

“Tribal Chief”

A Video Game for the PC

Introduction

It is dark, the screen is black. Along the bottom in white lettering is a translation of a prayer now concluding. The speaker asks that all the 4 legged animals and insects will accept and assist you as Chief. You are given a name.

Someone calls for the door. “Mitakuye Oyashin.” A small stream of brilliant white light bursts into the lodge. The old man nods at you, it is okay to leave. You crawl over and around the feet and ankles of the men, careful to avoid the hot stones in middle. A drum group of elders has already started a traditional song.

As you emerge from the lodge, you can barely make out a group of women coming toward you. They quickly place a bonnet of feathers over your head that extend all the way down to your feet. Goose bumps shiver your body as the cool breeze tickles the sweat while the Eagle Feathers gently caress your skin. The Song continues.

One by one the men line up to give you gifts, introduce themselves and tell you quickly about the status of their faction. The first is the war chief, he gives you a blanket and tells you that 8 braves are ready to serve. Next is the medicine chief he gives you a buffalo robe, there are 2 other healers in the tribe. Next the dream chief offers an eagle fan and a personal drum which has been in your tribe for as long as anyone can remember.

Allies from other tribes have sent representatives and gifts. You are given a personal drum group. Many women give nothing but look at you askance; they study your entire body and monitor your every move with skepticism. The song ends.

Finally, you meet your political advisor; he asks if you know the history of your tribe (have you played the game before). No matter the answer, he asks about your personal history and the user must select how he came to power – warrior, healer, dreamer, lover, or speaker. You must then choose one of about 12 animal clans – these choices determine your personality, inherent strengths and how others will respond to you.

Your advisor announces who you are your name, profession and your clan. The people all unceremoniously disperse and go back to their homes and what they were doing. They are very independent.

If you have never played the game before, the advisor goes over aspects of the interface. If you have played before or when he is completed, he offers you a smaller bonnet and your war bonnet is placed in storage.

It is time to make your first decision as Chief.

Objective

The intention of the game "Tribal Chief" is to simulate and introduce people to the lifestyle, culture, sociology, spirituality, politics, economics and history of the Native people from the Americas. The challenge is the survival of your tribe against the elements, geography, colonialism and even the tribe itself.

The game emphasizes skills in problem solving, conflict resolution and relationship building as well as knowledge of the culture and mythology. Success in these areas nets an increase in the most obvious indicator of achievement – the immigration of people into your tribe. As the size of the tribe increases your ability to manufacture, hunt and trade increases, the experience gets deeper and more complex.

Overshadowing all of these issues is European expansionism. This issue is the primary narrative force and will determine the outcome of the game that will correspond directly to the history of 12 or more actual "Tribal Chiefs". For example, a decision to fight may conclude the game with your death or in the same way as Geronimo reached his ending. A decision to run – Chief Joseph, compromise – Chief Red Cloud and spirituality – Big Foot. The endings are partially randomized yet they are likely to correspond to actual events in history. Thus, there is a chance that the "Chief Joseph ending" will allow the player to escape to Canada, however it is more likely that he will be captured at Bear Paw, Montana which is what actually happened.

Further considerations include navigating diplomacy between tribes, migration patterns, working within pre-existing tribal leadership entities, challenges to authority, maintaining spiritual favor, fair trade agreements, and the building and maintenance of relationships within your tribe. A Chief is a spiritual, political, psychological leader who is part legislator, clergy, counselor, judge, historian and prophet. Perhaps most important is the proverbial "bullshit detector" that one must acquire in order to determine when someone is lying.

The game is a conglomeration of various histories and traditions. It does not represent the ways of just one tribe. It is not entirely accurate as no completely accurate account of the life back then exists. Even if it did it may not make for a good game. My intention is to give people a "feel" for what tribal life was like, an appreciation for the culture, and an intense experience that helps in everyday relationships and problem solving issues. Like most of contemporary native history, the Plains tribes of the Lakota who were the most open to share their culture with outsiders heavily influence the game.

Market

The game appeals to those with an interest in American History, particularly Native American History. Estimates are there that as many as 15 million American people, most of them living in urban areas, have some Native blood in them. Beyond that aboriginal people completely dominate the southern hemisphere and there is intense interest in Europe, particularly Germany, in Native American culture.