Nancy Drew: Interview with a Game Designer

This month we managed to catch up with the designer of the Nancy Drew: Warnings at Waverly Academy, Cathy, for a short Q and A. She’s got all the answers on the creation of Nancy’s 21st PC adventure game, plus a little insight on the future. Check out the interview below.

What was your main inspiration for Warnings at Waverly Academy, beyond the books?
That would have to be my own crazy school experience.

Having moved around a lot growing up, I was always switching schools—though never to one as prestigious as Waverly! I met every personality and stereotype imaginable; from large schools with immutable cliques to smaller ones where students crossed social lines simply because there weren’t enough of us otherwise. Add to that the unique experience of down life from college, and I had a world filled with unique characters and situations to draw from.

Can you discuss the themes of the game and how you chose to incorporate them?

There were three main themes: Gossip & rumors run amuck, all the important issues to high school girls (such as social standing, grades, boyfriends, etc.), and the gothic styling of Edgar Allan Poe. A large portion of the story was driven by the girls’ opinions of each other and the scandals that kept breaking—gossip and rumors—which were deliberately chosen by the Black Cat to cause the most damage to the intended victim’s psyche—the important issues. Poe provided our link between the girls and Ms. Hallowell, as well as a grounding theme for the school. We used dozens of Poe references throughout, pulling from The Black Cat to The Pit and The Pendulum and beyond, to imbue the world with his gothic touch.

How did you help shape the characters and environments to reinforce your concept?

During initial design, I worked up detailed character profiles, including what exactly everyone was afraid of or afraid of everyone. Although the high school stereotypes are present, Anne (our scriptwriter) and I wanted to make sure that each girl was more than just her social standing. The dorm rooms were designed with the intent of conveying additional insight to the girls’ characters with decorations that really showed off their personalities. Public areas, such as the library and the fores, were designed with a traditional gothic aesthetic. Plus, I brought back Nancy’s phone with a vengeance, appending her to the latest cell phone technology. This allowed us in bringing in texting and photos as an additional way to further the story and really give it the feel of being in school. I confess this was new to me in college. I only knew two people with cell phones, let alone high school!

How do you tie all that up and still keep the ‘Nancy Drew’ experience strong?

Even after 23 titles, that’s still one of the greatest challenges facing design. To keep it strong, you have to keep it fresh. Each game needs its own flavor while still embracing the quintessentially Nancy and it’s why we generally don’t have to back to back games with the same feel—spooky adventure mystery. Waverly was Nancy’s first foray back to high school since her very first adventure in Secrets Can Kill and we wanted to create a completely different experience with its modern, layered design, gothic fears, environmental changes and new tech toys. Warnings at Waverly Academy provides a rich, thrilling experience for everyone.

Any spoilers for the future?

Well, as those following the Amateur Sleuth Blog and our Twitter feeds have read, we recently chose our concepts for some future titles. All I can say about these games is this: they’re exciting new mysteries in spectacular locations. I also know that our savvy audience reads our news updates about the latest hidden mysteries in games. The Phantom’s Lie, which had Caribbean pamphlets to tease Riptide of the Seven Ships, The Haunting of Castle Malley had a Waverly sign hinting at Warnings at Waverly Academy, Ransom of the Seven Ships contained a Wizard of Oz book alluding to The Trial of the Twain. They all seem to be hinting at the game two titles from their release. Hmm, I wonder what hint we put into Warnings at Waverly Academy for ND23?

The holidays are just around the corner and we’re going to kick off with a coupon for one of our most beloved games starting on Thanksgiving. Check out the H1 homepage for all the details on Wednesday 25th.

Nancy Drew: Warnings at Waverly Academy is available for digital download exclusively at www.HerInteractive.com, or buy a physical boxed copy from our online store or at most major retailers!

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Her Interactive’s first ever Nintendo DS™ game, The Hardy Boys: Treasure on the Tracks is available now at Best Buy, Gamestop, Toys R Us, and Amazon, or buy it directly from us at www.HerInteractive.com! Check out the microsite at www.TreasureOnTheTracks.com and play the minigames.

Check out the “Dare to Play” blog for more information about upcoming games and behind the scenes info.

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