

**I.P. 8 – Game Design 101**

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### Exercise 1.2: D.O.A.

*Take one game that you've played that was D.O.A. By D.O.A., I mean "dead on arrival" (i.e., a game that's no fun to play). Write down what you don't like about it. What did the designers miss? How could the game be improved?*

A game that was D.O.A. for me was Halo 4 for the Xbox 360. Growing up and going through high school, my friends and I would all rush home from school to play Halo 3 and spend hours and hours having a great time. We were all eagerly anticipating Halo 4 to release, but there was a lot that was changed from the original formula that just didn't work. We did not like how the gameplay felt as it was too fast which removed the gameplay elements and interactions that were true to Halo. It also felt like there was some sort of disconnect between the game client and the server which caused a lot of frustration. It overall just felt like a game trying to be something that it simply was not. The designers missed taking the core features from previously successful titles and ensure that they were either unchanged or just tweaked enough to be perfected. Instead, the designers overhauled massive systems which just made the game not feel like Halo anymore. The game could have been improved simply by listening to fans and what they wanted to begin with. The gameplay speed should have been decreased and dedicated or better servers purchased to ensure fair and consistent experiences.

### Exercise 2.1: Think of a Game

*1. Think of a game, any game. Now write down a description of the game. Be detailed. Describe it as if to someone who has never played a game like it before.*

Super Mario 64 is a 3D Platformer which involves Mario, the playable protagonist, trying to save Princess Peach. To do this, Mario must jump into paintings found in Princess Peach's castle to enter levels. Each level has a different theme, and the objective is to collect every star available in the level. Once Mario collects enough stars, different areas of Peach's Castle will open which will allow Mario to access even more levels. After Mario collects even more stars, he will have his first fight with Bowser, the antagonist of the game. Mario will continue to collect stars and search more areas of the castle until he is able to fight Bowser for the final time to save Princess Peach.

*2. Now think of another game—a completely different type of game. The more different this game is from the first one, the better. Describe it.*

Halo is a first-person shooter which involves Master Chief, the playable protagonist, trying to save humanity by stopping the Covenant, an alien species. Master Chief is a Spartan, a human who has gone through training and laboratory creation and has special armour to make him or her a war machine. You will go through multiple levels in the campaign to try to put a stop to the covenant and save humanity.

*3. Compare your descriptions. Which elements were different and which were similar? Dig deep and really think about the underlying mechanics of each game.*

Super Mario 64 and Halo are games that are in two completely different genres yet share a few similarities. The story elements are the same in a way as they both involve one character embarking on a quest to save a situation. Gameplay wise, they both allow for complete 3D movement around environments and provide the player with clear objectives to progress through the game. Both playable characters can jump, and they both need to make their way through levels while defeating enemies. For differences, Mario's main way to defeat enemies is to jump on them while Master Chief must defeat them with a weapon. Mario's main objective is always to collect stars while Master Chief can have various objectives throughout missions such as reaching a certain area or defeating a certain enemy to progress through levels. The actual perspectives of the characters are different as well since Super Mario 64 is played from the 3<sup>rd</sup> person perspective while Halo is played from a 1<sup>st</sup> person perspective.

### **Exercise 2.3: Objectives**

*List five games, and in one sentence per game, describe the objective in each game.*

NHL 22 – Shoot a puck into the opposing team's net more times than the opponent within a specific amount of time to win the game.

Halo (Single player) – Defeat enemies and complete marked objectives without dying to complete a campaign level.

Halo (Multiplayer) – Defeat more opponents than the enemy team within a time limit to win.

Super Mario Bros. – Run and jump over obstacles to make it to the flagpole without dying to complete a level.

Pac-man – Collect all pellets and power pellets on the screen without being caught by a ghost to proceed to the next level.

**Exercise 2.6: Challenge**

*Name three games that you find particularly challenging and describe why.*

Dark Souls – In Dark Souls, every single movement and decision matters immensely and you only have seconds between each combat movement to decide your next step. If you progress through a boss fight and make a single mistake and die, you now are required to start over from the beginning. This creates a sense of mastery for the player since they will need to try to complete sections multiple times to master it before they are able to progress. It is a very punishing game and one that I could not complete myself.

Cuphead - Cuphead creates difficulty through gameplay mechanics the same way that Dark Souls does. Throughout the game, and especially through boss fights, players are challenged to complete mechanics with flawless execution or else they could die and would need to restart. This, again, creates a sense of mastery for the player and the feeling of a real accomplishment after each section of the game.

Super Meat Boy – Super Meat Boy was extremely challenging as it requires the user to do frame-perfect inputs to make their way through levels. Although each level is short and could technically be completed in just seconds, the mastery of game mechanics is expected as to complete levels you must do them perfectly. If you jump even just a second too early, you will need to restart from the beginning of the level. What causes this game to be even harder is that once you get stuck on a certain level for long enough, it is difficult to break the muscle memory that you have established by doing the same level repeatedly.

**Exercise 3.8: Utility and Scarcity**

*What are the resources in the games Scrabble and Call of Duty? How are they useful to players? How are they made scarce by the game system?*

Resources are an important aspect of gaming as they help guide players in playing a game. In Scrabble, the resource that are attributed to the game would be each letter piece, the normal squares on the game board, and premium squares on the game board that multiply points. For Call of Duty, the resources would be a player's health, their equipment count (grenades, C4, etc), weapon, ammo, and fatigue meter for sprinting, and time in multiplayer matches. The resources in scrabble are useful to players as it is functionally what allows them to score points to win the game. In Call of Duty, the resources are what all the entire game system to function. If a player runs out of ammo or cannot find a

weapon, they will have a much hard time of completing any objective. If a player runs out of health, their character will die, and they would have to restart a mission in single player or would give an enemy player an added point to their score in multiplayer. Scrabble makes resources scarce by having a pre-determined number of letter pieces and game board squares. Call of Duty makes resources scarce by setting limits on how much ammo a weapon can hold, how much equipment a user could carry, restricting time in certain modes, and by only allowing health to regenerate over time or by finding a health pack.

#### **Exercise 4.7: Game Characters**

*Name three game characters that you find compelling. How are these characters brought to life within the game? What allows you to identify with them? Are they rounded or flat, dynamic or static?*

Master Chief – Master Chief is brought to life in Halo by making him seem very “robotic” and neutral. He acts as though he has a mission to complete and has nothing else that matters to him. I think what allows people to identify with him would be how he is focused on a singular thing, yet from the narrative perspective, it is obvious that he is slowly softening up and becoming more human than Spartan. It creates a sense of allowing yourself to open to new experiences and not stay stuck on the same things throughout your life. There is not always a single objective in a game, just as there is not always a single objective in life, and it is interesting to see the character progression that occurs in Master Chief. Earlier in the series, it could be argued that Master Chief would be a flat and static character compared to the rounded and dynamic character he is today.

Cloud – Cloud Strife from Final Fantasy VII would be another example of a compelling character. Cloud is brought to life within Final Fantasy VII by being introduced as an overconfident character who believes he does not need anyone or anything. Throughout the game, he begins to open and change into a more caring character that values the friendships that he has made. Again, like Master Chief, it is easy to identify with Cloud since the feelings that he portrays are easy to identify with.

Rosalina – Rosalina from the Super Mario series is a compelling character, especially when compared to other characters in the series. Mario, Luigi, and the other series characters do not have very much in-depth backstories. Rosalina was given a full backstory involving her exploring the galaxy with the Lumas and missing her mother. The sense of family and bonding that is involved in Rosalina’s backstory and her own actions as a character is what makes her easy to relate to. She would be a very rounded and dynamic character.

## References

Fullerton, T. (2018). *Game Design Workshop: A Playcentric Approach to Creating Innovative Games, Fourth Edition (4th ed.)*. A K Peters/CRC Press. <https://doi.org/10.1201/b22309>