Lecture 4

Game Components
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Game Components
So You Want to Make a Game?

- Will assume you have a *design document*
  - Focus of next week and a half…
  - Building off the ideas of previous lecture

- But now you want to start building it
  - Need to assign tasks to the team members
  - Helps to break game into *components*
  - Each component being a logical unit of work.
Traditional Way to Break Up a Game

- **Game Engine**
  - Software, created primarily by programmers

- **Rules and Mechanics**
  - Created by the designers, with programmer input

- **User Interface**
  - Coordinated with programmer/artist/HCI specialist

- **Content and Challenges**
  - Created primarily by designers
Features of Game Engines

• Power the **graphics** and **sound**
  • 3D rendering or 2D sprites

• Power the **character** and strategic **AI**
  • Typically custom designed for the game

• Power the **physics** interactions
  • Must support collisions at a bare minimum

• Describe the **systems**
  • Space of possibilities in game world
Commercial Game Engines

- Libraries that take care of technical tasks
  - But *systems* always need some specialized code
  - Game studios buy *source code licenses*

- Is LibGDX a game engine?
  - It has libraries for graphics, physics, and AI
  - But you still have to provide code for *systems*

- Bare bones engine: *graphics + physics*
Game Engines: Graphics

• Minimum requirements:
  • Low level instructions for drawing
  • API to import artistic assets
  • Routines for manipulating images

• Two standard 3D graphics APIs
  • OpenGL: Unix, Linux, Macintosh
  • Direct3D: Windows

• For this class, our graphics engine is LibGDX
  • Supports OpenGL, but will only use 2D
Game Engines: Physics

- Defines physical attributes of the world
  - There is a gravitational force
  - Objects may have friction
  - Ways in which light can reflect
- Does **not** define precise values or effects
  - The direction or value of gravity
  - Friction constants for each object
  - Specific lighting for each material
Game Engines: Systems

- Physics is an example of a game **system**
  - Specifies the *space of possibilities* for a game
  - But not the *specific parameters* of elements

- Extra code that you add to the engine
  - Write functions for the possibilities
  - But do not code values or when called

- Separates programmer from **gameplay designer**
  - Programmer creates the system
  - Gameplay designer fills in parameters
Systems: Super Mario Bros.

- **Levels**
  - Fixed height scrolling maps
  - Populated by blocks and enemies

- **Enemies**
  - Affected by stomping or bumping
  - Different movement/AI schemes
  - Spawn projectiles or other enemies

- **Blocks**
  - Can be stepped on safely
  - Can be bumped from below

- Mario (and Luigi) can be small, big, or fiery
Traditional RPG Analogy: Engines

- Highest level decisions in the rulebooks
  - Dice mechanisms for entire system
  - Explanation of action types
  - Overview of spell, combat system
  - Statistical requirements for game entities

- SRD: System Reference Document
  - Feature of 3.x D&D (discontinued)
  - Allows creation of compatible games
Modern digital games borrow a lot from traditional RPGs.

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Characteristics of an Engine

- Broad, adaptable, and extensible
  - **Encodes** all *non-mutable* design decisions
  - **Parameters** for all *mutable* design decisions

- Outlines gameplay possibilities
  - Cannot be built independent of design
  - But only needs highest level information
  - **Gameplay specification** is sufficient
Data-Driven Design

- No code outside engine; all else is data
  - Purpose of separating system from parameters
  - Create game content with **level editors**

- **Examples:**
  - Art, music in industry-standard file formats
  - Object data in XML or other data file formats
  - Character behavior specified through scripts

- Major focus for alpha release
Rules & Mechanics

- Fills in the values for the system
  - Parameters (e.g. gravity, damage amounts, etc.)
  - Types of player abilities/verbs
  - Types of world interactions
  - Types of obstacles/challenges
- But does not include specific challenges
  - Just the list all challenges that could exist
  - Contents of the pallet for level editor
Rules: Super Mario Bros.

- **Enemies**
  - Goombas die when stomped
  - Turtles become shells when stomped/bumped
  - Spinys damage Mario when stomped
  - Piranha Plants aim fireballs at Mario

- **Environment**
  - Question block yields coins, a power-up, or star
  - Mushroom makes Mario small
  - Fire flower makes Mario big and fiery
Traditional RPG Analogy: Mechanics

- Engine + mechanics = core rulebooks
  - Material tailored to genre, setting
  - Less information than an adventure module
  - But enough to create your own adventures

- Vary the mechanics by genre
  - D&D: high fantasy
  - Star Wars: space opera
  - Top Secret: modern spy thriller
Game AI: Where Does it Go?

- Game AI is traditionally placed in **mechanics**
  - Characters need rules to make right choices
  - Tailor AI to give characters personalities
- But it is implemented by programmer
  - Complicated search algorithms
  - Algorithms should be in **game engine**
- Holy Grail: “AI Photoshop” for designers
  - Hides all of the hard algorithms
Interfaces

• Interface specifies
  • How player does things (player-to-computer)
  • How player gets feedback (computer-to-player)

• More than engine+mechanics
  • They just describe what the player can do
  • Do not specify how it is done

• Bad interfaces can kill a game
Interface: Dead Space
Traditional RPG Analogy: Interface

- Interface includes:
  - Character sheets
  - Pencils
  - Maps
  - Dice
  - Player voices

- Alternate interfaces for D&D
  - LARPing
  - Play-by-mail
Interface Tips

- Must consider input devices in design
  - For PC, typically mouse and keyboard
  - Game controllers have different “feel”

- Consider depth and width of interface
  - Details are best processed at the center of vision
  - Peripheral vision mostly detects motion

- Strive for “invisible” interface (metaphorically)
  - Familiarity is better than innovation
Content and Challenges

- **Content is** everything else

- **Gameplay** content define the actual game
  - Goals and victory conditions
  - Missions and quests
  - Interactive story choices

- **Non-gameplay** content affects player experience
  - Graphics and cut scenes
  - Sound effects and background music
  - Non-interactive story
Traditional RPG Analogy: Content

- Content is what creates an adventure
  - Could include adventure modules
  - But also includes the DM’s imagination
    - “Dealing with the exceptions” 90% of time
    - DM must quickly adapt to the players

- Ability to improvise provides another lesson:
  - Content should be easy to change as needed
  - Needs well-designed engine + mechanics + interface
Why the division?

- They are not developed sequentially
  - Content may requires changes to game engine
  - Interface is changing until the very end
- Intended to organize your design
  - **Engine**: decisions to be made early, hard-code
  - **Mechanics**: mutable design decisions
  - **Interface**: how to shape the user experience
  - **Content**: specific gameplay and level-design
Milestones Suggestions

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<th>Alpha</th>
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<td>Completed Game Engine</td>
<td>Mechanics (Implementation)</td>
<td>Interface (Functional Mock-up)</td>
<td>Interface (Polishing)</td>
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Design Elements
Summary

- Game is divided into four components
  - Should keep each in mind during design
  - Key for distributing work in your group
- But they are all interconnected
  - System/engine limits your possible mechanics
  - Content is limited by the type of mechanics
- Once again: design is iterative