

PUZZLE-BASED GAME CASE STUDY: THE 11TH HOUR: THE SEQUEL TO THE 7TH GUEST

Summary

Name of production: The 11th Hour: The Sequel to The 7th Guest
Writer: Story and screenplay by Matthew Costello, revisions by David Wheeler
Developer: Trilobyte, Inc.
Audience: Rated for teenagers (ages 13 and up)
Medium: 4 CD-ROMs, includes The Making of The 11th Hour
Presentation location: Home
Subject: Psychological horror story
Goal: Entertain
Architecture: Linear, string of pearls

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PROGRAM DESCRIPTION AND BACKGROUND

The 11th Hour: The Sequel to The 7th Guest is a psychological horror video game. As stated in the title, it is the sequel to The 7th Guest, one of the most popular computer games ever created. The 11th Hour uses the same haunted house and many of the same characters as the first game, which was set in the 1920s. But the new game places the action in the present, where a series of mysterious murders and disappearances plagues the towns surrounding the house.

One of the people who disappears is Robin Morales, a successful TV producer. Carl Denning, her ex-lover and the star of her show, goes to the haunted house to find her. The player assumes the role of Denning, directing his search of the house. The point of view alternates between seeing Denning from a third-person point of view, as in a traditional movie, and seeing through Denning’s eyes in first-person point of view. The player/Denning is helped in the search by a personal digital assistant.
(PDA), which mysteriously appears at his home. The PDA includes a video screen, VCR-type controls for rewind and playback, a keyboard, an electronic map of the house, and a help button.

This PDA game book plays segments of video about Morales’ investigation of the haunted house. To earn these snippets of video, the player/Denning has to solve dozens of puzzles created by Henry Stauf, an evil toy-maker and master of the mansion. A successful player of the game gradually pieces together the video, which shows what happened to Morales. The program ends with a final deadly game between Denning and Stauf.

Examples of many of the game elements can be seen in the video The Making of The 11th Hour, which is included in the Chapter 21 area of the “Chapters” section of the Writing for Multimedia and the Web CD-ROM.

**THE 11TH HOUR: THE SEQUEL TO THE 7TH GUEST AND THE COMPUTER GAME**

Unlike some of the narratives described in later chapters, both The 7th Guest and The 11th Hour are puzzle-based games, which have a strong appeal to a major portion of the gaming audience. The puzzles include word puzzles, board games, and even artificial intelligence games. Most of the puzzles have a limited connection to the story.

Writer Matthew Costello said that what set The 7th Guest apart from other video games of this type was that it was one of the first games that actually tried to scare computer game players. The 11th Hour continues in this horror tradition, but moves from the Gothic horror of the first game to psychological horror.

**PRODUCTION BACKGROUND**

Matthew Costello wrote the story and script for The 11th Hour. This script was revised by the video director David Wheeler. The project was developed by Trilobyte Inc., whose head designers, Graeme Devine and Rob Landeros, had major input into
the script, particularly how it would be used in the overall game. Trilobyte, once a major developer of computer games, has gone out of business. The 11th Hour was distributed by Virgin Games, Inc.

GOALS AND CHALLENGES WRITING THE 11TH HOUR: THE SEQUEL TO THE 7TH GUEST

The challenge in writing and designing The 11th Hour was to tell a compelling, interactive horror story without abandoning the puzzle-based game format that had been so successful in The 7th Guest. The developers wanted the story to be interactive, but they did not want to hand over complete control of the story to the user. As designer Graeme Devine said in an interview:

I've learned, perhaps most of all, that I want to be, need to be, a storyteller, and that means that I want it to be my story—have my start, my middle, my end—rather than allow the stories to be so interactive that there's a zillion endings, a billion middles, and a hundred beginnings. (Demaria 284)

MEETING THE CHALLENGE

THE INTERACTIVE STORY, THE PDA GAME BOOK, AND PUZZLES

The primary way the writers and designers met this challenge was through the use of the PDA game book. The story of Robin Morales’ disappearance was originally written as a linear video, but instead of playing it as a linear video, the user can access only bits and pieces of it on the game book. These intriguing bits and pieces lead the user forward in the search for Morales. The player can also play back the video snippets and gradually assemble them into the complete story. The player eventually learns that the game book and its images are an attempt by Samantha Ford, an earlier victim of the house, to help Denning save Morales.

The player needs to understand what happened to Morales in order to make the right choice at the end of the game. This process is not unlike the traditional mystery in which the investigator gradually puts together the story of what happened by piecing together bits of information. (See The Pandora Directive case study in Chapter 23.) One difference here is that the game book actually delivers video images as opposed to just getting information about the past through dialogue.

The second major difference in The 11th Hour is that the video snippets are not discovered through carefully putting together the evidence and clues related to the event. Instead, the video is earned by solving puzzles in the Stauf Mansion that are unrelated to the Robin Morales story. Many of the puzzles involve a treasure hunt in which investigator Carl Denning must win games and interpret clues to find certain objects, such as a champagne bottle. When he finds that bottle and pops the cork, he is rewarded with a video scene.

Although nothing the player does will alter the Robin Morales story in the game book’s video, the player does have the choice of where to explore in the house and which games to play and which games to skip. In order to nudge the narrative forward, however, not all puzzles and not all rooms are open to the player at one time. This is illustrated on the game book map, which indicates which rooms are open
at a certain time and place in the game. What video the player can access is also limited by where the player is in the game.

**Linear Narrative and Introduction of the PDA Game Book**
The game book is introduced in the linear beginning of the story when a package arrives at the home of Carl Denning. Before the package arrives, Denning is watching a TV show that is discussing the disappearance of his producer and lover, Robin Morales.

**INTRO-1 INT/DENNING’S COUNTRY HOME—AFTERNOON**

A UPS truck is pulling away and a package is on the doorstep. Denning crouches down and picks it up and goes back inside. He returns to his chair and opens the package, revealing a small, portable computer of some kind. He switches it on, and a game flickers to life on the machine..."Funhouse From Hell"—Cartoony images of mayhem, monsters...

Slowly, the computer game changes to an image of Robin looking frightened in the basement of an old house. She speaks to him from the small screen.

ROBIN

Carl...help me...please!...I can’t get out...

I...

The image of Robin fades away and the video screen goes blank as if the game has shut itself off. Denning shakes the box and clicks it on and off but it seems to have died.

**DENNING**

What is this!?

He sets the game computer on the arm of the chair, gets to his feet, and begins to pace. The game starts beeping. He grabs it and switches it on. An image of the Stauf Mansion appears briefly and fades away and the game shuts down again.

**DENNING**

Damn!

Then the screen comes alive for another brief moment: An image of Robin appears. She mouths the word "Help,"—but there is no sound and the picture quickly fades. Denning pulls on a leather windbreaker and stuffs the game in his pocket as he crosses the room and leaves in a rush.
The remainder of the introduction is also linear until Denning actually enters the Stauf Haunted House.

**Interactive Narrative and the Puzzles**

Once Denning enters the house, the remaining video has to be earned by solving puzzles and finding objects in a treasure hunt. These puzzles are justified narratively because the evil master of the house, Henry Stauf, is a toy-maker and game designer who likes to torture his guests with difficult and deadly puzzles.

One of the first puzzles occurs when Denning enters the house. The game book beeps, and a creepy male voice (Stauf) says, “Winter coat worn for a mixer?” The words also appear on the game book screen. By touching the help button, the player/Denning gets this clue from a mysterious female voice: “Be warned that ‘worn’ means destroyed.” (The player can, of course, make the puzzle more challenging by not pressing the help button.) A second try with the help button elicits, “Mixer might not be a party. What if it’s a beverage?” The following hints include: “Something’s mixed up here,” and “A beverage might be found in the library.”

With the help of the map in the game book, the player can find the library but still might need a couple more clues to discover the object of his or her search. The help button offers: “Winter coat is an anagram,” and “Winter coat is an anagram of ‘Tonic Water.’” Denning (and the player) now knows he is looking for tonic water. But before being allowed to find the tonic water, the player first has to solve a puzzle that involves putting all of the library books of the same color together in a limited number of moves. If he or she succeeds at this, the player is finally allowed to get his or her hands on the bottle of tonic water. The reward is a video clip about Morales played on the game book (in boldface type in the script that follows).

**Interactive Video Script Sample**

Although the video about Morales is presented interactively to the gamer, it was written and shot as a linear story. In the script sample that follows, the sections in boldface type are examples of video fragments that are triggered by Denning/the player solving puzzles and finding various items. The script sections that are not in boldface type are not initially revealed to Denning, but the player/Denning eventually gets to see all the scenes.

**MODULE I SCENES: HARLEY-ON-HUDSON**

I-1 EXT/COFFEE SHOP ON MAIN STREET–DAY

There is a line of pick-up trucks parked outside a coffee shop in “downtown” Harley. Like the rest of the town, the coffee shop seems frozen in time—somewhere in the late fifties when the freeway went in and traffic (and life in general) began to pass Harley by. Like a flash to the present, a convertible driven by a young, beautiful woman in dark glasses motors down Main Street and pulls into a parking spot between two beat-up pick-ups in front of the coffee shop. The coffee shop is filled with breakfast customers and all eyes are on the convertible. The woman gets out, and she’s dressed in a fashionable short skirt, heels, and a tailored jacket—
all in black—looking as if she’d be more at home in a Manhattan design studio than the sleepy town of Harley. It’s Robin. She walks up to the front door of the coffee shop and goes in.

The following boldface segment is revealed to Denning on the PDA when he touches the tonic water bottle in the haunted house.

1–2 INT/COFFEE SHOP–DAY

Robin enters the coffee shop and stands just inside the door next to the cash register, keeping her dark glasses on. Any motion has come to a complete stop and everyone is looking at her. Finally a waitress speaks up. She’s a truck-stop woman—kind of voluptuous, a little rough-edged, and attractive in an earthy sort of way. She has a prosthetic hand protruding from the sleeve of her sweater. Her name is Eileen Wiley.

EILEEN

Just sit anywhere, honey. Menus are on the table.

ROBIN

Thanks. Is there a non-smoking section?

There is a slight rumble of laughter. Virtually everyone including the cook is smoking. Eileen grins and shakes her head.

Robin walks toward a booth by the window. The only sound is the clicking of her heels and the slight rustle of her clothing. She sits down, takes off her dark glasses, and inspects the menu. Slowly, everyone goes back to their business and the sound level raises back up to that of a normal coffee shop environment. Eileen comes over to Robin’s table.

EILEEN

What can I get for you this morning?

ROBIN

Do you have oat-bran muffins?

EILEEN

This isn’t an oat-bran kind of place, honey. We’re big on chocolate donuts here.

ROBIN

I don’t suppose you have any Perrier water.

EILEEN

Let me check...Hey Slim, we got any Perrier?
Slim is the cook. He sticks his head out from the kitchen.

SLIM
Fresh out of Perrier, Eileen. Had a big run on it this morning.
Everyone in the restaurant laughs.

EILEEN
Sorry, honey. How about a San Pellegrino?

ROBIN
Oh? That would be fine.

EILEEN
I’m kidding, hon. The only water we got comes out of the tap.

ROBIN
Just bring me a donut and a coffee.

EILEEN
Now you’re talkin’. Shall I make that a cappuccino?

ROBIN
Enough with the jokes, okay?

EILEEN
No, I’m serious. As unlikely as it seems, we actually have an espresso machine.

Robin smiles and shrugs.

ROBIN
Okay.

EILEEN
Be right back.

She leaves and Robin takes out a small palm-size computer and begins to type. Eileen returns with the donut.

EILEEN
Here you go. Be right back with the coffee.

ROBIN
You’re Eileen Wiley, aren’t you?

EILEEN
Who wants to know?
ROBIN
I’m Robin Morales. I’m a producer with Case Unsolved the TV show.

EILEEN
Is that the one with Carl Denning?

ROBIN
Uh-huh.

EILEEN
Ooh, I like him... Wouldn’t mind serving him up a couple of specials.

She laughs and Robin smiles.

EILEEN (CONT’D)
What’s he like?

ROBIN
He’s... uh... he’s a man.

EILEEN
You mean he’s a man like you can’t live with him or a man like you can’t live without him?

Robin thinks about it a moment, then grins.

ROBIN
He’s both.

EILEEN
Aren’t they all?

They both laugh and Eileen sits down.

EILEEN (CONT’D)
So what are you doing in Harley?

The following segment is revealed to Denning on the PDA when he touches a satyr in a painting.

CLERK

Hello, Marie.

An eighteen year old girl moves with a slow sensual saunter toward the desk. She has a look of petulant sexuality, dressed in a short denim skirt, white high heels, and a white T-shirt.
MARIE
Where’s Chuck?

CLERK
I thought maybe you were here to see me.

MARIE
You wish... Is he in his office?

The clerk checks his watch.

CLERK
He’s got a meeting in five minutes. He hasn’t got
time for you today, Marie.

She smirks.

MARIE
Just tell ‘im I’m here.

He picks up the telephone and punches a button.

CLERK
Chuck, Marie Wiley’s here to see you... But you
got a meeting at... Okay, okay.

He hangs up and reaches behind him for a room key and
hands it to Marie.

CLERK
Lucky number 7... Have fun.

She takes the key and turns and leaves without another
word. The clerk watches Marie’s hips move under her
tight-fitting skirt as she goes out the door.

This scene continues, and there are several more scenes in the first module, which
is shown during the “Seven O’clock” section of the game.

MULTIPLE ENDINGS

Although the player (and Denning) accesses the video about Morales in bits
and pieces, the order in which he or she accesses the video has no affect on the
Robin Morales story. Piecing together Morales’ story and properly understanding it
does, however, help the player make the right choice at the end of the game, where
Denning faces three possibilities. Unlike the earlier puzzles, which weren’t directly
related to the story, this final choice is “a real dramatic choice which goes to the
player’s values and interests” (Costello). Following are the multiple endings of *The 11th Hour*.

V-8 INT. TEMPLE’S BEDROOM—NIGHT [REAL TIME]

Denning rushes in, hearing the screams of Robin.

**ROBIN(OS)**
Oh, God—help. Please, no more—no.

**DENNING**
Robin!

But he enters the room, and there’s no one there. Nothing. The door slams behind him. There is a rumble, the sound of the house fully alive, a deep bass note that swells. Denning slowly turns.

And as he turns we see three doors...and each door begins to open...slowly...End of Module V.

### ENDCASE

The opening sequence of the Endgame is triggered after all scenes of Module Five have been witnessed. Then the final choices are presented...

E-1 INT. THE STAUF MANSION—NIGHT [11:00]

DENNING stands facing the three doors. Stauf materializes in front of the doors.

**STAUF**
Hello, Carl Denning and welcome to “LET’S MAKE A REAL DEAL”!

**DENNING**
Who the hell are you?

**STAUF**
Why, I’m Monty Stauf, your host on LET’S MAKE A REAL DEAL and have I got a real deal for you...I wonder what this is in my pocket...(He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a wad of money)... Six, count ‘em, six hundred dollars!

He peels off six bills and hands them to Denning.

**STAUF (cont’d)**
Now, Carl, here’s the deal: You can keep the six hundred dollars but you must choose a door, be it door number 1, 2, or 3...OR you can pay me two hundred dollars and see what’s behind the door of your choice. What’ll it be, Carl?
DENNING
I’ll pay.

He gives Stauf two hundred.

STAUF
Thank you. Now which door?

DENNING
The one in the middle.

STAUF
Okay! Let’s see what’s behind door number two!

The door opens to reveal a large television set.

STAUF
A big screen TV! Isn’t this fun, Carl?...Now, let’s make another deal. You can keep the TV AND the four hundred dollars you have left, or you can pay me two hundred dollars to see what’s behind another door.

Denning gives Stauf another two hundred.

DENNING
Let’s see what’s behind number one.

STAUF
All right! What a player!...Door number one!

The door opens to reveal Marie. She’s sitting on a chair dressed in a black bra and panties, garter belt, stockings, and high heels.

STAUF
It’s sweet Marie! She can be absolutely yours anytime, night or day!

MARIE
Anytime.

STAUF
Imagine the hours of fun and enjoyment you’ll have with Marie! A lot more exciting than watching TV.

MARIE
You can watch me if you like.

She places her hands on her knees and trails her fingers up the inside of her thighs. She licks her lips and smiles. Suddenly the big screen TV flickers to life, and Samantha [an earlier victim of the house, who has been helping Denning] appears on the screen.
Samantha
Be strong, Carl Denning. Don’t give in to temptation.

Stauf
Damn it! I thought that TV was unplugged!

Samantha
Choose me.

Stauf
What a choice! Marie—sweet, sensuous, sexy Marie—or Samantha in a wheelchair! Hah!

Denning
What’s behind door number three?

Stauf extends his arm and rubs his fingers together.

Stauf
Pay up.

Denning gives him the last two hundred dollars.

Stauf (Cont’d)
Door number three!

The third door opens and Robin is there.

Robin
Carl, I’ve been so frightened. Please, choose me. Save me. I love you.

Marie
I’ll give you anything you want... Anything and everything.

Samantha
Don’t listen to them. You’ll be lost forever.

Stauf
Shut up, Samantha!

Samantha
He’s afraid of you, Carl. Choose me. Destroy the power of this hellish house.

Robin
Carl, you have to choose me. After all we’ve been through... I need you, Carl.

Marie
Anytime... anyplace... any way you want me.
Stauf confronts the player.

STAUF
Well, what’ll it be, sport? The choice is yours...

CUT TO: THE DOORS.

E-2 INT. TEMPLE’S ROOM—NIGHT

(Triggered by choosing Robin)

Note: All choices should be made real choice—all saved positions from Mod Five on will be erased after choosing. The Player is told this. They can eventually see all three endings but not before re-experiencing the last part of the game.

Denning chooses Robin’s door. He enters and they embrace. There are tears in her eyes.

ROBIN
Thank God.

DENNING
Let’s go home.

E-3 INT/DENNING’S COUNTRY HOME—DAY

Robin is in Denning’s living room watching a newscast on TV. A woman anchorperson is reading the news.

ANCHOR
The body of TV reporter Carl Denning was found floating in the Hudson river today. Denning disappeared during his honeymoon in Harley-on-Hudson after his celebrated marriage to Robin Morales, newly appointed president of the Stauf Broadcasting System.

Robin watches without emotion. She clicks a button on a remote control and the picture fades to black.

E-4 INT. TEMPLE’S ROOM—NIGHT

(Triggered by choosing Marie)

Denning moves toward Marie’s door. She gets up from her chair and walks away into the darkness beyond, looking over her shoulder with a seductive smile. Denning enters the door and follows her.

E-5 INT/BEDROOM—NIGHT

Denning enters a bedroom. Marie is on the bed, lounging back, inviting. Denning gets on the foot of the bed
and crawls up on top of her. He kisses her and she responds passionately which unleashes a hunger in him. She rolls him over so that she is straddling him. She kisses his neck and chest and unbuttons his shirt as she works her way down. Denning looks down at the mane of hair cascading over his stomach. She looks up at him—but it isn’t Marie. It’s Stauf in a wig!

**STAUF**

What a deal!

Denning screams.—THE REST OF THE SCENE IS PLAYED INTO THE CAMERA AS PLAYER’S POV. Stauf rolls off the bed and grabs a barbecued rib from a plate on a dresser. He tosses the wig onto the bed.

**STAUF**

I’ll let you in on a secret—’cause you’re so special. (smacks his lips) Mmmm...these are good...

He laughs. He offers up a rib.

**STAUF (CONT’D)**

Like a bite?...Some choice you made, huh? Oh, don’t look so sad. I’m not so bad...See...?

Stauf metamorphoses back into Marie, still eating the rib, red sauce dripping off her chin onto her chest. More lip-smacking.

She holds out the rib, nearly finished.

**MARIE/STAUF**

Sure you wouldn’t like a bite...? After all—(she laughs)...It’s you!

Marie laughs uproariously and the laughing voice begins to sound like Stauf’s, then she metamorphoses back into Stauf, laughing, doubling over. He begins to cough and it becomes a disgusting, choking sound. As he chokes, he begins to change into his native form—the alien creature that’s been behind this all along. It looks up, jaws open, salivating—as it leaps, devouring the player into blackness.

***E-5-PG INT/BEDROOM—NIGHT [PG VERSION]***

Marie leads Denning into a bedroom holding his hand. When they reach the bed, she pulls him close and they tumble to the mattress. He kisses her and she responds passionately. She rolls him over so that she is on top. She kisses his neck and chest and unbuttons his
shirt as she works her way down. Denning looks down at the mane of hair cascading over his stomach. She looks up at him—but it isn’t Marie....etc.

E-6 INT. TEMPLE’S ROOM—NIGHT (Triggered by choosing Sam)

Denning moves toward the middle door containing the TV with Samantha’s image. He reaches to touch the screen and there is an explosion of white light.

E-7 INT/SAMANTHA FORD’S STUDIO—DAY

Denning finds himself in Samantha’s studio. Samantha looks up at him, sitting in her wheelchair next to one of her monitors. She looks more relaxed than anytime before. She smiles.

SAMANTHA
Welcome, Carl Denning. You made the right choice.

DENNING
It wasn’t easy.

SAMANTHA
No.

DENNING
I hated leaving Robin behind.

SAMANTHA
I know. You risked your life for her...But it was too late to save her.

DENNING
So what happens now?

She extends her hand.

SAMANTHA
Come and see.

He takes her hand and stands behind her as they both look at the monitor. On the screen, the Stauf Mansion is engulfed in flames.

SAMANTHA
You won, Carl.

DENNING
What about Robin?

Samantha shakes her head.
SAMANTHA

She was lost the moment she said yes to Stauf.

They watch the monitor as the house burns. There are tears in Denning’s eyes. Samantha looks content, virtually radiating an inner peace. It’s been a long battle for her. On the monitor, there is nothing left but blackness.

THE END

HORROR AND HUMOR

Another element that the writer Matthew Costello thinks makes this game successful is its blending of humor and horror, because “part of horror is to laugh and be scared” (Costello). If a horror viewer has no release from fearful tension, he or she can overload and turn off to the material.

The following example occurs towards the end of the game when the murderer, Chuck, is himself destroyed by the house.

IV-8 EXT. MANSION—DAY

Chuck struggles with his heavy burden in the overgrown field approaching the mansion.

IV-9 EXT/MANSION PORCH—DAY

Chuck drops his bloody bundle on the porch and knocks on the door. This time when he pushes the bundle in, Chuck gets pulled in with it.

IV-10 INT.—INSIDE THE STAUF MANSION—NIGHT

Chuck finds himself in the kitchen.

JULIA HEINE is at the table cutting something with a cleaver. She is dressed as she was in THE 7TH GUEST, except the dress is faded, tattered, and stained. She whacks at whatever she’s cutting...She looks up at Chuck.

JULIA

Are you ready?

CHUCK

For what?

STAUF

Soup’s on.

Stauf suddenly appears.
Soup’s on!

A head emerges from the soup pot.

Soup’s on!

The kitchen starts to change, the walls turning a deep red, shiny, dripping. And in the cascade of red blood streaming off the walls, onto the floor, there are faces, screaming faces in the wall, looking out, begging. Chuck begins to scream. Julia comes towards Chuck, her meat cleaver dripping blood.

How 'bout a Chuck roast?

Stauf laughs.

Chuck steak!

Chuck him into the soup!

The cleaver comes down.

The writing processes for *The 7th Guest* and *The 11th Hour* were similar even though the story structures were different. The scenes in the first game were designed to be self-contained scenes. In the second game, however, the scenes were meant to be combined to form a complete linear story.

For *The 7th Guest*, the developers had the basic idea about a haunted house game and an evil toy-maker. They contacted Matthew Costello, a horror novelist, to develop the story. He created a novella and broke it into scenes, connecting them to each room.

*The 11th Hour* followed the same writing process, but the story grew out of the Stauf files, which were background material for *The 7th Guest*. Costello wrote a novella based on this material and sent it to the designers, Graeme Devine and Rob Landeros, who critiqued it. Then Costello wrote a script using film script format, with the difference in format being that each segment is numbered and tied to a certain room in the mansion and eventually to the prop in the treasure hunt that triggers it. This device broke up the linearity of the story and organized the narrative by the physical environment and by the way that the user interacts with that environment. This script received further comments and revisions by designers Devine and Landeros and video director David Wheeler.
CONCLUSION: RESPONSE TO THE PROJECT

Critical response to the project was strong. It received raves in most of the major gaming magazines, won a Critic’s Choice Award from CD-ROM Today, an Invision Award from New Media, and it topped many best-seller lists.

REFERENCES