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Game Design III

Level Design

This report seeks to evaluate the data design of the game *Firewatch* by using Hunicke, et al's MDA Framework. The analysis will look at the levels of the game and how they are constructed and influence the game play.

Mechanics

The main mechanics of *Firewatch* is that players can move around the game world and interact with the objects around the world. There is also a map that players can use to help navigate their way through the game world. The items can also be inspected to gain further information and added to an inventory to be kept for further use. Additionally, players can communicate with an NPC named Delilah via the walkie talkie. Interacting with certain items will also allow the player to interact with Delilah, the player is given a list of dialogue choices to choose from which will give varied responses from Delilah. Mechanics of a game can be used to set up and design the levels of a game and this can be seen in *Firewatch*. The game takes place in vast partially open world being the park the player character inhabits. *Firewatch* uses the core mechanics of movement and interacting with items to craft these interactions that happen within the game world and place the objectives and interactable objects distances apart to create progression in the game and therefore levels. The progression through these levels is also done through the mechanic of talking to Delilah via the walkie talkie. The player can get to the point Delilah tells them to go to and interact with objects but can halt their progression through the level by not talking to Delilah.

Dynamics

Due to the game's partial open world and "levels", a dynamic of play that can be formed is the duration of completing the game story. This in turn can give a change to pacing of the level progression and affecting the levels. Early in game, the player character falls down a shale slide. The player can lengthen the time taken to get to the next are which affects the level progression. Additionally, they can choose to not tell Delilah about the fall and just walk around the game world and stop level progression. Since the game has a semi open world, the player can navigate the game world to the next point however they see fit and encounter other interactable objects which may or may

not be ready to be used to interact and progress through the game world and in turn progress the narrative.

Aesthetics

The design of the world being a forest park can incite feelings of calmness and serenity in the player. As the character walks through the game world they may also feel a sense of awe and wonder for the forest as they explore. Certain interactions and movements can however change this. When going down the shale slide the player may feel nervous as they do not know if they will be able to get down safely or not. Aesthetically due to the presence of the unknown the game can bring levels of tension and worry to the game, mainly when the player starts getting followed. A sense of uneasiness can also be found through making decisions in the game. This can be noted in the beginning as the players start making tougher decisions in regards to the NPC Julia. What starts as a heartwarming love story becomes a series of painful decisions and heartache for the player as Julia falls into early onset dementia which can be even more painful if the player knows someone who is a victim of dementia.

Conclusion

Firewatch uses level design through creating a game that makes a semi open game world that is influenced by its mechanics. The mechanics and the level affects the way the player progresses through the woods and will cause experiences of calm and nervousness in the game.

References

- Hunicke, R., LeBlanc, M. and Zubek, R., 2004. *MDA: A Formal Approach to Game Design and Game Research.*
- Takahashi, K. 1999. *Yu-Gi-Oh!*[Card Game]. Japan: Konami.