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GIMM 110

11/5/2024

Final Game Analysis

For my first ever “big” game I’ve made myself, I think I did alright. I wouldn’t say I was ever particularly “challenged”, per se, I have had coding experience in the past, though that’s not to say this project didn’t have its issues throughout development. Here, I would like to dissect my project and go in-depth with my thought processes when designing each aspect of the project.

First, I would like to cover the visuals. The game’s menu features a simple cartoon aesthetic, communicating to the player that the game is not to be taken too seriously, just a fun time that won’t shake you to your core, just to play and enjoy. My introductory animation utilizes a similar feel, with simple shapes being used to create a light-hearted atmosphere. The story I portray in it is of a man whose cake was stolen by a thieving scoundrel, so he must get it back. For my first time utilizing Adobe Animate, it was a struggle. The program was not very conducive to how I usually try to draw and animate. I tend to draw using a tablet and pen, and I tend to not use pathing or shape tools, I just draw the figure I need at the time I need it. Working in this different environment was a strange transition, but one I could work with.

The sprite work in this game is all very simple, all done in sixteen by sixteen grids. I was inspired by the simplistic design of “Super Mario Bros. 3” and the cartoony sprites that game utilized. The animations found are all very simple, utilizing only a few frames, running at varying speeds to emulate the early animations found in my game of inspiration. The character sprites are all very simple, depicting the man with the stolen cake with snappy movement and speedy swaps to other animation states. The tileset has two varieties in consistency, depending on the levels you play. The earlier levels have simple, grassy plains, typically found in platformers with warm, happy atmospheres. The vibrant colors and rounded corners provide a very soft and welcoming environment, communicating that the player is safe to make mistakes and learn rather than be immediately punished and forced to quit the game. However, a second tileset exists for the latter stages, and this tileset has a very different energy to it, depicting a different mental state I was in while developing these assets and stages. These sprites are more detailed, with harsh corners and more drab colors. As well, some sprites are utilized in the foreground, blocking the player while behind them, something that was not present in the earlier stages. Additionally, some sprites work in tandem to portray different messages or decor in the environment. Finally, a darker-toned variant of the more detailed tileset is utilized for the final level, to communicate a change in time, as well as a change in theming and messaging. The details become more graphic and disturbing, as well as depressive messages lining the walls to communicate a feeling of hopelessness and worthlessness to the player. To contrast the tonal shift, the final “game over” screen returns to the goofy, light-hearted theming that the intro screen had. I chose to do this to leave the player with a moment of confusion, as if what they had played wasn’t real, and nothing had happened, when in fact, it did, and the hard cut to the jolly energy makes the depressive atmosphere switch linger that much more.

The coding in the game was not much of a challenge for me. Again, I would like to state that I have experience in working with code and designing simple games, so after getting used to Unity and the different terminology and organization of different information, I had a very easy time getting different mechanics to work. My first mechanic I needed to make sure would work properly was jumping, and in tandem, falling. Thankfully, Unity has functions to help calculate player positions, movement, and velocity, so I did not need to create my own arc method to add basic platformer movement. Next, I wanted a simple collection system, similar to the coins found in my game of inspiration. To fulfil that, I added the sweets, where each one would add one point to your score. However, I later expanded it further with the implementation of two new items and a gatekeeper. Firstly, I added a variant of the sweet, which I dubbed the Super Sweet, which will give the player two points instead of one, though I planned for it to be usually found in harder to reach locations. Next, I added the gatekeeper, a shadowy figure which will not let you pass unless you have at least ten points. Upon the player colliding with the figure, it will disappear, take ten points, and allow the player to progress. The shadow in the first level can be bypassed if the player utilizes a specific technique with strict timing, though later on, collecting sweets for the shadow man is mandatory to progress. Finally, I added the pills item for the final stage. To match the gloomy and depressing atmosphere and messaging of the level, the player is led to collect the pills, where each one will subtract five points from your score, pushing it into the negatives, and decrease the player’s run speed and jump height, adding to the narrative as the effects of the pills and events in the game play out. (On a side note, I would like to mention the shadow figure present in the final level. Unlike the previous levels, there is no requirement for points, nor is there any way to reach a positive number of points, yet the shadow man is still found at the end. I left him in the game for narrative reasons. I will not be divulging them here, but it is intentional for him to be there, for the player to pass through him, and for him to never leave the level.)

My main desire for player control was a double jump, where the player would be able to jump in midair to reach a greater height, or fall off an edge and still jump in midair. I was able to easily add a counter for additional jumps, and the method in which I implemented it allows for me to add features where the player is granted additional jumps. The grounding check I utilized initially did not allow for the player to jump after falling off a ledge unless they had already jumped previously. To counter this, I added a statement that would give the player their mid-air jumps back after they become grounded again. This allowed me to reimplement the technique of post-ledge jumping, granting a learning curve for the player to understand game mechanics. Next, I implemented the pills, which I covered previously their purpose and intent. The coding for this item was a bit trickier, as it conflicted with my jumping script and prevented the player from jumping at all. I was able to work out myself the issues with the code, it was simply calling on an outdated and confusing script I no longer used, so after reassociating the function with the right script, and tweaking the amount of player movement each pill would restrict, I was happy with the final result.

Finally, I added a couple of additional movement options in case the player wanted to rush through the longer sections of the game. First, to give the player a simple speedier movement option, I added a sprint by holding down the left control key on the keyboard. This increases the player speed by about one and a half, though it will not increase jump height. This sprint allows for players to move faster through the levels, though it may result in mistakes being made due to the higher speeds. The sprint interacts naturally with the pill mechanic, though it does not bring the player to their original high speed. Instead, it dynamically shifts the player’s speed based on how many pills they have collected, so after collecting all of the pills in the final stage, the player will barely reach their original base walking speed. Finally, I wanted to give the players an additional movement tool for maneuvering around the environment in the form of a higher crouch jump. While holding the “s” key and on the ground, the player can then execute a high jump, which is much higher than the player’s original base jump height. Combined with the double jump, the player can reach great heights, however, the code I used to add the crouch will not allow the player to execute a crouch jump in mid-air, only while on the ground. This is to prevent players from reaching unreasonable heights, as well as to add to the difficulty and decision making the player needs to perform in order to pass the obstacles. I wanted to add difficult obstacles and hidden platforms the player could reach if they utilized the crouch jump, mid-air jump combination, but to display the tactical purpose, I positioned the shadow man to be bypassed by properly performing this technique, displaying the advantage of learning the timing to reach great heights and bypass potentially tiresome obstacles.

With the final project coming to a close and “completed”, I would say I am content with how the final project turned out, though I am not “happy” with it. My initial game was originally fun and whimsical, focusing around tight gameplay and movement, but I scrapped my later content in favor of the story I would tell in the latter half of the game. I wanted to time players in the stages, give exploration and perilous journeys a purpose, and reward tight platforming and skilled maneuvering. But after my mental state shifted during development, I removed any trace of this in favor of simply meeting the requirements. Yes, this game works, and for all intents and purposes, it is complete, but I will never be happy with it. After that point, this was no longer my game. I wasn’t pushing the boundaries of my skill, I was just doing good enough. Maybe that’s more telling of my character, being able to sacrifice what I had wanted in favor of what others wanted. But to me, even if this game is considered a success, both this game and myself are failures, and I will not become a success until I can say with certainty, that someone enjoyed something I made, and this game, I doubt will fulfil that. But for this assignment, it is done, and it should meet every requirement set, so if that is the measure of success, then this game, and myself, excel at meeting the needs of others at the cost of our own.