Vilom Chronicles Design decision document

Team 10 – Mojo Jojo Studios

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GAME IDEA

Vilom Chronicles is a unique take on the traditional 2D platformer genre. The player starts the game as an evil vampire that has the desire to corrupt and conquer the entire game-world with it's magic. This differs from almost every other 2D platformer because the player almost always plays the good guy. However, the main twist of the game, is that the player, once he or she has completed the vampires side of the game and conquered/corrupted the entire gameworld, suddenly has to play as the good guy and fight it's way back through all of the levels already completed by the vampire. The difference is that all of the levels are corrupted (evil) and totally different based on how the necromancer acted, while still feeling like the level you visited before as the necromancer. The combat in the game will be made challenging, testing the player in multiple ways, creating a sense of achievement.

VISION STATEMENT

World altering action-packed skill-testing perception-based combat-platformer

TARGET AUDIENCE

Gamers that like platforming and action games that are very challenging (hardcore gamers)

UNIQUE SELLING POINT

Unique style of combat, corruption world altering, two playable characters

GAME EXPERIENCE ANALYSIS

Challenge: The game will give the player a challenging experience. This challenge mainly comes from the combat and platforming aspects, in which the player's capabilities to analyze, anticipate and react are being tested. Since the gameplay tests these skills in the smallest of situations, it will quickly trigger a sense of achievement. The analyzing aspect of the challenge consists of the need for the player to examine his enemies. The anticipation aspect of the challenge is formed by combining the learned behavior of the enemy in the analyzing aspect and give a clear view of the current situation. The reaction aspect of the

challenge will test the player's capability to react on time in the anticipated situation. Thus the player must understand the enemy's capabilities and abilities, and react accordingly.

The changing of characters and the corruption mechanic will create an extra level of depth to the challenge of the game, while the game is staying the same at its core, it will keep providing new challenges to the player.

INITIAL DESIGN DECISIONS

This chapter will cover all of the (interesting) design decision that were taken to realise the game described earlier. A lot of design decisions are related to each other, so for document clarity we have decided to group design decisions together in a way that fits the game's design best. Each group of design decisions has the original design description from assignment 2.1 aside from the concrete design decisions taken during 2.3. Sentences or part of sentences that are not in the prototype but can be added later, are marked in red.

COMBAT

Original design description

The combat, as explained in the game experience analysis, focusses on the feeling of generating satisfaction from small achievements. This is done by testing the player's skill in various ways. To achieve this feeling the player will be able to predict the enemy's behavior by looking at the enemies animations and listening to sound cues. The player will have to react to this behavior of the enemy in the correct way, using his abilities to dodge, block or counter the attacks. Most enemies can be beaten in multiple ways, since enemies have several different attack and defense abilities, that each have at least one countermove available to the player. Finding these counters will also create a sense of satisfaction.

Concrete design decisions

A lot of design decision were made to complement the combat in Vilom Chronicles. We do want to mention that we do think that we came up with a good combat design but it is not complete nor solid as new design aspects probably will be added, changed or removed during the real development process of the game. The design mentioned below is thus a reflection of our current idea of how the combat should work.

One of the main experiences that the combat in Vilom Chronicles should create, is the feeling of defeating an enemy by outplaying it using your own skills. A couple of combat rules were created to generate this experience. The first part is that enemies can only be hit when they are attacking or are in a special state than can be triggered through various actions like parrying or block-crushing. This prevents the player from being able to 'just attacking' the enemy and thus has to outplay the enemy's behavior/abilities. This can be changed to that enemies can be hit when not attacking and not blocking if the AI is good enough to avoid the player's attacks when done in a non-intuitive way. But this is quite hard to achieve and should be tested if it possible. To support the possibility of outplaying an enemy by countering it, both Vairl and Tanis have specific attack with certain properties. In the prototype, Vairl has a fireball and Tanis can hit low and high. In the full game, this would be more complex. For example, Vairl can have a low slide that goes under standing punches / sword-slashes / projectiles but gets beaten by low

moves. The general rule is that both characters almost always have a tool to counter a certain attack. (Some attack may not be counterable with an attack for the purpose of game design) Another supporting feature is the parry feature. Tanis (and possible Vairl) can parry attack by timing the block and if timed correctly and it creates an opportunity to attack. The final feature that was added as a combat rule, is the stamina system. Doing certain actions like jump, dodging, teleporting etc. cost stamina. This forces the player to think ahead as taking a certain action might limit him/herself in the long run. For example, Vairl's teleport is a very strong ability to get out but it would be unfair if the player can easily attack and get out within a short time window. The stamina system forces the player to do one of the two, resulting in more tense en smart decision making by the player. Again, by limiting how the player can defeat it's enemies, a stronger sense of achievement is created when the player does so successfully. By combining these four combat rules, a player has to and can use Vairl and Tanis's abilities to defeat and outplay the enemy. This generates a sense of satisfaction as the player overcomes challenges in the game by using it's own skillset to the max.

It was also mentioned that enemies should be learnable and when learned, can be predicted to a certain degree. To make this possible enemies have detailed animations that give hints about what type of attack it is (going to) doing. This is also implemented in the prototype to a certain degree, as it was very hard to find sprites with detailed enough animations and type of attacks. Each type of action of an enemy consists of a start-up phase, active-phase and ending-phase. The animations that play during the start-up should give the player (if seen fast enough) information about what the enemy could possibly do. Depending on the skill and knowledge of the player this can range from that the enemies might attack to recognizing a specific attack and knowing how to counter. Perfectly recognizing a attack and countering or avoiding it when at the brink of death creates a sense of achievement as the player survived/won using it's perception and thinking rather than just luck. A perfect example of this is that the boss for Tanis has an instant kill where the boss tries to encapsulate Tanis in an orb where tanis has to roll/jump out of before the orb is completely surrounding Tanis. To support the animation principle, sound cue's were added to also give the player hints about what enemies might do.

Another design decision that was made regarding the combat was that enemies have decently capable AI. In the prototype the AI only look at if an attack is within range. However, in the future versions it will also use other information such as it's health, recent actions that happened (for example the player countered a specific move) and the perceived state of the player. If a player jumps in on the enemy when the enemy is idle, it can of course anti-air the player with ease. When a certain type of enemy is heavily wounded, it might act desperately, using risky or unique attacks in different situations than usual. Or when a player just countered a specific move a smart enemy would not use that attack for a while as it knows that the player can counter it easily. Implementing this makes every battle unique and keeps the player wary, again resulting in a satisfying feeling of achievement when winning a thrilling battle.

THE TWO CHARACTERS

Original design description

By having two characters the game creates a contrast between the first and second playthrough of the levels, after having corrupted the levels in the first playthrough as the evil necromancer, the player will have to play through all the same level as the good knight. This also gives an extra level of depth to the story and makes for a more interesting combat, since both characters will have completely different skillsets. This keeps refreshing and exciting to play and new things to master.

Concrete design decisions

Two characters were designed and implemented in the prototype, Vairl and Tanis. Vairl is the evil vampire and Tanis is the 'good guy' knight. Due to time constraints and lack of experienced pixel-artists in the theme, it was nowhere near possible to fully design our own characters with the specific tools and animations the we wished the characters would have had. Instead, existing sprites from two different games were used in the prototype and using them in creative ways to create a sort-of representation of the desired characters. Vairl and Tanis have matching (to a certain degree) and unique abilities, creating two unique play-styles while staying true to the style of combat in the game. As mentioned earlier, mastering the capabilities of a certain character will result in a sense of satisfaction and achievement for the player, as mastering a character is closely tied to how well a player fights in the combat of Vilom Chronicles.

Vairl, the evil vampire, is a supernatural being and thus has magical abilities and is more 'agile' than Tanis. Vairl is easier to play as Tanis as he is more agile and has ranged attacks to deal damage from a distance. The sprites of the evil vampire Dimitri Maximoff from Darkstalkers (Capcom) were used in the prototype to represent Vairl, as they are both vampires and the sprites are from a fighting game. (Fighting game characters often have a lot of attacks and detailed animation, which is very useful, see combat section.) However, using this spritesheet also limited what was possible as Vairl in-game. In the end, Vairl has the following abilities that support the game design in the following ways:

- A block, which allows Vairl to block attacks if the player reacts accordingly.
- A magical hover, allowing Vairl to fly in the air for a short amount of time, giving the player an extra mobility option.
- A teleport, it works the same as a dodge but the player can teleport into any direction they want. (Different than a roll)
- Multiple physical attacks with different hitboxes/ranges, allowing the player to counter the enemies.
- Multiple special attacks with unique properties, these are a fireball, jumping guard-crush and a uppercut. A fireball can be shot from a distance, the guard-crush can break certain enemies block and the uppercut is a strong counter move that has to be used wisely.
- Vairl can be freely controlled in the air when jumping
- Vairl walks faster

- Special corruption finisher that is hard to pull off but causes a lot of corruption compared to a normal kill. F.e. a touch of death or neck-bite attack.
- A parry

Tanis, the 'good guy' knight, does not have any magical abilities by himself (That doesn't prevent him from finding/gaining them later on during the game) and thus relies on it's armor and melee weapons. Because of the armor, Tanis is less mobile than Vairl. Tanis plays like a tank with many close melee attacks thus has to get in using it's limited mobility and abilities before it can deal damage. It was rather hard to find anything well suited for Tanis but the best spritesheet that we found was Leo from Warzarth (Capcom, also a fighting game). In the game, Tanis has the following abilities that support his design:

- Tanis has a locked jump, meaning that the player has to fully commit to a jump like in real life.
- Tanis can double jump. This can be used for jumping in and out of range fast, baiting attacks or correcting a mis-input.
- Tanis walks slower than Vairl, making him less agile
- Tanis has a shield-dodge-roll that is only partially invincible and thus has to be timed. The roll is very useful for getting close or even countering an enemy by rolling through the the enemy's attack and hitting them.
- A block so the player can block the attacks if reacted successfully.
- A low, normal and jumping attack. Due to sprite and coding constraints Tanis only has these three attacks. In the real game Tanis would have more types of normal melee attacks with different speeds/range/hit-height.
- Tanis can throw his sword, dealing a lot of damage but Tanis needs to pick up his sword after that. If the player misses, the player can only do minor damage with Tanis's fists until the sword is retrieved.
- A parry. If Tanis perfectly times it's block, it parries the enemies (if possible) and makes the enemy vulnerable. This is the counterpart of Vairl's block crush and is harder to pull off.

CORRUPTION: HOW TO CORRUPT

Original design description

As the player starts as an evil vampire, (s)he will want conquer the world. To create this experience the game has a corruption mechanic. This results in a feeling that the player has an influence on the world he is playing in.

Completing a level in the most difficult method would mean for the highest level completion corruption, raising the corruption for the entire stage to maximum. Making a kill would increase the local corruption slightly higher, certain spells result in more corruption from a kill than others. Capturing a checkpoint would increase the local corruption mildly. Special locations would hold unique consequences based on the location, in the case of a temple you may chose to leave it and have no effect on the corruption, corrupt the location increasing the corruption level harshly or destroy it entirely increasing the corruption mildly. In the second playthrough of the game the decisions at these locations may mean a special

enemy emerges from the temple or a small dungeon is available for Tanis.

Concrete design decisions

Vilom Chronicles has a dynamic corruption system, which is implemented in the prototype. Each in-game ground-tile has a corruption value, which changes when the player does certain things. These can be changed by killing enemies, doing certain things to a checkpoint and doing certain actions at special locations. Killing enemies changes the corrupt within a certain vicinity immediately. Checkpoints can be either corrupted or destroyed with destroying increases the corruption way more than corrupting. (See the images above) The corruption is made visible because the dynamic corruption system changes the look of the ground tiles as soon as the corruption starts. During gameplay or when the stage is completed, the total corruption or the corruption of certain tiles might cause special events. The simplest is that the total corruption can cause the stage to be lv.1 up to lv.X when playing Tanis. This is also implemented in the prototype. The stage for Tanis has two version, one for corruption lv.1 and one for corruption lv.2. The corruption mechanic creates both challenge and satisfaction as many player might want to find out what the different corruption levels do and thus have to play better and better to get a higher level. When reaching a higher corruption level than an earlier try, the player will be satisfied.

CORRUPTION: AFFECT ON DIFFICULTY

Original design description

The idea of the corruption is that it influences the world and we intend this game to be quite tough for every player, and so we give a tool to the player to influence the difficulty of his second playthrough(to a certain extend). If in the first playthrough the player decides to make the game incredibly difficult through actions he decided to take(such as not kill an enemy, or skip a checkpoint) the second half of the game will follow that difficulty, so this mechanic suits the difference in skill between players. This will mostly be done through corruption level. Enemies get stronger and platforming gets harder as the corruption level increases, thus increasing the difficulty.

A difficult path in the first playthrough means a high corruption level thus the second playthroughs difficulty goes up. This gives a feeling of control and adds a level of challenge to the game.

Concrete design decisions

Designing this part of the game is simple yet hard. Enemies should be increasingly harder to defeat as the corruption level increases. This is not only achieved in Vilom Chronicles by increasing the enemy's HP and damage output but also by changing the behavior and abilities of the enemies as well. This sounds simple at first but this leads to designing unique

attacks which only appear at certain corruption levels which challenge the player. This is implemented in the prototype. Below are a couple of examples.

Zato, the boss which Tanis has to fight against, gets a minion that joins the fight at lv.2 corruption. The makes the boss-battle totally different compared to lv.1 as the player has to manage two enemies at the same time. Aside from the minion, Zato also gets an instant-kill that is avoidable if the player acts smart.

Potemkin, the large tank enemy, gets more attacks as the corruption level increases. At lv.1 corruption he gets a body drop because the corruption causes him to be less precise and he randomly falls over. At lv.2 he also gains a low hop smash that counters the counter that players could use against his dive attack. This causes players to play more cautious.

The ninja, a rather weak enemy when playing as Vairl, gets many more attacks as the corruption increases. At lv.1 it gets a strong gunshot that acts different than the knife throw, forcing the player to be more wary of it's jumps. At lv.2 it gets all new melee attacks, making it less predictable how to counter this enemy.

The level of corruption can also alter the platforming in the stage.

The way corruption affects the difficulty will always keep players on their toes as 'familiar' things keep changing and challenging to overcome while adjusting the difficulty to suite the player (to a certain degree). This also results in a sense of achievement and satisfaction as the game never gets too easy and well-known.

MOVEMENT SYSTEM

Original design description

In our game we decided that control over the player is an important feature as the challenge should come from the player's own capabilities and each failure should be the player's own fault. Having momentum in the character's movement controls makes it feel less responsive, so the character movement will be consistent and instant with the player's input. So if the player wants to turn around, this will happen instantly. If the player wants to start moving from standstill to the right he will instantly be at the constant velocity.

Concrete design decisions

To create the sense that the player is fully in control of it's character, a couple of design decisions were taken. The first one is that the game runs at 60 frames per second or higher*. Running the game at 60 frames per second makes it easier for the player to see what enemies are doing and thus react quicker. Also the players inputs will be handled more often / faster, making the game feel instant and more fair. The second design decision is that walking, crouching and blocking are instant. They have no start-up time before their properties start to work. Jumps, attacks and dodging are not instant as that would make the game too easy and defy the anticipation aspect of combat. The third design decision is that movement abilities like dodging and teleporting always travel the same distance, allowing players to learn it's distance when playing the game and decreasing the uncertainty. The last design decision is that walking does not have any start-up momentum and is always consistent or standing completely still. Other movement abilities might not follow this but they often do like rolling. All of these design decisions give the player the sense that he/she

is fully in control, never making it 'the games fault' when the player lost. This indirectly supports the sense of achievement because when the player experiences the game as unfair, he/she does not get any satisfaction from it at all.

*= not in prototype due to lack of optimization, high-end pc's can run the game at 60fps with ease while a low-end laptop might not.

SOUND

Original design description

To complement the action-packed feeling and gameplay of the game, the game will have a fast paced soundtrack to keep the player focused and energetic.

Concrete design decisions

The first and possibly most important design decision, is the sound cue's for the actions that enemies can take. Certain, if not all, attacks have sound cue's allowing the player to use his/her hearing to predict what the enemy is going to do. These can be simple grunts signalling an attack, a specific chant for a specific spell or the a noise implicating that some attacks is charging. This also helps creating the experience of satisfaction for the player for the same reason as the detailed attack animation. By allowing the player so use its senses to react and outplay enemies results in a sense of satisfaction and achievement. The second design decision is the usage of background music to hype up the player and keep the combat going. As there was no musician on our team, we were resorted to using pre-made music.