



Learning Games Initiative at
Utah State University

Aristotle's Assassins

Who knew the academy could be so deadly?

High Concept

Aristotle's Assassins is a role-playing adventure game set amid the political turmoil of Ancient Greece. Players uncover a conspiracy to assassinate Aristotle, but the game really gets hot after players realize *they* are the assassins.

Features

General Features

- Explore a visually and acoustically immersive environment.
- Interact with unique and richly interactive non-player characters (NPCs).
- Investigate custom 3D graphics which provide fresh sights in addition to the rich environments of Bioware's *Neverwinter Nights*.
- Enjoy an entertaining, original score by Bryan Pearce (Pearing Sounds, Inc.).
- Experience full motion video cut scenes that create depth for the plot.
- Engage with nonlinear freedom of play gamers expect from a fantasy game world.
- Collect original bardic magic spell-items that trigger historic Dorian sounds.
- Download new levels from the LGI website to expand game environment.

Game-play Features

- Wander the Greek landscape and discover the safest route from Stagira to Athens.
- Outwit a wandering rhetor with challenging NPC dialogues.
- Intermingle with Greek citizens to find the best method to debunk a magician.
- Gain prestige by interviewing astronomers and predicting an eclipse.
- Navigate through an historically accurate recreation of the Athens marketplace.
- Discover a secret passage in Alexander's imperial garden.
- Persuade NPCs to advance the plot and your influence in the game.
- Solve numerous puzzles contextualized around ancient Greek culture and politics.

Overview

Player Motivation

The game is chiefly a single-player adventure. Players will interact with a fictional rendition of Aristotle; in addition, players will also be able to immerse themselves in democratic uprisings. Along with the political tension and indispensable secret societies, ancient Greece will be completely interactive so that players can explore the philosophy, history, music, myth, and society of Greece near the end of Alexander's reign.

Project Philosophy

Aristotle's Assassins demonstrates the principles of stealth learning using very inexpensive game development tools in order to push the boundaries of digital game-based learning in the academy. The game's main standard is play; educational content is strong but not overt. In instances when we must decide between good game-play and educational content, good game-play receives priority. The game's first priority is to appeal to players who select immersive, compelling adaptations of the *Neverwinter Nights* role-playing game.

This project relies upon multidisciplinary collaborations in design, implementation, and play, and demonstrates that such collaborations are not only possible but also highly advantageous.

Genre

The game employs the fantasy/role-playing genre that permits players to explore Greece and Greek history while integrating mythological creatures and legends into gameplay.

License

Aristotle's Assassins is designed and built with the *Neverwinter Nights* game engine, the Aurora

Toolset: an open-source game engine distributed with the game. *Neverwinter Nights* is an award winning game from *Bioware* that has received over 80 awards since its release, including Game of the Year, RPG of the year, Excellence in Programming, Top 10 Game of All Time, Best Game Play, Best Overall Game, and more. *Bioware* has a strong commitment to supporting both amateur and team-based modules. LGI hopes to develop *Aristotle's Assassins* on a sufficient scale to attract *Bioware's* promotional support.

Target Customer

Ancient Greece is familiar to a broad range of customers, in addition to classrooms that teach Greek culture and philosophy. Gamers interested in role-playing games and especially those interested in Greek myth and history will want to play this immersive, engaging game.

Competition

While there are several retail modules available through *Bioware's* website, there are none that encourage both students and players to work first-hand through educational content.

Unique Selling Points

Aristotle's Assassins features custom 3D images, sounds, voices, and original music. The game is a completely fresh look at the world of *Neverwinter Nights* and a new, interactive experience within the politics and culture of Ancient Greece.

Target Hardware

Neverwinter Nights is a DVD-sized PC/Mac role-playing game. *Aristotle's Assassins* requires a computer meeting *Neverwinter Nights's* minimum system requirements: 450 MHz, 96 MB RAM, 1.2 GB Hard-drive, and 16 MB OpenGL video card.

Further Details

Additional design goals include both educational engagement and low design costs. In regards to educational engagement, the design team seeks to engage players powerfully enough to entangle historical a cultural learning with exciting game-play. Deeply researched historical and cultural content sneaks in knowledge equivalent to a college-level humanities course.

The game also features a multiplayer mode that will permit large groups of up to 64 players to enter the game world; in addition, the game can be the location of electronic classrooms seeking innovative ways to motivate student-driven educational experiences.

Aristotle's Assassins takes place in and around ancient Athens, including the town of Stagira; a caravan trail through the desert; a rural bazaar; and the *peripatos* (the covered walkway where Aristotle strolled while teaching) on the outskirts of Athens. The landscape varies from barren rural settings to bustling urban marketplaces, and will feature several small springs and oases. Palm trees and desert scrub are the primary forms of vegetation, and there is one deep, rocky crevice in one of the tile sets where the assassins' guild resides. These landscape features each require custom 3D rendering for use in the *Aristotle's Assassins* game module.

Mellifluous is an up and coming musician who has recently been summoned by the famous philosopher Aristotle to Athens for a conversation and recital. On the way to a command performance on the *peripatos*, Mellifluous learns that a plot to assassinate Aristotle is afoot and is strongly encouraged to help save him. To facilitate this, Mellifluous is given a special spell to protect

Aristotle in an emergency. But on the way to the *peripatos*, Mellifluous gets hints that the spell could have unintended consequences— if only because Mellifluous is not yet skilled enough at wielded the magical powers of music. At the climax of the first level (the prototype), two archers attack Aristotle, Mellifluous casts the spell, and although Aristotle is protected from the arrows, Aristotle is also turned to stone. After Mellifluous unintentionally causes the assassination, he must infiltrate two warring secret societies to find out why he was framed. Mellifluous will be in a position to choose whether to foil the plans of one secret society or the other. Either way, Mellifluous must join a race against secret societies and governmental powers to collect the fragments of Apollo's Tome—an artifact that can restore Aristotle and decide the fate of ancient Greece. The game's design will be sufficiently open-ended to support several climatic endings; each ending relies on what Mellifluous chooses to do with Apollo's Tome.