Alexandra Anderson
December 21st, 2023
Final MFA Research Paper

<div align="center">A Critical Analysis of *Teamfight Tactics* and its Inspired Mechanics</div>

The auto battle (auto chess) genre is a subgenre of strategy video games that emerged from games like *Mahjong* and *Chess*, establishing it as a strategic game genre with *DOTA Auto Chess* as the first entry. The second entry is *Teamfight Tactics* released in June of 2019 by Riot Games. The developers at Riot Games take battle royal mechanics and make them their own through player observation and intuitive strategies. The primary question asked in this critical analysis is how does the auto battler *Teamfight Tactics* implement mechanics inspired from other genres? The secondary question asked is why do they implement mechanics inspired from other genres? The thesis guiding this evaluation is the players of *Teamfight Tactics* connect to the game's design vision through the game's implementation of mechanics inspired from other genres. This is important to consider due to how essential it is for players to become a part of the game system and connect to the vision behind the game. Additionally, combining mechanics inspired from other genres creates a unique opportunity to expand and develop the limits of game genres themselves, diversify them, and potentially create new genres entirely. As one of the first entries to auto battle, it's crucial to recognize how *Teamfight Tactics* connects the players to its design vision as it sets the standard and leads the way for this emerging genre.

Teamfight Tactics has several adaptive and rewarding meta games around the base game. Meta game is defined as how the game plays in its current state and adds crucial value to gameplay function. T*eamfight Tactics*' meta game is made up of its synergies, items, augments, positioning and scouting, and streaks. *Teamfight Tactics'* meta game revolves around its economy and around a theme. Currently in Set 10, the theme is Remix Rumble and uses champions and synergies from *League of Legends* relating to the current season (ex. Heartsteel and KDA). Riot Games introduces different mechanics every season and balances them to fit the theme. They constantly change *Teamfight Tactics* and progressively implement mechanics from various genres to connect players to their design vision. This is done masterfully with each update as they keep the meta games fresh and consistently iterate how to connect the players to their design vision to ensure players experiment, experience, and explore the mechanics. Their design vision consists of how they take in "Meta Shifting," adapting how the meta game behaves by adding in new items, tacticians, and synergies and buffing or nerfing various stats, skills, items, etc (Tolga C., 2020).

In *Teamfight Tactics* 8 players compete in a free-for-all auto battle with various *League of Legends* champions. Each champion costs between 1 to 5 gold, with the higher cost champions requiring a higher level to increase the percentage chance of purchasable champions in the shop. The game consists of stages and rounds where each stage consists of 7 rounds except for stage 1. Each stage has 3 PvP (player versus player) rounds, 1 Draft (carousel of resources aside from gold), 2 more PvP rounds, and 1 PvE (player versus environment) round in order (Tolga C., 2020). During each round, a short battle automatically commences, with two players matched or each paired against computer-controlled enemies. In the rounds against computer-controlled enemies, each enemy has a chance to drop gold, units, or item orbs that the player can

use (Tolga C., 2020). During a game, buying duplicates of the same champion turns them into two or three-star pieces with higher stats. Items play a pivotal role in *Teamfight Tactics* by providing bonuses to the holder (damage, health, etc) and grants them, or other units around them, special effects. Players accumulate gold during rounds and can save it to build interest and increase their income per round by +1 gold for every 10 gold they have saved (Tolga C., 2020). Interest income is capped at +5 gold per round, with exceptions for augments that overrule the limit (Tolga C., 2020). Players can gain additional income per round with win or lose streak bonuses by either winning or losing consecutive rounds. Streak bonuses increase at a threshold of 2, 4 and 5+, each tier granting +1 gold per a round (Tolga C., 2020). Players spend their gold on champions, rerolls to refresh their champion shop, or experience points to increase their level. Players are represented by their "Little Legend" and sorted by their remaining Health Points with their avatar on the right side of the screen. Once a player has zero health points, they are out of the game and shown what rank they placed out of 8. This overview provides context for how *Teamfight Tactics* implements mechanics inspired from other game genres into their meta game and connects players to their meta shifting design vision. For example, *Teamfight Tactics* uses incremental-inspired mechanics in its meta game through its economic system, augments, and items.

  Teamfight Tactics implements incremental, idle, and clicker genre inspired mechanics utilised in games like *Cookie Clicker*. The mechanic of focus in *Cookie Clicker* is the bank, which is an expensive building that produces cookies, banks cookies, and generates interest. These numbers stack on each other and grow exponentially which is a core mechanic of incremental games in which resources and numbers grow progressively across time. Another core mechanic of *Cookie Clicker* is rapid clicking where you click quickly and produce a desired result with instantaneous positive feedback. These mechanics are implemented in the meta game of *Teamfight Tactics* through the game's economic system with currency and interest as described earlier on. Moreover, there are variations of augments which directly allow player involvement with the game's design vision when they used in-game. For example, Think Fast is an augment that says, "Shop refreshes are free this round." (*Mobalytics*, 2016). Players must click the reroll button fervently to refresh the champions shown in their shop and buy what they can during the limited time. Thus, players rapidly click and the desired result with instantaneous positive feedback is achieved. Hedge Fund++ is an augment that says, "You have no interest cap. Gain 40 gold." (*Mobalytics*, 2016). Removing the interest cap allows a player's gold interest to grow exponentially demonstrating a core incremental mechanic. An incremental and idle mechanic implemented into another augment is Pumping Up III which says, "Your team gains 12% attack speed. Each round, increase this by 2%." (*Mobalytics*, 2016). The champions' attack speed growing across time is an incremental mechanic with an idle mechanic as this process happens automatically with no player controls. In addition, the item Guinsoo's Rageblade increments champion attack speed as it says, "Attacks grant 5% stacking attack speed." (*Mobalytics*, 2016) There is inventive use of incremental-inspired mechanics to create a unique economic system for the player to engage with, connecting them to the game's design vision. The innovative meta shifting of incremental mechanics gives players the opportunity to experience an auto battle in new and interesting ways with sustained retention across replays.

  Teamfight Tactics implements avatar-based customization in the form of the "Little Legnd" which is inspired from other game genres like massively multiplayer online. For

example, *World of Warcraft* allows players to choose from different character races including humans, elves, and other fantasy creatures. A study conducted by Stavropoulos et al. explored the associations between avatar race and immersion and the prolonged exposure in relation to a specific in-game character race (Szolin, Kim, et al., 2022). The authors suggested that the specific racial backstory and characteristics of the Draenei may increase the likelihood of greater immersion within a population of players that either relate to or desire to be like this race (Szolin, Kim, et al., 2022). The implementation of this avatar mechanic into Teamfight Tactics' meta game increases factors such as avatar embodiment and deindividuation, subsequently increasing the likelihood of player connection to the game's design vision. Creating a personal relationship between the player and their avatar allows player motivation to be guided as they become a part of the game system and can directly interact with the game's design vision.

Loot boxes provide the player with randomized virtual rewards, are associated with rewards or currency, and therefore share structural and psychological similarities with gambling (Xiao, Leon Y., et al., 2021). For example, there is extensive utilisation of loot boxes in casino games like a slot machine in which there are random rewards which creates a game of chance for its player. Another example is in *Genshin Impact* as their loot system uses a Hierarchical Loot Table, a data structure containing many sub tables for the sub-drop mechanic (*Genshin Impact Wiki*, 2014). Different sub drops mean players have chances to get different rewards and with varying percentages of chance to drop items and could receive repeated rewards. However, in *Teamfight Tactics* there is no chance to get duplicate rewards which in an auto battle is an ideal design shift to ensure loot boxes function within the game system. Loot boxes don't solely exist as item orbs in *Teamfight Tactics* and are also attributed to augments. For example, Portable Forge+ says "Open an armory and choose 1 of 3 unique artifacts crafted by Ornn." (*Mobalytics*, 2016). Ornn items are very powerful items of which there are 10 total possible to receive. In addition, the Radiant Relics augment says, "Choose 1 of 5 Radiant items. Gain a magnetic remover." Radiant items are powerful versions of regular completed items and there are 35 kinds of radiant items possible to receive. Although there's luck and randomness in terms of which items will be presented to the player, giving the player the choice between a few items creates player choice to balance the metagame and connects them to the integral meta shifting of the inspired mechanics. The delicate balance between randomness, luck, and player autonomy in the gambling-like mechanics in the meta game creates variance in gameplay and captivates the players attention so their focus is solely on the game and are immersed within the design vision.

These inspired mechanics discussed don't necessarily occur naturally within the auto battle genre and is something that *Teamfight Tactics* implements to expand the genre and develop the connectivity between their design vision and the players. If I were to take this analysis one step further, I would consider pathways on how the meta game and its mechanics connecting the player to the design vision could be improved through implementing more player agency to establish players further as a pivotal part of the game system. *Teamfight Tactics* has solidified auto battle as a formidable strategic video game genre through how they connect players to the game system and their design vision.

References

Anders, Sonja, and John Widmark. "The Currency of Influence: A Study of the External Impact of Teamfight Tactics' Metagame and Its Effect on Player Strategy." *Uppsala Universitet*, 2023.

"Augments List - TFT Set 10 New Mechanic!" *Mobalytics*, 2016, mobalytics.gg/tft/augments?tier=3.

Beernana, Riot. "What Is Teamfight Tactics? - League of Legends." *What Is Teamfight Tactics? - League of Legends*, 2020, www.leagueoflegends.com/en-us/news/game-updates/what-is-teamfight-tactics/.

Buček, Silvester, and Martina Kobetičová. "Establishing New Genres in Digital Games: The Auto Battler Case Study." *Acta Ludologica*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2020.

C., Tolga. "Teamfight Tactics by Riot Games - Breakdown." *LinkedIn*, 21 Dec. 2020, www.linkedin.com/pulse/teamfight-tactics-riot-games-breakdown-tolga-co%C5%9Fkun.

Casian, Andrei, and Martin Zannato. "Predicting Teamfight Tactics Results with Machine Learning Techniques." *Kristianstad University Sweden*, Kristianstad University, 2020.

Holmberg, Marcus, and Alex Modee. "Random Rewards in Video Games and Their Impact on Player Engagement." *KTH Royal Institute of Technology*, KTH, 2021.

Szolin, Kim, et al. "Exploring the user-avatar relationship in videogames: A systematic review of the proteus effect." *Human–Computer Interaction*, vol. 38, no. 5–6, 2022, pp. 374–399, https://doi.org/10.1080/07370024.2022.2103419.

Tyler, Joshua Edward. "Teamfight Tactics' New Mechanics Are Game-Changing." *Game Rant*, 4 Jan. 2021, gamerant.com/teamfight-tactics-mid-set-update-mechanics-shop-reroller-training-dummy/.

Wiki, Contributors to Genshin Impact. "Loot System." *Genshin Impact Wiki*, Fandom, Inc., 2014, genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Loot_System.

Wu, Yinjie, and Yu Sun. "An autochess game designed to improve the critical thinking skills of its players." *Advanced Information Technologies and Applications*, 2023, https://doi.org/10.5121/csit.2023.130612.

Xiao, Leon Y., et al. "Loot boxes: Gambling-like mechanics in video games." *Encyclopedia of Computer Graphics and Games*, 2021, pp. 1–7, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-08234-9_459-1.