Winner Takes it All - Group report

Professional Ethics and Deontology

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Section 1 - Summary

This is a multiplayer turn-based game playable over the internet by 2-4 players. The background story is that there is a medieval-fantasy prison on a remote island, which is a hopeless place where the worst criminals are sent to serve their sentence (usually for life). When they disembark from the vessel that carries them there, those criminals know that they have no chance of getting out of the prison by normal means. It is far away from any land, surrounded by thick walls and unsympathetic guards who will increase their suffering given any reason. Once the new convicts adjust to the daily drills and prove good fighting skills in conflicts with other inmates, a new possibility can be offered to them. That possibility is taking part in a last-man-standing deathmatch, which allows up to 4 prisoners to compete against each other on an arena, and the one that survives, is given a pardon and can leave the prison island. The Winner takes it all.

Avatars owned by the players are thrown into an arena encircled by mountains. Each game is a separate match, where players must strategize their movement and actions to achieve the final goal - be the last one surviving. It combines strategy and exploration of the environment to find the best spot on the map and good loot that will allow the player to defeat the other players.

The player sees the game from a top-down perspective, where his avatar is spawned in one of the corners of the map. The player then needs to go through the map and find other players that he can fight. Along the way he can collect loot that will contain better weapons. There are two phases of the gameplay - the movement phase and the attack phase. The movement phase lasts for 20 seconds, and during that phase the player can roam around the map

in search of loot and other players. It is good for him to go into hills as the camera then moves higher up, giving him a better wider view of the map. When the movement phase ends the attack phase begins, where players that see each other can try to engage in a fight. This phase lasts 5 seconds, so players need to choose very quickly which weapon they want to use and attack the other player. Only one attack per turn can be done. When the attack phase ends, the game server calculates the damage and updates the player's health. If a player's health goes to 0, he dies and can't respawn in the same game.

This pattern continues until there is only one player left alive and he is the winner. Then the player is moved back to the lobby where he can choose to join another local server, or host his own one, and invite others.

Section 2 - Game Analysis

The game's core mechanic requires the players to think strategically and take advantage of the arena. It pays off to **a)** explore the map and find good weapons, **b)** find a high hill from which the player has a better view angle, so he can see other players before they can see him.

The target audience is people who like strategic and turn-based games aged 14+.

A normal game between 2 players could last about 10 mins if they were able to find each other quickly.

A player has both a health bar and a stamina bar. When he moves, the stamina bar depletes, so if he moves far, he might need to stop before the movement phase ends. However, while he defeats

other players, his maximum stamina gets additional points, so he can move further, and therefore has an advantage over other surviving players.

Graphics and SFX

The world of the game and the graphics and music are meant to be grim and convey the brutality and ultimacy of what the players need to do. Maybe it is not fully visible in the current state of the game, but that is just because we lacked the time to polish it and really put the work into those facets of the vertical slice.

If we had the time, we would add a more suggestive landscape, with a lot of skeletons and decaying bodies from previous fights. The arena would have a lot of old ruins, bridges and obstacles like walls and canyons that would make it more interesting for the players to really take advantage of strategy.

Weapons and combat

Each player starts with a basic weapon - the Club, which can cause 1 point of damage to the enemy players, and it is a close range weapon, meaning that it can only be used to attack enemies that are very close to the player.

Additionally he can collect 3 other types of weapons scattered around the map:

- The knife - close range, 3 points of damage

- The brick - throwable (long range), 2 points of damage

- The Bomb - throwable (long range), 3 points of damage

The player can choose which weapon to use upon each attack, and if he uses any weapon (besides the club), it will be removed from the inventory. So players who collected more loot are better prepared for attacking other players.

Players can only attack once per combat phase so they should decide carefully what they want to do. Once you click the attack button you cannot go back.

We had to limit a lot of features that we wanted to add to the game due to time constraints, our initial game idea was very different from the final product. Items like potions that heal the player, chests that drop random items or weapons, traps that players could place for other players, fog of war, are some of the examples of features that could not be implemented.

In the end, we still managed to present a final product so we are satisfied with the results even though they are not perfect.

Section 3 - Analysis of the ethical dimensions of the game

In essence this is a game about convicts (criminals) who must kill other convicts in order to escape from their sentence and earn their freedom. This obviously poses a lot of questions about the morality of the world, in which the game is set.

Is it ethically correct for a "tournament" where prisoners fight to the death in order to earn their freedom? The answer nowadays is quite obviously no, but in former times such events were very real, and even nowadays Thai prisoners can fight (not to the death) in organized fights to cut off time on their sentences or even earn their freedom if complimented with good behavior, like this article from Claire Reid points: "But the scheme is not designed to free dangerous criminals back to the streets. Those who are selected to take part must show

5

exemplary behavior and be able to point out personal development to officials." (Claire Reid, 2021).

The world of *Winner Takes It All* takes a different approach to prison sentences that, quite frankly, would be inhumane in the real world. Having human beings kill each other in order to gain freedom from a place where they arrived due to committing similar crimes on the outside, is an absurd idea. We as a team cannot see how such an approach would improve the rehabilitation ratio of convicts, most likely, quite the contrary would happen. But there was a correlation between the concept of the game world and the real world, at a certain place and time in the past, where such tournaments were organized for the enjoyment of the public, the most iconic being the gladiator shows at Roman coliseums.

The big question is however: Is *Winner Takes It All* an immoral game? Let us ask three questions to answer this, like we learned in class:

1. Does it produce a negative impact in society/individuals?
2. Does it disrespect any kind of moral right?
3. Does the game make you a worse person?

We would argue that it is not an immoral game, even though it can disrespect moral rights.

To tackle the first point, we would argue that no, it does not produce a negative impact in society/individuals.

The world setting of *Winner Takes It All* is a far-fetched and outdated one from any prison programs that exist today in the world. This irrealism is transparent to any player of the age required to play *Winner Takes It All* (14+), these are humans that already acquired ludic maturity

in a normal livelihood, which in turn, in our opinion, breaks the transfer of the interactive nature of games into real world actions. If one argues that the game brought a negative impact to a player we would challenge them implying that it was not the game that caused a possible accident but the player itself had, for example, violent tendencies. If age restrictions are respected, and a lot of times they are not, the risk of video games making someone a more violent individual are close to zero. As Alex Hern says in one article: "Studies consistently find that the long-term impacts of violent games on youth aggression are near zero"" (Alex Hern, 2020).

Even if video games tend to simulate reality, the great majority of the human race can distinguish between the actions they have in the video game and the ones they have in real life. Only if someone already fantasizes about certain activities can video games amplify these desires.

So should the law make it illegal to have violence in video games because of such outliers? We would argue against it, we should minimize the risks however, meaning, respect age restrictions as an example.

Moving on to the second point, *Winner Takes It All*, does violate moral rights if we look at it as a real world scenario.

Is it moral to sacrifice lives, not only that, but have humans fight one another to death for an end goal that only satisfies the last survivor. No, in our view, it is not. We would like, however, to emphasize the line between fictional and reality. If one has this separation clear in their minds our game cannot be considered an atrocity in regards to morality.

Only players with ludic maturity should play the game, even if this is not only defined by age, it plays a big part in the human brain development.

In the real world no human should be put through the conditions that are laid out in *Winner Takes It All*. No amount of violence is good for the human species, and this method of dealing with prisoners has long been abolished, not only because most humans are entitled to human rights but because it would prove ineffective as a rehabilitation method.

Our game's whole premise is a big violation of human rights if applied to the real world. Meaning it can be considered immoral and unethical if transferred to reality.

Finally, regarding the third and last point, the answer to this is related to what was already said when expanding the first point.

Our conclusion is that if you have lucid maturity, *Winner Takes It All* will not make you a worse human being, since you will be able to draw the line between fictional and reality and not transfer actions between those two.

Is there a correlation between video games and an increase of violent behavior in individuals?

This question has been asked millions of times especially when events like mass shootings occur. Video games titles like: Grand Theft Auto are very quickly linked to the reason why such massacres occur if the author of such horrible events was considered addicted to video games.

We as a team, as previously mentioned, tend to disagree with this ideology. Quoting an article from Forbes: "No study has ever shown that violent video games result directly in actual

violence, let alone mass shootings. That doesn't mean it isn't possible, though the numbers suggest it's very unlikely." (Erik Kain, 2013).

It is certainly possible that someone who buys a game like Grand Theft Auto goes on to cause a shooting, but this is most likely to happen in America, who boasts a far higher number of shootings while having no higher numbers of video game consumption.
Like the chart below indicates.
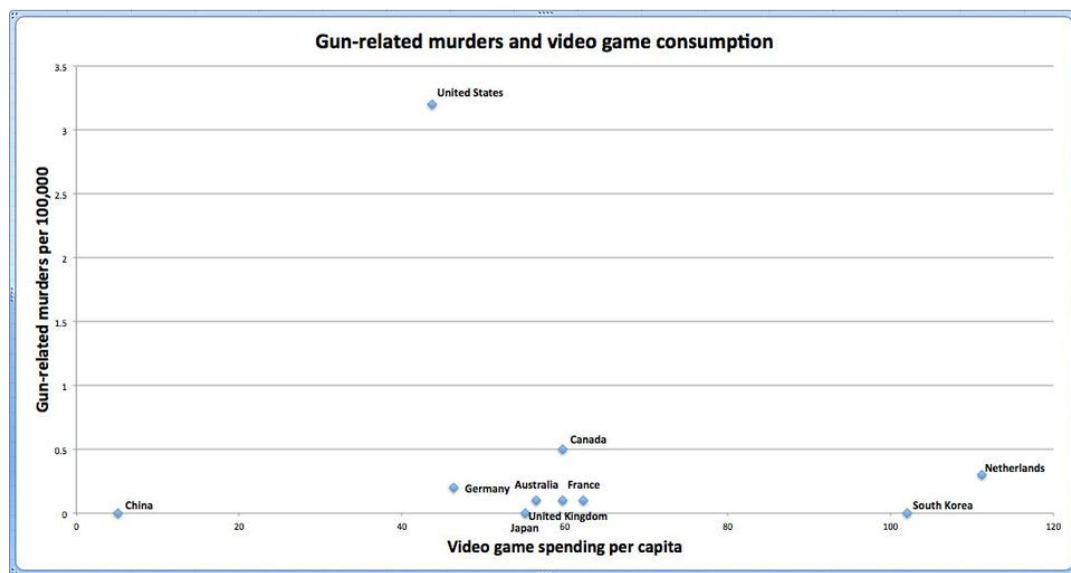
The reason we are writing this is to make a point that videogames are not the causes for more violent behaviors. It depends on a great number of factors, and we believe that video game consumption is a very small percentage in this equation.
If an individual is mentally stable and has the required ludic maturity to distinguish between the consequences of reality compared to that of a videogame, no violent behavior will be drawn out from the videogame. If not, on the other hand, video games can be a funnel for fantasies that can be very detrimental to an individual and boost someone's desire to cause harm to others.

9

It is of importance to say that, we feel that, individuals who already show violent tendencies in their teenage years and before are more keen to play video games that have more violence in them, since this is an easy and safe way to "act" on their desires. This can be a problem but it is not sufficient reason to prohibit violence in games. Even when drinking and driving there is a safe amount that someone can consume before being considered a crime, people are not completely prohibited from drinking when driving, the same can be applied to videogames and their restrictions. If respected and applied responsibly no issue should surface.

Is Winner Takes It All a balanced game?

An unbalanced multiplayer game can produce a negative and unpleasant experience for the players. It is one of the biggest sources of frustration and unfairness in multiplayer video games. Companies invest a lot of resources in order to try to fix these issues as fast as they possibly can. Although it is a common strategy to make characters or spells that are going to be released overpowered, this way players are incentivised to buy the character and cosmetics to gain an edge over their adversaries.

Our vertical slice in its current state can be considered an unbalanced game, due to lack of time dedicated into balancing all gameplay elements and lack of features that were intended to be present but could not be implemented.

On the other hand, one characteristic that makes the balancing of *Winner Takes It All* much easier is the fact that there is only one character in the game and all players must play with the same character. There are also no special abilities the character can use and no level scaling

system or any feature like that implemented. This makes it so all players start in an equal manner when a match begins.

What makes *Winner Takes It All* unbalanced (every multiplayer is a bit unbalanced) are the weapons that the user can collect. With weapons players can gain a clear advantage over others, since some weapons are much stronger than others. But this is intended. Exploration should be rewarded in *Winner Takes It All*.

We predict that players who tried the vertical slice would conclude that it is not balanced. For example if a player happens to find a bomb he is immediatly at an advantage compared to a player that did not find a bomb.

This could be fixed by adding a feature of movement speed, for example, depending on the weapon selected, but then again the team had no time to worry about extra features and needed the core of the game to be completed.

Another issue is that if a player that has low health points wants to just run away from the enemy so that he does not die, he is allowed too. There is no reduction in movement speed of the character depending on its health, which was the fix the team had in mind for this problem.

The bottom line is, if the team had more time and especially experience in Unreal Engine 4 most of the present issues and lack of features would be fixed as planned in the Game Design Document.

Utilitarianism and Deontology in Winner Takes It All

Winner Takes It All does not comply with either a utilitarian or deontological ethical moral compass. An argument can be made that in a twisted reality it does follow a deontological ethical moral compass, but for the purposes of this report we are comparing it to the real world.

Since the big majority of society is not aware of the events that are occurring in the world of our vertical slice there is no "gain" for humanity in it. Returning to the example of the ancient Roman Empire, the events in the Coliseums involving fights between gladiators to earn their freedom comply with a utilitarian view, since the "happiness meter" of Roman society increased because of these events. These events were made for the public and the emperor, and were greatly sought after at the time. In *Winner Takes It All* however there is no audience for these predicaments, therefore no increase in happiness occurs for anyone, there is no gain for society in what is happening. In fact it opposes utilitarianism because it promotes sadness to the majority of participants and only brings "joy" to the winner, which would be followed by the life trauma the winner would experience as the result of surviving such conditions. This approach would be very detrimental to society since extremely dangerous criminals are being released unknowingly to the public simply because they managed to survive a deathmatch.

Similar incidents happen in TV series such as *Squid Game* or the movies *Hunger Games,* these depict in a good manner the amount of stress, trauma and hate that such situations cause in a human being.

Secondly let us discuss why our game does not comply with a deontological moral compass either. Deontology tells us that actions that comply with certain rules are the ones that we as humans must partake in, we as humans have duty and dignity and these come before what

we might perceive as correct at a sensible time. It can be assumed that the prisons are just following the set of rules that were laid out for prisoners, and human rights for everyone do not exist or are very different from the real world.

In this fictional world the way someone that committed a horrible crime earns their freedom is by partaking in this event. But these rules are not universally good moral rules, this of course depends on the type of society the world of *Winner Takes It All* has because the moral rules we have in our world could be very different from the ones of *Winner Takes It All*.

The team did not think that deep into the universe of the vertical slice so we are assuming that the morality of both societies are similar. With this said there are no set of universally moral correct rules that are being followed in the setting of the game.

Which kind of responsibility do we accept from the misuse of our game?

If we were to ship our game, we should definitely include all information about the target age and how we see our game, which is - it is fiction. It's meant to be almost like a chest game - but with more graphical images in order to give more immersion. But that doesn't change its nature, and we need to emphasize that. The game doesn't tell players in any way that what they are seeing is something that they should follow in real life.

We think that making the game turn-based makes it a bit less real and reminds players that this is just a pastime, and it's similar to cards or a board game. Generally it takes a lot of the realism out of the way. Even if there are things like death animations and attacks, they are not played right away, but at the end overy turn, so it doesn't give the player a feeling that he's that much involved in the attack itself.

Epilogue

Winner Takes It All, from our perspective, is not an immoral game or ethically incorrect game. As we explained this is subjective and everyone has a different opinion. But if someone is of a certain age, stable and mature no harm should be caused by playing Winner Takes It All.

Working on this project was a real challenge, a lot of frustration and sweat went into creating such a vertical slice, but in the end it was worth it, we managed to push through and deliver a final product and for that we are proud.

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