

Nick Degens

derdejaars student KI aan de
Rijksuniversiteit Groningen



It's that time of the year again: people wearing silly red hats, trees being clothed against the cold with lights, and the 'silent' tiptoeing of a big fat red man on the roof. Yes indeed, it's Christmas. The time of the year where nearly everyone is forced to go buy nice presents for their loved ones. I myself am of course no exception to this rule, even though I have made procrastinating into a true skill. So, when running in and out stores during the last weeks, I notice one strange detail. Nearly all of the stores I pass through seem to have a small variety of video games, even stores which you might say have nothing to do with them. This is weird, because when you think about it, video games (as we know them) haven't been around that long and it's a very recent thing that the prices are so low that most of us can actually afford them.

Computer science has come a long way since the first games were produced, and in these days we have come to expect a lot from games. We want better graphics, faster game play, and so on. We also want to play against a smarter opponent. After all, what fun is a game without a challenge? This is where AI kicks in, and that has also seen many changes over the last periods. Most of us avid game players can remember the times in which monsters would just run around like headless chickens. But in our current day of age, how has AI profiled itself? Are we trying to 'evolve' our AI into a copy of human behaviour? Or is it that these days we are trying to focus on making an AI that is practically invincible?

Of course there is a lot to say about these questions. We can look at certain 'famous' systems, such as "Deep Blue", which were created to be the optimal opponent (concerning chess). By using the best heuristics and search algorithm, they attempt to narrow the possibility space to the most optimal of prospects. The reason for this is understandable; they try to simulate a form of human behaviour (such as finding the most optimal move in this chess example) and attempt to perfect it in the time it has allotted to make a move. All these systems have some sort of constraint, whether it be time or calculating power; but do the constraints of man match the constraints of these systems? It is my belief that by creating 'AI' like this, you are not trying to reproduce the behaviours of man, but instead trying to focus on finding the most optimal adversary.

Where do we draw the line? What kind of opponent do we really prefer? Do we prefer trying to beat a perfected computer rival, or would we feel more content with beating another 'good' human player? I myself think it's the latter; because how many times have you heard the excuse: "Well I lost, but it is okay, because it was a computer". It seems to me that people have accepted that computers are generally better than mankind at playing games (thus claim that computers cheat in some form?). But we lose that excuse when we play against another human (unless of course we claim that they cheat as well). I believe that even when we can create a computer opponent that is so lifelike no one can distinguish the difference between it and a human player; we will still claim they are cheating in some form, solely for the fact they are a computer...

Where will it all end? I don't know. Personally I think the day wherein 'aliens from mars' will wave a white flag on the screen and plead for you to stop the genocide of their people is still a long, long time away. Playing with another human being is something I will still prefer over a computer opponent, because for all their faults and problems, somehow modern day AI can't beat the interaction you get from playing with somebody 'real'. Even if they are completely silent, for it makes you feel less alone in the game. ✎

