Child of Light Level Design MDA Analysis

Introduction

Level design pertains to the creation of content where the player can utilise the system afforded to them. Child of Light is a 2D platformer game developed by Ubisoft Montreal. In this analysis, a brief exploration of the games approach to level design will be analysed. Followed by an analysis of Child of Light in terms of its mechanics and how the mechanics interact with the level design. This will be done by analysing the mechanics of the game in the early levels where most of the introduction of mechanics happens and interact with the levels designed for the player to interact with and learn.

Analysis

Level design, like many topics in game design, is a broad subject and has many intricacies. In this analysis, the focus will be on how the initial levels of the game employ level design to complement the systems that were developed. To do this, a few things need to be understood. What exactly is level design? In its simplest form, level design is the design or creation of content in which the player can engage the systems and have an environment to which they can learn. At its core, level design and system design work in tandem to create a player experience. That is where the concept of level design difficulty comes in. Level design is either built around the *complex system difficulty* or *the conceptual difficulty*. Complex systems level design has to do with the addition of more system elements in order to have intricate level design. Whereas conceptual level design is the creation of a level based on conceptual ideas of how the player will interact and be introduced to the game. Conceptual level design is the harder of the two, however, Child of Light uses it to introduce the game to the player.

Child of Light achieves this relationship of level and system interaction mostly through conceptual level design. For the sake of this essay, the early chapters of the game will be looked at. The early levels of the game go through a tutorial style phase where the player is introduced to new mechanics as the game proceed. The player is then able to practice those new mechanics within the level.

Mechanics and Dynamics

The game uses the conventional WASD movement for platformer games. This movement is introduced to the player when they spawn not through prompts but by where the main

character, Aurora, is spawned. This area is sizable and safe. This ensures that the player is not interrupted when they are still learning the game. As the player proceeds to the right, they are presented with a small obstacle. This serves the purpose of showing that the player also has a jump, but it is introduced through level design and no prompts. As Aurora moves further to the right, the player is then given the option to interact with interactable objects. Now with interaction and jumping introduced to the character, the level design encourages the use of both these mechanics when the player has to interact with a block to reach an otherwise unreachable platform without jumping on said block then jumping onto the desired platform.

Firefly gets introduced. Firefly is another character the player is in control of. Firefly has their own set of abilities which are introduced gradually as well through level design. Wishes are plants which contain replenishes for the characters the player controls. After Firefly is acquired, there are wishes close by. This is a level design decision to show the player that they can now use Firefly to reach wishes anywhere on screen and collect what they drop. Another thing introduced with the wishes is how they show which direction the player needs to travel to move the game forward. This is two system interaction presented to the player through the level design. Firefly also works as a light source. This is done through another two level and mechanic interactions. Firstly, the player will typically move into a dark cave, where they will be prompted that they can use the left mouse button to illuminate the area with Firefly. Secondly, after this interaction, the player will have to apply this illumination mechanic to solve a simple light puzzle. Now the mechanic has another use highlighted through the design of the level.

Conclusion

Child of Light is inherently a game with a complex system, however the level design is not designed in dependence of the complex system. Instead, Child of Light uses conceptual level design. As discussed above, the couple of analysed system and level interaction show that the early levels are set up in such a way to firstly introduce the player to a mechanic and how they can use it initially. Then there will be other interactions which will require the player to mix the mechanics they have learnt previously to proceed into higher levels.