The Five Essentials of Every Game

This list is aggregated from a few resources on the fundamentals of game design. In concept, every game requires these five elements. In practice, there may be ways to design engaging experiences without adhering to this list. However, this framework is flexible enough to apply to just about every game that has been imagined. If you employ this framework in the evaluation of game designs, you will not only be able to understand the game quickly, you will be able to identify improvements in design.

Competition:

Competition is our goal in the game. It is often set by a marker and it is evaluated by the distance from that marker. Competition often involves a goal and a natural obstruction to the goal. In a race, players compete to be the first to reach a destination (marker).

Implements:

Implements are what we use to eliminate the obstruction to our goal. In non-digital gameplay, implements are the balls, bats, and game pieces we use to accomplish our goals. In digital gameplay implements refer to the simulated items used to accomplish the goal. For a third person shooter, the avatar's gun is the implement, not the mouse we use to communicate the action.   In this case, the mouse is more of a technique, in the way a pitcher might use their left or right arm to throw a ball.

Territory:

Territory is the physical or theoretical parameters of the game. It defines the boundaries of the game, and helps determine where play ends and the rest of life begins. Conventional territories include a play field, the board of a board game, or the virtual space of a third-person shooter.

Inventory:

Inventory refers to the items players accumulate during play. In digital games, inventory elements often include points, mana, and currency. Inventory is anything the player accumulates as an indication of success or failure in the game environment. In the Project Gotham racing franchise, the inventory includes is Kudos, which the player acquires when they drift or skid the car well.

Rules:

Rules dictate how the other four elements will be used. Rules establish the relationship between competition, implements, territory and inventory. Rules are what distinguish baseball from cricket or dodge ball from soccer.

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