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Advanced Game Design

Essay 2

As our project nears completion, our group is actively working towards a finished product. With an approaching deadline, we are asking ourselves whether or not we are missing anything fundamental. In, “The Art of Game Design” by Jesse Schell, the various necessary aspects, mechanics, systems, and experiences that go into and come out of a game are discussed. In chapter seventeen, Schell talks about how the story is an aspect of the game that the players should experience rather than simply be exposed to. Schell uses *Lens #78: The Lens of Story* to talk about how designers can use their story to better their game. This lens describes how designers should reflect on whether or not their game needs a story and if so, how can they make it interesting.

However, when it comes to our game, it doesn’t necessarily need one. Can it have one? Sure it can. One player serves as the protagonist that must use a group of astronauts to protect a space colony from a group of space aliens that are controlled by the other player who serves as the antagonist. Of course, this can be expanded using different maps as areas in the story and different cubes as characters. On the other hand, I don’t think any of that is necessary. When we decided to make the game astronauts versus aliens, none of use spoke up about trying to implement a storyline. I think that when it comes to our game, the other components of the tetrad (aesthetics, technology, and gameplay) are strong enough without a completely flushed out storyline.

Another aspect of a game, this time from a mechanics perspective, is playtesting. After all, playtesting is a designers chance to see how everything looks during gameplay. In chapter twenty-seven, Schell talks about the importance of playtesting. Playtests are where the game’s different mechanics and how those mechanics interact with each other can be seen. Playtesting also allows game designers to see how players react to the different aspects of the game *while* they are playing them. It is in this chapter, that Schell introduces us to *Lens #103: The Lens of the Playtest*.

This week, our group was able to put together the final pieces of an executable version of out game. That being said, it is finally ready to be brought to other people for playtesting. The main reason we need other people to playtest this is because we know the game and how it’s supposed to run. We need people who know nothing about the system and the mechanics to not only play it, but break it and bring out any flaws. Kudos to Justin for not only finding people to playtest the game, but for making questionnaires for the playtesters. Hopefully we will be able to take the information we get from the questionnaires to fine tune our game and fix any problems that came up. In order to make that most of your playtests, Schell uses this lens to give us five different things we should take into consideration. He suggests we figure out why we should do it, who should be there for it, where it should take place, what we are looking for, and how we get the information we need.

Freedom is something that people come to games for. While we can’t give players freedom in the literal sense, Schell states that games should give players the feeling of freedom. In other words, the player is only as free as we let them think they are. In chapter eighteen, Schell talks about exposing players to the illusion of freedom. This is possible through goals, constraints, the game’s interface, and visual design. Schell then talks about *Lens #79: The Lens of Freedom*. He suggests that we should do our best to make our players feel as free as possible…within the confines of the game’s rules and procedures.

Designers can make this possible by thinking of the areas of the game where players feel free, the areas where they may feel constrained, and areas where they can be given more freedom. In our game, player have the most freedom when they are placing their cubes and when they are flicking them. Players may feel constrained on their opponent’s turn, when they can’t place a certain cube because of a cost, or when they can’t flick a cube a way they want to. These particular constraints are necessary. In a turn-based game, players shouldn’t be able to make moves on their opponent’s turn. Costs are in the game to balance out the strengths of each player’s group of cubes (“stronger” cubes have a higher cost while “weaker” cubes have a lower one). Not being able to flick a cube the way you want to is most likely the result how the cubes moved in the previous turn and proper physics is a staple that that leaves little to no room for inaccuracy.

In chapter twenty-three, Schell talks about the benefits of experiencing a game while part of a group. Games not only allow us to compete and collaborate with each other, but they also allow us to learn about the people that we’re playing with and ourselves. He explains that while designers should want those that are playing their game to have fun, they should also want those watching to be having just as much fun. When it comes to our game, we are no different. Since our gameplay currently only supports two players, there is the possibility of people having to wait for their turn to play. Especially if a group of people are gathering around the game.

Schell uses this chapter as an opportunity to talk about *Lens #95: The Lens of Spectation*. He believes that the players shouldn’t be the only ones benefitting from the game. If done right, spectators should be able to have fun and enjoy the game even though they aren’t actually playing. In order to make your game interesting to watch, Schell suggests asking yourself whether or not your game is interesting. Afterwards, think of ways you can make it interesting, or even more interesting. Honestly, I think the game can be fun for spectators. Earlier in the semester, we put together a physical version of the game to get a better feel for the mechanics and systems involved. There was a point where I was a spectator and I enjoyed watching the gameplay. What kept me interested was the strategy involved in the game.

In order to make the game more interesting, we could build upon the existing level of strategy. That would involve giving each player more meaningful choices and options during gameplay. We could do this by finding a balanced way to add more players, or come up with more units with different abilities. Whatever we do would have to not only keep the player thinking, but keep the spectators thinking too. As a was watching the gameplay, I remember trying to predict what would happen next, which piece would be used to attack, and which would be targeted. For me…that was fun.

As previously stated, games should allow players a certain level of freedom. That being said, they should have a certain level of simplicity. In chapter seventeen, Schell talks about simplicity makes them feel freer than they are in the real world and how transcendence makes them feel more powerful. Simplicity and transcendence both give the player a sense of control in the game and that control is comforting. In this chapter, Schell introduces *Lens #75: The Lens of Simplicity and Transcendence*. He states that the right combination of simplicity and transcendence is hard to make. He suggest listing the ways the game world is simpler than the real world and comparing that to the type of transcendent power the player receives.

In our game simplicity can be found in the way players are required to flick cubes at their opponents to win. It’s only difficult if the players make it difficult. The transcendent power can be the ability to command your cubes and use them as you see fit. We could make it simpler by making all the cubes exactly the same and removing their special effects, but where’s the fun in that?

As the end of the semester draws near, the final pieces of the games that we have been working on are being put together. In chapter twenty-nine, Schell talks about the relationship between designers and clients. He not only stresses how important this relationship is, but also talks about how to properly handle suggestions from clients. Schell suggests finding common ground regarding what the client wants and what can actually be done. In a few weeks our group will have to present our finished product to our client-i.e., our professor.

This brings us to *Lens #107: The Lens of the Client*. For this lens, Schell suggests that as a designer, you should ask yourself a few questions to make sure you and the client are on the same page. In order to do get a clear understanding of what is expected of the final product, you should compare what the client said they wanted, what they think they want, and what they really want. Luckily, our client was very clear when describing what he wanted from us. At the beginning of the semester, he told us that he wanted a fully functional game. However, what he really wants is a fully functional game…that not only meets his expectations, but effectively shows our understanding of and ability to apply the material we’ve learned this semester.