Game Design Publication Review
Game Mechanics: Advanced Game Design
(Ernest Adams, Joris Dormans)

Game Design II   PA216
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I have chosen the book Game Mechanics: Advanced Game Design, as it does have the word "Advanced" in its name and I was hoping to read a book that would not re-explain to me stuff that I already know. Fortunately, the book gets *advanced* pretty quick and although there was significant overlap with the *PA215* and *PA216* courses in some areas (such as the entire Chapter 2, "Emergence and Progression"), it often does point out quite interesting views on the subject matter. The book also often explains the workings of internal economies of existing games, such as Civilization and Starcraft, and while I have played most of them, I often did not give much thought to the reasons behind many design choices in them.

The first three chapters explain the basics of game mechanics and the key differences between different types of them, as well as the relationship between game mechanics complexity and the complexity of the game as a whole. The book also points out how the game rules can be adjusted to put more or less emphasis on the emergent structures in them and how these two ways of creating challenges can be balanced in different game genres. As previously mentioned, this part of the book overlaps with the PA216 course, however I still found the examples from existing games valuable, as well as the closer view on the actual methods in which the two elements can be balanced in games.

Chapters 4 through 7 then describe the economies found in many, usually strategic, games. Basic actors of these economies (drains, sources, converters, traders) are introduced and described, as well as the consequences of changing the balance between them and between their relationships. The book then introduces the Machinations language to model and simulate game mechanics and economies. I have to say that the book has more-or-less failed to convince me of the benefits of using such a language to describe game mechanics in an actual game, as I often found it harder to use than a verbal description of the rules. However, I believe that the language can be of use while balancing the rules in some types of games. Chapters 6 and 7 then use the Machinations tool to describe more and more abstract actors of internal economies based on the basic actors, as well as their roles in existing games. While I have been familiar with many of these patterns over the many games I have played, the book sometimes pointed out the ways how these patterns can be used for different results that I have previously not thought about.

Chapter 8 then describes how Machinations can be used for gathering statistics about runs of the game specified by the diagrams to balance games, and how these statistics can be used for finding superior strategies.

Chapter 9 proved to be one of the more interesting for me, as half of it is actually oriented on designing a strategic game using the described approach, as well as adding more complex rules to it. Seeing such a process was rather valuable for me, as it was quite different from the ways I have been designing games in the past.

Chapters 10 and 11 focus on building levels and creating progression from the basic rule blocks, as well as describing the different ways of how progress can be implemented in games. The book often uses Machinations to describe the different patterns, which was, in my opinion, sometimes doing more harm than good, as it tends to overcomplicate things a bit (although they would probably be beneficial to

readers who actually have not played that many games as I had). The book also focuses on different phases of games.

Chapter 12 focuses on how the game mechanics can be used to convey messages to the players, also using some quite interesting examples (such as *September 12* and *Train*). While this chapter was also quite interesting, in my opinion, it sometimes did over explain things that are quite clear to anyone who has played these games, although, again, might be new for the ones who did not.

Overall, the book has mostly shown me a more "scientific" way of looking at the game mechanics I already am familiar with in the games that I have already played, although I think that this angle will be valuable for me in designing my future games. At the same time, the book sometimes over-explains things that I think are clear to anyone who plays games – what, hopefully, most of the people who design games, are.