

‘Variations on a Theme’

game mechanic analysis

Combos

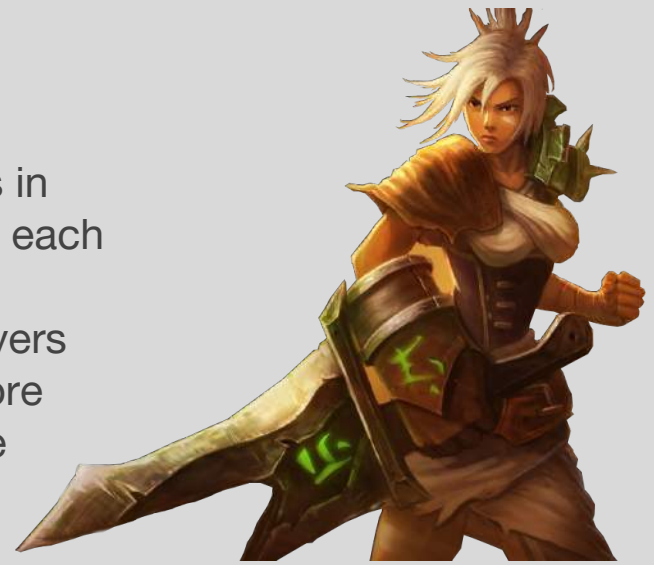


Combos are a mechanic implemented in games to reward spending more time playing.

- A combo is a set of actions that when performed in a specific order and timing, will give the performer an advantage over 'regular' play.
- Performing combos is usually hard, requiring more mechanical proficiency than regular moves to execute successfully.
- Because combos are usually difficult to pull off, they encourage players to spend more time playing the game to practise.
- Combos reward the player for putting time into mastering part of the game, because they usually have a desirable effect- whether this be a higher score, more damage to their opponent, or something else.
- Pulling off a combo that is known to be hard makes you feel awesome and makes your friends think you're cool!



In 'League of Legends', different characters require different amounts of mechanical skill to play effectively. All characters in the game have 4 skills or abilities they can use, and because each skill is different, some champions are just easier to play than others. This game uses this mechanic well, giving newer players the option of playing an easier champ, while also offering more experienced players harder champs that could possibly have more of an effect on the game if used correctly.



In the 'Mortal Kombat' arcade-style fighter games, no matter what character a player picks to play as, they all share the same basic attacks. Each character, however, has different moves or attacks that can be used with different combinations of buttons. The existence of these combos encourages players to spend time practising and memorising them, because using them is more effective at winning than just mashing basic front punch.

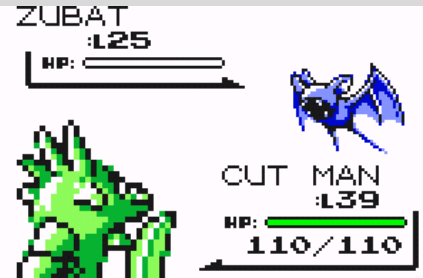


Randomness



Randomness in games is something that a player cannot guarantee with certainty.

- Randomness adds variation, making the game more interesting.
- It gives a game higher replay value because it won't be exactly the same each time it's played.
- Randomness adds another thing players must take into account, potentially increasing the skill cap.
- Increases the chance a 'worse' player can beat a 'better' player, making the game more interesting and broadening the audience range.
- Can be difficult to implement satisfyingly. For example, "Street Fighter" had random damage and stun durations, but players became frustrated because they felt like winning or losing was all up to chance.



Critical hit!

Randomness can be anything from the layout of a map ('Banished') to a chance to deal extra damage ('Pokemon')

Compare for example, the games 'Starcraft 2' and 'Age of Empires 2', two popular RTS games.

In 'Starcraft 2', the layout of the selected map is exactly the same, every game. In the early stages of the game, the skill is in whoever can execute their build order faster. In 'Age of Empires 2', the map is randomly generated each game. This changes the skill in the early game from pure mechanical speed to the ability to adapt to a slightly different situation.

This small difference changes the way these two otherwise similar games feel to play. Some players may feel discouraged by the invariability of 'Starcraft 2', and feel like if they're not following a pre-determined build path by the numbers, they're playing sub-optimally. Others may dislike the inconsistency of 'Age Of Empires 2' and feel like games are unfair because a player may get what they feel is a better setup than theirs.

This ultimately comes down to a personal preference, but there is no doubt that the randomness in 'Age of Empires 2' adds another element to the game players have to contend with, increasing the depth.



Both 'Starcraft 2' and 'Age of Empires 2' share a genre but play differently due to the ways in which they include randomness.

Permadeath



Sir Taco has been slain by a Spike Trap

The Maya is always at the top of the Castle.

-Sir Taco's Parting Words

Permadeath is on dying, you lose all progress, with no second chance.

- Permadeath means that when you lose or die in game, it's permanent.
- You don't get a chance to revive and try again from a previous checkpoint, and you lose all progress gained towards the end.
- Depending on the game, permadeath can make the game feel more 'hardcore', and the player may be inclined to think about the consequences of their actions more than they usually would.
- This is often a feature in small mobile games, like 'Temple Run' or 'Flappy Bird', where the aim is to see how long you can last before failing.
- Permadeath is extremely polarising, and can ruin a game if used incorrectly. It is usually not suitable for games that contain a heavy story based element where a player would lose hours and hours of progress over a small mistake.

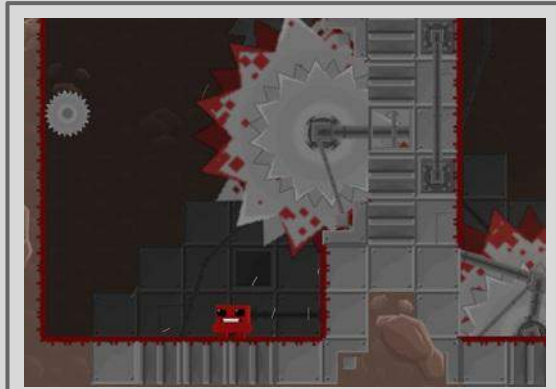


Permadeath completely changes the feel of a game

‘Normal’ games use death as a small setback or a “you get X amount of tries at this puzzle” mechanic where the user is allowed to save their progress and replay a puzzle or challenge as many times as they need until they advance. Permadeath games feel a lot harsher in the sense you only get a single try to complete the entire storyline, and is definitely not a suitable mechanic for every single game.

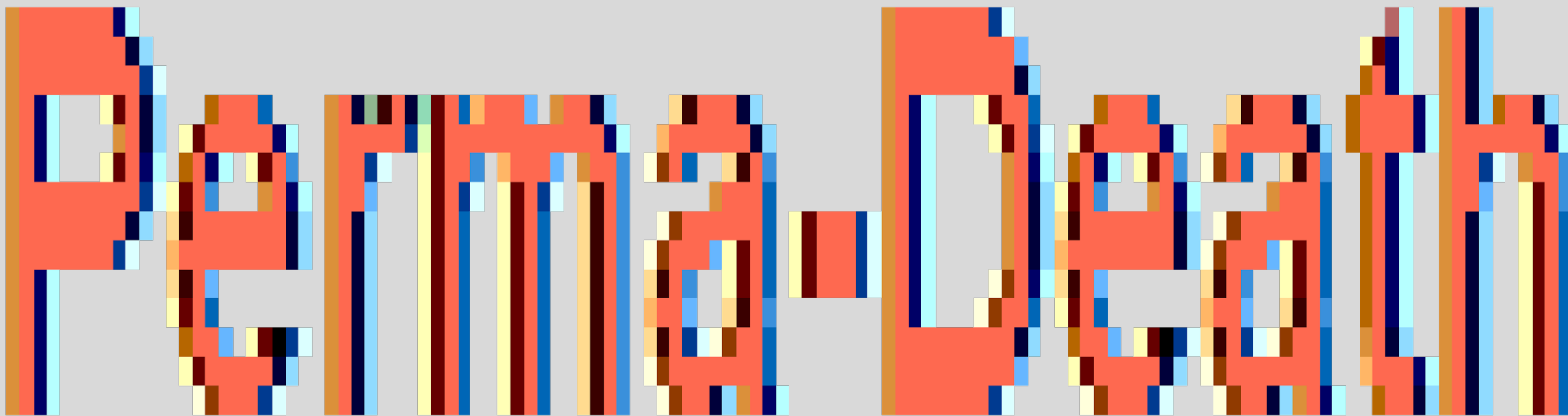
Some games give permadeath as an option - ‘Diablo 2’, ‘Demon Souls’ and ‘Minecraft’ all give the player the option of having permadeath as a feature or not. This is good as many players may find themselves frequently dying, and would not otherwise be able to complete the game if they lost all progress when they died.

Having permadeath as a feature can mean not necessarily having to make have the game as long to get the same amount of play out of it. action platformer ‘Risk of Rain’ has ‘only’ 5 levels you need to beat in order to finish the game, but because of it’s extreme difficulty and permadeath, it can still take someone hours of trying to finish the game.



‘Super Meat Boy’ gives you as many tries to complete a level as you need, whereas ‘Risk of Rain’ only gives you one try to complete the whole game.

Variations and expansion on:



Illustrated by:



Diablo 2



Minecraft



Risk of Rain



Rogue Legacy



Sim City 4



Banished

“Corpse” mechanic

The games ‘Diablo 2’ and ‘Minecraft’ expand on the idea of Permadeath by dropping your progress into a findable “corpse”.

In ‘Minecraft’, when you die, you drop all your held items and experience and are then respawned at where you first spawned into the game. This creates a situation where you have a chance to get back your progress in the form of your items and experience, but only if you can find and retrieve it in a certain time window. It is a similar situation in ‘Diablo 2’, where on death you drop your items and gold into a “corpse” which you must retrieve if you want your hard-earned loot back.

Both of these games also offer a “hardcore” game mode, in which your save is deleted on death for players that want it. For those that don’t though, this “corpse” mechanic is an intermediate, “conditional permadeath” which fits the semi-realistic feel the games are going for.

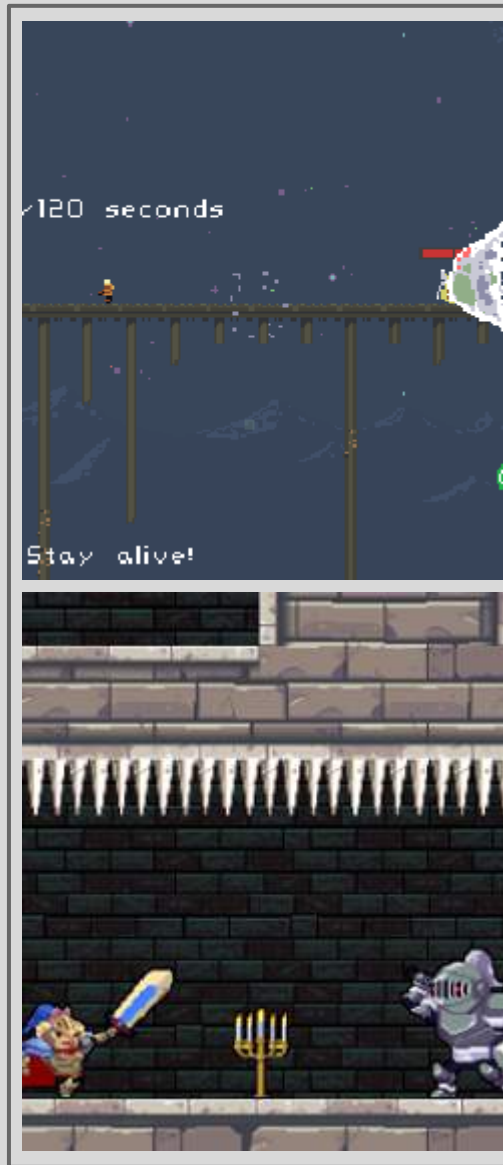


Small stacking benefit

In both 'Risk of Rain' and 'Rogue legacy', in each run you earn or unlock small bonuses that increase later run's chance of succeeding.

In 'Risk of Rain', each time you die, you must start fresh again, with your character at minimum level again, and at the very beginning. While playing, you collect items which help you in your current run, and achievements that unlock the option to find better items in subsequent runs. This way, each run, you increase your chance of beating the game increases slightly so you're not completely back at square one.

In 'Rogue Legacy', it's expected you'll die a few times, almost being impossible to beat the game on your first try. Each run, you collect gold which you can spend on small but stacking upgrades after you die, which take effect in subsequent runs. After dying multiple times, slowly but surely your character grows in strength, making each run easier than the last, eventually being able to beat all bosses and the game.



No way to win

In both 'Sim City 4' and 'Banished', there isn't really a way you can win at all.

In 'Sim City', the aim of the game is really just to build your city. The point in 'Sim City' is never really to win. 'Sim City' does have small quests you can do, and while it is possible for your city to be ruined by things like pollution or natural disasters, you can't really 'lose' like you can most games.

'Banished' expands upon this idea, but takes the idea of permadeath to heart - you play as a small group of settlers trying to survive in extremely harsh conditions. When you play 'Banished' it's quite common for all of your settlers die and you lose. You can't win in 'Banished', and losing's so easy that a game of 'Banished' just feels like a desperate scramble for survival until everyone dies and you lose - this is the only way a game can end, the difference is just how long you hold out for.



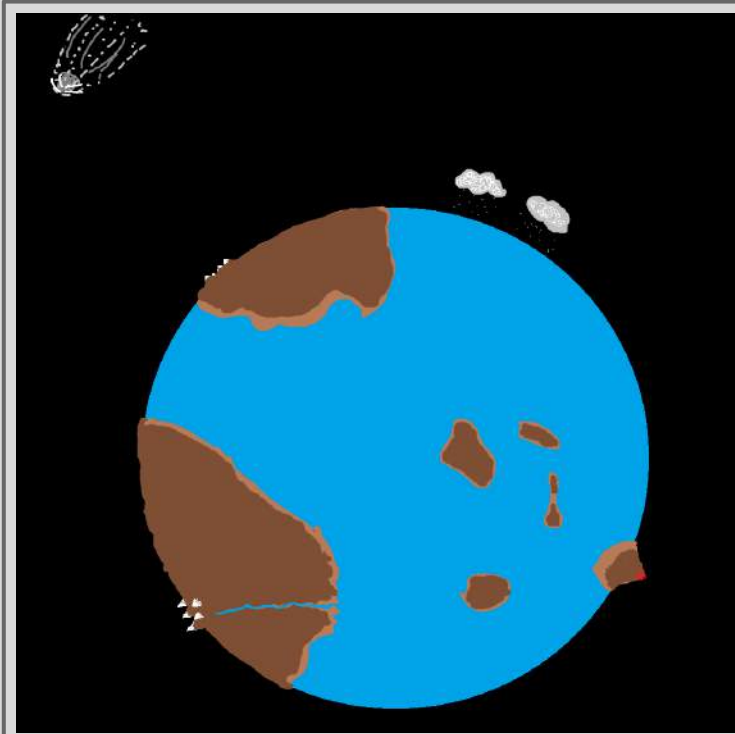
Concept - 'Nature's Ruin'

A God-sim where you play as Nature against Humans .

In 'Nature's Ruin', your goal, as Nature, is to guide the planet's ecosystems so it supports as many different forms of life as possible. Grow forests, guide clouds and churn seas to shape the planet and make the planet as habitable as possible.

Once the planet reaches a certain stage though, a different kind of life forms that call themselves "Humans" will find the conditions perfect for survival and will start to shape the planet as they see fit. Inevitably, the Humans will have a greater influence over the climate and eventually they will be the only kind of life form in existence. 'Losing' in this way is inevitable, and your goal is just to see how long you can last.

This raises critical thought about our environment, and asks the question "are humans nature's enemy?"



Guide the planet from a barren rock to a thriving ecosystem and survive for as long as you can before humans come and start to work against you, shaping the planet for their needs instead.

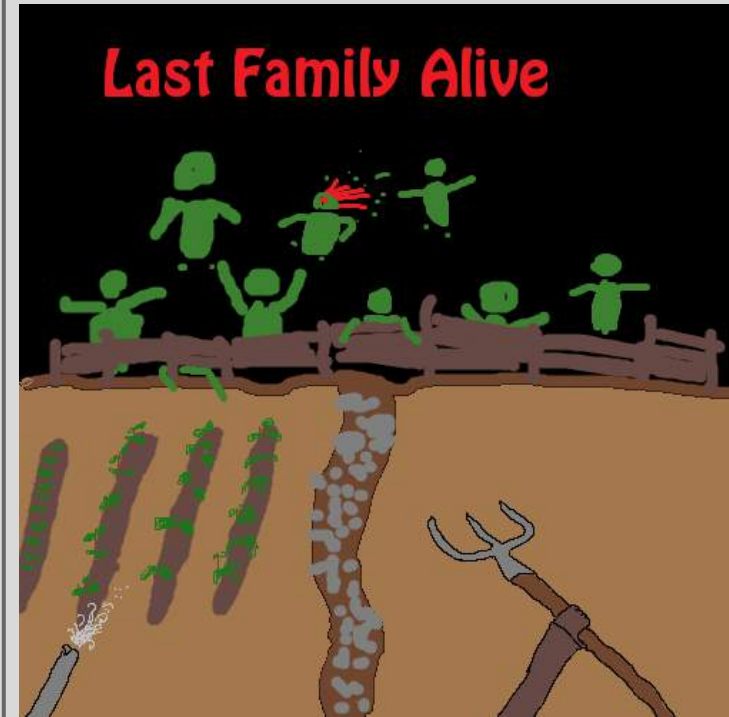
Concept - 'Last Family Alive'

A zombie survival farming hybrid.

You are the last family alive after the zombie apocalypse hit, and you must defend your farm and maintain enough resources to survive.

During day time you farm and collect resources to repair your farm house and weapons, while at night you must defend the ever-growing horde of zombies. With there being no way to win, the objective is to see how long you can last before they overcome your defenses and eat your family.

This raises awareness for all the farmers out there currently having to defend their harvest and families from zombie hordes.



Maintain your farm by day, fight off hordes of zombies by night, all in a typical farmer's day's work.

Concept - 'Tax'

Make sure your town's payment to the king makes it.

It's tax season again and it's your job to guide the caravan of food and wares through dangerous territory to the capital city. When you get robbed, die and fail as you inevitably will, a successor is sent with more goods and wares so the capital receives their payment. Every time you fail, you leave behind the wreckage of the caravan which you can, on your next run, choose to inspect to try and salvage anything left behind, or avoid so you don't succumb to the same fate.

Though this is set in a medieval time, this mirrors what happens in countries without proper government, where local warlords can take what they want from local villages.



Guide your village's payment to the king through dangerous lands, and succeed where the last guy failed.

'street fighter combos' art by David Soames
'tony hawk american sk8land' from coolrom.com
'riven' image from leagueoflegends.com
'mortal kombat scorpion fatality' <http://aeruhl.deviantart.com/art/Scorpion-strangulation-Fatality-MK-300941336>
'poker hand' from <http://www.sporcle.com/games/g/pokerhands>
'critical hit pokemon' from <http://thedailypos.org/content/imagefests/getfest.php?fest=82494&part=54113>
'starcraft nexus ' <http://www.giantbomb.com/forums/general-discussion-30/blizzard-comments-on-no-lan-support-in-starcraft-i-250493/>
'age of empires 2 ' screenshot taken in game
'rogue legacy death ' screenshot taken in game
'nethack death ' <http://forums.kingdomofloathing.com/vb/showthread.php?t=194571>
'diablo 2', 'risk of rain', 'rogue legacy', 'banished' screens taken in game
'minecraft' image <http://www.gamespot.com/articles/minecraft-creator-discusses-sale-to-microsoft-sell/1100-6425368/>
'sim city' from <http://www.neogaf.com/forum/showthread.php?t=516340>

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