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In this essay, the level design present in the game *Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2002) will be analysed using the MDA framework by Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubek. This will be done with a specific focus on the units made available to the player in the prologue and orc campaign.

Mechanics refers to the different components of the game implemented by its creators (Hunicke, Le Blanc & Zubek, 2004: 3). Furthermore, mechanics are the actions the player performs to interact with the game system (Hunicke et al., 2004: 4). *Warcraft III* is a real time strategy game (rts) where the player selects units by left clicking and dragging. Thereafter they right click to move the units and attack enemies. The player must build buildings to perform actions to manage their economy, such as collect resources, produce units, and upgrade units.

The gameplay is divided into chapters. These act as levels and are comprised of several smaller quests which the player must complete in order to progress. There are levels which are exploration based, whereas others require the player to build a base while completing quests. In exploration-based levels, the player is made aware of new units by discovering them in the world and are taught how to use them by completing the quests presented. Thereafter in levels where building a base is required, they are able to purchase buildings which allow them to produce these units. The introduction of new units plays a large part in facilitating the increasing difficulty of each level. These stronger and more complex units allow for more complex interactions with enemies, as well as allowing for different play styles and tactics.

Macro level design is used very effectively in *Warcraft III* to facilitate the increasing difficulty of levels. These can be seen by the units which the player is taught to use in the prologue chapters. In Chapter 1, the player is taught to control Thrall, a hero unit with increased health and powerful abilities. Grunts, the basic orc melee combat unit of the game, are introduced to the player in this level. Chapter 2 of the prologue covers the most basic buildings and units needed to manage the player's economy, which is crucial in a rts game. Buildings and units can only be created if the player has enough resources, so resource collection and management is a core skill which the player must know. This chapter teaches the player to control resource-collection units such as peons. Furthermore, the player learns how to use these resources to produce grunts by building barracks. Thereafter, the player must use these grunts to rescue orcs from a human camp. In the process of this quest, shaman units are discovered. The micro level design of this level supports effective learning by only introducing the player to footmen at first, which are the basic human offensive unit. Thereafter, the shaman unit's offensive debuff

enables the player to more effectively combat the ranged human units (riflemen) and the stronger knights which are finally introduced at the end of the level.

The orc campaign also demonstrates this increasing difficulty. In Chapter 1 of the orc campaign, the troll headhunter is introduced to the player through the narrative. These are high damage ranged units which are ideal for combatting the higher-level enemies in this chapter. Furthermore, in Chapter 2, the raider unit is introduced to the player. Shortly after, the player is confronted with harpies. These must be defeated by using the raider's ensnare ability to bring them to the ground so that the melee units can attack them. This demonstrates how this game teaches specific mechanics through the level design.

The dynamics are created as the player interacts with the game system (Hunicke et al., 2004: 2). The player is increasingly challenged throughout *Warcraft III* as they are taught how to control units. Furthermore, as the player deepens their understanding of how to build different buildings to produce units and how these units function, they may follow different builds in order to respond to certain situations. For example, if the enemy consists of many flying units, the player may create raiders to make use of their ensnare ability to bring flying creatures to the ground. The differing quests in each level allow the player to explore the mechanical capabilities of units and challenge the player in different ways. For example, there are quests which involve time pressure as there are timed enemy attacks which the player must respond to with the appropriate units. In many cases, the game gives the player the freedom to respond in a multitude of ways by choosing which units they would like to create.

Aesthetics are the emotional responses evoked within the player as they experience the dynamics of a game (Hunicke et al., 2004: 2). One of the prominent aesthetics which the player experiences is Expression. This is evoked as the player is able to choose how they would like to respond to quests with regards to what buildings they build and which units and upgrades they purchase. Another aesthetic experienced is Challenge as the player is presented with multiple challenges (such as quests and enemies) which they must overcome in each level. The final aesthetic present is Discovery. This is experienced as the player moves through the world and encounters new enemies and units. These discoveries allow for more complex interactions with the game system which enhances the aesthetic of Challenge.

In *Warcraft III* level design is used to effectively provide increasingly complex interactions as differing units are made available to the player. This, along with the challenge of more powerful enemies, creates an engaging experience for the player as they interact with the game system.

References:

Blizzard Entertainment. (2002). *Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos* [Video game]. Microsoft Windows. Blizzard Entertainment.

Hunicke, R., Le Blanc, M., Zubek, R. (2004). MDA: A Formal Approach to Game Design and Game Research. In Proceedings of the AAAI Workshop on Challenges in Game AI. Available from https://users.cs.northwestern.edu/~hunicke/MDA.pdf