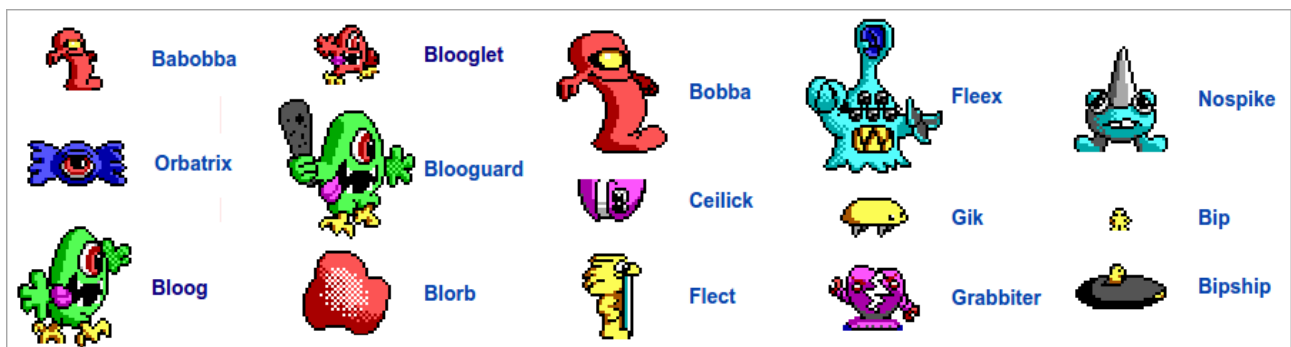


PCKF

- Modding Theory - Nomenclature



all hints and tips by Public Commander Keen Forum Members
collected by Ceillick
assembled by Nisaba

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Nomenclature (by Xky Rauh, 2006)

When you're making a mod, how much time do you spend coming up with a name for the creatures, locations, and items? What criteria do you use in weeding out possibilities and settling on a final term?

One of the things that gave the original Keen games their charm – in my opinion – was the meaningful length of names given to the creatures. Gargs and Yorps are very simple enemies, in function, appearance, and difficulty... so they get monosyllabic names. Vorticons, on the other hand, are harder to predict (at first) and are much more dangerous – they get longer names, and are more developed. Those decisions could have been made from story-to-game, or they could have been developed as game sprites first, and story written about them second.

Similarly, certain Keen enemies get their names based on their abilities or presence... Skypessts, Shockshunds, and Blorbs come to mind.

But are there any Keen enemies whose names are longer than three syllables? Vor-ti-con, Shi-ka-di, Poi-son-Slug, Ber-ke-lold... I can't think of any off the top of my head, besides the Vortininja, but he's an exception, because his name combines "Vorticon" with "Ninja," a term most players are already familiar with.

Many mods, I've noticed, don't really pay attention to that. Some of our mods have creatures who are named with several silent letters, complicated sequences of consonants, and some over 10 letters long! Those are difficult to read fluently, let alone remember and use on a consistent basis.

It's up to us, as a mod author, to make these names more memorable and relevant than their originals. If we make the names too complex, the player's eyes glaze over the jumble of letters, and refers to the sprite in question as "the Vorticon replacement." If we make the names too simple, the player's mind glazes over the content, deeming it "too simple" or even "too derived / contrived."

What goes through your mind, as a mod author, when it comes to naming your creations?

Author: Xky Rauh (2006)

Nomenclature (by Ceilick, 2011)

Xky strongly stresses the importance of having alien sounding names that are simple to say and that stick in the players mind, but only briefly mentions the naming technique used extensively in Keen Galaxy: naming creatures based on their abilities or appearance.

“Notice also how meaningful the names in Keen4-6 are - wormouth, skypest, shockshund, sparky, spirogrip, even Bloog sums up their facial expression, and Blooglet lets us know it's a small version. So if you're naming sprites, that is a good way to name them.” (Benvolio, 2006).

These kind of names play on different words and use puns to create unique enemy names. As Benvolio mentions, these kind of names don't even have to be real words: the word 'Bloog' doesn't have any meaning in it itself, but the way it sounds is what gives it character and makes it feel appropriate to the appearance of the Bloogs.

These kind of names can really stick with the player through the game, but there is a danger in them being too corny, plain, or contrived. Naming a smiling creature a “Happyguy” probably won't work and neither will a robot called the “Electrishocker”. These are just too over the top and derivative.

Just as it is important for creature names to be things the player *can* remember, it is also important that they be things the player *wants* to remember. The player needs to feel comfortable saying and thinking your creature's name. As Xky mentions, don't give the player an excuse to refer to your creatures as “the such-and-such replacement” just because you gave it a bad name.

Author: Ceilick