Aveyond Interview

Amaranth Games' Amanda Fae serves up an in-depth look at her role-playing title set in an original medieval world

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Rhen Darzon is a young girl who lived in the community of Clearwater. One day, while she was playing outside, a mysterious stranger, a priestess, approached and asked for her help. Not very long after, a slave trader came to the village, captured the lass and sold her into servitude. Some months later, she accidentally cast a sword magic spell on the son of her master, whereupon she was sent to the Shadwood Academy to train as a Sword Singer. Lars is a sorcerer who has some talent as a healer, but whose true strength lies in his ability to deal out substantial amounts of damage. He practices a different form of the arcane arts, source magic. This type calls for greater amounts of mana, but its effects can be magnified quite significantly through the use of an orb staff.

In _Aveyond_, an RPG released earlier this year, you can play these two characters as well as six others. Described as offering more than 60 quests, hundreds of places to discover and at least 50 hours of gameplay within a medieval-style world, the title also lists quite a few other interesting features. Some of these are legions of different characters and creatures, strategy-based battles, and pets, while the various things you can do range from joining magic guilds to digging up graves, buying a mansion, getting married, riding dragons and more. The title had been on our radar for some time, so when we started to see and hear positive feedback despite its limited visibility, we decided to learn more. As luck would have it, we found its creator, Amaranth Games' Amanda Fae, willing to answer our questions at length.

Includes 16 exclusive screenshots

Jonric: What kind of game is Aveyond? What's it about, and what major influences are reflected in the basic concept? When did development start, and when was it released?

Amanda Fae: Aveyond is a 2D RPG that is similar to the old Final Fantasy games. It's about a slave girl named Rhen who is set free when it is discovered that she can learn sword magic.

She goes to a prestigious academy of magic to train, and is pulled into a dangerous quest to destroy a powerful demon, Ahriman.

I came up with the concept of Aveyond in 2004. I wanted to make an RPG that played like an adventure game. My major influences were Final Fantasy and Kings Quest. I loved both genres, so I crunched them into something that I wanted to play. Development started in September 2004 and finished in January 2006. It has been a lot of hard work, but well worth it since I finally get to play the game!

> *As soon as Rhen learns about her quest, however, the game becomes open-ended and you can fully explore the world. Because of the open-ended structure, it is possible to have several quests at one time.*

Jonric: What range and balance of gameplay does Aveyond offer, and what kind of gamer is most likely to find it appealing? How much playing time and replayability does it provide?

Amanda Fae: I made the gameplay open-ended so that the player can spend lots of time exploring and little time watching movie sequences. The game is a blend of fighting and solving puzzles. You will need to fight monsters to collect money and make your characters stronger, and you will need to solve puzzles to advance the storyline.

I think that this game has a strong appeal for players who like 2D RPGs and adventure games. Aveyond has 40 hours of playtime, but can take much longer if you want to complete all of the side quests. You will have to make several decisions in the game, and your choices will determine what options are available to you later on. Many quests can have several outcomes. The game also has several endings. You can become a powerful ruler, a hermit, or evil incarnate, etc.

Jonric: What has happened to set the stage for the beginning of the game? And once play begins, how linear or open-ended is the structure?

Amanda Fae: 15 years ago, the demon Ahriman destroyed the kingdom of Thais. During the final battle, the queen of Thais gave birth to a girl-child. At the birth, the queen's oracle pronounced a prophecy; the child would destroy Ahriman and save Thais if she reached adulthood. Tailor, a young but trusted queen's guardsman, offered to take the child to a safe place and raise her where Ahriman would not know to find her. As Thais fell to Ahriman, Tailor fled the city with the child and escaped across the ocean to a land not yet influenced by Ahriman's dark grip. Tailor settled in a small mountain town, married a local village woman, and raised the child as his own.

When the game starts, it is 15 years later, and Ahriman learns that a child who will destroy him has been born. He sends his minions to find her. Luckily, a sun priestess finds Rhen first. Thus, Rhen begins her quest to survive and ultimately destroy Ahriman.

The beginning of the game is linear. You must perform small tasks to become familiar with the game controls and view scenes that reveal the plot of the game. As soon as Rhen learns about her quest, however, the game becomes open-ended and you can fully explore the world.

Because of the open-ended structure, it is possible to have several quests at one time. To make your questing easier, the game has a journal that you can use to keep track of your to-do list.
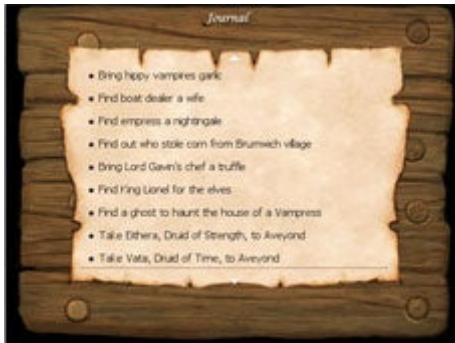
Jonric: Since the look of Aveyond seems sure to draw comparisons to console RPG, how does your game differ from them?

Amanda Fae: There are lots of things that make Aveyond different from your typical console-style RPG. Most console RPGs use random battles. You know the ones... you're walking around on an empty map and then suddenly, a battle screen opens for you to fight some monsters that have emerged from the forest. In Aveyond, you see all of the monsters on screen, and you only go into battle when you touch one. When a battle ends, you automatically get some experience points, but you have to loot the monster bodies if you want gold and items.

> *Instead of "surprise" battles, you see the monsters running around on screen. If one catches you, the battle opens in strategy mode. During battle, you can control up to four characters.*

Second, Aveyond uses a quest system that is more akin to an adventure game than a RPG. Many of the quests are multi-tier puzzles. For example, in one quest, you must find a nightingale for an empress. But to catch it, you have to collect birdseed and a cage, and then set up a trap.

Jonric: What kind of gameworld did you create, and what were your goals for the type of environment you wanted players to experience? And what are some interesting or unusual locations?

Amanda Fae: Aveyond takes place in a medieval world. It consists of four continents and several islands. There are over 60 maps to explore, including villages, dungeons and exotic lands.

The main goal for this type of gameworld is to immerse the player in the land they are exploring. Each area has its own environment. For example, when you explore the highland forest, you're

greeted with chirping birds, butterflies, wind and the sound of flowing water. As you get closer to villages, you hear people chatting, village sounds and music.

One of my favorites locations in the game is the militant squirrel hideout. The evil little squirrels will ask you do devious tasks, and your only reward for most of them will be three lashings from the squirrel commander. Another place that I like is Witchwood. The witches are always hexing each other and trying to pull you into their mischievous plots. You can help them turn each other into mice, fill their swamp with ooze, and take their "good" children away.

Jonric: With respect to the player characters, what are their backgrounds, and to what extent can the player customize them?

Amanda Fae: You can find eight playable characters in the game. There is Rhen, a feisty sword-singer; Lars, a spoiled sorcerer; Te'ijal, a devious vampress; Galahad, a narrow-minded paladin; Pirate John, a randy fellow; Elini, a demon summoner who is looking for another husband (she has three!); Mad Marge, a tavern owner with a bad temper; and Dameon, a priest gone bad. You can have up to four characters in your active party, and you can select the party leader. The character who is leading the party will appear on screen as you wander around.

To put it mildly, the fates are cruel to the characters. Let us look at poor Galahad, as an example. He wants to drive a stake through Te'ijal's heart, and the vampiress want to turn him into her eternal slave. If you are devious enough, you can buy Te'ijal a soul pendant and let her trap Galahad's soul. What fun!

You can change Rhen's and Lar's wardrobes during the game. There are some quests that aren't available unless Rhen is wearing the "right" clothing. You can also determine the skills that your characters can learn.

Jonric: Is there any form of character creation? And as for the advancement, how extensive is the skill system, what are some interesting examples, and are there any non-combat ones?

Amanda Fae: With Aveyond, you don't create your characters, you have to live with the ones that I've made. They should give you many laughs at their expense, however! You can choose how they interact with one another and their fate. Some outcomes will result in new game

tactics and some will result in characters leaving the quest. Many of the decisions you make for your characters will have life-changing impacts on them... literally! For example, a string of decisions can help you change Galahad into a vampire. Ha ha ha!

There are several skill systems in the game. Rhen can equip swords of power to change her skills, Lars can use orb staffs to affect the potency of his magic, and Elini can steal the souls of the creatures you are fighting. The creature soul-stealing skill is quite interesting. When you steal a creature soul, it will stay in your party until you steal another one. Some creature souls will do great things for you. The Magic Mushroom, for example, will reduce the amount of mana your party needs to cast spells.

There are some non-combat skills that you can use. One skill lets you climb ropes and another one allows you to burn meat. Yum!

Jonric: What is the combat experience like in Aveyond, how important is it, and what other forms of gameplay will we find?

Amanda Fae: Aveyond has a turn-based combat system. Combat is 50 percent of the game. The system is a bit different from the typical one you would find in a console-style RPG. Instead of "surprise" battles, you see the monsters running around on screen. If one catches you, the battle opens in strategy mode. During battle, you can control up to four characters. The game doesn't have typical combo attacks, although there are many defensive spells that can keep your players alive long enough to finish the fight.

The other half of Aveyond is dedicated to puzzles. There are over 60 of them to solve.

Jonric: How important are weapons and armor? Are there many different ones, can they be upgraded, and are any special ones that are particularly difficult to acquire?

Amanda Fae: Weapons and armor are very important. When you upgrade your characters, you will see a huge difference in their abilities to defeat monsters. There are over 50 different weapons and armor items that you can find. This includes seven classes for weapons and five for armor.

> *Since there is only one of me, I knew that development from the ground up would take me three-plus years. When I found an engine that did what I was looking for, I purchased it and focused on the game logic, not the engine logic.*

I don't have a weapon upgrade feature, but this may be added in the future. Several of the weapons are unique, especially as the player progresses to advanced levels in the game. To get these, you will have to solve difficult quests or fight tough monsters.

Jonric: What about the magic system you implemented? What different types are there, and what's involved in learning and casting spells?

Amanda Fae: There are various types of magic in the game - sword magic, source magic, demon magic and sun magic. The most advanced spell system is for the sorcerer, Lars. First, he can join a guild and become a Necromancer, Elite Mage, Annihilator or Time Master. To teach Lars spells, you give him scrolls to learn. To cast magic spells, you use mana. In addition, Lars can buy an empty orb staff and equip it with orbs. Each orb has properties that will affect the potency of a spell. For example, when you pass a fire spell through the Dragon Orb Staff, the spell magnifies. However, if you pass a water spell through this staff, it splutters.

Jonric: What variety of opponents can players expect to face, and what are some unusual or otherwise notable examples?

Amanda Fae: Opponents include monsters, rogues, mercenaries, demons, cute furry things, etc. In all, there are 70-plus types of opponents to face.

An unusual one is the Magic Mushroom. If you try to use any magic against it, it will get stronger. My favorite, however, is the Angel of Death. She loves to annihilate the party. What a woman!

Jonric: Are there many friendly or neutral NPCs populating the world of Aveyond? What kinds of functions do they fulfill?

Amanda Fae: There are many NPCs in this game. Most of them will tell you about recent events and give you quests. Some of the NPCs will change over time and have their own adventures. For example, one boy from Rhen's home village will set off on his own adventure across the world. He never joins the party, but you can check in with him occasionally to see how his travels are going.

There are many types of NPCs, and I've done my best to make them unique to the area that they exist in. NPCs include villagers, dwarves, vampires, witches, Amazon women, sea folk, talking cat-creatures, etc.

Jonric: How significant is questing within the overall gameplay? Are there very many types and optional tasks?

Amanda Fae: There are over 60 side quests and they are 50 percent of the gameplay. In one funny side quest, you can find a SludgeMaster 2000 for some witches who want to fill their swamp with sludge. There are also serious ones. You can find out who tried to assassinate the king of Sedona, cure an Empress's nightmares, attend a ball and buy a manor, capture a dragon, stop the Snow Queen and Mountain King from destroying the Northern Isle, etc.

Jonric: What were the primary considerations that impacted your decisions regarding the technologies to use?

Amanda Fae: The most important thing to me was the speed of deployment, which is why I opted to buy a game engine rather than build one myself. Since there is only one of me, I knew that development from the ground up would take me three-plus years. When I found an engine that did what I was looking for, I purchased it and focused on the game logic, not the engine logic. My decision allowed me to finish a large game in a year and a half.

Jonric: To finish up, what prior experience do you have creating games in general, and how large was the Aveyond team? And do you have any parting thoughts?

Amanda Fae: I've been creating small free games for several years now. It was only after the success of my last freeware game that I decided to sell Aveyond. Amaranth Games is located in Seattle, Washington. At this time, the *evil gaming empire* consists of me. Ha ha ha! Actually, I did have substantial help on Aveyond from two really talented guys, Aaron Walz and Jim Moore.

Jim Moore helped me with the art. I realized early on that my artistic abilities were er... lacking, so Jim made most of the game's graphics. It really made a difference!

Aaron Walz created the music. If you listen to the score, you will notice that all of the instruments are real! Aaron is a true perfectionist and I was very lucky to have him create the music for me. I worry about mentioning him here because I'm afraid he'll get swooped up by a big game corporation and I'll never be able to afford him again. You can learn more about Aaron at www.walzmusic.com.

And go play Aveyond! :D

Readers who have learned enough about Aveyond to consider playing it will probably be interested to know that it's available via download from the Amaranth Games site with 10 hours of free time to help you assess how well it fits your personal preferences. Of course, Amanda Fae has also been very accommodating in this regard, so we definitely thank her for filling us in on her interesting project through her informative answers to our many questions.