

The MASK of the PHARAOH

Game Treatment

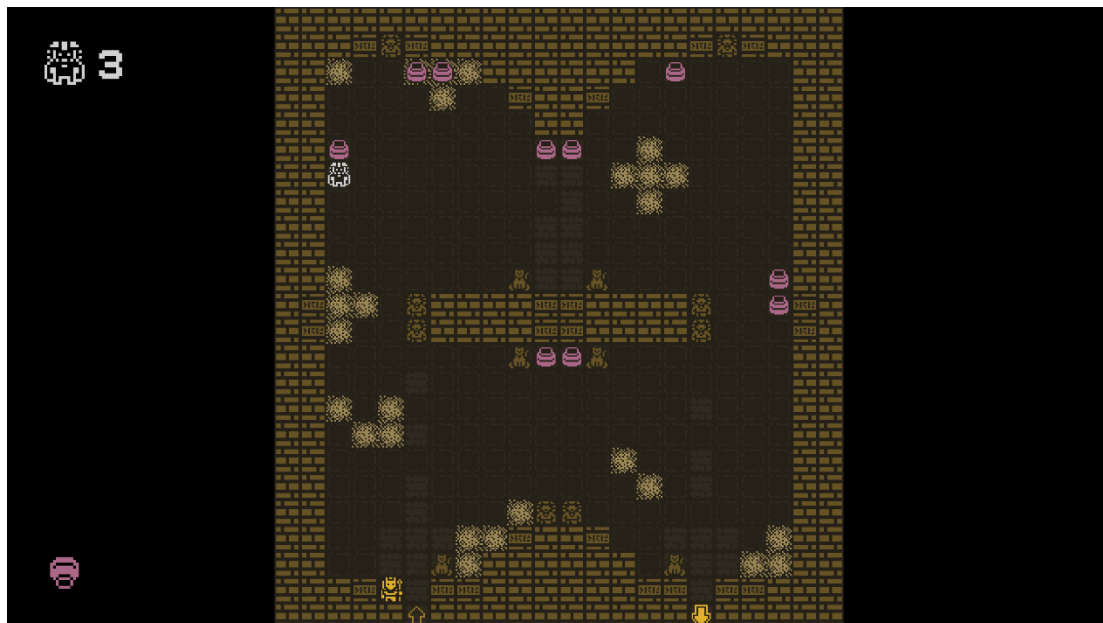
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Executive Summary

The Mask of the Pharaoh is 2D grid-based puzzle game where the player takes control of the ghost of the ancient Pharaoh, navigating his way through room after room of puzzles.

In each room, the player must reach the exit without letting the soul of the Pharaoh become too weak, by interacting with the environment and making use of several different death masks unlockable through the journey. Masks will let them possess different objects, each coming with a different set of abilities that must be used cleverly to find the correct path.

By solving new puzzles the player will get deeper and deeper into the Pharaoh's pyramid, finding new paths, uncovering secrets and meeting a whacky cast of Egyptian gods along the way.



Game Overview

General Idea

The Mask of the Pharaoh challenges players with a huge variety of puzzle rooms built around a single main mechanic: being able to **change your death mask**. By wearing one of the several masks found throughout the game, the ghost of the Pharaoh controlled by the player is able to move its spirit to a nearby object of a specific type and take control over it.

The **ghost** by itself is only able to walk for a very limited number of steps, so death masks become the player's main form of **movement**, as each transformation gives the Pharaoh a new set of specific movement options and ways to interact with the environment – but also comes with heavy restrictions.

Through these limitations navigating the pyramid becomes itself the puzzle, and each one of its rooms will test the player's ability to **master each transformation**, carefully plan all of their moves and make use of all the resources at their disposal in order to reach the exit.

Key Features

Transform with death masks – The Pharaoh starts off in its basic ghost form, which only lets him move for a very limited number of steps before his soul dissolves. To get to the exit, the player must possess the objects found within the room by wearing the corresponding death mask and make use of their unique abilities.

Discover each form – Starting off with only being able to possess a simple vase and roll around the room, more masks related to Egyptian gods will be unlocked as the player progresses through the pyramid, letting them control mummies, jump obstacles, swim through currents and more. Also, possessing an object is the only way to interact with the environment, letting the Pharaoh use pushable objects, switches and other puzzle elements found in the room.

Plan out each step – Movement is heavily limited, so a single step in the wrong direction might spell your demise! Players will have to take into account every interaction and carefully plan out their route to the exit if they want a shot at beating each level, but they will be able to reset each room at any point if they mess up.

Explore the pyramid – All puzzles will be part of a fully connected map making up the Pharaoh's pyramid, split into sections dedicated to different mechanics. And the path forward won't be linear: sections will branch off to allow players to complete puzzles in a different order, or secret paths might be unlocked to reach hidden areas, bonus puzzles and optional collectibles.

Meet the Egyptian gods – The Pharaoh will be accompanied on his journey by Anubis, god of the dead, and meet the varied cast of the Egyptian pantheon throughout his adventure. These gods might not be exactly how he expected them however - through their interactions, the game will unravel a light-hearted story with a good sense of humor.



Game Experience and Design Goals

The Mask of the Pharaoh aims to provide a challenging and rewarding puzzle experience to the player thanks to its **level design** and **progression**, mostly focusing on the following goals:

Create simple problems with clever solutions – The basic premise of each room is as simple as it gets - get from point A to point B - but the limitations posed by the game will make it much more challenging than it seems. Nevertheless, players should always be able to plan their solution from the very beginning of the puzzle and be rewarded for clever use of their resources.

Fully explore every mechanic – Between all the mask transformations and objects found in the puzzles, *The Mask of the Pharaoh* features a deep and rich set of mechanics, each interacting in unique ways with the others. All of these mechanics will find their place in dedicated sections of the game and every opportunity to make an interesting puzzle out of them will be explored.

Show, don't tell – Players will have the opportunity to discover and fully understand all the mechanics by themselves, with tutorials being replaced with curated puzzles that will guide the player to the intended solution through their design.

On top of the elements regarding design, *The Mask of the Pharaoh* wants to deliver to the player a **funny story** through its cast of quirky characters, in order to break up the puzzle progression and give the player a more complete experience.

Genre and Target Players

The Mask of the Pharaoh is a **2D grid-based puzzle game**, with an arcade-style core gameplay that uses extremely simple controls and a simple 8-bit pixel art aesthetic.

The gameplay entirely focuses on puzzle solving and, as such, is targeted at **fans of the puzzle genre** who will enjoy its challenging set of levels.

The game is supposed to get moderately difficult, especially towards the end of each section, but because of its **difficulty curve** players of all skills should be able to pick up the required mechanics and solve the puzzles needed to progress with the story. The hardest challenges will always be **optional**, and mostly kept as bonus content for the most dedicated players.

Player Motivation and Hooks

The player must help the Pharaoh recover his death mask by solving puzzle after puzzle in his pyramid, so that he can finally return to the afterlife. In order to do so, players are challenged to make use of their environment and the different masks found throughout the game to overcome these obstacles.

The puzzles are indeed the main focus and hook of the game as their **clever solutions** will reward whoever manages to solve them, and their constantly increasing difficulty curve will help maintain a sense of progression and encourage players to explore the pyramid further. New mechanics are introduced at key points through the unlockable death masks, mastered through dedicated puzzles, and then combined together to create endless new challenges for the player.

Players will also be rewarded for fully exploring the pyramid through the various **secrets and collectibles** hidden throughout the levels, often coming with extra difficult bonus puzzles for anyone who is up to the challenge.

Through the game, besides unlocking new levels and abilities, the player can also enjoy a **lighthearted and funny story** with interesting characters filled with sense of humor, so finding out what happens next in the Pharaoh's journey to the afterlife will leave the player hooked.

Target Platforms

The Mask of the Pharaoh is currently planned to be released on **PC only** due to the popularity of 2D puzzle games on this platform, and it is planned to be released across the major digital stores for PC games, such as Steam and Epic Games Store.

However, a **Nintendo Switch port** might be considered during later stages of development, as games in a similar style have proved to be quite popular on this console as well.

Releases for other consoles like Playstation 5 and Xbox One are not being planned, since *The Mask of the Pharaoh* does not fit the type of game usually played in these platforms, both in gameplay mechanics and game design.

Game World

Story and Setting

Our tale is told in the land of **ancient Egypt**, in times where Pharaohs still ruled the land and their bodies were buried deep within the grand pyramids built as a show of their power and greatness. Our protagonist is one of the big shots himself, but when he finally bites the dust he finds his spirit stuck in the pyramid, and his **death mask** is nowhere to be found. To an Egyptian, dying without a death mask would mean your spirit would not be able to locate its body to then be able to safely reach to the afterlife.

This is when he meets **Anubis**, a deity in Egypt lore and the shepherd of souls, who explains to him that he must overcome the challenges set before him in this very pyramid, all in order to reclaim his mask and prove himself worthy of the afterlife awaiting a Pharaoh. With his guidance and the help of other deities that lend him their strength, the Pharaoh must now show his worth as he prevails over the deadly puzzles waiting for him and uncovers the truth behind death and the pyramids.

Maps, Levels and Challenges

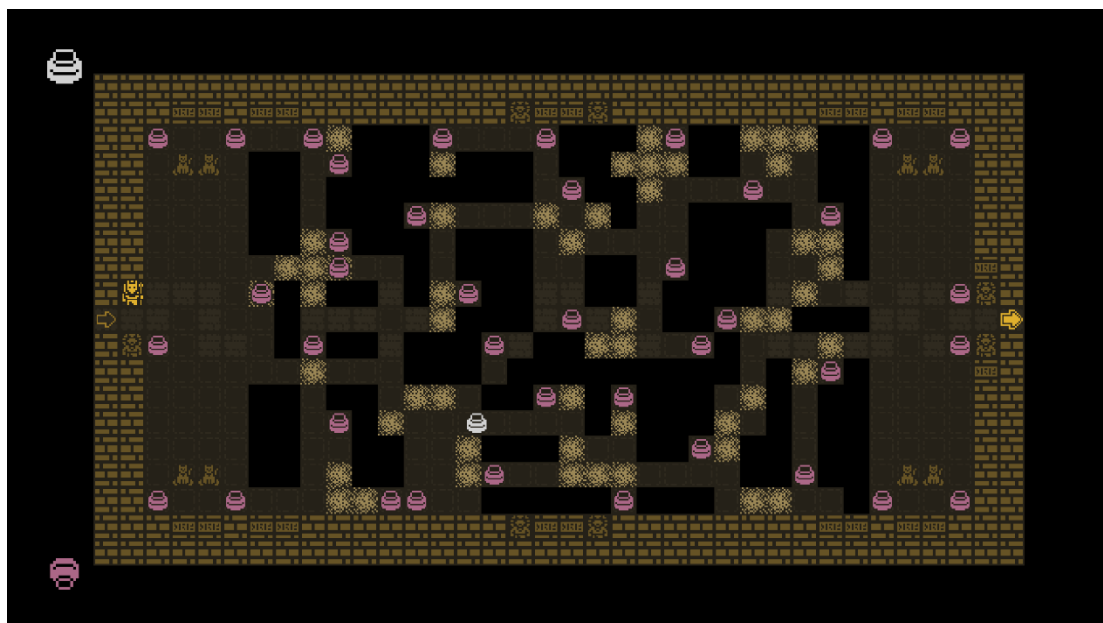
Levels are structured in a way where we can introduce a certain mechanic then slowly build on it, as well as the many **interactions** it has with other abilities. Of course, the **difficulty** also increases as the game progresses.

For a very clear example, the first ability the Pharaoh is introduced to is the ability to possess objects, and the very first available to him is the vase. In the tutorial level of the vase we are introduced to how the base movement works, as well as how it interacts with certain types of tiles like sand. This is also clarified through text in conversation with the main helping character in the story, Anubis. In the second level of the vase, however, pits are introduced and how the vase works with them, as well as the ghost itself. The ability to reload the level also becomes more relevant than in the tutorial.

This structure of level design is repeated for each new mechanic introduced, and the levels get progressively more complex with said new tricks when mixed with previously introduced ones. In turn, new major abilities like that of a mask of a god receive entire regions of the pyramid associated with them as a main focus of the story, with **Osiris** being the first.

It should also be mentioned that this isn't the only perk of new mechanics: **hidden rooms** that can only be accessed through new abilities in older floors are scattered throughout the pyramid, which will challenge adventurous players with harder puzzles in unique ways. Of course, such commitment does not go unrewarded, as **special collectibles** will be obtained per secret room completed. Who doesn't like to show off their skills?

To facilitate exploration and backtracking, the player will be able to freely **return to previously completed rooms**, with statues of Anubis found at the entrance of each room acting as teleporters between them. In addition, the first few areas of the game will act as a **central hub** from which several paths will start, and where characters met during the Pharaoh's journey will make new appearances.



Skills and Items

By changing his death mask, the Pharaoh is able to possess different objects and assume different forms. Some examples that have currently been implemented in the game prototype are the following:



Ghost – In his basic ghost form (when he's not wearing any mask), the Pharaoh can move through objects and hover over pits, but he can't interact with the environment in any way and he can only move for 3 steps before his soul is lost forever.



Vase – Using the vase mask (or better, wearing a vase on his head), the Pharaoh can possess a vase and then roll in any chosen direction, until it hits something and breaks releasing the Pharaoh's soul. However, sand will stop a vase rolling over it, allowing it to change direction.



Mummy – Using Osiris' mask, the Pharaoh can control a mummy from its sarcophagus and walk much farther than usual. The mummy is also able to push other items such as vases and blocks and drag sand around after walking over it, but it will be destroyed after taking 9 steps and the soul of the Pharaoh will return to the original position of the sarcophagus.

Other examples of masks planned for a future release are a **cat** mask (Bastet) that allows the player to jump over obstacles and a **crocodile** mask (Sobek) that can swim through water currents.

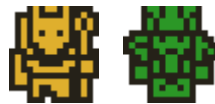


Levels also feature additional interactable objects such as the aforementioned **pushable blocks**, **sand** tiles and **buttons**, that can be used in combination with the correct masks.

Characters



In *The Mask of the Pharaoh* there is one main character referred simply as **the Pharaoh**. This is who the player controls during the entirety of the game. The Pharaoh is designed with a lack of color, representing the fact that he is a ghost. Through the dialogue some of his personality traits are shown, such as his sense of humor and confidence in his abilities, but also his arrogance, expected of someone treated as a living God all through his life.



Besides the Pharaoh there are some supporting characters to give some flavor to the story and help the narrative flow, as well as to give hints to the player during the introductory levels. These characters are Egyptian gods, like for example **Anubis** and **Osiris**, and they are represented as an adorned statue that is possessed with the spirit of its respective god. These characters are mostly funny yet authoritative, which is normal for an immortal being. Of these characters it's worth mentioning Anubis, god of the dead, who is with the player from the beginning of the game due to his duty to guard the afterlife, and is especially goofy offering a great and unexpected contrast with his title in the Egyptian pantheon



Progression

The game is level based, with each level being a different **room** of the Pharaoh's pyramid. In order to advance to the next room, the player must reach the exit without letting the soul of the Pharaoh grow too weak, using only his surroundings and acquired abilities. At the beginning of a level there sometimes is some dialogue between the Pharaoh and one or more Gods to give the player some progression in the game storyline and some clues about new and returning mechanics used in the room.

The main progression of the game is structured around different **sections** of the overall game map, each focusing on one or more specific mechanics, which include both required and optional puzzles: after completing each required puzzle in a section, the next connected sections will be unlocked to reveal more levels.

This makes the progression overall non-linear, as the player can choose in which order they want to solve the puzzles and complete each section. Not only that, but some levels require to be revisited after new masks are unlocked to progress to a different area or discover a secret.

With all this being said, in this game there is both **character** and **player progression**, since the main character progresses by gaining more abilities as he advances through the pyramid, and the player progresses by getting familiarized with the game mechanics, even though from time to time new ones are introduced that may cause the player to have to take some time to adjust.

Unique Selling Points

Highlights

The Mask of the Pharaoh's uniqueness as a puzzle game comes from multiple points, some inspired in existing games, others extracted from completely different genres to create a one-of-a-kind experience.

Multiple forms and object possessions – Being the ghost of a pharaoh searching for his death mask in order to pass on, we thought that it would make sense for the main character to be able to use other masks or well, objects as masks too, much like the vase. This way we introduce a unique way of solving puzzles, tied to both the fact that you're a ghost and that you're searching for a certain mask.

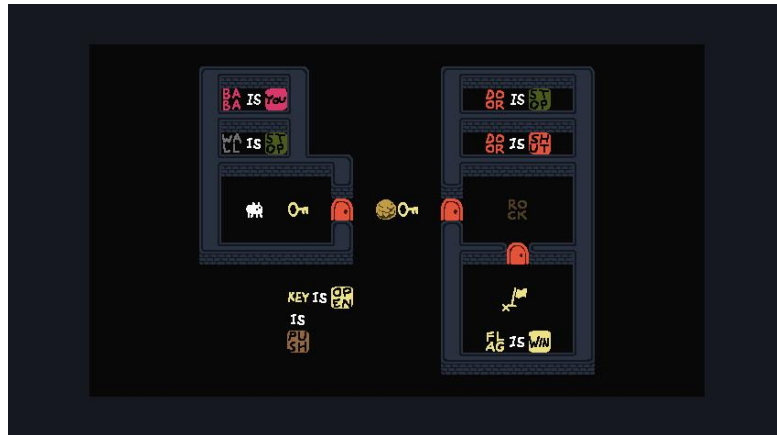
Restricted movement – Puzzles in this game are built around the Pharaoh's very limiting movement options, as its forms come with a limited step count or other restrictions. We used this mechanic and built upon it, introducing ways to refresh your much shorter movement range compared to that game, as well as ways to nullify it when controlling other objects, all in order to create an environment several different opportunities to design challenging puzzles.

Story and characters – Often associated with the 2D arcade-style puzzle game genre is a severe lack of story, or at least it is often simplified and left as a minor part of the game. We want to bring forth lovable characters with a quirky sense of humor in order to make the story more memorable, that will mostly reside within one of the sections of the pyramid and then make other appearances throughout the story or in the main hub.

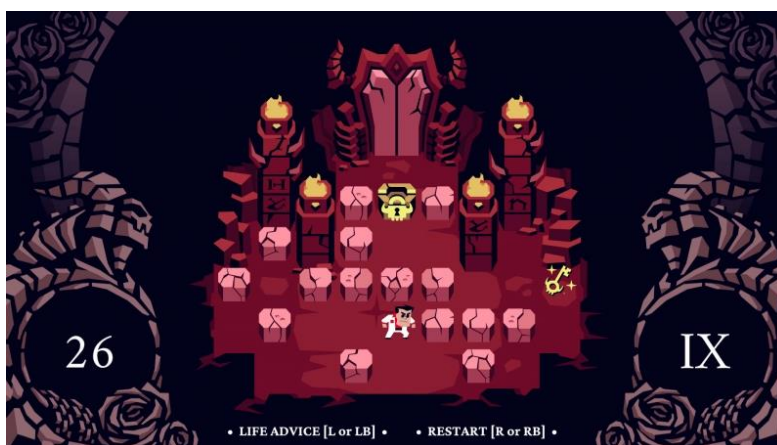
Explorable, fully connected map – The Pharaoh's pyramid is a huge interconnected structure, that the player will be able to explore freely thanks to the Anubis statues found in each room. These statues the option to both replay levels and find certain secrets only explorable once you unlock more abilities, which in turn can reveal bonus levels with unlockable collectibles. This way, we turn a normally linear genre into something more expandable, which also allows us to create the mentioned hub area to interact with gods and other characters you meet along the way.

Competition

The 2D puzzle game genre has recently made a resurgence, with multiple innovative titles becoming widely successful and introducing many new players to the genre. But while it might take some inspiration from some of them, ***The Mask of the Pharaoh*** finds a niche that isn't covered by many games on the market, as can be seen when comparing to other titles of a similar style:



Baba Is You – *Baba Is You* might be the closest and most direct competition to ***The Mask of the Pharaoh*** right now due to its popularity, and it served as an inspiration for its puzzle design philosophy, self-contained level structure and current art direction. However, our game trades the almost logic-based approach to puzzles from *Baba Is You* for a larger emphasis on movement, and introduces a fully interconnected environment full of secrets that encourages exploration.



Helltaker – This small indie title shares some similarities with our title because of its step counter, the main mechanic of the game, which gives its puzzles a similar

feel to the ones we're designing. ***The Mask of the Pharaoh*** takes a similar premise and greatly expands on it, both in terms of scope and mechanics, with the introduction of multiple transformation, a bigger map to explore and a much larger number of puzzles.



Akurra – One of the few open-world puzzle games on the market, *Akurra* lets the player freely move around and explore multiple islands, while going for a more traditional block-pushing approach for its puzzles. We tried to capture a similar feel for the exploration without going for a full open-world experience, which gives us more control over the difficulty curve and lets us greatly expand on the puzzle elements with more mechanics and better challenges.

Production Details

Team

The Mask of the Pharaoh has been developed by a team composed of three people acting as programmers, level designers, artists, sound specialists and writers all at the same time, up until this point. With the complexity of the game in mind and the bases already established, the ideal team composition would be the following:

2 General Programmers – These workers would be responsible for programming new gameplay mechanics, as well as incorporating them with the story and visual/sound effects. The team believes that two people are needed in this area, since the mechanics are one of the main focuses of this game.

2 Level Designers – Once again variety is one of the key words in this game, so the objective is to have many puzzles with different levels of difficulty and different mechanics being combined. With this in mind, two workers would be responsible for the creation of the levels.

1 Artist – Due to the chosen art style and direction of the game, the team believes that only one artist should be hired, since the visuals could use some improvement but will stay very simple thanks to its current 8-bit pixel art aesthetic, even though this might be subject to change in the future.

1 Sound Designer – This person would be responsible for creating a soundtrack and sound effects fitting the setting of the game, its mechanics and its style.

The current team would be divided between the General Programmer and Level Designer positions, as well as being tasked with writing the story of the game.

Current State and Plan

Currently, The Mask of the Pharaoh has a **playable demo** for PC, consisting of four levels. These levels are fully functional in terms of gameplay mechanics, artwork and sound, and each level is introduced with some dialogue in order to give the player a taste of the story and the personality of the characters. This demo is mostly meant to showcase examples of the depth of the mechanics and variety in the challenges, as with only two masks being introduced so far the puzzles can already become quite challenging.

For the future, the team intends to create a reasonable amount of new levels and introduce more character abilities and gameplay mechanics throughout the game, in order to keep the puzzles interesting and give the player a sense of novelty all through the game. The first main focus will be to work on **mechanics** and **level design**, as well as introducing the map layout for the levels.

The story of the game is not yet complete, so more lore and characters must be added, which would help the introduction of new mechanics to the player, as well as provide a motivation to advance in the game. The artwork, music and sound effects should be improved as well, considering that at the moment they are very simple.

Until now the game was developed using **Unity** with the version 2020.3.20f1 and the team is planning to keep using it, since it is a free software with a wide community of users that may offer support and some of the team members already had previous experiences with it.

With all this taken into consideration, it is predicted that ***The Mask of the Pharaoh*** could be fully completed within one year.

Budget (Costs and Revenue)

Considering the average yearly salary for game designers in Portugal of 38163€ (figure taken from <https://www.salaryexpert.com/>) and the predicted development cycle of one year, salary costs should amount to around 160000€ for the developers and level designers.

This should be added to the commission costs for art and sound design and later marketing, coming to an estimated budget of around **200000€** for a title of this scope.

Due to its scope and costs, finding a publisher would greatly help with getting the project started, but crowdfunding options or a reduced team size might be considered if going for an independent release.

As far as revenue options go, ***The Mask of the Pharaoh*** is opting for a pay-once approach common for this type of game, with other options on the market going for around 9-20€ depending on the quality and scope. The closest example is Baba is You, which sells for about 12,49€. Since we have more complexity in other elements, we can assume a fair price would be around **14,99€**.

The option to expand upon the game or push content to free updates or DLC after the release is open, as the structure of the game easily lends itself to the introduction of more content through new areas and puzzles.



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