Hearthstone is a turn-based fantasy card game. Naturally, for a card game like Hearthstone, communication needs to be focused on conveying changes based on the player's interaction with the cards that are played. In terms of mechanics, this can get complicated as there are many different mechanics that need to be communicated as they are used. For this analysis, the broader feedback elements of the mechanics will be focused alongside the dynamics. Lastly, the aesthetics will be touched on at the end.

MECHANICS AND DYNAMICS

At the start of any game both players are given the opportunity to mulligan or swap out their firsthand. To communicate this phase, the game switches to a close-up view of the player's firsthand. The player will then choose which, if any, of the cards they will replace. If a card is selected, a bright red cross with the text, "replaced" will make it apparent to the player which cards will be returned to the deck [1]. Depending on whether they go first or not they will either receive an extra card after the mulligan is done and the game can begin.

A large part of the game's communication design is present in the gameplay. As there are so many mechanics all of which have their own feedback attached to them, it is important that the base communication design is efficient in its communication to convey the most important information the player will need in every turn. In terms of the mana mechanic, the player is only able to play cards if they have the adequate amount of mana to play said card. This is communicated in three layered ways. Firstly, the mana on the bottom right corner of the screen increases by one every turn from a minimum of one to a maximum of ten mana tokens. Secondly, this information is conveyed to the player on the cards themselves. Available cards will have a green outer glow to them [2]. Lastly, there is sound attached to the cards if they are playable or not.

Card placement is one of the most feedback heavy elements in Hearthstone. As mentioned above, cards available for play have a green glow around them. When the player clicks on a card they want to play, the card will rise above the other cards and follow the cursor waiting for the player to either place it on the board or to cancel the action. When it is moved on the board the green outer glow will turn blue to show that it is placeable [3]. Depending on whether the card is a minion or a spell, the feedback conveyed will change. If it is a minion the following could happen, depending on the rarity of the card, the placement of the card will have a varying amount of effects placed on it. The placement of the card will have an accompanying voiceline and placement animation, if it is a common minion (the least rare

card type), the card placement will tend to be subtle but noticeable enough to the player to know that their action has been resolved. If the card is a legendary (the rarest card type), the card placement will be accompanied with special effects, music and at times special camera movement alongside its placement voiceline, this shows the importance of the card played as most legendary cards hold powerful game effects. The same amount of detail is present in spell cards, however since spells are not minions, they usually have special effects which appear when the effect of the card is resolved, depending on the rarity and strength of the spell, the effects will range from small effects that appear on top of a card or deck to larger effects which affect the entire screen. Finally, when a card is placed either by the player or enemy, it is displayed on the left side of the screen so that the information of the card is available for a short duration, this is done so the player will be informed of the card's abilities, stats and effects.

During combat, the same principles of visual feedback are applied here as well. In combat, the player will know if their minions are able to attack if they have a green outer glow around them. If a minion was just placed and is not able to attack, it will have a small animation of "Zzzz's" on it. If the player misses this information and tries to attack anyway, an accompanying voiceline and text will play notifying the player that the card cannot be used for this turn.

When attacking with a minion, selecting it will lift the minion from the board and an indicator will appear from the minion to assist the player in aiming for a target they want to attack [4]. When an attack lands a few things will happen. The attacking minion will move and hit the target, secondly the card will play its attack voiceline. Lastly, damage will be conveyed on the screen as follows; the amount of damage will be indicated on top of the targeted unit and it's total health will be reduced [5]. If the damage taken was two or less no special effects outside of the aforementioned will happen. If the damage was above two but below five a small amount of screen shake will occur. If the damage was larger than five, a large amount of screen shake will occur as well as a rumbling of other minions on the board, if there are any.

Once all actions are satisfied during a player's turn and there are no available actions, the game will play a voiceline saying, "Job's done" to the player. The end turn button will turn from yellow to green as well. The player can click this button even if it is yellow, however if

it is yellow this means that there are possible moves, it is the player's choice to decide if they want to skip or play. When it is green there is nothing more the player can do.

AESTHETICS

In terms of aesthetics, Hearthstone elicits a sense of fantasy and challenge in the player. With the use of communication design, this is done using music mostly. Fantasy is communicated almost immediately when the game is opened, sounds of a fireplace and folklike music plays in the background constantly, giving a sense of medieval times that the game takes place in. In terms of challenge, Hearthstone is primarily a multiplayer PvP game. Players compete against each other. This sense of challenge is conveyed through the gameplay described above. When a player's minions or hero are attacked, the feedback conveyed to the player aides in driving the challenge aesthetic and motivates the player to retaliate and challenge their opponent in order to gain victory.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Hearthstone is a complicated game in terms of game design. There are a lot of mechanics which need to be communicated to the player at every stage of the game. In order to communicate these many mechanics, the broader mechanics which are available all the time need to be communicated efficiently. Hearthstone does this well as the base mechanics are clear and always available to the player. This in turn assists in giving the player a sense of challenge in every game they play and fulfill their sense of fantasy.

APPENDIX

[1] Mulligan of the player's firsthand showing which cards will be replaced.

[2] Cards available to play glow green and the mana tokens on the bottom right of the screen.

[3] Blue outline on placeable card.

[4] Indicator showing what the player minion will attack.

[5] Damage conveyed to player.

REFERENCES

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