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Compare/Contrast: Werewolf and Blood on the Clocktower

What aspects make a social deduction game shine? During this semester our class has played two social deduction games Werewolf and Blood on the Clocktower. Each of these games has a similar premise, everyone has a secret role which may put them on the good or evil team. While the good team is large in number, they lack the information to confirm who is on their team and who is not. On the other hand, the evil team is small but knows some if not all of their allies. The good team is trying to find and vote off the evil team before too many of them are picked off by the evil team at night. Despite the similar core idea, each of these games implements it in unique ways. I will explain why I find Blood on the Clocktower's implementation a more entertaining game by discussing the similarities and differences of each game.

Werewolf was first released in 1986, making it one of the earliest social deduction games. It was made as a rethemed version of Mafia, turning members of the mafia into werewolves. Blood on the Clocktower was published in 2022, making it a fairly recent iteration of social deduction games. The almost 40 years between these games has allowed Blood on the Clocktower to make adjustments based on what the industry has learned about social deduction games in that time frame.

The biggest difference between the two games is how they handle player elimination. In Werewolf, eliminated players are completely removed from the game. Their only way to interact is through silent spectating. When a player is eliminated from a game of Blood on the Clocktower, they only lose their role's ability. Eliminated players still interact with the game, closing their eyes during the night phase and being able to talk with non-eliminated players during the day. These players are also able to vote one final time at any point in the rest of the game. After this vote, these players typically cannot mechanically influence the game, but are still able to talk with fellow players, influencing it in that way.

The way players are "executed" and removed from each game differs slightly as well. In Werewolf, everyone voted at once to decide who they would execute each day. In Blood on the Clocktower, after a player is nominated the storyteller would move their hand in a circle and anyone who was raising their hand at that time would be included in the votes against the nominee. This process gave a bit more structure to the voting process, making it feel more influential and adding more tension to see how each player would vote.

A large part of both of these games is the different possible roles that each player can receive. Each game has a large list of different roles, almost all of which have a different ability from other players. Werewolf handles this by being easy to expand, any role that exists can be

in play, making it simple for new roles that extend the game to be added at any time. Blood on the Clocktower groups these roles into scripts. Each script typically has 25 roles that can be in play, each grouped into a category and placed on either the good or evil team. This system allows players to easily identify the possible characters that could interfere with their plans. It also allows for people to create and share balanced scripts with each other to help create interesting games.

The last aspect I want to touch on is player communication. During a game of Werewolf, each player is stuck in their seat and all communication during the day is public. At night, when the werewolves are choosing who to kill, they may communicate through hand signals. During a game of Blood on the Clocktower, players are able to get up and split apart into separate groups. Many players on the good team are incentivized to do this so that they can attempt to share crucial information without the evil team learning that they are an important role. This also allows the evil team to split off and discuss their plans for the night. The ability to split into smaller groups is one of my favorite differences from Werewolf.

Werewolf and Blood on the Clocktower are both games that can be a lot of fun, but I feel that Blood on the Clocktower has iterated and fixed many of issues in Werewolf. Both games are social deduction games that have asymmetric roles, player elimination, and an informed minority versus an uninformed majority dynamic. Blood on the Clocktower has changed how eliminated players interact with the game, how asymmetric roles are added to the game, the nomination and voting phase, and how players are able to communicate throughout the game. These changes add a lot of dynamics that I enjoy, private conversation and solo script design being the main ones. This does add a decent amount of complexity for players to consider during the game which may be considered a bad aspect but I and I believe many others find entertaining. This is why despite not winning any of the handful of games of Blood on the Clocktower that I have played, I found it very fun to be a part of.

Sources:

https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/925/werewolf

https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/240980/blood-on-the-clocktower

- Similarities
    - Social Deduction
    - Small evil team vs Large good team
    - Asymmetric Roles
    - Player Elimination
- Differences
    - Player Elimination
    - Script
    - Nominations and Voting
    - Player communication