

Design intentions and details

CD Project red – Recruitment Test

About the ability-related approach

The first thing I did when I read « Exploration Puzzle » was to think about references. Here are the ones who came to my mind:

- Portal
- The Talos Principle
- The Last Guardian
- The Witness
- And somehow : Pikmin

In these games, there are two main keys to solve puzzle:

- Interact with elements already present in the level design; you have to arrange them in the right combination. (i.e. : in The Talos Principle)
- Use player abilities to use or modify the level design. (i.e. : Portal)

Of course, these elements can be mixed for greater puzzle, but for this small prototype, my choice has been to rely mainly on abilities; as it is in my opinion more dynamic and involving.

About having a partner

In addition, these games all have a strong atmosphere. As the rhythm in exploration puzzle games is quite slow in general, designers need something to keep the player from being bored.

There is always something intriguing enough to distract the player from the puzzle itself:

- GLaDOS in Portal (and also Wheatley in Portal 2)
- The mysterious Father and the overall atmosphere in The Talos Principle
- Trico in The Last guardian

Like in The Last Guardian, I really liked the idea of having a partner as it fulfils two purposes: it can be involved in puzzles and if the AI is good enough, it will be a real asset to keep the player entertained and distracted.

Of course, I did not have the time to work enough on the entertaining AI part, but that was the intention.

Abilities

Even if the idea of having a partner (*I will call him Buddy now*) came from The Last Guardian, I always saw him as a small pikmin you would throw and use to complete various tasks.

The intention was to focus on the player-buddy and world-buddy interactions :

While the Player would sometimes have to interact with the world elements and NPC, having the buddies do most of these interactions with the world is an attempt at making it feel more “alive”.

Therefore, most player abilities are related to the buddy :

- Laser Pointer:

The player uses his laser to point to a specific location or item; all buddies will follow it like a cat follows a red dot. (A buddy will only follow the dot if it has sight of it.)

The player can use his pointer through a “fence”, however, buddies will only follow it if they’re on the same side as the dot.

- Hold and Throw:

This ability is used to help a buddy access an area unreachable by the player. Like the other side of a fence.

- Whistle :

Used to call the buddies back to the player.

Keys and Buttons

(Buttons are for Xbox 360/One controllers)

Laser: Left Mouse Click or Right Trigger

Jump: Space key or (A) button

Hold / Throw: E key or (X) Button

Whistle: A key or (Y) Button

Movement and Camera: Directionnal Arrows / AWSD keys + mouse or Controller joysticks

Next Room Cheat Code: “Back” button

Go to room Cheat Code: Number key on keyboard -> Press 4 to be teleported to the fourth room.

Buddy’s AI states

Normal: This buddy has nothing to do, it will listen to the player.

Held: This buddy is currently held by the player, it is waiting to be thrown.

Thrown: This buddy has been thrown and is waiting to hit the ground before doing anything else.

Chasing: When a buddy has sight of a rabbitNPC, it will start chasing it. Once the Rabbit reaches its hideout, the buddy goes back to the normal state.

While chasing, a buddy won’t listen to the player and will even leave the “hold” state.

Level Design intentions summary:

Rooms 1-4: Teaching controls and showcasing simple situations

Room 5: Use the whistle ability actively, to trigger elements, separated zones that requires dispatching characters all over the room vertically and horizontally.

Room 6:

- Make the buddy AI play against you. The rabbit doesn't help progressing in the level, it is only here to be chase by your buddies and forces you to handle them carefully.
- Use of a mirror to reflect the laser.
- Use a bigger room that requires exploration to understand and solve.

(More details and Walkthrough in the Level Design document)