

Module1-1 Reading Response

Adam Stammer

Game Analyzed: Backgammon

I thought it'd be interesting to analyze Backgammon in the context of MDA because of how little there is to the game, and because of how old it is. It's believed to be one of the oldest known board games played today tracing its roots back to tabula, which means that its design had little official or standardized analysis, so I'm applying a respectively new perspective to a very old game.

Mechanics are a large part of the game, since every turn relies on the randomness of dice, and the strategical moving of pieces as dictated by the rules. I think these mechanics aid in the enjoyment of the game because of how easy they are for most people to initially grasp, yet how developed one might progress. It's a nice balance of ease of play, and application of skill. Just enough randomness to keep things interesting, but still skill based enough that one who plays on a regular basis can get tangibly better at the game. This feature makes the game valuable beyond just submission, which I'll talk about in the aesthetics aspect of this writing.

The dynamics certainly help to spice up the mechanics. The clear competition help to motivate players not only to play in general, but motivate each and every move you make. You're frequently faced with the option to either slow down your opponent at the risk of yourself, or focus instead on helping yourself. I've played games in which turn after turn on each player knocks their opponents tile onto the Bar or constantly blocks their advances by staying in their way. These kinds of games can go on an on until both players are just bored, or one takes the lead and the other player basically gives up. Other games, though, involve little to no conflict and end up being little more than a race to see who can roll the largest numbers the fastest. Most people would agree, that neither of these cases are ideal, and the best games are a healthy mix of both. Most good games have a climax and Backgammon usually uses conflict to make that happen.

Aesthetically Backgammon is lacking compared to most modern board games, largely due to its simplicity. The challenge is enticing to some, but others view it as just an "old people game" not worth the time investment it takes to get better. While I disagree with that, I can understand where that view comes from. The game can get quite repetitive and most turns don't have a tangible sense of challenge. When they do, its a very real sense of investment into the outcome, but people often have little attention span to wait for such things. That repetitiveness does thankfully add to the submission of the game. I've passed many many hours playing backgammon over lunch back in high school because it was easy to do while holding an unrelated conversation. Pause the conversation when something interesting happens, and resume it again when that challenge is over. My discussion post also mentions the fellowship felt when teaching someone new how to play the game. I don't think that's unique to backgammon, but I do know many games that don't give me that feeling near as much. It makes for what I consider a very versatile social game.