

Fun

Question

What do you like about your favourite games?

Why do People Play Games?

- Reward
- Immersion
- Competition
- Escape
- Challenge
- Relaxation
- Excitement
- Discovery
- Intellectual stimulation
- Accomplishment
- Variety
- Social Interaction

What is Fun?

- Something that we really know intuitively
 - an altered state that we experience when we play a game
 - a sense of mastery or achievement
- Many attempts to understand fun
- One theory of fun:
 - Our brains are wired to understand patterns
 - We feel mastery when we have identified a pattern and used that knowledge to “beat” the system
 - Our brains get bored easily - once it has mastered a pattern and can apply it effortlessly, it needs to be challenged with a new pattern - similar but different
 - Games are a safe way to practice our pattern matching skills

Ludic vs. Narrative

- Games are a fusion of two type of entertainment
- Narrative: Storytelling
 - Story, Characters, Reveals, Reversals
 - Techniques are similar to film
- Ludic: Gameplay
 - Scores, Achievements, Rules, Mechanics
 - Techniques are similar to board games and sports
- Both are important in well rounded games, but ludic element are usually more important
 - Also tend to be “cheaper”
- Video Games also have elements that are (mostly) unique to it
 - Immersion in particular

Question?

What about games do you dislike?

What Isn't Fun?

- Punishment
- Tedium
- Inconsistency
- Cheating
- Presentation glitches
- Boredom

Question

What are some “kinds” of games?

Game Genres

- Genres
 - Action/Adventure
 - Horror
 - Shooter
 - Stealth
 - Platformer
 - Rhythm/Music
 - MMO
 - Racing
 - Sports
 - Role-playing
 - Turn-based strategy
 - Point-and-click Adventure
 - Puzzle
- Gameplay Styles
 - Open world vs Levels
 - Casual vs Hard core
 - Violent vs Non-violent
 - First person vs. Third person
 - Single player vs Multiplayer

Why Genre?

- A particular users enjoyment is often heavily tied to genre
- Genres set expectations
 - The user knows what to expect
 - The designer knows what users expect
- Genres come with prefab gameplay
 - Don't need to reinvent the gameplay wheel every time
 - Can limit creativity though
- Two key (contradictory) questions:
 - Is the game meeting expectations for this genre?
 - How is the game setting itself apart from the genre?

Elements of Successful Games

- A solid core mechanic
- A sense of place
- A range of challenges
- A range of abilities used to solve the encounter
- Skill required to use the abilities
- Reward early, often
 - Cut scenes, plot twists, new environments, puzzles, enhancements, surprises, gameplay variations
- Easy to pick up, tough to master
 - Intuitive controls
 - Balanced difficulty ramping
 - Gradual learning curve

Fun is Hard Work

- Much more difficult to plan and schedule than other portions of development
- Often don't know if it's fun until it's built
- Less tolerant of mistakes than other areas.
- Need to be careful about how aggressively advancement is gated by skill.
- How do you make things fun?

Extensive Tuning

- This is accomplished with extensive tuning
 - Grab someone off the street, let them try your game
 - When they become jaded, get someone new
 - You will become jaded very quickly – keep this in mind!
- Keep track of lots of things
 - Success / failure ratios
 - Where things are too easy or too hard
- Resist the urge to jump in and explain things
- Fix and iterate

Originality

- Novelty can be a great way to differentiate your game from the crowd
- There are pitfalls however
 - Players may be confused when game diverges from established general practices (very few games are completely original)
 - More time must be dedicated to training the player
 - Different isn't always good
 - Always justify changes from standard practice in terms of an improved game experience
 - If it isn't broken, don't fix it
- Originality in itself doesn't make for a good game
- Execution is crucial

How to Get There

- Design for the player, not for yourself
 - Put yourself in their shoes
- Some things sound good on paper, but don't work well in practice
 - Is it a tuning, or a systemic problem?
 - If the latter, toss it
- Relentlessly prototype gameplay
- Some features may be good or bad depending on the player
 - If they are important to your game, make them optional
- Learn from other successful games
 - Improve on what they did, right and wrong

How to Get There (cont'd)

- Justify the existence of each feature of your game
 - It is boilerplate?
 - get it done quickly as possible
 - Does it add to the game? How?
 - spend your time here
 - Does it subtract from the game?
 - drop it
 - Is it fluff?
 - don't waste your time, drop it
- Details are important
 - This takes a surprisingly long time to get right
 - Up to 2-5x the initial implementation time

Analyzing games

- Playing games with a critical eye is key
- Mechanics
 - Micro, macro
 - How is it like an unlike other similar games
 - Player ability, controller mapping
 - Level structure, freedom / limitations of the world design
 - Bugs, exploits?
- Presentation
 - Art style
 - Sound, music
 - Camera
 - How is the story advanced
- Others
 - Length of game
 - Aggregate rankings (Game Rankings, Metacritic)

Suggestions for Your Designs

- Focus on core game-play
- Concentrate on one or two of the “fun areas”
 - The front-end isn't a fun area, so don't waste time on this
 - Every hour you spend on this is an hour taken away from the game
- Some things will be difficult to achieve with limited time and artistic resources
- Keep it simple: a game doesn't have to be huge to be fun!
 - You don't have time to create an epic
 - One good level is better than ten mediocre ones
 - Keep it as technically simple as you can
 - Remember Tetris

Summary

- Games concentrate on and are effective at different aspects of fun
- Every aspect isn't addressed in every game
- Know what is fun for your target audience
- When in “designer mode”, play games with a critical eye
- Focus on one or two key aspects, and dedicate your effort there