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Game Design

MDA Analysis

This analysis aims to look at the game *Devil May Cry 5* developed and published by Capcom through the lens of the MDA framework by Hunicke, et al. The game has three different playable characters (with a fourth added as DLC) with unique mechanics and playstyles so for this analysis, the character of Dante will be used.

Mechanics

The game is a stylish action game and as such the core mechanics of the game is combat with varied combos and dispatching enemies in quick succession. When it comes to the case of Dante, the player uses melee and ranged attacks. Dante uses his melee and ranged attacks with various melee weapons and ranged weapons each with various outputs and effects. A few melee examples are Dante's sword, Rebellion is the standard weapon with decent damage output and speed, the Balrog are a pair of gauntlets and greaves used for quick combos and the Cavalier is a motorcycle chainsaw weapon while slow, deals massive damage. For ranged there is Dante's handguns Ebony and Ivory which deal rapid fire damage and have a charged shot for added damage, Dr Faustus which uses red orbs, the game currency as ammunition for special attacks and the Kalina Ann rocket launchers which deal massive damage. Each weapon has its own unique move set, allowing each weapon to stand out for more than just visuals. The weapons are used to attack enemies and chain combos and weapons can be switched mid-combat.

Additionally, Dante has a stance system that the game refers to as "Styles". Dante has four styles that he can access. Swordmaster, Royalguard, Trickster and Gunslinger. Swordmaster allows for special moves and combos used for Dante's melee weapons. Gunslinger is the same as Swordmaster but applied to Dante's ranged weapons. Trickster is movement-based abilities such as a dash or recovery from being attacked by an enemy. Royalguard is a defence-based style that focuses on blocking enemy attacks and sending it back as a counterattack. Like Dante's weapons the styles can be changed freely during combat. Due to not outwardly changing Dante's appearance as opposed to his weapons, the game communicates Dante's change in style by Dante flashing and a voice saying the name of the style upon selection. The game's UI will also reflect this by enlarging the letter that represents the style (S for Swordmaster, T

for Trickster, etc). Lastly Dante has access to the Devil Trigger (or DT), which is his equivalent of a super form. As Dante defeats enemies he gains meter for his DT. When used, Dante becomes faster and stronger and gives him temporary flight, allowing for his attacks to deal greater damage. In DT, Dante regains health lost as his DT gauge depletes. Eventually, Dante can use an upgraded version of his DT called not Sin Devil Trigger (SDT). In SDT, Dante gains even more power and has special attacks available in SDT. However, unlike standard DT, Dante does not regain health in SDT and his SDT gauge depletes faster than his standard DT gauge. These changes are communicated visually by having Dante take on a more demonic appearance. Devil Trigger can be used once the minimum amount of meter has been filled and can be switched on and off freely, provided there is enough meter.

Dynamics

Dynamics can be created from the mechanics and interaction of the mechanics and the player. With this the levels of the game were also influenced and designed in a way to allow for situations for players to interact with the core mechanics of the game, with the levels having large areas for the player to fight enemies with freedom of movement.

What also encourages players to engage in various ways of play is the ranking system in the game. When the player defeats enemies, a rank is given, starting from D (Dismal). As they defeat more enemies, the rank will increase from D, C (Crazy), B (Badass), A (Apocalyptic), S (Savage), SS (Sick Skills) and finally SSS (Smokin' Sexy Style). Though there is a case of diminishing returns as reusing the same combo will reduce the score for their rank. Getting hit also lowers or if low enough, resets the rank back to D. This adds an incentive to play in a way the game would consider "stylish" to show off one's skill at the game and its mechanics. The level of style the players have during combat is given a score and can be added to the overall level score. How players will increase the rank is through variation of their combos and attacks. The ranking system applies to all the playable characters in the game who also have their own ways of reaching the SSS rank.

The rich amount combos and attacks through the weapons and styles allow for players to reach SSS rank in a variety of ways. If using a single weapon, a way this can be done is to use all the available combos that the weapon can use and its style attacks. What can also be done is to switch weapons mid combo and continue the attack combo with that weapon. For example, starting a basic combo with Balrog, switching to Rebellion mid-combo, launching them in the air with the move High Time and then jumping and following up with an aerial combo by Cavaliere. What can also be done is to use the ranged weapons to maintain the combo from a distance to give the player more time to reach the enemy and continue the attack with the current weapon or a

different weapon. Ranged attacks can also keep enemies stuck in the air (“juggling”) to allow for transition into a ground or air combo. Additionally, some charged shots will have temporary continuous damage to maintain their combo and Switching styles can also add to the ranking by switching out the special attacks the player can use and by adding to the mobility of Dante allowing for more attacks and guarding does not lower or reset your ranking. Some explosive items are placed in the battle zone and can be used against the enemy to maintain and add to your combo and rank. Additionally, using DT and SDT will speed up the rate at which the player progresses through their ranks, lowering the number of combos needed. However, the enemies will die faster and depending on the number of remaining enemies, their health, and the current rank, this may not have the outcome the player intended to have.

Players can show off their combos online for other players to see and compare their combos and style with others. There are events and tournaments based around getting the highest with one of the most recent being an event held by Capcom where two players compete for the highest score, However this tournament uses Dante’s brother Vergil as he was recently added as DLC.

Aesthetics

With the above, the game aims to give the player a sense of spectacle through the mechanics of the game, the style system, and the various methods one can style on their enemies and show off their skills. Through learning and mastering the game’s combat a sense of accomplishment and progression is experienced as they experiment and play around with the game’s mechanics. This is exaggerated in the difficulty modes “Heaven or Hell” and “Hell and Hell”. The former is the enemies and player dying in one hit and the latter is the enemies having their stats from hard mode (“Son of Sparda”) and the player still dies in one hit. The mode is used not only for challenge but to show off one’s skill with the game and the characters. The level of challenge from building up style and surviving encounters by not getting hit, leaves the player feeling a sense of accomplishment and acknowledgment of their own skilful play. This in turn makes the player feel like they are representing the Dante seen in game cutscenes; a show-off fighter that never so much as breaks a sweat or get a single scratch in combat.

To add to this spectacle, the game uses adaptive music and links it to the player’s style. Each character has a distinct battle theme used for combat, with Dante’s being the song, “Subhuman”. For ranks D-B, the verse of “Subhuman” loops as Dante builds up style. As Dante reaches A rank the growled vocals and drums gain intensity and at S rank upwards, the song leads into the chorus. When the battle ends, the song blends into the outro. Also, if Dante gets hit at A rank or higher, the song will lead back into the verse and players will have to build up their style again.

In *Devil May Cry 5*, the game makes sets Dante up as the character for more experienced players of the series, with Nero as a more beginner friendly character with a smaller weapon set but the Devil Arm system a lot simpler to use and V as a more experimental character as his character plays very differently to the other two. Vergil plays similarly to Dante but without the style system. With the above considered, playing as Dante nets an additional experience of challenge as while each character requires learning and practice, Dante's varied weapon set, styles and DT modes make him a much more intricate and involved character to learn and play as, allowing a great sense of achievement for new players when they are able to style as get SSS ranks as him and allowing veteran players a sense of satisfaction being able to style as Dante from the get go. The adaptive music only adds to this and players are left feeling a sense of pride as the outro of "Subhuman" plays and they progress to the next section of the level for the next battle.

Conclusion

Devil May Cry 5 and its character Dante have gameplay based around combat with its depth combat mechanics through the weapon move sets, styles, and Devil Trigger which can all be switched and used on the fly. This allows for the experimentation intricate combos and stylish combat. This accentuated with the ranking system that reflects on player performance which incentivizes them to get the highest possible score. This in line with the adaptive battle music helps to create a sense of spectacle and pride in the player for their skilful gameplay.

References

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