

Analysis of Mechanics

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Title: Darkwood

Released: Early access 2014, Full release 2017

Author: Acid Wizard Studio

Primary Genre: Survival horror

Secondary Genre: Action adventure, Roguelike

Style: Surreal, Dark

Analysis

Darkwood is a game with a particular style. The game was developed by a small indie studio. The core game loop is focused on survival in a dark forest. During the day, the player must scavenge it for essential resources that can be used later to craft useful items. When night comes, the player must barricade himself inside a hideout and try to survive until the day.

Survival and horror are the main aspects of the game. Darkwood intentionally omits hunger and thirst mechanics and focuses primarily on resource management, preparation for the night, and surviving it. Night is not the only time the player is in danger. During the day, there are many dangerous places and enemies that can kill the player.

The game can masterfully build an atmosphere. Darkwood is avoiding jump scares, preferring to build atmosphere with greatly made sound design. Another big part of the horror gameplay is the top down view perspective with a limited cone of vision. This prevents the player from seeing what is directly behind him, so you never know what or from where something can attack you. During the night, multiple events can occur, so you never know what to expect.

Exploration and combat are very important parts of the game. The player is exploring a semi-generated world with multiple interesting landmarks. During exploration player can meet multiple NPCs. They are significant for the story, and the player can interact with them, piecing together a cryptic story. Combat can be really punishing, primarily focused on melee combat, at least at the start and middle of the game. The player can choose from multiple melee and firearm weapons to use. Timing is important because each weapon has a wind up time, and if you miss, it can hurt. Darkwood is keeping you in a feeling that you are still vulnerable, even with the strongest weapons, you never feel too powerful.

The game incorporates strong roguelike elements. The layout of the woods is semi-randomized on each playthrough, ensuring that each playthrough is different. Throughout the game, the player can level up and choose from 3 unique perks on each level, which can help or sometimes be bothersome. On harder settings, the game features permadeath, or limited lives that the player has. All of these genres play well with each other.

The secondary genres of Action Adventure and Roguelike strongly support and enhance the primary genre of Survival Horror. The combination creates an atmosphere where the world itself is a hostile entity, and the player is always at a disadvantage.

The style of Darkwood absolutely supports the gameplay, specifically the atmospheric and psychological horror. As I mentioned, the developers chose the top down perspective with the limited vision to manipulate the player's perception and generate fear without relying on typical horror jump scares. The game features a darkly detailed aesthetic that relies on murky colors and oppressive environments (overgrown, ruined areas). The minimalist use of music, reserving it for key moments, and the focus on ambient sounds (creaks, distant growls, footsteps) are crucial. Sound becomes the player's primary sense, making the unseen threats far more terrifying. The developers did a great job of letting players' own imagination think about what could be outside.

Overall, the style and genres are mixed together really well and make a great experience that I would recommend to anyone who likes atmospheric and horror games.