

Thinking about Gameplay

C395 Computer Game Design

Ken Forbus

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Overview

- The idea of gameplay
- Case study: Age of Kings
- Analysis

Gameplay

- “A game is a series of interesting choices”
 - Sid Meier
- Key problems for designers:
 - How do you make a player’s choices interesting?
 - How do you ease a player into your world?
 - How do you keep them interested as they gain experience?

Problem: Worlds tend to be complex

- Can overwhelm player
- Solutions
 - Organize game into subsystems that can be mastered semi-independently
 - Interactions between subsystems provide interesting properties of game world dynamics
 - Introduce new features gradually
 - Also provides intermediate goals for player
 - Also keeps game changing, hence interesting

Strategy games

- You control an organization rather than an individual
 - Armed forces
 - Company
 - Ant colony
- Winning requires managing your resources
 - Noticing important conditions
 - Short-term versus long-term investments
 - Multiple activities in progress at once
 - Self-motivated campaigns, plans, strategies

Case study: Age of Kings

- Time to experiment...

What are some key features of the modeled world?

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- Continuous flow of time
- Map provides the stage
- Monitoring activities of multiple agents requires substantial player attention
- Player must organize production activities
- Right level of abstraction critical to determining how fun the game is

The Story: What is it?

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- A conflict
- It has a beginning, a middle, and an end
 - What these are like in a particular game arise from the player's interaction with the model
- Beginning
 - ????
- Middle
 - ????
- End
 - ????

Why include campaigns?

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- Provided short, bounded experiences
 - More likely to pick it up again than if it always took hours
- Simplifies design of the AIs
 - Range of necessary behaviors limited
 - Can craft strategies for the specific scenario
- Provides structure for player to monitor progress

What would have to change to make a
persistent world?

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- Renewable resources
- More capable AIs
 - High-level strategic shifts as game conditions change
 - Ability to orchestrate long campaigns

What does the Research Tree provide?

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- Staged introduction of capabilities to help manage complexity
- Opportunity to balance long-term and short-term investments
- Progress tracking

What is the purpose of relics and wonders?

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- Produce instability later in the game
- Increase uncertainty of outcome