

The good, the bad, and the killer (Cover Blown)

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The good, the bad, and the killer was a prototype which was meant as an outset for our semester project. We were asked to focus on prototyping the game loop of the game. We made two different prototypes which tested different aspects of the core loop. In this essay I will explain the ideas behind these prototypes and what they sought to uncover.

Since this design challenge was not focused in any direction, the design process for these prototype ended up being a bit different from the previous challenges. Previously our hands were pretty tied in what kind of things that was possible to do, but with this prototype we could pretty much do anything. Our starting point for the prototype was that we wanted to make a board game where players received information through phone calls. We had an idea that it would be quite enjoyable and different to receive phone calls and trying to listen to information while playing a game. It was also pretty clear that if the calls were to make any sense, then people would have to receive different information, and there should probably be some conflicting information, either because players lied or because players received contradicting information. We identified a game loop that we wanted to prototype together with the idea of receiving phone calls. The loop goes as follows:

1. Receive hidden information
2. Discuss information
3. Decide on an action
4. See result of action
5. goto 1.

Our first prototype ended up with the following rules. Put four pieces papers in front of three players, the pieces has different colors. A game master leaves the room and starts to call the players with information like: "You win if you get the red piece of paper" and "You loose if Magnus gets the green piece of paper." The players then have distribute the papers among them within a time limit. We found the game quite enjoyable to play. People where laughing when they received phone calls and some blushed when lying. However it was also quite clear that the discussion phase of the game loop felt quite arbitrary. We thought it was probably due to the fact, that players had very little information as a basis for their decisions.

Trying to improve the discussion phase of the game turned out to be more difficult than I expected. I believe it is because that even though game loops

might serve nicely for a way of analyzing and talking about a game, it is a not really suitable to use actively as a part of the design phase. At least we could not simply take the discussion phase and replace it with something else, or change the discussion phase without also changing the other phases. In order to have information that was something meaningful to discuss, we had to figure out:

- What information exists in the game? Which also mean we had to figure out what exists in the game.
- What kind of information can lead to discussions?
- How much information does a player receive?
- Is the received information trustworthy or not?
- What actions can a players perform from the information?

This means that a phase of game loop can not be seen is a independent thing, but that it is highly coupled with the rest of the phases in the loop. We tried a couple of different kind of information all build with the "Who is who?" in mind.

Another problem with designing with a game loop in mind is, that some ideas is not easily described as part of a game loop. Some of the group members came up with the idea that at any point during the game, a player could stand up and shoot another player. We all thought this was a pretty cool idea, since it both added tension to the game and opened up for hero, anti-hero and Mexican standoff scenarios. However it is an idea that is hard to describe as part of a game loop, since shooting another player is something that might happen in any phase. A player can be shoot another player if she:

1. Receives a certain information.
2. Dislikes an argument.
3. Dislikes the decision the other players makes.
4. Finds the result of the decision suspicious.

We modeled the shooting mechanic as a parallel game loop which somehow works, but I am beginning to see game loops as more of a theoretical exercise than something useful for doing actual design.

In this essay I have described the game loop we designed for our prototype and why it ended up the way it did. I have also argued that I only initially found the concept of a game loop useful. I think that loops might be a good starting point for a design or discussion, but it is difficult to use when finer design decisions has to be made.