WSOA3003A Micro-Project 2: Communication Design Reflection and Analysis

For the 2nd microproject, a prototype had to be developed that focused on communication design. This was done by iterating on the prototype from the 1st microproject. Multiple visual changes were made to further communicate to the player the intended systems in place.

Intent

For this prototype I wanted to focus on communication mainly through visual means. This would be done through a general overhaul on the visuals found in the 1st prototype by using a wider variety of sprites, an updated UI and particle systems.

If there was enough time by the end, I wanted to add audio effects to further communicate attacks and abilities, as well as very simple animations for certain abilities should to portray an appropriate reaction from the units in the game.

Process

In the beginning, I created the sprites for both my player and enemy. These are extremely simple stickman images with different coloured shirts to indicate who is who. Green being the player and Red being the enemy. This would match the HUD for each respectively that indicated their health bar.

After these sprites were implemented, I decided to create icons which represent the two current debuffs found in the prototype (cripple and poison). These icons were represented by unique sprites which were a broken sword to represent crippled (deal less damage) and a vial of poison to represent poisoned (take one damage each turn). These icons would appear once a unit was affected and would remain visible just underneath the health bar of the respective unit until the required amount of turns have passed. To further illustrate this, I added text to each icon that represented exactly how many turns the debuff had to go. Once the debuff reached its end, the icons would disappear to show this.

After implanting the new HUD for both units, I created a system where the units' sprite would change between four sprites depending on their current state. The first state would be the default where the unit is just standing with their sword out. If the unit is defending, their sword would be replaced with a shield. This sprite change lasted for a whole turn and was made to indicate when a unit would be taking reduced damage. The third sprite would only be shown once a unit was below half of their maximum health. Their faces would change to look anxious or worried to reflect their current state. If the unit healed and went above half health, they would revert to the default. Finally, the last sprite (a coffin) is used when a unit has lost all their health and essentially is only used to indicate that the unit has died.

These sprites are designed in such a way that an emotion may be conveyed to the player. For example, the 'Defending' sprite may make the player feel slightly safer for the next turn, or the 'low health sprite' may make the player worry knowing their health is now low.

A total of three particle systems were used to visually indicate certain abilities, namely heal, poison (damage) and lifesteal. The healing particle effect is a sort of healing beam which is represented by crosses, of the units corresponding colour, rising from their base and going up and around them. The poison particle effect was created to represent when a unit would take damage from the poison. This is seen as small green orbs, the same colour as the poison, appearing from the head of the unit and falling very shortly until dissipating. I made it like this on purpose for it to portray a sick feeling like that found in cartoons and other media. The last particle system used was to represent the lifesteal ability, this was the trickiest thing to communicate effectively through visual means as the game in its current state is very

static. The particles used are red orbs floating from one unit to the other as if absorbing the opponent's life force or health, which is exactly how the lifesteal ability works. Currently only the player has this ability however if the enemy were to use it, I would make the particles the same colour as the health of whoever is getting their health taken. This would solidify that you are indeed taking your opponent's health and adding it to your own.

My basic attack for the prototype had almost no communication or feedback so I added a sound cue to whenever the units attack to indicate this. I did want to implement an animation of sorts where the unit would move or shake when hit but in its current state, it seemed out of place as everything else is mostly static.

Lastly, I added icons to each ability's buttons to visually communicate what the specific ability does. These ability icons fit certain conventions, which clearly communicate the usage or allude to it at least.

Reflection

With this prototype, there are multiple ways that can be implemented to communicate further with the player. However, I am satisfied with the current implementations. The usage of sprites and the UI successfully communicate the current state of the battle and how a player can use this to continue. The particle systems used successfully communicate their respective abilities and what they achieve through visual means.

To further communicate the ideas in this prototype. I would add a wider variety of sprites to perhaps incorporate and represent the debuffs present in addition to those already used. More particle effects for every other ability may also be created but would not be a priority given what they are.

On the other hand, removing certain information (such as the HP display) may change how significant certain communication is (specifically the 'low health' sprite with no HP information, signifying the state of the player/enemy).

One of the better improvements that can be implemented in the future, given the current state of the prototype, is the addition of sound cues. Given the time constraints, I could not make sounds that matched the current prototype and settled for the one. Certain sound cues should be used to indicate what abilities are being used which just creates additional layers of communication.

Another addition would be small or subtle animations that indicate a unit's current state, this can range from a small throwing up animation to indicate poisoned status or a small change in how the sword is held (almost dropping sword entirely) to show crippled status. This is not a major concern because of the current prototype but would be a nice addition.

In the end, I am satisfied with how the prototype turned out and I am happy with how the implementations communicate the ideas to the player.

Appendix

Player Sprites used:

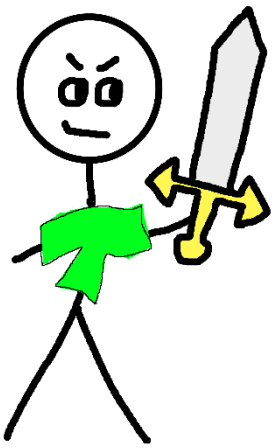

Figure 1: Player character default

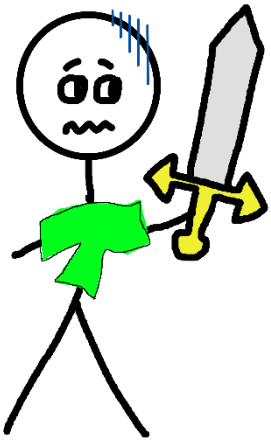

Figure 2: Player character hurt

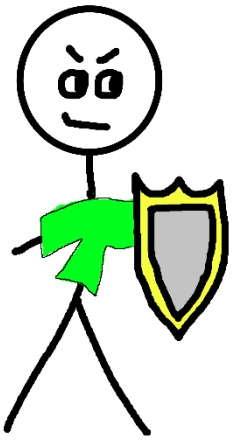

Figure 3: Player character defending

Icons used:

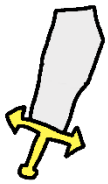

Figure 4: Attack icon (sword)

Figure 5: Defend icon (shield)

Figure 6: Heal icon

Figure 7: Cripple icon (broken sword)

Figure 8: Poison icon

Figure 9: Lifesteal icon