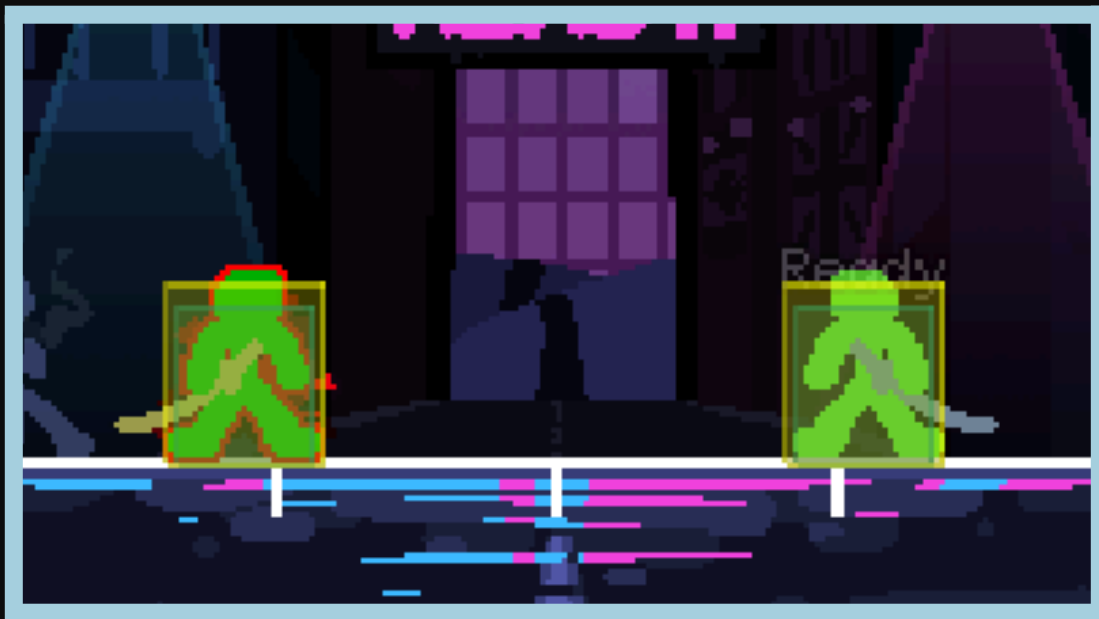# Depth Level Theory

 Depth Level Theory is a concept that aims to explain and improve the mental game and "reading" capabilities of an individual through understanding their opponent. In practice, if DLT is successfully executed, then you will be able to stay 1 move ahead of your opponent in the latter half of the match.

 As mentioned before, for DLT to be properly executed, you must recognize the depth of a situation you're in and through trial and error, see what depth level your opponent plays on.

 What is depth level? How to recognize the depth of the situation before you? All of these questions are quite easy to answer.

First, let's look at a situation so that it's easier to understand:

As many hustlers can tell, the players in the image are at round start distance. Yes, as soon as you start a match, you will already be presented with a situation that has depth level. If we look at this scenario through the

perspective of player 1, we can slowly start deducing the depth levels this situation can have.

AGG Depth level 1 – player 1 believes that Down cleave is the best situation in this move since it counters horizontal slash and avoids impale.

AGG Depth level 2 – player 2 believes what was stated before; therefore, they will try to counter with horizontal slash with up angle.

AGG Depth level 3 – player 1 believes that player 2 expects down cleave, therefore, they will in most scenarios horizontal slash to counter horizontal slash up angle.

AGG Depth level 4 – player 2 believes that player 1 will use horizontal slash to counter horizontal slash up angle, therefore, they will use down cleave to counter horizontal slash.

After AGG Depth level 4, the depth level cycle either repeats, or a different move is brought into the equation, which would be impale/flipped impale. However even these routes once again loop.

With this, we can prove that in nearly every neutral situation where both opponents have the same resources, depth level becomes a cycle.

However, this is not the end of our analysis of this situation.

Instead of going down the route of AGG (aggressive) depth, one of – or both – players may decide to play a passive move. With this, we go down the NRL (neutral) depth route.

NRL Depth level 1 – player 1 decides to use flipped stinger draw canceled.

NRL Depth level 2 – player 2 believes that player 1 will use flipped stinger draw canceled, therefore, to counter, they use lightning slice.

NRL Depth level 3 – player 1 thinks that player 2 expects the stinger, so they use down cleave, horizontal slash or impale to counter.

And after this level, the depth route becomes a part of the cycle.

With this, we can prove that due to the nature of the moves and tools that each playable character has, their choices always become a part of a depth loop.

Now, I'm sure you're wondering, what exactly does any of this have to do with being able to always be 1 step ahead of your opponent?

Dear hustlers, I often hear players say *"Oh, I always lose because I can't tell how far ahead my opponent thinks."* My hypothesis, hustlers, is that every player acts according to a certain depth level or, instead, they go for the move that they are most used to using in a specific situation (like in an opener). My hypothesis is that if we can correctly categorize the moves a player makes and the depth level which they follow, we can essentially make sure to be 1 depth level ahead of them and/or if we have seen the opponent in a situation similar to the one before us, they will make a similar choice to the one they previously made.

First off, we must first deduce the factors that go into making choices that do not follow the player's usual depth level. To my knowledge, these factors are:

1. The time they have in order to make a choice;
2. The health they have in that specific moment;
3. The free cancels and resources they have;
4. How used they are to that situation;
5. The momentum of the match at the moment of making a choice.

Now, let's go more into detail as to how exactly these factors affect the choices of a player.

1. Most players when having a long amount of time tend to make safer and/or more passive moves. However, when faced with time constraints, they make bolder, more aggressive moves which are usually in AGG Depth level 1. However, as I have noticed from my observations, *higher skilled* players make bolder but more passive moves and they are able to do hard reads. So, essentially, expect the depth level of your opponent to exponentially increase or decrease if you both are on time constraints. To put it into other words, time constraints push a hustlers play style to the max. Something else important to add: when

players are presented with a situation that they also faced previously in the match and they have time constraints in this new but similar scenario, they usually make the same move IF that move was not punished in the previous scenario.

2. If your opponent has a large part of their health left, expect them to *not think too much* about their moves and make safer moves instead of doing hard reads. If your opponent has a small portion of their health instead, they make much, much bolder or instead play as passively as possible.

3. Most players in certain situations rely on their super meter to make specific decisions that they are used to making. For example, in the case of cowboy mirrors, most players when they are in the range of horizontal slash try to instant teleport behind their opponent, avoiding the attack. Also, most players, especially cowboy mains, rely heavily on their free cancels to play as aggressive as possible in neutral. If a hustler does not have much super meter or free cancels, they resort to playing passively and avoid making choices with attacks unless they have a very solid read.

4. As stated before in the instant teleport scenario and the opener example, in specific situations, players may make choices that they are *used to making* in that scenario and do not follow their usual depth levels (still researching this factor).

5. If you have read your opponent multiple times in the match in a row and the momentum is *favored towards you*, the opponents depth level either increases heavily or instead decreases, similarly to the time constraints example, but in most cases, they resort to making aggressive choices during neutral, including RPS.

Now, finally, let us look at scenarios where the factors above do not make much of a difference to either players decision making. In these scenarios, Depth Level comes into play.

As I've mentioned before, Depth Levels are all part of a repeating cycle, however, this does not mean that learning what depth level a player operates on is pointless. By observing your opponents actions in specific scenarios, we

can slowly deduce what their play style is like and what to expect from them moving forward. Not only that, but if we are facing an opponent who thinks about their every move, we can even deduce what depth level they operate on, which we can stay 1 step ahead of to counter later on.

So that this concept does not seem completely baseless and ludicrous, I shall give an example that touches upon the time constraints I mentioned previously and how I stated that players make the choice they are most used to making:

In this scenario, I and the wizard player (blooodyspy) were in RPS. My move was spot dodge, while theirs was the move fall with the fall option enabled, which avoided most options and couldn't be countered unless I made a hard read.
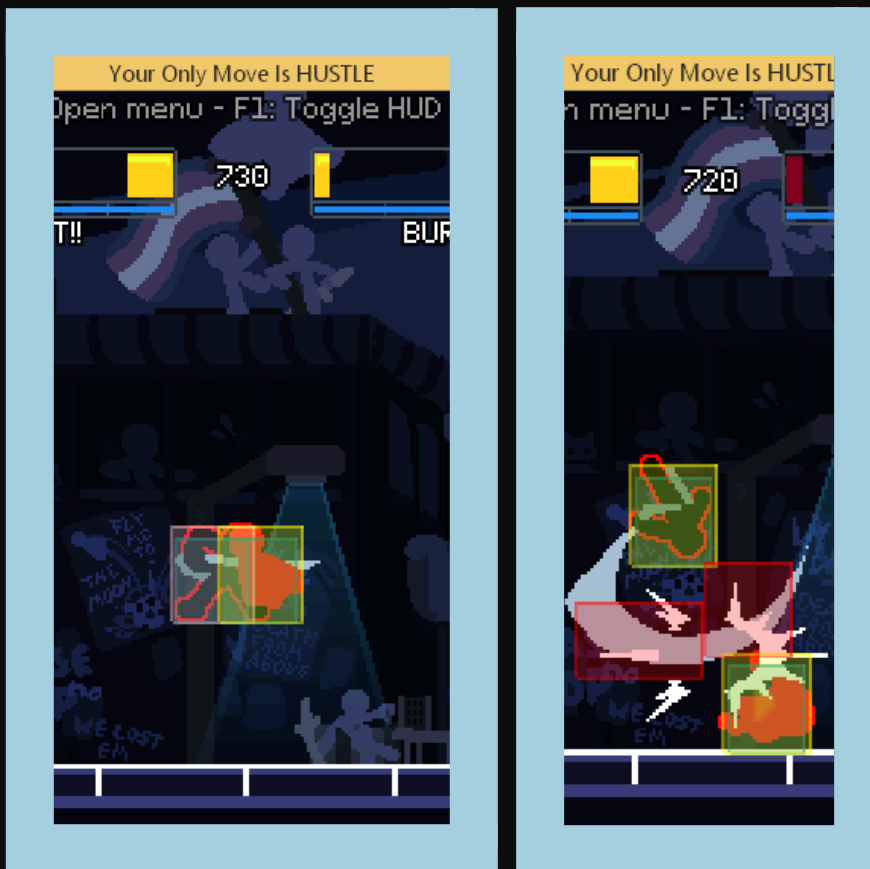
Later on in the match, we found ourselves in a similar situation. I believe that because of the factors I mentioned before (time constraints, health, etc.) blooodspy instinctively made the same move as he did previously which I was not able to read at the time (also a factor mentioned previously). This time, I was able to predict this action and countered with 3C down.

Everything mentioned in this document is currently only at a theoretical level and I am still trying to research it. If you, my dear hustler, have noticed the examples I have given in your own games and have feedback, feel free to send the reply and tell me whether or not you felt your or your opponents play style slightly change towards the end of your match.

Important note: the DLT factors that were previously mentioned also affect the chances of your opponent bursting after you begin your combo.

Here's something a known player by the name of Bowser has stated recently:

"Fighting game fundamentals can be both explained or learned intuitively, and boil down to both players trying to get into their respective win conditions, and at some point they have to interact.

Assuming you know all there is to know, including knowing your opponent's tendencies, you can figure out

 A. What you want to get out of this

B. What they want to get out of this

C. What can you/they actually do to achieve A or B?

D. Does your opponent know more or less than you?

And make a response.

Any actions you take prior to the interaction is attempting to maximize your own options and ability to take advantage of it (making A easier) and minimizing what the opponent can do (making B harder).

An opponent who only knows their character might not be taking your side of the game into consideration, and that's an example of exploiting D, and those tend to be where knowledge checks come from.

Since it isn't a complete vacuum, A B C and D can all come under a bit of a more advanced category which I'll just call

-E. Does it matter? Do I lose much if I choose wrong? Can I choose something that beats everything? Do I want to take a bigger risk to make future interactions easier?

These are where option selects, and planning for the future come into play. Set play, checkmate scenarios, and keeping yourself in constant advantageous positions."

Nowadays I would add something regarding panicking/tilt, as even high level players like Vine and Tsu have panic buttons.

Normally, someone forced into the opposite situation that they are most comfortable with will tend to have something they just autopilot. Often it is the fastest jab-like move.

The goal of DLT is essentially to understand B and C and capitalize on it, either by simply observing your opponent or utilizing D. As mentioned before, Depth levels go into different routes, and to catch up to our opponent, we must be on the same "wave length" as they are, or in other words, deduce which route (AGG, NRL, etc.) they are following. Do to this, we must examine their movements and choices. If they make a choice that is contradictory to their usual play style, we can deduce that this is a tendency that they have.

Requirement D that was mentioned by bowser can essentially nullify the need for understanding your opponent and being on their wave length. Knowledge checks are the greatest tools in your arsenal, and as luck would have it, Flipale can serve as a knowledge check because most people don't know that it can start flip RPS. With knowledge checks, you can make choices that don't even cross the thoughts of your opponent.

This, for now, concludes the first section of Depth Level Theory. Section 2 will be about trying to examine and deducing play styles and the tendencies following these play styles.

Section 2

Play styles and tendencies

Passive Play Style

When hustlers hear "passive play style", they probably imagine some boring dude that always zones and never goes on the offensive. And while these kinds of players are indeed playing in a defensive way, the goals of players with passive play styles are to try and make their opponent waste their resources and capitalize on their mistakes. In my opinion, all 4 current characters can embody this kind of play style: Cowboy, who has spot dodge and instant teleport at his disposal; Wizard, who has orb teleport, dodge, and can setup great defenses; Ninja, who has back sway and substitution; Robot, who, by simply pressuring their opponent, can force them to slip up or to waste their resources while desperately defending. The one thing common with most players, regardless of their chosen character, is that they go for the first "unexpected" attack that they see. For wizards, this is fast fall attacks such as icicle at close range. To keep it short, they all essentially go for the first fast attack opportunity that they see from an "unexpected" angle. This will be further updated with more exampled in the future.