

## **Aesthetic Analysis**

### **Guacamelee!**

#### **Summary**

“Guacamelee!” is a side scrolling beat ‘em up turned metroidvania style video game. Through aesthetic analysis, the game will be broken down into its bare components to determine whether the game is aesthetically appealing in terms of graphical style, gameplay and balance, and audio.

#### **Graphical Style**

The most prominent and strongest aesthetic in “Guacamelee!” is the graphical style. The game uses clever combinations of solid colours and basic shapes to create scenes that are appealing and enjoyable. They instil a natural sense of fun and excitement when presented through the Mexican theme. The theme is divided up into two major planes of existence; the living world and the dead world. The living world uses an earthy colour pallet of green, brown, and orange to display the colours of Mexico. Even with the variety in locations, such as the temple, giant tree, and even in towns, the game is consistent in its earthy tones never making the player feel estranged. This greatly helps when differentiating the living world from the dead world. The dead world has a negative colour filter feel, consistently using a blue to purple colour range. Since these tones are so diverse from each other, it is easy for the player to differentiate the two worlds and identify which they are currently in. This strengthens the readability of gameplay as switching between these worlds is a major part of the game, used to solve puzzles and reach new locations. Another piece of the graphical style is their use of Shapes. Rigid and simple is the design philosophy the designers appear to use for every character and scenery they create in “Guacamelee!” It is easy to identify characters such as enemies from the scenery. The main character, Juan, for example, stands out from any scenery due to his large and imposing body. The very clear cut lines of his shape allow for easy identification of where the main character is at any given time. Take the basic skeleton soldier as an example as well. The designers could create skeletons with plenty of small bones. Instead, they gave the skeletons a triangular poncho as a more basic shape with a clear, solid colour, making them easily identifiable. Combining these two aspects of simple shape and solid colour, “Guacamelee!” has created a way to be both generally appealing and very easy to identify.

#### **Gameplay and Balance**

The aesthetic of gameplay and balance is where “Guacamelee!” begins to fall apart. The game attempts to add diversity in gameplay through adding new fighting moves to the luchador’s skill set. These new moves can unlock new locations on the map, but really that’s it. Unlocked moves are supposed to add new depth to the combat allowing for longer juggling combos and new ways to quickly dispatch enemies. The problem is that this is completely unnecessary. It was infrequent that new abilities would be used in combat. Specifically, players will find they fight the same basic enemy through a majority of the game, the skeleton. By a quarter way through the game the skeleton becomes so trivial they can be annihilated with a few regular punches without fear. The only time any special move would be used is if the player was already heading in the direction of an enemy and needed some way to enter the space the enemy occupies. For example, a floating platform with a skeleton occupying the space could not be

reached as the player would take damage jumping into the enemy. The uppercut ability can strike the enemy first to avoid damage and reach the platform unharmed. The problem is found in analysing how this mechanic is utilized in game. If a combat based upgrade is not enjoyable or optimal for combat, then that upgrade should not be combat based. I would be more satisfied if the upgrade had just been a double jump, because that is all it is ever used for. Moves such as the head butt and body slam are at least used to break walls to unlock new areas or discover secrets, where the act of destruction makes sense to be transferable to cause damage, as a convenience, but not as a primary use. Even these abilities are useless in combat as regular combos are far more efficient. While I understand that, being a luchador, the upgrades being combat based is a logical connection to the character's progression, however in execution it is never used as such and thus feels underwhelming. There is no enemy that can't be defeated with the basic move set. If they had introduced new enemies that encouraged the use of unlocked abilities, this would not be a problem.

### **Audio**

The audio in "Guacamelee!" is a mixed bag of greatness and misuse. It boasts some of the most fitting Mexican themed music I have heard in a video game. Every location has well composed music, but it is used highly incorrectly. Multiple instances throughout the game felt completely disoriented by a disconnect between the music and what was currently happening on screen. For example, during the first mini boss fight with the large golem-like creature, the moment felt intense. This moment was completely diminished by the music in the background which did not associate with the current fight. The music playing was the level's theme that had been playing for the last half-hour of play time. When running away from the Alebrije, the feeling is the same. They surprisingly use different music, but it was so quiet and underwhelming it didn't bring any feeling of intensity when it was really needed. Music, while the average player does not directly pay attention to it, greatly sets the mood and intensity of the moment. It can be used to convey feelings or even provide context to a living, breathing world. Take the many moments players speak to X'Tabay. The level's music is lowered or silenced as you listen to her stories. Normally games would associate a theme song that would evoke emotions to give the player some connection to this important character. The absence of such music gave no such association. Throughout the game, there was no attachment, wonder, or feelings of any kind towards that character, or any other major enemy, in the slightest. When the major boss battle came, designers simply use the level's music continuously, completely ruining any feeling of confrontation with the characters that continue to taunt the player for the entirety of the game. This was completely off-putting and ruined the immersion of the game. Overall, while the music is excellent in and of itself, its use is everything, and "Guacamelee!" did not correctly use their repetitive scores to evoke emotion or properly frame situations throughout the game.

### **Conclusion**

Players are drawn into the world through the strongest and most noticeable aspect; its appearance. The game features a Mexican theme through a vibrant, colourful world, filled with all things Mexican. The game does a decent job at holding players' attention as they fight the army of the dead to save El Presidente's daughter, but while the game tries to present a strong combat system, it ultimately falls flat later in the game as repetitive enemies become trivial. With a lack of appropriate audio queues, the game also lacks a sorely needed sense of emotion.