SHADOWPLAY

CM0680
Combined Game Project 3

"Daisy the Viking Cow"

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SHADOWPLAY

Games Design Document

Shadowplay is a 3D forced perspective side scroller puzzle game where the player takes control of a lost Viking adventurer trying to navigate an ancient cavern while dark forces seek to impede his progress. Shadowplay uses a stylised look with a hand drawn silhouette aesthetic to increase the effect of being dark and alone to the player while also allowing us to highlight the use of light as a resource in our game. This look also lends itself to the historical setting heightening the sense of mystery.

SETTING

Our game takes place on the island of Iceland in the 9th century AD during the days of its first exploration and settling. In this land, close to the gods, the players assume the role of a nameless Viking adventurer in an excursion party out to explore the vastly growing world. In this new age of expansion and discovery, the ancient gods and monsters of myth and legend go with them in the eyes of those who believe.

The supernatural and divine have been used to explain that which was unknown since time immemorial, and the people of the early Viking age saw Thor in the lightning, mares in the night and dark forces stirring in the mists. Mighty warriors and self-proclaimed mystics often told tales of great beasts and otherworldly magic where imagination became belief, belief became faith, and now to us, lore; this is the corner stone upon which we have built the premise of Shadowplay.

ᚱᛜᚱᛜ ENVIRONMENT

Set in cave at the bottom a crevasse in a frozen wasteland during the Viking expansion age, the design of the environment along with the atmosphere will be bleak and dark with warm light coming only from the players torch and campfires; occasional cold lighting will be used as it diffuses through holes in the roof of the cave, allowing what little light can filter down through the ice to illuminate checkpoints.

The main environment will be rocky formations in a cavern underground, these formations will be in the form of caves and platforms which the player will be moving around on. Due to the climate of the area the game will feature little greenery due to the intense cold, but because it is so deeply sheltered from the elements, there will be some flora in the caves around some lit areas but fewer plants grow in the darker caverns. There is some evidence of human artifice in places, both from the original masters of the cave and from other adventurers in whose footsteps you tread. At the bottom of the crevasse in the depths of the cave, there are at times bodies of liquid water, though they are too cold to be traversed without losing all body heat. These are formed due to proximity to magma, which also causes the formation of geysers, small volcanic eruptions of high pressure water and steam, small examples of which can be found in the environment.

꧁꧂ NARRATIVE

Away from home and exploring an island of fire and ice, a party of Vikings makes camp in a high cave above a vast glacier. They have hiked across this land, in search of a place to call their own, and have seen great wonders on their way. Glad of the respite, the party wile away the night with songs and revelry as is their custom. They drink and feast in celebration of their fortune in surviving the journey thus far, and steel themselves for the journey ahead. After much merriment one man walks out to the entrance of the cave in a drunken stupor, when a vicious gust of wind thrusts him from his lofty perch and down into the depths of a crevasse.

Having miraculously survived the fall, he regains consciousness in a dark cavern where light seems to barely survive the journey from the surface. The Viking, dazed and alone, thanks the gods for sparing his life and gets to his feet. Lost, confused and injured he looks around to try and get his bearings, finding himself before the opening of a cave. Seeing no other course of action available to him, he enters the cave when a sinking, almost primal, fear settles into the deepest corners in his mind. He senses some dark presence creeping around at the periphery of his vision when he makes out the edges of some mysterious glyphs and symbols on the wall. The Viking strikes a torch to read the markings, and failing to find meaning in them, decides to head on, the bones of those who had come before him strewn across the floor suggesting it was unwise to remain here. Surmising the cave must lead somewhere, the flame of curiosity in his breast, he sets out to find a way to return to the surface to join his party before he succumbs to hunger, the elements, or something altogether more sinister.

MECHANICS

THE PLAYER

The player takes control of the Viking in the bottom of the crevasse and must find a way to progress forward to eventually make it out of the cave system and back to the surface. In Shadow play there will be puzzles and obstacles in the way of the player that will prevent them from moving out of each cave system that they will have to navigate in order to pass.

Player death is the loss mechanic in the game, this can result from a variety of things such as hazards (to be defined later), failure to meet conditions in a level such as timed events or death via insanity level reaching maximum. In this event an animation turns the screen black and the player wakes with a start at the last checkpoint, slightly shaken and can continue from there with some degree of insanity which will be determined during testing.

The win condition for each level is to overcome the challenge set and navigate the puzzle to make it to the next checkpoint, eventually leading to the end where the Viking returns to the surface.

LEVELS

The game will progress naturally though the sub narrative delivered through notes and environment set pieces. The player will advance through the game in a linear fashion to create the effect of a long singular journey the player is undertaking and not break the narrative of the game unnaturally into segments or levels.

Checkpoints will be provided to the player at set locations throughout the game play in the form of old fireplaces that adventurers past left before meeting their untimely demise in the cave. These are indicated by light filtering down from holes in the ceiling, granting the player light to start the fire. This is where the player will wake up on death or after returning to the game after exiting after the previous session. In the event of death, it is explained that it was a nightmare, letting the player continue with a higher insanity level than had they just reached the checkpoint. This is in an attempt to keep gameplay mechanics lore friendly and believable in the context of the theme and narrative. This system is also designed to keep players engaged on death and not punishing them so harshly they feel disparaged.

Levels will be made on a series of 2D planes using a combination of 3D and 2D assets. As it is forced perspective, the player will have an immediate view of the area around them. Light being an important factor in the game, the area illuminated by the Viking will be made visible while those out of range or obstructed will remain hidden to the player as if they were seeing from the point of the Viking themselves.

For the sake of this project we will be developing a demo that will include the features we intend to use for a full version of this game

⁂ MOVEMENT
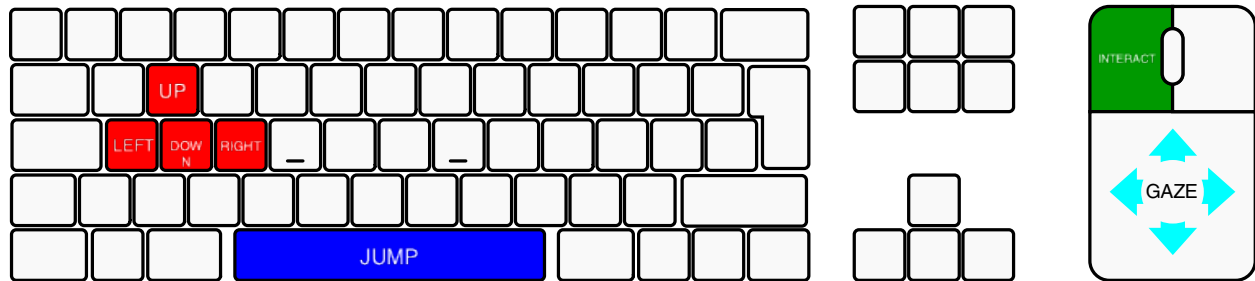
The player will have four main directional movement mechanics on the ground, as this game is a forced perspective side scroller it means the player will be only moving on one plane. Movement will be limited to, forward, backwards, crouch and jump. The player will be able to interact with ledges to mantle up onto the proceeding surface by pressing up as they approach them as a quality of life movement implementation. For more advanced movement the player will be able to interact with other objects in the environment allowing them to maneuverer larger gaps or get over objects that don't allow basic jumping to traverse.

The player will be able to interact with two kinds of ropes in Shadowplay, the first one is a hanging rope. To interact with a hanging rope the players will have to move forward while jumping and press up to latch onto the rope. From there the players will be able to use the movement keys to move up and down but also swing the rope back and forward to create momentum and can use the jump key again to release the player from the rope.

The second rope is the climbing one, these ropes are hung off the side of ledges or structures and are only used to move up and down on as a method of movement, they work the same as the prior, jumping into them latches on and clicking jump again releases the player from the rope.

There will also be seesaw elements, requiring the player to either weigh down one side to reach a higher point on the other side or to be used in conjunction with physics-based objects such as a catapult.

Lastly there are miscellaneous objects in the world the player will be able to pull and push to allow them to use as stepping stones or to maneuverer a puzzle situation in the game.

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Other than the insanity mechanic, the main way the character can die is through environmental hazards. Due to the theme and nature of the game, there is no health system and all environmental hazards are instantaneously lethal.

Fall damage is taken when the player falls from a height which would realistically be critically damaging to an individual attempting the same feat in reality. The exact height that will trigger this will be determined during testing.

Pitfalls are the most prevalent type of hazard in the game, covering a wide range of visual representations. They are characterised as areas into which it is lethal to fall and include everything from open chasms to water and magma.

Crushing or impact damage is taken when a moving or otherwise dangerous element such as a geyser makes contact with the character. The majority of these move at regular time intervals or in repeating patterns, requiring the player to choose the right moment to attempt to pass them. At times, it may be necessary to achieve a certain level of fear (see Shadowplay system) to navigate them. One other instance in which the player will be in danger of being crushed is when operating doors that slowly close over a given time. If the player is too slow, the closing door can be lethal. In the case of physics-based objects, it is possible to be damaged however this is only when the object has an amount of momentum which will be decided after testing.

Shadow denizens, while not strictly environmental hazards, can behave as such at high levels of insanity. Apart from increasing the characters insanity to a critical level, at moderately high levels of insanity, denizens can impart force upon the player, pushing them or slowing them upon interaction with the character. While they can not impart lethal force, they can delay the character while navigating a deadly hazard or push them off a ledge

SHADOWPLAY SYSTEM ⬥⬥⬥⬥⬥⬥⬥⬥⬥⬥⬥⬥⬥⬥⬥

The title system is at the core of gameplay and is comprised of x individual mechanics which collectively form a complex yet intuitive way of interacting with the environment.

⬥⬥⬥ TORCHLIGHT

The Shadowplay system is fundamentally based on the interplay between light and dark. The main source of light for the player is the torch which the player discovers at the beginning of the game. This is used to illuminate the environment and prevent the onset of fear and insanity. The torch burns down over time creating a time pressure to reach checkpoints where the player can reignite the torch.

⬥⬥⬥ THE SHADOWREALM

The Shadowrealm is a world which exists in the shadows cast by the torchlight or in the dark in its absence. It is home to shadow denizens, creatures and entities which can interact with the player based on the characters level of insanity, becoming opaquer, more able to physically influence the character and less contained by the shadows as it increases. Regarding implementation, the Shadowrealm is a layer whose opacity and influence is increased by the Insanity variable and by areas where shadow is present.

⬥⬥⬥ GAZE

In order for the characters fear or insanity to increase, the player must gaze into the shadows and upon denizens of the Shadowrealm. This is controlled by the players mouse and requires the player to have some discipline over where they move it to prevent them from unintentionally increasing their insanity. Strategies such as putting the mouse directly over the character or in the edges of the screen will cause insanity to increase to dissuade this behaviour. The gaze can also be used to the players benefit, allowing them to increase their level of fear intentionally. The characters head will follow their gaze to some extent.

✦ FEAR

This mechanic is the main way that the Shadowplay system will impact navigation of puzzles by providing a temporary speed boost to the character whenever the character looks at shadow denizens. This boost increases as long as the players gaze is on the shadows or denizens of the Shadowrealm, with the latter providing a significantly higher rate of fear. In total absence of light, the characters fear level stay at the maximum until they reach a checkpoint where they can relight the torch.

✦ INSANITY

The characters insanity level controls the rate of fear accrual and level to which the Shadowrealm and its denizens can be perceived as well as the degree of their influence on the player. At low levels, the player can make out vague forms of denizens, but they are unable to interact with the player physically. As insanity increases, they become more visible and solid, able to slow or push the player, and increase the rate at which the characters sanity deteriorates when gazed upon. At the highest level, the player can be directly pushed back by denizens of the Shadowrealm.
Insanity is increased by looking at shadow denizens or from interacting with them at all levels of insanity.
Once the character reaches critical insanity, they despair and resign themselves to their fate effectively killing the character.
Insanity is reset to zero when a player reaches a new checkpoint.

SOUND

The game will make use of a minimalistic ambient soundtrack, using the sound of the environment to enhance the sense of isolation and tension. The soundtrack used will dynamically change to reflect the players level of sanity, with more discordant sound incorporated at levels.

Audio will be composed, recorded and designed specifically for use in the game, and will dynamically change based on the fear and insanity variables, changing the spatial position and volumes of various sound sources. The exact dynamics will be decided during testing.