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Faction: Game Over?

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Lab Report 9

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Results from the Project 3 Brainstorm

From the lecture given in lab what I got from the Project 3 Brainstorm session in today’s lab is that story is essential in games in order to engage players in a meaningful way with the game’s mechanics. For example, it wouldn’t make much sense in a game about clowns if the mechanics of clowns involved mechanics such as gunning down other clowns, pulling off bank heists, and conjuring with fellow clowns at a shady Italian restaurant. These types of mechanics would be a better fit for a mafia type game (unless your game is about mafia clowns or something silly like that).

However, this is not to say that mechanics cannot at all be similar from game to game. Taking the clown and mafia game, maybe a die roll can be used to determine the success of both throwing a pie in a clown game and shooting a guy in the mafia game. While these mechanics are exactly the same at a drilled down level, the way these mechanics tie to their themes are completely different. Essentially, throwing a pie and shooting a guy are mechanically the same but would not swap well between the themes of both games.

Tying the story of a game helps drive the plot of the game and creates goals for the players that can help engage them into the theme of the game. With this in mind, I discussed several ideas for games with other students. Three of these ideas are written in the next sections of this lab report.

Game Story Idea: Subterfuge

The first story game idea I had is related to the game “FTL” and “Clue”, that I call “Subterfuge”. The idea of the game is that each player is in control of a sinking submarine with the goal of staying alive and sinking their opponent’s submarine. Each player has several crewmen with special roles such as: Captain, Weapons Technician, Mechanic, and Sonar Operator. Each of these roles bestows an increased ability to perform their specific talent, but all of them can attempt to perform any role on the submarine. The board is a cutout view of the layout of each player’s submarine including a few empty spaces of sea between the subs. Because I’ve been on an agent of chaos kick, there is also a giant sub attacking squid that can wreak havoc on either submarine, as well.

The mechanics of this game involve rolling for moving crewmen between sections of the ship, “Clue”-like mechanics of finding out what is wrong with areas of the submarines, die rolls to determine the success of actions, and random action cards that determine the actions of crewmen and the giant squid. As certain areas of the submarine flood, there is less game space for players and the potential to lose crewmen. These mechanics not only fit the theme of the game, but should be fun to play with, as well.

Game Story Idea: He Said/She Said

The second story game Idea I had is based on the collaborative effort of coming up with the time travel game with Jonathan Blunden, Glen Aro, and Josh Gutenberg. He “Said/She Said” is a game that involves the players as two elementary school kids that are sent to the principal’s office because they are both in trouble. The goal of each player is to incriminate the other while making themselves look innocent so that by the end of the game they do not get detention.

The mechanics of this game involve a custom deck of cards and a gameboard with specific times of the day slots on it. The deck of cards feature specific times of the day on which the card can be played and have an event with both a pro and a con on them. Players will alternate turns by placing down cards on either pros on their side or cons on their opponent’s side of the gameboard. The cards can counter other cards, exaggerate the pros or cons, or even block further placement of cards on specific times. The idea is that these mechanics kind of fit the childish feel of telling on someone and defending yourself through ridiculous allegations that a child would make.

Game Story Idea: Cook an Egg

The last story game idea involves two players trying to perform simple tasks in a style similar to that of “Surgeon Simulator 2013” and “Twister”. Each player tries to earn points by performing a task perfectly while handicapped in some way. One player picks a simple task and an odd handicap for the other to perform. The winner of the game is the first player to reach a set amount of points by performing their tasks perfectly.

I imagine that this game is played using a deck of two types of cards: actions and handicaps. Each player gets an equal number of actions and handicaps and, on their turn, combines them for the other player to perform. For example, a player might choose to have their opponent list out in order how to cook an egg but do so while singing out the instructions to the tune of “happy birthday”. If the player screws up trying to do both at the same time, then they do not earn any points. While this game involves some fairness of judgment, it seems like the mechanics fit this game quite well.

Characteristics of Games Exercises

Exercise 6.1: Purely from a monetary cost perspective, would you expect single people or people in families to spend more time playing PC games (consider how the costs are spread out)? Why? How does this difference compare to the difference you might see in other kinds of games, such as sports or boardgames?

While the initial monetary costs of a computer are quite high, I would expect single people to spend more time playing PC games rather than families playing PC games. Because PC games are generally playable by one person at a time, having a family play PC games together would be expensive for all the computers, computer equipment, and game software needed. I would expect families to play more sports or boardgames together because the cost is low and these types of games are more social because they require more than one person to play them.

Exercise 6.2: Purely from a cost perspective (both monetary and otherwise) what type of demographic differences would you expect to see in the player populations of an MMO and of online poker

I would imagine that the demographic differences between player populations of an MMO and of online poker to be relatively minimal. Depending on the type of MMO, poker and MMOs are both pay to play, strategy based, and require a lot of initial cost to learn how to skillfully play both. The biggest difference I see in the demographics for MMOs and poker that I see are possibly age. Poker is generally a more adult game that children do not play, while an MMO might target a younger audience.

Exercise 6.3: If all players in poker played with open hands, how would it affect the skill in the game?

If poker were played with open hands it would dramatically decrease the skill needed to play the game. Much of poker is based upon bluffing, and this is only made possible through the hidden knowledge that each player has of their cards and not their opponent’s cards. With open hands, this hidden knowledge is lost and the game would probably play out in a very predictable fashion with little skill needed to play well.

Exercise 6.15: Is traveling in an MMO busywork—is it busywork to walk from place to place? The first time? The tenth time? The thousandth time? How might an MMO deal with these changes over time in busywork?

Yes, traveling in an MMO is busywork, even if it is just walking from place to place. While the first time it might be interesting for the player to travel from one place to the other, due to the new sights along the way, it can quickly become busywork if the player must travel back and forth frequently. MMOs can deal with traveling by making it possible to teleport or “fast travel” between already visited areas. This would reduce the amount of busywork in the MMO.

Exercise 6.16: Is “grinding” for experience in an RPG busywork? How might an RPG deal with these changes over time in the busywork associated with a repetitive task?

Grinding for experience in an RPG can be busywork if the task is mindless and repetitive enough. An RPG might add to the variety of ways in which experience can be earned or add more interesting quests that go towards experience in order to lessen the amount of busy work that can come from grinding. Basically, the less a task has to be repeated without any variation, the less the action will feel like busywork.

Exercise 6.17: Would you expect beginners or experts in chess to resign earlier? Why?

I would expect experts to resign earlier in chess because they will have known when they have been outplayed sooner. A beginner at chess will not know the opening moves or the ways to play a scenario, while an expert will, so a beginner will probably keep playing when he has no way of winning, while an expert will simply resign.

Exercise 6.18: Why might computer games have relatively more busywork but relatively less downtime compared to other kinds of games?

Computer games can have relatively more busywork but less downtime because players do not usually have to wait in a computer game. This is possible because of the way computer games are made, decreasing downtime but giving the player more to do. For example, in a boardgame you have to wait for your turn when other people are playing, but in a computer game you usually have the option to play in real time, thus decreasing downtime.

Exercise 6.20: What would you expect of the player audience for games with a (low) horizontal asymptote in a reward/effort graph? Why? Can you give examples of such games?

For games with a low horizontal asymptote in the reward/effort graph I would expect the player audience to be mostly casual players playing games that have more luck and require less skill. This is because this type of reward/effort graph does not properly reward those who wish to put in a lot of effort to build skill in a game. An example of low skill, high luck games are card games like hearts when compared to a high skill, low luck game like chess.

Exercise 6.21: What would you expect to happen to the chess player audience at the point where the study of openings begins (i.e., how many chess players are there who inhabit the points just before and just after that point on the reward/effort graph)?

I would expect that the chess player audience at the point of where the study of openings begins to be sharply divided between those who have this knowledge and those who do not. The effort to learn the openings requires a lot and is probably only populated with an audience who is deeply involved in chess.

Exercise 6.22: How might the reward/effort graph of *Magic* have changed over time? For example, how might the graph have looked on release compared to how it looks now?

As the game of *Magic* expands to become more and more complicated, the reward/effort graph probably has small amounts of increases for the players for every expansion. While these small amounts of increases to the reward/effort graphs may exist, they are not nearly as substantial as the reward/effort increases when the player first learned the game.