

CSE 197: Computer Game Design



Demet Metan

Jhumur Halder

Nor Hidayah Binte Mohd Amin

Lehigh University

Description of Game

FATE is a single player role playing game (RPG) for PC produced by WildTangent in 2005. It is rated E10+ for mild fantasy violence.

The game takes place in the town of Grove, where the Dungeon Gate leads would-be adventurer to multiple levels of fame, fortune, and death. The player assumes the role of the adventurer and is assigned to a randomized quest at the beginning of the game that will take them deep into the dungeon.

FATE contains many elements of Rogue-like games. In particular, it has been compared to Diablo and Diablo II, and bears many similarities to the earlier games. The game is viewed from an isometric perspective. The dungeon, treasures and monsters are randomly generated. Certain items contain sockets, into which the player can put special gems in order to customize the item.

The player is accompanied by a pet, which can initially be chosen as a cat or dog. This pet fights on behalf of the player, and can also carry items. It can be sent back to town in order to sell unwanted findings. The player can transform the pet into various forms by feeding it fish (which can be caught in various bodies of water or purchased from Pikko the fisherman).

Along the way, there are many randomized side-quests that the player can obtain from the various townfolks of Grove. These side-quests earn the player gold, experience, and fame. Experience and fame can be used to advance his attributes and skills. There are no set character classes. Instead, the player chooses which skills to focus on and develops a custom character and a cat or dog of their very own. The avatar's increase in skills, experience and fame helps the player to progress into the lower levels of the dungeon, therefore helps him to achieve his final goal in level 49.

If the player completes the main quest he received at the beginning of the game, he is given the option to retire the current character, and start play over again with a descendant of the

first character. The descendant gets various perks and bonuses, including one item that is handed down from its ancestor. If a player chooses not to retire, he can advance their characters and go as deep into the dungeon as they like.

Game classification according to Artificial Intelligence:

	Deterministic	Chance
Perfect Information		
Imperfect Information		FATE

FATE is an imperfect information and chance game. The player does not know all the information about the current state of game. He does not have perfect information as to where the monster will strike from or what strength or magic the monster has. The chance element occurs when the player dies, and Destiny Master will present 3 options to the player. Each option has consequences such as the player will need to compensate Destiny Master with a certain amount of gold coins for reviving him to full health. The player will need to decide which option to take. Each option has a chance element. He will not know what the ‘nearby level’ Destiny Master promises to transport him to; it could be a level lower or higher than the current level before he dies. In the last option, Destiny Master gives player the chance to go to 3 upper levels (easier levels) in return for the player’s entire gold.

Is there meaningful play in FATE?

FATE is a meaningful play, because actions are discernable and integrated in the whole game and outcome occurs. Meaningful play emerges from the relation between player action and system outcome.

Player: action → System: responds

Discernable: The outcome of an action is communicated in a perceivable way.

In FATE, after the player takes any action, something happens or there is always an outcome (good or bad). In the encounter scenes, the player has to hit the monsters. If the player manages to hit them, a bar appears on the top center of the screen. That bar indicates the monsters' health level and the player will be able to know the 'damage' he has caused. Therefore, the action of hitting the monsters has a discernable outcome.

Integrated: Another component of meaningful play requires that the relationship between action and outcome is integrated into the larger context of the game. An action taken by the player has not only immediate significance in the game, but also affects the player's experience at a later stage in the game.

In FATE, the player is given a task. He can choose to take or decline the task. But if he takes the task and accomplishes it, he will be rewarded upon returning to the town of Grove. He will get better weapons, gold and fame from the people who gave the task to him. Hence, his achievements help him to be more powerful and allow him to progress to the other levels easily. They will also assist him to accomplish the final task of the game in level 49. Thus, FATE is an integrated game. However, there is an occasion in the beginning where there is an example of non-integration. Before the player plays the game, he needs to choose the gender of the avatar. The choice of the avatar does not affect the player's abilities and skills. Choice of gender does not play a role in the game. Therefore, this part of the game is not integrated with the whole of the game.

Is it a Game?

A game is a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules that result in a quantifiable outcome.

System: A system is a set of things that affect one another with an environment to form a larger pattern that is different from any of the individual parts. In FATE, all the levels contribute to the whole of the game system. The player goes through the dungeons and experiences the elements in the system. He will gain skills, experience, as well as get weapons, gold, etc during his adventure.

Players: One or more participants actively play in a game. Players interact with the system of a game in order to experience the play of the game. However, FATE is a single player game in which he is cast as a character in an imaginary world. The player controls and evolves a character over time within a narrative setting. For instance, in FATE, the player is responsible for getting rid of all the monsters which threaten the town of Grove.

Artificial Conflict: Games maintain a boundary from the “real life” in both time and space. Although games occur within the real world, the player engages into an artificial life which consists of artificial conflicts. This is one of their defining features a game. All games embody a contest of powers. The contest can take many forms, from cooperation to completion, from solo conflict with a game system to multiplayer social conflict. Conflict is central to games. In FATE, the artificial conflict is between the player and computer-generated monsters.

Rules: Rules provide the structure out of which play emerges, by demarcating what the player can and cannot do. In FATE, the player has to find the stairs to change the level. Another rule is that the player cannot change the avatar once he has chosen and started playing the game.

Quantifiable outcome: Games have a quantifiable outcome. At the end of the game, the player has either won or lost. The final quantifiable outcome in FATE occurs at level 49 where the

player either wins or dies. Therefore, there is no single quantifiable outcome each time the player plays the game except gaining levels and progressing in the game.

Game as a system

A system is defined as parts affecting one another in the environment. A system is made up of elements and dimensions. The four elements are objects, attributes (properties), internal relationship and the environment while three dimensions refer to the formal system, experiential system and cultural system. In FATE, four elements and their dimensions are explained as follows:

	Formal system	Experiential system	Cultural system
Objects	The avatar in the game	The player	The entire game
Attributes (properties)	Character skills such as magic, vitality, dexterity and strength points	State of the game Avatar the player controls	Designed elements (Origin of FATE comes from Diablo)
Internal Relationship	Actual position of the avatar in the game (the level he is in)	Strategic interaction Psychological (the player is surprised seeing multiple monsters)	Hero Mages Helpers Town folks (Minstrel, Rikko the Enchanter...)
Environment	Actual game play (Dungeons, Town of Grove...)	Context of play (Computer wants player to perish)	Adventurous personality, Heroism

Interactivity

Anatomy of Choice

	<i>Anatomy of choice</i>	<i>FATE</i>
1	What happened before the player was given the choice?	Represented by the current position and voice effects that explain the situation of the game elements. E.g. "You have perished" or "You have died".
2	How is the possibility of choice conveyed to the player? (external event)	The possible actions are conveyed through the persistent button controls as well as the state of the screen that explain the choices and their outcomes.
3	How did the player make the choice? (internal event)	The player makes the choice by pressing one of the three buttons that appears on the screen.
4	What is the result of the choice? How will it affect the future choices? (internal event)	<p>Each button pressed affects the system in a different way immediately and the game sends the player to a different level or sends him to the same level to continue. These levels vary in difficulty.</p> <p>According to the choice made, not only does the level but the amount of gold the player have change. This affects his fame, weapons, health and mana potions he can buy.</p> <p>If the player loses all his money on the choice, he may change his future choice of attacking or not attacking right away.</p>
5	How is the result of the choice conveyed to the player? (external event)	The result of the choice is represented to player via text message on the screen that informs him of the level he is being sent to.

Parts where no meaningful play is achieved:

The fifth question (“How is the result of the choice conveyed to the player?”) was not appropriately considered by the designer of FATE. The level that the player is being sent to is not presented to him before his transportation. He does not get the chance to prepare himself for the level he is going. Sometimes, when the player is sent to more difficult levels and does not expect to confront more monsters, he finds it very difficult to win that fight.

How would we resolve this problem?

Perhaps, a text message can be added to inform the player the level he is being sent to. This message can be added when the program is loading. This way, that player would know the level he is going and prepare mentally for it.

Perhaps we can program the system to avoid placing the monsters at the same exact spot that player lands on so that he does not have to fight them as soon as he arrives to the new level. It would be much better to prepare for an attack by summoning vampire bats, skeletons and wyvern. Before coming close to the monsters, the player needs to place the health potions into the shortcut buttons like 1, 2, 3 and arranges shortcut magic buttons like F1, F2, F3. In this way, he will have a greater chance to defeat the monsters whenever he lands on a different level.

The Magic Circle & The Primary Schemas

The Magic Circle of a game is the space within which the game takes place. In FATE, the magic circle is explicit as it has formal rules that set distinct boundaries for the player. These formal rules guide the play of the game. FATE is a closed system game whereby we consider it as a system of rules prior to the actual involvement of players. It is a RPG game that is not based on any specific culture.

The schema of the game refers to the way of organizing and framing knowledge. In other words, it is a way that the mind acquires, represents and transforms knowledge. The primary schemas are Rules, Play and Culture.

Rules are formal schemas that constitute the intrinsic mathematical structures of games. In FATE, the player is bound by rules that he must adhere to in order to advance to the next level. When the player and the monster attack each other and hit each other, the system will compute the damages of both sides and regulate the health levels of both the player and the monsters accordingly (this is the mathematical structure of the game).

Play is an experimental primary schema that emphasizes the player's interaction with the game. For instance, in FATE, when the player gains experience and increases his character skills, he becomes more powerful and this translates into his confidence to go on to difficult levels and confront dangerous monsters.

Culture is a contextual primary schema and highlights the cultural contexts in which any game is embedded. FATE allows the player to bring out his adventurous streak when he embarks on his journey into the dungeon. Man is by instinct a hunter. FATE allows him to exercise his hunting instincts by killing monsters and indirectly help the townfolks of Grove.

Operational, Constitutive and Implicit Rules

As with other forms of games, FATE does have similar characteristics such as:

1. Rules limit player action
2. Rules are explicit and unambiguous
3. Rules are shared by all players
4. Rules are fixed
5. Rules are binding
6. Rules are repeatable

The operational rules of FATE are as follows:

1. In order to start playing, the player needs to choose an avatar and a pet as well as deciding on the difficulty level (Page, Adventure, Hero or Legend) he wants to play.
2. The player starts from level 1 by going into the Gate in the town of Grove.
3. In order to win the game, the player has to accomplish the main goal which is to kill *Dragoneater the Elite Ettin Barbarian* at level 49.
4. The Player has to drink health potions to refresh himself when his health is close to zero.

The constitutive rules of FATE are as follows:

1. The computer will compute and keep track of player's experience and skills.
2. The computer will also compute and keep track of the damage caused by the player – according to the following formula:

$$\text{Damage} = \text{Attack Base} + \text{Weapon Bonus} - \text{Opponent's Defense}$$

The implicit rules of FATE are as follows:

1. The player needs a computer and a mouse before playing
2. The player needs to install FATE CD-ROM.
3. The player has to sit in front of a computer to play.

Game as Information Theory System

Information Theory studies signal transmission from a source to a target. Part of this process is noise or distortion that enters into the signal from an outside source. Very often, noise will increase the uncertainty and the amount of information in a message. Redundancy in the system will balance out noise by ensuring that not every component of a message is necessary.

In FATE, there are several information redundancies. For example, the health bar on the screen will indicate the highs and lows of the player's state of health. However, there is an accompanying audio that will voice out "*Your health is low*". The same happens when the Mana bar indicates a low level. The information redundancies serve to reinforce knowledge that the player might overlook in his excitement when playing the game.

Fortunately in FATE, there is no noise in information. The absence of noise is planned as part of the game design to facilitate younger players who might otherwise be confused with the extra information.

Game as Information Systems

Games as Information System refers to knowledge. Depending on the game, information can be randomized, acquired, transformed, hidden, rearranged, remembered or forgotten. Perfect information exists in a game when all players have complete knowledge about every element in the game at all times. In games of imperfect information, some of the information may be hidden from players during the game.

There are four kinds of Information:

1. ***Information known to all players***

FATE is a single player game whereby the player knows the level he is in, the gold he has acquired etc.

2. ***Information known to only one player***

In FATE, the player knows what kind of weapons he has with him and in his inventory. This information is only known to him. The player's character skills and spells he has learnt are only known to him.

3. ***Information known to the game only***

Like many digital games, FATE has locations and features that are hidden to player at the beginning of a game. These features will be slowly revealed throughout play. The hidden information that is gradually revealed through play is the map. Only the game knows the complete map and the paths leading to the dungeons.

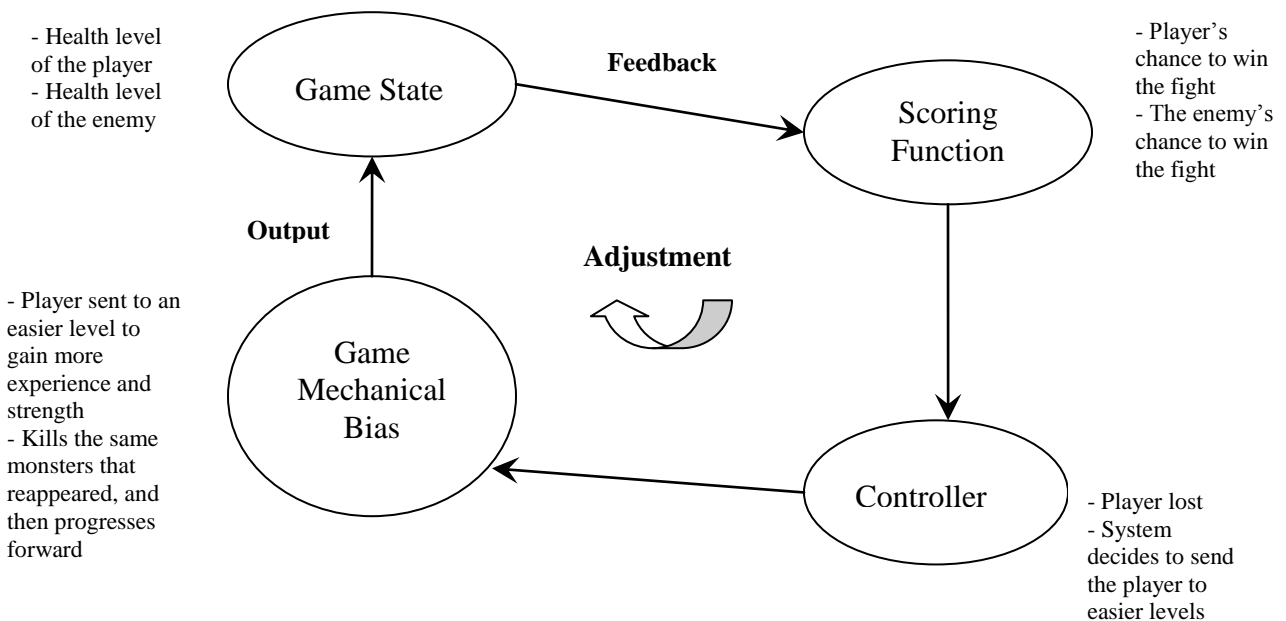
4. ***Randomly generated information***

The computer has randomly placed the monsters that the player needs to kill in each level. He must search throughout the Dungeons and fight them.

Game as Cybernetic Systems

FATE has negative feedback system as well as positive feedback. In terms of negative feedback, when the player dies, the system sends him to more difficult levels from the previously easier levels that he had visited. When the game sends the player to the upper levels in the dungeon, it takes more time for him to get back to the level that he was in and therefore it takes more time to reach his final destination. This negative feedback prolongs the game as well as magnifies the late successes. The player cannot just progress quickly and reach the final goal and finish the game.

Important Note: Upper levels in the dungeon are easy levels (Level 1, 2, 3). Lower levels of the dungeon are more difficult. The more the player progresses in the game, he must go to lower levels like 30, 31, 32... The final task being is in level 49. He must reach Level 49 to finish the game.



When the player dies, the system sends him to an easier level to gain more experience and strength. These levels are the levels the player has already visited. However the monsters the player has killed before will reappear again. He has to kill the same monsters that he has previously killed. These monsters reappear so that the player can fight and gain experience. When he fights more, he gains more experience and if he fills up the experience level bar, he gains more points so that he can distribute to his strength, magic, and dexterity or vitality level. Thus, after killing these monsters, he will possess enough strength to move on and return to the level where he has died at the first time.

Another negative feedback is that the summoning will cost mana (magic portions) and the summon creatures last only one to two minutes depending on the level the player is in and how many magic points he has in his notebook of his character skills. When the duration of the summon creatures end, they disappear. This is a negative feedback that stabilizes the system and prolongs the game and the player's fight.

A positive feedback in the game is the fight scene in which the player encounters a powerful skeleton. When he attacks the skeleton, the skeleton will revive 4 more skeletons which make it much harder for the player to kill. This feedback makes the skeleton stronger and therefore harder to be killed. It destabilizes the system and magnifies the early success of the skeleton over the player.

Conclusion

FATE has been awarded Runner-Up 'RPG Game of 2005' by PC Gamer Magazine. It is undoubtedly an engaging game that has good 3D visual effects and haunting music that suit the mood of the game play. Its effective storyline and customizable character and pet designs with personalized names are among one of the boon of this game. Its powerful integration and well-designed user interface graphics remain the strength of the game. The game also enables the player to experience a state of 'Flow' and keeps him in the 'flow' as illustrated by Csikzentmihalyi (1990) "Flow Theory". The player who engages in FATE lose awareness of time and space since the game adjusts the challenges to the skills of the player.

There are however some downside to the game. The map given to the player on the screen is problematic and incomplete. It is also frustrating for the player who sometimes could not find the monsters in the dungeon and the stairways to the next level (although some gamer will argue that this aspect forms an adventure in itself). There is also no rule book that explains the rules of FATE. The player has to figure out the rules as he plays.

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