

Game Design

6

Dramatic Elements

What Are Games Made Of?

- Formal Elements – define the structure of a game
 - Players, Objectives, Procedures, Rules, Resources, Conflict, Boundaries, Outcome
- Dramatic Elements
 - Challenge, Play, Premise, Character, Story, World Building, The Dramatic Arc
- System Dynamics
 - Games as Systems, System Dynamics, Interacting with Systems, Tuning Game Systems



Dramatic Elements

- Formal elements create a game-like experience
 - For a game to be “good”, it has to engage and invest the player(s)
- Dramatic elements give context to gameplay
 - To create more engaging games, we need to understand how dramatic elements create engagement

Dramatic Elements

- Dramatic Elements
 - Challenge
 - Play
 - Premise
 - Character
 - Story
 - World Building
 - The Dramatic Arc

Challenge

- How do we define challenge without referring to individual experience?



Challenge

- Most players are engaged by challenges
 - Not simply something hard to do, but
 - Tasks that are satisfying to complete by providing a sense of accomplishment and fun
- Challenges are
 - Individualized
 - Dynamic

Challenge vs. Difficulty

- Is there any difference?



Challenge vs. Difficulty

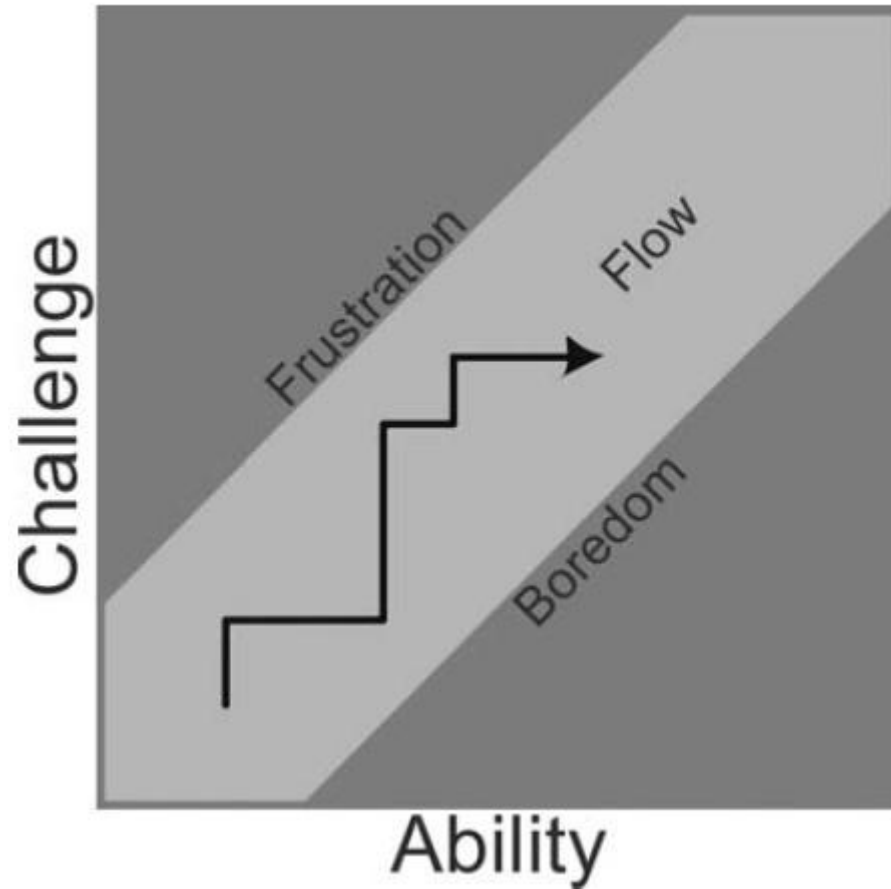
- Is there any difference?
 - Definitely!



Challenge

- Most people describe challenge similarly [1]
 - Begin with tasks you have a chance to complete
 - Concentrate on what you are doing
 - Task has clear goals
 - Task has immediate feedback
 - Immersion
 - Control over your actions
 - Sense of self disappears during the experience but is stronger after it finishes
 - Sense of time is altered

Challenge – Flow[1]



Play



Play



Play

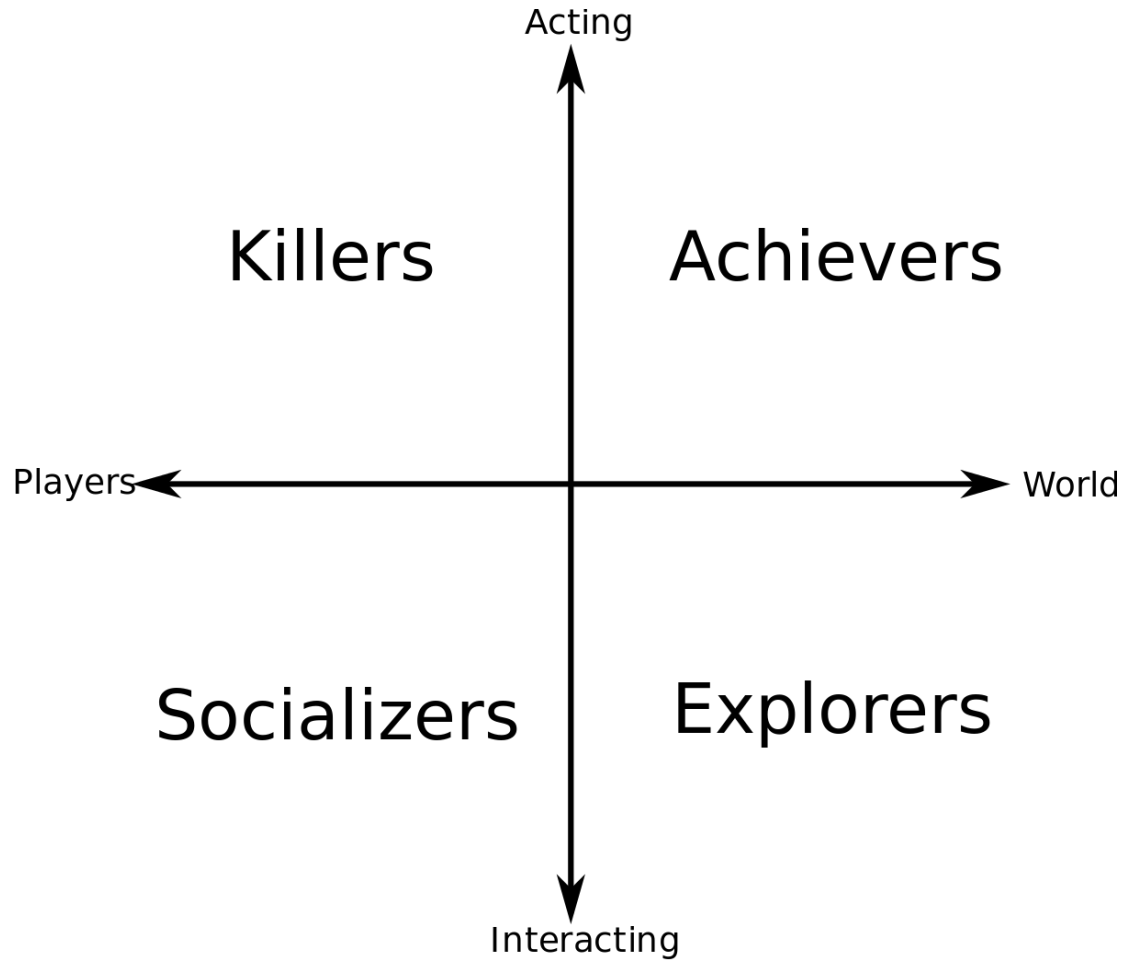
- Freedom of movement within a rigid structure
 - Rules of games are the rigid structure
 - Players are free to act within those rules
 - Play has many faces [1]

	Free-form play (<i>paida</i>)	Rule-based play (<i>ludus</i>)
Competitive play (<i>agón</i>)	Unregulated athletics (foot racing, wrestling)	Boxing, billiards, fencing, checkers, football, chess
Chance-based play (<i>alea</i>)	Counting-out rhymes	Betting, roulette, lotteries
Make-believe play (<i>mimicry</i>)	Children's initiations, masks, disguises	Theater, spectacles in general
Vertigo play (<i>ilinx</i>)	Children "whirling," horseback riding, waltzing	Skiing, mountain climbing, tightrope walking

Players

- Bartle's Taxonomy
 - Classifies players by what they want from a game
 - Achievers
 - Explorers
 - Socializers
 - Killers

Players – Bartle's Taxonomy



Players – D&D Example



Players – D&D Example

- Players vs. Audience Members
- **Robin Laws** – Types of players in D&D
 - The Power Gamer (MinMax-ers)
 - The Butt Kicker (Murder hobo)
 - The Tactician (Planners)
 - The Specialist (plays the same type of character)
 - The Actor (role players)
 - The Storyteller
 - The Casual Gamer

Premise



Premise

- Traditional elements of drama to create player engagement
 - Tied to the formal game elements
 - At the lowest level, establish the action of the game within the setting
 - Time and place
 - Main character(s) and their objectives
 - Action that advances the story

Character



Character

- Character are there to fill our games with life
- Several ways to create characters
 - Psychological – mirrors the audience's desires and fears
 - Representative – mirror a group of people
 - Historic – real world figures

Character

- Player Character (PC) vs. Non Player Character(NPC)
 - The PC creates conflict that drives story
 - NPCs fill out the world and act or react to the player
- Game characters are similar to characters in other media

Character

- Features unique to game characters:
 - Agency – a representation of the player in game
 - Empathy – attachment of a player to the character
- Characters vs. Avatars
 - Characters are usually predesigned, have a back story, motivation, etc.
 - Avatars are player created, allow for roleplaying, customization, etc.

Character

Character

Avatar



Story



Story

- The outcome of a game must be uncertain
 - Just like the first time you read a story
- Integrating story into your game
 - Story chapters separated by gameplay, but which are not affected by gameplay result
 - Allow the game to change the story according to player action (e.g. branching storyline)
 - Emergent storyline

Story



EA Sports



World Building

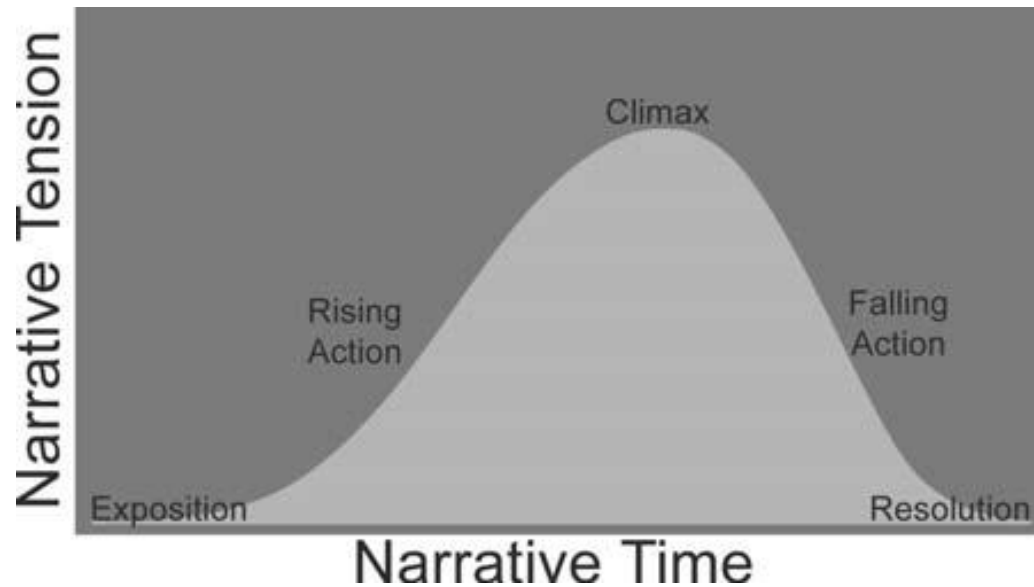
- Deep and elaborate design of a fictional world
 - Maps
 - History
 - Culture of inhabitants
 - Government
 - Politics
 - Economies
 - Etc.

World Building



The Dramatic Arc

- Drama is Conflict followed by Resolution (Release)
- The classic dramatic arc [1]



The Dramatic Arc

- In a game, the most important thing about drama is that conflict and resolution are in the hands of the player
 - When a player resolves the conflict, there is a sense of personal accomplishment on top of the emotional response

Case Study

- The Witcher 3 – Wild Hunt
 - Challenge
 - Play
 - Premise
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Challenge



Play



Wait! With wine must we toast this moment joyful.

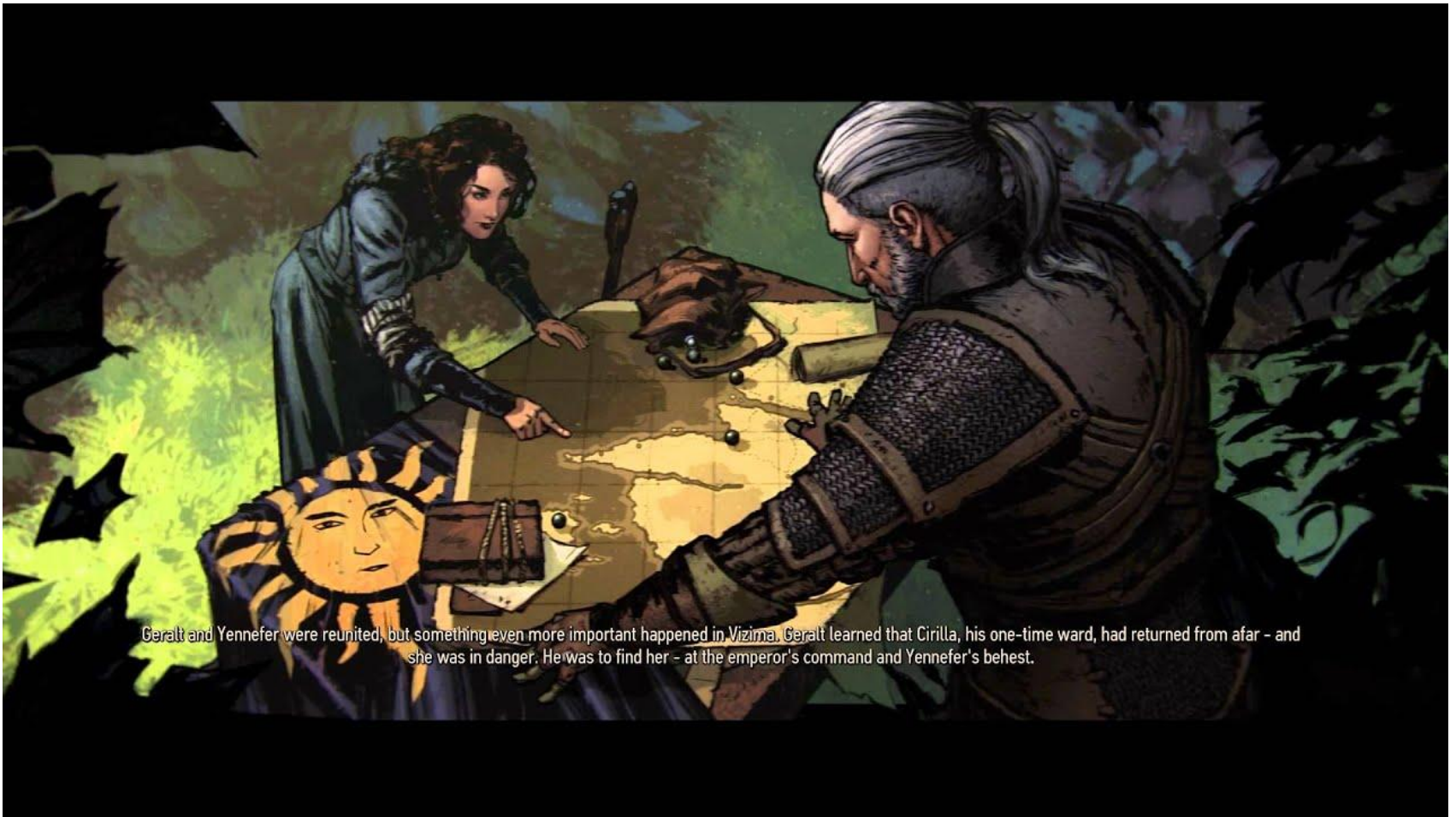
Premise



Character



Story



Geralt and Yennefer were reunited, but something even more important happened in Vizima. Geralt learned that Cirilla, his one-time ward, had returned from afar - and she was in danger. He was to find her - at the emperor's command and Yennefer's behest.

World Building



Bibliography

1. Fullerton, T., Game Design Workshop: A Playcentric Approach to Creating Innovative Games, CRC Press, 2014