

Game Design Document

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1 Goals and Requirements

1.1 Context

Flimsy Candle is a 3D exploration game made as a personal project. I was made to reflect my mental state at the time and to convey a message for those who are in the same state as me in exploration for a purpose.

1.2 Theme

The game would have a rather depressing theme where the player is the only source of light other than some collectibles. The theme should inspire the player to look for comfort but encourage the player to explore and step outside of their comfort zone. The game is meant to reflect my wish to explore and find my place and purpose in the world.

1.3 Team

Design, Programming and Art-Bill Cao

1.4 Goal

1.4.1 General Goal

To make a game that can fully immerse the player. The game should create an anxious environment that encourages the player to keep exploring and advancing while keeping the mechanics simple. It should reward the player for venturing into unknown to align with the main creation idea of finding a purpose for life.

1.4.2 Mechanics

The core mechanic is a burning candle that serves as the player. The candle is, as indicated by the title, flimsy. It can be easily affected by the environment and slowly burns. When the candle burns out, the player would die and has to start anew. To build around this mechanic, there should be objects to allow extension of the burning time and reduce the burning time.

1.4.3 Level

To tie in with the burning candle theme and exploration, the level would be completely dark with all environmental lighting removed. All environment should have reflective surfaces however for the candle to shine upon. The level should feature maze-like splits to confuse the player in their exploration. Finally, the level should feature a giant lighting device, a light house or perhaps a giant lamp to serve as the final destination of the candle.

1.5 Requirements

- controls to accommodate player movement, which includes sliding and jumping
- Modelling for player, environment, NPC and other structures
- Candle burning noise and wind noise
- A level that serves as the journey that will be travelled by the candle.

2 Gameplay and Mechanics

2.1 Gameplay

2.1.1 Game Progression

In the walk-through, the player would overcome difficulties in the map and find the road to the lighthouse, guided by the giant lighthouse that can be seen from the entire map.

2.1.2 Objectives

The objective of the game is reaching the top of the lighthouse.

2.2 Mechanics

2.2.1 Player Movement

The player can use WASD to move and SPACE to jump controlling the candle.

2.2.2 Burning and death

The player should burn whenever they are not in the light. It is a representation of the passage of time and progression of life. Mechanically it is a way to urge the player to move. The burning is represented by the shortening candle and dimming light. Aesthetically, it is represented by emitting particles from the wick, which simulates the burning flame. The burning is accelerated when the player moves, which also causes the flame to emit in the opposite direction to the movement. When the candle is burnt to minimum height, it burns out and dies, at which point the player would have to restart from the latest save, more details in lamp section. Another way the candle burns out is when wind blows it out, in which case there is still a lot of candle left, but the flame has diminished, more details in the wind section. When a candle dies, its remain is left behind like an indicator and reminder for future candles, however its collider will be removed to avoid the path being obstructed. When a candle falls off the edge, no remain is left.

2.2.3 Wind

A directional wind, characterised by the wind particles that blow in the direction of the wind and a whooshing sound that quiets down when player moves away from it. The wind would accelerate the dimming of the candle and blow it out completely if the brightness of the candle reaches a minimum value, in which case the candle is considered dead as well. The wind can be blocked by walls and any material object, which excludes the dead candles.

2.2.4 Flame Spirit

A small floating square that emits light that is bright enough for the player to rest within. When the player consumes the spirit by colliding with it, they are rejuvenated, gaining brightness and size. However, after the consumption, the spirit can no longer be used as shelter until the the next candle comes along.

2.2.5 Lamp

A design that was introduced later that serves as checkpoints. The player can rest within the light of lamp and when died, they would spawn next to the lamp closest to the final destination. It is a mechanic introduced to reduce the frustration of death and encourage the player to explore more. However, the lamp doesn't provide any healing like the flaming spirit. Hence resting at the lamp would not yield any progress.

2.2.6 Pressure Pad

Small pads that are designed to be used in conjunction with movable parts of the map to open gates or other intractable. Since they are harder to spot, especially in the dark, they again serve as encouragement for player to not just look at walls, but also beneath them.

2.2.7 NPC and Narration

Specially designed NPCs are placed in several places in the map, they, in conjunction with the narrator tell the story of the game. The player can interact with NPC, each representing a kind of person that I have met in real life and simply serves as a representation of me. The NPCs hand players some options to the game so they can complete the run with their unique interpretation and reflection. The narration serves both as a guide and a critic to player's actions. It is my voice there as the commentary of the journey I wish the player to participate.

3 Art

Since I am not great with art, the art is made by combining the basic unity shapes and objects. Particle system is used to simulate motion of objects.

Lighting is a major aspect of the art of the game where light represents life and certainty. The player fights to keep the light on and dies when the light goes out. To reflect that, a red colour is used for the player and all player related items and NPCs, including stray candle who is similar to player. Tax collectors shine a blue light, both cold, brutal and of a higher temperature. It is chosen to represent the dominance of the tax collectors over player, and their willingness to help. The guards have a yellow light, which is again of a higher temperature to player, indicating their passion, youth, and by extension their naivety. One could say they are young people who are burning very bright and fast, devoting their life to something they love, before the doubt and negativity kicks in.

4 Level Design

The level reflects how I feel about my life at the moment. It starts with a singular path with some challenge in the form of wind that can be easily overcome. The journey continues into a maze where the player cannot easily see all the turns and paths. It is a reflection of my current uncertainty of my future which I hope will pass soon. Within the maze, I presented distractions in the form of misguiding light and a stray candle, both of which represent the distractions I put myself through to avoid doing the right thing. The tax collector represents help to me that has been only there for monetary exchanges. Not all such helps are useful or beneficial to me. The player pushes forward to a bigger maze where not finding the right path would easily mean the end of the candle's life. However, once, through, the player is greeted by the light house, which is also the title screen. The player would need to go through the win instead of escaping this time to reach it, much like how I feel I should be doing at the moment. Eventually, the player is presented with a rather monotonous task of climbing, but it is a necessary chore for accomplishment. Eventually, when the player see the lantern in the title screen, they could finish the game by simply entering it, illuminating the world. It is a purpose and a job, and it would represent the success of the journey of the candle.

5 Screenshots

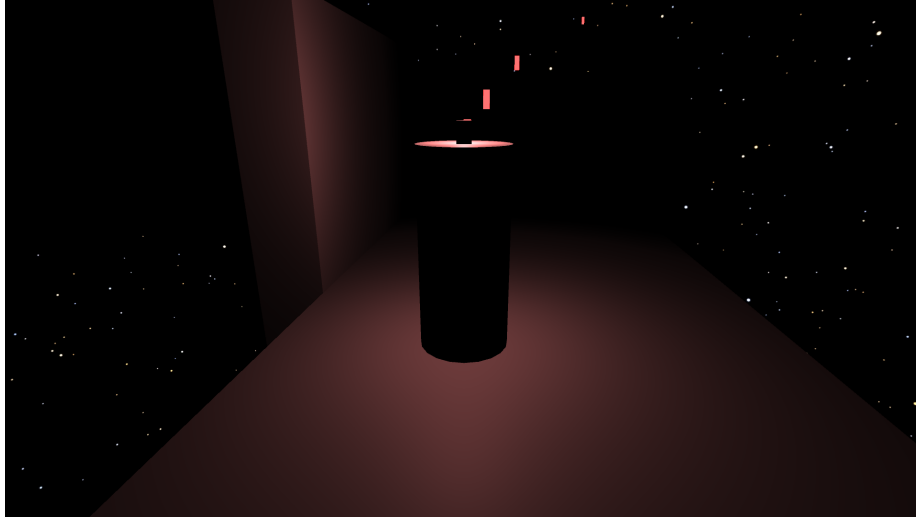


Figure 1: The first linear wind challenge



Figure 2: A lamp serving as both spawn point and resting spot

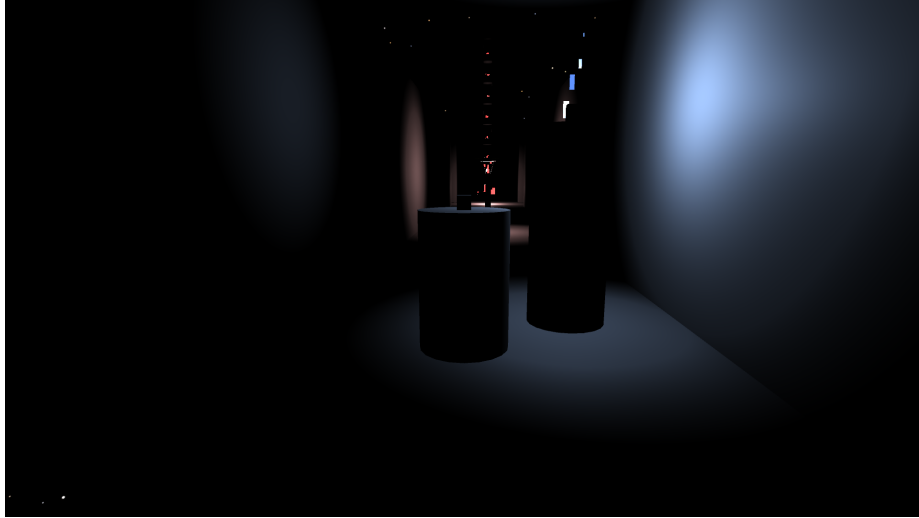


Figure 3: The grim light of tax collector

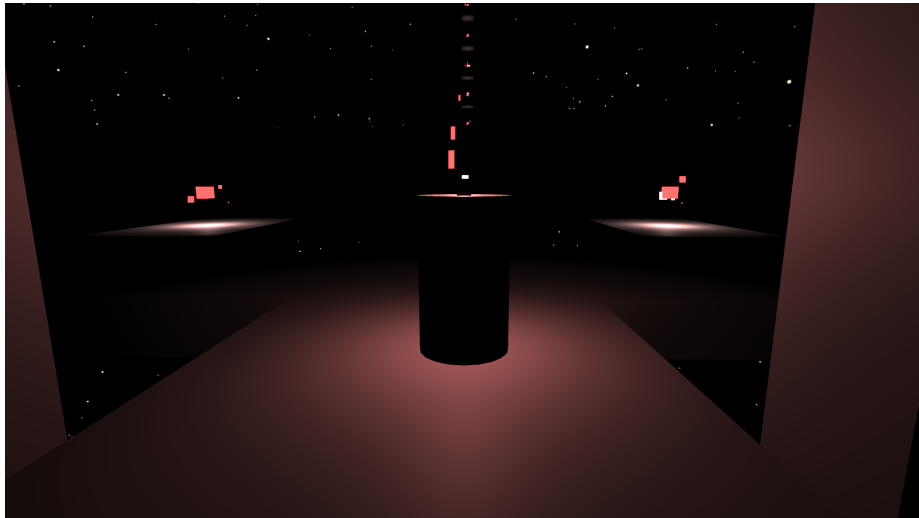


Figure 4: Making choices without much information

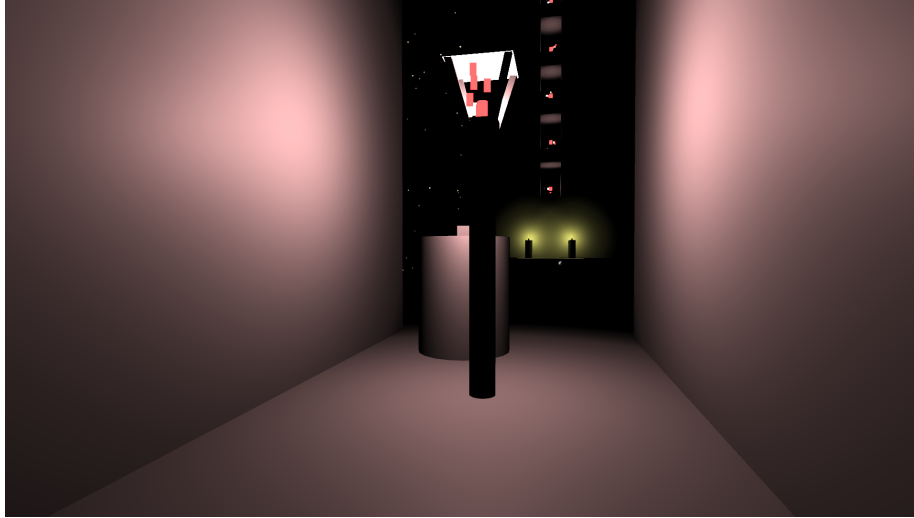


Figure 5: A final rest place before the lighthouse

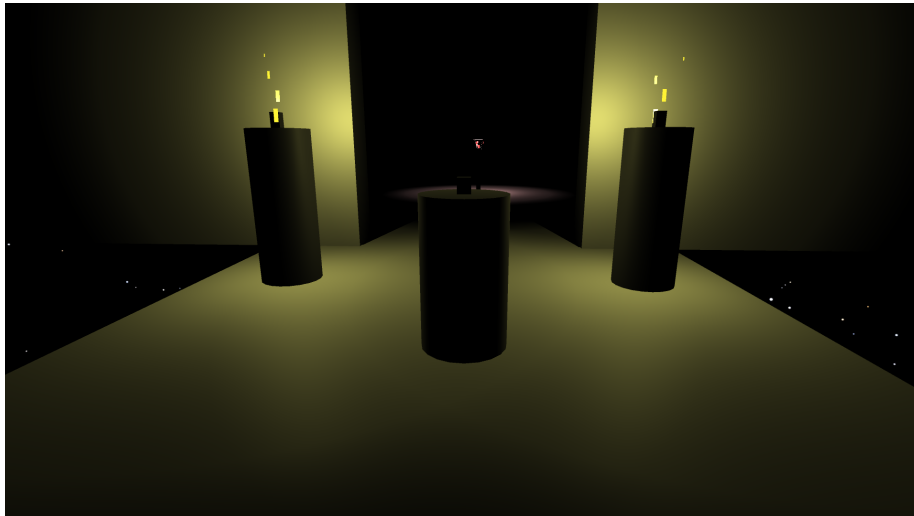


Figure 6: Entering lighthouse guarded by the energetic guards