Avatars and Affordances

UnEpic is a 2011 platformer RPG in the Metroidvania genre. The player controls the protagonist as he adventures through a fantasy castle and fights dozens of types of enemies and bosses. The character can equip and use multiple types of melee and ranged weapons, as well as learn to cast powerful spells and craft potions.

Affordances

Jump

The simplest and most obvious affordance given to the player in UnEpic is the ability to jump. Not only is this affordance expected by anyone who has played a platformer before, but the player is also required to use this affordance in order to leave the starting screen. The left side of the game's first screen has a ledge which requires the player to jump in order to reach.

Climb Ladder

Another affordance that has to be discovered in order to leave the game's first screen is the ability for the character to climb ladders. This affordance is mostly obvious to the player since ladders exist in the real world for climbing, but the game also incentivizes learning of this affordance due to the right side of the game's first screen being a long ladder required to reach the above platform.

Read Sign

This affordance is less obvious to the player and is never explicitly required or shown to the user. If the character stands in front of a signpost, they can hit the interact key to read the sign for (sometimes)

helpful information about the current area. Signposts are part of the background and don't interact with the character in any other way, making this affordance much less obvious. While not specifically required to progress, interacting with signposts often informs the player of nearby shops and warns them of upcoming dangers.

Light Torch

The first main area of UnEpic is extremely dark, and the player character starts off the game equipped with a lighter to illuminate a small area around him. If the character stands in front of a torch, lantern, or other seemingly flammable object while holding the lighter and the player hits the interact key, the character will permanently light the object and illuminate a large portion of the room. Just like reading signs, this affordance is never explicitly stated to the player, but it is a reasonable jump of logic to assume that upon encountering a torch it might be able to be lit. While not specifically required to progress, interacting with and lighting the torches on each screen makes it easier for the player to track the position of enemies, especially when using spells and ranged weapons.

Change Equipment (Hot Swap)

This affordance is offered to the player instead of the character and is very clearly specified and encouraged. The character starts the game with no weapon equipped, but with three weapons assigned to the hot swap bar. If the character exits either side of the initial room in the game, they are presented with enemies. The hot swap bar itself is clearly labeled with the keys required to equip or use each of the items assigned to it. These elements all combine to, regardless of the player's prior history with games, make it extremely obvious that the hot swap bar offers the affordance of changing equipment and that learning how to change equipment is required to proceed through the game.

New Affordance

Ledge Grab/Climb

One affordance that could be added to UnEpic without drastically changing the game design is the ability for the character to grab and climb up ledges. There are multiple screens just in the first area of the game that due to the lack of a ledge grab, and clumsy implementation of jumping-while-climbing, are more frustrating than necessary. The affordance for the character to interact with ledges by grabbing them, hanging, and climbing up would open up a lot of possible map designs and help to reduce minor frustrations during gameplay. A common way to convey the affordance of ledge climbing in games is by making climbable ledges look distinct from ledges that cannot be climbed. Aside from that, or if all ledges can be interacted with, a good way to convey and incentivize the use of the ledge climbing affordance would be to make the platform at the left of the starting screen (which is used to convey the affordance of jumping) slightly higher, meaning it would require both the jump and ledge grab to be used in order to effectively make it onto the platform.