

SoAC_ProjectProposal_BreconGaskell

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Character action games
and the appeal of mastery

Dissertation proposal

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Introduction

The proposal for an analysis of how mastery, variety of game mechanics and style are used to encourage variety of play in video games. And dissuade players from playing in a purely efficient manner. And how the "Character Action" genre's unique mechanics can help to achieve this. And how the genre was developed and iterated on with mastery of combat mechanics in mind. As well as a list of what games in the genre will be studied and some initial research documents on the subject of challenge and mastery in video games.

"One of the responsibilities I think we have as designers is to protect the player from themselves"

Sid Meier, GDC 2010[1]

Background to the Proposed Research

A game being played by a beginner at the casual level and a game being played by an experienced player, someone who has mastered the game in question will look very different.

A beginner could play in a variety of ways, testing out the games mechanics and learning and adapting as they go. Ideally playing the game in a way that the developer intended to be enjoyable as they are introduced to mechanics, environments and encounters organically.

Someone with a lot of experience, or has mastered the same game on the other hand will be able to play the game more efficiently, taking the quickest route or using the least amount of resources required. Two different players with a certain level of experience are likely to play the game in much the same way because of this, resulting in a lack of variety in play.

"Many players cannot help approaching a game as an optimization puzzle. Given the opportunity, players will optimise the fun out of the game."

Soren Johnson, *Designer Notes* [2]

Character Action games as a genre in particular have some unique ways of avoiding this. "Character Action" as a genre shares much in common with the "Hack and Slash" genre of games, with a greater focus on weapon and attack variety, combos and spectacle. Character action can be quite complex, with a high skill ceiling, but can typically be played without making full use of the games systems to a certain extent.

"The character action genre was designed to evolve the arcade score attack experience into a modern form. It is a form of spectacular skill-based gameplay that uses high score systems to constantly push players to further explore what makes it so thrilling."

Christopher Hovermale, *Destructoid*[3]

The focus of the combat in the "Devil May Cry" series of games for example, as well as defeating the enemies in each encounter. Is to achieve and maintain a high "Style" ranking, that is tracked and displayed on screen at all times. "Style" is increased by weapon variety, attack variety and avoiding attacks. And is reduced by repeating the same same attack in quick succession, taking damage or taking too long between actions.

"Even in shooting or action games, if you know that you can just kill this guy this way, but maybe if I could try to do it a little bit cooler, or a little more interesting. Maybe there's a bit of, 'hey, I've got the gallery behind me and I'm going to show off some play that you've never thought of,' but there's also the element of showing off to yourself and creating your own play style. I think that had a lot to do with the games I played when I was younger, and that really came to the forefront in DMC."

Hideki Kamiya[4]



Devil

May Cry 5, Capcom[5]

The encounters and levels of the game are then also ranked taking Style into consideration, as well as other factors such as time taken, items used and points collected. This system encourages variety in gameplay as a form of mastery and challenge. More skilled players are likely to make use of a wider variety of options in the game in order to maximise their score, so two equally skilled players are likely too have different experiences.

"Seeing statistical and tangible evidence of my skills improving inspires me and motivates me to push myself further... assuming that score actually corresponds with more exciting and skillful gameplay."

Christopher Hovermale, Destructoid[6]

Aims & Objectives

- An analysis of the Character Action genre through the history and development of the "Devil May Cry" series of games, with a focus on how the style ranking system was conceived and iterated on throughout the series.
- An examination of the origins of "Devil May Cry" as an early build of Resident Evil 4, and how its unique identity made it unsuited to the horror genre but was strong enough in concept to continue on as a new brand. [7]
- An analysis of the success and failures of each entry of the series, E.G. poorly recieved changes in the first sequel followed by the return to form and greater success of the third entry in the series and how the mechanical changes to each contributed to how they were recieved.
- An analysis of how later games in the genre, such as "Bayonetta"[18] and "Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance"[19] made use of Style mechanics.
- Explore how boss fights in the genre form key points of the games pacing and progression and how they act as a test of competence and an opportunity to display mastery.
- Analysing and comparing player feedback and reviews to games in the genre and what aspects of those games contributed to the results.

- A review of gameplay from high skill players and how the gameplay differs between people of similar levels of skill as a result of style systems and the appeal of spectacle as opposed to simply speed and efficiency.
- A literature Review of studies on the psychology behind challenge and persistence in video games, and what drives players to master a game to their potential.

Resources

"Building persistence through failure" [8]

Research paper on the role of challenge in Video Games, looking at the psychology of players reacting to failure and their likelihood to persist through challenge under different circumstances.

"Motivation in video games: a literature review"[9]

A research paper analysing the reasons for playing video games for the pursuit of "fun".

"Video Games: Developing Resilience, Competence, and Mastery"[10]

Research on positive psychological effects of Video Games from "Integrating Technology in Positive Psychology Practice".

"The Role of Failure and Mastery Orientation in a Challenging Video Game"[11]

A dissertation examining the importance of failure in Video Games, and how it can encourage mastery.

"The Roles, Mechanics, and Evolution of Boss Battles in Video Games"[12]

A thesis on how boss battles in video games developed, their mechanics and how that affects gameplay quality and key boss battles in video game history.

Data Collection

"Character Action" games to study, analyse and compare player reviews and feedback.

- Devil May Cry [13]
- Devil May Cry 2 [14]
- Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening [15]
- Devil May Cry 4 [16]
- DmC: Devil May Cry [17]
- Devil May Cry 5 [5]
- Bayonetta [18]
- Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance [19]
- Ninja Gaiden [20]

Plan

Task	Date
Game background research	2 nd , November, 2022
History of Devil May Cry and the genre	16 th , November, 2022
Analysis of development and iteration	30 th , November, 2022
Data analysis of game reviews	14 th , December, 2022
Literature review, challenge in games	4 th , January, 2023
Interim Viva	16 th , January, 2023
Mechanics and iteration in other games	1 st , February, 2023
Boss Fights and unique challenge	15 th , February, 2023
Study and comparison of high skill play	22 nd , February, 2023
Findings, conclusion	8 th , March, 2023
Final report hand in	26 th , April, 2023

Reference List

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<https://www.gdcvault.com/play/1012186/The-Psychology-of-Game-Design> (accessed Oct. 21, 2022).

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"How Devil May Cry's arcade inspirations shaped character action games," *Destructoid*, Mar. 10, 2019.
<https://www.destructoid.com/how-devil-may-crys-arcade-inspirations-shaped-character-action-games/>
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C. Lawson, "IGN Presents: Inside Devil May Cry Creator Hideki Kamiya's Secret Arcade," *IGN*, Sep. 15, 2014. <https://www.ign.com/articles/2014/09/15/ign-presents-inside-devil-may-cry-creator-hideki-kamiyas-secret-arcade> (accessed Oct. 21, 2022).

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Devil May Cry 5, Japan, Capcom, 2019

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"E3 2001: Interview with Shinji Mikami - IGN," *web.archive.org*, Oct. 18, 2022. <https://web.archive.org/web/20221018234208/https://www.ign.com/articles/2001/05/17/e3-2001-interview-with-shinji-mikami> (accessed Oct. 21, 2022).

[8]

C. G. Anderson, K. Campbell, and C. Steinkuehler, "Building persistence through failure," *Proceedings of the 14th International Conference on the Foundations of Digital Games*, Aug. 2019, doi: 10.1145/3337722.3337741.

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G. Reid, "Motivation in video games: a literature review," *The Computer Games Journal*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 70–81, Nov. 2012, doi: 10.1007/bf03395967.

[10]

J. G. Tichon, D. Tornqvist, J. G. Tichon, and D. Tornqvist, "Video Games: Developing Resilience, Competence, and Mastery," <https://services.igi-global.com/resolvedoi/resolve.aspx?doi=10.4018/978-1-4666-9986-1.ch011>, Jan. 01, 1AD. <https://www.igi-global.com/gateway/chapter/146910#pnlRecommendationForm> (accessed Oct. 21, 2022).

[11]

C. G. Anderson, "The Role of Failure and Mastery Orientation in a Challenging Video Game," *escholarship.org*, 2020. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/99k2x2d0> (accessed Oct. 21, 2022).

[12]

T. Agriogianis, "The Roles, Mechanics, and Evolution of Boss Battles in Video Games," *Undergraduate Honors College Theses 2016-*, Jan. 2018, Accessed: Oct. 21, 2022. [Online]. Available: https://digitalcommons.liu.edu/post_honors_theses/45/

[13]

Devil May Cry, Japan, Capcom, 2001

[14]

Devil May Cry 2, Japan, Capcom, 2003

[15]

Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening, Japan, Capcom, 2005

[16]

Devil May Cry 4, Japan, Capcom, 2008

[17]

DmC: Devil May Cry, Japan, Capcom, 2013

[18]

Bayonetta, Japan, PlatinumGames, 2009

[19]

Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance, Japan, PlatinumGames, 2013

[20]

Ninja Gaiden, Japan, Team Ninja, 2004

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GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

77 / 100

GENERAL COMMENTS

Instructor

(Brief marking criteria)

(20%) Research-informed Literature

Marks awarded for:

o Identifying what has already been done within the field

o Topic familiarity

o Literature review using appropriate sources - journal papers and book chapters rather than just web sites

o Selection of relevant models & concept

- Great use of quotes in the paper that are relevant to the project and promote our idea

- Good view to work already conducted in the field with a plan to address new ground.

- Good balance of sources and materials used to illustrate points, well done.

16/20 Marks Awarded

(20%) Knowledge and Understanding of Subject

o Explaining why this project is worth doing

o Description of how the work to be done by in the project relates to the work identified in the literature review

o Discussion of any ethical issues raised by the project

- A lot of consideration given to the reasoning and potential result of the project.
- Methodology of research noted with a plan on how to gather more information for the final piece.

15/20 Marks Awarded

(30%) Analysis

o Identification of a specific problem to be investigated

o Discussion of different ways in which the problem might be investigated

o Discussion of what the project needs to do in order to be a success

o Description of any deliverables that will be produced by the project

- Specific problem/question identified and dissected in a way that it could provide interesting insight into a pressing social issue that has wide reaching impacts.

- Project needs detailed clearly.

- Deliverables of project presented well.

- Strong ties to traditional video game based contextual studies, well done.

24/30 Marks Awarded

(15%) Practical Application and Deployment

o Well-defined aims and objectives o Clear statement of which research methods are to be used and why they are appropriate

o Clear statement of which analytical methods are to be used and why they are appropriate

o Clear statement of which tools are to be used and why they are appropriate

o List of any deliverables

o Clear planning chart showing both timing and resource use

o Limited and relevant appendices

- Aims and objectives very clear and concise. Gives a good view to the overall goals of the project.

- Clear research method statements

- Deliverables listed, could potentially go into more detail with the specifics in relation to any potential surveys conducted etc.

12/15 Marks Awarded

(15%) Skills for Professional Practice

o Correct spelling, grammar and punctuation

o Flow of narrative/fluency

o Coherence o Word processed

o Correct use of referencing with bibliography

o Strict word limit

- Skills for professional practice worked in well, watch for narrative flow throughout and ensure that the paper is written in a way that someone who has no idea about video games etc. can read and fully understand the topic.

- Good bibliography and referencing.

Note:

Good proposal, well done Brecon. My main piece of advice would be to not cast such a precise net at first. Aim for a wide reaching topic and slowly hone into your final point about 'Devil May Cry' for example. This will allow you to use things like Psychological studies on conditioning or reward based behavior potentially.

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