

WSOA3003A MDA ANALYSIS 1: Pokémon Diamond & Pearl

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Pokémon Diamond Version & Pearl Version (2006) are role-playing games with turn-based elements developed by Game Freak. They tell the story of a Pokémon trainer going on a journey as they train and battle other Pokémon, and other Pokémon trainers while simultaneously fighting against a villain organization named Team Galactic. Both games are essentially the same but offer a different Pokémon to battle against as the final boss to capture. The focus of this essay will be on *Pokémon Pearl Version*. The way the player manipulates data during combat mode as well as when they are exploring allows for a unique player experience only offered by the game itself. This essay will discuss the game *Pokémon Pearl* and analyze it using the principles of the MDA framework by Hunicke, LeBlanc, and Zubek.

As mentioned above, *Pokémon Pearl Version* is an RPG with turn-based elements where the player takes control of a Pokémon trainer of their choice and goes on an adventure where they face (and must battle against) several wild Pokémon as well as Pokémon trainers (GameFreak, 2006). This game came out on the Nintendo DS and has three basic screens on which the player can perform various actions - the first being a field map of the region they are in (called Sinnoh), the second being the battle screen where the player battles against wild Pokémon as well as other Pokémon trainers, and the last being the menu screen where the player is able to organize their items/collectibles as well as change other features about the game (As depicted on Appendix A, B and C). Hunicke, Leblanc and Zubek's framework of Mechanics, Dynamics, and Aesthetics (2004) will be used to analyse two critical systems within *Pokémon Pearl Version* and thus provide a deeper understanding behind the data design of the game and how this data is manipulated by both the player and the developers in order to create a unique player experience. The MDA framework proposes the idea that breaking games down in three major components (Mechanics, Dynamics, and Aesthetics) allows for a more graspable understanding of the development of video games, where every data input is essential to the game's design. (Hunicke, LeBlanc & Zubek, 2004, p.2).

To elaborate, this essay will firstly analyze the battle system of *Pokémon Pearl version*. When encountering a wild Pokémon or interacting with another Pokémon trainers, the player will enter a turn-based combat mode where they make use of their available Pokémon to defeat their enemy. The player must manipulate various data in order to defeat them; using Pokeballs that they collect within explore mode to capture the Pokémon after defeating them in battle; the player must also be conscious of the level of their own Pokémon as well as the wild Pokémon's level and thus must make use of the available abilities of their own Pokémon

in order to decrease the enemy's HP and win the battle. The mechanics available to the player (as depicted in appendix B) are to fight, use an item from their bag, or run from the fight. Some dynamics arising from these mechanics include resource management – where the player makes the choice to either completely avoid conflict with a wild Pokémon or fight and receive the benefits and consequences that come from fighting (which include using up items to heal their Pokémon or directly affect the enemy Pokémon in order to win). The enemy's level affects the way the player manages their resources against them, which in turn affects the way the player manages the way their Pokémon interacts against them. This manipulation of data allows for a system where the player is allowed to choose how they want to progress through the story. In contrast, the player is not allowed to flee from a fight against a trainer or capture their Pokémon; trainer fights mostly occurring as main missions compared to encounters with wild Pokémon, which would count as side missions. Trainer missions are usually more difficult, with the player encountering Pokémon with higher levels. This is an example of how the developers manipulate mechanics and data in order to build a specific player experience, as well as keeping the player on track with the game's narrative.

The aesthetics of *Pokémon Pearl Version* mostly centers around Fantasy, Challenge, Narrative and Discovery. The player is able to experience a game world which balances between a somewhat realistic role-playing game (where they travel, meet people, cycle between day and night etc) and a fantasy game where they are able to capture and control monsters roaming the world, they live in. Due to the nature of the console it was made for (Nintendo DS), this juxtaposition is very apparent (see Appendix A and C) – the top screen shows a top-down RPG game map with grass assets, NPCs and signs simulating the real world, while the bottom screen shows the Pokémon the player owns and their stats/wellbeing. The design of each Pokémon is also reminiscent of real animals, a further fusion of reality and fantasy. This data makes the game feel more immersive and offers a game experience unique to Pokémon players.

In conclusion, *Pokémon Pearl Version* was interesting game with lots of data to analyse and allows for further understanding of the game's system and how the player experience is made to be unique through manipulation aesthetic, mechanic, and dynamic data from both the player and the developers. While data design analysis can be a vast and vague way of analysis, the mechanic data design of *Pokémon Diamond & Pearl* allows for a pleasant game experience.

References

1. Hunicke, R., LeBlanc, M. & Zubek, R., 2004. *MDA: A Formal Approach to Game Design and Game Research*. s.l., s.n., pp. 1-5.
2. GameFreak (2006) *Pokémon Diamond & Pearl*. [Nintendo DS Cartridge] Nintendo DS. Japan: The Pokémon Company and Nintendo

Appendix List



Appendix A: Pokémon Pearl in-game Menu (taken from <https://www.mobygames.com/game/nintendo-ds/pokemon-pearl-version/screenshots/gameShotId,283459/>)



Appendix B: in-game Battle screen in Pokémon (taken from <https://www.pokemoncrossroads.com/forum/showthread.php/14890-In-Review-Pok%C3%A9mon-Diamond-and-Pearl>)



Appendix C: in-game screenshot of the exploring mode in Pokémon Pearl (taken from <https://www.pokecommunity.com/showthread.php?t=443743>)