
HAMISH MACNAIR
A (Mostly) True Diary of a 13-Year-Old
Games
Friends
School
Football
Girls?!
Big Ideas
and
Total Chaos...
Diaries, Di
and O
Stu
REAL L
REAL THO
BIG
ADVEN
"Funny, honest and brilliantly relatable.
Game idea?
• dragons
• castles
• multiplayer?

Hamish MacNair and the End of the World (Probably)

C C Hughes

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PART 1 — The Worst Year of My Life

Sunday, 1 September 1996

9.43 p.m.

I have decided to keep a diary. I have never done this before. So far I have spent eleven minutes deciding how to begin, which does not seem promising.

Last week I read a book about a boy whose life was one disaster after another. I laughed so hard Mum came upstairs to see if I was choking. The worrying part was that most of his disasters were perfectly ordinary.

I thought: I could do that. Not the disasters. I manage those without assistance. The writing-down part.

What goes in a diary, anyway? Important events? Private thoughts? Inventions? I considered starting with the weather, but this is Angus in September. It rained. There. That should cover the next fortnight.

I bought this notebook with my own money, so I shall start with the facts. Facts are generally less dangerous than feelings.

My name is Hamish MacNair. I am thirteen years and seven months old. It matters enormously to me. Mum says it will matter to her when I am old enough to put my socks in the laundry basket.

PRIVATE. DO NOT READ. ESPECIALLY JENNIFER FRASER.

If this diary is discovered after my death, I was probably not doing anything heroic. I was probably dying of embarrassment. I believe this is medically possible, although the NHS has not yet recognised it.

I have three ambitions: finish my computer game, avoid becoming a school legend for the wrong reason, and speak to Jennifer Fraser without saying anything that will follow me to the grave. By Christmas I hope to have managed one.

I live in Angus, go to school in Dundee and have discovered that my face is changing without asking permission. My nose appears to be growing faster than the rest of my head. There is a spot beside my eyebrow which may have its own weather system.

Tomorrow school starts again. By lunchtime I expect to know whether the next ten months will be survivable.

We are doing basketball in PE this week. My school trousers are already too tight. Mum has also bought me pants with penguins on them. I see no reason these facts should be connected, but experience suggests otherwise.

Davie says nobody notices what pants you wear. Davie also once told me nobody would notice if he cut his own fringe. For six weeks he looked like a startled hedgehog.

I could ask Mum to exchange them. Unfortunately that would involve discussing my pants with Mum, which is worse than most known illnesses.

Grandad Patrick says a diary should record what happened, not what I reckon happened. I have already caught myself improving the facts. He used to work with electrical systems and says you cannot fix a fault until you know what it is. I have not told him about Jennifer.

Current problems, in order of severity: Jennifer Fraser may think I am an idiot. Davie McIntosh definitely thinks I am an idiot. There is a possibility that both are correct, despite my being very good at computers.

I have also started making a computer game. I have not told many people because the last time I described it, Dad asked if I could put football in it.


SUNDAY 1 SEPTEMBER 1996
Back to school.
New term. New plan.
Still playing Kingdom Fall.
Maybe this is the year I get a massive version.
I will be better at maths.
And not panic (as much).
To do:
Find timetable
Maths homework
Check game bags
Try to stay calm
Be better at math
DUNDEE
KINGDOM FALL
MAPS
LEVELS
SPRITES
SOUND
IDEAS
KF v0.1
KF v0.1
GAME FUEL
Game ideas:
Bigger map
More enemies

Monday, 2 September. 7.12 a.m.

Mum woke me by opening the curtains. She says natural light is good for the body. I said so is adequate sleep. She told me to get dressed.

The new school shirt is too stiff and the trousers are too tight. Mum says I have had a growth spurt. Dad says I am finally growing into my ears. Neither statement is encouraging.

At breakfast Mum asked whether I had everything. I showed her my pencil case, calculator, timetable and two spare pens. She meant my packed lunch. I had forgotten it.

'It's a good job somebody in this house thinks about ordinary things,' she said.

Dad looked up from the newspaper. 'I think about ordinary things.'

'Name one.'

He thought for so long that Mum put the kettle on again.

Davie is meeting me at the bus stop. He has also promised not to mention the trousers. These are separate promises, and I do not trust either of them.

Mum said I would feel better once I saw my friends. I pointed out that my friends were a substantial part of the problem.

Dad asked whether I was looking forward to school. I said I was looking forward to next June.

8.21 a.m.

Davie was waiting at the bus stop eating a packet of crisps. He has a way of looking cheerful before eight in the morning that I find suspicious. He asked if I had spoken to Jennifer over the summer.

'We exchanged words at the library,' I said.

'What words?'

'I asked whether she wanted the computer when I finished.'

Davie stared at me. 'Romance is alive and well, then.'

I explained that she had been using the computer to look at art courses and I did not want to interrupt. He said that was almost thoughtful, except I had then explained the computer's memory capacity to her for six minutes.

He was not there. I do not know how he knows.

At school Gordon McPhee arrived with a suntan, new trainers and a story about a girl called Maria in Spain. Every time somebody walked past, he started the story again from the beginning. By registration Maria had become older, prettier and more impressed by him.

‘You are not to interrogate people about their holidays,’ Davie whispered.

‘He has claimed to have met Maria at the airport, taken her out seventeen times and said goodbye on a beach. He was away for ten days.’

‘Maybe she was very organised.’

I asked how many days he had actually been in Spain.

'Why?'

'Because the duration of your relationship now exceeds the holiday.'

Davie made a strangled noise. Gordon said I was a wee freak.

This is what happens when I contribute facts. Mum says I could try contributing fewer.

11.06 a.m.

Mr Robertson asked us to describe our summer. Davie said he had learned to skateboard. He did not mention the hedge. Gordon mentioned Maria. When my turn came, I said I had written a routine to

make computer-controlled villagers remember things that happened to them.

'And did you enjoy that, Hamish?' Mr Robertson asked.

'Yes.'

He looked surprised. I was surprised he was surprised.

'Could you make one remember its homework?' he asked.

The class laughed. I considered explaining the memory model, but Mr Robertson gave me the look teachers use when a joke is in danger of becoming a lecture.

At lunch Jennifer sat opposite us. She has dark hair that she is always pushing out of her eyes, usually leaving pencil on her cheek. She asked whether I'd had a good summer.

'Twenty-three days of measurable sunshine,' I said.

'That's not what I meant.'

Davie kicked my shin under the table.

Jennifer smiled anyway. She had a sketchbook beneath her arm. A corner of the page showed a dragon with one wing smaller than the other. I wanted to ask about it. Instead I asked whether the wings were anatomically feasible.

She looked at the drawing, then at me. 'He's a dragon, Hamish.'

'Yes, but—'

'He hasn't passed his flying test yet.'

I laughed. So did she. Then the bell rang and she left with Kirsty.

Davie leaned across the table. 'There. That's how ye talk to her.'

'I asked a scientific question.'

'And she made it funny. Try doing that next time.'

I have written this down because Davie occasionally says sensible things. It is important to keep a record. Nobody would believe me otherwise.

9.18 p.m.

Mum asked how school went. I said I had been academically adequate but socially inconsistent. She told me to put the bins out.

Later I found Grandad's old notebook in my desk drawer. On the first page he had written: IF SOMETHING GOES WRONG, CHECK WHAT YOU ASSUMED.

I assumed Jennifer would find my question irritating. She did not. I assumed Gordon would not mind an arithmetical correction. He did.

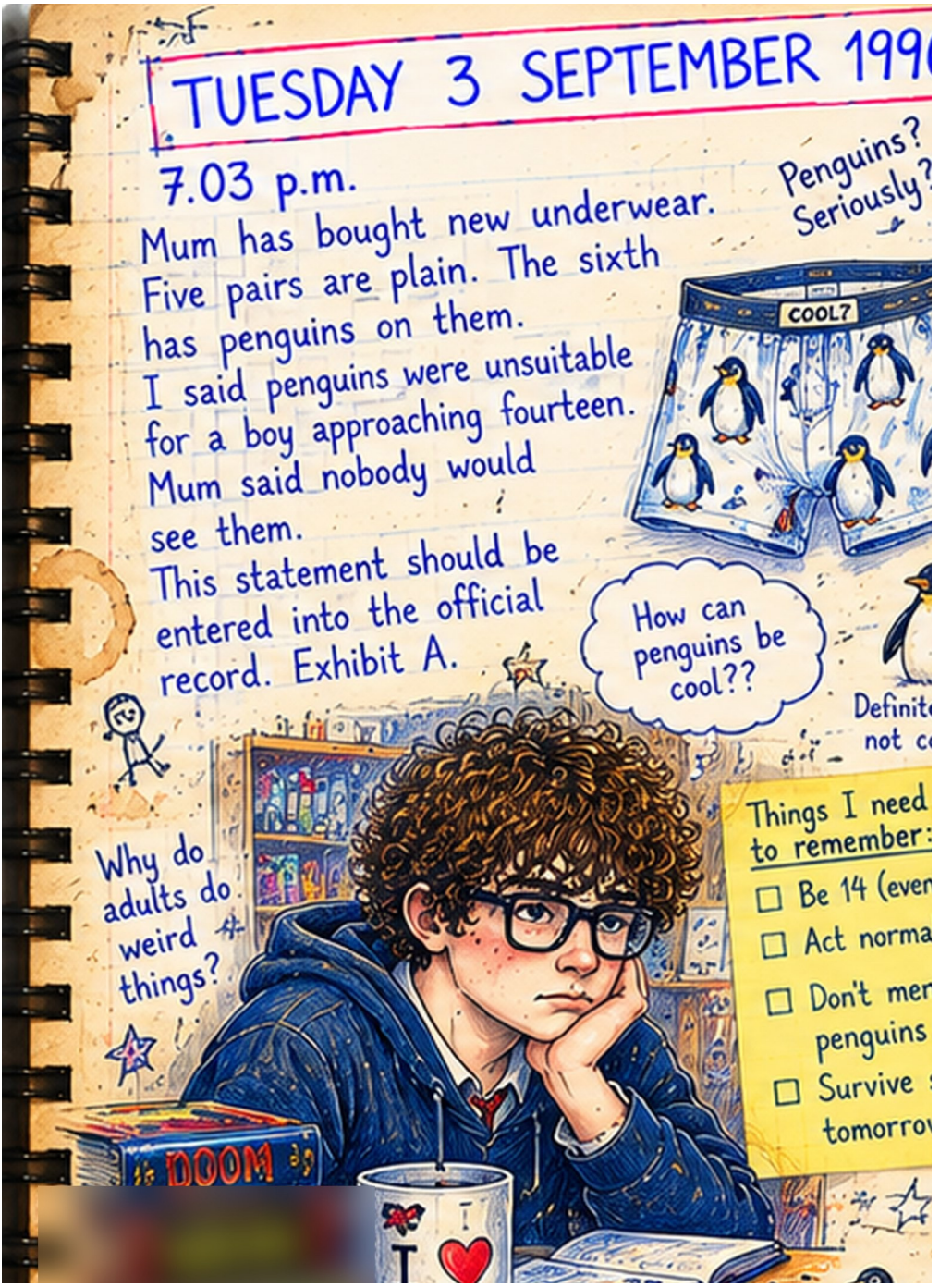
Perhaps tomorrow I will ask Jennifer about the dragon rather than its wings.

I have also drawn a preliminary diagram of my face. The spot is larger than it was this morning. This is not a promising start to the year.

Tuesday, 3 September. 7.03 p.m.

Mum has organised the new underwear into six pairs. Five are plain. The sixth has penguins on them. I said penguins were unsuitable for a boy approaching fourteen. Mum said nobody would see them.

This statement should be entered into the official record as Exhibit A.


TUESDAY 3 SEPTEMBER 199
7.03 p.m.
Mum has bought new underwear. Five pairs are plain. The sixth has penguins on them.
I said penguins were unsuitable for a boy approaching fourteen.
Mum said nobody would see them.
This statement should be entered into the official record. Exhibit A.
Penguins? Seriously?
COOL?
How can penguins be cool??
Definit
not c
Why do adults do weird things?
Things I need to remember:
Be 14 (even
Act norma
Don't men
penguins
Survive
tomorro
DOOM

Wednesday, 4 September. 11.16 a.m.

Mr Douglas announced basketball. I had forgotten my PE shorts because Mum had put them in the wash after discovering something in the pocket that she described as 'a scientific experiment involving half a banana'. Mr Douglas said I could play in my school trousers.

I told him the waistband was under considerable strain.

'You'll be fine, MacNair.'

He is paid to teach physical education. It is worrying that he does not understand forces.

I asked Mr Douglas if I could sit out. He asked if I was injured. I said not yet.

'You'll be fine,' he said.

This is the sort of prediction that should be legally binding.

Gordon charged towards me with the ball. I stepped aside. He caught my shoulder. Something tore. My trousers dropped approximately eighteen centimetres.

The penguins appeared.

For one full second the gym was silent. Then Davie shouted, 'HAMISH! YER ARSE!'

This was inaccurate. My pants remained in place. Unfortunately, they were the penguin ones.

My glasses fell off. Somebody began making flapping noises. Gordon shouted 'Penguin Boy'. Jennifer Fraser, who had come to the gym door carrying a message, looked directly at me and laughed.

I attempted to pull up my trousers while holding the ball and searching for my glasses. The ball bounced away. Mr Douglas blew his whistle, which made the situation feel like an official sporting event.

I have considered leaving school and becoming a lighthouse keeper.

3.48 p.m.

I hid beside the bicycle sheds. Jennifer found me there.

'I came to say sorry,' she said.

I looked at the ground. 'The event had several objectively comic elements.'

'I wasn't laughing to be horrible.'

'I know.'

She leaned against the wall beside me. 'I like penguins.'

I told her they are unusually loyal to their mates.

She bent over laughing again.

'What?' I said.

'Nothing. Sorry. It's just you.'

This was not reassuring. Then she added, 'You were brave, coming back into the game.'

'I was instructed to by Mr Douglas.'

'You still did it.'

She walked away. I stood there wondering how it was possible to feel better and worse at the same time.

Thursday, 5 September. 8.10 a.m.

By morning the story had developed. According to Steven I performed a somersault. According to Martin I ran the length of the gym in my pants. Neither happened. Somebody had drawn a penguin on the blackboard.

I confiscated it. He had another by interval.

Mrs Campbell paired Jennifer and me for an English exercise about misunderstandings. Jennifer suggested a story about a boy who thinks a girl is laughing at him when she is trying to make him laugh.

I suggested a written exchange of accurate information.

'Or they could talk,' she said.

I dropped my pencil. When I bent to pick it up I struck my head on the desk.

Jennifer said, 'You're having a week, aren't you?'

I said, 'There are still two days left.'

After class Mrs Campbell asked me to stay. She said I noticed things other people missed, but sometimes forgot that other people had feelings about them. On a slip of paper she wrote: NOTICING PEOPLE IS NOT THE SAME AS UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE.

I have put the slip in this diary. It is an irritatingly good sentence.

THURSDAY 5 SEPTEMBER 1996

12.04 p.m. – Lunch

Sat next to Davie. He was telling everyone about his holiday (as usual). I mostly pretended to listen. Saw Jennifer across the room. She was with Kirsty and the oth Laughing about something. No idea what, but it looked important.



Plan:

☐ Try to talk to he

FRIDAY 6 SEPTEMBER 1996

Took my bike out. Rode all over Dundee.
Cleared my head. Feels good.

Game is coming on.
Still loads to learn
but it's fun.

To do:

- ☐ Fix bike chain
- ☐ Level 1 bug list
- ☐ Read game guides
- ☐ Try new ideas
- ☐ Don't overthink



Places to game:

- ☐ Bridge
- ☐ Harbour
- ☐ Old buildings

Dundee loop:

Tay Bridge

Riverside

Friday, 6 September. 3.58 p.m.

Mr Douglas spoke to me after PE. Mum had apparently telephoned him. I considered changing my name.

'You can keep score until the new kit comes,' he said. 'And being no good at basketball doesn't mean you're no good at everything.'

I said I knew that. I did not tell him I was glad he'd said it.

Gordon made flapping noises during lunch, but stopped when Jennifer looked at him. Davie said he could deal with Gordon if necessary. I told him it wasn't necessary. He said the offer stood.

At the end of English Jennifer passed me a folded note. Inside was a penguin holding a basketball. Underneath she had written: STILL THE BRAVEST BIRD IN PE.

I put it in my maths book to keep it flat.

At tea Mum asked why I was smiling at algebra. I told her it was private. She looked delighted, which was alarming.

Davie rang to check I was all right. He called me Penguin. I told him never to do it again.

I hope he rings tomorrow.

SATURDAY 7 SEPTEMBER 1996

10.27 a.m. – Trying to do homework but my brain keeps going everywhere. Can't concentrate.



















Things to do:

- ☐ Maths homework
- ☐ English essay
- ☐ Stop thinking

Is it normal to think about too many things at My head feels

Sunday, 8 September. 11.40 a.m.

Grandad has a notice above his workbench: IF IT ISN'T BROKEN, DON'T FIX IT. Underneath: IF IT IS BROKEN, DON'T TELL YOUR GRAN UNTIL I'VE HAD MY TEA.

Grandad Patrick took me into the shed to look at a radio which hadn't worked since before I was born. Its wooden case smelled of dust and cold metal. He handed me a screwdriver and told me to take the back off.

'What am I looking for?'

'First, what you can actually see.'

I pointed out a loose wire. He nodded. I said the wire had probably caused the failure.

'Probably. But don't marry your first explanation.'

We fixed the connection. The radio crackled, hissed and eventually produced a voice talking about roadworks. Grandad sat back as though we'd brought somebody home from the dead.

'People are harder than radios,' Grandad said. 'You can't always see where the wire's come loose.'

I asked whether this was about school.

'It's about everything,' he said, and went back to the radio. He was trying to find the football results.

I asked if he had ever made a serious mistake at work.

"Aye. Once I told a manager exactly what I thought."

"What happened?"

"He promoted me. Never been so careful with my opinions since."

Before I left, I told him about the penguins. He didn't laugh immediately, which is why I like him. He asked whether I'd been hurt. I

said only socially. Then he laughed, but in a way that didn't make me feel smaller.

'And the lassie?' he asked.

I said Jennifer had apologised and given me a drawing.

'Well, there's a thing.'

On the bus home I tried writing down what actually happened. Jennifer had spoken to me twice this week. I had decided the first conversation was pity and the second politeness. Neither conclusion was supported by evidence. This was annoying.

Tuesday, 10 September. 12.49 p.m.

Mr Patterson opened the computing room at lunchtime. Three people came: me, Steven and a boy who wanted to know whether the machines could run Doom. Mr Patterson said nobody was installing anything without permission. The boy left. Steven stayed long enough to ask if we could install Doom with permission.

He showed us an old computer with the case removed. Dust lay over the circuit boards like grey fur. The hard drive sounded like a spoon caught in a bicycle wheel.

'It works,' he said.

I asked whether he meant it switched on or actually worked. These are different things. Our toaster switches on, but only burns one side of the bread.

He looked at me for a long time. Then he laughed.

'You and I are going to have some interesting conversations, MacNair.'

I liked him immediately.

Tuesday, 10 September — 6.26 p.m.

Grandad and I went to buy screws. He spent fifteen minutes discussing a hinge with the man behind the counter and came away with three screws, a pencil and an invitation to an anniversary party. I had been expecting four screws.

'How did you do that?' I asked.

'Bought screws?'

'Get invited to a party.'

'Asked how his wife was.'

I considered this. My conversations usually begin with what I need. Grandad appears to begin with the person. This may explain why people invite him to parties and ask me to stop talking.

He gave me the pencil. 'You can be right about a thing, son, and still make an arse of talking about it.'

I wrote this in the diary. He said to spell it properly.

I asked what thing.

'You'll work it out.'

This is the trouble with older people. They have spent decades collecting useful information and then give it out one mysterious sentence at a time.

I showed him my game notes. At present I have a village, a baker, a knight and a dragon. The villagers are supposed to remember what has happened to them. If the baker cheats somebody, that person will be less willing to trust him later.

Grandad looked at the pages.

'Where's the fun?' he asked.

I explained the system in considerable detail.

'No,' he said. 'Where's the fun for the person playing?'

I said you could watch what happened when people remembered things. Grandad asked if watching a baker hold a grudge was my idea of a Saturday night. I said it depended on the grudge.

'Then give somebody a reason to care about the consequences.'

He told me about an engineer who designed a control panel so complicated that nobody could use it. The engineer blamed the workers. Grandad said the panel was wrong.

'But the instructions were clear,' I said.

'Only to the chap who wrote them.'

I asked if this was a metaphor.

'No,' he said. 'It was a terrible control panel.' I am beginning to suspect Grandad can recognise a metaphor but refuses to admit it.

WEDNESDAY 11 SEPTEMBER 1996

Maths was hard.
Fractions still make
my brain hurt.
Need to practice.
Maybe I can turn it into
a game? Numbers and
levels might help.

To do:

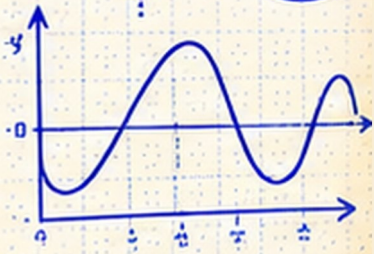
- [ ] Be normal
- [ ] Finish English
- [ ] Fix game bug
- [ ] Work on next level
- [ ] Maybe ask Mr R?

$\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4} = \frac{3}{4}$









Game physics?

- [ ] Gravity
- [ ] Jump height
- [ ] Falling speed
- [ ] Water / buoyancy
- [ ] Make it realistic







Maybe I could
make water look

Thursday, 12 September. 4.13 p.m.

Gordon cornered Davie outside the changing rooms. He had heard about Davie's skateboard accident and was telling everybody that Davie couldn't stand up without help. Davie laughed along at first, which is what he does when he doesn't want people to know they're bothering him.

Then Gordon shoved his bag into a puddle.

I told Gordon to pick it up.

He said, 'Make me, Professor.'

I was not going to make him. Gordon is bigger than I am, and I have never won a fight against anything heavier than a duvet. My stomach felt as though I'd swallowed a handful of cold coins. I picked up Davie's bag instead.

Gordon said something about the penguins. I said, 'You've told that joke before.'

He looked confused.

'And it wasn't very good the first time.'

Davie laughed, rather too loudly. Gordon looked from him to me. For a second I thought he might hit us both. Then the bell went, and he walked away. I have never been so grateful for a school bell.

Davie's exercise book was damp. We took it to the library and separated the pages with paper towels. He said I hadn't needed to get involved.

'You would have done it for me,' I said.

He stared at the book. 'Aye.'

I did not tell him I was frightened. I suspect he knew.

Friday, 13 September. 8.58 p.m.

I have named the game Kingdom Fall. It sounds as though something enormous is about to happen. At present the most enormous thing that can happen is the baker refusing to sell bread.

The baker wants flour. The knight wants respect. The innkeeper wants everyone to pay what they owe. I tried giving the innkeeper a numerical kindness score, but it made her behave as though generosity were a vending machine.

Davie came round with biscuits because he thought I'd had a bad week. I hadn't asked him to. He simply arrived.

I gave the innkeeper a younger brother. Now she sometimes helps him even when it costs her money.

This is not a complete model of human behaviour. Yesterday the baker refused to serve his own mother. I may have missed something.

Monday, 16 September. 9.02 p.m.

Jennifer asked what I was drawing during lunch. I showed her the castle and the village. She asked who lived there. I explained the baker and knight. She asked who the dragon was.

I said he had not been developed.

'Can I draw him?' she asked.

I said yes before I had thought about it. This is unusual. Normally I can think of six reasons not to say something before anybody finishes asking.

She opened her sketchbook and drew Fergus in about three minutes. One wing was shorter than the other. He looked worried.

'Why?' I asked.

'He's frightened of flying.'

'Dragons fly.'

'Not this one. Not yet.'

I thought about Fergus all the way home. A dragon afraid of flying is a ridiculous idea. I have already drawn up three ways it might make the game better.

Grandad's first rule is to write down what happened. What happened is that I thought I was making a game about a castle. Jennifer may have just made it a game about somebody.

Tuesday, 17 September. 5.51 p.m.

Jennifer has invited me to her birthday party. I have read the invitation four times. It gives a time and address but no guidance on what to say when I arrive. Invitations should really come with instructions.

Davie inspected the invitation as though it were a forged banknote.

“It’s a party, Hamish. You go in, say happy birthday, eat a sausage roll and come home.”

“What if I say the wrong thing?”

“Then eat two sausage rolls. Nobody talks with their mouth full.”

Mum suggested I wear the blue shirt. Dad said it made me look like a geography teacher on his day off. Mum said Dad had once worn brown corduroy trousers to a wedding and was in no position to comment.

I decided to buy Jennifer a set of graded drawing pencils. In June she complained that cheap pencils snapped when she tried to shade faces. I remembered the brand.

The shopkeeper asked if they were for my girlfriend. I knocked an entire display of rubbers onto the floor. He helped me pick them up without saying anything, which was worse.

THURSDAY 19 SEPTEMBER 1996

Coding ideas.
Started a proper plan for Kingdom Fall. Need to think about levels, enemies and how it all fits together.

To do:

- [ ] Plan level 1
- [ ] Draw enemy ide
- [ ] Think about sto
- [ ] Look at tile set
- [ ] Back up files!
- [ ] Do English (lat

Level 1 – Hill Fort



Enemies:



Goblin (basic)



Guard (stronger)



Dragon? (boss?)

Tiles / assets:

- [ ] Grass
- [ ] Stone
- [ ] Water
- [ ] Castle walls
- [ ] Trees
- [ ] Torches





Friday, 20 September. 6.48 p.m.

Davie came to collect me. He examined my shirt and said I looked 'almost human'. He had brought a packet of crisps as an emergency provision. I asked what emergency required crisps. He said most of them.

Jennifer opened the door wearing a dark blue top and a silver star necklace. I had practised saying 'Happy birthday' on the bus. Instead I said, 'You've got a neck.'

'I have had it for years, Hamish.'

Davie made a noise behind me that sounded like a bicycle tyre deflating.

Inside, the house smelled of crisps, furniture polish and somebody's perfume. A little cousin asked if I was Jennifer's boyfriend. I said we were classmates. He said that was what his sister said before she got married. I avoided him for the rest of the evening.

7.52 p.m.

Gordon arrived with his hair arranged into a shape that must have required industrial equipment. He said he'd brought Jennifer something special. Davie asked if it was another story about Maria in Spain. Gordon pretended not to hear.

Jennifer opened my present first. Gordon leaned over her shoulder.

'Pencils,' he said, as though I'd given her a used bus ticket.

'These are the ones I wanted,' Jennifer said.

'They're graded,' I began.

Davie widened his eyes.

'From a shop,' I finished.

Jennifer laughed. 'Thank you, Hamish.'

Then Gordon gave her a bracelet in a velvet box. Everybody admired it. I began to worry about the pencils. A bracelet lasts for years. Pencils get shorter every time you use them. I had bought Jennifer a present that was slowly disappearing.

8.39 p.m.

The downstairs toilet flooded.

Barry Kinnear came out of the bathroom looking as though he had witnessed a murder. Water spread across the hall carpet. Jennifer's dad shouted for towels. Someone called Barry 'Bog Roll', and the name began spreading faster than the water.

I found the stopcock under the sink, shifted three cleaning bottles and turned it until the water stopped.

'You saved the kitchen, son,' Jennifer's dad said.

'It was a valve,' I said.

'A very useful valve.'

Barry sat on the bottom stair, red-faced and furious. I could see the others watching him through the sitting-room door. Gordon was laughing.

Barry looked at me. 'Did ye tell them?'

'No.'

'You sure?'

'Yes.'

I could have made a joke. Everybody was waiting for one. I remembered the penguins, and how long a laugh can last when you're the one standing in the middle of it.

'It's just plumbing,' I said.

He looked away. 'Right.'

9.03 p.m.

Jennifer sat beside me on the stairs. The house was quieter. Someone had put music on again. Her shoulder touched mine.

'I've started using your pencils,' she said.

I was so relieved I nearly explained the different grades again. Fortunately, I managed to keep my mouth shut.

'I haven't started using Gordon's bracelet.'

I tried not to smile.

'There it is,' she said.

'What?'

'Your proper smile.'

Gordon passed the stairs and said I was obviously destined to become a plumber. Jennifer told him to shut up. I have never been so grateful for an instruction directed at somebody else.

She asked whether I wanted to come round next week and show her more of the game. I said yes, immediately, before I could invent a reason not to.


SATURDAY 21 SEPTEMBER 1996
End of week. Definitely
Level 1 is nearly finished.
Tests ages but it's real.
Feels more like a proper game now.
I just need to keep going.
To do:
Test level 1
Add enemies
Fix bugs list
Save game
Keep going!
KINGDOM FALL
DEMO 0.1
DEMO 0.2
DEMO 0.3
CODE EAT SLEEP REPEAT
Next version:
Better level design
More enemy types
Save option
Level 1 ideas:
Caves
Older graphics
Sound effects

MONDAY 23 SEPTEMBER 1996

Back to school properly.
Feels like everyone knows something I don't.
Try to get on with it.
Keep head down.
Maybe make progress on Kingdom Fall.

To do:
- ☐ English homework
- ☐ Maths questions
- ☐ Work on game til
- ☐ Find better sound
- ☐ Be more confider
- ☐ Don't worry (so



Castle tiles:
- stone wall
- gate
- tower (3 sizes)
- flag ???

Ideas for today:
- ☐ Fix collision bug
- ☐ Add waterfall
- ☐ Test new tiles
- ☐ Make menu scr
- ☐ Save game opt

Sunday, 22 September. 10.01 a.m.

Davie says Jennifer showed Kirsty the pencils twice. He also asked if I'd kissed her. I said no.

'There's always next time,' he said.

It astonishes me that Davie believes there will be a next time. I am trying not to believe it too much, in case that ruins it.

Mum asked how the party went. I said there had been a minor plumbing emergency but otherwise it was successful.

'And Jennifer?' she asked.

I said she liked the pencils.

Mum smiled in a way that made me deeply suspicious. She says I have to be in bed by ten on school nights. I pointed out that this rule was not scientifically connected to my social development. She said it was connected to her having some peace and quiet.

I have kept the invitation. It is folded inside the back cover, where nobody will find it unless they are reading my private diary. In which case, please stop.

PART 2 — Girls, Computers and Other Disasters

THURSDAY 26 SEPTEMBER 199

History today – castles and battles.
Good for game research.
St Andrews looks amazing.
Need to go porperly one day.
Maybe take Jennifer?
(Too soon. Definitely too soon.)

To do:

- ☐ History notes
- ☐ Research St A
- ☐ Add castle det
- ☐ Plan next leve
- ☐ Keep it simpl
- ☐ Don't overthi



St Andr





Castle features for game:

- ☐ Gatehouse
- ☐ Courtyard
- ☐ Keep
- ☐ Tower walk

Real place
Real history
Real inspira
Why does
feel so ex

Tuesday, 15 October 1996 — 9.13 p.m.

I have received my first proper payment for computer work: fifty pounds from Mr McAllister, who sells electrical equipment in Dundee and believes the Internet is going to replace the Yellow Pages.

He asked me to make a page with his address, opening hours and a photograph of the shop. I said it would be a straightforward job using HTML, the language that tells a web page where everything goes. He asked whether HTML was a new kind of television. I said no. He looked disappointed.

I brought the fifty pounds home in an envelope and hid it under the biscuit tin. I had not decided whether it was savings or computer money. I suspected Mum would decide for me.

Mum found it.

Fifty pounds. Enough for a memory upgrade, several games, or roughly six years of Davie owing me lunch money.

Mum looked at it for a long time.

‘You didn't tell us you were doing work for somebody.’

‘It was only a web page.’

‘It was somebody paying you to do a job, Hamish. What happens if it goes wrong?’

I started explaining backup copies. Mum folded her arms. Apparently that was not the sort of wrong she meant.

Thursday, 17 October — 7.46 p.m.

The modem connected on the fourth attempt. It sounded like two kettles having an argument. I was uploading Mr McAllister's photograph when Mum picked up the telephone.

The connection died.

'I'm trying to ring Auntie Morag,' she called.

'I am transferring a file!'

'Well, transfer yourself off that phone line.'

I disconnected. The picture had arrived as eight horizontal strips. The shop now appeared to have been constructed by somebody who had never seen a building before.

At school Mr Patterson examined the page and asked whether I thought the letters needed to be that large.

'They're legible.'

'From Fife,' he said.

He showed me how to make the phone number easier to find and remove the bright green background. I asked whether this meant my first version was bad.

'It means it's a first version, Hamish. That's why they call it one.'

I wrote that down. Mr Patterson noticed and looked pleased, which was embarrassing for both of us.

Saturday, 19 October — 4.17 p.m.

Davie came round to help test the website. He entered the wrong address three times, then announced it was broken.

'It's not broken. You're typing a space.'

'Normal people type spaces.'

'Not in an address.'

'Then the Internet's broken.'

He asked whether I could make a website about him. I asked what it would contain.

'My achievements.'

'That might be a very small file.'

He hit me with a cushion.

When he left, he said, 'You're still coming to the park tomorrow, aye?'

I told him I had work.

'It's Sunday.'

'The computer doesn't know that.'

He said, 'I do.'

I watched him go. Then I switched the computer off and caught him at the gate. We played football badly for two hours. A dog stole the ball. Davie chased it and lost one shoe in a puddle. None of this required a modem.

Saturday, 26 October 1996 — 2.14 p.m.

SATURDAY 26 OCTOBER 1996

Stayed in most of the day.
The castle level is nearly finished.
The boss now works and the music fits.
Added the secret room and a hidden item which I'm really pleased with.
Also improved the enemy AI and fixed a few bugs that were annoying me.
It's actually starting to feel like a proper game.
Still some work to do but this is the best it's ever been.

Brilliant day!
Made huge progress.
Everything feels like it's finally coming together.

To do:

- [ ] Finish castle level
- [ ] Add secret room items
- [ ] Improve boss AI
- [ ] Finalise music (castle)
- [ ] Add menu and save
- [ ] Playtest full level
- [ ] Fix any new bugs
- [ ] Back up files (again!)
- [ ] Reward myself!



CASTLE LEVEL - CURRENT PROGRESS



BOSS DESIGN (FINAL?)



- big an
- multip
- shakes
- needs animal
- maybe
- looks

ENEMY AI - NOTES



Guard
- patrols
- spots player
- follows
- works well



Archer
- shoots at range
- different height
- needs line of sight
- add sound



Wizard
- fires spells
- unpredictable
- looks good
- maybe stronger?



Bat
- flies in patterns
- dives at player
- easy but annoying
- add better sound

MUSIC IDEAS

- [ ] Castle theme (main)
- [ ] Boss music (dramatic)
- [ ] Secret room (mysterious)
- [ ] Menu theme
- [ ] Use sound effects from samples
- [ ] Keep it simple but effective
- [ ] Maybe add echo in castle
- [ ] Test on headphones

SCHOOL WORK

- [ ] Maths - homework (fractions)
- [ ] English - essay draft
- [ ] History - castles (useful!)
- [ ] Science - forces (a bit tricky)
- [ ] ICT - finish spreadsheet task
- [ ] Home - maybe some coding later...

Castles are actually more interesting than I thought. Might give me some real ideas for level design!

IDEAS FOR NEXT

- [ ] Underground section after castle
- [ ] New enemy type (ghost?)
- [ ] More traps and puzzles
- [ ] Better lighting effects
- [ ] Different weather outside?
- [ ] Final boss later
- [ ] Complete title screen and menu
- [ ] Try to make a demo version

DUNDEE - EVENING WALK



Went for a walk later. Cold but clear and the view over the Tay was amazing

Castle layout (version 3)

Jennifer invited me to her house to work on Kingdom Fall. I arrived twelve minutes early and spent ten of them walking around the block because I did not want to appear overeager.

Her mum opened the door while carrying a basket of washing.

'You must be Hamish.'

'Yes.'

'Jennifer's upstairs. Take your shoes off, please.'

I did. One sock had a hole at the heel. I had not anticipated a footwear inspection.

The hallway smelled of toast and something flowery. Framed drawings hung above the stairs. There was a picture of a girl on a bus, looking out at a dark street. It made me feel lonely, although nothing bad appeared to be happening.

'Jennifer did that,' her mum said.

'It's good,' I said.

'You can tell her.'

I was already worried about telling Jennifer things.

2.33 p.m.

Jennifer's bedroom contained more evidence of a personality than my room. There were posters, postcards, books piled sideways and scraps of paper hanging from string. A cassette player sat beneath the window. On the desk was a row of little paper figures she'd made for the game.

I picked up the innkeeper.

'She's got one sleeve rolled up,' I said.

'She's always working,' Jennifer replied.

'That wouldn't change her behaviour in the program.'

'It changes how you see her.'

I nodded as though I understood. I did not.

We spread a map of the kingdom across the carpet. I had put the market beside the castle for efficient trading routes. Jennifer moved it towards the river.

'People would want to be near the water.'

'The distance from the castle is longer.'

'Not everything's about the castle.'

I explained that the knight would need quick access to the market.

'Maybe the market doesn't want quick access to the knight,' she said.

She drew a tiny fish stall. Then a bakery. Then a woman with an enormous basket and a dog that looked suspiciously like a mop.

I found myself laughing.

3.11 p.m.

Jennifer showed me her drawings of Fergus. His left wing was shorter than his right.

'That's an error,' I said.

'No, it's the point.'

'Dragons require symmetry for stable flight.'

'Fergus doesn't fly.'

'Why not?'

'Because he's frightened.'

I stared at her.

'But he's a dragon.'

'Exactly.'

I could fix the wing. Jennifer did not want it fixed. This seemed a waste of a perfectly good dragon.

Her mum brought us orange squash and biscuits. I thanked her. She asked whether I liked school.

I said it was quite good at putting hundreds of children in one building, although the timetable contained several design flaws.

She looked at Jennifer.

Jennifer said, 'He's always like this.'

I could not tell whether this was an endorsement.

4.02 p.m.

We began making Isla, an explorer who wanted to leave the kingdom. Jennifer drew her with muddy boots and a map that had been folded so often it was beginning to tear.

I said the character should have a quest.

'She has one.'

'What is it?'

'To find out what's beyond the map.'

I pointed out that the map already showed the entire playable area.

'Then make it bigger.'

She said this as though she were asking me to move a chair.

I have spent three months making the game small enough to fit on a disk. Jennifer has asked for the rest of the world.

4.49 p.m.

We were sitting close together at her desk while I explained how the scanner worked. Her hair smelled faintly of shampoo. She leaned over to see the screen. Our shoulders touched.

'You can stop explaining,' she said.

'Have I been unclear?'

'No.'

She turned towards me.

I turned towards her.

I was about to say something when the telephone rang downstairs.

Jennifer jumped.

'That's probably Kirsty,' she said.

I said, 'Yes.'

She stood up, looked at me for a moment, then went to answer it.

I remained in the chair. I think we might have been about to kiss. I have drawn a decision tree on the opposite page. Every branch ends in PANIC.

5.36 p.m.

As I left, Gordon McPhee cycled past on a mountain bike that looked as though it had been assembled from expensive advertisements.

'All right, Jen?' he called.

'Fine,' she said.

He looked at me and smiled in a way that suggested I was an amusing piece of furniture.

I spent the walk home considering whether Jennifer preferred Gordon. He has good hair, a bicycle and the ability to speak without appearing to calculate his own pulse.

Davie came round later. I told him Gordon had passed Jennifer's house.

'And?'

'He may be interested in her.'

'Are you?'

'That's not the issue.'

'It's exactly the issue, ya daftie.'

I asked whether Jennifer inviting me round was evidence of romantic interest.

Davie said, 'It might be evidence she likes spending time with ye.'

I had not considered that. I went to bed feeling better, which was annoying because Davie had been right.

Sunday, 27 October — 11.21 a.m.

I dreamed I was about to kiss Jennifer and a railway announcer interrupted to explain the timetable.

Mum asked why I was so quiet at breakfast. I said I was considering a problem involving maps.

She said, 'Aye. That's what we'll call it.'

I have no idea what she meant.

I do know I want to go back to Jennifer's house. Not only because of the game. I want to hear her explain why a dragon is frightened of flying and why an explorer would go beyond a map.

This is not an efficient use of my time.

I intend to do it anyway.

Tuesday, 29 October — 8.02 p.m.

The telephone bill arrived.

£87.46.

I had prepared a chart demonstrating that the household had benefited from my commercial activities. The chart contained three arrows, a pie graph and a section entitled LONG-TERM VALUE.

Mum looked at it, then at the bill. 'Hamish, I am not paying eighty-seven pounds and forty-six pence for a pie.'

Dad said, 'It's not even a very good pie.'

I pointed out that it was a statistical representation. Mum asked if statistical representations could be used to wash the dishes. I said not directly. She handed me a tea towel.

Dad examined the itemised list.

'Look at all these calls.'

'They're not calls to people,' I said.

'That somehow makes it worse.'

Mum asked whether the fifty pounds I'd earned could contribute. I said I had intended to reinvest in the business.

'Your business can invest in this phone bill.'

I calculated that my website work had produced a loss once the telephone charges were included. I wrote the equation in the margin of the bill.

Mum saw it.

'Do not turn my bill into homework.'

I had never seen her so angry. Not shouting angry. Tired angry, which is worse. She had come in from work, still wearing her coat, and there were dishes in the sink and Dad had forgotten to buy milk.

I apologised.

She looked at me for a long time, then said, 'I know you love all this. I just need you to notice the rest of us sometimes.'

I wanted to explain that I did notice them. Instead I put the kettle on.

Wednesday, 30 October — 7.09 p.m.

I drew up a timetable for the telephone. Mum approved it after adding a large section marked FAMILY CALLS. Dad asked whether checking the football score counted as an emergency. I said no.

He called me a dictator.

I said dictators generally do not submit schedules for parental approval.

Thursday, 31 October — 6.49 p.m.

THURSDAY 31 OCTOBER 1996

Halloween. Best day in a long time.
Worked on the haunted section for the castle.
The new atmosphere and music really work.
Ken came round after school and we tested it properly. It actually feels scary now!
The lighting, the sound and the little details make a huge difference.
Still a few bugs but it's so close.
I'm really proud of this.
This could be the best level yet.
Need to keep going and finish it next week.

Halloween!
Great day.
Lots of progress.
This level feels special.

To do:

- [ ] Finish haunted section
- [ ] Add ghost enemy AI
- [ ] Improve lighting effects
- [ ] Test on Ken's PC
- [ ] Menu and level select
- [ ] Add Halloween music
- [ ] Fix falling through floor
- [ ] Collectibles and score
- [ ] Back up files (again!)
- [ ] Try to finish next week!

HAUNTED CASTLE LEVEL (DRAFT)



GHOST ENEMY IDEAS



Ghost (basic)
- floats
- goes through walls?
- simple AI
- appears suddenly



Armoured Ghost
- slower
- takes more hits
- drops coin?
- looks cooler

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-
-
-
-

SOUND / MUSIC IDEAS

- [ ] Haunted theme (main)
- [ ] Ghost sound (echo)
- [ ] Door creak (long)
- [ ] Chain sounds
- [ ] Wind through castle
- [ ] Witch laugh (scary but not silly)
- [ ] Maybe choir in background?
- [ ] Keep it atmospheric



Sounds much better with headphones!

TITLE SCREEN (HALLOWEEN?)



COLLECTIBLES / ITEMS



Coin
- score
- maybe 1UP?



Gem
- higher value
- special sound
- unlock area?



Key
- opens door
- different colours?

SCHOOL TODAY

- [ ] Maths – OK
- [ ] English – wrote a decent paragraph
- [ ] History – castles (perfect timing!)
- [ ] Science – dull
- [ ] Lunch with Ken – game talk
- [ ] Home – worked on level and music

Halloween at school was good. Some great costumes. Everyone talking about parties. I just wanted to get home and work on the game.

IDEAS / NOTES

- [ ] Haunted castle feels really good
- [ ] More environmental details (cobwebs, torches, banners)
- [ ] Hidden room with treasure
- [ ] Use shadows more
- [ ] Maybe a secret boss?
- [ ] End of level sequence
- [ ] Could make this the demo level?
- [ ] It actually feels like a real game!



DUNDEE – HALLOWEEN NIGHT



Went for a walk later. Cold and a bit spooky

CASTLE DETAILS (IDEAS)



Dad has told three people in the pub that I am “on the Internet”. One asked whether I could find his cousin in Canada. Another asked whether I could fix his television. Dad told them I was running an information service.

'What service?'

'Information architecture.'

Dad put down his newspaper. 'Are you selling secrets?'

'No. I made a web page.'

'For fifty quid?' he said.

I nodded.

Dad stared at me as though I had discovered oil in the back garden. Mum said the money should go into my savings account. I suggested buying more memory for the computer.

'You already spend all your time on it,' she said.

'Exactly. More memory would make that time more productive.'

She said that was not the argument she thought it was.

Friday, 1 November — 5.41 p.m.

Mr McAllister telephoned the house to say somebody had found his shop through the website. Mum took the call and passed it to me.

Afterwards she said, 'Well done.'

I said, 'The investment is beginning to pay off.'

She said, 'Don't push it.'

At tea Dad suggested I make websites for the whole of Dundee. I told him I would first need a reliable way to stop him lifting the receiver.

Jennifer has asked if I can put some of her drawings on the computer. She says the dragon should look frightened rather than fierce. I told her I can scan the picture, but I cannot guarantee the colours will survive.

She said, 'That's all right. We'll fix it.'

I have written WE in the margin. I hope Jennifer never sees this page.

I told Davie I was pleased we had fixed the problem. He asked whether I meant the computer or Jennifer. I told him to go home.

Tuesday, 5 November 1996 — illustrated diary notes

TUESDAY 5 NOVEMBER 1996

Bonfire Night!
Cold, clear and a bit smoky.
Good day. Got loads done.
Feels like the game is really coming together now.

No school today - holiday.
Went into Forfar with Ken in the morning.
Had chips and a can and looked round the shops.
Picked up a new magazine with some great tips.
In the afternoon I worked on the bonfire level.
The fire and lighting effects actually look good!
Still a few bugs but the atmosphere is brilliant.
Music fits perfectly and it finally feels alive.
One step closer to finishing.
This is the best it's felt so far.

To do:

- [ ] Finish bonfire level (test)
- [ ] Add fire and smoke effects
- [ ] Improve lighting and shadows
- [ ] Test on Ken's PC
- [ ] Menu and save game
- [ ] Add crowd /background
- [ ] Fix collision near bridge
- [ ] Balance enemy speed
- [ ] Back up files (again!)
- [ ] Playtest whole section



BONFIRE LEVEL - CURRENT PROGRESS



ENEMY IDEAS - BONFIRE SECTION



Torch Mob
- follows player
- throws torch?
- groups
- fire effect



Scarecrow
- slow
- appears from smoke
- takes more hits
- good atmosphere



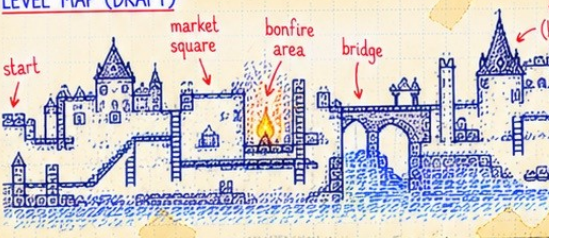
Angry Dog
- fast
- low health
- bites
- good for surprise

MUSIC / SOUND IDEAS

- [ ] Traditional feel (pipes /drums?)
- [ ] Bonfire crackle (loop)
- [ ] Crowd noise (murmur)
- [ ] Fireworks (distant)
- [ ] Footsteps on wood
- [ ] Torch whoosh
- [ ] Dog bark (short)
- [ ] Menu music (same theme)
- [ ] Keep it atmospheric not annoying!



LEVEL MAP (DRAFT)



SCHOOL / LIFE

- [ ] Maths - OK
- [ ] English - started essay
- [ ] History - surprisingly interesting
- [ ] Science - forces (still tricky)
- [ ] Lunch with Ken - game talk
- [ ] Home - level design most of the day

Forfar was good. Picked up a few ideas from the old buildings. Might use some for future levels.

IDEAS / NOTES

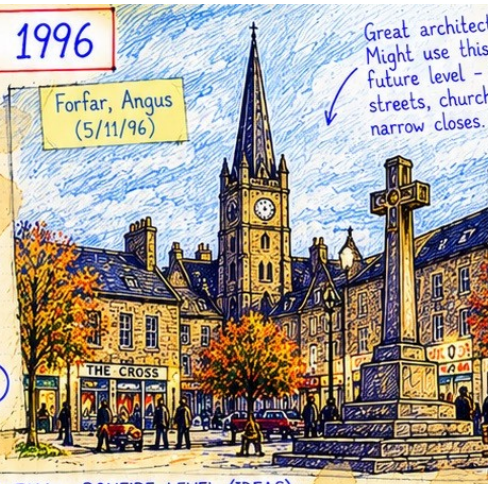
- [ ] Use real Forfar buildings for inspiration
- [ ] Add church spire in background?
- [ ] Make the square feel busy
- [ ] Maybe a big firework at the end?
- [ ] Hidden room in the old mill?
- [ ] Try different coloured smoke
- [ ] Add flags and banners
- [ ] Could be one of the best levels!



FORFAR, ANGUS

TUESDAY 5 NOVEMBER 1996

Bonfire Night. No school today – holiday.
Went into Forfar with Ken.
Picked up some bits and had chips.
Walked round the town. Looked at the old buildings for ideas. The place feels full of history – could be a good location for a later level. Lots of stone, closes, old windows and the church. Saw the firework display at the recreation ground later. Brilliant!
Feels like the game is coming together now. Just need to make the bonfire level work properly – fire, smoke and crowd shadows.



To do:

- [ ] Finish bonfire level (test)
- [ ] Add fire and smoke effects
- [ ] Improve crowd behaviour
- [ ] Test on Ken's PC
- [ ] Menu and save game
- [ ] Add Forfar buildings?
- [ ] Fix collision near fire
- [ ] Add night lighting
- [ ] Back up files (again!)
- [ ] Keep going!

KINGDOM FALL – BONFIRE LEVEL (IDEAS)



ENEMY IDEAS – BONFIRE LEVEL



Guy Fawkes
- appears in crowd
- throws torch
- runs away

Fire Spirit
- floats
- goes through walls
- leaves fire trail

Crowd (NPC)
- moves in groups
- reacts to noise
- can block path

SOUND / MUSIC IDEAS

- [ ] Bonfire crackle (loop)
- [ ] Fireworks (distant)
- [ ] Crowd murmur (loop)
- [ ] Church bells (distant)
- [ ] Footsteps on cobbles
- [ ] Wind (night time)
- [ ] Maybe add real recordings?

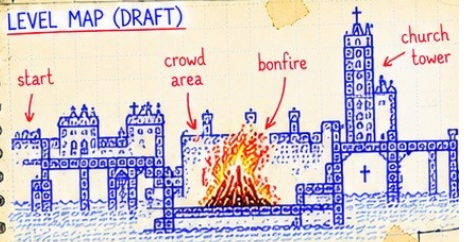


SCHOOL TODAY

- [ ] Maths – nothing ☺
- [ ] English – read and note ideas
- [ ] History – Scotland (actually interesting)
- [ ] Science – forces (dull)
- [ ] Lunch with Ken – game talk
- [ ] Home – worked on level



LEVEL MAP (DRAFT)





IDEAS / NOTES

- [ ] Use real Forfar buildings for inspiration
- [ ] Add church interior later?

Chips, fireworks and game design. Perfect day.

Wednesday, 6 November — 7.43 p.m.

I have invented a new feature for Kingdom Fall. People in the game will remember things you do. Not just defeating dragons. Ordinary things. Helping someone carry flour. Giving a lost child directions. Accidentally setting fire to a chicken. The chicken was not intentional.

Davie asked what happened if you were horrible to the villagers. "They remember," I said. "Better not put Gordon in it," said Davie. "You'd run out of memory." Gordon calls me Calculator, which I consider an insult to computers.

Thursday, 7 November — 9.16 p.m.

Jennifer has drawn a village noticeboard, complete with missing-cat posters and an advertisement for turnips. One sketch resembles Mr Patterson with horns. She claims this is a coincidence.

The villagers could leave messages about things that happen. The game would make its own history. I called it revolutionary. Jennifer suggested I finish the save function before starting a revolution. She is annoyingly sensible. I think I might be in love with her.

Friday, 8 November — 4.38 p.m.

Mrs Kerr asked us to write a speech about an invention that would improve the world. I invented the Universal Meaning Translator. Mum saying "I'm not angry" would translate as "YOU SHOULD ALREADY KNOW WHY I'M ANGRY." Dad saying "Five minutes" would mean "I HAVEN'T FOUND MY KEYS."

Mrs Kerr wants me to demonstrate it on Monday. I agreed before remembering that Monday involves other people.

Saturday, 9 November — 6.12 p.m.



Went to Tayport and looked across the Tay at Dundee. The bridges looked enormous and the city looked small. I sketched a bridge for Kingdom Fall where a guard asks questions before letting you across.

Davie suggested that answering badly enough should earn you a job guarding the bridge. We may have invented Scottish local government. I also worked on Monday's speech. I have added a demonstration. This may be a mistake.

Monday, 11 November — 8.54 p.m.

Monday. 11 November 1996

Long day at school. Maths test went better than I expected. English was ok but I kept thinking about the cave level.

After school I worked on the moving platform code again. It finally works most of the time, but sometimes the enemy still falls through. Need to check the collision boxes. The shadows and torch light are looking much better now.

I tested the new section with the waterfall and it feels right. Still a few glitches but it's getting there.

Getting tired but happy. This could actually be really good.

To. do:

- [x] Fix moving platform bug
- [x] Check enemy collision
- [x] Improve shadows
- [x] Add water reflections
- [x] Test full section
- [ ] Show Jennifer level 5
- [ ] Finish homework (mayb



Ideas:

- more c
- moving
- water
- bigger
- trap
- secre
- end

Enemy walk cycle (update)



Slower and more natural now.



Lighting test:

- darker corners
- torch flicker
- mist layer
- moving shadows
- water drip effect
- try blue light ?



Level 5 - bridge section (v4)

Platform logic:

Monday 11 November 1996

KINGDOM FALL

Cave level 5

- enemy movement
- water reflections
- bridge lighting
- sound test
- collision boxes
- final bug check



Today's progress:

- [x] Fixed moving platform bug
- [x] Check enemy collision
- [x] Improved shad
- [x] Water reflect (v3)
- [ ] Add secret
- [x] Test full s

Show Jennif level 5

(maybe

Enemy walk cycle (update)



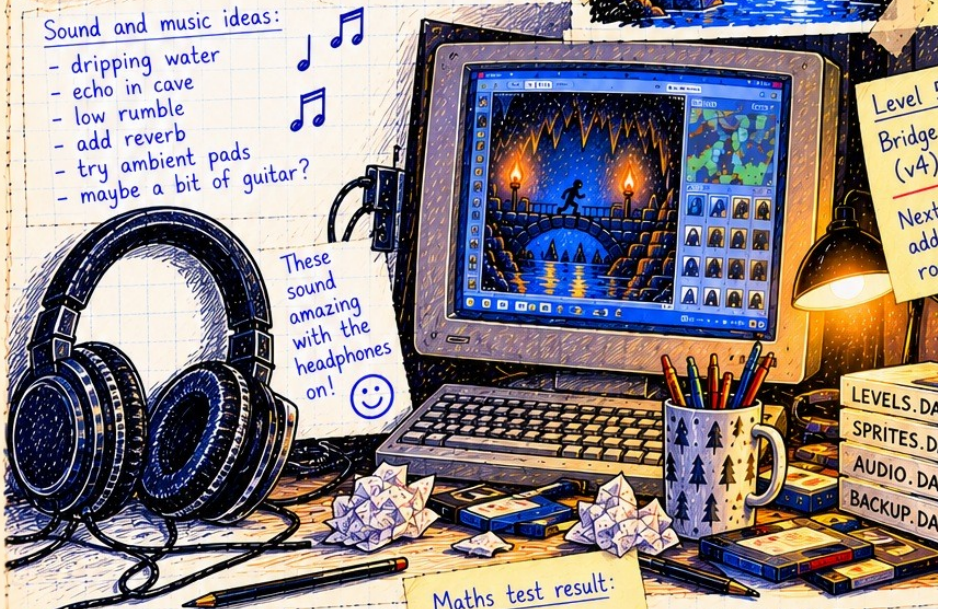
Slower and more natural now.



Ca v3 w a W n

Sound and music ideas:

- dripping water
- echo in cave
- low rumble
- add reverb
- try ambient pads
- maybe a bit of guitar?



Level

Bridge (v4)

Next add ro

Maths test result:

I have become famous. Not in a good way. I brought a cardboard box to English with UMT-9000 written across it. Jennifer volunteered "I'm fine." I pressed the imaginary button. "Translation: I am not fine, and the fact you need a machine to tell you is the problem." The girls laughed.

Gordon shouted, "You're a wee idiot." I pressed the button again. "Translation: I've run out of interesting things to say." The room exploded. Even Mrs Kerr smiled into her register. Gordon said he would see me after school. I spent the afternoon wishing I had invented a machine for predicting consequences.

Tuesday, 12 November — 5.27 p.m.

Several girls have started using the UMT. Isla asked whether it could translate boys. I said boys were relatively straightforward. Jennifer said, "Translation: Hamish has absolutely no idea." Everybody laughed. Even me, eventually.

Gordon knocked the cardboard translator onto the floor. A button fell off. Jennifer said quietly, "That wasn't funny, Gordon." He walked away. Her saying it made me feel better than all the laughter yesterday.

Wednesday, 13 November — 7.06 p.m.

Someone drew a translation button on a maths worksheet. Mr Patterson confiscated it, then asked if I could make the translator work on a computer for the school open afternoon.

I explained that real language processing would require a considerable database. He said, "I meant a little programme." Oh. I can probably do that. Jennifer will draw the screens. Davie volunteered the rude answers. These will require editing.

Thursday, 14 November — 8.19 p.m.

Gordon has started calling me Professor Underpants. Davie says bullies do not require a logical connection between their insults and their targets. An inefficient system.

Gordon announced he could make a better translator. I said he was welcome to try. He asked whether I was challenging him. I said I was offering technical encouragement. Jennifer says not every problem needs an answer. A completely foreign concept.

Friday, 15 November — 4.47 p.m.

We tested SAY WHAT YOU MEAN in the computer room. It displays a sentence and three possible translations. Jennifer made the buttons into little speech bubbles.

“I’M JUST GOING TO HAVE A QUICK LOOK IN THE SHOPS.” A: five minutes. B: fifteen minutes. C: you will grow old here. Correct answer: C.

Mrs Kerr got eight out of ten. Mr Patterson got four and said the marking was unfair. I said it was designed to simulate life. Jennifer nearly fell off her chair laughing. Gordon stood in the doorway watching, although he called it childish.

Saturday, 16 November — 10.28 p.m.

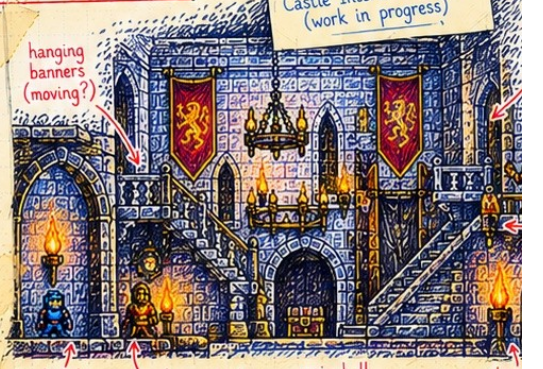
SATURDAY 16 NOVEMBER 1996

No school today. Proper game day. Spent most of the morning working on the castle interior. It's starting to feel like a real level now.

Ken came round with pizza and we tested the new enemy AI. Loads better. Still a few bugs – the bat gets stuck in corners and the guard sometimes walks through walls. Annoying!

In the afternoon we worked on the hidden room and key system. It's actually coming together. Feels brilliant when a plan finally works.

Kingdom Fall
Castle Interior – Level 2
(work in progress)



To do:

- [ ] Finish castle interior (level 2)
- [ ] Fix bat AI (gets stuck)
- [ ] Add moving banners
- [ ] Improve torch lighting
- [ ] Test key hidden door
- [ ] Menu and save game
- [ ] Add cut-scene idea?
- [ ] Back up files! (again)
- [ ] Playtest whole section
- [ ] Maybe start next level?

ENEMY IDEAS – CASTLE LEVEL



Guard
- patrols
- spots player
- calls alarm?
- can be avoided

Bat
- flies in pattern
- gets stuck
- lose 1 health
- make lower?

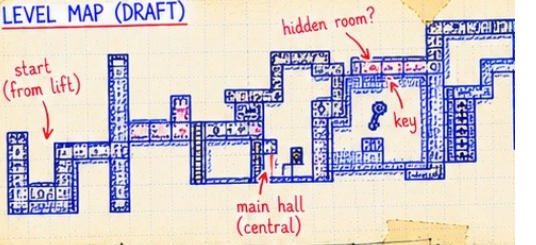
Ghost
- appears in dark
- goes through walls
- slow but scary
- good for atmosphere

Chandelier Trap
- drops if player stands below
- loud sound
- can be reset?

MUSIC / SOUND IDEAS

- [ ] Creepy organ (castle)
- [ ] Wind through windows
- [ ] Footsteps on stone
- [ ] Chandelier drop (loud!)
- [ ] Bat wings (flap)
- [ ] Hidden room theme (mysterious)
- [ ] Maybe record something with Ken's keyboard?

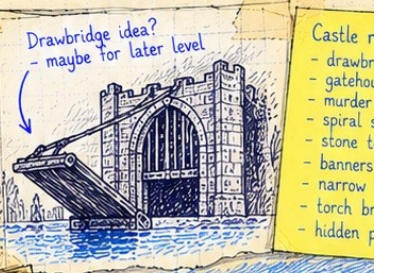
LEVEL MAP (DRAFT)



SCHOOL / LIFE

- [ ] Maths – OK
- [ ] English – read chapter (boring)
- [ ] History – castle research (actually useful!)
- [ ] Science – forces (still tricky)
- [ ] Helped Dad with computer (printer problem)
- [ ] Game with Ken – all day!
- [ ] Pizza – excellent
- [ ] Home – late, happy

Looked up old castle layouts for ideas. Real castles have so many hidden rooms!



Castle r
- drawbr
- gatehou
- murder
- spiral
- stone t
- banners
- narrow
- torch br
- hidden



Ideas:

Worked on the castle interior. There is now a secret passage, a drawbridge and a bat that gets stuck in a wall. I named the bat Gordon, then felt guilty and changed it to Nigel.

Jennifer brought new banners and a miserable-looking ghost. She said Gordon had been caught shoving a first-year. I said good. She said he did not seem very happy. I hate it when people make me think about things while I am enjoying being right.

Monday, 18 November 1996 — 8.42 p.m.

Mr Patterson asked if he could show Kingdom Fall to a lecturer at Abertay. I agreed, provided he didn't copy the files. Mr Patterson said the man was a lecturer, not a burglar. I said the two were not mutually exclusive. He told me to go to class.

I have prepared three floppy disks: the game, a backup and a backup of the backup. Davie suggested a fire extinguisher and a priest. I asked what the priest was for. He said the fire extinguisher might not work.

I told Jennifer.

She said, 'Does that mean someone might see my drawings?'

'Yes.'

'Then I need to finish Isla.'

I said the game would run without Isla's finished drawing.

She looked at me.

'That's not the point, Hamish.'

I have heard 'That's not the point, Hamish' three times this month. I still haven't worked out what the point is.

Tuesday, 19 November — 6.51 p.m.

I discovered Gordon finds reading aloud difficult. Today he got stuck halfway through a paragraph. Two boys sniggered. He went red and pushed the book away.

Afterwards I found him kicking the vending machine. I told him that would not improve the selection. He told me to get lost. Instead I asked whether he wanted to test a programme tomorrow. “Why?” “Because I need somebody who’ll tell me if it’s rubbish.” He thought about it. “You’ve found the right person.” I think that was a joke.

Wednesday, 20 November — 7.32 p.m.

Gordon came to the computer room. I made a version of the translator that breaks sentences into manageable pieces. No timer. No audience. He read three sentences without stopping and asked if it could handle his English homework.

“Why are you doing this?” he asked. I told him I wanted to see whether it worked. “Don’t tell anybody.” I promised. Before leaving, he pressed the broken button on the cardboard UMT. “Translation: this thing’s still rubbish.” Then he put it carefully back.

Thursday, 21 November — 10.47 p.m.

THURSDAY 21 NOVEMBER 1996

Raining all day.
Stayed in and worked on the game.
Ken came round after tea. We sorted the new water level and finally got the lift to work properly.

It's starting to feel like a real game now. Added sound effects and a bit of story text. Still loads to do but it's coming together. Ken thinks it could be special if we keep going. That made me feel good.

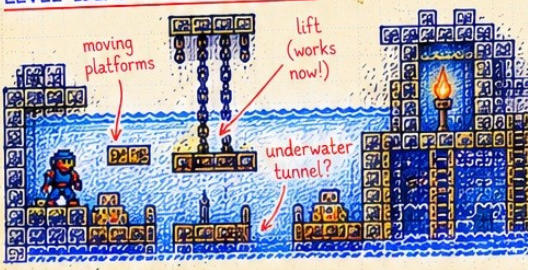
Mum shouted about the mess again (deserved). Need to sort schoolwork too. But tonight I'm happy. Proper progress.



To do:

- [ ] Finish water level (test again)
- [ ] Add lift and moving platforms
- [ ] Improve enemy behaviour
- [ ] Add sound effects (more!)
- [ ] Write story text for level 2
- [ ] Test on Ken's PC
- [ ] Menu and save game
- [ ] Fix any bugs
- [ ] Back up files (x2)
- [ ] Try to get schoolwork done!
- [ ] Keep going!

LEVEL IDEAS - WATER SECTION



ENEMY IDEAS



Piranha Fish
- swims left/right
- charges when close
- 2 hit kill?



Jellyfish
- floats
- stuns player?
- avoid or attack



Drowned Guard
- slow but strong
- patrols underwater
- drops key?

SOUND IDEAS

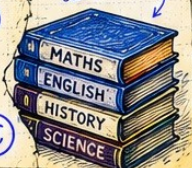
- [ ] Water ambience (loop)
- [ ] Bubbles (player underwater)
- [ ] Lift mechanism (chain)
- [ ] Stone gate (heavy)
- [ ] Enemy sounds (fish / jellyfish)
- [ ] Treasure chest (good sound!)
- [ ] Maybe music changes underwater?



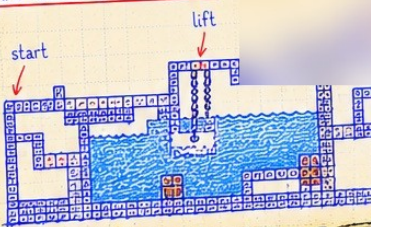
SCHOOL - TODAY

- [ ] Maths - OK
- [ ] English - read chapter (did some)
- [ ] History - Scottish castles (useful!)
- [ ] Science - forces (boring)
- [ ] Lunch with Ken - game talk
- [ ] Home - more coding
- [ ] Also tidy room (eventually...)

Might actually use this for castle ideas?



MAP IDEAS (WATER LEVEL)



Two boys started mocking Gordon over his reading sheet. His chair scraped back. I thought he would hit someone. Instead I stood up, without a plan, and announced he was testing my new software. One boy asked if it was a programme for idiots. “No,” I said. “It’s for people who want to learn without an audience of idiots.”

Jennifer laughed. Isla laughed. Davie supplied an unnecessary running commentary. Gordon sat back down. At the gate he said, “We’re not pals. And you’re still a wee weirdo.” I said that seemed fair. Then he said, “Cheers for yesterday.”

Jennifer appeared beside me. “That was a decent thing you did.” I said I was merely conducting software testing. She held my hand for approximately four seconds. I counted. In hindsight this was not the correct response.

Back home I worked on Kingdom Fall. The villagers now remember kindness. Rescue the baker and he might give you bread later. Help the guard and he might open a gate. It makes the game better. I think I know why.

I still have the broken cardboard translator under my bed. Gordon says it belongs in a museum. Jennifer says it belongs in the bin. I have decided to keep it until somebody can explain why both of them are smiling at me.

Sunday, 24 November — 6.13 p.m.

I rehearsed the demonstration in my bedroom. The knight arrested the baker. The baker accused the innkeeper of stealing a loaf. The innkeeper demanded payment. Fergus refused to leave his cave, which is sensible if you ask me.

Then the whole program stopped.

I stared at the screen.

The baker couldn't leave because the knight blocked the door. The knight couldn't move because the baker was in the way. I had invented the world's first medieval traffic jam.

I fixed it. On the next attempt the knight arrested the innkeeper. I am considering calling this an advanced feature.

I have decided not to mention this unless asked.

Monday, 25 November — 7.18 a.m.

Mum insisted I eat breakfast before leaving. I explained that eating was not the immediate priority.

'It is in this house,' she said.

I carried the floppy disks in a padded pencil case. The bus was late. A boy from S3 sat on my bag, and I spent seven minutes imagining the disks being crushed. I couldn't ask him to move because he had a moustache.

At school the computing room smelled of warm plastic and dust. Mrs Kerr told us not to trail cables across the floor. Mr Patterson rearranged the desks. Jennifer pinned her drawings beside the monitor.

She had drawn Fergus with his uneven wings folded tightly against his body. Isla stood on a hill with her back to the castle.

'You made her look as if she's leaving,' I said.

'She is.'

'Where's she going?'

'That's what we have to find out.'

I liked that answer. Unfortunately, it meant more programming.

11.34 a.m.

Dr Alasdair Muir arrived wearing a coat that looked as though it had survived several Scottish winters. He was accompanied by a man in a dark jacket who introduced himself as Colin Sutherland from Tay Digital Entertainment.

Mr Patterson looked surprised to see two visitors.

Dr Muir asked what the game was about. I explained the simulation system, the villagers' memories and the way small decisions could change later events.

Sutherland asked whether it was 'a sort of medieval adventure thing'.

'No,' I said.

Dr Muir smiled. 'Show us.'

I loaded the disk. The drive clicked. Nothing happened.

I felt all the blood leave my face.

Mr Patterson said, 'Give it a moment.'

The screen came to life.

The baker argued with the knight. The innkeeper interrupted because the baker owed her money. The knight arrested the innkeeper.

Everyone laughed.

I began to explain the mistake that made everyone wait for everyone else.

'Don't fix it yet,' Dr Muir said. 'Why's it funny?'

I said the knight had misunderstood the situation.

'And?' he asked.

Jennifer said, 'Because he thinks being in charge means he's always right.'

Dr Muir looked at her. 'Exactly.'

I was annoyed. I'd written seventeen variables to make the scene happen. Jennifer explained why it was funny in eleven words.

Dr Muir went over to her drawings.

'Who made these?'

'I did,' Jennifer said.

'Why's the dragon worried?'

'Because everyone expects him to be frightening, but he's afraid of flying.'

Dr Muir laughed. 'Now that's a character.'

Sutherland asked whether Fergus could breathe fire. Jennifer said he could, but he was afraid of doing it in case somebody got hurt.

'Could you make him look more dangerous?' Sutherland asked.

Jennifer said, 'He is dangerous.'

'He doesn't look it.'

'That's the interesting part.'

Sutherland moved on to the computer.

12.06 p.m.

Sutherland asked whether the game could be sold. I said it was unfinished. He said that wasn't always a problem. He asked whether I had considered licensing it.

I had not.

He handed me a business card: thick cream paper, embossed logo, a real office address. I held it by the corners as if it might leave fingerprints.

I wondered whether I ought to have one. HAMISH MACNAIR, AGE THIRTEEN, AVAILABLE AFTER HOMEWORK.

Jennifer had spent hours on Fergus's wings. I'd spent hours making him move. I knew both things mattered. For some reason, I forgot this the moment somebody said the game might sell.

I put the card in my pocket. When Jennifer asked what Sutherland had said, I told her he liked my game. She went quiet. I heard myself say 'my' and wished I could rewind the last ten seconds.

He asked how old I was.

'Thirteen.'

'Remarkable.'

I liked the sound of that word.

Then he said, 'Your parents would need to be involved, of course. We could have a conversation.'

He looked at Mr Patterson rather than Jennifer.

I noticed this. I did not say anything.

4.27 p.m.

Jennifer and I walked to the bus stop. She was carrying the drawings in a cardboard folder. Rain had begun to fall and she kept the folder under her coat.

'That was good,' I said.

'It was.'

'He thinks it might sell.'

'He does.'

I told her I wanted to improve the market system before anybody else saw it.

She said she wanted to redraw Isla's hands.

I asked why.

'Because she should look like she's been somewhere.'

I said the programming was more urgent. It came out sounding as if her drawings were a hobby and my code was saving lives.

She stopped walking.

'Hamish, you wouldn't have half the game without the people I've drawn.'

'I know.'

'Do you?'

I said yes. She looked unconvinced.

I tried explaining that the code made everything happen. Halfway through, I realised I was making it worse. I kept talking anyway. This is a particular talent of mine.

Jennifer said, 'Right.'

She walked ahead.

I followed her to the bus stop, but she didn't say much more.

Tuesday, 26 November — 8.46 p.m.

TUESDAY 26 NOVEMBER 1996

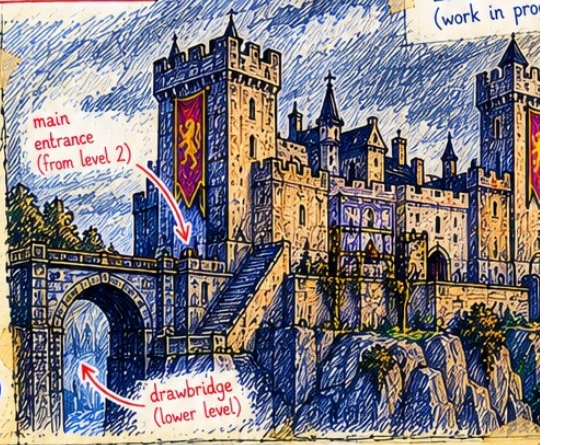
Cold and grey today. School was OK but I just wanted to get home and carry on with the game.

Level 3 is the castle keep. This is the proper heart of the game now. Big stairs, windows, banners and the boss at the end. It's getting exciting.

Ken suggested a new enemy idea and we worked on the AI together. Also did some story text for the old king.

Mum made soup (legend) and left me to it. Good day. Feeling like this is actually going to be something.

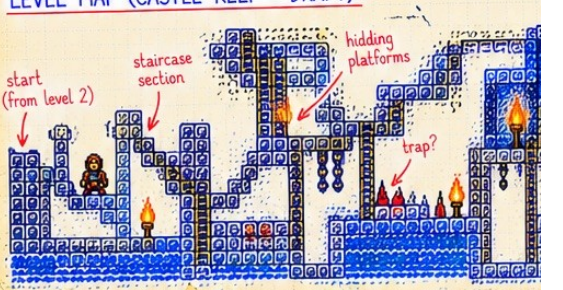
Kingdom Fa
Level 3 - Th
(work in pro



To do:

- [ ] Finish castle keep (level 3)
- [ ] Add boss character & AI
- [ ] Improve stair and platform logic
- [ ] Add banners and lighting
- [ ] Write story text (king's diary?)
- [ ] Test on Ken's PC
- [ ] Menu and save game
- [ ] Fix any bugs (fall through!)
- [ ] Back up files (x2)
- [ ] Keep going!

LEVEL MAP (CASTLE KEEP - DRAFT)



ENEMY IDEAS - CASTLE KEEP



Armoured Knight
- slow but strong
- blocks attacks
- patrols stairs
- can be stunned?



Archer
- fires from above
- limited range
- ducks down
- needs cover



Flying Gargoyle
- swoops attack
- comes in pairs
- hard to hit
- maybe later level?



King's Guard
- fast
- follows player
- stronger armour
- appears near boss

BOSS IDEAS

The Fallen King
- slow but powerful
- 3 attack stages
- uses throne room
- final test of skills
- maybe changes after halfway?



SOUND / MUSIC IDEAS

- [ ] Creepy choir (distant)
- [ ] Church bells (reverb)
- [ ] Wind through windows
- [ ] Heavy footsteps (armour)
- [ ] Boss music (epic!)
- [ ] Maybe record some ideas?



STORY IDEAS

- [ ] Old king's diary (notes)
- [ ] Why the castle is abandoned
- [ ] Link to earlier levels
- [ ] Hidden room with history?
- [ ] Maybe unlock something?
- [ ] Keep it simple but interesting

The King's

They came
The river tur
I trusted the

— 17th Mar

Sutherland telephoned our house. Mum answered. She thought he was selling insurance and nearly hung up.

He spoke to Dad for twenty minutes. Dad came upstairs afterwards looking impressed.

'Apparently somebody wants to talk business with you.'

I said it was possible. Dad asked why I was speaking like a man being interviewed by the police.

Dad asked whether I'd be famous.

I said fame was not a primary objective.

He asked whether I'd be rich.

I said money was a secondary consideration.

He said I was the first MacNair in recorded history to say that.

I told Davie. He asked whether the game would make enough money to buy a PlayStation.

I said that was not how licensing worked.

'Then what's the point?' he asked.

I propped Sutherland's card against my monitor. It looked important. I kept checking it was still there, although business cards do not usually escape.

Then I remembered Jennifer's face at the bus stop.

I should ask Jennifer what she thinks. I have written ASK JENNIFER on a scrap of paper and placed it under the card, where I am unlikely to see it.

I have not yet done so.

Thursday, 28 November — 7.36 p.m.

Mr Patterson asked whether I'd spoken to Jennifer about the possible deal. I said it wasn't a deal. It was a conversation.

He said, 'That's not what I asked.'

I told him she knew Sutherland had been there.

'That's not what I asked either.'

He took off his glasses.

'Hamish, it's exciting when somebody notices your work. Just remember whose work they're noticing.'

I said I understood. I do understand. I just haven't done anything about it.

Friday, 29 November — 4.16 p.m.

Davie asked to see the business card. He turned it over twice.

‘You could put your name on one of these,’ he said.

‘I don’t have a company.’

‘You have a game. That’s nearly the same thing.’

He set the card on the desk beside Jennifer’s drawing of Isla. The explorer’s boots were muddy and her hands were scratched. Jennifer had spent an entire evening getting the hands right.

‘Is her name on it?’ Davie asked.

‘On what?’

‘The card. The deal. Whatever it is.’

I said there wasn't a deal. Davie said that wasn't his question. Apparently everybody in Dundee has agreed to ask me questions I cannot answer.

I tried imagining Kingdom Fall without Jennifer's characters. It would be a collection of faceless villagers arguing about bread. Technically impressive. Probably not a bestseller.

I put the card underneath Isla's drawing. On Monday I shall tell Jennifer exactly what Sutherland said, including the bits I would rather forget.

I have started a list of possible opening sentences. So far I have crossed out every one beginning with 'Actually'.

READ MORE IN THE FULL BOOK

This is a preview.