

Travis Moore

GAM450—Spring 2017

Professor: Jen Sward

GDC Summary & Questions

GDC Summary & Questions

A Torch in the Dark: Using Creative Direction to Light “The Darkest Dungeon”

Summary

Darkest Dungeon was successful because they invested early on in a strongly defined vision with a distinct creative core and built outwards. The creative direction can be seen like a tree with roots, a trunk, and many branches that all exist for a reason. The roots are the raw inspiration and influences of the game. The trunk is the consolidated vision. The branches are the disciplines that grow outward from the trunk, like the art, design, and gameplay. Externalize the game’s identity from that of the developers. For example, Bruce Wayne is the creative director, but the creative direction is batman. The creative direction needs to be strong enough to live on its own, like a living, breathing member of the team.

Having a strong creative direction helped the game stay away from trending art styles and pick a stronger art style that reinforces the core game. Pixel art would not have let them be melancholic, morose, and black, which fits the theme of the game better. Top-down/Isometric view is generally the standard for the genre that Darkest Dungeon is, but this view would’ve robbed the game of the claustrophobia and tension of being there in the dungeon, not lording up above, safe from the dangers of the dungeon. This allowed for focus on the characters, which is a big part of the emotional attachment aspects of the game.

They used the creative direction as a razor to measure the relative value/importance of the features needed for the game. Trust in the creative direction of the game to make the right decisions. The creative direction also provided guidance in the creation of risky aspects of the game that other games would otherwise avoid. The final boss fight is a thematic compression of the player’s experience. It is usually risky to arbitrarily take from the player, but it plays towards the theme of uncertainty and horror and fits the intensity of the experience.

Questions

Question 1: How does a strong creative direction handle the need to make a mid-production pivot? Is such an action possible with this system or does the need to pivot indicate that the creative direction wasn’t strong enough to begin with?

Question 2: Could you expand upon the practices of creating a strong creative direction? How do you start, what should the team be doing to create a strong creative direction?

Question 3: How do you know when a creative direction is strong enough to start development? Is there any development or prototyping that needs to be done before a creative direction is considered ready to go?
