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CREATING GAMES
Williams College | Art & CS 107

Game Critique Assignment

Play one of the assigned games for **at least two hours**. Ideally, spread this time over multiple sessions to encourage reflection. For board games, prefer playing with other students in the course. Write a freeform response to the game of about one page, which you will not submit. Take some time away from your response, and then extract your best ideas into a critique that you will submit.

I recommend that you solicit feedback on your critique from peers, the Writing Center, teaching assistants, or me during office hours. Success requires not only good ideas but also clear communication; this assignment forces you to focus through writing.

Type your work and save the original electronic document in case I ask you for a clean copy later. You are permitted to make final edits by hand in pen on the printed work because final proofreading is important and I value a window on your editing process. Unlike most assignments in this course, on this one you may not deviate from the proscribed *format*, including length limits. However, I encourage you to propose studying a different *game* than the assigned one(s) more than 36 hours before the deadline.

Your document must comprise:

1. A **title**, which primarily applies to your "depth" section (choose this last)
2. Your **name**, your **e-mail address**, the due date, and "Art & CS 107"
3. A scholarly **citation** for the game
4. An **objective description** of the game in no more than four sentences, focusing on only the most essential elements
5. A bulleted list of three observations demonstrating **breadth**. Each must be no longer than four lines.
6. About two paragraphs exploring a single, separate observation in **depth**

Do not reference yourself or your play sessions in the critique, because doing so would indicate that you were insufficiently familiar with the subject to construct an academic argument. Acknowledge assistance that you received and cite all sources that you consulted.

Excepting the bibliography and acknowledgements, your work must fit on a single side of a single page when typeset comparably to the example on the reverse of this sheet. You are permitted to spend **at most four hours** writing and editing. The critique is due at 8:30 am in class, in hardcopy, on the due date. You may also submit it in hardcopy to my 3rd floor mailbox in TCL at any time prior to 8:20 am on the due date. I will not accept work that is submitted late, is submitted by alternative means, is handwritten, or that uses a sans serif font.

Multiple Goals Broaden the Player Base
and Generate Replay in *Bean Dreams*

Bean Dreams[1] and its predecessor, *Bean's Quest*, are the first two platformer video games with satisfyingly tight controls on a touch screen. The game references the core mechanics, blocky art, secrets, tone, and power-ups of Nintendo's *Super Mario Bros*.

Observations

- Is the theme, which includes a jumping bean in a sombrero, a laudable embrace of Mexican culture in games or racist caricature? What about *Guacamelee!* by Drinkbox Studios or Techland's *Call of Juarez*?
- *Space Invaders: Infinity Gene* (*SIIG*) is a critically acclaimed top-scroller for touch screens. Both *Bean Dreams* and *SIIG* restrict movement to a plane, use tap controls for movement, and automate secondary controls for shooting and jumping.
- *Bean's Quest* offered only horizontal movement control, leveraging environment effects as alternative movement mechanics. *Bean Dreams* extends this with the red chili pepper powerup that allows swiping to dash. This corresponds to the speed and attack of the *Super Mario Bros*. fireflower.

Discussion

Each level of *Bean Dreams* presents multiple explicit goals: complete the level, complete the level in fewer than the "par" number of jumps, collect all fruit, and collect the Axolotl. There is also an implicit goal of locating secret passages. Satisfying these goals grants points that feed the reward cycle of unlocking new levels. The goals require differing skill sets. Completion and fruit need only perseverance. Par jumps require careful timing and studying the level. The Axolotl and secrets are puzzles.

Because of these differences, players with diverse play styles and abilities can enjoy the game. That broadens the accessibility of the experience to a wide demographic. It also encourages social play, with multiple players taking turns. However, new levels unlock well before all current goals are completed, so a single player can access nearly all content even without the skill to, say, complete the par jumps.

All goals for a level cannot be completed in a single play-though. For example, the path through the fruit can rarely be traversed under the par jump threshold. This mandates replay, amortizing the cost of asset development and the player's purchase price over playing time. Replay is warranted because par jumps require rehearsal, and acceptable because the compact levels respect the player's time. The need for precision generates an edge of frustration. However, this produces a strong intrinsic reward on success, and frustration is limited by the "salt" checkpoints and quick reload on failure.

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[1] Kumobius, *Bean Dreams*, video game for iOS, Apple App Store, Dec. 4, 2014. http://beandreamsgame.com