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Catharsis Planning Document

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Project Concept

Primary Goal

The primary goal of “Doubt” is to deliver on the core engagement type of catharsis. In order to do this, “Doubt” is going to focus on telling a story to the player about the fear of uncertainty.

Environment / Setting

“Doubt” will take place in a simple geometric environment. The player and other characters will be represented by simple shapes with eyes to give them an anthropomorphic quality. The environment exists to give the player a space to find characters to talk to and guide the player in order to advance the story. The environment should feel big comparative to the player in order to make the player feel small and relatively insignificant.

Mood

The mood of the game should match the story arc of the game. The first act of the game should establish the hopes, fears, and goals of the main character for the player. The mood should feel cautiously hopeful. The player should feel like the character has a lot on the line and should be a little worried that the character’s confidence hangs in the balance. The second act should consist of the player chasing their dreams by talking to other people about their work. The second act should leave the character doubtful that they’re good enough to pursue their dreams. The character should feel alone, defeated, and doubtful for their future. The third act sees the character expressing this defeat and doubt only to have one last person express their hope for the main character. The mood should feel like a tragedy with a glimmer of hope at the end. The player should realize that they are not truly misunderstood or alone and that doubt, while it exists, should not control their life and prevent them from trying.

Overview

Genre / Experience

The genre of “Doubt” is a single player 2D role-playing game that uses a top-down perspective. The player controls the main character of the game, a triangle, and must explore the world and communicate with the other characters in the game in an attempt to make their hopes and dreams come true. The world is populated by other characters to talk to and conversations allow the player to progress the story and try to build their confidence.

Inspiration

Aspects of “Doubt” ­are inspired greatly from “Undertale”. I’m taking a very simple approach at making a mechanically simple game that is not challenging to play so much as it is an exploration in creating a compelling game narrative. I’d like to have the conversations in the game to affect future dialogue in the game, like in “Undertale”. However, unlike “Undertale” I do not want the game’s conversation parts to feel like a battle. Instead, I want the conversations to be more like a “choose your own adventure”, where answers lead to different dialogue provided and different outcomes.

Engagement Techniques

Rank of Techniques for Achieving Engagement Type

“Doubt” primarily focuses on the catharsis engagement type. In order of importance, “Doubt” uses the following techniques to help achieve this engagement type:

1. **Emotional**: “Doubt” is an exploration in writing a tragedy. While I’m hoping to elicit sadness from writing a tragedy, I also hope to have a few sprinkled moments of comedy to break up the routine and not make the game an absolute downer. I plan on using the writing to deliver in the tragedy areas, but there could be a few visual gags in the game that might help to deliver on the comedy element of the game.
2. **Understanding**: The writing of the story should help deliver a feeling of understanding in the game. I’m sure anyone who plays the game has experienced doubt and a lack of self-confidence. I hope that players will understand and relate to how the main character feels though the way I choose to write the story.
3. **Transformative**: This is an area of catharsis that I’m not quite sure how I can directly create. I imagine that seeing the story through to completion and having the illusion of choice will give the player a sense of acceptance for how they acted and the outcome of what the main character has gone through.

Mechanics

Core Mechanics List and Implementation

I’m considering making “Doubt” a very mechanically simple game so that I can focus creating narrative for this catharsis game. As such, the mechanics of “Doubt” are limited to simple movement and a simple dialogue system that will display conversation text and allow the players to input answers to questions. With this system in place I’ll be able to create a sort of branching choice system.

**Mechanics:**

* 2D Movement
* Start Conversation
* Answer Questions
* Multiple Dialogue Choices
* Saved Choice Data
* Pause System

Controls

Control Scheme and Layout

“Doubt” has simple controls that should be familiar to anyone who has played a simple 2D role playing video game using a gamepad. In addition to this I’ll probably be putting in the ability to play the game using the keyboard:

**Gamepad Controls:**

* Left Analog Stick:   
  Movement & Dialogue Selection
* A Button: Talk & Confirm Dialogue Choice
* Start Button:   
  Pause Menu

User Interface

Pre-Game UI

“Doubt” has a fairly standard menu that is controlled by the keyboard or gamepad. The game starts with opening splash screens for DigiPen, myself, and best played with gamepad screens of which only the DigiPen splash screen is not skippable. This leads directly to the start screen which features the title of the game, DigiPen copyright, and a single start button. Pressing the start button will open the main menu with options to start a new game, view the controls, view the credits, or quit the game. Quitting the game opens a confirmation of destructive action modal that will allow the player to return to the main menu or quit the game. The controls button leads to an explanation of the gamepad controls. The credits button lists DigiPen, the instructor and myself as creators for the game, and also a special thanks. Lastly, the new game button will start the game.

In-Game UI

As far as UI that is always on the screen, “Doubt” has a very minimal UI that features only a clock to track what time it is during the game. Because the second act of the game takes place during a convention setting this section will only last so long. The clock is a sort of countdown timer to track how much longer the player has left in this act. Other than this, I plan on implementing the dialogue system as UI that is displayed when the player talks to other characters. This UI element looks like a standard text box that types out the text being displayed, gives a small portrait of the character saying the text with their name, and also gives button instructions for the player like “skip”, “next”, and “close”.

Pause Game UI

“Doubt” has a pause menu that can be activated by pressing the start button on the gamepad. This will greatly darken the game screen and present a menu that is very similar the main menu of the game. As such, the pause menu has resume, controls, main menu, and quit game buttons. The resume game button will get rid of the pause menu and resume the game. The controls menu will display the gamepad controls for the game. The main menu and quit game buttons have confirmation of destructive action modals that are called before performing either of their actions to return to the main menu or quitting the game entirely.

Learning

Primary Teaching Methods for Players

“Doubt” is a simple game, but will have a few features to teach the player to move and talk. At the start of the game the player will be asked to move using “arrow keys” or the “gamepad analog stick” and will then present the player with a pop up image of the “A button” to show that the player can talk to other players. The game revolves around these controls alone, so after doing this once, the player should be able to figure out how to play the rest of the game.

Feedback

Visual Feedback Systems

Visual feedback in “Doubt” comes in the form of interacting with the other characters. The conversation dialogue UI will pop up and take up a good portion of the screen to show that a dialogue has been started. I plan on placing “A button” images above a character’s head when the player is within a small radius around a character who can be spoken with. Due to the game being simple and mostly about telling the story through text dialogue I do not believe I’ll have much else in the form of visual feedback for the player.

Audio Feedback Systems

As far as audio feedback systems I plan on using simple 8 bit sound to fit the minimalist nature of the game in its geometric visuals. Simple noises to represent the player or other characters speaking and a slight background ambiance music will exist in the game. I imagine as I get deeper into the game I’ll probably supplement the music in the game with more audio track that best represent the current mood of the game. As of right now that is a secondary feature and not my primary focus.

Focal Points

Key Visual Landmarks

Key visual landmarks in “Doubt” involve making simple environments to represent rooms and hallways. Characters will be simple geometric shapes with blinking eyes. This game is not about a lot of discovery so I do not imagine I’ll be spending the majority of my time making environmental assets.

Art Assets

Art Assets List

The art assets I’ll need for “Doubt” are subject to change, as I will be making these assets myself, and currently are listed as follows:

**Art Assets:**

* Menu Title
* Menu Buttons
* Controls Diagram
* DigiPen Splash Screen
* My Splash Screen
* Best Played Splash Screen
* Game Logo
* Player Sprite
* Multiple Character Sprites
* Player Portrait
* Character Portraits
* Walls
* Dialogue Box
* Gamepad Buttons
* Arrow Keys

Audio Assets

Audio Assets List

The audio assets I’ll need for “Doubt” are subject to change, and will be comprised of assets I make and assets that I use from the DigiPen sound library. These assets are currently are listed as follows:

**Audio Assets:**

* Button Hover
* Button Selected
* Menu Music
* Player Speaking
* Character Speaking
* Different Pitch tones for Character and Player Answers
* Player moving
* Characters Moving
* Player Move
* Ambient Music
* Ambient Noises
* End Game Audio
* Defeat Audio
* Menu Audio

Risks & Mitigations

Specific Risks

The biggest concern I have for risks involve writing my own dialogue system for Unity. I need to have the dialogue type out on the screen within the confines of the dialogue box, allow for the next dialogue to be written out, and close the dialogue box when the dialogue is complete. I also need to create a dialogue response system that will allow the player to answer questions. This is turn will result in needing to save the player’s responses to create a branching dialogue and narrative. Mechanically there is quite a lot for me to create in order for this to happen. This is on top of writing a branching narrative, which is what I am most worried about. Other risks involve the overall scope of the project, the time I’ll need to create audio and visual assets, and how much work I’ll be receiving in my other classes.

Specific Mitigations

In order to mitigate the over scope that I might have in “Doubt” I have started making my dialogue system early. I am giving myself the coming weekend to complete this system. Depending on how far I get will determine if I keep developing in Unity or use a more complete storytelling platform like Twine. Regardless of how the weekend goes I’ll be emailing the instructor to let them know how far I got and what option I will be pursuing to make sure I’ll have enough for this assignment.

As for writing a narrative, this is the next area that I’ll be spending most of my time in. I’ve never written a narrative before so I imagine that I’ll need to get works in progress created quickly to get in front of a lot of eyes for reading. The more people I get to go over what I’ve written the better quality and the more I’ll learn for future narrative assignments. As for asset creation, the time risks involved in making assets will have to be prioritized by must have and “would like to have”, this way the most important things will get done first, one at a time.