

# Game **DESIGN** Workshop

A PLAYCENTRIC APPROACH TO  
CREATING INNOVATIVE GAMES



2ND  
EDITION

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with a foreword by Eric Zimmerman





### 3.2 Create character screens: World of Warcraft and City of Heroes

team games, like football, have different player roles that make up the full team. Role-playing games, as the name implies, have a variety of roles for players to choose between. Players can take on the role of healers or fighters or magic wielders. These roles define many of the player's basic abilities, and often players will create more than one character in an online world so that they will have the opportunity to play several different roles.

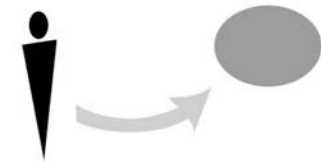
In addition to roles that are defined within the game rules, however, you might also want to consider potential play styles as a type of role when you are designing your game. Richard Bartle, creator of the first multiuser dungeon (MUD), wrote a widely-referenced article describing the four basic player types he found in his MUD. These were: achievers, explorers, socializers, and killers.<sup>1</sup> Bartle posits that players often have a primary play style and will only switch if it suits their purposes. Online worlds such as Second Life offer players a completely open-ended play environment where roles are player defined. This design decision tends to encourage creativity and self-expression rather than competition. So if you are designing a game with different roles for your players, or if you provide the opportunity for players to define their own roles, the nature and balance of these roles will be a critical consideration.

## Player Interaction Patterns

Another choice to consider when designing your game is the structure of interaction between a player, the game system, and any other players. The following breakdown of interaction patterns is adapted from the work of E. M. Avedon in his article, "The Structural Elements of Games."<sup>2</sup> You'll see that many digital games fall into the pattern "single player versus game," and, more recently, "multilateral competition." There's a lot of potential in the other patterns that is rarely taken advantage of, and we offer these ideas to you in the hopes that they can inspire you to look at new combinations and possibilities of player interactions to use in your designs.

### 1. Single player versus game

This is a game structure in which a single player competes against a game system. Examples include solitaire, Pac-Man, and other single player digital games. This is the most common pattern for digital gaming. You'll find this pattern in arcade games, console games, and PC games. Because there are no other human players in this pattern, games that use it tend to include puzzles or other play structures to create conflict. It is perhaps because of the success of this pattern that we now refer to digital games that have more than one player as "multiplayer" games when, in fact, games have been multiplayer by definition for thousands of years.



Single Player vs. Game



Multiple Individual Players vs. Game



Player vs. Player



Multilateral Competition



Unilateral Competition

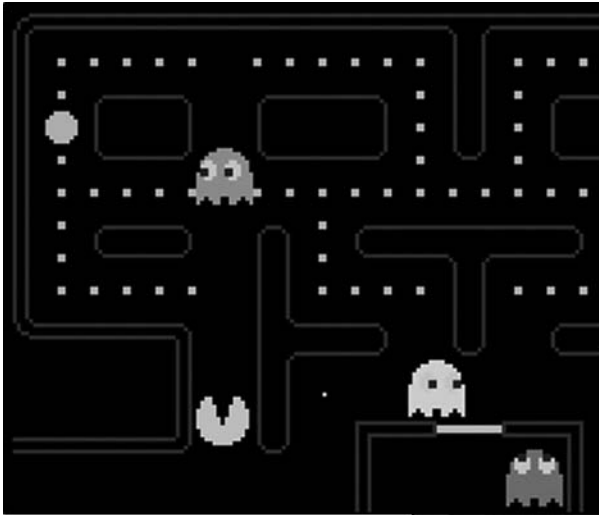


Cooperative Play



Team Competition

### **3.3 Player interaction patterns**



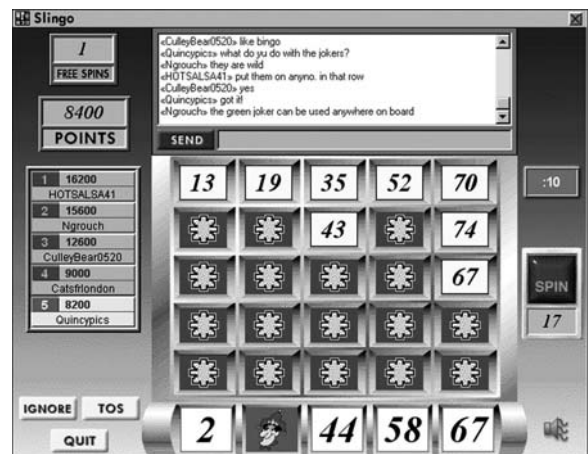
### 3.4 Single player versus game examples: Pac-Man, The 7th Guest, and Tomb Raider

*Pac-Man © 1980 Namco Ltd.  
All Rights Reserved. Courtesy  
of Namco Holding Corp.*

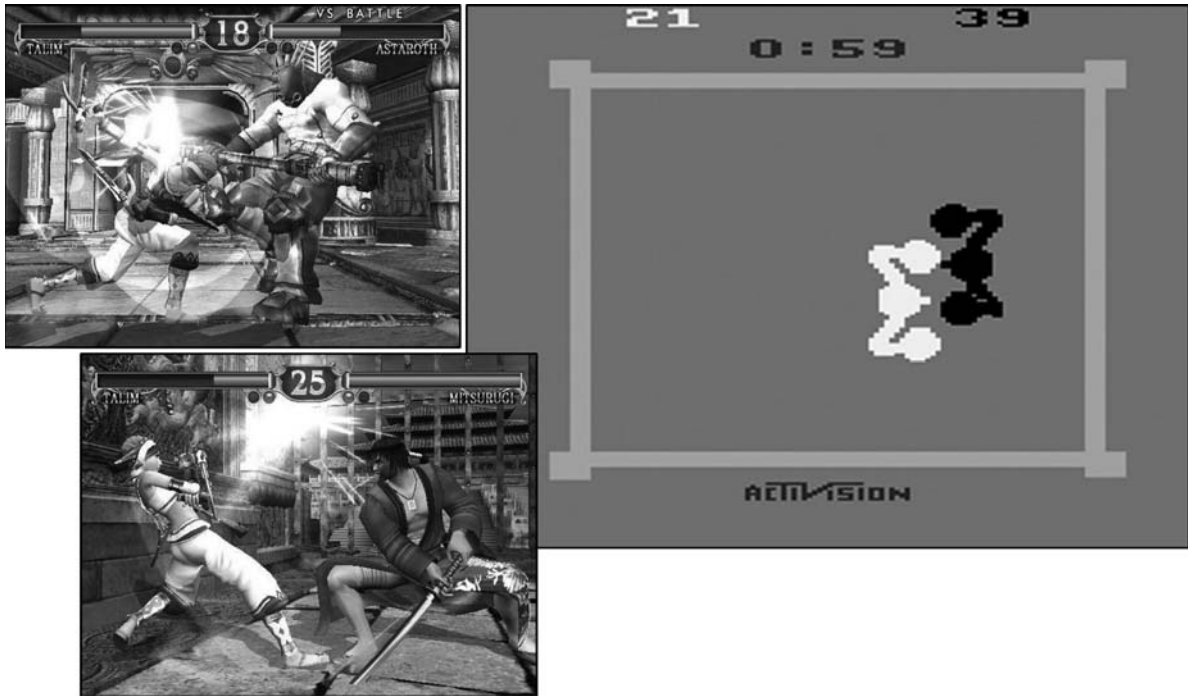


## 2. Multiple individual players versus game

This is a game structure in which multiple players compete against a game system in the company of each other. Action is not directed toward each other, and no interaction between participants is required or necessary. Examples include bingo, roulette, and Slingo. This is a rarely used pattern in digital gaming, although AOL had a lot of success with their online Slingo game. Essentially, this pattern is a single player game that is played in the company of other players who are also playing the same game. This pattern works well for non-competitive players who enjoy the activity and the social arena (a large percentage of Slingo players are women). This pattern also works well for gambling games.



### 3.5 Multiple individual players versus game: Slingo



### 3.6 Multiple individual players versus game: Boxing for Atari 2600 and Soul Calibur II for Xbox

*Soul Calibur II © 2003 Namco Ltd. All Rights Reserved. Courtesy of Namco Holding Corp.*

## 3. Player versus player

This is a game structure in which two players directly compete. Examples include checkers, chess, and tennis. This is a classic structure for strategy games and works well for competitive players. The one-on-one nature of the competition makes it a personal contest. Two player fighting games such as Soul Calibur II, Mortal Kombat, and others have employed this structure successfully. Again, the intense competition marks this pattern for focused, head-to-head play.

## 4. Unilateral competition

This is a game structure in which two or more players compete against one player. Examples include tag, dodge ball, and the Scotland Yard board game. A highly undervalued structure, this pattern works as well with “free for all” games like tag, as it does with intensely strategic games like



### 3.7 Unilateral competition: Scotland Yard

Scotland Yard. As does tag, Scotland Yard pits one player, Mr. X, against all the other players. However, unlike tag, Scotland Yard has the larger



### 3.8 Multilateral competition: Super Bomberman and Mario Party

group (the detectives) trying to catch the singled out player (the criminal). This game balances between the two forces because the criminal has full information about the state of the game, while the detectives have to work together to deduce the state from clues left by the criminal. It's a very interesting model for combining cooperative and competitive gameplay that is wide open for digital game development.

#### 5. Multilateral competition

This is a game structure in which three or more players directly compete. Examples include poker, Monopoly, multiplayer games like Quake, WarCraft III, Age of Mythology, etc. This is the pattern that most players think of when they refer to "multiplayer" gaming. Nowadays, the trend is to think of multiplayer in terms of massive numbers of players, but as the thousands of years of pre-digital multiplayer game history supports, there's still plenty of room for innovative thinking in terms of smaller, directly competitive groups. Board games with this pattern of player interaction have been "tuned" for generations for groups ranging between three to six players; clearly there's a social force at work that makes this an ideal group size for

direct competition. Want to do something fresh in digital gaming? Try tuning your multiplayer game to encourage the same high level of social interaction that occurs with a three to six person board game.

#### 6. Cooperative play

This is a game structure in which two or more players cooperate against the game system. Examples include Harvest Time, the Lord of the Rings board game, and cooperative quests in World of Warcraft. This pattern has received a lot of attention in terms of children's board games, like Harvest Time, but not much in games for adults. Reiner Knizia, the prolific German game designer, tackled this pattern in his Lord of the Rings board game, in which a group of players cooperate to save Middle-earth. Also, role-playing games often feature cooperative quests within a competitive game structure. It could also be argued that Second Life's noncompetitive, creative environment is a form of cooperative play. It would be interesting to see more designers experiment with this approach.

#### 7. Team competition

This is a game structure in which two or more groups compete. Examples include soccer, basketball,



**3.9 Cooperative play: Lord of the Rings board game**

charades, Battlefield 1942, and Tribes. Team sports have proved the power of this pattern of player interaction over and over, not only for the players but for a whole other group of participants—the fans. As if responding to the need for this particular multiplayer pattern, teams (called clans or guilds) sprang up almost immediately upon the introduction of multiplayer and massively multiplayer digital games. The multiplayer features introduced in Halo 2 include custom games in which players can define their own rules and teams. Think about your own experiences with team play—what makes team play fun? What makes it different from individual competition? Is there an idea for a team game that comes from your answers to those questions?

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**Exercise 3.3: Interaction Patterns**

For each of the interaction patterns, create a list of your favorite games in each pattern. If you can't think of any games in a particular pattern, research games in that area and play several of them.

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**3.10 Team competition: Halo 3**