CSC 281 Game Reflection Journal

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Reflection #1: Game Design Frameworks

Game 1: The Wolf Among Us

Game Information

Game: The Wolf Among Us

ESRB Rating (if available): M17+

Platform: PC

Game Summary

Provide a brief (approx. 1-5 sentences) summary of the game you have played. The main gameplay style and primary goal of the game should be described. Make sure you use terminology from the MDA paper.

The Wolf Among Us is a movie-like detective game that gives a player opportunities to direct the main character down a path based on dialogue choices in conversations. Alongside dialogue options, The Wolf Among Us is full of quick-time events to make a player interact in high-intensity situations . The game also has slow sections that allow a player to feel like a detective and search for clues. Thus far, Wolf Among Us is a detective thriller full of discovery and character building that has made me feel like my actions matter while I'm searching for the people who have been committing murders.

Gameplay Experience

Write 2 to 5 paragraphs about your personal, subjective gameplay experience during each 45-60 minutes of playing the game, comparing both play sessions (NOT a play-by-play description of what happened). Consider writing about (but not limited to) the following:
- Your emotional state while playing the game (and what led to that)
- Your thoughts on the characters in the game
- Your thoughts on the game's story, and narrative progression. Did you like the story?
- Your thoughts on the gameplay. Was the game fun to play? Why?
- Was the game interesting to play?
- What kind of social interactions did you have with other players? With bystanders?
- Did you experience flow while playing the game? What contributed to this feeling?

During the first 45 minutes of my playtime on The Wolf Among Us, I was filled with an emotion of anxiousness and sorrow. Starting with even the first few minutes, the characters around me were clearly unhappy with my presence and it left me feeling unwelcome and alienated in a world I was discovering. When you find the girl that you had just met to be decapitated at your doorstep, it adds to the anxious and unwelcome feelings of the world. Along with this, the thoughts that I build for the characters I was meeting felt unsettling as every character gives off a tone of being untrustworthy. Even when you meet people that you supposedly work with, they hardly give off a sense of friendship and comfort which keeps the game feeling ominous while you try to figure out what's going on.

My second 45 minute play session had me even more emotionally shocked then the first. I discovered my new partner decapitated just like the girl from the beginning and alongside that, the fight scenes evolved even further since I discovered that I and other characters have the ability to transform into monsters.

Even in the first 45 minutes, I thoroughly enjoyed the story. Many detective games can have a slow build to a climax however The Wolf Among Us, starts off abruptly with an intense fight and murder that kept me looking for what would happen next. Then, the game slows down slightly and lets you make conclusions on things that you can't be sure of. After just 45 minutes of playtime, I had an excitement for what would happen next. The gameplay in the first 45 minutes is highly engaging since the gameplay is full of quick-time events and dialogue options that made me feel like I was not just watching a movie and I had a serious effect on how my interactions between players would go. The game also gives the player the ability to walk around and discover clues. Although I thought that this gameplay design was good at splitting up the game between fighting and detective work, I often felt like these sections were sometimes too slow and boring.

Since this was my first playthorugh of The Wolf Among Us, I wanted to make my interactions as realistic as I would interact with people in my real life. Therefore, I tried to treat people as kindly and sympathetically as possible and tried my best to always give people the benefit of the doubt. Even when characters acted in ways that should not have had my respect, I tried to always go down the path of acting like a trustworthy sheriff that was there to help.

In both sessions I found the game to have a flow that was very enjoyable. The game goes from dialogue, to action, to detective work, which works very well in constantly engaging the player and keeping the game at a steady pace. The flow also allows the player to get to climax's in the story that feel well earned. Although I felt like the flow in my 2nd 45 minute play session was more action packed then my first, I think the game knows exactly when it should go from calm to intense in a way that always makes the player feel in disbelief on what's going on.

The Wolf Among Us was very interesting to play-through during both of my play sessions. As someone that almost exclusively plays competitive multiplayer games, The Wolf Among Us let me try a story game that I think would be interesting to anyone despite the genre they would usually play.

Game Design Analysis

Write 2-5 paragraphs with your observations on the design of the game you have played. The emphasis here is reflection upon the design of the game. Use your gameplay experience to provide supporting evidence for your assertions about the design of the game. Consider discussing one or more of the following (no need to address all of them):
- Innovative elements of the game

- What design elements make this game enjoyable or unenjoyable?
- Your thoughts on the level design in the game. Are the levels varied? How?
- What kinds of challenges does the game provide? How does the game keep these interesting?
- How does the game create conflict?
- How does the game keep the player interested?
- How does the game make use of space within the gameworld?
- What is the tone of the gameworld? How does the game create this tone?
- Does the game help foster social interaction among players? How?
- What would you change about the game? What was frustrating?
- What ideas does this game give you for your own game project?
- Does the game exhibit emergent complexity?
- How did you respond to the game's reward structure?
- Your thoughts on the game's use of cut scenes to support the narrative (for example, how do the cutscenes support or interfere with gameplay?)

The Wolf Among Us has several design elements that made it especially enjoyable to play. Starting with the types of gameplay, The Wolf Among Us has segments including cutscenes with quick-time events, dialogue options, or exploration through an area that allows the player to walk around and discover clues. During my time with the game, the game cycled through these types of gameplay in a way that made the game interesting and never "the same". Oftentimes, games will feel like the same game with no slowing down; The Wolf Among Us does a great job slowing down when it needs to in order to allow the player time to choose important dialogue options or discover clues. Despite the game being slow at times, the sections are far from pointless since they do a fantastic job to make the player feel like a detective with something to solve. The slower sections also lead into major plot climaxes that couldn't be present without the slower dialogue and clue seeking.

Another thing that I enjoy about The Wolf Among Us is how the game creates conflict. So many characters in the game feel suspicious which leads to difficult decisions. Even when you think that you have pinpointed the person that you think committed the murders, the game leads you down a path of potential suspicion on another character. This mix of emotions often leads to conflict with characters that insist on having no part in the crimes being committed. Conflict is also created with the very tense mood that the game has. Since the main character appears to be disliked by nearly every member of society, it is easy for the game to fluently attack your character by someone that is unhappy with how you are treating them. Lastly, the game gives the player dialogue options that are often aggressive in times where dialogue that could deescalate the situation would be more appropriate. This leads to many scenes of conflict.

AGE Diagram
Construct an AGE for this game (go to Insert > Drawing).

Aesthetic Experience based on the 6-11 Framework

Refine your discussion of the aesthetic experience earlier by applying the 6-11 framework. Document your revised version below.

Game 2: Dark and Darker

Game Information

Game: Dark and Darker https://www.darkanddarker.com

ESRB Rating (if available): M 17+

Platform: PC

Game Summary

Provide a brief (approx. 1-5 sentences) summary of the game you have played. The main gameplay style and primary goal of the game should be described. Make sure you use terminology from the MDA paper.

Dark and Darker is a brutal multiplayer game that focuses on player vs. player combat with bows, swords, and spells. Dark and Darker takes place in a dungeon environment that (as the title of the game suggests) is very dark. During gameplay, assuming the player does not encounter other players, the player's goal is to collect chests and loot the many mobs that they will battle throughout the dungeon to acquire gems and improve their gear. As a zone closes and pushes the player to a final area, exit portals will spawn to allow the player the ability to leave and stash/sell the gear they've acquired. Then a player can choose to go back into the dungeon with their newly acquired gear and risk it for more (or go back in with starting gear).

Gameplay Experience

Write 2 to 5 paragraphs about your personal, subjective gameplay experience during each 45-60 minutes of playing the game, comparing both play sessions (NOT a play-by-play description of what happened). Consider writing about (but not limited to) the following:

- Your emotional state while playing the game (and what led to that)
- Your thoughts on the characters in the game
- Your thoughts on the game's story, and narrative progression. Did you like the story?
- Your thoughts on the gameplay. Was the game fun to play? Why?
- Was the game interesting to play?
- What kind of social interactions did you have with other players? With bystanders?
- Did you experience flow while playing the game? What contributed to this feeling?

Dark and Darker has a very repetitive and addictive gameplay loop that does a great job at controlling a player's emotion. During both of my play sessions, I was constantly in a state of distress and discomfort due to the ominous Dark environment that is full of enemies. Unlike a lot of multiplayer games that focus on having a brightly-lit and balanced combat area, Dark and Darker does the opposite and makes the player feel like there could always be someone or something hiding in a dark corner. Since the player feels so weak against enemies, every piece of gear that is found feels valuable. Therefore, the feelings of excitement and relief that I got whenever I escaped from the dungeon was unmatched to any game I've played.

Although Dark and Darker doesn't have characters with dialogue, it does have different characters that a player can select. Each of the nearly 10 classes have differences in abilities, perks, armor, and weapons which leads to very different combat experiences accordingly. The variation in characters also helps to reduce repetitiveness. Although my first 45 minutes was fun to play in the fighter class, switching to the rogue class in the second 45 minutes led me down a completely different stealthy style of gameplay since the Rogue is much weaker and faster.

Dark and Darker has no direct narrative progression but it does present a story in its setting and different maps. From what I played, you can tell that the general story is that you are playing as a character seeking riches as you go deeper and deeper into the dungeons. Dark and Darker does a fantastic job of portraying the greed of people since the game constantly tempts the player to risk everything they have in order to potentially gain some more riches. Even though the player fully controls the character, the game plays out like a book since every dungeon feels like an unbelievable new experience.

The gameplay is some of the most fun that I have had in any extraction-style game. In the first 45 minutes of my playtime, I despised this game and found myself hardly ever improving my loot since I would die to the brutal mobs of the world. On the second 45 minute play-session however, things start to come together and enemies that were once challenging become manageable. Dark and Darker is able to be fun due to it's enormous skill curve that

can be noticed from even the first couple hours of my playtime. Dark and Darker focuses on the sense of high risk with high reward which keeps the game addictive even when you're losing. The losing makes things interesting because it allows the player time to reevaluate a situation and decide what they could do better on next time they are put into a similar situation. Both of my play sessions were thoroughly interesting because I felt like I was always learning something about the enemies I was battling or the class that I was playing.

   Dark and Darker has some of the harshest, yet realistic, player interactions I have seen in any game. With so many players trying their best to simply survive with so much on the line, I had very little trust in the players that I encountered. Within both play sessions, many people would immediately engage in combat while some of the players that I encountered would crouch up and down trying to form an alliance. Regardless, this game always put the thought in my head that maybe whoever I encountered might have a lot of valuables that could make me rich. This led me to frequently backstab people I had met and left me with hardly any trust for people in the game.

Game Design Analysis

Write 2-5 paragraphs with your observations on the design of the game you have played. The emphasis here is reflection upon the design of the game. Use your gameplay experience to provide supporting evidence for your assertions about the design of the game. Consider discussing one or more of the following (no need to address all of them):

- Innovative elements of the game
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- What is the tone of the gameworld? How does the game create this tone?
- Does the game help foster social interaction among players? How?
- What would you change about the game? What was frustrating?
- What ideas does this game give you for your own game project?
- Does the game exhibit emergent complexity?
- How did you respond to the game's reward structure?
- Your thoughts on the game's use of cut scenes to support the narrative (for example, how do the cutscenes support or interfere with gameplay?)

   Dark and Darker innovates in very interesting ways on the extraction-style games that have become very popular recently. Namely, Escape From Tarkov has been the largest extraction game and does so in the style of being brightly-lit in the style of an ultra-realistic military simulator. Dark and Darker innovates on the foundations of Escape from Tarkov by being an extraction game set in medieval times in a dark setting. With so many multiplayer games being shooter games, Dark and Darker shows that it's possible to innovate and make an extraction game with very primitive weapons that can still feel incredibly rewarding.

   Dark and Darker presents challenges through the unforgiving mobs and player versus player combat found in every game. Alongside the combat, Dark and Darker is unforgiving in

how tedious it is to regain health since a player can't quickly regenerate health points when out of combat. During some games a player can make early mistakes and stay low on health points because they forgot to enter the dungeon with potions equipped. This often leads to interesting gameplay since a player needs to play cautiously in every engagement since health is so valuable.

   Dark and Darker has a reward structure that is one of my favorites among the many games that I have played. The game has a rarity system which helps to establish how good an item is and the system gives the player a large amount of satisfaction when they get something such as a "legendary". Alongside this, gear isn't very common so every piece of gear can feel like a step up. Especially when you kill a player full of high tier armor and weapons, it is exciting to know that you will be significantly stronger in your next fight.

AGE Diagram
Construct an AGE for this game (go to Insert > Drawing).

Aesthetic Experience based on the 6-11 Framework
Refine your discussion of the aesthetic experience earlier by applying the 6-11 framework. Document your revised version below.

Reflection #2: Choice Analysis

Game 1: The Wolf Among Us

In-Game Choice Analysis
Identify and write about at least 5 in-game choices in terms of:
- Your observation
  - The type of choice

- ○ Amount of information you have about the choice
- ○ Significance of the choice
- ● Your opinions
  - ○ Why is it interesting to you in the context of the game?
  - ○ Would you change it as a designer after you know the consequences following your playthrough? If so, what would you change?

Choice 1

Choice 2

Choice 3

Choice 4

Choice 5

Game 2: [Self-Selected Game Title]

In-Game Choice Analysis

Identify and write about at least 5 in-game choices in terms of:
- Your observation
  - The type of choice
  - Amount of information you have about the choice
  - Significance of the choice
- Your opinions
  - Why is it interesting to you in the context of the game?
  - Would you change it as a designer after you know the consequences following your playthrough? If so, what would you change?

Choice 1

Choice 2

Choice 3

Choice 4

Choice 5

Reflection #3: Media of Discourse

Game 1: The Wolf Among Us

Designer Introduction

Write 1 to 2 paragraphs about the designer of the game. Consider writing about (but not limited to) the following:

- Their previous games
- Their descriptions of their games
- Their intent in the game's design
- Their history

Aesthetic Preferences and Genre

Write 2-5 paragraphs with your observations on the preferences of the game's designer. The emphasis here is reflection upon the design of their games, and the genres used.

Aesthetic Analysis and Game Purpose

Write 3-5 paragraphs analyzing the aesthetic experience, and the purpose this game serves as a media of discourse.
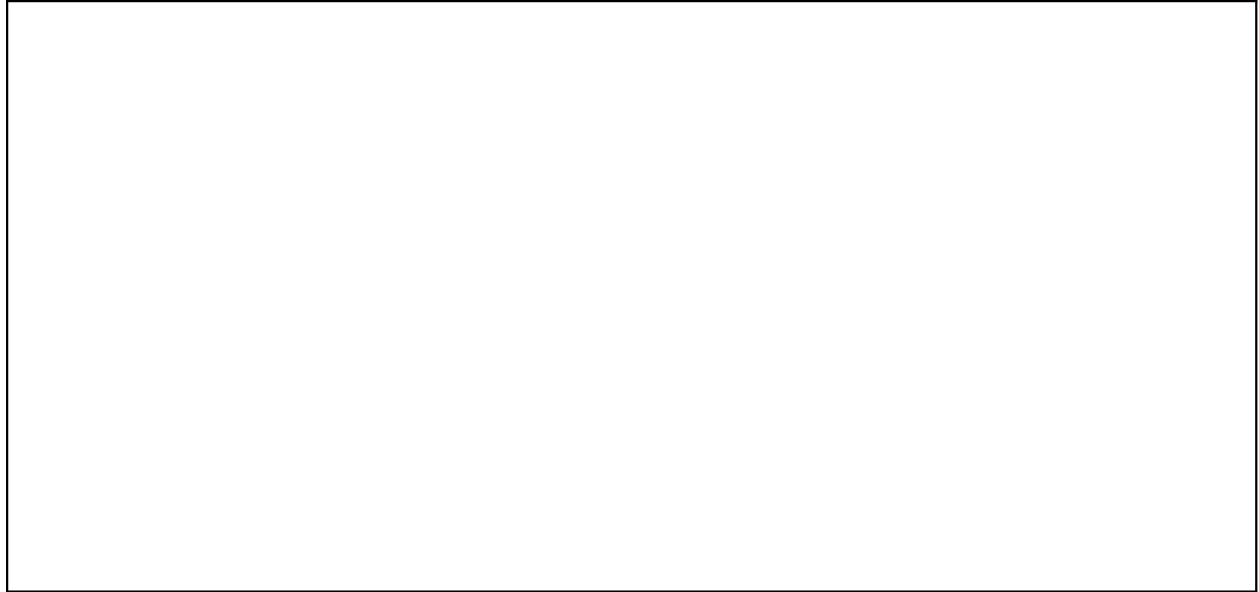
Game 2: [Self-Selected Game Title]

Designer Introduction

Write 1 to 2 paragraphs about the designer of the game. Consider writing about (but not limited to) the following:
- Their previous games
- Their descriptions of their games
- Their intent in the game's design
- Their history

Aesthetic Preferences and Genre

Write 2-5 paragraphs with your observations on the preferences of the game's designer. The emphasis here is reflection upon the design of their games, and the genres used.

Aesthetic Analysis and Game Purpose

Write 3-5 paragraphs analyzing the aesthetic experience, and the purpose this game serves as a media of discourse.

Reflection #4: Games as Viewership

Please reflect on the issues related to games from the perspective of performance and spectacle rather than design or play as we have seen so far in this class. Here are some aspects and questions to get you started in this reflection.

- **Spectating:** How do spectators view games differently from players? Are there different ways in which spectators enjoy different games?
- **Players to performers:** What is the effect of spectator following on players in the way they relate to the games they play and enjoy?
- **Sub-cultures:** Live streaming, commentating, tutoring, and speedrunning are examples of subcultures within the larger concept of game viewership.
- **eSports:** Players as athletes--What are some of the similarities and differences between traditional sports vs games?
- **Economy** of game viewership and eSports
- **Social media effects** of game viewership, sharing, and esports

You can pick some or all aspects above, and also talk about relevant things that are not listed here. You are expected to write a reflective essay with text and images (### words), but you can write a longer essay. The preference is for well-written shorter essays as opposed to too much content without writing polish. It is okay to just pick one or two of these aspects and explore them more fully as long as there is enough depth in the discussion.

Essay Topics

Which aspect(s) and questions do you want to explore?
-

Which game(s) and/or communities would be good example(s) of your chosen aspect(s)?
-

Reflective Essay

References