

Tilburg University

The battle of games

van den Herik, H.J.

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THE BATTLE OF GAMES

Three passions are governing this issue of the Journal: developing new strategies for classical games, constructing an appropriate language to grasp the fundamental notions of a game, and comparing the complexity of a game with that of another game. Each passion calls for a different type of researcher.

The first passion has a full spectrum of researchers: from thinkers to hackers and vice versa. The scientific challenge is to understand what strategy is followed by the top Grand Masters (or the top programs) and how this strategy can be implemented (or improved). There are several approaches possible and many of them have been reported in this Journal over the last two decades. In the current issue we find two excellent examples of such research. One is on search and the other one on knowledge. The idea is that search can be improved by pre-search. The article by Hlynka and Schaeffer explains the how and why of the idea. For knowledge, the relation with Grand Masters is even greater. Almost by definition the top Grand Masters are very skilful and versatile, so the question is how to formulate rules that make adaptive reactions possible. Campitelli and Gobet contribute with many new insights into the old foundations in this area, which were formulated more than half a century ago by De Groot (1946). Still, in both cases the conclusion is that further research is needed to measure the profits of the improvements adequately.

The second passion is experienced by polymath and polyglot researchers. They are the formalists of the games community. Their main research question deals with a suitable formulation of concepts, terms, and notions. Important issues are ontologies and query languages. A successful semantic search in databases will help a human Grand Master considerably in his/her preparations. Here the allies of competitors and composers

coincide. Both are interested in finding themes that characterize the positions under investigation. The Chess Query Language (CQL) as described by Costeff is a first step. We are convinced that the ideas expressed in the article will find their way into CHESSBASE tools and with due adaptations into GOTOOLS. It was a pleasure to read that database constructor Stiller was at the origin of CQL and that support vector machines should be instrumental when running the implemented ideas of such a language.

In the third passion the complexities of various games are compared by theoreticians and pure scientists. They have introduced a scale of measurements, since each game has its own idiosyncratic elements which are difficult to compare. The current issue is mainly on chess, namely on Chess, Gothic Chess, and the Chess-like game LOA (Lines of Action). However, there are no clear comparisons of the three games mentioned. Yet, it is worth to remark that a small step aside has been made to Capablanca's Chess on an 80-square board. We are sure that in 2005 many other games will be discussed and "measured" by theoreticians. A provisional conclusion is that the world of games is sprawling in all directions. The more games there are on the battlefield, the heavier the battles.

For a while I would like to continue with other parts of the contents of this issue. With much regret I would like to have your attention for Ken Thompson's contribution on the passing away of Mike Valvo. For many years, he was the Tournament Director of our tournaments: the North American Computer-Chess Championships (NACCCs), the World Computer-Chess Championships (WCCCs), the World Microcomputer-Chess Championships (WMCCs), and the Computer Olympiads (COs). He did a very good job and made a real community of our group. He shall be missed. Personally, I would like to thank him publicly for the many lessons learned and I would like to state that I feel privileged to have succeeded him in some of his tasks. Thank you Mike for our long-standing cooperation.

Looking into history, we see a report by John Hamlen on "Seven Year Itch". Hamlen provides a table full of comparisons. They may be a source of inspiration for researchers possessing an element of the third passion.

If we consider the natural development from classic games to commercial games, then we see that this new research area still in its infancy is subject to an identity crisis. We do not wish to interfere in the world of commercial games, but reading the report by Spronck we see that science, commerce, and games have a special relation, in which the discussion of quantity and quality also plays a part. We are interested in the international conference on Computer Games: Artificial Intelligence, Design and Education (CGAIDE) as well as in the GAME-ON conference and focus on the scientific outcome of these conferences. We would like to report the ideas and progress in this research area to our readers and tell them about the successes achieved. However, the battle of games should be restricted to the playing ground of the games involved and preferably not widened to the organisers of conferences or, even worse, to the authors of articles (or programmers of Game AI).

Games are part of our lives and soon we will see a broadening of the set of games in Taiwan, since a special session on *Robotic Pool and Snooker* is envisaged. I look forward to seeing you all at the 10th Computer Olympiad and the 11th Advances in Computer Games Conference in Taipei, Taiwan. Details are given on pp. 259-260 of this issue.

Jaap van den Herik

Change of residential address

Please note that as of January 1, 2005 our residential address will read Minderbroedersberg 6a, 6211 LK Maastricht, The Netherlands.

All our other coordinates remain unchanged.

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