Thinking about Gameplay

C395 Computer Game Design
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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?
What are some key features of the modeled world?

• 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?
Why include campaigns?

- 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?
What does the Research Tree provide?

- 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?
What is the purpose of relics and wonders?

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