

2273877

Ashish Juggpall

WSOA3003A

Game Design IIIA

An MDA Analysis on the Digital Game “Journey”

## Introduction

This is a formal analysis of the digital game “Journey” (The PlayStation 4 edition) utilising the MDA (Mechanics, Dynamics and Aesthetics) Framework created by R. Hunicke, M. LeBlanc, R. Zubek. This analysis solely focuses on the Level Design of the indie game. The digital game was originally published in 2012 by Annapurna Interactive and Sony Computer Interactive and was remastered for the PlayStation 4 in 2015 and was developed by Santa Monica Studios and Thatgamecompany. The game is mainly, a single player that requires players to traverse a large sandbox discovering ruins, activating objects and occasionally dodging enemies while making their way up the mountain.

## Mechanics

Players can move their character using the left analog stick as well as the directional buttons. The camera can be moved using the right analog stick or using the controller’s motion controls. Pressing the “X” button allows players to jump. If players hold “x” while charged, they may jump higher and/or glide for an extended duration. Players must collect floating red materials to gain power and create charged jumps/flows. Holding “O” button allows player to activate environmental shrines, creating pathways can give players charged flows. Holding “O” when near larger floating red materials allow players to activate them, as well as charge the player up as well.

## Dynamics

The game starts off with slow movement and a simple instruction of using the left analog stick to move, the further the player progresses, the more the game introduces its mechanics to the players through gameplay. This drives the main idea of exploration in the game as players discover more controls, the further they progress and explore new landmarks and surrounding, instilling the nature of wonder and mystery as players progress throughout on their journey. Players may only jump higher if charged therefore to solve environmental puzzles as the game progresses, players must explore enough terrain to acquire enough red materials generating enough power to jump and complete obstacles. The bigger environmental puzzles featuring larger red materials also provide players with good examples of environmental puzzles, as player must firstly explore the terrain to gain enough power to reach the puzzle yet must activate each material or traverse in a specific order to proceed to the next stage of the journey. Journey possesses many obstacles yet only one enemy type is

featured in the last stages of the game. Throughout this stage, the player is not able to enter combat but must escape using the controls thought to the player and is a further emphasis on the journey in which the player must take towards the big mountain and its exploration. Players may also interact with other players, if connected online, which may affect the player's experience of discovery within the game world whereas players may experience the single player orientated journey with other players changing the tone and pace.

## Aesthetics

The game's environmental design is brilliant as it does not directly inform the player to journey towards mountain yet leads each player into the path towards the mountain using a wide-open landscape with little to no landmarks. The ruins and landmarks featured throughout the game provide players with a vague explanation as to what they represent, motivating players to explore and gather their own approach as to what it could mean, emphasising the importance on the uniqueness of each player's experience as well as the journey they embark on rather than the destination at the peak of the mountain. The colour palette used to create journey's environment uses a blend of similar colours yet changes throughout different levels, creating an emphasis on level progression, therefore having strong browns in the desert yet gradually shifting to bright white and blue colour near the mountain further emphasising the level of progression to players without directly indicating what level and/or stage they are currently in. The main character's design indicates to players that traversal and power activation is its only abilities through the design of the player's body and face as the player is dressed in a long flowing red gown, only showing the character's legs and face to the player as an indicator that the player may not execute any actions that require hand movements as well as helps players to keep track of their avatar as the red stands out in contrast as opposed all the environment and surroundings' colours.

## References

- [1] R. Hunicke, M. LeBlanc, R. Zubek. *MDA: A Formal Approach to Game Design and Game Research*.
- [2] Santa Monica Studios, Thatgamecompany (2012-2015) *Journey*. Annapurna Interactive, Sony Computer Entertainment.