

Assignment 2

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1 Introduction

For this assignment the RPG experiences Fiasco and the LARP En För Alla are analysed and compared. During this analysis the following questions will be discussed:

- RQ1: What position would the mixing desk faders have for this game? Is there another fader that would help describe these games?
- RQ2: What is the role of the rules regarding social interaction and sense of achievement in these games?
- RQ3: Where are the games on the GNS-scale?
- RQ4: What seems to be the differences in the “social contract” between these games and board games?

The mixing desk faders in RQ1 are discussed as defined by Jaakko Stenros, Martin Eckhoff Andresen and Martin Nielsen[1]. The GNS scale in RQ3 is discussed as defined by Ron Edwards[2]. For the discussion I will use game design patterns as defined by Staffan Björk, Sus Lundgren and Jussi Holopainen[3]. Patterns will be marked as *Pattern*.

2 Game Descriptions

2.1 Fiasco

In Fiasco a group of players have to create a story in *Cooperation*[4]. Fiasco is *Unwinnable*[5]. In Fiasco every player is *Roleplaying*[6] one *Character*[7]. The story takes

place in two acts, each act consisting of two times x *Scenes*[8], x being the amount of players. Between the acts a tilt is established, that the players have to include into the second act. The players have to have a break between the first and the second act. After the second act an aftermath is determined for every *Character*[7]. The material needed to play Fiasco include two times x black and two times x white *Dice*[9], x being the amount of players, and lists containing possibilities for the tilt, the aftermaths and the setup. The *Characters*[7] are setup by rolling all of the *Dice*[9] and then picking the *Dice*[9] one after the other using the list to establish relations, locations, needs and objects between the *Characters*[7]. The setup process ends when there are no *Dice*[9] left and the players have developed the *Characters*[7] on that base. Then all of the *Dice*[9] are rolled again. The first act begins. Every scene another *Character*[7] is in the spotlight. The player of that *Character*[7] can choose to either establish or resolve the *Scene*[8] and the other players will do other option. Resolving a *Scene*[8] is done by picking a *Die*[9] and giving it to the player, who's *Character*[7] is in the spotlight during that *Scene*[8]. The colour of the *Die*[9] decides over the outcome of the scene, white being a positive and black being a negative outcome. The second act is played with the same procedure with the addition the tilt. The tilt and the aftermath are determined using the *Dice*[9] the players received until that point in the game, with the amount of black and white *Dice*[9] influencing the outcome.

2.2 En För Alla

En För Alla is a LARP set in Sweden in an alternative reality, where Sweden is a dictatorship and there is a civil war taking place between the state's military and a revolutionist group. The *Characters*[7] played by the players are all taken into custody and locked into one room, because a revolutionist was hidden in their building and the military wants to find the person who helped the revolutionist. If the *Characters*[7] do not get a culprit and two witnesses to sign a document within a certain amount of time, all of the *Characters*[7] will be imprisoned. The locked room is indicated by a marking on the ground. The players have to stay within the marking while they are in-game, but they are free to exit the marked area at all times if they want to get off-game. There is a *Game Master*[10] acting as an officer of the state's military. The *Game Master*[10] able to introduce new information to the players/*Characters*[7] and can also remove *Characters*[7]/players from the LARP. In the following discussion I will not view the *Game Master*[10] as part of the players, but as organizer.

3 Analysis

3.1 RQ1: Mixing Desk Faders

Figures 3.1 and 3.2 show the fader positions for the two experiences. In the following discussion I will reason my fader positioning.

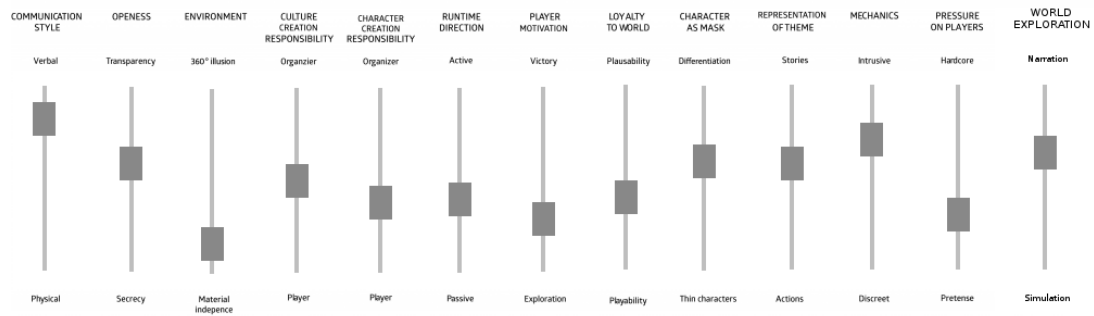


Figure 3.1: Mixing Desk Fader-Positions for Fiasco

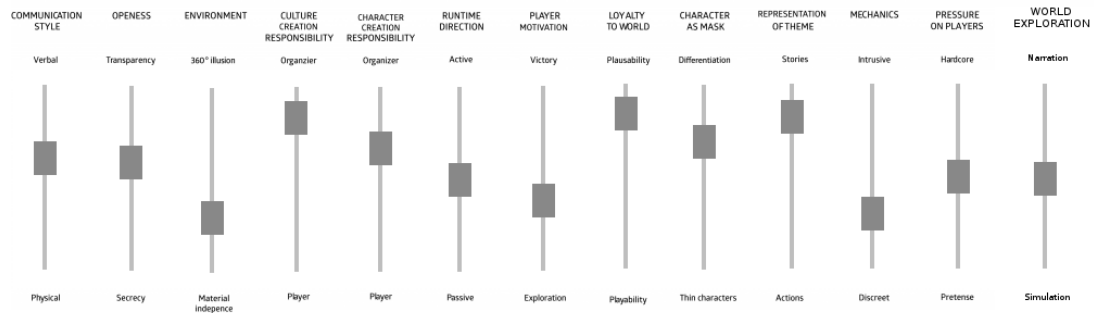


Figure 3.2: Mixing Desk Fader-Positions for En För Alla

3.1.1 Openness

In Fiasco the overall setting is known to the players and the players develop the *Characters*[7] in the group, so there is a lot of information known about the *Characters*[7]. Additionally the players have the information that there will be a tilt to the story after the first act and an aftermath after the second act. In the documents the players also have a List of possible tilts and aftermaths. The players do not know specific story events at the start of the game, as the story is developed during the run time. Another aspect that increased the transparency for our game session was that a player introduced a *Meta-Technique*[11] to communicate thoughts to the players during conversations between the *Characters*[7].

In En För Alla our group got introduced to the setting and the *Characters*'[7] situation before the start of the LARP. We also had workshops prior to the start to get to know and develop the *Characters*[7] further. The players have a lot of information about the LARP before the start.

3.1.2 Mechanics

The mechanics in our game session of Fiasco were intrusive, as we always had breaks between the *Scenes*[8] where we were discussing the next *Scene*[8]. Also it is an explicit rule to have a break between the first and the second act after the tilts were decided. Rolling the *Dice*[9] before the aftermath also disrupts the flow of the story. As mentioned before we also introduced a *Meta-Technique*[11] to communicate *Character*[7] thoughts to the players, which added another slightly intrusive element to the scenes.

In En För Alla the players are usually in-character from the start to the end of the LARP. The players' ability to exit the LARP can result in *Drop-In/Drop-Out*[12], but this behaviour is not intended. Neither did I experience, nor did I hear from other players that they experienced this behaviour. In our game session our *Game Master*[10] paused the game at two times to clarify information for the players.

3.1.3 Environment

Fiasco is an experience that is not designed to be a 360°Illusion. For playing Fiasco the group of players only need the rule lists containing the information about outcomes of the *Die*[9] rolls and the *Dice*[9] to play the game. When acting out the *Scenes*[8] we sometimes used props (e.g. our mobile phones), but most of the time we were imagining things (e.g. using a pointing hand gesture as gun).

In En För Alla the *Characters*[7] are supposed to be locked in a room, the players however are not really locked in a room. In our session we were given props as costumes, which increased illusion. This LARP can be played anywhere, but the amount of noise depends on the chosen location. En För Alla supports more illusion than Fiasco as the whole story is taking place in one room.

3.1.4 Character Creation Responsibility

The organizer provides lists for setting up the *Character*[7] relations, etc. Some of the *Characters*[7] components are determined by *Randomness*[13], but the players can develop the *Characters*[7] around those components. While the players are limited in some regards, the players have freedom for the most parts when it comes to creating their *Characters*[7].

In En För All every player was handed a *Character*[7] sheet describing the *Character*[7]. It was up to the player to decide the *Character's*[7] sex and to fill spaces that were left open by the *Character*[7] sheet. The players have less influence on their *Characters'*[7] personalities and world views than in Fiasco.

3.1.5 Culture Creation Responsibility

As the setting in Fiasco is given and is a realistic setting, a lot of culture is already set up from the start. The players have the ability to introduce values and morals of the *Character*[7] group to create a subculture inside of the given culture.

In En För Alla a lot of the culture is already given by the setting. Additionally *Characters*'[7] world views and morals are partially given by the organizers.

3.1.6 Runtime Direction

The players in Fiasco have to direct the story freely for the most parts. The only limitations in directing the story is the limited amount of black and white *Dice*[9] and the inclusion of the tilt.

In En För Alla it is up to the *Game Master*[10] on how much he wants to direct the story during runtime. In our game session the *Game Master*[10] got engaged a view times to help the players driving the story forward and give it a new direction, but many times the *Game Master*[10] let the players develop the story.

3.1.7 Loyalty to the World

Although Fiasco takes place in a real world setting and the *Characters*[7] actions are plausible, only *Scenes*[8] were acted out and the players could decide what should be included in the scenes. This enabled the story to span over multiple days and even included two flashbacks. This way a lot of potentially boring everyday moments from the story, that would have taken place if the story would have been played in a LARP, were removed.

In En För Alla the loyalty to the world is very plausible, as the players usually act out everything their *Characters*[7] are doing and there are no actions the *Characters*[7] could take that the players would not physically be able to. Unlike Fiasco there is no skipping the parts of less activity, I experienced moments during the LARP where the whole group sat together in silence for seconds if not minutes.

3.1.8 Pressure on Players

The game rules in Fiasco don't put a lot of pressure on the players. In our game session we decided to act out the *Scenes*[8]. I personally felt some social pressure, as I am inexperienced in roleplaying or acting, so sometimes it was hard for me to improvise and stay in *Character*[7] during the *Scenes*[8], but other players expected me to do so. Also I did feel pressured to move the *Scenes*[8] in a logical direction and drive the story forward. While the game itself does not put a lot of pressure on the players, pressure can still build on the players by the player group.

In En För Alla I experienced a similar pressure as in Fiasco, as I sometimes had a hard time acting out my *Character*[7]. I think there was an additional pressure on the players, as played situation was an uncomfortable situation for the *Characters*[7]. At some points during the LARP I experienced bleed-out[14], as the situation also became uncomfortable to me, e.g. when the whole group sat in silence not really knowing what to do.

3.1.9 Player Motivation

The goal is to create a story and some players may even *Play to Lose*[15] to creating a more compelling story. Even though some players might try to create the best possible outcome for their *Character*[7], the game itself can not be won, which makes victory as the player motivation not viable.

I would argue that it is easier in En För Alla for players to play with a motivation of victory, as the *Characters*[7] have goals that the player can adapt[6]. Some of the *Characters*[7] have unreachable goals, so some players have to *Play to Lose*[15], which makes Exploration a more reasonable motivation. I experienced that I played with the motivation to reach the best possible outcome for my *Character*[7], although it was unclear what that would be.

3.1.10 Character as Mask

In Fiasco it could happen, that some *Characters*[7] are close to the player, but from what I experienced and heard from other players, there usually is differentiation between the players and their *Characters*[7]. I noticed that especially inexperienced players tend to let some personality traits flow into the *Character*[7].

As the *Characters*[7] and their personality traits are for the most parts given by the organizers I would say it is up to chance if a player receives *Character*[7] that is thin or different.

3.1.11 Communication Style

The communication in Fiasco is mostly verbal. There is some physical communication between the players in the *Dice*[9] that are given to players when deciding the outcome of a *Scene*[8]. In our game session we used gestures to act out the *Scenes*[8]. Fiasco does not require that kind of physical communication.

In En För Alla the communication is mostly verbal. The players act out everything the *Characters*[7] are doing, but *Characters*'[7] situation does not require a lot of physical communication.

3.1.12 Representation of Theme

Fiasco does not hand the players many actions except the ability to chose a *Die*[9] to resolve the *Scenes*[8] in a positive or negative way. The players are given story elements that represent the theme.

En För Alla provides a well defined setting and situation that carry the theme. The theme is mostly represented by the story given to the players, however there is also the action handed to the players to sign a document, which also enacts the theme. I would say that in my experience the theme was mostly represented by the story.

3.1.13 The “13th Fader”

As a 13th fader to describe these two games I would propose a World Exploration fader. At one end would be Narration, which has the world being explored through fixed story events in the LARP or off-game narration. At the other end would be Simulation, which requires the players to explore the world present in the LARP through *Character*[7] actions.

In Fiasco the world was mostly explored by the players deciding the narrative by establishing and concluding *Scenes*[8]. Exploring the world through the *Characters*[7] actions in the *Scenes*[8] was only a minor part in our session.

In En För Alla a lot of the world exploration was given from the story in the setup. Another source of world exploration was information introduced by the *Game Master*[10]. The world could be explored by the *Characters*[7] having knowledge of the world that was not previously introduced (e.g. photoshop is a known software).

3.2 RQ2: Role of Rules

3.2.1 Social Interaction

When playing Fiasco all players are constantly active. In our game session we had a *Character*[7] dying at the end of the first act, which resulted in the exlusion of the *Character*[7] from the story’s current timeline as *Death Consequence*[16], but not in *Player Elimination*[17]. The player was still involved in establishing and resolving *Scenes*[8] and when the player’s *Character*[7] was in the spotlight we played a flash back involving the *Character*[7] and the *Character’s*[7] funeral. Fiasco also supports *Cooperation*[4] between the players to create a story and encourages communication between the players.

One of the rules that highly affects the social interaction in En För Alla is that the *Characters*[7] have to follow the orders of the *Character*[7] played by the *Game Master*[10]. This enables the *Game Master’s*[10] *Character*[7] to order *Characters*[7] to follow him out of the room. This way the *Game Master’s*[10] *Character*[7] can kill other *Characters*[7], with the *Death Consequence*[16] being, that the *Character*[7] and player are excluded

from the rest of the LARP. The *Death Consequence*[16] is very different when comparing En För Alla to Fiasco. Other rules of En För Alla that influence the social interaction are that although the players are inside of a magic circle all violence is completely forbidden, which means that even the *Characters*[7] can't enact violence. Also the restriction in space plays a role in the social interaction, as *Characters*[7] can not separate from the group.

3.2.2 Sense of Achievement

Since Fiasco is an *Unwinnable Game*[5] the sense of achievement can not come from victory. Sources for a sense of achievement in Fiasco can be *Player-Defined Goals*[18]. As *Roleplaying*[6] suggest a player adopts the goals of the *Character*[7] they are playing. Other players may get a sense of achievement from developing and exploring their *Character*[7] while playing the story. Another source for a sense of achievement could also be being able to include the tilts, locations, objects and relations, that are semi-dictated by the game, into the story, in a way that makes sense and drives the story forward. One player told me that he felt a sense of achievement when other players complimented him for how he acted out his *Character*[7].

Just like Fiasco En För Alla is *Unwinnable*[5]. In *Roleplaying*[6] a player adopts the goals of the *Character*[7] he/she is playing, which also applies to En För Alla. However not all *Characters*'[7] goals in this LARP are reachable. Another source for a sense of achievement can come from fulfilling *Player-Defined Goals*[18], e.g. creating a tragic story.

3.3 RQ3: GNS-Scale

Fiasco strongly supports a narrativist play style, as the players are able to establish and resolve scenes, therefore having the director and author stance on many instances and only being in actor stance at some times when acting out the *Scenes*[8]. Fiasco even provides a tool, namely the tilt, to create a twist in the story. I could experience this in our game session, as we had ethical questions in the story as one *Character*[7] killed another *Character*[7] and one player had his *Character*[7] commit suicide to create a more dramatic story. On the other hand I also perceived that players tried in the earlier *Scenes*[8] to create the best possible outcome for their *Character*[7], even when the *Scene*[8] had to be resolved in a negative way for that *Character*[7]. This indicates a gamist play style as the players tried to prevent their *Characters*[7] from "losing". It is also possible for a player to have a simulationist play style in Fiasco, as it is possible for a player to explore *Characters*[7], situation or the setting.

In En För Alla the players usually have the actor stance, which supports simulationist play, as the player can explore the *Character*[7] and try to explore the world and situation through the eyes of the *Character*[7]. A gamist play style is the least supported by En För Alla, because although the *Characters*[7] have goals, some goals cannot be achieved

and the LARP as a whole cannot be won. However I also experienced gamist play in our session as there developed competition between *Characters*[7], as one *Character*[7] wanted to survive, while others rather wanted the whole group to die than to blame an innocent person.

3.4 RQ4: Social Contract

When playing board games the social contract usually involves playing to win, while roleplaying games often encourage the player to *Play to Lose*[15], which is the case for both, Fiasco and En För Alla. Also other behaviour is seen as acceptable in the magic circle of a board game then in the magic circle of a roleplaying game. For example is it acceptable for a player in the Gang-Rape *Roleplaying*[6] experience[14] to say to another player how that player is being “raped”, while that would be less acceptable in a board game. *Roleplaying*[6] gives the players an alibi to act in such ways. This is especially true for LARPs like En För Alla, where it is usually expected of the players to act out their *Characters*[7].

4 References

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