MDA analysis, Level Design; Child of Light

1672977 (Mandaha Shallot Rolivhuwa)

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg 2050, South Africa

WSOA3003A

Introduction

In this analysis we discuss the MDA framework (Mechanics, Dynamics and Aesthetics) of the game with respect to level design. Level design is the creation of game levels, developing stages in a game where a player has a chance to take different actions and explore more on the game. We will breakdown the design of the game, elements used, rules, gameplay etc. reflected from the player and the game designer's perspectives.

The MDA will help us to discover the relation between the design of the game and the game artifacts, thereafter we get to view the player's response or results after game consumption. We also use readings by *Scott Shumaker* to give more description on Aesthetics and game system, the fun and appeal projected by the dynamics of the game.

Background

Child of Light is a fairy tale, platforming role-playing video game that was released in April 2014 and published by Ubisoft on these platforms namely, Windows, Switch, PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4, PlayStation Vita, Xbox 360, Xbox One and Wii U. This game is about a story of a young girl called Aurora, a princess to the Duke who ventures in a fantasy world in the land of *Lemuria* to save her kingdom and to get back home/to her people by finding the missing moon, stars and the sun. This game takes players through the journey that Aurora takes from the beginning until the end as this game is based on a story line with choices that a player takes to complete a mission and move to the next chapter.

In terms of control, we can see in the first chapter that the first player uses the cursor keys to control the leading actor, Aurora and the second player controls the firefly "Igniculus", according to research this was done so that parents can play this game with their children but in general this is to have more interaction in the game and create a chance for second players to join in as more characters are brought up in the game. The game is a good example for Level Design because it is built up of different layers that form stages of the adventure that the player must take and in those stages of the game there are places with different actions that a player must initiate or take part in for an example; battles, casting spells, entering to places and collect treasure, trading, meeting up new characters and partnering with them.

There are other playable characters in the game, they form part of the adventure and help the main character to complete the mission as she moves from one mission to another namely, Igniculus (the firefly), Rubella, Finn, Robert, Oengus, Genovefa, Norah and Golem. All of them have their own roles and they come with their own story line backgrounds and they also have abilities or attack skills they use while fighting battles when helping the main player. The developers of the game used a unique spectacular idea of creating a game with a storyline like a movie which can be followed and more interest in players arouse to find out more throughout the story line until the end of the game.

Objectives

The game is like a puzzle that needs to be solved by playing along to the story line or what the developer expects the player to do in the game. In the beginning we meet a young girl with the main role and her goal is to save her kingdom by retrieving the moon, stars and the sun stolen by the Black Queen, and after that she needs to get back to her father (Duke of Lemuria). In every journey that the main role takes she must take the chances that will give her a lead, in the first chapter she meets Finn who partners with her and help fight monsters and evil creatures along with firefly, where their main goal is to defeat those creatures and find the way back to Lemuria, after defeating the enemies they all get an upgrade on their skills "Oculi". Oculi is a stone like element that is used to increase the players skills and can be combined with other stones to make one strong or better stone.

The main goal in each of the chapters, although I have played two chapters only is to get through the challenges, along with other characters on the way to finally get to the evil queen who stole the lights of Lamuria kingdom, to get to the end of the game the players have to attack, get more powers and work together. The game does not necessarily have a one way rule of completing the game because the player is allowed to make choices on how to complete the mission since this is an adventure so any choice a player takes must lead the play somehow to the end of the game, where the kingdom is restored.

MDA framework with reference to Level Design

According to the Robin Hunicke, Marc LeBlanc, Robert Zubek Mechanics assist in modifying the overall gameplay dynamics, emphasizing that the view on the dynamics depend on the game mechanics. Mechanics of the game are the actions, activities that players take part in, rules, procedures guiding the player and all that show how the game work overall. Now looking at the core mechanics of this game, the player walks in right and left direction, flying, casting spells, attacking (turn based combat), healing, collecting items, entering houses/places, and communicating with other characters in the game. In this game we meet Aurora who is the first player travelling with a second player, the firefly controlled by a mouse. All the characters in the game have their own actions with their own skills that help in defeating the enemies, Aurora has a sword she uses in attacking, in the beginning before upgrading skills she is able to attack and also defend herself and attain more skills like using light ray and star light when the game proceeds after defeating enemies. As the player moves to the next level, her skills are upgraded, she grows taller and her age is increased, she meets and partner with new characters and continues the adventure, the change in levels bring out game flow and more player- player interaction and game interaction.

Some of the characters in the game like Igniculus the firefly, help the main character in her journey, this the character controlled by the second player. This character has the abilities to heal the players, collect items from flowers that increase its glow, slow the enemies' movement, cast spells during combat to interrupt or reduce the strength of the attack from enemies. The other character in the first chapter is Finn, who has the abilities and skills to attack, he can use lighting, water and fire to attack and has the ability to defend himself. Finn can also be healed by the firefly during combat which makes the game fair, it is a way of managing time in the game because if that was not implemented then this character would get attacked and not lose HP while the enemies are depleted. In mechanics there is also an action of collecting items by the firefly that increases the MP (Magic Points) and some increase HP (Health Points), this plays a role in game communication and game interaction. Level Design also plays a big role in upgrading players' abilities and skills, in every level you take or a battle you get a chance to attain more skills or more powers and more experience that you will make use of in next levels and that also makes the game easy to follow.

Dynamics of the game are fine tuned by the mechanics to create game aesthetics. The overall game system is made up of design elements and this work together to support the dynamics of the game. In terms of difficulty, the game has normal and hard mode which means that players have a chance to choose how they want to experience the game in terms of challenge. This game has a system of communicating HP and MP, getting collectables, sharing of information from the game itself to the player and by the characters in the game. The Design of the game require a player to move up from one level to another following the designer's principles and the information shared in the game therefore that adds to the use of Level Design. In the game we also see that it is not possible for the player to win the game alone, in that case the designer wants the main player to have interaction with other members in the game and work together to get through the challenges of the game.

The system of the game creates an expression after the players have experienced the game and we consider that to be the aesthetics of the game, A game is not about being just "Fun" as the word, but it is more complex or on deeper level, the game can be fun in terms the challenge, frustration, surprises from unexpected actions in the game. The aesthetic components of this game can be broken into, fantasy (game as make-believe), Narrative (game as drama) and here we play a game that is like a story, an adventurous one, Challenge (e.g Combat system), fellowship (the main player partnering with other members in the game), Discovery (The kingdom of Lemuria and the missing lights that have to be found by princess Aurora, expression and submission (The game makes you want to play more and discover what happens in the end therefore in that way a player becomes invested in playing the game until the end).

Conclusion

The game is incredible and different, It is not only about the nice visuals of the game but the experience in playing the game, levels in the game have a good layout and the design grabs attention, information is clear to the players and the game can also be played alone or with other people, which is interesting that a single player and multiplayers can control the game, I would play it again and move to other levels to experience more fun and challenge and I can recommend other people to play this game.

References

- Techniques and Strategies for Data-driven design in Game Development by Scott Shumaker
- MDA: A Formal Approach to Game Design and Game Research by Robin Hunicke, Marc LeBlanc, Robert Zubek.
- Game Programming Golden Rules by Martin Brownlow.
- https://www.ign.com/wikis/child-of-light/Walkthrough
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child_of_Light#Notes