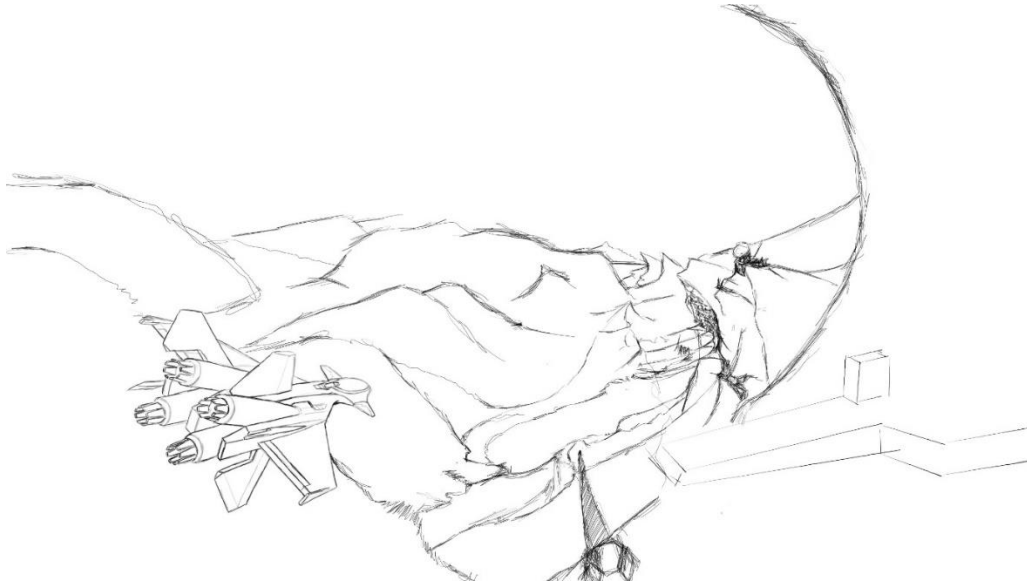


GGP

ASSIGNMENT 1 - IDENTIFYING PROFESSIONAL CONSIDERATIONS



17 May 2020, Digital drawing of airplane model "Tourist" approaching a city built over a canyon, GGP

Part 1: The Project

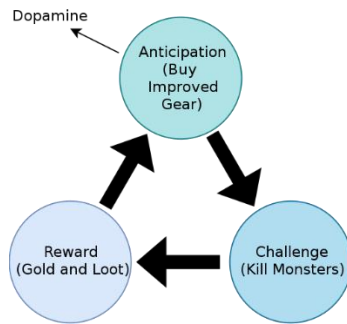
The project is called GGP (Gears Grind Project). GGP is about merging two videogames into the same virtual world, so we have three main projects: two in the front-end ¹ (the videogames) and one back-end (the virtual world). The first video game is a third person arial combat game, where you are a pilot and must manage an inventory of weapons, upgrades, aircraft components. In the second game you play as an artificial neural network (builder AI in short) able to morph the landscape. You can order to build structures on a base, make other bases, send units on a quest of collecting resources, make pacts with other players, or obliterate them. As mentioned, pilots and builder AIs play in the same virtual world, and they can interact with each other in

¹ Software in the font-end is directly used by the players, while back-end software meant to interact with other software behind the scenes.

different ways, but detailing this further does not contribute to *Part 2*, so I will have to limit it—sadly!

Part 2: The Essay

As the project name suggests, the concept of “grinding” is emphasized. Grinding, in games, is the repeated killing of enemies, or completion of quests, to obtain rewards. Gears Grind would feature the possibility to go around places and take out computer-controlled enemies. Upon death, these enemies would drop certain items with different probabilities, depending on the characteristics of the enemy. A similar mechanic is devised for the strategy game: you would be able to pillage computer-generated outposts to gain random rewards.



"A typical compulsion loop for a video game", (Masem, 2020), based on (Samson, 2017).

The problem here is that the element of chance could get people into a gambling problem. Video games are deliberately designed to get you into what is called *compulsion loop* (Kim, 2014): a self-sustaining chain of activities that will promise you a reward if you kill enemies. Furthermore, with rats and pigeons, there is evidence that we can bring more lasting response pattern to an activity if the rate of the reward, instead of being certain, is *variable* (C. B. Ferster, 1957).

Randomness, albeit controversial, has been used everywhere since a long time (Hopson, 2001). It is nothing new. However, it does not mean it is a harmless thing to do. We have seen the featuring of 'loot boxes' in many AAA titles ². The money that goes around is considerable. For example, in *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive* (CSGO), you can get a special knife to use during matches by opening 'containers' (FANDOM Games Community, 2021). In 2017, as per request of China's Ministry of Culture, we understood that the probability of getting an ultra-rare item (a knife) was roughly 0.26% (CSGO 国服, 2017) (u/oOMeowthOo, 2017). The price of a crate key in 2017, in the US, was \$2.50. We can see here what is essentially gambling: to spend money without knowing the result of the outcome. A report commissioned by GambleAware has concluded that there is indeed a link in terms of psychology between video games having this "loot box" mechanic and traditional gambling (James Close, 2021).

² "AAA", pronounced "triple A", is informally conferred to games released by medium or large video game companies.

But there is a difference in GGP. It was not intended to ask players for money. The first release was planned to be MIT licensed, where people could look at the code, see what is happening, and maybe host their own servers. However, instead of using money, players are using their time. I argue that this could be gambling as well. Players are using something of value (their time) to see if one day they can have the luck of getting that specific, rare item. Furthermore, in-game trading was in plan. Players could ascribe a monetary value to the items, which would meet the criteria for gambling according to UK's 2005 Gambling Act.

However, releasing the product with a MIT license would clear me from a certain degree of responsibility, as it disclaims that the product is given 'as is' without warranty of any kind (SPDX Workgroup, 2018), but in a guest lecture for this *Professional Issues* course, Professor Shannon Vallor talked about being *answerable*: I have a choice on what kind of product I would like to release into the world, and the kind of product I release will affect my reputation. Therefore, even though there might not be legal consequences, I could incur into a social cost.

Governments found the pressure to act on this problem. In Europe, some countries have decided to enforce an age rating (James Close, 2021), but it does not seem that age restriction is appropriately followed. Back in 2005, it was hard to miss adolescents owning a copy of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, despite it being age rated as 18+. Other countries have outlawed the games featuring gambling on their territory (James Close, 2021). The UK Government has decided to review their Gambling Act to see if certain video games should be regulated (UK Government, 2020).

But how much should we attribute to games the tendency to fall into a gambling problem? Another factor at play could be the specific fragility that a person has. It is true that the videogame has an influence, but it is hoped for there to be an equilibrium in the psychosocial context (American Psychological Association, 2020). However, the more a developer stresses this gambling mechanic, the more they could bring a dysfunction to this equilibrium. There could also be a generational

gap where parents are unaware of the risks their children are facing.

To conclude, it is a real concern for people to be sucked into games in an unhealthy manner, as there is a connection between video games and gambling if you use things like 'loot boxes', and there are aspects part of GGP that may be classified as gambling. If not legal, there is a social responsibility to not take advantage of this.

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