

Everything Will Be Alright

Game Design Document For The Pirate Software Jam 15

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Introduction

This document is partially a guide to my design ideas, but it also reflects on the how and the why. I've never written a Game Design Doc before, so I don't really know what is expected of it, but I hope at the least it helps understand what I've chosen to do with the game. Please play the game before reading this document; the game is primarily about story and atmosphere, and this will be less effective if you know what's coming.

Game Summary

'Everything will be alright' is a short, story-focused horror game about the fears that live within each of us, and how they can be amplified by who and what we interact with.

Inspiration

This game has a number of inspirations. In particular, elements of Undertale, Yume Nikki and Omori jump to mind. This game definitely has a lot of

Undertale's simplistic art style is one of the key parts of this game being an inspiration; I'm not good with art, especially compared to other elements of game development, so I'm hoping that I can piece together something cohesive enough with a similar styling.

Omori tells it's story through still frames depicting events that have happened. The opening cutscene is a good example of what I'm going for, although my own game has a lot more detail in these still images because I have to tell as much about the story as I can in only a few minutes (whereas Omori has a full game to tell it's story).

I've previously made a game more in the weird style of Yume Nikki, and I'm hoping that with this game I can amplify the horror elements of the game, particularly with things like the boss design.

Player Experience

The player will start by reading through the lore of this world, understanding what souls and shadows are, before being cast into a fight with a strengthened, combined shadow seeking to consume them. When they defeat the boss, the boss's health bar will begin to regenerate

Platform

The game is being built for Windows and Linux desktops and WebGL platforms.

Development Software

The game is being developed using the Monogame framework. The KNI engine is used for the web port (as Monogame itself does not have this capacity, but the developers of KNI have added it separately). Sublime text with the Dotnet CLI are used for the code side of things. Aseprite is used to create pixel art for the game, with the cutscene sketches drawn in Krita. Music is made in the DAW Reaper, with a number of plugins for different instruments (such as pianos and synths) and effects (like reverb and delay). Muscore is also used for some of the music composition as well.

Genre

The best way I can describe this game is with the term 'RPGMaker Horror', used to refer to games such as Ib. The boss battle has more elements of a top-down 2D shooter, however I feel like this section of the game complements the horror aspect more than being a defining feature in itself. I see the game as much more of a story experience than a game, and as such it's hard to pin down a single genre to describe the game in terms of its gameplay.

Target Audience

People who enjoy story-based games, in particular horror games, are who I'm primarily targeting with this game. In particular, I hope that this audience will understand the emotional meaning I'm trying to convey with the game as a whole.

Concept/Story

Theme Interpretation (Shadows and Alchemy)

When I first saw the theme, I was stumped. I knew that I didn't want to try anything related to wizardry or potions or anything else related to the traditional, fantasy definition of alchemy, so my thinking revolved around the idea of combination (as was suggested in the theme description on the jam page).

A few years ago, I came up with the very beginnings of a story for a game jam, the theme for which was "5 minute horror" or something similar. At the time, I was not confident enough in my development skills to even try to enter the jam, but I had the start of a story thought out: the protagonist and their partner would be sitting together before the partner transformed into some eldritch horror that the player would have to defeat in a duel. This idea floated around in my head for a little bit, but I never did anything with it. Fast forward to the start of this game jam (which started around midnight for me), I saw the theme announcement as I was going to bed and I started thinking about the sorts of things I would do for this theme. And the idea above came back to me after a while lying in bed, and I figured that with some further thought I could make it work.

From there, the story above evolved; the concept of a soul and a shadow entered my mind, and shadows being linked to fear immediately hit me as a means of inspiration; I've written a lot about fear because I feel it a lot in many ways, so to use that idea felt natural to me. The name, and the final song, are a part of a little snippet of song lyrics I had written but didn't know what to do with, and when I had linked the idea of shadows to fear I couldn't help liking the idea of using this song to provide a little bit of hope at the end of the game.

I then thought about how I could combine alchemy with this idea, and the thought of combining shadows to create more powerful fears got me interested; this was somewhat linked to the idea I had before (with the protagonist and their partner) except I had never fleshed out the explanation. Combining fears also felt like something I could relate to with the things I was seeing on the internet, with my own fears of what was going to happen being influenced by the things I saw there (particularly in relation to politics and the current state of the world). From here I was able to flesh out the ideas of combining shadows further (with the help of a friend who read over my initial ideas and helped iron out the plotholes) and I ended up here.

In my eyes, I've also viewed the alchemy component as me combining all of these half-formed ideas into something more cohesive, and hopefully them coming together will become some sort of alchemist's gold (or at the very least my ideas and story will make sense for players).

Gameplay Overview

Mechanics

The gameplay of the game is a simple top-down shooter. The player can move, and can shoot a lazer, charging it for a second before shooting. The player's goal is to dodge the enemy's attacks while shooting it with the lazer until it runs out of health. As this game is meant to emphasise the story, the gameplay is simple and adds to the story more than being fully fledged on its own.

Plot

The cutscene takes the player on a journey through this world I've created, a world of souls and shadows. It explains what souls and shadows are, and notably explains how shadows can combine to create a strong foe contained within a person's mind. I imagine this focuses on a couple afraid to tell each other how they feel, but I've tried to keep the images in the cutscene as broad and encompassing as possible to allow players to come up with their own interpretations of events.

The battle is meant to be a representation of fighting with fear, with this combined shadow that's formed from these two people. I've tried to indicate that this particular combination is only two people's shadows; the central part (the circular enemy part of the boss) represents the coming together of the two halves, which are coloured slightly differently to indicate that they are two different people's shadows. The ending sequence of the boss uses a bunch of healthbars constantly going up to represent the idea that this shadow is all consuming of someone's thoughts; I know of this feeling as I've been afraid before, and I know that when I've been really scared of things it's the only thing on my mind for days at a time, that I can't stop thinking about it. I don't want to leave the game empty though, and the idea of keeping hope, that everything will be alright resonates with me a lot too, partially as a message to myself to be honest; a lot of my creative works (most of which I've never shared with anyone) are created for me, to process my emotions or to serve as reminders to myself, and this game/experience is no different. If others can see my meaning, and can understand it for themselves within their own lives, then that's nice, but honestly as long as by the end of this I can remember the whole experience and use it to remind myself that everything will be alright, I'll be happy.

In my head-cannon (like I say, the entire game's story is up for contention based on the players experience and imagination), the main character is a really good artist who's recently met someone and fallen in love with. He uses sketches like what are seen in the cutscene as a way to get his thoughts and emotions into the world in a really quick form, and more often than not they are never refined further. As he's fallen more and more in love with this person, his sketches become more and more singularly focused on the fear he has about telling them how he feels. I've never thought much about the other person's perspective because I find this narrative more a representation of my own feelings, my own fears, but I can imagine this person feeling similarly to him, not knowing how to tell each other how they feel. Their shadows build up this constant cycle of doubt and fear and their mental unrest meld together in the form of the shadow the protagonist fights, with his fears

overwhelming him sending him into a state of panic. Yet even in this panic, something keeps him going: the hope that one day he'll find a way to tell them how he feels. And while this whole game is a work of fiction, hidden in the fog of fantasy are the smallest fragments of a true story, only visible when the light is shone at just the right places.

Art

Theme Interpretation

As part of my emphasis on the souls and shadows idea, the art will feature a lot of contrast between dark black (representative of shadows and fear) and bright white (representative of a person's soul and their hope); all characters will be represented as white souls with a dark shadow where the light can't reach. The protagonist's weapon becomes a bright white, and the boss flashes white when it's hit to show the protagonist's hope of defeating it. The lights in the arena get darker as the boss when the boss hits the protagonist to represent a diminishing hope in the protagonist. It's very simple, probably a little overused, but it works really well to tell the story and emotions I want (plus it simplifies any art of people because I only need to worry about silhouettes).

The boss is represented by the colour magenta, and I've used this in a few places through the game to symbolise it. One piece of art in the cutscene uses it under a bed to represent the monster under the bed that many of us were afraid of as kids, and the health bar is this colour to link the combined shadows to that as well.

Design

I will be the first person to state that I'm not an artist, and that my art is not my best skill. As a result, I've decided to keep things as simple as I possibly can, as well as trying to minimise the amount of things I have to draw, relying on symbolism rather than detail for a lot of the work.



Originally, I had intended to use large pixel art pieces (320x240; the game's native resolution), yet even when I halved those numbers the scale was too large for my own limited ability to make something nice, and I resorted to using the blur tool to cover up my artistic inability (which didn't help much, just framed the poorly drawn hands you can see to the right – admittedly it looks slightly better when scaled up, but not enough to be worth using in my eyes). I had made a rough sketch of this piece in the notepad I've been using to record ideas and plan out how I'm going to make specific things work, and I liked the roughness and simplicity of it in this form. After testing it out, this simpler design looks better, is easier to make and provides me with a lot more room to play around with the symbolism of colours, which is really important to me with the themes and story I'm trying to convey (as I've described above as part of the theme interpretation). It also makes use of a higher-resolution digital painting solution, which will make it easier to add effects to the work; my favorite creative hobby is producing music, and I find being able to play around with new instruments and effects the most fun part of the process, plus it's a good, relatively constant source of inspiration. Hopefully some of those ideas will be able to seep through into the art for the game too with this solution.

The cutscene uses simple, sketched graphics. I've decided to keep this sketched look like I had for the draft piece I described earlier as the protagonist's art; he's more than capable of making such

impressive drawings, but he also draws art to convey his emotions. These sketches are him trying to quickly put on a piece of paper how he really feels. I can relate to this idea a lot because I do it myself, although admittedly I don't draw. I have a notepad sitting in my room that I use to write ideas for lyrics, or letters to people with things I'll never tell them in person, maybe because I'm too afraid to say what I want. I want to try and convey this idea within the art. I also want the art to feel very open to interpretation; while I'm describing what I feel about it all now, I don't want that to be the only conclusion people can draw from it.

The story as explained in the cutscene is intentionally not very clear, just a description of how the elements of the game's world work together, and hopefully the player will be able to come up with their own ideas of what the protagonist is experiencing based on how they feel about the ideas in the story. An example of the newer art style can be seen above; note the use of shades of black and white only, hitting home on the idea of contrasting souls and shadows. Maybe I'm going too hard on it at this point, but this cutscene only lasts a minute or two, so I think it works well for that period of time. It's a lot like the opening cutscene of Omori. I plan on adding some film grain to make it more dynamic than just a still image; Omori does better animations with strokes moving around and coming more to life, but I don't have the time to look at how that would work with code in my Monogame tools at the moment; I also think that keeping it simpler is a better representation of my ideas for the protagonist and how he sees this type of art.



The boss battle section of the game uses simple sprites to represent the player and the enemy. The player is white to represent their soul, continuing the idea of white is soul from the cutscene. The enemy is made up of three parts; the left and right halves are a slightly different colour from each other to represent two different shadows, while the centre has touches of magenta to continue to emphasise the idea of fear when the shadows merge. The boss makes use of spines as a projectile and in design, which (if I'm being completely honest) is because I didn't know what else to do that would make some sort of logic and cohesion with enemy design and projectile. This is why the boss is covered in spines.

The boss arena is lit up by 4 lights which will dim each time the player is hit. The arena will always have a small amount of light present no matter how many times the player is hit, as these lights represent the soul of the player, and their never giving up hope; this idea is linked to the closing message of the game. Most players will probably not see or notice this, but I think it's important that it exists, further building up the lore behind the game. This is an important highlight of me straying away from a retro style, as the effect I've created uses shaders. While theoretically it would be possible to replicate with pre-rendered sprites (although alpha values might be difficult to factor in; while I know the basics, I'm no expert on how old consoles render graphics and have no idea what alpha processing old 80s and early 90s consoles had), I've never seen the effect done in any of them.

Audio

Music

This game will feature three separate music tracks: a song titled 'Everything will be alright' played at the end of the game, the chords of this song used as a loop during the cutscene and a dark metal boss theme.

The lyrics for 'Everything Will Be Alright' existed before the game's conception; they were an idea I had for a song, except I've never touched them since writing them down. (The original idea for the song was inspired by Mori Calliope's 'End of a life' and its soft, rap verses mixed with a melodic chorus). When I had this idea it was written about some of the fear and regret I've had in my life, and I wanted some way to comfort myself. I think that a lot of the other lyrics for verses I have are also really good, but I struggle to imagine associating this chorus with anything else now... Maybe if I continue this game I can continue this song too.

The cutscene uses the piano track from 'Everything will be alright', with the second half repeated and a feedback technique I've played around with to create a crescendo at the end representative of the combined shadow's formation. I absolutely love the way this lines up with the cutscene; I'm sure there's far better, more controlled ways than using Reaper's delay plugin feedback parameter to craft this effect, but I'm happy that this worked.

For the battle theme, I knew at the start of the jam that I wanted some sort of dark, metal piece to play. I've been listening to quite a bit of metal recently, and if you look at my last.fm profile you can see over the jam period I listened to a lot more to get myself into the mood to make something. I found myself inspired by a few different places for this piece; bands like Takamachi Walk, Unlucky Morpheus and Imperial Circus Dead Decadence inspired the metal elements of the piece. The best inspiration for the battle itself is the Mythrix battle from Risk of Rain 2; it's music conveys a sense of epic hopelessness which I love, and which I think fits well with the theme of this game. You can see this in the battle theme (which I've called 'Everything will be Consumed'), with my use of the piano present in the theme, as well as the guitar. To be totally honest, I've never really recorded (or seriously played) the guitar, so I know that in the actual track the guitar has very poor quality. I think in part this adds to the feeling, kind of making it a little uneasy, and I've tried to emphasise this by adding a bitcrush effect to the entire piece.

I think there's still work to be done with the music; if I continue with this I want to redo the battle theme and get some input from people who know more about producing metal than me. I'm still pretty happy with how this turned out over such a short span of time though.

Sound Effects

I don't have much experience with sound effects, but there's always time to learn :). In the menu, I'd like a quick sound to play reminiscent of the Final Fantasy VII select sound as the player clicks to begin the game.

During the battle, the player will have a short, dull hurt sound. This should be similar to Undertale's hurt sound, except possibly a little brighter to represent the player better. A heartbeat might also start playing when the player is hit, although I'm not certain of this. The lazer will have a charge and a shoot sound, which should sound like a classic lazer charge and blast sound (think Star Wars:

a lightsaber being pulled out, followed by a storm trooper's lazer blaster), although a little less harsh; I know this will sound out of place if I'm not careful. The boss should have some ambient noises like soft roars or screeches, as well as a hurt sound. The boss may also get some additional sounds related to its attacks, including a swish for the spines moving around (although this is less clear).

Game Experience

UI

There should be minimal explicit UI in the game; absolutely none through the cutscene (instead allowing players to focus on what they're seeing related to the lore), and only the boss health bar during the battle. The boss's health bar is an important part of the messaging of the game, as the ending sequence where more and more health bars fill up is intended to represent the fear consuming a person, becoming the only thing they think about, the only thing living inside of them. Because of this significance, I want to draw attention to it during this battle.

The player's lazer will be a charge weapon to add difficulty to the battle. As it charges, the lazer will become brighter and more vibrant, changing colour to white. Once the weapon is fully charged, it will return to its original colour. If it hits the boss, the boss will flash white for a second as well.

Controls

The game will feature very standard controls. WASD and arrow keys will be used for moving the player around, the mouse will be used to aim and holding left click will charge the weapon. These key binds cannot be changed (due to technical limitations and the time constraints; I'm too lazy to figure out how to serialise a settings class right now).

Development Timeline

18th: Initial setup and getting the structure of the cutscene data in place and visible.

19th: Neatened up the text, found fonts and looked at health bars in the battle scene.

20th: Wrote the player controller and lazer controls. Begun sketching artwork.

21st: Added lighting shader to the desktop build, struggled to get it to work on the web version.

Begun messing around with music ideas.

22nd: Solved issue with lighting shader on WebGL, continued with sketching ideas for art. Get a final draft for the cutscene text.

23rd: Plan the bosses attacks and start implementing them in the code.

24th: Start work on final pieces of background art. Finalise the text for the cutscene. Publish an initial test to itch.io to identify bugs in the web build and give to playtesters for feedback.

25th: Continue working on art. Fix bugs found in the web build (these are inevitable).

26th: Continue working on art. Hope to all hell it's going to be finished soon.

27th: Begin working on music production and sound effects.

28th: Refine the boss and implement the music.

29th: Continue with boss refining (adding text).

30th: Continue refining the ending sequence (extra text) and finish art for the boss itself.

31st: Finish testing, refine the music slightly and publish.