

Noughts and Crosses: A Monopoly Game

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Introduction

This is an ongoing project that started as an exercise to introduce the concepts and methods of game design. The objective was to turn a just-for-fun game into a serious game. The chosen game was Noughts and Crosses (NaC).

The process started by choosing and classifying a well-known game in terms of its basic elements (e.g. rules, objectives, number of players) to better visualize its scope. After this, it was about to change some of those elements, while using an iterative process: define, play (test), evaluate and repeat.

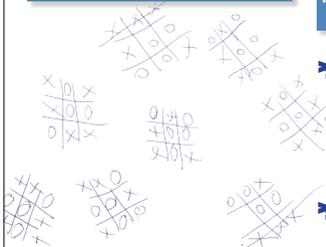
Changing the Rules

Original NaC

- Very stiff and static
- usually played as paper-and-pencil game
- played symbols not move

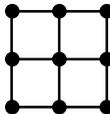
Adapted NaC

- Flexible and loose
- physical game: in a board and with two sets of game pieces
- allow the players to move the game pieces played
- limit the number of the game pieces (three for each player) to allow more movement



Similar to one variation known as "Three Men's Morris":

This game uses a different board with lines and dots, and can have an optional rule in which played pieces can only move to an adjacent point.



This optional rule is interesting, as while playing the NaC with the above rules, it was felt the necessity to change something to keep the game amusing as it was starting to be monotonous.

New Rule

- Restrict the time a game piece can be in the central square of the board by 2 turns (on the 3rd turn, the player has to move it out).
- More dynamic, as the central place is very desired and one needs to think two turns ahead



Finding the Theme and Genre

A serious game implies a purpose besides entertainment.

This game was adapted to critique money accumulation, and the concept of wealth generates wealth. A real-life positive feedback loop.

New Rules

- the game would need to have more than one match
- each time a player wins a match it wins a new game piece to play

In this new game, when a player wins a match, he earns a new piece, i.e. earn more wealth, that will help him "invest" and win again. The loser will keep being "poor", and even if his condition could allow him to have some advantages (like play first, no center-place piece restriction), they would be artificial as they do not leverage the outcome of the game.

Although its rules are very simple to follow, it added a stressful layer to the first matches as they define the course of the game.

One could argue that as the game is resolved in the first matches it loses interest in continue to play, because the players do not "have an ongoing emotional investment in defeating each other" (LeBlanc, M. 2004). But that is the reflective part: knowing forward that you will be losing but "have" to keep playing.



Conclusion

A few changes on a simple game were able to draw attention to a situation and question its players.

This is a work in progress, where the cycle of define-test-evaluate was essential to spot potential problems and evolve the gameplay.

References

Hunicke, Robin, Marc LeBlanc, and Robert Zubeck. MDA: A Formal Approach to Game Design and Game Research. Paper presented at the AAAI-04 Workshop on Challenges in Game AI, 2004.

LeBlanc, Marc. Mechanics, Dynamics, Aesthetics: A Formal Approach to Game Design. Lecture at Northwestern University, 2004. Available at: <http://algorithmancy.8kindsoffun.com/MDAnwu.ppt>

Norman, Donald, and Ortony, Andrew. Designers and Users: Two Perspectives on Emotion and Design in Proceedings of the Symposium on Foundations of Interaction Design, 2003.

New Rules (On Going..)

- Game with multiple matches that ends when one of the players goes bankrupt, i.e. one of the players have all the game pieces.
- Each player has three wealth tokens - golden X's and O's - and alternate at placing them on any of the nine spots of the board
- A game piece can be in the central square only two turns
- When someone wins a match, they earn an extra piece to play
- The players can have up to 5 game pieces to play. When they reach this limit, they receive a game piece of the opponent set: one that the opponent hasn't won yet, and if those aren't available, he receives one that is in possession of its opponent



Variation 1

When a player have pieces of the opponent's set, he can opt to play them and try to do a "3 in-a-row" with those pieces.

But..

- How can the players be rewarded if they both win?
- How can the prize be divided?
- Should the player that places the last piece that makes the 3 in-a-row get a larger prize?
- Or should, be the player that already had the pieces on the board?
- Doesn't this conflicts with the objective of the game and ending the game fast? So why the winner should use the earned opponent's pieces?

Variation 2

Using real money to play: game pieces as 1€ coins, heads for one player and tails for the other.

Though both players game pieces' sets are equal, the distinction remains when a player earns his opponent piece, if he chooses to play it, the opponent's symbol should be turned up.

To get the opponents money you have to play with his pieces. So, it gives an "opportunity" to the losing/poorer player to "climb the ladder".

But..

- Do the players use their own money to play?
- Or it is provided as part of the game set?
- When someone ends the game, can the winner keep it?
- When both players win a match, as money can be divided, the available money can be exchanged and distributed.
- Can the exchanged money be played as the original coins?
- Should exist a "bank", to change the money?
- Using real money, is more engaging, but socially questionable, as money-related games are subject to regulation. Also, distinguish players' game pieces using their position is hard to tell them apart.
- Should the game use fake money?
- Does the game loses meaning?