THE FLOOR IS JELLY

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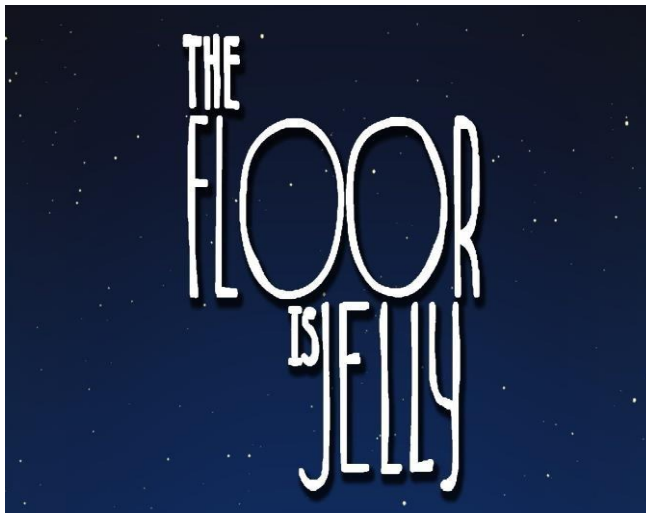
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MDA GAME ANALYSIS

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1.

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Introduction

The Floor is Jelly falls under 2-D Platformer (M.Klappenbach, 2020). There is a little different about this game. It is an imaginary world that is made completely out of gelatine, from the floors right to the walls. Everything you touch is bouncy just like how jelly is. It was developed and published by Ian Snyder and the soundtrack is by DISASTERPEACE (The Floor is Jelly, 2014). This essay is going to analysis this game using Robin Hunicke, Marc LeBlanc, Robert Zubek's MDA framework which is "a formal approach to game design and game research" (Hunicke, R., LeBlanc, M., Zubek, R, 2004). This essay is going to show whether this game shows data design, commination design, level design and feedback loops, and these are going to be discussed under the main headings which are mechanics, dynamics, and aesthetics.

What is MDA?

To start off, MDA is a formal approach to the general analysis of games. The analysis is going to be based on the game developer's perspective where the developer first experiences the mechanics then moves to the dynamics and lastly the aesthetics of the game. Aesthetics are defined as the desired emotional response that are raised from the players when they are interacting with the game (Hunicke, R., LeBlanc, M., Zubek, R, 2004). Dynamics are the "responses" or effects of the mechanics in reaction to the inputs the player makes during gameplay (Hunicke, R., LeBlanc, M., Zubek, R, 2004). Mechanics are the actions and control mechanisms that are in the game which are presented to the player and these make the game 'function' (Hunicke, R., LeBlanc, M., Zubek, R, 2004).

Mechanics

Mechanics are the things the player can do during the game. (Hunicke, R., LeBlanc, M., Zubek, R, 2004). The main mechanic in this game is the jelly platform and others are jumping, respawning, walking sideways, changing of perspective, and window entries. These simple mechanics iterate the simple theme and dynamic of the game.

The platform is not concrete like traditional platform games, this could be a good thing and bad thing for the player. This mechanic behaves in the same mannerism as a trampoline, with the right timing the avatar could gain momentum from the jello and end up jumping higher to reach high platforms. However, when there is an obstacle such as the black/dark purple spikey box, jumping too high might end up killing the avatar and respawning it. However, there is no specific number of lives given to the avatar so it can die as many times. This encourages the player to be more strategic about their jumping, with correct timing and patience. Data and level design is uniquely shown during game play of this platformer game.

Data design in game is seen through how the player needs to use their abilities to find an open window in order to go to the new level, the puzzle-like sub-genre controls the data in the game. Level design is exhibited through the different layouts for each level you progress into, for example look at figure 1.1, it differs in colour schemes and layout from figure 1.2.

The design of the levels not only come through with different layouts and colour schemes but with new discoveries and new abilities as players progress through levels. There is a level/levels where you 'collect' tapeworm-like floats that allow you to unlock 'teleport', so if you reach a level like the underwater one which will be mentioned below, you can go back to collect these worms to unlock levels that may assist, e.g. reaching a level that allows you to rotate the scenery of the game so you can go back to reach the doors underwater. The other element that can be portray data design is through the avatar being able to make the small grass strips grow into trees when the avatar passes on them. This mechanic indicates to the player that their avatar has been on that level which can decrease repetition of levels.

Aesthetics

Communication design is seen through the use of sound during gameplay. The visuals, together with the sound, make the player feel mesmerized and always questioning themselves on what is going to happen next. (Hunicke, R., LeBlanc, M., Zubek, R, 2004).

The game starts off with different coloured abstract shapes of jelly going floating around the screen that later turn into jelly platforms, setting the first level of the game. The colour choice throughout the game is minimalistic and 'calm' to the eyes, it compliments the melotone music that plays in the background. Later, the avatar appears, and it looks like the ghost from Pac-Man. (Gilder, 2014)

To see that the avatar has advanced to a harder level, the colour of the environment changes, this could also possibly indicate an element of level design. In the beginning, the environment appears to be during the day, with trees and exits/entrances that look like an open window (See Figure 1.1). The different levels imitate the process of a day, from the day/afternoon to the imitating of the sunset (Figure 1.2) and lastly showing the night-time (Figure 1.3 & 1.4).

The sound of the avatar jumping is a bit higher than the background music, the longer the jump sound is, the higher the avatar goes and vice-versa. This communicates to the player about their use of the jump mechanic. The simple design of the avatar does not clearly show player's actions, so the sound design ensures the player knows that their jump input is recognized by the game. Moreover, sound design also differs whenever there are good or bad

decisions made during gameplay. For example, whenever the avatar collects the tape-like worms there is a different "good" sound effect which tells the player that they have made a good decision whereby the sound effect of hitting the black obstacle notify that this action was a bad decision/outcome.

"Dynamics work to create aesthetic experiences" (Hunicke, R., LeBlanc, M., Zubek, R, 2004). The calm music in the background also changes with the colours as well creating a sense of pleasure in the way they complement each other, simple and hypnotizing. The music and colours keep a player calm and relaxed if the game gets a bit frustrating because of the jelly platforms. Communication design is perfectly balanced between its level designing.

Dynamics

Feedback loops are seen through the exploration element in the different design of the levels where they show more than two 'exit points', these are the 'window entries' where the avatar uses to enter different levels.

Curiosity is then built into the player as they wonder about the different outcomes if they entered a certain window instead of the other. This curiosity could then either encourage the player to test out every level a specific window offers, this being a positive feedback loop. However, getting to the second window offered could be a bit more challenging and this results as a negative feedback loop. For example, the one window could be closer and easily accessible, but the second window could be a bit further and requires determination from the player.

The player may also feel frustration due to the limited mechanics offered in the game. This frustration can be experienced during a level where during the level, the avatar encounters a game feedback loop of water. The water mechanic possesses a similar level of density as the gelation platform, but it is not as dense as the platforms (See Figure 1.5). Further analysing this feedback loop which could serve the player in a negative outcome or a positive outcome just depending on how the player uses it. Let's look at an example of a negative feedback loop, during this level with the water element, the next available door is underwater, and the water is very bouncy because of the limited mechanics it is a bit difficult to navigate how to get the avatar deep enough to get to the door without being killed by the black obstacles.

The game not providing a ruleset also adds to this frustration because the player doesn't know what the objective of the game is. However, this serves as a good dynamic because it keeps players wondering and wanting to explore more. Picture memory also is experienced

during gameplay, if you don't have picture memory you would end up just playing and not knowing if you are repeating a level or not.

Figures

Figure 1.1 (Courtesy of The Floor is Jelly site http://thefloorisjelly.com/)

Figure 1.2 (Courtesy of The Floor is Jelly site http://thefloorisjelly.com/)

Figure 1.3 (Courtesy of The Floor is Jelly site http://thefloorisjelly.com/)
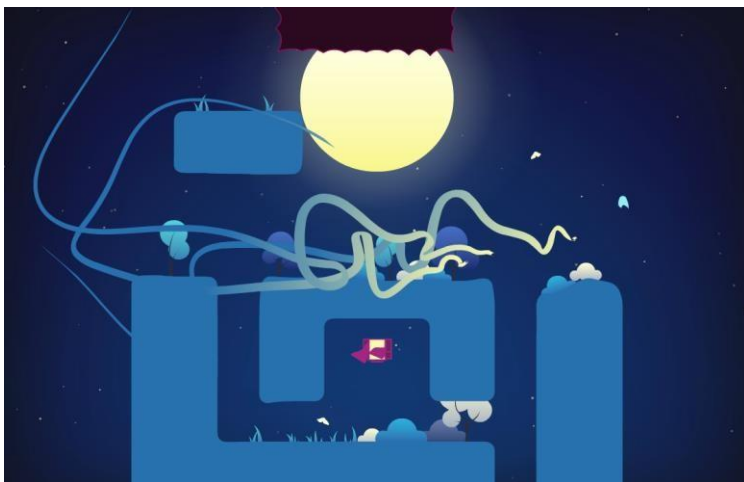

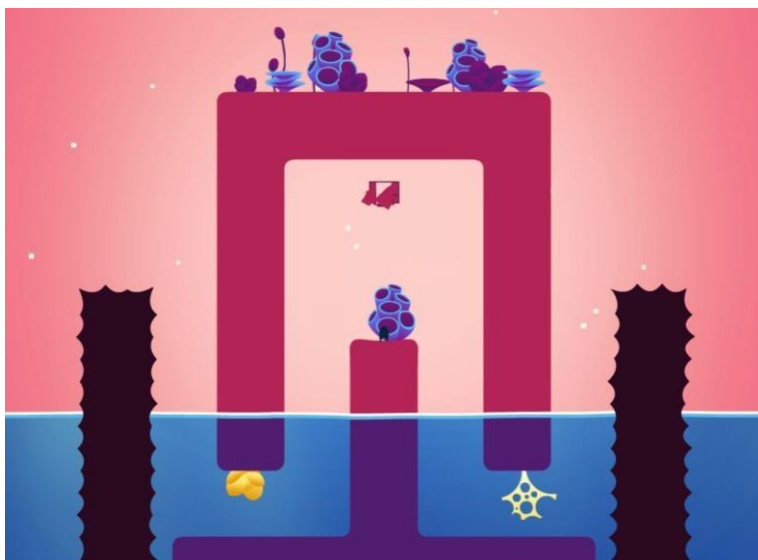Figure 1.4 (Courtesy of The Floor is Jelly site http://thefloorisjelly.com/)

Figure 1.5 (Screenshot from The Floor is Jelly)

Conclusion & Evaluation

This game was different to the rest, I got attracted by the core mechanic which was the jelly platforms. However, the game not having a ruleset can make a player feel lost during gameplay as they do not know what thy required to do because there is no stated objective. The simple visuals and the relaxing background music decreased a bit of this frustration and this was just one of the great indications of good communication design in this game. If there were detailed user interface such an addition of a timer or even a limited number of lives given, it could have discouraged players very quickly and decreased the game's replayability. Overall, this was a good game which showed their mechanics, dynamics, and aesthetics through their design of levels, communication, data and feedback loops.

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