Faculty of Media
Bachelor of Arts Animation and Game

Semester: SuSe23
Project: D(e)adCare

Logline: Prevent various children from killing themselves before and during their play in a cozy 3D isometric daycare room with a lot of potential for chaos.

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1 Introduction

The player starts the game within a preparation phase and a completely unknown daycare room. After the short timer runs out, the children come storming through the door and immediately start to examine certain objects, depending on the player's strategic usage of tools. It is now their job to protect the children for a minute with other mechanics. At the end, the player is rewarded with a rating and the dependent amount of helpful distraction items which can be collected and used over the course of the whole game. Replaying levels is therefore encouraged and intended for the sake of experimentation and progression.

From the beginning, the focus of D(e)adCare is to deliver a fun experience by winning aswell as (purposefully) losing the individual levels as fast as possible. We use many animations of children getting hurt to convey the game's sadistic humor and play with the imagination of further possible interactions. The short, biphasic gameplay ensures a concrete separation between anticipation and surprise, strategy and chaos, leading to even more diverse experiences of fun.

2 Individual Contributions

Determining the contribution in each field should be taken with caution since some tasks were collaborations of our team members or products of shared problem solving. Overall, I have taken on the role of Production Manager, Game & Level Designer, Concept Artist and Code Reviewer. Accordingly, I assume the contribution share in A&G Design to be **45%**, in Game Developement / Technical Art **15%** and in A&G Methodology / Producing and Production Management **40%**.

2.1 A&D Design

Concerning Design I had two major roles: Concept Artist and Game Designer. For the children and the levels I drew many concepts on paper and digitally, which have been used only partially though. Since the isometric perspective constricts the field of view and the animations have to be readable enough to the player, we have considered many sizes and proportions for the children aswell as the rooms. Simpified hands and enormous heads are the result we agreed on to ensure less detailed animation work and instead more visibility in exaggerated movents. The visual variety of my drawings didn't resonate very well with the vision so we ended up using more generic looking children, which, in the end, still work for our game's look in my opinion.
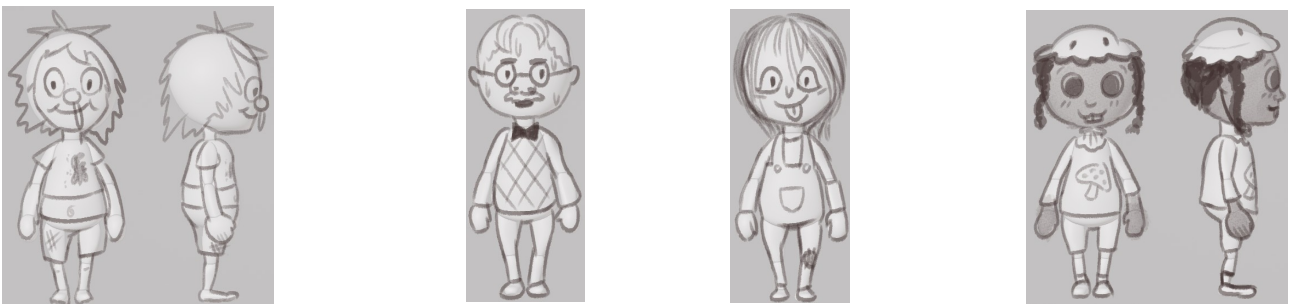
Most importantly, I am responsible for assuring quick, functional and fun gameplay, adhering to the Vision Keeper's idea. Together with my team we have agreed on three main game features we have wanted to implement: taping objects, moving objects and using consumables to protect children from dangers.

My job was to strive for simplicity and cohesiveness for all mechanics, so I came up with the biphasic approach of using both tape and moving in a strategic manner in the preperation phase. This would include a fixed amount of tapes and limitless moves. Later we would then give the player the ability to stop children by reversing an interaction timer or throwing in earned consumables (cookies) in the action phase. This makes gameplay more structured and players can concentrate on two mechanics at the same time instead of being overstrained with tools. At least for our quick-paced game with time limits, this has proven to be a helpful decision.

I have improved upon these mechanics many times in terms of their clarity and importance for players and our team, e.g. by sorting objects (mainly visible furniture) in our levels into three main categories with their own rules:
- moveables that the children cannot interact with and only serve as blockades that can be moved by the player
- interactables that can be taped once, cannot be moved by the player and are the only targets for the children where they can either play or get killed
- decorations with no gameplay relevance and cannot be moved by the player

To take into consideration the "Flow"; that the player is neither bored by no challenge or overstimulated by too much, I decided on level rules that I apply during my Level Design:

- make the spawn point of children always at the door (was later animated to make children enter properly)
- amount of deadly targets = amount of children in the level
- add additional harmless targets (including "wait-targets" that are invisible to the player) to balance the difficulty (and add believability to the children by "waiting for their turns")
- place interactables rather far apart or only so, that moveables could never block everything
- add only so many moveables that at least one interactbale object cannot be blocked off, also taking the static room interior into account
- decorations should not be placed to disturb any of the rules above
- spawn point should be protected from the player moving objects in front of it
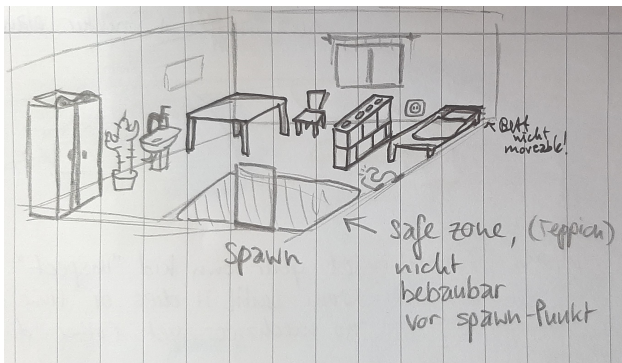
Everything I listed above was the result of my regular user testing every 2-3 weeks and my learnings in terms of Game Design, respectively this semester's lecture "Game Design Class" by Stephan Jacob. I had roughly 2 people testing our game each time and I carefully adjusted questions based on their playstyle. With their help, I found mostly bugs but also got valuable feedback regarding which mechanics work or didn't work. E.g., our project lacked in user feedback for taping and moving objects in which case I provided an outline prototype mentioned in 2.2. with the help of Hakon.

Lastly, I got to try out a few UI designs which were scrapped and later design the background for the levels with a custom gradient.
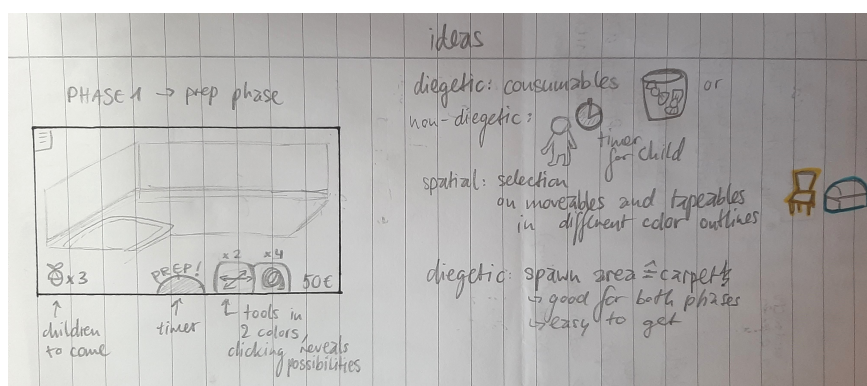
2.2 Technical Art / Game Developement

In the field of Technical Art there was nothing I really partcipated in. As stated above, I was only the Game & Level Designer, so I cared for properly setup Unity prefabs with attached components and reported export/import issues of assets to my teammates. Since my teammates were already professional regarding performance optimization and our game takes place in a confined space, I never had to worry too much about the game's polycount.

Where I actually pull my 15% from is in my role as a Code Reviewer, since Lukas was our only programmer in this team and I had gathered enough experience in previous study courses to assist him in many cases. I ensured that every bug my team found was either solved by me or Lukas. This included e.g. incorrect children AI behaviour, counting errors and our beloved NullReferenceExceptions. Sometimes I found the time to implement UX enhancing features such as a prototype for a ¨halo-effect¨ around clickable objects in the preperation phase of D(e)adCare. But this prototype might not be seen in the final version if we manage to use a more suited asset from the Unity Asset Store in time.
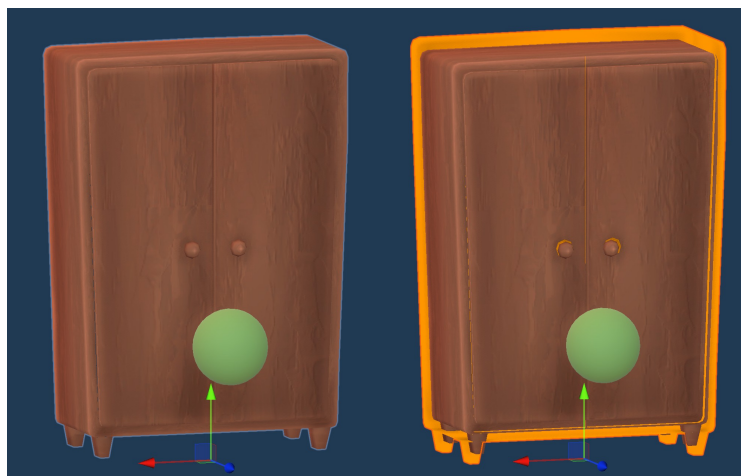
2.3 A&G Methodology / Producing and Production Management

As my role as Production Manager suggests, I have spent a lot of time to iterate on the scope of the project and coordinate my team's work towards our goal. I monitored our collaborative Miro board, where I applied techniques such as the "Moscow Matrix" and "Roadmapping" from this semester's course "Producing and Production Management 2" by Prof. Boris Kunkel. These tools enabled my team to collect our production goals and sort them by requirements we needed or wanted ro fulfill in a given time frame. I prepared spaces for our team to keep track of our to-do lists and reminded of deadlines for specific milestones that were set on the roadmap.
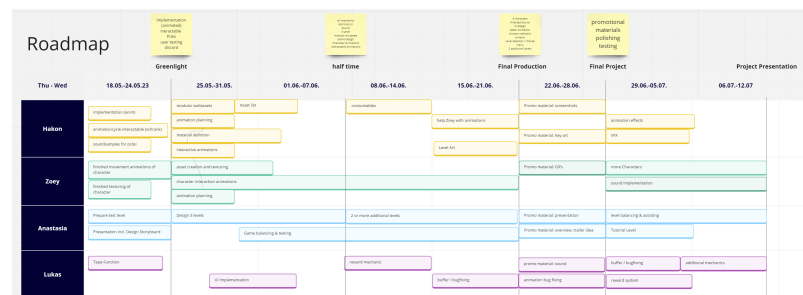
Furthermore, I tried to always keep a healthy working environment and be a mediator when problems between our teammates arose. This proved to be very exhausting but rewarding, since my team always respected my decisions, even though I wasn't used to handle some of the emotional involvement and very fast-paced conversation.

Additionally, I cared for our presentations and communication outside of the team. I mostly prepared meetings for our team to align our vision and prepare for our coachings, so that any problem or opinion could be addressed by the affected person. As stated in 2.1, I also organized regular user testing sessions and reported the analysed feedback back to my team, so that we could reconsider priorites.

3 Analysis and Conclusion

After this semester's experience of working in a team of four for the first time, I highly concentrate on fair workload and trust between me and my teammembers. The effort my colleagues put into working together and sometimes for whole days had a huge impact on me. I must admit that I wasn't as committed to the project compared to them, which I feel was a good decision nonetheless since my workload seemed healthy to me. I tried many times to balance workloads but I felt as if I didn't let my teammates decide for themselves so I stopped questioning the time they put into this project. We communicated our availability and conditions right from the start and since everyone agreed to take over specific tasks, I am grateful to have enjoyed my project work with my own limits in consideration and barely enough time to participate in other lectures. Therefore I would like to continue the genuine attitude towards future teammembers and assure that everyone's boundaries are respected.

As the Production Manager I learned how to manage the abilities and time of my team to a certain extent. So many factors such as changing priorities, sickness or unknown capabilities led to myself feeling out of control or even unable to lead my team like I wished to. I have tried to overcome this feeling by speaking to my team and optimizing our efforts by taking their opinions into account. In the future I would still try to act as a leader in my team since I seem to get along with people quickly and I want to eliminate further self-esteem or controlling issues by talking more openly.

My work ethic changed during the project a few times from being over-committed to not interested, depending on upcoming deadlines and fulfilled goals. It seems that I still lack the sense of setting smaller goals and seeking further tasks beyond my main ones. My choice of roles for this project might have also affected this behaviour since I usually really enjoy drawing and texturing. But this time I felt the need to prove myself in the development aspect. I have taken great joy in designing game mechanics and organizing my team, even though it would have been probably more comfortable and engaging if I had chosen a different role. I will therefore improve in my prioritized fields and watch my fellow teammates how they are up to the task of a Game Designer or Production Manager. Maybe that will inspire me to help and make me miss the job I had now.

4 Advice for Future Work

I would like show my respect towards user testings and testers. They provided our game project with valuable information about different play styles, attentiveness of people and several personality-driven experiences of fun. Our team and I derrived from the results of testing our coaches and colleagues that certain game mechanics were used more than others and which expectations were placed on a level. These testings were and will be crucial in exploring a game's possibilities further and improving a game's feel.

Organization and mutual respect greatly impacted our workforce and is probably told to everyone in our industry. Still, there is always the luring promise of less work when ignoring meetings regarding prioritization or setting consistent pre-deadlines. I can only recommend to others and myself to start early and stay strong against this lethargy in future projects.