Perceived Fairness in Souls-like Combat: A Weak-Point AI System in Unreal Engine 5

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Abstract

Souls-like games are often praised for being difficult yet "fair," but that feeling depends on whether players can read what the enemy is doing and believe outcomes come from skill rather than hidden advantages. This paper introduces a combat prototype in Unreal Engine 5 that aims to support perceived fairness through a weak-point–driven design and responsive enemy behavior. The system combines three elements: (1) a weak-point mechanic that rewards observation and precise timing, (2) resource pressure through stamina and healing limits that encourage deliberate decision-making, and (3) an AI setup using Unreal's Environment Query System (EQS) to select positions and actions in ways that remain challenging while preserving gameplay readability. Rather than claiming performance gains, the study proposes a planned mixed-method evaluation focused on player experience. Participants will play short scenarios under controlled conditions (e.g., weak points enabled vs. disabled, or different AI responsiveness settings) and rate perceived fairness, trust in enemy behavior, challenge, and sense of control. Brief open-ended comments will capture why players judged the combat as fair or unfair and which cues shaped that judgment (for example, attack telegraphs, reaction timing, and consistency of punishment and reward). The expected contribution is a practical design approach for Souls-like combat that links technical AI choices to measurable player perceptions, offering guidance for building difficulty that feels demanding without feeling arbitrary.

Keyword: Perceived Fairness, Souls-like Games, Player Experience, Enemy AI, Unreal Engine 5